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THE DIALECTICS OF DISUNION: W. B. YEATS'S AND T. S. ELIOT'S
POETIC CONFLICT

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THE DIALECTICS OF DISUNION:
W.B. YEATS'S AND T.S. ELIOT'S POETIC CONFLICT

by

TOM EAGLE

A THESIS SUBMITTED
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE
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MASTER OF ARTS

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ABSTRACT

Experience for W.B. Yeats and T.S. Eliot is not always, as some critics are too quick to suggest, a continuous process of unification, but rather is often a juxtaposition of irreconcilable conflicts. One of the ways that Yeats and Eliot manifest this dialectic is in the conflict between present and past. In *New Poems* and *Last Poems*, Yeats fears that modern society has lost many of its noble traditions and characteristics, a concern that he parallels with very personal worries of his own physical desiccation. Similarly, *Poems 1920* and *The Waste Land* contain some of Eliot's most extreme contrasts between the past and contemporaneity, a polar opposition that he expresses as society's vulgar modernity and its culturally rich history. Yeats's and Eliot's poetic disunity also occurs when the individual, in *The Wild Swans at Coole* and *Ash-Wednesday*, is divided against itself in a conscious effort to attain a greater artistic and/or spiritual insight, a process that I call self-effacement.
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INTRODUCTION

The year 1919 was a watershed for both W.B. Yeats and T.S. Eliot: Yeats's first poetry volume influenced by the mystical revelations of his wife's automatic writing, *The Wild Swans at Coole*, was published; and Eliot helped enunciate the modernist temperament with his essay, "Tradition and the Individual Talent." These two publications are also significant for bringing into focus images and themes that constitute an approach to writing that both poets used extensively. This approach is dialectical in nature and consists of a language which polarizes oppositions, a language that Yeats and Eliot discovered could be exploited for effectively creating poetic tension. This dialectic emphasizes disunion, not resolution. So that when, in *The Wild Swans*, Yeats searches for that which is "most unlike" himself, his opposite, and when Eliot seeks to escape from personality, as he announces in "Tradition," both are involved in an activity that is sustained necessarily by the energy of contrast and dissimilarity. Experience for Yeats and Eliot is not always, as some critics are too quick to suggest, a continuous process of unification, but rather is often a juxtaposition of conflicting elements that derive much of their meaning and significance from that aspect of the dialectical relationship which holds those elements apart with separate identities.

I investigate in my essay some of the ways in which Yeats's and Eliot's poems manifest this dialectic through some of the major poetic themes. In the first section, for example, I discuss the conflict between contemporaneity and the past. The section's first chapter is devoted to arguing how the speaker in Yeats's *New Poems* and *Last Poems* fears that modern society has lost many of its noble traditions and characteristics, a concern that is very similar to Eliot's. Yeats also parallels this anxiety of social degradation.
with very personal worries of his own physical desiccation. But although the weight of years sometimes seems to hang heavy upon Yeats in these last volumes, he often affirms the potency of youthful vigor through lusty repudiation of preconceptions concerning right conduct for the aged. He had not possessed such physical virility in the past, Yeats says, nor had he the kind of creative efficacy that he begins to believe is achievable in the last volume. His present thus conflicts ironically with the past, offering hope of revitalization.

It is of such a possibility for revival that Eliot tenuously hints when he describes contemporary society in Poems 1920 and The Waste Land. But these two volumes are more taken up with some of Eliot’s most extreme contrasts between past and present, a dialectical opposition that he expresses as society’s vulgar modernity and its culturally rich history. Eliot emphasizes the differences between these temporal extremes by using an allusive technique that juxtaposes elements of society’s cultural legacy and modern society’s ignorance of that heritage.

The second section of my essay shifts the focus of poetic conflict to a discussion of how the self in Yeats’s and Eliot’s poetry is divided against itself in a conscious effort to attain a greater artistic and/or spiritual insight, a process that I call self-effacement. Yeats’s theme of the anti-self epitomizes this process and depends upon the sanctity of unique dissimilarity between the primary and antithetical selves to discover hidden truths, to commune with the anima mundi. A curiously anti-romantic construction for Yeats, this architecture of objective and subjective selves, the pure examples of which have archetypes manifested between their extremes that possess varying degrees of the two qualities, has some of its strongest poetic expression in The Wild Swans at Coole.
For Eliot, this self-effacement occurs when impersonal asceticism attempts to subsume forcefully the quotidian pleasures achieved through personal feelings. *Ash-Wednesday* is largely an account of the conflict arising out of this attempt, is what Eliot himself calls the "time of tension." This internal struggle is so extreme as to be externalized visually, when the penitent speaker sees his "same shape twisted on the banister" below, a figure that is analogous to Yeats's antithetical self. This scene is a good measure of the radical division that Eliot intentionally attempts to create between self and self, of the "tension between dying and birth" that ends the poem.

In dividing himself, Eliot positions himself thematically closer to Yeats, just as he does when describing the conflict between contemporaneity and the past. For both poets, present and past, self and self are the forces of contention responsible for much of their poetic tension. Yeats and Eliot do not mediate this tension toward reconciliation, but rather sustain it as the ambivalence between dualities. They have entered these conflicting opposites into a dialectical relationship, a relationship whose partners are defined by and made more meaningful through their differences.
SECTION I

The Conflict Between What is Present and Past

Where are the eagles and the trumpets?

Buried beneath some snow-deep Alps.
Over buttered scones and crumpets
Weeping, weeping multitudes
Droop in a hundred A.B.C.'s.

---T.S. Eliot, "A Cooking Egg"

For both W.B. Yeats and T.S. Eliot, modern society has mismanaged its rich cultural inheritance so that it has become an errant offspring of its past. Their poetry reminds us often that some discontinuity has occurred in social evolution, that a certain degradation erodes contemporary culture. The ceremony of form and the ritual of custom have given way to the anarchy that is the modern world’s disregard for proud traditions. Society’s past thus conflicts with the present in a manner that could only offend the reactionary sensibilities of Yeats and Eliot, and they manifest their similar concern in a poetic language of contrast and anxiety.

Unlike Eliot’s impersonal critical assessment of social decline, though, Yeats’s expression of dissatisfaction is a very personal cry revealing, by the time of *New Poems* (1938) and *Last Poems* (1939), his frustration with himself as well as the world. Yeats’s growing discontent originates from his efforts to throw himself later in his career into the maelstrom of unadorned, energetic life, in what Richard Ellmann says is Yeats’s belief that he had played his inner being false by dressing it in costume and metaphor instead of ex-
pressing it directly. This late insistence upon living and articulating experience directly made Yeats increasingly aware of and sensitive to mortality, his own and all men's. He thus became filled with a sense of regret for opportunities that he had missed both personally and artistically, for the passage of friends who embodied nationalistic virtues, and for the "numb nightmare" of a world in which he had to live. But it is characteristic of Yeats to arrange his thought and discipline his imagination by ideas of antithesis, and so he, like Eliot, is able to bring to bear the means that will help shore his ruins. For he borrows from his theory of cyclic temporality, represented by his gyres of personal and social phases, those elements of immortality that can render the immediate realization of disappointment and mortal transience a little more palatable. "What matter," Yeats asks, that so much of the world's beauty has faded and that he has been unduly concerned with "painted forms or boxes of make-up"? For all things are subject to rebirth and transfiguration, passing through the trembling veil of one life into the next. Thus was Yeats burdened heavily by his mortal frame but given strength to endure that burden by his belief in a system of transcendence. This dual vision informs the poetry of New Poems and Last Poems, lending it the kind of creative energy that can only derive from such a dialectical relationship as Yeats's greatest happiness and his deepest sadness, his oxymoronic "tragic joy."

Joy plays no part in Poems 1920 and The Waste Land (1922), although Eliot shares Yeats's preoccupation with themes of loss and social degradation. For Yeats's intensely subjective approach to bracing himself against society's erosion would be anathema to Eliot. Eliot had eschewed in "The Function of Criticism" (1923) the virtues of a more objective poetry, saying that the difference between classicism and romanticism is the difference between "the complete and the fragmentary, the adult and the immature, the
orderly and the chaotic."3 The poet also "must develop or procure the consciousness of the past,"4 says Eliot, and therefore he elected to contrast the modern world unfavorably with the old through allusion. This allusive method allows Eliot to describe a contemporary society ignorant of its cultural legacy and an older world rich in historical significance. Modern memory is hard pressed, Eliot asserts, to salvage the conscience of a people who are devoted single-mindedly to the present and given to "stirring dull roots" only occasionally. His portrayal of the past is not always unimpeachably glorious, but Eliot does insist that an awareness of that past's significance is absolutely necessary for artistic success and cultural enhancement. He provides some of his strongest testimony to this necessity in Poems 1920 and The Waste Land, inveighing against the intellectual and spiritual sterility that robs modern man of a sincere appreciation for monuments of his past. These icons have not become reminders of an older time, but rather antiquated appendages to a world dying a death of ignorance and cultural stagnation.

Although Yeats's tragic gaiety and Eliot's use of allusion are so typical of each poet as to be representative of their widely differing styles, both are the function of a powerful dialectic that each poet chose as a means to emphasize the conflict between past and present. Such a dialectic allows Yeats and Eliot to widen this conflict to extremes, stretching the relationship of past and present to one of absolute temporal and thematic opposition.
Chapter One

Personal and Social Pasts: New Poems and Last Poems

In his study of Yeats's last poetic phase, Arra Garab observes that this later poetry is often a record of the poet's struggle to escape the conditions and circumstances of mortality, an effort made increasingly necessary with time's passage. This desire to flee originates, paradoxically, from Yeats's earlier decision to pitch himself into the "frog-spawn of a blind man's ditch," to descend from his tower and thrust himself directly back into the life of men rather than of elaborate metaphor. For what he found there supported his growing conviction that the world was becoming progressively violent and destabilized, that it was following a path toward anarchy which he had predicted through his theory of gyres. Man was arriving at the end of these gyres' 2000-year cycle, which had begun with Christ's birth and was now terminating with the birth of some terrifying, apocalyptic "rough beast" and in times when things "fall apart" and a "blood-dimmed tide is loosed."

By the time of New Poems and Last Poems, Yeats's anxiety for what the world was becoming infuses the poetry with a sense of regret for what the world has lost. Like Eliot's "waste land," all "ancient lineaments are blotted out," severing the modern world's ties with its history and making it ignorant of worthy traditions. Yeats thus shares Eliot's concern for contemporary society's loss of appreciation for its heritage, and also like Eliot perceives this loss as contributing to a relationship of conflict between society's past and present. Yeats emphasizes this conflict throughout New Poems and Last Poems, but parallels the denouncement of modern social degradation with a fear of individual mortality that represents a very personal departure from Eliot's impersonal approach to the theme of temporal conflict. Just as society is
experiencing a decline toward anarchy brought about partly through its disinclination to observe the stabilizing rites of tradition, says Yeats, so is he approaching the physical and intellectual decline that is old age’s inheritance. To defend himself against both of these failures, Yeats in his last poetry volumes develops a gaiety that can transfigure "all that dread." It can do so, Yeats hopes, because temporal cyclicism, represented by his interpenetrating gyres, makes the immediacy of disappointment and anxiety appear insignificant within the context of reincarnation and recurring historical phases. All those valuable aspects of social and individual history that are missing now should reappear some day when the temporal cycles containing them swing round again.

But Yeats could never be satisfied with such a contemplative attempt at resolution as his tragic gaiety. The tides of opposition by which he had been influenced, the dialectical form of philosophy which shapes the corpus of his poetry constitute too strong a background from which he could ever hope or want to escape. Indeed, Douglas Archibald quotes Yeats as saying that the whole system of his mythology, described in A Vision, "is founded upon the belief that the ultimate reality . . . falls in human consciousness . . . into a series of antinomies." And so against his tragic joy Yeats sets a passion of fierce intensity, refusing to yield to an old man’s life of quiet meditation. He boasts of both a physical virility and a mental acuity that had been lacking in his youth, and in so doing strains again the oppositions of past and present into conflict. Only this time, that conflict has an element of hope that closely corresponds to the suggestion of resolution between society’s present and past that Eliot makes in The Waste Land. For as in that country where the roots of cultural heritage are given hope to survive by the sound of thunder, and so reintroduce to the modern world some vestiges of its past, so is
Yeats's present condition as an old man in New Poems and Last Poems given a chance to experience those characteristics closely associated with youth that he never had.

It is in these last volumes that Yeats manifests an affection for the past that tends to cast the present into a pejorative light, creating a language of sharp contrast and severe conflict. In "The Gyres," for example, although Yeats defines temporality in terms of cyclicism, he evidences concern and dissatisfaction with modern society. Yes, "all things run / On that unfashionable gyre" and we can escape in some ways the strictures of a time-conditioned existence. But much of the poem's language emphasizes the modern world's loss of beauty in a manner entirely similar to the way that Eliot describes a contemporary world devoid of virtues. Yeats immediately describes this loss in the first stanza: "And ancient lineaments are blotted out" and "Hector is dead." The speaker possesses a strong sense of regret for an elegance and glory once risen high but now sunk low, for "A greater, a more gracious time." He has an affinity for this history and it is only with effort that he refrains from yearning for those "painted forms or boxes of make-up / In ancient tombs." Nostalgia and identification with the past have been the result of his rejection of the present, for the modern world yields no grace nor human achievement. "Irrational streams of blood are staining earth," producing a people insensitive to their heroic history, a people whose "Conduct and work grow coarse, and coarse the soul." The speaker must survive in a world made almost unbearable for the sensitive individual, "blood and mire the sensitive body stain," and live a life made into a "numb nightmare."

Yeats's nightmare is living in fear of losing the Irish heroic ideal and proud traditions. He had once asked in "A Prayer for my Daughter," "How but in custom and ceremony / Are innocence and beauty born?" His concern
for the disappearance of custom and ceremony derives from the fact that the soul of Ireland has grown "course" through modern social degradation. For those "irrational streams of blood" have infected Ireland, whose people Yeats says in "The Statues," are "thrown upon this filthy modern tide" that is "formless, spawning, fury wrecked." Caught up in this modern nightmare, Yeats found that as he grew older, he grew more reactionary, more prone to deny the present: he wrote to Lady Cunard, "As I grow old, I become more conservative and do not know whether that is because my thoughts are deeper or my blood more chill." He therefore turned to the past for his ideals and viewed the artist as a preserver and arbiter of the aristocratic court, a position with which Eliot has close sympathy. Conflict arises, then, when the flux of modern events threatens to lose the attributes of "A greater, a more gracious time" in ignorance and contempt: "A Bronze Head," for instance, describes a "foul world in its decline and fall" pitching "Ancestral pearls . . . into a sty." Only the act of remembrance can bridge the gap between the disordered present and the ceremonial past, Yeats intimates in "Under Ben Bulben." He enjoins Irish poets to "Scorn the sort now growing up / All out of shape from toe to top, / Their unremembering hearts and heads / Base-born products of base beds." "Unremembering" the Irish cultural traditions can be remedied only by engaging in the opposite activity, remembering, and actualizing those ideals, much in the way that the great men and women of Yeats's youth did.

And it is in poems such as "Beautiful Lofty Things" and "The Municipal Gallery Revisited" that Yeats indulges in a bit of personal remembrance, obeying his own enjoiner to "Cast your mind on other days / That we in coming days may be / Still the indomitable Irishry," and bring the conflict between past and present into sharper focus. For these two poems catalogue
and describe people whom Yeats has known personally and who have embodied for him nationalistic attributes; they have all, though, died. Their passage affects him personally, but more importantly, it denies the world those attributes. John O’Leary, John Butler Yeats, Standish O’Grady, Lady Gregory, and Maude Gonne are all identified in "Beautiful," a poem deliberately framed by the tension resulting from loss: the poem begins, "Beautiful lofty things;" and ends "... All the Olympians; a thing never known again." The semi-colon following the first phrase and preceding the second distinguishes them, both setting them apart to circumscribe syntactically the body of the poem and bringing them together to join meaningfully in conflict. Similarly, past and present, represented by these friends and their death, are widely separated by time but brought together by the act of remembrance. The necessity of this action for appreciating the past, however, only serves to emphasize the discontinuity between temporal extremes, a relationship that Yeats describes further in "Municipal Gallery." In that poem, he identifies this problem of those things that shall never be known again. Yeats is "in despair that time may bring / Approved patterns of women or of men / But not that selfsame excellence again." These men and women had embodied qualities that Yeats believes the modern world has lost, is indeed characterized by their absence. For all "that pride and that humility" which these friends had demonstrated in their lives and which had been a part of his world earlier are now gone, and with them a sense of ennobling virtues’ passage.

Yeats complements the theme of loss contributing to the dialectical relationship between society’s present and past with a very personal concern for what he might be conceding to old age. In what represents a deviation from the parallel to Eliot's perspective of society’s relationship to its own history,
Yeats describes a personal tragedy that corresponds to the social tragedy of loss and degradation. A poem such as "Are You Content," for example, reveals a disquietude about the efficacy of the poet's creative effort. For Yeats is acutely conscious in his last volumes of having reached the final stages of a passionate artistic career, and he assumes uncomfortably that quiet dignity expected of a poet grown old. He is "Infirm and aged" in "Are You Content," a condition far removed from earlier protestations of youthly vigor. Youthful confidence is also missing as Yeats uneasily questions, "Have I, that put it into words, / Spoilt what old loins have sent?" He is acutely aware of his mortality now, and has replaced that action of youth with the reflection of age. Such contemplation serves only to torture Yeats with a fearful anticipation, spurring him to cry, "I am not content."

Denis Donoghue had anticipated this disquietude when he observed in earlier poems a stance of fierce, desperate joy that had a terrible insistence hardly concealing despair. Later, several of the poems in Last Poems elaborate upon Yeats's response to that despairing question to himself, "are you content," anxiously comparing the poet's condition of old philosopher facing eminent death to that of a personal past full of the promise of life. In "The Apparitions" the speaker's comfort gained through increasing joy is undermined by his visions of impending death. He is a man grown old and who has known the satisfaction of experiencing a "joy / [which] Grows more deep day after day." But we quickly learn in the same stanza that this joy is qualified by a sense of an uncomfortable expectation of life's end. For one has "need of all that strength" resulting from when an "empty heart is full" because "increasing Night / . . . opens her mystery and fright." The happiness expressed at the beginning of this third stanza thus survives in toto for only the first three lines before we encounter the qualifier "But"—preparing
us for some attenuation of that joy—which appears as a sign of the increasing reality of death and the decreasing prospects for life. And the terms of this death are not the gentle surrender of one comfortably reconciled to his fate. Rather, the speaker has to face a darkness which contains all the "mystery and fright" of an unknown which he does not look forward to encountering. Yeats effectively intensifies this contrast between joy and the fear of death with the repetition of "Fifteen apparitions have I seen; / The worst a coat upon a coat-hanger" as the concluding couplet of each of the three stanzas. These lines emphasize contextually the fear of life's termination because they infer that the worst apparition is the scarecrow image that the old man has of his own death, a worse image, Richard Ellmann suggests, than "old clothes upon old sticks to scare a bird" because its nothingness is emphasized by the mechanical coat-hanger; stylistically, because of their use as a refrain; and mechanically, because they are italicized, a purely visual device that Yeats realized had strong reinforcement value.

Enduring as an old man for Yeats thus means being extremely sensitive to the debilitating physical effects of time, effects that emphasize the contrasts between what he had and what he has; this is the same contrast that he and Eliot make in their observations of modern society. And in the first half of "The Circus Animals' Desertion," Yeats contends with the threat of the most serious loss of all: the desertion of creativity. That artistic sensibility which had previously guided the production of his work must impulse the poet toward new sources of creativity. For now he is but a "broken man." Efforts to discover suitable subjects for poetry have ended in frustration: "I sought a theme and sought for it in vain, / I sought it daily for six weeks or so." The daily task of creative labor has taken its toll on the speaker, since he believes that "Maybe at last [he is] but a broken man," and that he must settle for
something less than what he had hoped, his own "heart." The language here clearly betrays the speaker's self-doubts and his resentment towards some of the disadvantages that he has inherited as an old man. This disaffection is similar to the concerns raised from self-examination in "Man and the Echo." In that instance, the speaker had started to question his own value: "All that I have said and done, / Now that I am old and ill, / Turns into a question till / I lie awake night after night / And never get the answers right." Yeats's weakened, elderly condition has induced anxiety and doubt, whereas before, confidence had been one of the building blocks of his artistic career. The apparition of "a coat upon a coat-hanger" has instilled mistrust in Yeats of his own artistic abilities and leads to the fear of creative impotency in "The Circus Animals' Desertion." For that spectre of a coat was the result of an old man's awareness of death's proximity and of youth's remoteness, a sensitivity retained and exacerbated in "The Circus." The speaker contrasts his abilities as a poet now, to his artistic powers as a poet before. "Maybe at last being but a broken man / I must be satisfied with my heart, although / Winter and summer till old age began / My circus animals were all on show." Until his life as an old man began, the speaker enjoyed the abundant fruits of his artistic labor, the wide diversity of his poetic subjects, "Those stilted boys, that burnished chariot, / Lion and women and the Lord knows what." But now the circus master is old and frail, his theme is "sought for . . . in vain." What can he do now, asks Yeats, "but enumerate old themes"?

He can, in "Lapis Lazuli" and several other poems of this period, transfigure all that "dread" into "gaiety." This is Yeats's tragic joy, which comes when man "completes his partial mind" and brings about the utmost degree of fulfillment both for man and for the fallen world forming the matrix of his art.7 Yeats describes in the second stanza of "Lapis" how all "perform their
tragic play," but like "Hamlet and Lear," are "gay." They can be so because all "things fall and are built again," because history operates cyclically and restores from mortal ruin both man and his society. Yeats had conceptualized a cyclical history much earlier, in A Vision (1925), but had not found it necessary until now to use his theory of the gyres as a solace for human mortality. For he, like the two oriental gentlemen carved in the lapis lazuli, has left behind youth and is living the last days of life. The idea of reincar- nating life, then, can provide profound consolation for immediate loss. That is why in the sonnet that constitutes the final stanza of "Lapis" these Chinamen's "eyes mid many wrinkles, their eyes, / Their ancient, glittering eyes, are gay." Armed with the knowledge that all will rise again, they can stare on "all the tragic scene," with "mournful melodies" playing in the background and reinforcing the sense of tragedy, and still be joyful.

But unlike Eliot, Yeats is unable for long to be satisfied with such an abstract philosophy. In "An Acre of Grass" the balance struck by Yeats's oxymoronic tragic joy tips back toward an anxious concern for time's debili- tating effects, and Yeats searches for something more immediate that can relieve this concern. As before, he recognizes in himself failing vitality due to age: "Now strength of body goes; / Midnight an old house / Where nothing stirs but a mouse." He is at "life's end," where "Neither loose imagination, / Nor the mill of the mind" casually focusing on the flesh "Can make the truth known." He is repudiating here efforts at intellectualizing the human condition, a surprising reversal from someone who has received succor from life's impermanence through the complex, dual perspective that is tragic gaiety. No longer is that impersonal contemplation sufficient for Yeats. His supplication, "Grant me an old man's frenzy," begins to clarify his belief that rage and passion are essential catalysts for artistic production and mystical in-
sights, that powerful emotions can somehow assuage or at least distract him from the immediacy of mortality. He must "remake" himself through this frenzy until he is as a Timon or Lear, until he can ask, as the speaker does in "The Spur," "What else have I to spur me into song?" For only a mind "inspired by frenzy" can prevent mankind from forgetting an "old man's eagle mind." Yeats must resist the "temptation [which] is quiet," an old man's rest, because that kind of quiet cannot lead to work of enduring merit, provides no machinery for working the "truth" into poems. The assumption that an autumnal serenity necessarily accompanies one into old age must therefore be censored by Yeats as injurious to his intellectual health as a poet. Only an intense personal energy, such as that espoused by the speaker in "The Wild Old Wicked Man," can redeem Yeats from that quiet "temptation."

And in a remarkable transfiguration of concern, this redemption changes Yeats's anxiety for his own frail mortality to uninhibited pride for that same elderly body, creating conflict once again, but in a new manner, between present and past. Our first hint of this new emphasis in the temporal dialectic occurs when the resistance against time's debilitating physical and intellectual effects appears in a curiously celebratory manner in "Wicked Man," but loses none of the contentious language of contraries by doing so. The framework of opposition to Christianity is complemented by the motif of old man irascibly retaining the best qualities of youth, and rejecting the worst of old age. The old man begins his argument with the girl of the poem by contrasting his status as mature writer with the inexperience of young men. He has "what no young man can have / Because . . . [the young man] loves too much." In these lines the speaker suggests that he is immune to the romantic impulses which infect and cloud the mind of youth, informing us
early that his persuasive rhetoric will at least partly comprise language emphasizing dissimilarity and contrast. Yeats continues by clarifying the distinctions between his capabilities and those of youth: "Words I have that can pierce the heart, / But what can he do but touch?" He sustains this dichotomy when later he states, "A young man in the dark am I / But a wild old man in the light / That can make a cat laugh or / Can touch by mother wit / Things hid in their marrow bones."

Yeats thus lays claim in "Wicked Man" to not only an intellectual and creative competence that he associates with age and which he had been fearful of losing in other poems, but also to a physical passion that he had never possessed. He confirms this lack of sexuality in his youth when he continues to boast in "The Spur": "You think it horrible that lust and rage / Should dance attendance upon my old age; / They were not such a plague when I was young." His latter years have become a spring season of lusting and boasting, not the winter of dispossession attributed to them by convention. For Yeats's bold statement, tantamount to a taunt, affirms his determination that the advent of old age shall not deprive him of the physical passion that tradition associates with youth and decry as perverse when attendant upon the elderly. And because he has acquired the vigorous quality of sexual passion that had been missing the the dreamy years of Crossways and The Rose, Yeats's present now conflicts with his past to his advantage. The dialectical relationship between these temporal extremes now strengthens his position as an old man, instead of weakening it as in "An Acre of Grass."

The poem that best illustrates this change in the conflict between Yeats's past and present is "The Circus Animals' Desertion." As we saw earlier, much of the poem is taken up with Yeats's valid concern that he is losing creative energy—he had "sought a theme and sought for it in vain." But like
Eliot's modern waste land, Yeats's present has promise of not being completely sterile: there are rumbles of thunder in Eliot's poem suggesting the introduction of revitalizing water in that "decayed hole among the mountains"; and the sudden surge of physical confidence Yeats experienced in such poems as "The Wild Old Wicked Man" and "The Spur" precipitates new hope for his artistic abilities in "The Circus." In the third and fourth stanzas of this poem the poet begins to intimate that his "dreams" of Oisin and the Countess Cathleen which "had all [his] thought and love" at the time of their creation do not now constitute proper themes for Yeats. He parades these old circus animals not for praise, but as Frank Kermode observes, to show how they had served in the past to cheat the heart, how they were the consolations of his own imperfection and estrangement. And what he has been separated from is that "heart" of the self which is firmly anchored in real life, not symbolic life. Yeats says, "Players and painted stage took all my love / And not those things that they were emblems of." "Players and painted stage," then, have been the dream, the work of imagination which relegates real life to a position of minor importance. Yeats's past approach to creating does not work for him now and must be corrected by returning and emphasizing not the emblem itself, but what the emblem represents. "A mound of refuse or the sweepings of a street, / Old kettles, old bottles, and a broken can," are all appropriate beginnings for the telling of a tale. Only at life's end can the poet, now wise and old, perceive through hindsight that these images are where the heart really lies, and it is to the heart that he is now devoted and not to "vain gaiety, vain battle, vain repose" of past symbols. Only now can he "lie down where all the ladders start / In the foul rag and bone shop of the heart."
Yeats's discovery of new circus animals for creative efficacy, like his new-found physical virility, is no less part of that dialectic setting past and present at extremes than his assessment of modern social degradation. For both social and personal conflicts are based upon something missing: contemporary society, Yeats told us in "The Gyres," has become a "numb nightmare" in which a "greater, a more gracious time has gone"; and after expressing some anxiety for failing abilities because of age, Yeats boasts of a physical prowess and intellectual capacity for pursuing new poetic directions that he had not experienced in youth. Whereas in society's temporal conflict he faults the present, he condemns the past in the contrast between his personal present and past. In sustaining this temporal conflict, Yeats closely allies himself with Eliot and his acerbic evaluation of contemporary culture. Eliot also maintains in Poems 1920 and The Waste Land a framework of dialecticism that allows him to emphasize the fact that disparity exists between social qualities of the past and of the present. Although Yeats often manifests this dialectic in terms that Eliot would consider far too personal, the basis of that dialectic remains the same. Both are caught in the tidal forces created by that dialectic, so that at their closest point of correspondence, in their perspective of modern society, they are similarly torn between past and present.
Chapter Two

Society's Vulgar Modernity/Its Culturally Rich History:

*Poems 1920 and The Waste Land*

Elliot is concerned more consistently than Yeats with the problems of a society that has betrayed its cultural inheritance through ignorance of that inheritance's value. The modern world has isolated itself from the past, Elliot asserts, and has therefore determined the circumstances of its own intellectual and spiritual death. Just as Yeats emphasizes this kind of discontinuity between both society's and his own past and present in *New Poems* and *Last Poems*, Elliot heightens the sense of conflict that has resulted from this discontinuity by consistently introducing images from the past into the present in *Poems 1920* and *The Waste Land*. In doing so, Elliot clearly contrasts the heroic and ordered lives of history, such as those of the Attic and Roman eras, with the life of impotence and anomie characterizing the contemporary world. These images and motifs are, as Elizabeth Drew suggests, reminders of times when the world was not uniformly stale and unsavory—as it is in the poetic worlds of Sweeney and the lonely figures of *The Waste Land*—and of the creative imagination's work in art and thought which have embodied a different reality and pictured a different vision. Such works are "different" because they are enduring, not transient. Thus the worlds of the temporal and eternal are always co-existent in *Poems 1920* and *The Waste Land*, but it is a co-existence of disunity, rather than of harmony.

In "Gerontian," the first poem of *Poems 1920*, the modern world has lost the faith and spiritual understanding that history has given it opportunities to know, and as a result is unforgiven: "After such knowledge, what forgive-
ness?" History, therefore, has become human experience lived without the framework of a Logos, and "deceives with whispering ambitions." "We would see a sign!" is the cry of a people who have lost faith because of such self-deception and is symptomatic of an age that is content with vulgarizations, with inadequate representations of spiritual and historical truth. Christ "the tiger" is "To be eaten, to be divided, to be drunk / Among whispers," among the quiet voices of refined sensibility that articulate a "thousand small deliberations" but not a profound love felt by passionate men and resulting in spiritual insight. Gerontion's world exists in a single season of denial, "depraved May," that returns whenever the life of sense stirs without love. The language of the poem also is emotionally arid, except for the two lines, "I that was near your heart was removed therefrom / To lose beauty in terror, terror in inquisition." Gerontion and his world were once close to the "heart" of God, but that relationship failed because of the supervision of a reasoning faculty, was lost in "inquisition." Man has come to live by the knowledge supplied by empirical science, that "inquisition," and to rely on his own desires and "whispers," believing that he can control his own fate. As a result, he has lost his faculty for experiencing the "beauty" of an intensely close and profoundly loving relationship with "Christ the tiger" or anyone else: Gerontion says, "I have lost my passion: why should I need to keep it / Since what is kept must be adulterated?" Any vestige of passion would soon be twisted, Gerontion is convinced, beyond any resemblance of its original form or intention by the perverse necessity of modern circumstances.

Such emotional and spiritual aridity is the result of man's failure to learn from history, a failure that precipitates modern man's arrogance toward "Ancestral pearls" in Yeats's poetry. With its "many cunning passages, contrived
corridors / and issues," history defeats modern attempts, if any are made, to make sense of the past. But paradoxically, those who do not understand their past confront Gerontion's future. Eliot states in "Tradition and the Individual Talent" that a clear perception of history and a non–conflicting relationship with tradition can be obtained only "by great labour." But Gerontion and his world's "attention is distracted" from this effort by more immediately quotidian preoccupations, such as financial matters—the language of economics, "owner," "rented," "profit," appears strategically in the poem— that have all the fascination which should be devoted to things religious and spiritual. In Gerontion's experience, though, the nearest things to such a fascination for the mysterious communion that could result from the proper acceptance of the divine in man are the overtures made by "Mr. Silvero / With caressing hands"; by "Madame de Tornquist, in the dark room / Shifting the candles" to arrange the scene; and by "Fraulein von Kulp," who turned and looked invitingly as she was about to enter her room. Christ came "To be eaten, to be divided, to be drunk" by these people, but their empty actions reveal that they are the victims of a history betraying the modern world by way of "cunning passages" and "contrived corridors," giving "such supple confusion / That the giving famishes the craving." All is now a season of "depraved May," when the past is effectively sealed off from the present in a way that adds to the milieu of misery and spiritual impotence of Gerontion's world, for it cannot inform the present. "The word within a word" is "unable to speak a word" because even if it were to be "still believed," it would be in "memory only," a function of history that allows only "reconsidered passion," not an immediacy of emotion that reinforces the belief.

But Eliot informs us in "Burbank with a Baedeker: Bleistein with a Cigar" that Christian, and even pagan, history is full of events that should resist the
decay of modern memory. Part of the epigraph to "Burbank" reads, "nil nisi divinum stabile est; caetera fumus"—nothing endures unless divine; all else is smoke. And while many of Venice's glories are "divine" in a religious sense, Eliot makes it clear that they also represent certain secular ideals of enduring quality against which is contrasted the immediate and ephemeral. One of the ways Eliot effects this kind of contrast is by using ironic names. Burbank, for instance, has an encounter with "Princess Volupine," a name which suggests "wolf," "voluptuous," and "supine." These connotations, and the fact that she and Burbank meet "at a small hotel" for what we can safely assume is a rather seedy sexual liaison between tourist and decayed aristocrat, reduce the royalty of her title to no more than humorous pretension. Princess Volupine's next customer, Sir Ferdinand Klein, is also a small study in contrast between greatness and triviality, a contrast that Eliot emphasizes by separating the first, royal part of his name, Sir Ferdinand, and the last, reducing part of his name, Klein ("small"), by stanzas in a disconcerting manner. This is a reflection of the world of modern Venice, a glorious, culturally rich setting for an interior life of little substantive consequence. Its citizens, just as the members of contemporary society in Yeats's poetry, have been false to the past by failing to appreciate it, to live up to its ideals. It is a place of petty encounters, such as between Burbank and Volupine, and of ugly ignorance, embodied in Bleistein.

What makes Eliot's portrayal of Venice's decay even more damning is his satire of Burbank's idealism. Eliot depicts modern attitudes towards the ruin of time that is the Venice of today in Burbank's provincial, uncritical eagerness to admire what is only the "smoky candle end of time" that still "declines." Burbank is expecting to see the Venetian splendor pictured in his Baedeker, an idyllic bastion of European heroic history caught in a suspen-
sion of time. Grover Smith describes him as one who takes to himself the artistic and spiritual values, one who is "the appreciative embodiment of the enduring spirit whose works are catalogued in the guidebook." How more severe the contrast, then, when Eliot sets Burbank's romantic idealism against the reality of a Venice that is barely able to be supported by history's edifice while "rats are underneath the piles," gnawing away at the traditions that once made Venice a true showplace of European culture. Just as "Princess Volupine extends / A meagre, blue-nailed, phthisic hand," so does the city project a sickly image made partly by visitors such as Bleistein, who is unable to appreciate the art of Venice with a "lustreless protrusive eye." It is the partial realization of the defeat of high expectations that leads Burbank to reflect at the poem's end, "Who clipped the lion's wings / And flea'd his rump and pared his claws?" Burbank's romantic illusions about Venice are finally disturbed to the extent that he can start to question the substance of what he has seen. Where are the living traditions of an heroic age that would lend meaning and potency to memorials such as the lion statue, Burbank queries in his naive way. They have gone the way of "the God Hercules," a once-important figure of a proud culture that has slid in decay to the tune of "Defunctive music under sea."

Decay is one of those tragic elements that are inherent in the very quality of life, transcending historical epochs and characterizing all people of all times, Eliot makes clear in the "Sweeney" poems, but the nature of the tragedy itself differs greatly from the classical age to the present. In "Sweeney Erect" Eliot implies that the difference between classical tragedy and modern tragedy is the distinction between permanence and impermanence. The seventh and central quatrain echoes Emerson's dictum that history is the "lengthened shadow of a man," is comprised of moments when great men
performed actions that would endure to be appreciated by future generations. But appreciation connotes influence, and Eliot, like Yeats, contends that history is not a valid influence in contemporary life. He says in prose:

There is coming into existence a new kind of provincialism which perhaps deserves a new name. It is a provincialism, not of space, but of time; one for which history is merely the chronicle of human devices which have served their turn and been scrapped, one for which the world is the property solely of the living, a property in which the dead hold no shares.12

The vestiges of human dignity and heroism that comprise history's best moments are missing in Sweeney's world. He himself is symptomatic of Eliot's "provincial" age. So much so that Emerson surely would not have defined history as he did if he had "seen the silhouette / Of Sweeney straddled in the sun." His ambivalent attitude toward the female epileptic is a mock-heroic parody certainly not in the tradition of Aspatia's story, nor of the Ariadne and Theseus legend to which the poem alludes.

The proud and romantic lines of the poem's beginning,

Paint me a cavernous waste shore
   Cast in the unstilled Cyclades,
Paint me the bold anfractuous rocks
   Faced by the snarled and yelping seas.

Display me Aeolus above
   Reviewing the insurgent gales
Which tangle Ariadne’s hair
And swell with haste the perjured sails.
are rudely contrasted with the lines that bring us to the present:
Morning stirs the feet and hands
(Nausicaa and Polyphem).
Gesture of orang-outang
Rises from the sheets in steam...

Jackknife upward at the knees
Then straightens out from heel to hip
Pushing the framework of the bed
And clawing at the pillow slip.
The language of ancient romantic tragedy trivializes the language of modern interpersonal relationships, polarizing the extremes of heroic and epileptic life. The latter extreme is epitomized by the assertion that Sweeney "Knows the female temperament," a statement which is also ironic in light of Sweeney’s cruel treatment of his lady-friend. As he "tests the razor on his leg / Waiting until the shriek subsides," Sweeney broadens the gap between his world and the classical past. His apathy is indicative of a modern malaise of failed love. Even good intentions are undermined by ignorant vacuity, such as when Doris brings "sal volatile / And a glass of brandy neat" for the suffering of the woman. She has come in response to the "lack of taste" exhibited by this epileptic, but smelling salts and brandy are distinctly inappropriate remedies for epilepsy. This absurdity and the other pictures of life’s degradation and vulgarization, Eliot tells us, cast no Emersonian shadows, will remain impermanent images that pale in contrast to the painting of that "cavernous waste shore."
In "Sweeney Among the Nightingales," Eliot telescopes his associations with even more immediacy than in "Sweeney Erect" to illustrate the conflict between past and present. The particularly animalistic portrayal of Sweeney in the first stanza—"ape," "zebra," and "giraffe" quickly characterize Sweeney—is at extreme odds with the next two stanzas' images of cosmic significance. Here, the myths of both the heavens and the underworld are veiled in doom. The "stormy moon" is sliding toward the river Plate, portents of death are present, the great constellations "are veiled," and the symbol of life itself, the sea, is "hushed" and "shrunken." Amidst these signs of ill fate sits Sweeney, who "guards the horned gate." It is through this gate that, traditionally, truth is revealed from the underworld; it cannot do so now, though, because Sweeney blocks the way. And the "truth" that he prevents from being revealed is for Eliot lasting human tradition, not the devitalized actions of the customers in the public house that cannot long be sustained and that have no meaning beyond their immediate effects.

And image that does have endurance is the nightingales; it is the device by which Eliot bridges the gap between Sweeney's world and Agamemnon's world. These nightingales are the inviolable voices of Philomela and, therefore, of all rich mythological associations. But Sweeney and the rest of the customers do not hear the singing. For they are inside, secluded from the nightingales' voices as they sing of dead Agamemnon's memory and of all associated with that, such as the relationships of man and nature and the gods, of mortality and immortality, and of nature and spirit. Sweeney and his modern world's seclusion from their cultural legacy and these relationships robs the past of its greatness, denies Agamemnon his moment in history when he utters his cry of betrayal which is the poem's epigraph, "Alas, I am stricken deep by a mortal blow."
The birds also sing in *The Waste Land*—disturbingly so. For their voices are the reminders of past epochs and events whose significance just eludes the modern conscience, and sing the songs "mixing / Memory and desire." They are the singing voices through which Eliot expresses a comparative vision, a perspective of history in which twentieth-century forms of belief and disbelief, of culture and of life, are kept in a continuous and critical relationship with those of the past.¹⁴ In his discussions of other poets and of the critic's role, Eliot goes far toward explaining the importance of this allusive technique. His earliest statements concerning the importance of tradition are made in "Tradition and the Individual Talent," when he says that "not only the best, but the most individual parts of [the poet's] work may be those in which the dead poets, his ancestors, assert their immortality most vigorously."¹⁵ This is not to say, however, that blind adherence to the past should be encouraged. Rather, Eliot makes clear, especially in "What is a Classic?," that a balance should be maintained between tradition and contemporaneity: "The persistence of literary creativeness in any people . . . consists in the maintenance of an unconscious balance between tradition in the larger sense—the collective personality, so to speak, realized in the literature of the past—and the originality of the living generation."¹⁶ What is required, then, is an "historical sense, which is a sense of the timeless as well as of the temporal and of the timeless and of the temporal together."¹⁷ Allusion is a servant of this balanced sensibility of timelessness and temporality, and is one of the means that "through the living authors . . . the dead remain alive."¹⁸ It is the dysfunction of this sensibility, though, that Eliot depicts in the larger arena of social context in *The Waste Land*. It is here that the balance between an awareness of the timeless and temporal has gone awry, the result of Western man's emotional, intellectual, and spiritual sterility. The voice in the arid desert of modern life that is the
nightingale's and speaker's song cries out from the effort of resurrecting "the dead," from the tension resulting from "stirring / Dull roots with spring rain."

Because resurrection of that "heap of broken images" from man's past exists only as possibility and not actuality, the tension between allusion and meaning assumes threatening dimensions in *The Waste Land*. Always in the poem is the possibility of modern man's understanding of his culturally rich past, but this understanding is never achieved. Just as Yeats begins to acquire in his last poems qualities associated with his early past, society in Eliot's world comes closer by the end of *The Waste Land* to receiving the rain that promises new life and revived growth through a better sense of the past. But the rain mainly exists only in the subjunctive reality of "If there were water / And no rock," not in the actuality of the speaker's present circumstances, which is living among a people "now dying / With a little patience." This is a people essentially dead to the knowledge of "the roots that clutch," the branches" that grow out of the "stony rubbish" of contemporary ignorance. What exactly the branches of racial memory are this people "cannot say or guess." Still, although the "nymps are departed" in "The Fire Sermon," as is Hercules in "Burbank," to take with them the allure of classical knowledge and to leave behind the image of prostituted love—"The nymphs are / departed / And their friends, the loitering heirs of City directors"—there are tenuous promises of rebirth hidden among the dry stones of sterile society. Or rather, there are threats of such. For the language of a rebirth's possibility is couched in terms of an unwanted fate, of force-feeding those "dull roots." In "What the Thunder Said," for example, the living dead who exist among the "mountains of rock without water" experience much agitation: "Here one can neither stand nor lie nor sit." Their existence among the arid stones is disturbed because there "is not even silence in the mountains / But dry sterile
thunder without rain." Portents of renewal do not augre well for a people determined to die; the fulfillment of such forecasts would be considered a reprisal, not a saving grace. But there is no escaping the voices nor the faces of the past: "There is not even solitude in the mountains / But red sullen faces sneer and snarl / From doors of mudcracked houses." The countenances of knowledge denied freedom menace modern placidity, forcing it almost within hearing range of "the hermit-thrush [that] sings in the pine trees" and that stirs memory and desire.

The nightingale that is Philomela also disturbs the waste land with her singing. In her case, however, the song has become incoherent babbling that does little to add meaning to the antique mantels with their wall decorations in "A Game of Chess." The reductive perception of Philomela's song as merely "Jug Jug" transforms the mythological panels to stumps of a past without meaning for the present. These are "staring forms / Leaned out, leaning, hushing the room enclosed." Philomela's song and other articulations of a rich heritage reach out into silence after being reduced by "dirty ears" to the meaningless "Jug Jug" that precedes and mirrors the insubstantial talk of "'Do / You know nothing? Do you see nothing? Do you remember nothing?'" The efficacy of modern memory as a force to retrieve and attach meaning to object or event is called into serious question here, raising again the spectre of a people not really living, not really dead: "'Are you alive, or not? Is there nothing in your head?'" With no racial memory, there can be no significance to the cultural artifacts of the dead. The cost of ignorance of such artifacts is high. Eliot reminds us in The Use of Poetry and The Use of Criticism, "The people which ceases to care for its literary inheritance becomes barbaric; the people which ceases to produce literature ceases to move in thought and sensibility."20
Like Philomela, the modern world has suffered the indecent trauma of a rape. Only it is a rape of an historical sensibility resulting from a people that has ceased to care about its inheritance, a people entirely similar to those who have turned Yeats's world into a "numb nightmare." The "sylvan scene" depicting the metamorphosis of Philomela is situated, along with the other reminders of antiquity, among objects that have supplanted these relics as centers of value. There are "marble," "jewels," and "satin cases" that seduce one away from the recognition that the real symbols of worth and vitality lie elsewhere in the room. For in "vials of ivory" are "synthetic perfumes" that drown "the sense in odours," washing away the roots of memory and the power to appreciate the significance of the scene where "the barbarous king / So rudely forced" Philomela. Eliot emphasizes Philomela's in comprehensibility to the modern world by later repeating her song in "The Fire Sermon." She sings, "Twit, twit twit / Jug jug jug jug jug jug / So rudely forced. / Tereu." Her song is still the same. The notes conveying the story of antiquity and inheritance are still muted by the shades of the "Unreal City" and their preoccupation with "the profit and loss," devitalizing symbols of their own cultural heritage until they are but "withered Stumps of time." The past for Yeats and Eliot has often been the origin of "beautiful lofty things." Now, "Heroic reverie [is] mocked by clown and knave ("A Bronze Head"). The past's heroic and artistic virtues conflict with the present's foolish ignorance, and Yeats and Eliot are caught between the two, admiring the one, but living in the other.
SECTION II
Self-Effacement

When the moon's full those creatures of the full
Are met on the waste hills by country men
Who shudder and hurry by: body and soul
Estranged amid the strangeness of themselves

--W.B. Yeats, "The Phases of the Moon"

In a statement from *Per Amica Silentia Lunae* (1917) that could serve as an appropriate epigraph to *Ash–Wednesday* (1930), Yeats writes that happiness "depends on the energy to assume the mask of some other life, on a rebirth as something not one's self, something created in a moment and perpetually renewed."¹ For Eliot, this effort is the struggle to escape those "undisciplined squads of emotion" which distract the poet from his artistic crafting and the religious penitent from his prayer, and is a flight necessary to those two activities' success. For Yeats, this statement is the seminal idea behind his doctrine of the mask and the theoretical foundation from which would evolve the more complex systems of personal and historical movements between complete objectivity and subjectivity, represented by his gyres and Great Wheel. The common denominator between these Yeatsian theories is the contention between opposites, a troubled relationship which paradoxically attracts antinomies to each other as one attempts a transfiguration as something "not one's self." Yeats stresses this attraction when he writes further in *Per Amica*: "We meet always in the deep of the mind, whatever our work, wherever our reverie carries us, that other Will."² However, anti-selves, synonymous with "masks," may be brought together to inform and enlighten,
but they cannot be reconciled. Any resolution hinting at unification would destabilize the dialectic's distinctive balance and eviscerate the contentious dynamism driving antinomies simultaneously toward and away from each other. The anti-self is a part of man, but is a detached self, what Yeats describes as "in some sense of our being, and yet of our being but as water with fire, a noise with silence."3 And it is the irreconcilability of the anti-self with the primary self that Yeats often emphasizes in "Ego Dominus Tuus," "The Phases of the Moon," and "The Double Vision of Michael Robartes." "The Phases" identifies those stages, represented as spokes on the Great Wheel paralleling the phases of the moon, evolving toward either complete objective body or subjective spirit, and the inevitable mutual attraction between opposite points on the Wheel; and Michael Robertes's visions of both the "dark moon and the full" pull him between the two so that he is nearly "undone." Only from such pulling of tidal, antithetical forces, though, is the birth of a new vision possible, Yeats insists. All creative men must recognize their own proper mask, ideal opposites, and in trying to become those nearly impossible other selves create the dramatic tensions from which art arises.4

Art created from the tension of a divided self is part of Ronald Bush's observation when, in his study of Eliot's character and style, he discerns that the power of the poet's early verse is the result of an almost unbearable tension between romantic yearning and intellectual detachment, a tension that manifests itself in some of the major poems not as feeling and intellect working hand-in-glove but as powerful emotion held in powerful check.5 Elizabeth Drew also notices Eliot's restrained emotionalism when she evaluates Ash-Wednesday as a poem of intensely personal emotion that is removed from romantic subjectivism by the interposing of symbolic emblems and by
the distancing of the whole experience into its own aesthetic world. Ash-Wednesday is, indeed, an account of the conflict arising from Eliot's asceticism attempting to subsume the quotidian pleasures achieved through personal feelings. The poem chronicles this effort to sublimate, the process of a divided consciousness fighting between the estranged selves of discipline and emotion. Such a conflict for Eliot can have no steady evolution toward some final, reconciling goal. Rather, it is characterized by the line, "Teach us to care and not to care," a seemingly paradoxical request for both experiencing and eradicating feelings. Poetry itself is not, after all, a "turning loose of emotion, but an escape from emotion," as Eliot had said eleven years prior to Ash-Wednesday's publication. And Eliot asserts that the only context in which the struggle to liberate oneself from such an integral component of experience may even remotely be possible is religious discipline; and it is a struggle defined by indecision and ambivalence, by what Elizabeth Drew describes as progression and regression. "Turning" away from worldly concerns and facing toward a strong commitment to spiritual matters is a delicate maneuver, one involving many twists on the stairs of the pilgrimage. What Eliot attempts in Ash-Wednesday is to prevent that turning from swinging past the fulcrum of caring and non-caring and gaining momentum toward one or the other, to destroy forever the balance necessary for artistic and spiritual achievement. As it is for Yeats in The Wild Swans at Coole, though, the self first must be divorced from its old identity in a process of self-effacement before a transfigured, enlightened personality can emerge.
Chapter Three

Personal Detachment: The Wild Swans at Coole

It is in "Ego Dominus Tuus," written in 1915 and published in 1917, that Yeats first synthetized systematically the artistic and supernatural philosophy which had resulted from a life-long interest in the paranormal and a more recent involvement in automatic writing. These mystical activities had led him in the years just prior to writing "Ego" into prolonged communication, he believed, with his own anti-self, the metaphorical importance of which Yeats could relate poetically through Hic and Ille's dialogue, the didacticism of "The Phases of the Moon," Minnaloushe's relationship with the moon in the "The Cat and the Moon," and the divided vision of "The Double Vision of Michael Robartes." Each of these poems derives thematically from Yeats's simple notion that the creative man is destined to quarrel with himself, something which Eliot does in Ash-Wednesday, and is an idea which evolved for Yeats into the more elaborate systems of self and anti-self, gyres, and the Great Wheel. Both the poems of Yeats and Eliot's Ash-Wednesday, therefore, work in patterns of conflict between antithetical forces that cannot be resolved. Resolution is not possible, suggests M.L. Rosenthal, because no one can choose absolutely between opposites, a division further complicated by the two antinomies' dependence on one another for whatever it is they signify.

Mutually defining relationships exist in "Ego" also as two conflicts: Ille's polemic against Hic, and his struggle to invoke his anti-self. Hic's position in the argument with Ille represents the objective, primary man associated with the body, a position Yeats ultimately makes to look indefensible because it denies any reality beyond the immediacy of the self and the natural world. Hic would, he says, "find myself," a sentiment representative of the age—Ille
brands Hic's statement the "modern hope." Hic's concept of self-realization includes the preference for artists who rely on the limiting sphere of knowledge and understanding that comes by way of mundane "imitation of great masters" and "sedentary toil." It is not surprising, then, that he should object at the poem's beginning to Ille's use of "Magical shapes" to summon some strange "opposite" and its knowledge as "the unconquerable delusion."

Such claims Yeats carefully rebut through Ille's determination to forge a reality based upon continual conflict, one that scorns Hic's sentimental view and includes life's "dissipation and despair." Representing Yeats's spiritually enlightened subjective man, Ille is compelled to envision experience as extending beyond a mere physically oriented sensibility to encompass what Norman Jeffares describes as a source of creativity that is conventionally ununderstood. This source is closely allied to Ille's definition of the self, which is radically different from what Hic intends. It is, Ille begins to explain, his "own opposite" which comprises all that he has "handled least, least looked upon." Divorced from the familiar, the anti-self can help the truly creative artist regain the "old nonchalance of the hand" that had been lost with the ascendancy of objective man. This lack of inspiration is responsible for a dramatic deterioration in modern artistic efforts: "Whether we have chosen chisel, pen or brush, / We are but critics, or but half create." Whereas it is Eliot's desire in Ash-Wednesday to escape his emotional self that is tied to the material world and thereby become a more fully spiritual self, Ille's hope is that he can create wholly by confronting that "mysterious one" who possesses the kind of knowledge that the contemporary world has dispossessed. For the anti-self mirrors and completes particular people in the world so that they can fully realize their creative potential. If Ille can meet that estranged part of himself who, he says, looks "most like me, being indeed my double," then he too could meet
his greatest success since it will "disclose / All that I seek." He would also escape the "Timid, entangled, empty and abashed" condition of the modern artist who has only the hollow shell that is a life lived without ever assuming the mask of his other, opposite self.

The Yeatsian ideal of a self temporarily appropriating an anti-self entails much conflict, though. Much of "Ego"'s poetic tension derives from Ille's actual attempt to encounter that which is "most unlike" himself, a relationship whose own extremes are indicative of the possible difficulties in closing the divisions between selves. Yeats compares the desire to attain what is most wanted but least possible—the human condition when seeking one's mask—to a "hunger for the apple on the bough / Most out of reach." The effort required to reach and pick that fruit is almost superhuman, especially since one is attempting to extend the delimiting characteristics of his normal self and thereby transfigure his personality. Ille's interpretation of Dante's fate insists that the Italian master was able to reach that farthest apple and then " fashioned from his opposite" an image that allowed him to depict, if he willed, that which was most uncommon to him. But Dante's accomplishment is measured by his sacrifice, by his decision to "set his chisel to the hardest stone" and endeavor to perform the hardest of all possible tasks: depicting that which was least known to him. Yeats, in *Per Amica*, speaks of a "Daimon who would ever set us to the hardest work among those not impossible,"7 and in "Ego" this demon is analogous to that impossible other self which drives Dante to "climb that stair and eat that bitter bread." Only through such arduous toil can the kind of artist Yeats admires achieve superb artistic crafting and find the "unpersuadable justice." He does so in the guise of a new identity, one forged from the old unenlightened self and its personal demon, the spectre of all least known, least understood.
The transient union between self and anti-self results in the artist presenting to the world a face that might conflict with his original personality; Yeats emphasizes this especially because such a meeting of selves is possible only to those who have awakened to all of reality's misfortunes. Yeats writes in *Per Amica*: "The other self, the anti-self or the antithetical self . . . comes but to those who are no longer deceived, whose passion is reality."8 This is art's function, to reflect a "vision of reality," insists Ille in a rejoinder to Hic's argument that there must be "men who have made their art / Out of no tragic war." Hic in turn is responding to Ille's description of Dante's struggle to carve his art from the hardest stone, contending that there have been other artists reconciled with the world, "lovers of life" who "look for happiness / And sing when they have found it." Such men, according to Ille, are mere propagandists who use their servile art to falsify reality rather than to present it:9 "The rhetorician would deceive his neighbours, / The sentimentalist himself." The truly subjective artist, however, sees behind the facade of the world's "happiness" to perceive conflict and regret as man's usual lot: Ille asks rhetorically, "What portion in the world can the artist have / Who has awakened from the common dream / But dissipation and despair?" Such an artist can celebrate what pleasure he does discover in life privately, or he can do so, as Ille suggests Keats did, publicly and despair over life's tragedy privately. For Keats had his "face and nose pressed to a sweet-shop window," separated from what he yearned for most, and finally "sank into his grave / His senses and his heart unsatisfied." But in spite of being shut out "from the luxury of the world," Keats still made "Luxuriant song." His art became in a very real and important sense his mask, that other self into which he could lose himself for the time it took him to forget his condition as a "poor, ailing and ignorant man." His life might have been unhappy and unfulfilled, but in striv-
ing to break through that shop-window to his greatest desires, his art became magnificent testimony to all that his life was not.

Although at the end of "Ego" Ille swears that he seeks "an image, not a book," he has returned in the beginning of "The Phases of the Moon" to his tower to consult the tome of occult knowledge abandoned earlier by Robartes so that he can discover a way to possess that image of his anti-self. His understanding of that book has apparently been limited, for Aherne encourages Robartes to reveal to the tower's occupant only the "broken crust" of revelation regarding "all those truths that are [his own] daily bread." These "truths," we overhear in the conversation between Aherne and Robartes, are an elaborate scheme of human patterns and archetypes that exist through the tension created by the attraction of their polar opposites. Perhaps Yeats's most didactic poem, "Phases" is based upon his theory of the Great Wheel and gyres which, as he explains in A Vision, is "every completed movement of thought or life, twenty-eight incarnations, a single incarnation, a single judgment or act of thought." 10 Within this great cycle man "seeks his opposite or the opposite of his condition." 11 However, when the "moon's full those creatures of the full," or creatures of complete subjectivity, "Are met on the waste hills by country men," and these men "shudder and hurry by" the apparitions of their opposite selves. For "body and soul" are "Estranged amid the strangeness of themselves"; although they recognize one another as opposites, they are unable to join in harmonious union. This is the tension between self and anti-self described in "Ego," and is the difficult relationship with one's opposite that in A Vision Yeats asserts is necessary to the large scheme of personal and historical phases:
Only by the pursuit or acceptance of its direct opposite, that object of desire or moral ideal which is of all possible things the most difficult... can [the individual] attain self-knowledge and expression.12

Louis MacNeice provides a good example of this relationship between opposites of the Great Wheel when he says that the man of Phase 3, who is almost without intellect and is a phase of "perfect bodily sanity," becomes a persona for poets of the opposite phase, Phase 17. This seventeenth phase, MacNeice notes, consists of the sensitive artist who is confused and violent, harassed by his own intellect and desires, and looks to the man of Phase 3 for patterns of idyllic innocence.13

Conflict exists also in the evolution from phase to phase, in the effort of a particularized persona to rend the veil into the next level of incarnation. Yeats uses terms of battle to depict this struggle, such as when he describes the sequence of events preceding the pure soul Phase 15: "The thirteenth moon but sets the soul at war / In its own being, and when that war's begun / There is no muscle in the arm." That struggle continues in the fourteenth moon, when there is a "frenzy" of activity in which the "soul begins to tremble into stillness." It hovers on the brink of consummation as pure spirit, obliterating body, and so begins to "die into the labyrinth of itself." Even existing in the perfection of the full moon as complete spirit or in the new moon of total body, the soul is plagued by conflict, though. For at these extremes it is too "perfect at the full to lie in a cradle." As Eliot discovers in Ash-Wednesday in the conflict between the emotional and spiritual bodies, such perfection of one or the other opposite can have no place in conventional society, would be too "lonely for the traffic of the world," and therefore is relegated to an existence away from human life: "Body and soul cast out and cast away / Beyond the
visible world." This is a time of "terror" that is redeemable only by the fact that these perfections of body and soul have arrived at the point of the inter-penetrating gyres where they reverse, where body and spirit are reintroduced to the world by their desire to seek their own opposite and thereby begin again that pursuit through the imperfect incarnations of the moon's phases.

Yeats and Eliot both hint at the tenuous possibility of reconciliation in the conflict between past and present, and do so again in the division between selves. In "The Double Vision of Michael Robartes," Yeats uses the act of dancing as a symbol of a beautific ideal helping to reconcile body and soul, self and anti-self. Divided structurally into three parts, the first two actually contain Robartes's vision of the human potential for widely divergent incarnations that constitutes the basis of Yeats's Great Wheel and gyres. Robartes's first vision occurs when "the old moon is vanished from the sky / And the new still hides her horn," a time when the body is purely physical. The individual consists of no more than the material essence of clay, being "pounded till it is man." It is also characteristic of this new-moon phase that the spiritless, mindless body is dispossessed of all ability to exert will: "When had I my own will? / O not since life began." In such a condition, man is "Constrained, arraigned, baffled, bent and unbent," answerable not to himself but to "wire-jointed jaws and limbs of wood" that are themselves obedient to some vague "hidden magical breath." Contrasted against this picture of total physicality is Robartes' vision of the human type at the fifteenth lunar phase, when all is spiritual fulfillment without bodily constraints. Three images are predominate here in the second section: Sphinx, Buddha, and female dancer. The first is associated with intellect, and recognizes "all things known, all things unknown." The Buddha sees "all things loved, all things unloved," and is therefore a representation of the heart, the seat of emotion. Between these two
ances a "girl at play" whose oscillating movement between pure intellect and pure emotion reconciles these two and makes her a vision of the perfection of art.

Such a utopian vision, however, is not possible for Yeats without the presence of a tension resulting from the interplay of opposites, and is ultimately only a temporary illusion. There are two sets of opposites operative in the poem, reinforcing the sense of conflict that is ameliorated suddenly but insubstantially in the last stanza. The first conflict is between Robartes's two visions, that of Phase 1 where the body is characterized as the malleable form of "complete plasticity," and that of Phase 15 where the spirit exists in "complete beauty." That these two states of being exist at polar extremes from each is made clearer when, in the poem's third section, Robartes is torn by what he has seen: "To such a pitch of folly I am brought, / Being caught between the pull / Of the dark moon and the full." His "dark" vision of spiritless bodies denied freedom through will contrasts with the full moon's illumination of human perfection mentioned above, of what Richard Ellmann calls three images of the self at its fullest development. As Eliot will find in Ash-Wednesday that he cannot choose absolutely between opposites, Robartes belongs to neither one of these absolute phases, centering himself between them so that he is "caught" between their "pull." Their mutual lunar attraction has, indeed, become a distraction for Robartes, making his "pulses beat" as though he "had been undone." He is, as Harold Bloom observes, trapped between the inescapable deterministic, objective world, and the unattainable freedom of art, a combination itself of intellect and emotion evolved into perfection of beauty. There is no sustained attempt to resolve this conflict, for although Robartes has momentarily transcended his ignorance and "arranged" his vision into "a song," it is a song that still exists as conflict. The price for
such knowledge, says Yeats, is indicated by the cry of despair, "Thereon I made my moan."

The second set of contraries defines Yeats's perception of art, suggesting in itself that antithetical forces are prime constituents of the creative effort, a point that Eliot makes clear in *Ash-Wednesday*. These elements consist of "A Sphinx with woman breast and lion paw" who gazes "upon all things known, all things unknown, / In triumph of intellect"; and a "Buddha, hand at rest, / hand lifted up that blest" whose sight is "fixed on all things loved, all things unloved." Sphinx and Buddha, representatives of intellect and emotion, exist in the poem as separate, distinct abstractions, but are brought together in harmony by the motion of the "girl at play" between them. For she dances a dance of reconciliation, a movement necessary for art's perfection. Representing physicality, she balances between intellect and emotion, affirming Yeats's view that art is not one or the other solely, but a parity of the two. The mind as a conveyer of intelligence and emotion must be brought under control and also reconciled with the body so that it seems paradoxically "to stop / As 'twere a spinning-top." Yeats is careful to stress, though, that this is a feat that could only be performed in this dream-like vision, in a reality that is a product of Robartes's imagination. It is a reality, in fact, in which seemingly only the unreal can participate, since the dancer has already "danced her life away, / For now being dead it seemed / That she of dancing dreamed," a dream twice removed from actuality because the dreamer is "dead." And thus as Eliot will determine that the best he can hope for is to continue trying in the fight to assume fully his most spiritual self, to arrive at a point past the "tension between dying and birth," so does Yeats discover that the reconciliation of body and spirit and of intellect and emotion is only possible in "the mind's eye." For this reconciliation's existence is defined paradoxically by
non-existence: the Sphinx, Buddha, and dancer are "dead yet flesh and bone." Just as Ille and the types on the Great Wheel are denied their full potential through contact with their anti-selves except by the most difficult struggle, so are these figures unable to attain a unity of being except through vision. All are separated from that most unlike themselves because Yeats, like Eliot, perceives that antinomies lend each other significance, are mutually defining. Detachment from one's "double" who looks "most like" himself is necessary if the assumption of one's mask is to have its greatest meaning.
Chapter Four
Impersonal Attachment: *Ash-Wednesday*

Like Yeats, Eliot perceives man's life divided between conflicting aspects of himself. As Yeats would see this contention occurring in the effort to assume the mask of his most difficult other existence, so would Eliot interpret it in *Ash-Wednesday* as the struggle to deny sensual personality and accept the arduous path of the religious penitent. This pilgrimage, what Derek Traversi terms a process of growth into acceptance,\(^1\) begins when in Part I the poet attempts to renounce his artistic past and to embrace a spiritual future. Or rather, he reveals an ambivalence about artistic ambition because such work has been firmly rooted in the secular world where he has not paid enough attention to his spiritual existence, and because he has resigned himself to artistic impotence resulting from old age. For he has assumed here the persona of an old poet who no longer desires "this man's gift and that man's scope," whose ambition is dead and whose aspiration he tries to bury in the struggle to turn away from the world. "(Why should the aged eagle stretch its wings?)," he quietly asks in the first stanza, and in doing so establishes an almost defeatist tone for the rest of the section. This attitude is reinforced by the utter apathy and powerlessness of the short, listless lines in the second stanza, "Because I do not think / Because I know I shall not know . . . Because I cannot drink." The insistent "because" persists throughout the whole section, helping the speaker to rationalize his belief that he is no longer privileged to "drink / There, where trees flower, and springs flow." These images of youth and life endure only for the brief span it requires the speaker to deny their relation to him, and are burdened with serving additionally as symbols of
creativity, lightened only when the speaker says that "there is nothing again." For he has returned to that state before he began his artistic crafting, when the creative mind was empty of striving and of pursuit toward the "infirm glory of the positive hour."

But there is "something" after that "nothing" which begins to fill the void left by the "vanished power of the usual reign" and which re-orients the speaker toward new subjects for art's creation. In these first faltering attempts at prayer, the speaker starts to realize possibilities of using prayer's subject as poetry's subject. He does not want to fool himself about finding the divine in ordinary life, so he turns inward through meditation and attempts to arrive at an understanding with himself concerning his past life as a poet ignoring the spirit and his new life as proselyte. Arrival at this new status may have been as a second choice—those wings which had lifted him to creative heights "are no longer wings to fly / But merely vans to beat the air"—but a new poetic direction has been set, and with it the realization that he "cannot hope to turn again" back to the old sources of his art. He does, in fact, want to capitulate in religious submission,2 and "forget / These matters / that with [himself he] too much" discusses, matters sufficiently reprehensible to require "God to have mercy upon us." Eliot's concern for his past life of sinful poetic preoccupation with mortal despair conflicts with his new—found faith in spiritual discipline and becomes the center of tension for the entire poem. He has begun one of six isolated attempts to subsume his emotional self, pursuing another aspect of himself that Yeats describes doing when he searches for that which is "most like" him but is also the "most unlike." For Eliot must now, he realizes, relinquish worldly concerns so that he can "sit still," an act of complete simplicity that has important spiritual potential. If his supplication, "Teach us to care and not to care / Teach us to sit still," is successful, then the individual
will can be dissolved through identification with God’s will. Those old aspirations of drinking where the "trees flower" and the "springs flow" are now redefined as aspirations of passive activity, as the desire to allow revelation to occur of and by itself.

In Part II we begin to see that Ash-Wednesday exists as a fragmentary series of attempts to start his new life of ascetic discipline, not as a continuous poetic narrative. For in this part, the first of the six sections to be originally published but traditionally appearing second in the complete poem, Eliot is concerned in a different manner with the subject of the proselyte speaker's plea in Part I, to eclipse the individual will with the divine will. He uses an image that represents the almost total dissolution of the old self. It is a voluntary disintegration motivated by the conviction that only through surrendering oneself totally can one arrive at the correct path of both spiritual and artistic salvation, just as Yeats perceives consummate artistic talent available to those who look beyond their immediate self to find their opposites. Eliot had indicated the importance of this divestiture when he quoted St. John of the Cross in the epigraph to Sweeney Agonistes: "Hence the soul cannot be possessed of the divine union, until it has divested itself of the love of created beings." This is the curiously unwilled, inactive stage in Eliot’s process of self-effacement that follows from the first efforts at spiritual atonement and redirection and precedes the spiritual struggles of the rest of the poem. The "three white leopards" have assisted materially in furthering the speaker’s attempt to reduce his individual will by metaphorically devouring all vestiges of human desire. Their success is measured by the speaker’s new-found capacity for benign behavior that induces an etherized contentment of charitable proportions: "And I who am here dissembled / Proffer my deeds to oblivion, and my love / To the posterity of the desert and the fruit of the gourd." There is a strong sense here
of the speaker suffering a pleasant death, of a bequest that presumes some extinction. Human action as performed in the past by the speaker is suitable only for oblivion, and even his altruism, that selfless "love" which he offers to "posterity," is decreed appropriate only for the future. Past and present dim in importance, then, in light of the hope for what is to come after the time of atonement. All that transpired before this period and that had been part of the speaker's life represents now the old self redeemed partially by the present efforts to forget that past: "Let the whiteness of bones atone to forgetfulness . . . / As I am forgotten / And would be forgotten, so I would forget." Ille hopes to transfigure his present life though his anti-self, to make it extinct so that a new understanding can occur, and the speaker here in Part II hopes that with the mind's neglect of the self's former existence comes the death of that life, for the bones now "scattered and shining" have "no life in them."

Because the speaker has reconciled himself to a new life recovered from the scattered bones of his disassembled old existence, Part II is the repository of a serenity not present in any other section of Ash-Wednesday. Those bones, in fact, recite a litany to the Virgin Mary/Beatrice that resolves conflicts of multiple paradoxes itemized in the lyric. First, however, in her capacity as the "Rose of memory," Mary—she is referred to as a rose in the Ash-Wednesday litany—conjures images that do not reconcile: "Calm and distressed / Torn and most whole." This is a description of an existence plagued by the extremes of separation and near-communion with God. The next stage in the rose's evolution is that of forgetfulness, an act that still entails unresolved conditions of exhaustion and enhancement, worry and repose. But when the "single Rose" is transformed into "the Garden," serene contemplation ensues. There is a termination of the torment brought about by "love unsatisfied" and by the "greater torment / Of love satisfied." Defeating the normal expectation
of what the human response to unrequited and requited love should be, Eliot powerfully reiterates with new implications what had become his well-known maxim, that poetry is an escape from emotion. What he achieves in *Ash-Wednesday* is the poetic expression of an important variation on that maxim, that one's spiritual life must also be an escape from emotion—thus the supplication, "Teach us to sit still." Ideally, if one can escape the disordering chaos of feeling, then he will have reached the "End of the endless / Journey," just as Ille believes that if he can flee the unimaginative conventions embodied in the "modern hope," then he can successfully complete himself through contact with his opposite. Eliot emphasizes this right conduct for poetic and spiritual enlightenment in the lyric through repetition: the lines, "The single Rose / Is now the Garden / Where all loves end," are followed later by the words of praise, "Grace to the Mother / For the Garden / Where all love ends."

But feelings and emotions are, of course, integrally human qualities that are not so easily displaced by spiritual discipline, and in the central section of *Ash-Wednesday*, Part III, Eliot illustrates the internal struggles of the spiritual pilgrim; this is the religious penitent attempting to adhere to Eliot's austere code of conduct for passage to the "Garden / Where all love ends." This section has a decidedly dream-like quality to it that has its stylistic roots in what Eliot termed, in an essay published in the same year as *Ash-Wednesday*, Dante's "visual imagination." This imagination works from seeing visions, which was once "a more significant, interesting, and disciplined kind of dreaming." In his vision Eliot's internal conflict to subsume personal feeling and attraction to the material world through spiritual detachment becomes externalized. That is, his struggle is represented metaphorically as two figures of the same man, a man slowly and painfully learning to divorce himself from the temptations of his material life. In this vision the speaker climbs upward in
penance, witnessing his "same shape twisted on the banister / . . . Struggling with the devil of the stairs who wears / The deceitful face of hope and of despair." It is a tortured other self whom the speaker views, who grapples with the devil that is doubt and which alternately presents the face of "hope and despair"—Eliot is still careful to couch his language in contraries. Only the deliberate, agonizing attempt at self-effacement has produced this mirror-image of the speaker; he is now as those "country men" in Yeats's "The Phases of the Moon" who "hurry by" their opposites, "Estranged amid the strangeness of themselves."

It is, then, a distinctly unpleasant process that the religious pilgrim must endure if he is to achieve the necessary emotional detachment. Much of the imagery reflects this unpleasantness, but is itself contrasted with appealing imagery to reinforce the nature of the conflict occurring in the section. The atmosphere, for example, consists of amorphous "vapour" and "fetid air," a suitably hostile environment for fighting one's own "devil." The path at the stairs is particularly gloomy, partially obscuring the condition in which the spiritual pilgrim must travel. It is a lonely path, also, and one not illumined by divine help in locating the correct direction to go: "There were no more faces and the stair was dark." The speaker's utter solitude is compounded by other discomforts represented in Eliot's characterization of the stairs leading away from personality and worldly concerns. These representations are grotesque and harsh. The stairs are described, for instance, as "Damp" and "jagged," and are compared to "a man's mouth drivelling, beyond repair." And as if seeking further extremes for exacerbating the already difficult travails of the penitent speaker, the kind of strenuous efforts that Yeats describes as necessary to find one's "impossible" other self, Eliot also compares those stairs to "the toothed gullet of an aged shark." The harsh consonant sounds of
"Damp," "jagged," toothed," and "gullet" lend verbal emphasis to the conceptual acerbity of the passage.

Eliot brings such visionary similes quickly into juxtaposition with more tranquil images in the third stanza. By this time, the speaker has reached the third stair and has just left behind the struggle of his former self. But such detachment is not possible without further difficulties that, paradoxically, assume the form of pleasant images. For here at the third level the speaker sees from afar the sensual world and is greatly tempted; this temptation compromises the spiritual progress that he has made. Through a "slotted window" he views the "hawthorn blossom and a pasture scene" in which a "broad backed figure . . . / Enchanted the maytime with an antique flute." The speaker is similarly enchanted with what he sees of the world he has left in order to adopt a severe Weltanschauung that would allow him to be removed successfully from that world. The music of the sensual life seduces him away from the impersonal path he has chosen, playing a song of "sweet" blown hair and "brown hair over the mouth blown, / Lilac and brown hair." The worldly preoccupations are responsible for making the speaker actually hesitate in his progress toward complete invulnerability from such distractions: "Distraction, music of the flute, stops and steps of the mind / over the third stair, / Fading, fading."

Although the distractions are temporary, they do reveal the speaker's susceptibility to reverting to that old subjective self he had left on the stairs below. This is the crucial "turning" point in the section. For as Michael Robartes is caught between the conflicting forces of pure objectivity and subjectivity, "between the pull / Of the dark moon and the full," so does the speaker realize how the body and spirit can be torn between the passive desire to turn toward spiritual asceticism and the dynamic human need to respond to the world. One has to attain a "strength beyond hope and despair" if he is to continue
denying personal response. The speaker discovers this strength, but not before he has been infected by the doubt of his own human weakness. If God would "but speak the word only," then he could remove the stain of doubt represented in the cry repeated twice, "Lord, I am not worthy."

In Parts IV and V the divine "Word" is still not spoken, and yet the speaker strives to resolve the conflict of a divided self preventing him from communing successfully the "silent sister veiled in white and blue." These sections of the poem chronicle this movement between despair and hope, turning back and forth in their own thematic movement; the typographic distinction between the "word" and the "Word" effectively indicates the two poles of the speaker's journey described here.4 Redemption of all the time wasted in the old body of sensual pleasure establishes Part IV's theme, but is a paradoxical precursor of the fatalistic tone informing Part V. The path that the speaker now treads has a restorative effect because the journey brings with it the ability to reinstage with "a new verse the ancient rhyme." That which had been lost, this "ancient rhyme," had sung of the "unread vision in the higher dream." Now the order is to redeem that vision so that the speaker can presumably regain and take advantage of some insight into the end of his pilgrimage. Eliot acknowledges the dream's importance when he repeats the request later in the section with some variation, "Redeem the time, redeem the dream / The token of the word unheard, unspoken." Although "the word" has not been uttered, there is a sense here of the possibility that at least its token might be experienced by the speaker. He has this consolation, plus his moment in the garden with Mary, who "bent her head and signed." But in Part V, the speaker laments the fact that the final enactment of grace has not yet occurred, that the world is not yet ready to experience the stillness that comes with spiritual austerity. For "Against the Word the unstilled world still whirled / About the centre of the
silent Word." Religion has become a superficial practice with sincerity re-
placed by general hypocrisy: people "walk in darkness, who chose thee and
oppose thee"; they "affirm before the world and deny between the rocks."
The world has become spiritually barren, where people espouse Christianity
publicly without fully committing their souls privately. To do so would mean
submitting to a type of terrible surrender—the speaker asks, "Will the veiled
sister . . . / pray for those who offend her / And are terrified and cannot
surrender." This action is a letting go of part of the self, a process exempli-
fied in the speaker's progress up the hard-won stairs.

Because the speaker is part of this world afraid to surrender, his sensual
self ultimately impedes his spiritual progress is Part VI. For it is that part of
him firmly rooted in experience to the world where "there is not enough si-
ence" for heeding God's call. This sensate self compels the speaker to look
through a window to the material world and onto scenes that appeal to him
physically and emotionally, precipitating once more a nadir in the crisis of
body and spirit. Now, however, that crisis undergoes a transformative process
that represents an assuaging of the speaker's guilt for being attracted to such
objects. It is an impersonal attachment, however, for the speaker still wants to
learn "to sit still" and not be unduly distracted from his deep meditation. He
realizes after so much struggle that a complete turn away from the material
world may not be desirable, nor even possible. He has found the "strength
beyond hope and despair" to surrender himself as much as is possible to the
"veiled sister" of Part V, but by the end of the poem his surrender is not
unconditional: his turning has been made by the will, but not by the whole
self. His will does "not wish to wish these things," but it is the "lost heart"
that "stiffens and rejoices / In the lost lilac and the lost sea voices." In the
spiritual no-man's land that the speaker finds himself, he discovers that he is
CONCLUSION

Yeats and Eliot both realize that dialectical relationships afford opportunities for poetic conflict. In describing the nature of divisions between past and present and between differing aspects of one's self, these two poets take full advantage of the extremes to which dialecticism can push relationships. The resulting poetry consists of polarized oppositions, of antinomies that Yeats and Eliot realized should never be fully resolved if the contentious dynamism supporting their styles and themes was to remain.

If there is any general movement toward resolution of Yeats's and Eliot's poetic conflict, it is, ironically, in the poets' acceptance of contention. Yeats's description of the artist continually struggling to assume the mask of his opposite and Eliot's pilgrimage to escape worldly concerns best illustrate these two poets' realization that such struggle is eternal for those seeking to make art and prayer successful. It is the nature of the primary self and the anti-self to be estranged from each other, Yeats says, and the artist is destined always to try to encounter his antimony, but never actually to do so. Ille may search all he desires for that distant relative who is so unlike himself; his hunt will never end in the manner he intends. And when Eliot makes repeated attempts to close out completely the material world and to survive temporarily in the spiritual realm, those attempts end each time in failure. But the value of these actions resides in the trying, in the actual attempt to escape the self. For in this process of self-effacement, conflicting elements produce synergistic effects—the struggle to bring together opposites that Yeats and Eliot discover to be unreconcilable can still result in something greater than if those antimonies
unable to resist reconstituting the physical world which part of him needs badly. The weakened spirit "Quickens to recover / The cry of quail . . . / And the blind eye creates / The empty forms . . . / And smell renews the salt savour of the sandy earth" (my emphasis). Hearing, seeing, and smelling are physical sensations far removed from that condition of spiritual transcendence over material desires for which the speaker had hoped.

If he cannot have his transcendence, then Eliot would have a compromise, albeit an unwelcome one. The "time of tension," he finally realizes, is permanent for any penitent seeking the profoundest religious communion, just as Yeats found that man has his greatest potential in the continual struggle to seek his opposite. We cannot "mock ourselves with [the] falsehood," says Eliot, that complete spirituality is possible, that, as much as we would detach ourselves from quotidian experience, total uncaring for the world is desirable. "Teach us to sit still," Eliot asks again, and not "to care" too much for our material surrounding. Attachment to this environment of distractions, "these rocks," is acceptable only if it is impersonal, an ascetic quality increasing the chance of success for Eliot's supplication, "Suffer me not to be separated / And let my cry come unto Thee," a plaint that might well have come from Ille as he wandered along those wet sands in search of that part of himself capable of enhancing his experience and completing his existence.
had remained isolated and had not been acted upon. This is the process of continual conflict from which art arises for Yeats and Eliot.

Sustained conflict may often circumscribe both Yeats's and Eliot's poetry, but it does not dictate the manner in which it is described. The stronger stylistic forces of Yeats's very personal and Eliot's impersonal approach to writing poetry demand that this description be guided by these two idiosyncratic methods. So that when Yeats aligns himself with Eliot in his concern for modern society's ignorance of the past's significance, he does so in conjunction with very personal observations of his own present and past. Such observations represent dramatic deviations from the kind of acerbic, highly objective evaluations of contemporary society that we are accustomed to in Eliot's poetry. For Yeats, as clearly the more subjective-oriented of the two poets, is intent on illustrating in his last two poetry volumes the ways in which his own physical decline as an aging artist often parallels society's own deterioration. He, like Eliot, fears the devitalization of a culture that has cut the roots of its traditions and cultural legacies; unlike Eliot, Yeats records also his personal anxiety concerning creative and physical impotency resulting from increasing age. This conflict between past and present moves only slightly toward some attenuation of its severity when Yeats begins to express some interest in new artistic subjects and some confidence in his ability to craft them, and when Eliot hints ambiguously at the possibility of renewal after society's spiritual and cultural drought. Both poets, however, are still caught in a time that largely threatens disparity between what was and what is.

The result of Yeats's and Eliot's insistent use of similar conflicts is a poetry charged with the strain of disunion between warring dualities. Sustaining this dialectic meant for the two poets depending on the effects of unresolved contention, not on the results of building discord and then delicately dismantling it
through reconciliation. Such a process of resolution would not have preserved the inviolability of the dialectic's constituents, a condition that Yeats and Eliot believed necessary to the uncompromising conflict that drives their depiction of past and present and divided selves.
NOTES

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2Douglas Archibald, Yeats (Syracuse UP, 1983) 176.


4Eliot, Selected Essays, 6.

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2Archibald, 206.


7Garab, 47.


10Kermode, 90.

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8Headings, 42.


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17Eliot, Selected Essays, 4.


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2Yeats, Mythologies, 337.

3Yeats, Mythologies, 332.

4John Unterecker, 16.
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5Archibald, 176.
6Archibald, 177.
9Unterecker, 148.
15Richard Ellmann, *The Identity of Yeats*, 225

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