

THE EARLY T. S. ELIOT AND
WESTERN PHILOSOPHY

M. A. R. HABIB



PUBLISHED BY THE PRESS SYNDICATE OF THE UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE
The Pitt Building, Trumpington Street, Cambridge CB2 1RP, United Kingdom

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS
The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 2RU, UK <http://www.cup.cam.ac.uk>
40 West 20th Street, New York, NY 10011-4211, USA <http://www.cup.org>
10 Stamford Road, Oakleigh, Melbourne 3166, Australia

© M. A. R. Habib 1999

This book is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception and to the provisions of relevant collective licensing agreements, no reproduction of any part may take place without the written permission of Cambridge University Press.

First published 1999

Printed in the United Kingdom at the University Press, Cambridge

Typeset in Baskerville 11/12 $\frac{1}{2}$ pt [CE]

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloguing-in-Publication Data

Habib, Rafey.

The early T. S. Eliot and western philosophy / Rafey Habib.
p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 0-521-62433-9 (hardback)

1. Eliot, T. S. (Thomas Stearns), 1888-1965 - Philosophy.
2. Philosophy in literature. I. Title.

PS3509.L43Z68148 1999

821'.912 - dc21 98-11677 CIP

ISBN 0 521 62433 9 hardback

Contents

<i>Acknowledgments</i>	page viii
<i>List of abbreviations</i>	ix
<i>Introduction</i>	i
1. Opponents of bourgeois thought: Adams, Babbitt, Santayana, Symons	12
2. Bergson resartus and T. S. Eliot's manuscript	39
3. Philosophy and laughter: Schopenhauer, Laforgue and Bergson	61
4. Irony as a Kantian meditation: Eliot's manuscripts on Kant	97
5. Eliot, Bradley and the irony of 'common sense'	125
6. The divorce from old barren reason: from philosophy to aesthetics	161
7. The struggle against realism	188
8. Irony as form: <i>The Waste Land</i>	220
<i>Notes</i>	254
<i>Index</i>	286

CHAPTER I

Opponents of bourgeois thought: Adams, Babbitt, Santayana, Symons

HENRY ADAMS AND THE SEARCH FOR UNITY

Henry Adams and Irving Babbitt were two of the contemporary prophets whose oracles furnished the high table of Eliot's studenthood, a table spread richly with a variety of antagonisms toward the liberal-humanist heritage. Although Adams did not directly influence Eliot's thought until after 1918, his work provides a useful starting point for contextualising the impact on Eliot of his Harvard professors Babbitt and Santayana and of Arthur Symons' book *The Symbolist Movement in Literature* (1908). These were figures who, between December 1908 and January 1910 (when Eliot began to attend Bergson's lectures at the Collège de France) exerted a considerable influence on Eliot. As an undergraduate at Harvard Eliot had taken courses on the *Divine Comedy* and Donne's poetry; he had obtained Laforgue's complete works by Spring 1909. The function of Symons, Babbitt and Santayana might best be described, to use Eliot's own subsequent phrase, as having initially 'directed' his 'interests' and moulded his assessment of these writers.¹ This chapter acts as a preface to Eliot's encounter with the philosophies of Bergson, Kant, Plato, Aristotle, Bradley and others. It is essential to determine what Eliot's assimilation of his pre-philosophical studies and influences allowed him to bring to his encounter with philosophy and how they may have shaped it.

In his autobiography Adams defined a comprehensive dilemma which cast its shadow over the intellectual and cultural endeavours of Babbitt, Santayana, Royce, Bradley and Eliot himself: the search for unity in a world fragmented as never before. As Adams stated: 'this problem of running order through chaos ... unity through multiplicity, has always been, and must always be, the task of education'.² Adams retrospectively noted that he 'seemed to know nothing –

to be groping in darkness – to be falling forever in space'.³ The metaphor is apt: the Greek word for substance or essence is *hypostasis*, which literally means 'standing under'. There was no first principle, no foundation, on which Adams could stand. In his review of Adams' book, Eliot himself observed: 'Wherever this man stepped, the ground did not simply give way, it flew into particles'.⁴

The forms of disintegration inherent in the modern bourgeois world – the trampling over the past by industrial economic motives, the reification of the present, the collapse of religious authority, the multiplication of world-views, the extreme specialisation and mutual disconnectedness of various fields of study, the indefinite status of human identity and purpose – were placed by Adams in a vision of chaos which he saw as advanced by science. In Adams' eyes, this chaos posed an incalculable problem for the unifying disciplines of philosophy and history.⁵ The science harnessed by industrial society had all but overtaken the ability of theology and philosophy to situate it within an all-embracing scheme. It was now science which provided the overarching context and paradigm for other disciplines, as witnessed by the several late nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century positivistic movements in sociology, philosophy, economics, linguistics and literary criticism. All of these movements emerged directly from the presumed authority of the natural sciences and a positivistic desire to emulate their methods.

As Marcuse has shown, many of these forms of positivism arose in reaction against Hegel's system,⁶ the last great bourgeois synthesis in which science had been constrained as but one aspect of the totality of human interests and purposes. By the end of the nineteenth century, such a synthesis of universal and particular, individual and community, past and present, human and divine, was no longer possible. It had dissolved into a scientific atomism and disconnected particularism on one side and an abstract monistic unity on the other, whose mutual dislocation can be viewed as a condition of irony, the most comprehensive name for that impasse. The philosophies of Bradley, Royce and other neo-Hegelian idealists might be viewed as last-ditch attempts to retain the larger unifying synthesis against the disintegrative onslaught of positivism and realism. Eliot's own deployment of irony, idiosyncratic as it may be, is deeply rooted in this general condition. Adams stated that scientists at the turn of the century 'were plainly forced back on faith in a unity unproved and an order they had themselves disproved'.⁷

In his 1919 review of Adams' autobiography, Eliot remarked that 'Adams yearned for unity, and found it, after a fashion, by writing a book on the thirteenth century'.⁸ The historical development described above was expressed by Adams as a movement from thirteenth-century unity, authorised by theology, to a twentieth-century multiplicity grounded in science.⁹ Eliot would encounter this historical scheme again in Jacques Maritain before elaborating his own adherence to it. Adams' despairing view that there are no ultimate things or essences which can serve as the ultimate foundations of human inquiry or purpose led him to the kind of scepticism which Eliot also found in Bradley. Adams helps us to see that Eliot's own arrival at scepticism was not an idiosyncratic journey but represented merely one avenue towards a general impasse of liberal-humanist thought.

Adams saw the 'movement from unity into multiplicity, between 1200 and 1900' as 'unbroken in sequence, and rapid in acceleration'.¹⁰ He often implied that thought was an artificial, metaphorical process, merely a prism to refract the originally intermingled components of reality into an orderly and definable spectrum: 'Except as reflected in himself, man has no reason for assuming unity in the universe.' Adams concluded that 'in the last synthesis, order and anarchy were one, but that the unity was chaos'.¹¹ This may help us to understand Eliot's own philosophical dispositions. The assertion that opposites somehow share a deeper ground of identity rehearses a perennial strategy of philosophy to *control* the gulf between unity and diversity. The strategy is salient in the work of Plato, Hegel and, among Hegel's followers, Bradley. But none of these thinkers asserted that unity and diversity were *the same*.

What Adams confronts is thought at a historical stage where unity can no longer claim precedence over diversity: the only recourse is an abstract assertion of their identity, a desperate aspiration of unity to assert from within its coterminousness with the multiplicity which ever threatens to exceed its coordinating frontiers. This is a strategy which characterises Eliot's philosophical, aesthetic and social thought: he will insist on the identity of the Platonic worlds of form and flux, of Kant's noumenal and phenomenal realms, of Hegelian universal and particular, of thought and feeling and, later, of culture and religion.

What could be the locus of such identity? The strategy of Adams, Eliot and many of their contemporaries is ironic: to retract the

contradictions of the 'objective' world into human subjectivity, to see the mutual extremes of unity and diversity as characterising not the world itself but the point of view taken towards the world. This was a general strategy of many thinkers in this period anxious to escape the limitations of bourgeois thought. Thinkers such as Schopenhauer and Nietzsche had already expressed these limitations, viewing the categories with which we 'understand' the world, including space and time, as subjective and pragmatic fictions. Locke and Hume had been unable to explain how the multiplicity of sense experience was referred to a unified and coherent substratum of experience, the self, which they viewed as a 'convention.' It was Kant who traced back into the formal structure of subjectivity itself the contradiction between unity and multiplicity: the empirical ego undergoes a variety of experiences; underlying this is the transcendental ego which unifies that diversity. In his essay on laughter, Baudelaire also described this ironic bifurcation of the ego.¹² A similar process is at work in Laforgue. In all of these writers, the duality of the ego, whose own structure contains the relation between unity and plurality, becomes the subjective counterpart of the 'objective' irreconcilability of unity and diversity in the world. What for Adams was a personal cast of mind can be seen as but one supervention on the general dilemma and strategy of irony which emerged in recent history.

IRVING BABBITT: THE ONE AND THE MANY

Irving Babbitt, whose course on French literary criticism Eliot took at Harvard in 1909–10, described the dilemma of relating the One and the Many as 'the ultimate problem of thought'.¹³ The literary ideas of Babbitt which attracted Eliot were rooted in an ideological conflict and educational debate between a representation of bourgeois scientific and economic interests on the part of reformists such as Charles Eliot and John Dewey, and traditionalist humanist opponents such as Babbitt and Arnold.

Babbitt's humanism posits a unity which might contextualise historically the reductive multiplicity and isolated present of the bourgeois world. Like Adams, Babbitt discerned in Occidental history a movement from mediaeval Christian unity to modern secular multiplicity. He saw multiplicity as embracing individualism, unrestrained liberty in morality, politics and aesthetics, uncontrolled

pluralism, a literal obedience to facts and the unconstrained hegemony of science. This multiplicity is articulated formally by the predominant philosophies of a bourgeois democracy: rationalism, empiricism, utilitarianism and pragmatism. Babbitt traces these tendencies to the earlier Renaissance which emancipated 'the senses ... the intellect, and ... the conscience. It was ... the first forward push of individualism'.¹⁴

Babbitt identifies the eighteenth century France of Rousseau as 'the second forward push of individualism'.¹⁵ He sees the Protestant Reformation and the French Revolution as the crucial historical impulses towards modernity. At the heart of these eras of expansive individualism he locates Bacon and Rousseau who respectively embody 'scientific' and 'sentimental' naturalism, which attempt to explain man's nature and the world on 'natural', rather than transcendent, foundations. As a result of this misguided veneration of the sciences, affirms Babbitt, 'Man has gained immensely in his grasp on facts, but ... has become so immersed in their multiplicity as to lose that vision of the One by which his lower self was once overawed and restrained.'¹⁶

Babbitt sees the paradigmatic status of science as inaugurating a period of 'literalism' in all areas of thought, a utilitarian reduction of meaning to a one-dimensional system of reference. For Babbitt, this signifies both an immersion in the uncontrolled plurality of 'partial' facts, and a loss of connection with the archetypal modes of unification as embodied in the classics and Christian theology: 'Language interests us, not for the absolute values it expresses, but only in so far as it is a collection of facts and relates itself to nature.'¹⁷ One of Eliot's central aesthetic – and ultimately theological – projects will be to reinstate in language a symbolic and allegorical mode. To deny the literal status of language is to reopen its connections with past and future, to redeem the myth and metaphor at its heart which have been repressed in recent history. The world as governed by bourgeois economic and scientific interests is a world of a perpetual present, of historical amnesia. Babbitt views humanism as a means of emancipating humanity from 'this servitude to the present' which has been the legacy of bourgeois philosophy and science as developed on Baconian principles.¹⁸ Babbitt also derided the modern ethic of work and action in industrial society, which contrasted with Aristotle's view that 'the highest good is not the joy in work, but the joy in contemplation'.¹⁹

In *Rousseau and Romanticism* (1919) and *Democracy and Leadership* (1924), Babbitt sees Rousseau as both the father of 'radical democracy' and the fullest representative of romanticism.²⁰ Babbitt here articulates the opposition between classicism and romanticism. Classicism expresses what is 'normal' and 'central' in human experience; it is not local and national but universal and 'human'; it thus offers a model of representative human nature.²¹ Hence it seeks a 'true centre', an abiding permanent human element through change. Classicism employs an 'ethical' imagination which insists on restraint and proportion. In contrast, romanticism's pursuit of the strange, extreme and unique is premised on a conception of imagination, derived from Kant and Schiller, which is utterly free from all constraint. Babbitt's main objection to romanticism is its fostering of 'anarchic individualism' and evasion of moral responsibility. In avoiding a centre of human experience, it condemns itself to both intellectual and moral relativism, a blind immersion in the 'Many' with no recourse to the stabilising authority of the 'One'.²²

In the light of this opposition between the classical ethical imagination and the romantic utopian imagination, Babbitt sees the history of modern thought as a conflict between the ideals of Rousseau and those of Edmund Burke, between the bourgeois ideals of the French Revolution and those of a traditional feudal order. Babbitt's *Democracy and Leadership*, cited by Eliot as one of the key books representative of the modern classicist tendency,²³ is structured around this 'battle between the spirit of Burke and that of Rousseau'.²⁴ What Babbitt argues for in the name of 'humanism' is a reversion to feudal and aristocratic virtues: Burke is 'a frank champion of aristocracy'.²⁵ In Babbitt's commentary on Burke we might discern the origins of Eliot's ideas of tradition, impersonality and classicism. According to Babbitt, Burke recognised that true individuality is a product of tradition. For Burke, the individual must 'respect ... the accumulated experience of the past ... that the superficial rationalist would dismiss as prejudice'.²⁶

The conflict as formulated by Babbitt is between overt reliance on reason and reliance on historical 'experience much wider than that of the individual'.²⁷ In qualification, Babbitt adds that Burke 'does not wish any static hierarchy'.²⁸ These comments anticipate many statements of both Bradley and Eliot, especially the latter's view of tradition as an 'ideal order' in continual modification. Babbitt quotes Burke as saying that the State is a 'partnership ... between

those who are living, those who are dead, and those who are to be born'.²⁹ It is instructive to consider what Burke himself goes on to say:

Each contract of each particular state is but a clause in the great primaeval contract of eternal society, linking the lower with the higher natures, connecting the visible and invisible world, according to a fixed compact sanctioned by the inviolable oath which holds all physical and all moral natures, each in their appointed place.³⁰

Burke's words express a crucial dimension of his political strategy: the situation of the present, as something temporal and transient, within an eternal scheme. They also help us to see the ultimately theological and feudalistic roots of Babbitt's politics as well as of Eliot's theory of tradition. Far from being new, this theory merely transposes to an aesthetic plane a model of conservative political thought whereby the present is always exceeded by a vaster temporal (or atemporal) scheme and where change or innovation must develop organically from past roots rather than breaking free of them.

The point here is that, as Kenneth Asher has recently stressed,³¹ Eliot's thinking about literary history and aesthetics did not somehow predate or develop separately from his political orientations. Nor, inasmuch as it was inspired by Babbitt, did it derive primarily from Babbitt's literary ideas but rather from the ultimately political determination of their shape. For both men, literary and political orientations grew from the same fundamental presuppositions. Babbitt himself does not follow up on the analogies Burke draws between the development of the political state and that of literature: 'The precept given by a wise man, as well as a great critic, for the construction of poems, is equally true as to states. *Non satis est pulchra esse poemata, dulcia sunt.*'³² The 'great critic', whom Burke forgoes naming, is Horace, whose text *Ars Poetica* continues: *et quocumque volent animum auditoris agunt.*³³

It is perhaps not an accident that Burke enlists a literary-critical maxim to make a political point: the empire of reason ushered in by the French Revolution is abstract; it shifts the decision making process to individual private interests, and bypasses the entire realm of human sensibility built up through successive generations. Horace's maxim – 'It is not enough for poems to be beautiful; they must charm, taking the soul of their audience wherever they will' –

draws attention to a poem's effects on human sensibility and emotion. In the same way, implies Burke, a political state cannot be somehow shaped abstractly in the ahistorical vacuum of reason. This view is continuous with Aristotle's conservative contention that a state must be the natural efflux of a people's way of life rather than a mechanism for abruptly transforming this.

In another analogy Burke invokes literature as necessarily growing from past tradition as a model of ideal political change.³⁴ The final point germane to Eliot's theory of tradition is Burke's repeated insistence that, rather than casting away all our old prejudices and letting each individual rely on 'his own private stock of reason', individuals 'would do better to avail themselves of the general bank and capital of nations, and of ages'.³⁵ This general bank is Europe: the manners and civilisation of 'this European world of ours' have 'depended for ages upon two principles . . . the spirit of a gentleman, and the spirit of religion. The nobility and the clergy . . .'³⁶ These passages bring together the crucial elements of Eliot's theory of tradition, helping us to see more clearly its ultimately feudalistic premises: that innovation extends, rather than subverts, tradition; that change must evolve, answering not merely to reason but to human sensibility; that private interests should be subordinated not to national imperatives but to a collective European heritage; above all, that reason cannot be abstractly conceived as a faculty exercised by independent individuals upon first principles which have no actual historical basis. According to Burke, the age of chivalry has given way to that of 'sophisters, oeconomists, and calculators'. The nobility and the clergy have been displaced by Demos, the 'swinish multitude'.³⁷ Babbitt quotes these anti-democratic sentiments with approval³⁸ and affirms that Burke has few equals in political thought in his treatment of the One-Many problem.³⁹

Babbitt's humanism, concerned with perfecting the individual, urges a return to the Renaissance ideal of the 'complete' man who achieves a Socratic harmony between thought and feeling.⁴⁰ Babbitt insists that both life and man constitute a oneness that is always changing,⁴¹ and, anticipating Eliot's philosophical views, that experience contains both unity and multiplicity.⁴² Babbitt sees himself as following not only a Christian tradition which subordinates intellect to will but also an Aristotelian belief in the conflict between an appetitive and a rational self which fixes human nature.⁴³ In a passage which Eliot will later quote with qualified approval,⁴⁴

Babbitt suggests that man craves 'an enthusiasm that will lift him out of his merely rational self'.⁴⁵ At the foundation of Babbitt's humanism, then, is a view of human nature as essentially fixed through all its surface changes and a view of reality as ultimately a unity. This represents Babbitt's backward-looking attempt to reconcile the One with the Many. Like Bradley's philosophy, Babbitt's humanism attempts to contextualise the bourgeois world as merely one dimension of ultimate reality which transcends but includes it.

Literary criticism, according to Babbitt, is infected with the pervasive disease of impressionism, which is but a localised symptom of the general disintegrating effects of Rousseauist attitudes.⁴⁶ Babbitt's situation of this dilemma in metaphysical and political contexts may have underlain Eliot's increasing perception of literary criticism as a philosophical activity. Literary men should be philosophical, says Babbitt, since both literary criticism and philosophy confront the same problem: to reconcile the One and the Many.

To reaffirm the role of 'objective' judgement Babbitt calls for comparative and historical methods which treat the classics 'as links in that unbroken chain of literary and intellectual tradition which extends from the ancient to the modern world'.⁴⁷ The modern obsession with originality, says Babbitt, betrays 'the profound doctrine of Aristotle that the final test of art is not its originality, but its truth to the universal ... Now ... there is a riot of so-called originality ...'.⁴⁸ These statements will be echoed almost verbatim by Eliot.⁴⁹ Genuine originality, Babbitt suggests, 'imposes the task of achieving work that is of general human truth and at the same time intensely individual'.⁵⁰

This combination of general and individual, universal and particular, is something for which Eliot will argue in both his philosophical and literary-critical writings. A further symptom of unrestrained individualism, in Babbitt's eyes, is the 'intrusion of the author and his foibles into his work'. In contrast, classical literature addresses our 'higher reason and imagination ... those faculties which afford us an avenue of escape from ourselves'.⁵¹ Again, these are formulations which will find precise echoes in Eliot's work. What is needed, says Babbitt, is a critic who will use the 'historical method' while guarding against its dangers of relativism by seeing 'an element in man that is set above the local and the relative ... in Platonic language, he will perceive the One in the Many'.⁵² This was a call to which Eliot evidently responded.

SANTAYANA: THE MARRIAGE OF PHILOSOPHY AND POETRY

Also gracing the table of course-offerings at Harvard was the Spanish-Catholic philosopher, aesthete and novelist George Santayana. In 1907–8 Eliot took Santayana's course in the History of Modern Philosophy and a further course, Philosophy of History. In 1909–10, the material of which was later developed into Santayana's two books *Three Philosophical Poets* (1910)⁵³ and *The Life of Reason* (1910). A brief look at Santayana's thought may help us to understand how his call for a unity of poetry and philosophy may have influenced Eliot. As Manju Jain observes, Santayana 'appears to have played a formative role in helping Eliot to define his views on the relationship of philosophy and poetry'.⁵⁴

There are some instructive points of convergence between Adams, Babbitt and Santayana. At the centre of Adams' and Babbitt's thinking had been a concern with what they saw as an historical passage from unity to multiplicity, correlative with the rising hegemony of bourgeois values such as a commitment to the work ethic, individualism, novelty, pluralism, an exclusive focus on the present and an increasing positivism. The problem, for both men, was that of finding order and unity in the world bequeathed by these bewildering historical transformations. Santayana's 'classicism' is problematic. Unlike Babbitt, he does not call for an uncompromising return to classical values, attempting thereby to turn the clock back on the individualistic and experiential thrust of both Enlightenment thought and romanticism. Instead, like Eliot after him, he attempts to formulate a classicism which will absorb yet transcend the insights offered by these historical movements. This led to Santayana's insistence on the necessary combination of poetry and philosophy: like Babbitt, he saw these as confronting essentially the same problem, that of the One and the Many.

In Santayana's *Three Philosophical Poets* (1910) the One–Many problem is raised in a combined literary and philosophical context. His formulation of 'tradition' is even more similar to Eliot's than Babbitt's. The greatness of Lucretius, Dante and Goethe, Santayana affirms, lies in the fact that their 'diversity . . . passes . . . into a unity of a higher kind'. Taking Lucretius, Dante and Goethe as the respective archetypes of naturalism, supernaturalism and romanticism, Santayana asks: 'Can it be an accident that . . . the most lasting exposition of these three schools of philosophy should have been

made by poets? Are poets, at heart, in search of a philosophy? Or is philosophy, in the end, nothing but poetry?' Philosophy's aim, he proclaims, is 'a steady contemplation of all things in their order and worth ... A philosopher who attains it is, for the moment, a poet; and a poet who turns his practised and passionate imagination on the order of all things, or on anything in the light of the whole, is for that moment a philosopher.'⁵⁵ These statements seem to suggest that, at their heart, philosophy and poetry are motivated by the same, 'classical', impulse: to contextualise present experience as part of a larger, ordered scheme.

According to Santayana, the naturalism of Lucretius is one approach to the problem of the One and the Many. It 'divines substance behind appearance, continuity behind change', and 'attaches all those sights and sounds to a hidden background that connects and explains them'.⁵⁶ Dante was distinguished, according to Santayana, by his viewing the world through moral, rather than natural, categories.⁵⁷ Dante's moral vision, says Santayana, entails that 'We should explain motion and life ... by their purpose or end'.⁵⁸ In Dante's scheme, as in that of Aquinas, the self-identity of objects as expressed by bourgeois philosophy does not obtain: 'Everything in the world was an effect of something beyond the world; everything in life was a step to something beyond life.'⁵⁹

Against this background, we can see how the absolutes of Bradley, Royce and the other neo-Hegelian idealists might begin to appear as more or less secularised versions of this conception of finite existence, of reality as hierarchically comprehending two spheres of life, the one completing itself in the other. As such, these absolutes may have furnished Eliot with a contemporary framework for reconstituting a theological vision of reality as embodied in Dante and shattered to its foundations by the cumulative onslaught of Enlightenment thought. Kenneth Asher has, for example, argued that for Eliot, Maurras' thought provided Bradley's empty absolute with an 'identifiable content'.⁶⁰

Santayana's treatment of Dante's symbolism may clarify how this dualistic model of reality relates to Eliot's ironic use of French symbolism. Santayana observes that 'in a world made by God for the illustration of his glory, things and events, though real, must be also symbolical; for there is intention and propriety behind them'. In a statement reminiscent of formulations of the French symbolists, Santayana explains the nature of this symbolism: 'Actual things were

only suggestions of what the elements in that ulterior existence ought to be'.⁶¹ However, there is a difference between Dante's symbolism and that of the French poets, as Santayana implicitly acknowledges: 'Symbolism and literalness, in Dante's time, and in his practice, are simultaneous'.⁶² While both subscribe to a dualistic vision whereby appearances can only hint at a profounder reality, Dante treats this reality as objective. Like Eliot after him, Santayana regards Dante as a classical realist who attempts 'to see things as they are'.⁶³ In the French poets, this deeper reality is a highly subjective vision priding itself on its rejection of the conventional world of appearance.

In contrast with the scientific impersonality of Lucretius, Santayana suggests, 'egotism is the distinctive attitude of modern philosophy and romantic sentiment'. Whereas Dante 'gives us a philosophical goal ... Goethe gives us a philosophic journey'.⁶⁴ Goethe, in fact, is 'a philosopher of experience'. Santayana here invokes the difference between a classical teleological situation of experience and a romantic focus on experience for its own sake.

Unlike Babbitt, Santayana sees romanticism's obsession with 'experience' as a corrective to conventional constraints. Romanticism and transcendentalism, says Santayana, 'disintegrate convention ... and restore us to ourselves, to immediate perception ... which is our only approach to reality'.⁶⁵ This is hardly the statement of an uncompromising classicist. The 'return' to pure or immediate experience will occupy Eliot in both his philosophic and poetic endeavours. Yet experience is precisely what limits the romantic: what confronts Faust, according to Santayana, is 'the merciless flux' and 'all a poet of pure experience can do is to represent some snatches of it ... To be miscellaneous, to be indefinite, to be unfinished, is essential to the romantic life'.⁶⁶

Hence, while it can probe beneath the layers of convention encrusted over experience, romanticism yet suffers from the general malaise of bourgeois science and thought: an inability to find connections and totality in the world of particulars. Goethe's work has no 'totality'. It is in the darkness of this impasse that Santayana seeks a classical accommodation of immediate experience: 'Spinoza has an admirable doctrine ... seeing things under the form of eternity ... when all its parts or stages are conceived ... together'.⁶⁷ If romanticism embodies a significant impasse of modern thought – the inability to discern unity in the world of particulars – any modern classical attempt to overcome this impasse must bear the

traces of its own romantic heritage. Hence Goethe 'was never so romantic as when he was classical' and Goethe's Euphorion is 'a romantic soul in the garb of classicism ...'⁶⁸ These statements are virtually identical with some of Eliot's own pained pronouncements concerning the viability of classicism in a romantic era.

For Santayana, the need for modern classicism to confront a pluralistic world entails a necessary combination of philosophy and poetry:

sensualism or aestheticism ... has decreed in our day that theory is not poetical; as if all the images and emotions that enter a cultivated mind were not saturated with theory ... The life of theory is not less human or less emotional than the life of sense; it is more typically human and more keenly emotional. Philosophy is a more intense sort of experience than common life is ... For this reason, philosophy, when a poet is not mindless, enters inevitably into his poetry ... Poetry is ... an echo of crude experience; it is itself a theoretic vision of things at arm's length.⁶⁹

This is a voice to which Eliot would not have been deaf: he will hear similar voices in Kant, Bergson and Bradley. Eliot himself was wrestling not only with the dilemmas depicted by Adams, Babbitt and Santayana but with the problem of poetic form and a tension between the prospective pursuits of poetry and philosophy. Here is the call to unite these disciplines with which Santayana concludes his treatise: 'Who shall be the poet of this double insight? ... It is time some genius should appear to reconstitute the shattered picture of the world.'⁷⁰ The modern poet is obliged to incorporate into his or her endeavour the perennial yet newly urgent problem of philosophy: the uniting of the One and the Many.

Eliot's answer to Santayana's call was ambivalent. Two of his varying assessments of Santayana are significant here. In a letter of 1920, Eliot volunteers: 'I have never liked Santayana myself, because I have always felt that his attitude was essentially feminine, and that his philosophy was a dressing up of himself rather than an interest in things.'⁷¹ Eliot's indictment betrays his own impatience with the inexhaustible openness of experience denoted by the 'eternal feminine'. The second part of Eliot's statement reveals that, far from viewing Santayana as a classicist, he placed him in a philosophical tradition of what he would later call romantic 'self-projection'.⁷²

Yet Santayana evidently exerted an impact on Eliot's criticism, arousing a prolonged curiosity as to the connections between philosophy and poetry. In his essay on Dante (1920), Eliot sum-

marises the philosophic responsibilities of the poet: 'The aim of the poet is to state a vision, and no vision of life can be complete which does not include the articulate formulation of life which human minds make.'⁷³ In line with Santayana's reaction against aestheticism and impressionism, Eliot maintains that when most modern poets confine themselves to what they immediately perceive, they produce 'only odds and ends of still life'. The lesson, in Eliot's eyes, is that Dante's method is not obsolete; rather our vision is restricted.⁷⁴ Eliot will repeat in 1924 that it would better for the poet to use the philosophy of 'other men' rather than that of the 'monstrous brother in one's own bosom'.⁷⁵ Hence, whereas Santayana desires poetry to take on the unifying responsibilities of philosophy, Eliot sees whatever unity poetry may achieve as constructed upon, rather than displacing, the unity already achieved by philosophy.

But what if the prevailing philosophies 'already' in existence have *not* achieved the unity which Eliot demands? Surely it was awareness of this very failure of modern philosophy which Eliot inherited from Adams, Babbitt and Santayana and proceeded to elaborate in his own philosophical work. Would such failure mean that the toppling burdens of the philosopher slide more and more onto the shoulders of the poet? What seems probable in Eliot's case is that his early insistence on the separation of poetic and philosophic endeavours mellowed into an acknowledgement that the boundaries between the two disciplines cannot be clearly conceived. Indeed, it is arguable that the early Eliot withdrew the burden of philosophy wholly into the aesthetic realm: having despaired of philosophy's potential, he turned to poetry and to literary criticism to establish models of tradition, myth and language which would reaffirm the contemporary world's lost connections with past archetypes of unification.

Santayana's impact is most clearly discernible in *Eliot's Clark Lectures*, delivered at Cambridge (1926) and in their revised presentation as the *Turnbull Lectures* at Johns Hopkins (1933). The central aim of these lectures is to investigate the meaning of the term 'Metaphysical poetry'. Apparently modifying Santayana's framework, Eliot offers his own 'tentative' scheme of three types of philosophical poetry.⁷⁶ The first occurs when a 'commonplace' thought is expressed in poetic form, as in passages from *King Lear*. The second is the 'discursive exposition of an argument' such as is found in Pope's *Essay on Man* and, at a higher level, in the Thomist–Aristotelian passages of the *Purgatorio*. The third type is when an

idea, ordinarily apprehensible only on an intellectual level, is translated into sensible form, as in certain poems of Donne. Eliot explains that this last type 'is *one form* of an enlargement of immediate experience which, in one form or another, is a general function of poetry'. This kind of poetry 'elevates sense for a moment to regions ordinarily attainable only by abstract thought'.⁷⁷ These statements go to the depth of Eliot's attempt to define metaphysical poetry as well as of his own endeavour to forge an ironic poetry which will continue in that tradition, which he sees as extending from seventeenth-century English to nineteenth-century French poetry.⁷⁸ Edward Lobb has offered a valuable account of the ramifications of 'dissociation of sensibility' as explored in these lectures.⁷⁹

It is clear that Eliot's own divisions of philosophical poetry depart from Santayana's. He has reservations about identifying 'metaphysical' with Santayana's designation 'philosophical'. Eliot suggests that only poetry of the 'first intensity', where the philosophy is '*fused* into poetry at a very high temperature', can be called 'philosophical'. Works such as Pope's *Essay on Man* effect the blend at a 'lower' temperature. Truly philosophical poetry must draw within the 'orbit' of sense what had existed only in the realm of thought; it must create a unity of feeling and of action, a union of sound and sense as well as of things 'hitherto unconnected in experience'.⁸⁰ Manju Jain asserts that Eliot 'took issue with Santayana for making the term "metaphysical" equivalent to "philosophical"'.⁸¹ I am unaware that Santayana had made any such identification, and I would argue that Eliot is making a distinction *within* Santayana's term: Metaphysical poetry is one category of philosophical poetry. Thus Dante was a Metaphysical poet *and* a philosophical poet in Santayana's sense.⁸²

In fact, by the time Eliot presents his *Turnbull Lectures*, his position inclines more toward Santayana's: 'I think that on the whole I accept Mr. Santayana's definition of "philosophical poetry"'. Concurrent with this shift is Eliot's increased tolerance for the poet who does formulate his own philosophy. In defining philosophical poetry, Eliot states, it is not important whether the philosophical system is taken by the poet from a philosopher 'or whether it is one which he evolves himself in the process of writing his poetry'.⁸³ In the last *Turnbull Lecture*, Eliot seems almost to have come full circle to a position close to, if not identical with Santayana's: in philosophical poetry, Eliot urges, the philosophical system is *believed* by the poet. But metaphysical poetry 'can occur either with or without belief. It

can occur either in the full possession of belief, or in the disintegration of belief, or in the conscious loss of belief and the search for it'.⁸⁴ Hence, Eliot reiterates Santayana's call for philosophical poetry with the proviso that the *kind* of 'philosophical' poetry we need now will be 'metaphysical': it differs from previous works in this combined genre in that where they were historically capable of expressing in verse a unified philosophical system, modern poetry must be metaphysical precisely to the extent that it may need to engage in a search for such a system. It must confront the same chaos as modern philosophy, returning to the same experiential roots; but it must offer its insights not as the content of contemporary philosophy refracted through verse but as sublimated into the formal texture itself of poetry.

ARTHUR SYMONS AND FRENCH SYMBOLISM

Babbitt's and Santayana's were not the only voices crying in the alleged wilderness of modern letters. In *The Symbolist Movement in Literature* (1899), which Eliot first encountered in December 1908, Arthur Symons too characterised the later nineteenth century, predictably, as 'the age of science, the age of material things'. He viewed the symbolist movement as a 'revolt against exteriority, against rhetoric, against a materialistic tradition'.⁸⁵ With symbolist poetry 'comes the turn of the soul . . . a literature in which the visible world is no longer a reality, and the unseen world no longer a dream'.⁸⁶ Symbolist literature, then, offers a redefinition of reality, which sees the contemporary bourgeois world as but a one-sided material dimension pointing to its own self-transcendence in a higher, spiritual reality. Symons characterises the preceding reign of realism under Flaubert, Taine and Zola as an age where 'words, with that facile elasticity which there is in them, did miracles in the exact representation of everything that visibly existed, exactly as it existed'.⁸⁷

Hence symbolism is reacting against not only the reduction of the world to a material dimension but the correlative reduction of language to a literalness which enshrines the possibility of absolute clarity. Symons quotes Carlyle's definition of the symbol as possessing a 'double significance', as a locus where 'the Infinite is made to blend itself with the Finite . . .'.⁸⁸ Seen in this light, symbolism is an attempt to reinvest language with its powers of ambivalence and

mystery, to relieve it of the stultifying burden of representing factitious identity. As Symons puts it, symbolism 'is all an attempt to ... evade the old bondage of rhetoric, the old bondage of exteriority.'⁸⁹ These statements will find echoes in Eliot's own concerted reaction against realism.

Long before modern literary theory began to erect itself upon the insight, Symons stated that language itself is 'arbitrary': words and symbols are 'mere sounds of the voice to which we have agreed to give certain significations ...' Such arbitrariness is only legitimised when 'it has obtained the force of a convention ...'⁹⁰ In a sense, French symbolism is a return to the arbitrariness beneath the layers of convention, a flight to a deeper subjectivity which negates or situates the literal subjectivity of the bourgeois self. Far from returning to a mediaeval religious regimentation of the signifying powers of language, French symbolism must erect subjectivity itself—and the literature which uniquely expresses it—into a religion. As Symons says, such literature attains its 'authentic speech' only by accepting a heavier burden: 'it becomes itself a kind of religion'.⁹¹ Once again, we find echoed Santayana's call for displacing into the realm of poetry the totalising impulses of philosophy or theology.

While the influence of Symons' book on Eliot has long been acknowledged, critics have usually referred to his chapters on Baudelaire and Laforgue, bypassing both the remaining chapters and Symons' general comments as elaborated above. Symons' insights into the other figures of French symbolism may have made an enduring impression on Eliot. One such figure is Balzac, whom Symons sees as a precursor of French symbolism rather than as a realist. Some twenty years before Lukács made a similar pronouncement in his *Theory of the Novel* (1920), Symons asserted that 'the novel, as Balzac created it, has become the modern epic'.⁹² Anticipating Lukács' commentary on Balzac, Symons suggests that it is Balzac's combination of philosophy and 'poetry' which lifted him above the barren realism of his successors, based on photographic representation of unrelated particulars: in Balzac's work 'philosophy is but another form of poetry'.⁹³ There is nothing in Balzac, remarks Symons, 'that appeals to the senses except through the intellect',⁹⁴ and Balzac 'creates, like the poets, a humanity more logical than average life; more typical'.⁹⁵

While Eliot's own assessment of Balzac does not coincide with those of Symons and Lukács, some of his aesthetic dispositions may

have been gleaned from Symons: the deficiencies of realism and photographic representations of reality; the need for poetry to abstract from actual emotions and contingent circumstances their inner logic and typifying unity; the consequent impersonality of vision; and the need to view intellect and sense as aspects of an original unity. All of these notions will receive support from Eliot's exposure to Bradley and other philosophers.

Equally pertinent to Eliot's thought is Symons' somewhat Lukácsian formulation of the disharmony between subjectivity and objectivity in the modern world:

The consciousness seems, as it were, to expand and contract at once, into something too wide for the universe, and too narrow for the thought of self to find room within it. Is it that the sense of identity is about to evaporate, annihilating all, or is it that a more profound identity, the identity of the whole sentient universe, has been at last realised? ... Every artist leads a double life ...⁹⁶

In this statement is concentrated the entire ironic posture of French symbolism: the faculty of reason, hypostatized by much Enlightenment thought, is seen as a limited dimension of the entire potential of human apprehension. The self or subject is either dwarfed in its endeavour to comprehend objective reality or its expansive vision can find no objective correlate. The visions of the poet probe beneath the conventional 'sense of identity' of both self and world, threatening to dissolve them into an originary chaos. Yet this initial chaotic destruction of conventional reality may be premised on a deeper notion of identity whereby all aspects of the 'sentient universe' are interlinked in a holistic vision. An artist's stance, then, is intrinsically ironic, mediating between a superficial socialised self and a profounder, authentic self. His ironic 'double' life consists in negotiating perpetually between the 'objective' world as offered up by convention and the subjective world which imagination offers in its place. This ascription of an ironic role to the artist will be encountered by Eliot in Baudelaire, Laforgue and Bergson.

In Symons' assessment, Baudelaire's verse too emerges from a fusion of philosophic and poetic faculties, combining intellect and sensation.⁹⁷ The desire for such a combination permeates Eliot's analyses of literature and is central, as seen in his *Clark Lectures*, to his definition of metaphysical poetry. Laforgue, according to Symons, 'has constructed his own world, lunar and actual ... frivolity

becomes an escape from the arrogance of a still more temporary mode of being, the world as it appears to the sober majority. He is terribly conscious of daily life ... his flight to the moon is in sheer desperation ... And he sees ... the possibilities for art which come from the sickly modern being, with his clothes, his nerves'.⁹⁸ In John T. Mayer's reading of these statements, Laforgue uses his puppets to construct a world 'which opposes the world of appearances, of feelings, and of bourgeois attitudes'.⁹⁹ Symons' statements separate Laforgue in significant respects from the other French symbolists: his symbols do not refer the present world of discrete objects to another, higher, world. Rather, like Eliot's similarly motivated symbols, their range of reference is circumscribed by the world of experience.

Indeed, the symbol for Laforgue embodies distance from the surrounding world; the most apt name for this distance is irony, which for both Laforgue and Eliot lies at the core of the symbolic process. Irony here represents the logical extreme of what Symons characterised as the 'duality' of symbolism. The Platonic bifurcation of reality by the other French symbolists is now resolved into an ironic bifurcation of subjectivity itself. Rather than viewing reality as dual, as both material and spiritual, the same reality is now viewed from more than one standpoint at once. This is the kind of irony which will undergo elaboration in Eliot's philosophical essays.

Symons notes that Laforgue's fantastic puppets are 'a way of taking one's revenge upon science, by an ironical borrowing of its very terms'.¹⁰⁰ He views this 'revenge' as embodied in Laforgue's laughter, which is the peculiar form taken by his irony. It is a 'compassionate laughter at universal experience'; yet it is a 'serious' laughter which effects 'a very subtle criticism of the universe, with a surprising irony of cosmical vision'.¹⁰¹ Laforgue's art, in fact, plays 'at a disdainful indifference. And it is out of these elements of caprice, fear, contempt, linked together by an embracing laughter, that it makes its existence'. This laughter, moreover, is the 'laughter of the soul' and Laforgue's Pierrot is 'a metaphysical Pierrot'.¹⁰² Hence the higher spiritual unity of the other symbolists is now displaced by a unity not of any objective world but the unity of an ironic subjective stance, an all-embracing laughter, which is nevertheless resigned to the impossibility of any real escape from mundane reality.

Symons' description of Laforguian technique could apply to Eliot's early verse: for a young poet and philosopher groping for

schemes of unification, Laforgue's poetic techniques may well have represented a concrete culmination of the complexly argued exhortations of Adams, Babbitt, Santayana and Symons to unite the experiential potential of poetry with the totalising powers of philosophy. These thinkers had all resolved the historical passage from unity to multiplicity into the most fundamental problem facing philosophy, literature and literary criticism: the connection of the One and the Many. Adams had arrived at the ironic conclusion that unity and multiplicity were merely projections of subjective viewpoints. Babbitt had approached this problem by referring present multiplicity to classical models of unity, attempting to contextualise within a humanistic unity both a one-sided Enlightenment reason and a romantic veneration of emotion. He had urged the need for literature to articulate its own position within tradition. He had also called for impersonality and a return to an ethic of disinterested contemplation rather than that of work, action and utility.

Santayana had stressed the need to combine characteristics found discretely in classical and romantic literature. What was common to Adams, Babbitt and Santayana was their rejection of the bourgeois reduction of the world to an endless present, comprising a vast realm of unconnected particulars whose secrets would yield themselves up only to positivistic science. All three thinkers saw the problem of unity and multiplicity as extending beyond philosophy into literature and the humanities. Babbitt and Santayana called for a convergence of philosophical and literary interests.

It might be recalled that the view of poetry as a philosophical activity derives from classical rather than romantic thought: it began with Aristotle's statement that poetry is more philosophical than history since its object is the universal rather than the particular. Hence, for all of the thinkers under consideration here, classical literature starts with deductive certainty, with the universal, with intellect as the vehicle of apprehending unity. Romantic literature begins with experience, with the particulars of sense which can achieve unity only by the uncertain and cumulative strategy of induction. Eliot's own definitions of Metaphysical poetry, encountered above, pose as their central problem the union of these two poles of classicism and romanticism, which are also understood by Babbitt, Santayana and Symons as the respective poles of philosophy and poetry: intellect and sensation. Eliot's analyses of the malaise of the modern world, in his essay on the Metaphysical poets