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A Study of The Rock by T. S. Eliot.

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of
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ABSTRACT

Chapter I of this thesis is just a brief account of the genesis of The Rock: brief for fear of reproducing what has already been ably said before by Mr E. Martin Browne in his book The Making of T.S. Eliot's Plays. In this section the pageant and music-hall revue, which were the vehicles for this vaguely propagandist work, are treated, and what is so strangely important about the music-hall form of entertainment is that Eliot was very much attracted to it. This chapter, although it just sets the scene, shows the author working at a much more superficial level than ever before.

Chapter II deals with the importance of Eliot's socio-religious thinking relative to The Rock in the 1930s. The authoritarian nature and very rigour of his orthodoxy may have been partly the reason why The Rock and After Strange Gods were never republished, but the important point is made clear, through these views on Christian orthodoxy and tradition, that Eliot was to be admired as perhaps the only poet and intellectual of great standing in England in the 1930s who gave his allegiance to something wholly outside himself. In addition, what is made explicit in this chapter, and held implicit throughout, is that Eliot was no turncoat who now gladly and facilely embraced the succour of Mother Church as some critics would have us believe. What is made plain is that this relatively new convert was finding a via media between facile hope and pointless despair - hence the very discipline and rigour of his Anglo-Catholic affirmations.

Chapter III is about the requirements of the medium in what ~~was~~ in fact the first time Eliot had moved beyond a coterie audience. The demands and limitations are listed as criteria against which The Rock can only be measured; and although the choruses may be the first bad poetry Eliot had written, it is made clear that he was conscious of the seeming hollowness of ecclesiastical utterances. It may seem paradoxical that Eliot, in this propaganda setting,

was actually trying to wring the neck of rhetoric, and the moral is even enforced by his inclusion of a verse-sketch which clearly shows an adulteration through rhetoric.

Chapter IV reverberates on the two preceding chapters in its delineation of a return to a purified yet traditional language as well. Although the nobility of language from biblical books is still there, Eliot was for the first time using a democratic, and non-hieratic, language of ordinary man. There is a new distrust of the cunning and rhetorical, **as** contained in the 'objective correlative' of before, and the author is attempting a personal atone through what seems to be an authenticity and sincerity of tone.

The Rock could conceivably exist without the choruses at all but they are important, unlike the prose episodes, because they were written without the various collaborators.

Chapter V attempts, very briefly, to establish that The Rock was not a propagandist's hackwork but that the author was consciously groping for new forms of prosody and dramatic techniques preparatory to his later plays and poetry and, as such, the work is seen in the perspective of an important stage midway in Eliot's career as an artist and thinker.

PREFACE

The Rock was the first of T.S. Eliot's commissioned religious plays and it was primarily written for performance at Sadler's Wells Theatre, Islington, London from 28 May - 9 June, 1934, on behalf of the Forty-five Churches Fund of the Diocese of London. After its first publications in England by Faber and Faber and in the United States by Harcourt Brace and Company, the author allowed the work to go out of print and for it to remain an occasional piece, except for the ten choruses which have been republished within his Collected Poems.

This thesis is not intended to be a patient elucidation of this forgotten text, but much rather its point and purpose is to study the work in relation to T.S. Eliot's own poetic, dramatic, critical and social writings and, by scanning its before and after, to endeavour to find some continuities, links and a perspective. As for the supplementary elucidation there are three most helpful books: E. Martin Browne's The Making of T.S. Eliot's Plays (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969); Grover Smith's T.S. Eliot's Poetry and Plays: A Study in Sources and Meaning (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961); and B.C. Southam's A Students Guide to the Selected Poems of T.S. Eliot (London: Faber and Faber Ltd, 1969) - these all contain useful guides, especially the former work by Martin Browne who collaborated with the author to write The Rock, and the latter work by Southam not only bears the Imprimatur of Faber and Faber, but was also prepared with the authoritative advice of Mrs Valerie Eliot whom the author thanks in his 'Acknowledgments'.

This thesis will also attempt to show how and why the man considered to be the most sophisticated and major British poet of the twentieth century, accepted of his own volition, a pedestrian and unpretentious duty to his faith to express his own personal and idiosyncratic views about church and society. What is more, it seems incongruous but interesting that this particular author should have conveyed these ideas, not through highly wrought and intensely allusive methods as he was wont, but that he did so by taking instead merely an

ad hoc improvisation of the village pageant from the past, and a type of revue which was enjoying some popularity in England at the time. Not only does such a concatenation seem strangely regressive to T.S. Eliot but, moreover, this cosmopolitan poet expressed through them a sectarian apologia for High Anglicanism.

The Rock, therefore, shows Eliot working at a shallower level than ever before, in what was his first work written outside a specifically literary, coterie audience. Nevertheless, this thesis will endeavour to show that The Rock was still the work of a major and subtle mind grappling with severe limitations and then transforming them. There is still a continuity of the author's concerns and motifs from his earlier writings and, even within the strictures of a provided scenario, the poet was able to give this pageant-play a distinctly Eliotic flavour. Yet conversely, this thesis will be somewhat like a biological field trip and it will show how the ecology is changing in Eliot's work. His earlier habitat of extreme human self-enclosure is now markedly gone and it will be shown that there is a more humane and positive concern filtering through in The Rock.

All quotations will be taken from the Faber edition of The Rock which was first published in England in 1934 but, for the sake of convenience, the ten choruses will be numbered corresponding to those reprinted in Collected Poems 1909-1962.

I wish to thank Mr. Peter Alcock for his suggestions and corrections which he has so kindly and patiently advanced for the preparation of this manuscript. His help with the text and his knowledge and supervision have been an immense help. I should also like to thank Professor R.G. Frenn for his introducing me to T.S. Eliot's poetry some years ago.

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Here is a place of disaffection...

Burnt Norton III

The Occasion and the Work - the years of l'entre deux guerres

There is only the fight to recover what has been lost
 And found and lost again and again: and now, under
 conditions
 That seem unpropitious. But perhaps neither gain nor
 loss.
 For us, there is only the trying. The rest is not our
 business.

East Coker V

The severe limitations imposed by the nature of Eliot's first venture in the theatre had prompted him to disclaim full authorship of The Rock in the prefatory note to the printed version, where he explains:

I cannot consider myself the author of the 'play', but only of the words which are printed here. The scenario,¹ incorporating some historical scenes suggested by the Rev. R. Webb-Odell, is by Mr E. Martin Browne, under whose direction I wrote the choruses and dialogues, and submissive to whose expert criticism I rewrote much of them. Of only one scene² am I literally the author: for this scene and of course for the sentiments expressed in the choruses I must assume the responsibility.³

Eliot then proceeds to distribute the authorship among those directly or indirectly involved in the pageant:

I should like to make grateful acknowledgment of the collaboration of Dr. Martin Shaw, who composed the music. To Mr F.V. Morley I am indebted for one speech for which technical knowledge of brick-laying was required; to Major Bonamy Dobrée for correcting the diction of the Christopher Wren scene; to Mr W.F. Cachemaille for the information concerning the relations of architects, contractors and foremen. The Rev. Vincent Howson has so completely rewritten the dialogue between himself (Bert) and his mates, that he deserves the title of joint author.⁴

- 1 The first scenario is by Mr E. Martin Browne; the subsequent scenarii, notes and typewcript drafts are housed in the Bodleian Library, Oxford.
- 2 The verse scene including the Redshirts and Blackshirts and Plutocrat, pp. 42-47.
- 3 T.S. Eliot, The Rock (London: Faber and Faber Ltd, 1934) p. 5.
- 4 *ibid.*

There was for the actual performances a cast in excess of 330 characters in the various scenes, most of whom were amateurs. Mr. Vincent Howson, who had formed the East End Amateurs, had recruited his group from friends of local cockney talent, to play his scenes with them, but all the other workmen were taken from University College, London, Dramatic Society. Stella Mary Pearce was the Producer, while her husband, Eric Newton, undertook the setting for the pageant-stage. Miss Elsie Fogerty, from the Central School of Speech and Drama, provided and directed the chorus which comprised seven men and ten women from that school. The Conductor of Lloyds Light Orchestra (40 players and a small choir) was Dr. G.F. Brockless.

There was an audience of approximately 1,500 each night for the two week duration of the performances at Sadler's Wells.

oooOooo

The action of the 'play' shows related situations in the tradition of the English Church, the symbolism of which was to be measured on the naturalistic level by the building of a church from its uneven foundations through to its final decoration and dedication. Ranging back and forth in time to show the persistence of the past in the present, the builders learn in their trials that the building of this church is not an isolated act, for they are given strength to surmount the obstacles of the present, by the apparitions and the tales of opposed church building in the past. The conversion of Saxon London by the priest Mellitus¹ was to provide the first parallel to the workers' efforts to prepare the foundations of the church, and this is in turn associated with the difficulties of Rahere² who had built St. Bartholomew's,

1 Mellitus (d.624) had converted the East Saxons and in 604 St. Augustine had consecrated him to be their bishop. Ethelbert, King of Kent, had St. Paul's in London built for him to be the place of his see.

2 Rahere (d.1143), a Norman ex-courtier of King Henry and Canon of St. Paul's, is said to have had a vision of being rescued from the jaws of hell by St. Bartholomew and had accordingly endowed St. Bartholomew's, one of the great architectural achievements in church building in the Middle Ages.

Smithfield. The builders are then confronted by a Communist Agitator and their standing guard over the half-built sanctuary is seen as reminiscent of Nehemiah¹ and his men rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem. The Agitator's incitement of a mob to destroy the edifice is next juxtaposed to the pillage and martyrdom of the Christians in the Danish invasions of the tenth and eleventh centuries. Part I is then brought to a close by the offering of the alternatives of Communism, Fascism and Capitalism, as represented in the personages of the Redshirts, Blackshirts and Plutocrat.

Part II, which was also to last for approximately forty minutes, begins with Bishop Bloomfield's² similar appeals for church building; two Crusaders' farewells and dedications to fight for King Richard; an interlude of a music-hall flavour with Ethelbert and his wife; a frivolous discussion among three middle-class people, and then a Stuart and Tudor crowd of iconoclasts (which served to contrast the final dedication and beautifying by the craftsmen); and then the legend of St. Peter and the Fishermen and the great church dedications of the past. The final sequence is a discussion by Sir Christopher Wren (1632-1723), Samuel Pepys (1633-1703) and his fellow diarist John Evelyn (1620-1706). To fill the interests throughout, ten choruses were provided to narrate or comment upon the various actions.

As for the actual title of the work, Eliot seems to be drawing upon the Biblical use of the word 'rock', to signify the supporting strength of God as the asylum of his people and the strength for weak mankind as in Psalm 89:26 (Thou art my father, my God, and the rock of my salvation) and Psalm 18:2 (The Lord is my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer).

1 The Old Testament: The Book of Nehemiah I - XIV passim.

2 Charles James Bloomfield (1786-1857), who became Bishop of London in 1828, had in 1836 issued an appeal for funds to build fifty churches in London, which was met with wonderful success. During his episcopate, nearly two hundred new churches were consecrated.

Perhaps Matthew 16:18 is also relevant in Christ's words to Peter: (thou art Peter and upon this rock I will build my Church).¹

oooOooo

In 1930 George Bell, the Anglican Bishop of Chichester, had Mr E. Martin Browne appointed to the post of Director of Religious Drama for that diocese, and the object of this newly created position was to enable promising artists to use their talents in this particular field. The Bishop, inferring from T.S. Eliot's dramatic criticism that this new Anglican convert might be interested in writing religious plays, had invited the poet among a few guests (which included Martin Browne) to Chichester in December 1930 for a party, with the intention of exploring the possibility of Eliot writing a play for him. However, very little eventuated on this occasion in communicating the proposal to the Bishop's guest, or over the next eighteen months, by which time the poet was to take up residence at Harvard for the Academic Year 1932-3.

It was not until March 1933 that the actual conception of The Rock was brought about, when a Rev.R. Webb-Odell was asked to organize a church building pageant by the Anglican Bishop of London. The expressed task was to direct the Forty-Five Churches Fund, a project to raise money, mainly from the existing churches of London, to finance the building of forty-five new churches in the new expanding suburban area North of the Thames. This venture was to entail a pageant, not only to raise money to endow these new churches, but also, as the chosen genre might suggest, to advertise the enshrined traditions of London churches to these people redistributed in this suburban area and to remind them of their great

1 The title seems to have been quite fortuitous. Lillah McCarthy in *The Observer* (4 Feb.1934), had dubbed a rehearsal 'The Rock'. Eliot wrote to Webb-Odell on 8 Feb. "My only objection to The Rock is that the Rock himself, if he gives the title to my production, will be identified by most people as St.Peter pure and simple, which does directly conjure up to my mind the Petrine claims - which are hardly appropriate..." Quoted in E.Martin Browne; The Making of T.S. Eliot's Plays, (London: Cambridge University Press, 1969), p. 27.

ecclesiastical heritage.

Mr E. Martin Browne, whose expertise was soon to be called upon to aid the project, recalls the genre on which this pageant was to be modelled - the open-air pageant which had flourished in England until the Second World War:

Its purpose is to celebrate the history either of a place or of a institution, and it does so by showing a chronological series of scenes, each led up to by a processional entry. It gives a great multitude of amateurs, concerned with the subject of the pageant, an opportunity of taking part without any severe strain on their ability (the leading actors are usually chosen rather for their lineage or other connection with the affair in hand than for skill in acting)....The total effect can hardly be called dramatic; it is a display of panoply; a more relaxed and less disciplined version of a great parade.¹

The original conception was to have been merely a series of tableaux based on the pride of the ecclesiastical history of London and the magnitude of such a venture would have normally just depended upon the story, the availability of actors, and the setting. However, the situation was complicated by the fact that the commission had demanded that the display would be staged in a theatre in central London for a period of about two weeks.

The actual printed version of The Rock entitled the performance a 'pageant-play', and it is true that a certain number of definite pageant features were retained, for that convention employed on occasions a synthesis of many of the arts: prose and verse, ballet, music and mime, comic sequences and spectacle - all of which were accordingly reduced to be accommodated on the theatre stage.

The word 'pageant' had apparently, in medieval times, referred to the cart on which a scene of a religious play was performed and this perambulating entertainment had been common then. The stage usually consisted of two rooms, 'the lower one curtained off as a dressing room, though it could on occasions be used to represent Hell'.²

1 E. Martin Browne, p. 27.

2 The Oxford Companion to the Theatre ed. Phyllis Hartnell 3rd ed. (Oxford, 1967), p. 713.

The pageant came through time to mean no more than a spectacular procession, with dramatic sketches and displays of dancing, songs, and processions to music, which would celebrate a particular locality or even a marriage. Ingenious machinery was often used and the genre became a not too distant remove from the elaborate Masques of Inigo Jones and Ben Jonson.¹ Excellent accounts of the pageant form may be found in Anthony Parker's book, Pageants: Their Presentation and Production, (Pitman Press, London, 1954); and within Virginia Woolf's Between the Acts, there is another good but less formal account of the village pageant. An excellent example of a pageant work is The Oxford Historical Pageant June 27-July 3, 1907, (written by several hands) and the general tone of this memorial to Oxford's heritage is one of great pride and reverence. There is an opening Ode by Robert Bridges which is conventionally used to invite all to the resplendant pageant. Various writers then give their respective accounts of such men as King Charles I, James I and II and their encounters and dealings with that University (e.g. one of the scenes is a conversation between Henry VIII and Wolsey at Oxford). The pageant finishes with an Epilogue significantly entitled 'The Secret of Oxford' and it was written especially for the occasion by A.T. Quiller-Couch.

However, when Martin Browne had been asked by Webb-Odell to undertake the project and prepare an initial scenario for the pageant, the progress of the draft did not seem to give them what they wanted. Martin Browne comments on the loose episodes in the following way:

It was unexciting in itself; and it gave no opportunity of confronting the situation of 1934. Some way must be found to focus attention on present needs and hopes, and to see the past in a perspective view from the present. We needed a framework of dramatic action in a contemporary setting. And, to lift the imagination of the audience to a height from which it could see the immediate business of church-building as part of² the continuing work of the Church, we needed a poet.

1 The Rock has something of the artificiality of the seventeenth century Masque, especially in its virtue versus vice aspect, but the rapport with the audience common to this convention, was to be left primarily to the upbraiding voice of the chorus.

2 Martin Browne pp. 5-6.

As a direct result of Martin Browne's prompting, T.S. Eliot was engaged, after some initial reservations on the committee's part, to write the verse interludes which were a common feature to the pageant form. The actual invitation had been extended and accepted almost immediately by the poet in September, 1933. His suitability for this task of writing what would essentially be didactic choral verse, was soon made obvious. First, his prophetic voice, which had earned him the esteem of a major British poet, was a reliable attribute for such a role. Secondly, Eliot was one who, after a soul-searching and tormented struggle, had eventually found his faith in the 'higher reaches' of the Anglican Church. His various comments of social criticism too, were communicating this very need for a sense of Christian community, the urgency of which seemed self-evident to many by the social situation in England at the time.

The major obstacle which confronted Martin Browne and Eliot immediately, was to form some coherence out of the scenario. Fortunately, Martin Browne had been inspired by a type of revue which was having some success at the time in the hands of producers such as André Charlot and Charles Cochran. Their often spectacular and hybrid variety shows were really of French origin and they were used to provide a survey, mainly satiric, of contemporary events. A revue, also with its numerous short scenes, did have that much needed merit for Martin Browne and Eliot, of using a 'thread of plot'.¹ Instead of the atomized presentation of a pageant with its implicit locality, the revue did offer some form of enveloping and explicit plot which would hold the sketches together.

These music hall revues had become very popular just before the First World War and especially at the Alhambra in the hands of Andre Charlot and at the London Hippodrome with the productions of Albert de Courville. Charles Cochran's Odds and Ends, presented at the Ambassador's Theatre in 1914,

1 Martin Browne, p.8.

was an advance on the typical revue in that it was a serious attempt, relying on cleverness and wit rather than dress and dancing, at what was called an intimate revue. It was this type of variation which Eliot seems to have finally adopted.¹ The revue is, in fact, not a forgotten form of art, for it was to enjoy further popularity with Noel Coward and, relatively recently, in the well-known revues At the Drop of a Hat (1959) by Michael Flanders and Donald Swan and Beyond the Fringe (1961), associated with Peter Cook and Dudley Moore.

The reason why the revue was most helpful to Martin Browne and Eliot was that it enabled the historical scenes to be viewed from the present by the workers who, together with the Rock, were made free of time on the theatre stage and this facilitated two interconnecting messages of the work: the eternal struggle of the Church with good and evil and the orthodox belief in the Communion of Saints. The pageant, on the other hand, was much more episodic in its nature.

The artificiality and essential shallowness of the form chosen was only to be expected. It was, after, all, a propaganda work, an 'advertisement'² which did not aim to create character, but tried instead to construct a theatrical form which would present certain problems vividly and sharply engage the attention of the audience. The personality as a whole was not engaged and no willing suspension of disbelief was called for. Nevertheless, it needs to be said that Eliot was quite partial to the old music hall and variety tradition, which had a definite effect on his earlier Sweeney Agonistes fragments.³ Eliot seemed to be aware that the popular music-hall traditions were really the only models on which he could effectively draw, as the English commercial theatre at the time could offer none. Even as far back as 1920 the poet had observed:

- 1 D.E.Jones states that the structure "was borrowed from a C.B.Cochran revue..." He footnotes his evidence as being from an interview by Burke Wilkinson of E.Martin Browne, *The New York Times*, 7 Feb. 1954, Section 2, p.1 Col 6. (This interview was unavailable for this thesis).
D.E.Jones, The Plays of T.S.Eliot (Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1960), p.39.
- 2 T.A.Eliot, "A Letter to the Editor", *The Spectator*, 8 June, 1934, p. 887.
- 3 First printed in *The Criterion* (Oct.1926 and Jan. 1927) and published in book form in 1932.

Possibly the majority of attempts to confection a poetic drama have begun at the wrong end; they have aimed at the small public which wants poetry... The Elizabethan drama was aimed at a public which wanted entertainment of a crude sort, but would stand a good deal of poetry; our problem should be to take a form of entertainment, and subject it to the process which would leave it a work of art.¹ Perhaps the music-hall comedian is the best material.

Three years later Eliot wrote a panegyric on Marie Lloyd whose music-hall entertainment for the lower class people in England he had greatly admired. Of that class he said:

In the music-hall comedians they find the expression and dignity of their own lives; and this is not found in the most elaborate and expensive revue. With the decay of the music-hall, with the encroachment of the cheap and rapid-breeding cinema, the lower class will tend to drop into the same state of protoplasm as the bourgeoisie. The working man who went to the music hall and saw Marie Lloyd and joined in the chorus was himself performing part of the act; he was engaged in that collaboration of the audience with the artist which is necessary in all art and most obviously in dramatic art. He will now go to the cinema, where his mind is lulled by continuous senseless music and continuous action too rapid for the brain to act upon, and will receive, without giving, in that same listless apathy with which the middle and upper classes regard any entertainment of the nature of art.²

The closeness of this tradition to Eliot's heart is evident in the comment with which he finishes the essay. Referring to W.H.R. River's *Essays on the Depopulation of Melanesia* in the essay, and how Melanesians had been deprived of all interest in life by the civilization forced on them from outside and as a result were dying from pure boredom, the author makes the following vituperative indictment:

When every theatre has been replaced by 100 cinemas, when every music instrument has been replaced by 100 gramophones, when every horse has been replaced by 100 cheap motor-cars, when electrical ingenuity has made it possible for every child to hear its bedtime

1 "The Possibility of a Poetic Drame", The Sacred Wood (London: Methuen, 1920), p.70.

2 "Marie Lloyd" (1923) Selected Essays, pp. 458-9.

stories from a loud-speaker, when applied science has done everything possible with the materials on this earth to make life as interesting as possible, it will not be surprising if the population of the entire civilized world rapidly follow the fate of the Melane-
sians.¹

What can be said for these two conventions, however, is that The Rock is a concatenation of the village pageant from the past and the music-hall revue of the contemporary stage and this factor just happened to fortuitously coincide with Eliot's own concern with the past and the present and the persistence of the one in the other. The traditional and the contemporary in juxtaposition, as it will become clear in the succeeding chapters, are just as pre-eminent in The Rock as they had been in the author's earlier poetry.

The threads of these ideas and the author's subsequent dramatic concerns will be picked up in the chapter succeeding the next, where the poet is seen embarking on a new 'expressionistic' form to communicate spoken verse of a mode not foreign to the music-hall revue.

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What remains to be stated in this introductory chapter are some of the early criticisms of The Rock. The pertinence of these bare quotations will be made apparent, either obviously or by implication, throughout the thesis, but they do represent the dismay or just the apprehension with which the work was greeted in 1934.

Conrad Aiken had this to say of The Rock:

In conjunction...with the handful of poems which Mr. Eliot has given us in the twelve years since he published The Waste Land, it is enough to make one uneasy. Without in any way distracting from the extraordinary beauty of Ash Wednesday or Marina, or from the occasional brilliance of other of the later poems, one cannot fail to notice a contraction both of interest and power in the recent work.²

1 ibid., p. 459.

2 Aiken, Conrad. "After Ash Wednesday", Poetry: A Magazine of Verse, Vol. 45 (1934) 163-4.

D.W. Harding saw a more auspicious message in the ramifications of the work:

Far less concentrated, far less perfect, far more easy-going than the earlier work, it has an increased breadth of contact with the world which takes the place of intensity of contact at a few typical points. The change is not one that can be described briefly. It can be roughly indicated by saying that the earlier work seemed to be produced by the ideal type of a generation, and asked for Mr. Eliot to be looked upon almost as an institution, whereas this later work, though not more individual, is far more personal. What seems certain is that it forms a transition to a stage of Mr. Eliot's work which has not yet fully defined itself.¹

As for the 'aged eagle' himself, the work was quite 'unauspicious' and he wrote to Bonamy Dobrée bemoaning the fact that his poetic inspiration had gone. The man whose prophetic voice and long-sightedness had expressed 'the disillusionment of a generation'² was, in The Rock, doing the work of a magpie:

I don't think my poetry is any good: not The Rock any way, it isn't: nothing but a brilliant future behind me. What is one to do?³

The following poem, written in the 1930s, is a much more all-encompassing criticism of Eliot: his apparent apostasy, his supposed flirtations with Fascism, and his trailing off of intensity in his poetry - all of which will be treated in some depth in the following chapters. This poem by W.T. Nettlefold, "Fan Mail for a Poet (To be read over a network of high-power Radio Stations by an American

1 Harding, D.W. "The Rock", Scrutiny, Vol III, No 2 (September, 1934) 189.

2 Eliot was to dispose of this phrase in "Thoughts After Lambeth" (1931) where he says in parenthesis 'I dislike the word 'generation', which has been a talisman for the last ten years; when I wrote a poem called The Waste Land some of the more approving critics said that I had expressed 'the disillusionment of a generation', which is nonsense. I may have expressed for them their own illusion of being disillusioned, but that did not form part of my intention.' Selected Essays, p. 368.

3 "T.S. Eliot: A Personal Reminiscence by Bonamy Dobrée" in T.S. Eliot: The Man and His Work, ed. Allen Tate (New York: University of South Delta, 1966) p. 79.

Hot-gospeller)", may be seen as symptomatic of a sense of near anger and almost of shame at T.S. Eliot's changing of camps. The Rock definitely represents a change of heart, but the following flyting and jibing is an outraged picture of betrayal yet also a lament:

HOW nice for a man to be clever,
So famous, so true;
So sound an investment; howEVER
So nice to be YOU.

To peer into basements, up alleys,
A nose for the search.
To challenge with pertinent sallies,
And then JOIN the Church.

First comes Frufrock, then Sweeney, and then
Thomas à Becket.
How frightfully nice of the good men
In cloth to forget it.

The broad-backed Hippo so weak and frail
Succumbed to the shock.
But the TRUE Church now can never fail,
Based upon 'THE ROCK'.

As a POET you visit today
The NICE Portuguese.
You can help England so in this way;
I DO hope you please.

You WILL watch Spain's terrible border;
Take care where you tread.
How AWFUL for England if you were
Shot down for a 'RED'.

I like you, and what's more I READ you:
There are such a few
Christian Poets so noble; indeed you
Must know it - YOU DO.

How nice for a man to be clever
So famous, so true;
So sound an investment; howEVER
So nice to be YOU.¹

The purpose of this thesis is to document this change in Eliot's allegiance and to show that, whatever the relative merits of The Rock may be, there is, despite the conscious intention of edifying an audience, still the desire

¹ Quoted from Poetry of the Thirties ed. Robin Skelton (London: Cox and Wymen, 1964) pp. 26-7.

to make a work of art. One can only repeat and say with hindsight that the author was being serious when he speculated that the likes of the music-hall entertainment should be subjected to a process which would leave it a work of art. The endeavour, of course, was a largely experimental one and also the result of the poet's generous giving of his time and talents. As such, it is apposite to note Eliot's own reflections on the effort he made in those years in which he also wrote The Rock:

So here I am, in the middle way, having had twenty years -
 Twenty years largely wasted, the years of l'entre deux
 guerres -
 Trying to learn to use words, and every attempt
 Is a wholly new start, and a different kind of failure
 Because one has only learnt to get the better of words
 For the thing one no longer has to say, or the way
 in which
 One is no longer disposed to say it. And so each venture
 Is a new beginning, a raid on the inarticulate
 With shabby equipment always deteriorating
 In the general mess of imprecision of feeling,
 Undisciplined squads of emotions.

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CHAPTER II

Eliot's Social, Religious and Literary Theory - the frame of ideas.

Although the Word is common to all, most people live as if each had a private wisdom of his own. HERACLITUS.

After his relatively sudden turning to Anglo-Catholicism in 1927, the tenor of most of T.S. Eliot's poetry and social criticism was to become characterized by a patently orthodox and reactionary stance, with its grim emphasis on Original Sin and renunciation. Crystallizing within him was a definite and marked predilection for a classical literary tradition, with its collateral dependence upon a general cultural, social, political and religious English tradition. What had been essentially an escape from the expression of personality in artistic terms, in "Tradition and the Individual Talent" (1917), was now seeming to contain a wider, more orthodox and theological depersonalization which was the complete acceptance of some authority outside of himself - that of God and the High Anglican Church.

As a new convert, the author immediately saw as his obligation to his faith and church, the necessity to comment upon religious and social issues in Europe and England, at times with almost uncompromising asperity. This frequent forthrightness with which he sometimes dismissed political and religious notions, is perhaps explained in a comment from After Strange Gods (1934) wherein, saying how differences in fundamental beliefs do not lend themselves to fruitful dialogue, he states:

In a society like ours, worm-eaten with liberalism, the only thing possible for a person with strong convictions is to state a point of view and leave it at that.¹

To begin with stating Eliot's most fundamental point of view, it can be said with assurance that the Pelagian heresy held absolutely no appeal for him. The tortured quest of the Waste Land poet did not finally lead to crossing the Jordan into the Promised Land - instead it led Eliot soon

1 After Strange Gods: A Primer of Modern Heresy (New York, 1934), p. 13.

after to Christian orthodoxy and the conscious resolve to subdue his will to that of God. The Rock, which also rests on this ever-present axiom of Original Sin, is a similar call for humility and repentance as "Ash Wednesday", in its recognition of the eternal struggle of good and evil in the world, but, for this occasion, the need for orthodox faith and belief was shown to be the requirements to offset the various and nefarious political 'heresies' which beset man.

Eliot had also expressed another of his fundamental attitudes in "Modern Education and the Classics" (1932), wherein he categorically says that there are only two finally tenable hypotheses about life, the Catholic and the materialist.¹ It is this latter political view which is rejected in The Rock as it is represented in that energetic, verse set-piece of the Redshirts, Blackshirts and Plutocrat. These materialist ideologies only serve to elicit the author's scorn in caricatures of those, who, from outside the Church, continually persist in devising political systems, whereby no-one need practise virtue and penitential discipline. Their policies are presented as mere parodies of the author's own firm insistence on faith and belief; and this political trio are portrayed as undermining the foundations of the church, for in the author's view their rootless materialism could only, at best, direct society by impure motives which aimed at false and temporal goods. However, the real threat of the two totalitarian and the capitalist creeds is represented by their interference with the individual's relationship with God, a relationship which Eliot was to insist, must at once involve a measure of human freedom and guidance of Christian orthodoxy. Eliot's chorus could not be more explicit:

There is no help in parties, none in interests,
There is no help in those who souls are choked and
swaddled

In the old winding sheets of place and power
Or the new winding sheets of mass-made thought.
O world! forget your glories and your quarrels,
Forget your groups and your misplaced ambitions,
We speak to you as individual men;
As individual alone with GOD.
Alone with GOD, you first learn brotherhood with men.

The Rock.p.46.

1 Selected Essays, p. 514.

As for the Plutocrat, his suave but vaporous and rootless proposals are the antithesis of orthodoxy. This pseudo-liberal man of straw is finally reduced to the absurd in the undignified scramble by the mob for the Golden Calf. Eliot's poetry and social criticism are besotted with quotations about materialism, or this perennial cult of the Golden Calf, upon which he once sardonically commented:

I would even say that, as it is the faith of the day, there are only a small number of people living who have achieved the right not to be Communists. My only objection to it is the same as my objection to the cult of the Golden Calf. It is better to worship a golden calf than to worship nothing; but that, after-all, is not, in the circumstances, an adequate excuse. My only objection is that it just happens to be mistaken.¹

One of the reasons why Communism and this pseudo-liberalism happened to be mistaken for the author was that, if materialism were the only major yardstick by which progress and society were measured, then the relation of the past and the present would be lost. What was most basic to Eliot's thinking at the time, and something which had attracted him in his social criticism, was the idea of the essential integrity of a Christian community, 'one in which there is a unified religious - social code of behaviour'.²

The concentration of people in an area for the sole purposes of amassing wealth, whether they be Jew or Gentile, was anathema to Eliot. In The Rock, Eliot, perhaps by intention, noticeably neglects materialistic alternatives to the social situation in England. Fascism and Communism had been plausible alternatives to the unemployment in Great Britain (a social situation which had killed all hope and bred despair), and the sense of solidarity and social life generated by the ideals of the Redshirts, or the sense of order of the Black-shirts, must have been very real proposals.

1 "A Commentary" The Criterion, Vol XII, No XLVIII, (April, 1933), p. 473.

2 The Idea of a Christian Society, (London: Faber and Faber Ltd, 1939), pp. 23-24.

Eliot, however, refused to pledge his political allegiance to either faction as such. He had dogmatically said that for a society to continue 'the only possibility of control and balance is a religious control and balance'¹ as an alternative to the totalitarian 'puritanism of hygienic morality in the interests of efficiency'.² The rigour of the author's stance is so apparent when he adds 'that the only course for a society which would thrive and continue its creative activity in the arts of civilization, is to become Christian'.³

Kristian Smidt has this to say about Eliot:

Eliot...did not give his allegiance to any party. He envisages a state of things in which the church, the 'Rock', shall be our guide in temporal as well as spiritual affairs.⁴

This may sound a quite nebulous statement, and D.W. Harding in an early review of The Rock takes the poet to task for his seeming disregard for confronting the social situation of the Eastern suburbs of London in 1934:

What is not convincing...is his suggestion that the Church is the only alternative, for his pleading relies upon false antitheses. It puts the plight of the uncultured vividly, but it does not show what the Church would do for them.⁵

Harding states further:

The only alternative to godless restlessness that this book gives are the rough-diamond piety of the builder's foreman, and more impressive, the satisfactions of the highly cultured who happen to be within the Church....

Eliot had partly answered this kind of criticism in 'The Spectator' when he replied to Derek Verschoyle's early review

1 ibid., p. 23.

2,3 ibid., p. 24.

4 Smidt, Kristian, *Poetry and Belief in the Work of T.S. Eliot* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1961), p. 231.

5 Harding, D.W. "The Rock", Scrutiny, Vol III, No 2, (September, 1934), p. 180.

6 ibid.

of The Rock in that paper of the previous week. Referring to the 'despair of the Church's attitude towards such questions as Housing and Population',¹ Eliot asked:

...would Mr. Verschoyle have wished me to tax my poetic resources by making my Chorus declaim about Birth Control.²

It seems that Eliot was not primarily concerned with contemporary issues in The Rock, but he concentrated instead upon the relation of present to past events and spiritual realities. Admittedly, we do have Ethelbert entertaining the notions of Credit Reform (p. 12.) and the economic policies of J.M. Keynes, but these are quite atypical of the author, and are perhaps just interim policies advocated at the time. What Eliot was concerned with in the work was the need to 're-establish a vital connexion between the individual and the race'.³ In order for this connection to take place and for a Christian community to flourish, the author demanded the recognition of the dual aspects of orthodoxy and tradition.

oooOooo

It is in fact in moments of moral and spiritual struggle depending upon spiritual sanctions, rather than in those "bewildering moments" in which we are all very much alike that men and women come nearest to being real.⁴

In After Strange Gods published a few months before The Rock, Eliot had associated orthodoxy with tradition and heresy with individualism. Tradition (he admits using these terms in their widest possible sense), is 'a way of feeling and acting which characterizes a group throughout generations',⁵

1 Eliot, T.S. Letter on The Rock, The Spectator, 8 June, 1934, p. 887.

2 *ibid.*

3 After Strange Gods, p. 22.

4 *ibid.*, p. 46.

5 *ibid.*, p. 24.

orthodoxy, 'a consensus between the living and the dead'.¹ Ever since "Tradition and the Individual Talent" Eliot had concerned himself with the ordered flux of tradition in order to achieve a sense of integrity, order and cohesion, and this sense of community, reflecting the past in the present, is one of the central messages of The Rock ('There is no life which is not in community'. p. 21.) - this statement in 1934 now seems both true for the poet in artistic endeavour (tradition) and in religious life (orthodoxy).

The author had prefaced these definitions with the statement that 'a right tradition...must be also a Christian tradition, and orthodoxy in general implies Christian orthodoxy';² and he goes on to emphasize the analogy, in agreement with Hulme in Speculations³ that heresy and orthodoxy may be at times equated with romanticism and classicism, but he is aware that a too thorough going contrast cannot always be sustained. However, what is important in these lectures in this respect, (he had stated in the Preface he was ascending the platform in the role of moralist and not as literary critic) is the attention which he gives to the seductive lure of heresy - writers such as Milton, Hardy and Lawrence, all of whom he accuses of that 'heresy' of giving a free rein to their personal and individual eccentricities:

The point is that Lawrence started life wholly free from any restrictions of tradition and institution, that he had no guidance except the Inner Light, the most untrustworthy and deceitful guide that ever offered itself to wandering humanity.⁴

1 ibid.

2 ibid., p. 23.

3 "Romanticism and Classicism". Posthumously published in Speculations: Essays on Humanism and the Philosophy of Art. (ed. Herbert Read, 1924); reprinted in Criticism: The Major Texts, ed. Walter Jackson Bate, (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World Inc., 1952), pp. 564-573.

4 After Strange Gods, p. 28.

It was these personal religious and individualistic enthusiasms, quite divorced from English religious and literary tradition, from which the author recoiled.

The notion which Eliot set against such 'heresies' is contained within the injunction of the Rock himself to 'Make perfect the Will'. This is an important calling in The Rock and, moreover, it was to become an integral theme of the author's first really dramatic work of the following year, Murder in the Cathedral. In short, the concept takes cognizance of the Christian notion of human freedom, whereby, in recognizing a divine necessity (the inevitable and eternal struggle with evil, past and present, which confronts the Church), and bearing this as God's will, one may be able to act freely and not from personal human desire. This schematization, adumbrated in The Rock, became a crux in Murder in the Cathedral as exemplified in the following often quoted piece. Thomas' involuted reply to the Fourth Tempter reads as follows:

You know and do not know, what it is to act and suffer.
 You know and do not know, that action is suffering,
 And suffering action. Neither does the patient suffer
 Nor the patient act. But both are fixed
 In an eternal action, an eternal patience
 To which all must consent that it may be willed
 And which all must suffer that they may will it
 That the pattern may subsist, that the wheel may
 turn and still
 Be forever still.

The Complete Poems and Plays of T.S. Eliot,
 pp. 255-256.

Eliot stressed in both these religious plays that to 'act' is illusory without the necessary subjugation to God's laws, in which the actor (agent or doer) and the patient (bearer or sufferer) had to form a complete union. In The Rock, it is the figure of the Rock himself who exemplifies this situation. This mysteriously mantled and symbolic figure represents the Church as an eternal witness, sufferer and martyr, while his chorus, who are the laity or the Church in action are seen as just the ordinary people struggling against the apparent disorders of the world, and the plausible temptations of the merely secular correctives to them. (The exact significance

of the Rock will be explicated in the final chapter as will, by implication, the notion of perfecting the will). Suffice it to say, however, that to perfect the will involved for the author a rigorous discipline of the spirit and a conscious asceticism and denial of the senses, in order that the strife between the secularism of the world and the Will of God could be reconciled. An illustration of this denial is stated most strongly in "Thoughts After Lambeth" (1931) wherein, regretting the emphasis of the Anglican Bishop's reliance on individual conscience, the author states:

Certainly, anyone who is wholly sincere and pure in heart may seek for guidance from the Holy Spirit, but who of us is wholly sincere, especially where the most imperative of instincts may be strong enough to simulate to perfection the voice of the Holy Spirit.¹

By comparison, the author states elsewhere, and not without a certain disdain, how easily one's instincts may cause such a simulation:

In Culture and Anarchy...we hear something said about the 'will of God'; but the 'will of God' seems to become superseded in importance by 'our best self, or right reason, to which we want to give authority'; and this best self looks very much like Matthew Arnold slightly disguised.²

This conception of right action with its corollary of individual liberty was the summum bonum of much of Eliot's writing in the 1930s. In "Catholicism and International Order" (1933) he had taken issue with this idea of what constitutes an 'action' as it is seen by purely political and social standards:

The conception of individual liberty...must be based upon the unique importance of every single soul, the knowledge that every man is ultimately responsible for his own salvation or damnation, and the consequent obligation of society to allow every individual the opportunity to develop his full humanity. But unless this humanity is considered always in relation to God, we may expect to find

1 Selected Essays, p. 374.

2 T.S. Eliot, For Lancelot Andrewes: Essays on Style and Order (London: Faber and Faber Ltd., 1928), p. 63.

an excessive love of created beings, in other words humanitarianism, leading to a genuine oppression of human beings in what is conceived by other human beings to be their interests.¹

This final sentence of the quotation reminds one of Eliot's second epigraph to "Sweeney Agonistes", by St. John of the Cross² ("Hence the soul cannot be possessed of a divine union, until it has divested itself of the love of created things"), but here this sense of disaffection takes on a more social meaning than in the Sweeney fragments of the 1920s.

What can be said, however, about the last three quotations, in relation to their author and The Rock is that Eliot is now accepting, by practising this asceticism and wearing this yoke, a wholly other authority outside himself, which seems a complete contrast to the autonomy and self-enclosure of much of his pre-conversion verse. "Prufrock", the man in "Portrait of a Lady" and "Gerontion", all lived in mirages of their own devising and their respective self-centred dramas dealt entirely with their own inescapable self, for if they ceased to exist their worlds would be snuffed out like a candle. In contradistinction to these early personae, there is now a new and frankly ex cathedra tone to his choral verse in The Rock, which does evidence this new acceptance of authority. It is almost as if the poet were making a new poetic pilgrimage by himself, but with a humility which, in point of fact, harassed his Pegasus to the Thirty-Nine Articles - a point which will be taken up in the analysis of the choruses.

This new sense of disaffection and humility in The Rock cannot be counted, however, as one of complete apostasy: two reasons may be forwarded to establish this. In the first instance, the author's earlier and well-known aesthetic manifesto "Tradition and the Individual Talent" (1917), was also a conscious striving towards an impersonality for art which was in the words of the author, to separate the man who

1 T.S. Eliot, Essays Ancient and Modern (London: Faber and Faber Ltd, 1936), p. 119.

2 St. John of the Cross (1542-1591), a Spanish mystical ascetic, wrote in both prose and verse about the experiences of the soul in its search for union with God.

suffered from the mind which created.¹ Such a doctrine is surely emblematic of the kind of martyrdom and self-denial advocated in the sentiments of The Rock; but whereas in that early work the preoccupation had been an aesthetic one, it is now deployed in another mode which is more social and theological in its import. Secondly, it can be said that Eliot's earlier sceptical and solipsistic stance has not now been replaced by any facile religious optimism for although there are certainly many affirmations in The Rock, there are, characteristically, no loud hosannas. The Rock does not offer any primrose lane of religious dalliance, but rather a via negativa similar to the disaffection spoken of in Burnt Norton; and, as it will be shown throughout the following chapters, there is no really substantial discontinuity between Eliot's thematic ideas in his so-called pre-Christian poetry and the works, both poetic and dramatic, which were to follow.

Another one of the cruces of Eliot's thinking in his poetry and plays, is his constant awareness of Augustinian Original Sin, and the way in which man can remedy time, thereby regaining Paradise. Harry Monchensey in The Family Reunion is one who depicts, with great poignancy, a lurid vision of Original Sin and the hell of determinism which attends it:

I am the old house
With the noxious smell and the sorrow before morning
In which all past is present, all degradation
Is unredeemable.

Complete Poems and Plays, p. 294.

For Eliot, the sin of Adam is perpetual in men's lives, and one can only search in vain throughout the poet's entire works to find even a glimmering hope that time may be made to advance or improve humanity at large. In The Dry Salvages III we hear the poet say:

¹ The mind of the poet is a shred of platinum. It may partly or exclusively operate upon the experience of the man himself; but, the more perfect the artist, the more completely separate in him will be the man who suffers and the man which creates; the more perfectly will the mind digest and transmute the passions which are its material.

Selected Essays, p. 18.

And the way up is the way down, the way forward
 is the way back.
 You cannot face it steadily, but this thing is sure,
 That time is no healer.

One has only to look to the first five lines of Four Quartets, wherein the central theme of the apparent impossibility of the freedom of the will is stated to see that concern with redemption from Original Sin:

Time present and time past
 Are both perhaps present in time future
 And time future contained in time past.
 If all time is eternally present
 All time is unredeemable.

Burnt Norton I

Time had been treated beforehand in "Gerontion" and The Waste Land as merely broken memories of the past, but then, in Ash Wednesday IV, the bird had cried "Redeem the time" and Eliot took up this very theme to expound in the seventh chorus of The Rock (p. 50). It was there he stated how time could be redeemed by the Incarnation of Christ, the event which the author thought gave the essential meaning to man's existence:

Then came, at a predetermined moment, a moment in
 time and of time,
 A moment not out of time, but in time, in what we
 call history; transecting, bisecting a world of
 time, a
 moment in time but not like a moment of time
 A moment in time but time was made through that
 moment: for without the meaning there is no time,
 and that moment of time gave the meaning.

Much of the author's early poetry had, to some extent, been concerned with a world without the 'meaning' and where, as a result of this, the opposites of death and life could almost exist in a Macbeth-like fashion. Any concept of eternity was remote, for there was no spiritual centre of gravity and Eliot's personae were always imprisoned within themselves; always on the periphery and removed from the divine centre (the Word). 'Reality' only seemed to be contained somewhere in the depths of allusive images, and it was always unfathomably deep within the various 'objective correlatives'. The Incarnation had now become in The Rock the possible source of redemption for this earlier

Eliotic death-in-life pattern.

It is perhaps worthwhile to retrace this concern of the author in order to observe its exact position in The Rock. Sweeney could say with a certain equanimity that 'Death is life and life is death',¹ for he was past shunning the thought of the difference:

Birth, and copulation, and death.
That's all the facts when you come to brasstacks:
Birth, and copulation, and death.
I've been born, and once is enough.
You don't remember, but I remember,
Once is enough.

Complete Poems and Plays, p. 122.

The pattern, of course was to linger on into the author's drawing room dramas, and Amy Monchensey in The Family Reunion was to speak of death as being no more significant than a mild change from life. It is merely:

A momentary shudder in a vacant room.

Complete Poems and Plays, p. 287.

However, these opposites of life and death, and birth and death were really to become just seemingly so, for they were two sides of the same coin. The agony of Eliot's Christian Ariel poems did have a spiritual centre which, although relatively ungraspable, is nevertheless there. As an example, the concluding line of "Animula" reverses the final work of the 'Hail Mary' from 'death' to 'birth':

Pray for us now and at the hour of our birth.

and the Magi seemed quite uncertain of whether it was really a birth or a death they had witnessed.

So too, throughout the Eliot canon, are the seeming opposites of time past and time present telescoped, whether the poet be talking of tradition in the present, or concerned with the timeless aspect of Original Sin. A good example of this are the author's later drawing room comedies which seem to be based on the proposition that the future has long since been settled and the knowledge of the past is about to be enacted. Finally, it may also be noticed that

1 Complete Poems and Plays, p. 125.

Eliot's famous dictum that poetry, to be criticism of life, should deal with "the boredom, the horror and the glory", once again collapses and refuses to separate the polarities of the beautiful and ugly, birth and death, and time present and time past.

There was definitely for Eliot a certain footloose errancy for most people in this world of time, and in order for this to be redeemed, and Paradise to be momentarily restored, he insists that man must continually try to behold the time-world in the light of eternity, and the actual world in the light of the real. The next section of this chapter will attempt to show that The Rock is a conscious study of this errancy, and a pilgrimage out of it to this meaning given by the Incarnation. However, it remains to be said that whereas later in Little Gidding opposites are finally made to co-exist for the author in the epiphany brought about by the deprivation and darkness spoken of in Burnt Norton III, The Rock represents, as Grover Smith rightly suggests, 'a philosophy of using time rather than of escaping from it, of focussing upon the life of the wheel as the means to attain the point, rather than of neglecting the wheel - nature and time and man's active life - for the sake of a more immediate communion'.¹

oooOooo

"I gotta use words when I talk to you."

Sweeney Agonistes.

"But I say unto you, That every idle word that Men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgement. For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned"

Matthew 12:36-37

One of the central concerns of T.S. Eliot in The Rock

1 Grover Smith Jr., T.S. Eliot's Poetry and Plays: A Study in Sources and Meaning. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1956), p. 178.

and elsewhere, was that of the correlation between the spoken word and the Word (John 1: 1. In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God), and the author once commented upon this parallel in the following way:

For Poetry...is not the assertion that something is true, but the making of that truth more fully real to us; it is the creation of a sensuous embodiment. It is the making the World Flesh, if we remember that for poetry there are various qualities of Word and various qualities of Flesh.¹

This analogue between the Word and the spoken word was to be made in the fifth movement of the Four Quartets, in all but for The Dry Salvages, but the metaphor had been anticipated as far back as "Gerontion" where Bishop Lancelot Andrewes (1555-1626), had been the author's mentor on this occasion. The Bishop's Nativity Sermon had been preached before James I and the text had been the cry of the Pharisees, "Master, we would see a sign from thee" (Matthew 12:38) and Andrewes's sermon had read as follows:

Verbum infans, the Word within a word; the eternal Word not able to speak a word: a wonder sure and...swaddled; and that a wonder too. He that takes the sea "and rolls it about the swaddling bands of darkness", to come thus into clouts, Himself!²

What Eliot had analysed in "Gerontion" was a contemporary apostasy from the Word who was the very fount of spiritual life and who made the universe revolve. The Word (the Logos; Christ, the Second Person of the Trinity) was, in this poem, paradoxically an untalking baby whose exact significance had become swaddled, or adulterated, in darkness. The Word had represented for Eliot, even at this stage, a stillness or still point in time which later signified a recognition of God who could be made known to man at any moment in history, possible moments of Incarnation. This centripetality had

1 The Bookman, LXX (February, 1930), p. 601.

2 Quoted from B.C. Southam's A Student's Guide to the Selected Poems of T.S. Eliot (London: Faber and Faber Ltd, 1968), p. 44.

been denied in "Gerontion" and hence the poem ends in its opposite - a mad centrifugality. These same polarities are now present in the opening movement of The Rock; where the various images are seen as gyrations out from this central Wisdom:

The Eagle soars in the summit of Heaven,
 The Hunter with his dogs pushes his circuit.
 O perpetual revolution of configured stars,
 O perpetual recurrence of determined seasons,
 O world of spring and autumn, birth and dying!
 The endless cycle of idea and action,
 Endless invention, endless experiment,
 Brings knowledge of motion, but not of stillness;
 Knowledge of speech, but not of silence;
 Knowledge of words, and ignorance of the Word.
 All our knowledge brings us nearer to our ignorance,
 All our ignorance brings us nearer to death,
 But nearness to death no nearer to GOD.
 Where is the life we have lost in living?
 Where is the wisdom we have lost in knowledge?
 Where is the knowledge we have lost in information?
 The cycle of Heaven in twenty centuries
 Brings us farther from GOD and nearer to the Dust.

The Rock, p. 7.

This fevered movement of the temporal is juxtaposed to a stillness of eternity; and made implicit throughout is the sterile turning of the Buddhist Wheel of carnality and fate. Immediately the oppositions may be drawn by inference between an Eternal and a Temporal City, in addition to these various qualities of the Word. The spoken word is seen in this chorus as spiralling out from its metaphysical centre of the traditional and orthodox mainstream of Christianity and language which world-centred man has denied. The whole point and purpose of The Rock is perhaps stated in the following resolve:

Where bricks are fallen
 We will build with new stone
 Where the beams are rotten
 We will build with new timbers
 Where the word is unspoken
 We will build with new speech.

The Rock p. 11.

Almost as a direct result of this orbiting away from this traditional centre, the old frameworks of language have become dilapidated, and need to be rebuilt. On the other

hand the importance of this particular resolve had been paramount for Eliot who, in retrospect, had said his stated task had been 'to purify the dialect of the tribe' (Little Gidding II), so that in cleansing his age's utterances, he might open their eyes to the truth. This had basically meant a fulfilment of language, an artistic 'Incarnation' through a language which beforehand had only been potential. For Eliot, there was always to be this tension in his poetry between the 'Logos' and mere words, or, in other words, that ineffable meaning and the merely temporal approach. This constant struggle to make valid sentences out of a bewitchment of language and the seeming hollowness of words is quite explicitly spoken of in The Rock, for the author did see poetic composition almost as a method and means of spiritual enlightenment:

Out of the sea of sound the life of music,
 Out of the shiny mud of words, out of the sleet
 and hail of verbal imprecisions,
 Approximate thoughts and feelings, words that
 have taken the place of thoughts and feelings,
 There spring the perfect order of speech, and the
 beauty of incantation.

The Rock, p. 75.

It is this actual cleansing through the purity of words that is enacted throughout The Rock in the effort to enter into a better relationship with God. Words in their correct syntax could in fact represent a victory over disorder; and this poet does strive, through the music and liturgy of the Church, to find some regenerate linguistic and religious forms for a just society and true community in what was one of his ever present concerns for pattern and order. Conversely, the Redshirt, Blackshirt and Plutocrat episode was, in part, included to enforce this moral, for their speech represents a parodic adulteration of language in the unmusical doggerel verse of the first two instances and the pretended diffidence and weighing of opinion in the last.

Such were the interconnecting patterns, both religious and linguistic, which had interested T.S. Eliot around the time in which he wrote The Rock. It now remains to trace in the forthcoming chapter exactly how he 'made the Word flesh' in order to give his choruses the 'sensuous embodiment' which could communicate the messages of his pageant-play.

CHAPTER III

Requirements of the Medium - Making the Word flesh.

We are living at present in a kind of doldrums between opposing winds of doctrine, in a period in which one political philosophy has lost its cogency for behaviour, though it is still the only one in which public speech can be framed. This is very bad for the English language; It is this disorder (for which we are all to blame) and not individual insincerity, which is responsible for the hollowness of many political and ecclesiastical utterances.¹

The chorus which Eliot was to use in The Rock had its roots in ancient Greek drama, where an 'orchestra' of voices would narrate or comment upon the action of a play. However, as it will be shown in the next chapter, the author used this ancient 'realistic' function of the Greek chorus in conjunction with that ritual form of communal expression used in some later medieval liturgical dramas; and it was to be this juxtaposition for tension between 'liturgy' and 'realism' which played a very major part in the earlier choruses of The Rock, where sentiments from a biblical and 'liturgical' past and a sordid and 'realistic' present are telescoped for the poet's various purposes of communicating through this music-hall medium.

The seven men and ten women who comprised the chorus were disguised for the occasion as stone-like figures in half-masks, the purpose of which was to emphasize their essential impersonality throughout the ages. Dressed in stiff stylized robes of hessian draped in statuesque folds, they spoke as forboding figures on the stage, for their stone-like appearances gave them a visually timeless quality. These formidable masked appearances remained motionless throughout; and this point, coupled with this essential anonymity, must have also had the effect of focussing the audience's attention on the various utterances they made, as these constituted the only dramatic quality of this elemental and static chorus.

Being present to symbolize this durability and eternal

1 The Idea of a Christian Society, pp. 19-20.

aspect throughout, the speakers fulfilled the function of blending the various prose portions of history in The Rock, into a poise between the past and the present. This whole concept of past and present and their possible reconciliation, redounds once again on "Tradition and the Individual Talent" where the author had said that such tradition must involve 'the historical sense' and 'a perception, not only of the pastness of the past, but of its presence'.¹ What this had called into play as early as 1917, was an essential depersonalization of the poet through the use of, and augmenting to, the literary traditions of the dead poets before him. The Rock, however, although generally lacking the allusive density and this dependence on other poets, still displays this concern by the use, on the one hand, of an impersonal Greek chorus and, on the other, the use of theological and biblical traditions which ranged from Hebraic writings through to established Anglo-Catholic orthodoxy. This all-inclusiveness, so essential to the author, will be illustrated in the final chapter.

Although this was the first time Eliot had used the traditional chorus as such, there had been in England from the turn of the century a dramatic revival in choral speaking. The Central School of Speech and Drama had been founded at the Royal Albert Hall in 1906, and the Oxford Verse-Speaking Festivals had become a prominent and popular venue for aspiring students in this particular art. This marked return to the ancient Springs of drama had been fostered to some extent by the translations of Greek plays by Gilbert Murray (his Trojan Women and Electra was published in 1905, Medea and Iphigenia in Tauris in 1910); and also, the exotic ritualistic Noh plays of Yeats with his Calvary (1921) and Resurrection (1931) bear some resemblance to Eliot's own use of abstract forms in The Rock's choruses.

This actual requirement of a chorus for a pageant-play was a relatively new venture for the poet, although the earlier dramatic fragments Sweeney Agonistes had been an

1 Selected Essays, p. 14.

attempt in this direction, but for this occasion it had to be designed primarily for a large, popular audience, and to convey a special message and emotion. In addition to a tight schedule of May, 1934, to stage the production, the poet immediately found certain limitations inherent in choral speaking required for this vers d'occasion. Eliot's earlier single voice as a poet could manage more difficult syntactical or musical passages of extreme subtlety and concentration, but an 'orchestra' of voices had to meticulously keep time for the lines now had to be delivered. Secondly, the author must have also found that a chorus had to be emphatic lest the sense of the utterance be lost, and this demanded a relatively precise and measured line. Thirdly, there definitely could not be much variation in tone or speed yet, conversely, a regular metre had to be avoided for the voices could descend into a jingle. Finally, and most important, the diction now had to be clear and supple and eminently audible.

These limitations obviously would have had to be confronted by any writer of choral verse but there was also, in addition to this, the occasion and sentiments to be dealt with too. It was, after all, a propagandist work, and the intention would have had to be largely one of triggering off certain responses which could readily come to the surface. Then again, the choruses could not have the integrity of poems and the words could not interact in the way in which a poem, spoken by a single voice, was capable of doing. Such an interaction of words would demand a close reading, as any accomplished poet would be consciously guiding his reader and demanding much more intellectual activity. However, The Rock was to be written primarily for a cross-section of the community to witness as performance, and as a propaganda form of entertainment it would easily lend itself to vicarious mewling and unctuousness - points which also had to be considered carefully by the poet.

It was these limitations which Eliot retrospectively commented on in The Three Voices of Poetry (1953), and, in almost apologetic tones, he did reflect on what must have certainly been a generous giving of his time and effort to this largely experimental work:

The invitation to write the words for this spectacle

...came at a moment when I seemed to myself to have exhausted my meagre poetic gifts, and to have nothing more to say. To be, at such a moment, commissioned to write something which, good or bad, must be delivered by a certain date, may have the effect that vigorous cranking sometimes has upon a motor car when the battery is run down. The task was clearly laid out: I had only to write the words of prose dialogues for scenes of the usual historical pageant pattern, for which I had been given a scenario. I had also to provide a number of choral passages in verse, the content of which was left to my own devices; except for the reasonable stipulation that all the choruses were expected to have some relevance to the purpose of the pageant, and that each chorus was to occupy a precise number of minutes of stage time. But in carrying out this second part of my task, there was nothing to call my attention to the third, or dramatic voice: it was the second voice, that of myself addressing - indeed haranguing - an audience, that was most distinctly audible. Apart from the obvious fact that writing to order is not the same thing as writing to please oneself, I learnt only that verse to be spoken by a choir should be different from verse to be spoken by one person; and that the more voices you have in a choir, the simpler and more direct the vocabulary, the syntax, and the contents of your lines must be. The chorus of The Rock was not a dramatic voice; though many lines were distributed, the personages were unindividuated. Its members were speaking for me, not uttering words that really supposed any character of their own.¹

Elsewhere, Eliot had emphasized about The Rock that the 'only seriously dramatic aim was to show that there was a possible role for the chorus'² - a comment from which one may infer that it was really just these ten experimental 'profusions' which were of interest for the author. As for the actual pageant itself, it was perhaps too inherently facile in its execution to demand Eliot's third dramatic voice of an individuated identity integrated into a definite dramatic structure, as Thomas Becket was in Murder in the Cathedral. It was, instead, the second voice of the poet himself which was used to express a much more elementary task of calling forth, at different junctures, certain moods of dramatic intensity and comment upon

1 Eliot, T.S. The Three Voices of Poetry (London: Cambridge University Press, 1953), pp. 6-7.

2 The Spectator, June 8th, 1934.

the various and episodic conflicts. Although it must be said that this was a definite limitation in relation to the third voice, it was hardly damning per se.

However, what The Rock had called for was an immediate rethinking for the poet in order to achieve a new speech rhythm of communication; and Martin Browne comments upon the genesis of this new versification designed for this work:

First the iambic line of Shakespearean tradition is given up: the stress shifts to the beginning of the foot, in accordance with the change that has come over English speech. This trochaic-cum-dactyllic foot is no more rigidly adhered to than was the iambic in Shakespeare's later plays. The verse is infinitely varied with many inverted feet: but the rhythm is strongly maintained.

The other change is a final freeing of the verse from the counting of syllables. The ten-syllable line of 'blank-verse' which was almost uniform in Shakespeare's early plays, came to vary from eight to fourteen syllables in his later ones: but still the ten syllable basis was at the back of the mind of both writer and hearer. Eliot had broken this 'blank verse' tradition of syllables by going at once back and forward. He has gone back to the basis established by the medieval poets, of a fixed number of stresses in the line without any fixed number of syllables. He has gone forward to meet the development of prose-rhythms by the inclusion of a very long, sweepingly rhythmic line having six or eight stresses, but still a part of the verse structure. Thus a form of verse much more varied than any before is placed at the service of the theatre....¹

By glancing back at Eliot's very different Sweeney Agonistes and seeing how much of its force was sustained by a contrapuntal verse, one can now see how this innovatory verse-scheme promised something much more advanced to come in The Rock. This verse of the choruses had the above quoted variants within its ground rhythm ('the ghost behind the arras' to use Eliot's own term), but choruses V, VII and X were perhaps characterized by a form of patterned poetic prose which may have been modelled on biblical patterns, especially the long flowing lines of the

¹ Martin Browne E., "The Dramatic Verse of T.S. Eliot" in T.S. Eliot: A Symposium (London: Frank Cass and Co. Ltd, 1948) compiled by Richard March and Tambimuttu, pp.197-8.

Psalms. More probable perhaps, is the influence on intonation in these choruses of Anabase by St. John Perse which the author himself had translated in 1930. Although the imagery of that poem is quite prodigious, whereas Eliot's choruses move with a puritan sobriety, it is the great sweep of those rhythms which bear some resemblance to these patterned choruses.

What these innovations do demonstrate is that Eliot is freeing himself from the dramatic monologue of the first voice; and what will be shown in the treatment of the choruses is a sense of liberation of rhythm and a dilution of syntax, density and speech which will prepare him, on the one hand, for the more prosaic and philosophic lines of Four Quartets and, on the other, for that four and five beat line which will be discussed in the next chapter. It will be shown also that the choruses of The Rock were a religious statement of personal atone by the poet and a conscious search for poetic honesty by the paring of the verse away to a language and rhythm of ordinary speech. This was to be a new achievement for Eliot, because his own voice is often most clearly heard, unmasked by those echoes and pastiches of other poets who had influenced him considerably in some of his earlier works - poets such as Laforgue, Gautier, and the English Jacobean poets, among numerous others.

The choruses of The Rock were to have little in common with the author's earlier verse, and this must be partly owing to a new anti-poetic distrust of the objective correlative which had been characterized by a generally solipsistic and visual approach. We have now instead a partial dropping of that mask, and an effort, with sincerity and humility, to confront the hollowness in ecclesiastical utterances. But before moving onto these choruses, it is worthwhile to pause over that one verse-sketch Eliot was responsible for in The Rock, if only just to illustrate some of these considerations by default.

That's right! What we wants is action, I says action.
The Rock, p. 40.

The short verse-episode of the Redshirts, Blackshirts and the Plutocrat was entirely Eliot's own undertaking, and its functions, in part, as an exploitation of that linguistic (and ideological) errancy with which the author was deeply concerned. Before this scene, parallels had been made to illustrate the perennial difficulties of church building from Nehemiah and the Israelites through to the political agitator's attempt to break up the bricks of the half-built sanctuary. It is then that we have these squads of Redshirts and Blackshirts marshalled onto the stage in 'military formation' (p.42) to offer their respective solutions to the plight of the unemployed. These 'new evangels' (p.44) say their pieces and are then summarily dismissed, but the perennial cult of materialism symbolized in the Plutocrat and his golden idol prove a stronger sway over the human chorus. Ethelbert and his men become despondant, but in response to his cry 'O Lord help us!' (p.47), the Rock is revealed 'brooding on the pinnacle' (ibid.), and it is he who will now bolster their slender hopes.

The whole travesty and reductio ad absurdum of the Communists and Fascists is summed up by Grover Smith in the following words:

In this scene, the one solely of his own invention, he diversified his style to sharpen contrasts. Lines for the Redshirts parody a clumsy unmusical free verse which he detested; those for the Blackshirts have a heavy, regular, foot-stamping beat. In both places the verbal ironies are crude, even more so than in the speeches of the Plutocrat. It is clear that Eliot was trying to denigrate these villains of the scene by making them as silly and vulgar in their talk as they are unchristian in their views. If in each case he relied too much on the effects of emotional prejudice among his audience, in a pageant such as this it would not do to give either the Redshirts or the Blackshirts the disruptive benefits of intellectual debate. Being present only as symbols of what has already been repudiated, they are hollow men.¹

1 Grover Smith, p. 173.

The Plutocrat, who comes in next to give his opinions, portrays a similar fecklessness and Grover Smith has this to say about him:

He, though hollow likewise, has a chance to argue his side. He is suave instead of militant, but he is for this reason all the more vile, and he will not be taken seriously when he grumbles about the salaries of the clergy, tithes, the Ecclesiastical Commission, and the difficulties of divorce. When at length he offers the Golden Calf, whose "real name is POWER", and makes the most coy pun in the language by saying "you'll find it very neat,"¹ his role is converted into a burlesque of anti-ecclesiastical criticism....To the purpose of the episode the Plutocrat's verse is exactly adapted; it sustains just the amount of stately pomp, enhanced by a mechanical blank-verse measure, necessary to make the bland triteness of his remarks sound foolish.²

In order to capture the zeitgeist of the 1930s which Eliot was concerned with in this episode, it is apposite to briefly comment upon the various political allegiances and polarities of opinion among poets and intellectuals in these Depression years; and also to say why the author liquidated so vehemently these materialist ideologies. It can be said that along with other poets of these years, Eliot must have felt 'thrown upon this filthy modern tide' (to use the Yeatsian line) for there was a marked contrademocratic temper which filtered through the works of Wyndham Lewis, Ezra Pound and T.E. Hulme, to name but a few; and the poet himself had made a somewhat notorious avowal in his Preface to *Lancelot Andrewes* (1928) a having a general point of view of 'classicist in literature, royalist in politics, and anglo-catholic in religion'.³ One may certainly boggle at the second declaration, especially when the great political issues of the thirties were those of fascism, communism and liberal democracy, pacifism and militarism - all of which were widely debated with passionate conviction. But at the opposite point of the political pendulum were the up and coming poets such as Auden, Spender and Day Lewis who were giving their allegiance to a more liberal and

1 neat, n. (sing. & collect. as pl.). Any animal of ox kind....The Concise Oxford Dictionary.

2 Grover Smith pp. 173-4

3 For Lancelot Andrewes p.7.

democratic spirit. In a magazine significantly entitled New Country (1933)¹ these three poets were first published together: therein, poems such as Auden's 'A Communist to Others'; Day Lewis's 'Letter to a Young Revolutionary'; and Spender's 'Poetry and Revolution', all capture the issues which were mooted among left-wing poets and intellectuals in England at the time. As for these actual poems, they perhaps have a faintly ludicrous aura to them today.²

T.S. Eliot was not entirely absent from the scene in these years, for his two Coriolan poems 'Triumphal March' (1931) and 'Difficulties of a Statesman' (1932) are remarkable forecasts of the political regimes to come for their depiction of the helplessness of the statesman and mob alike are quite relevant to the sentiments of this verse episode. The former poem is a brilliant weaving monologue where the cadence of syllable and rhythm enact the horror and futility of a world, both ancient and modern, on the march: the latter poem speaks of a similar incapacity and, like Coriolanus, the speaker has a sheer weariness of spirit which shows his inability to impose peace and order on his people. The author's dissatisfaction with the cult of the leader, (Il Duce Mussolini was in power in Italy and the Führer Hitler was in fact consolidating power in Germany at the time) and the suggestion of a dense pattern of reality reflected in the free colloquialisms, language and rhythms of these poems, actually do look forward to the emergence of the Eliotic hero on the one hand, and the unpoetical material the author was to use in The Rock, on the other.

However, the following may be briefly said about these three ideologies in The Rock. First, Eliot has said in After Strange Gods that English society had become 'worm-eaten with

1 Poetry of the Thirties ed. Allan Rodway (London: Longmans, Green and Co. Ltd, 1967) p. 2.

2 Many of the poets of the 1930s were active members (or just fellow travellers) of the Communist party in England, and Stephen Spender's book The God that Failed is a sad study of the eventual disillusionment of poets like Day Lewis, Auden and Spender himself who, in retrospect, had supported a tyranny worse than the one they opposed. With the benefit of hindsight, therefore, Eliot's voice did prove cautionary and prophetic.

liberalism',¹ and he later observed in connection with this vogue of Communism among the intellectuals of the 1930s, that 'communism flourished because it grew so easily on the liberal root'.² Secondly, the author was to reject Fascism as bunkum in 1939 when he stated that the 'fundamental objection to fascist doctrine, [and] the one which we conceal from ourselves because it might condemn ourselves as well, is that it is pagan'.³ Thirdly, the Plutocrat, that representative of Mammon,⁴ is rejected by the author on the grounds that the amassing of wealth as an end in itself can only smother the spirit of man in what is completely transitory.⁵

The following quotation, which does redound upon the ideas in the previous chapter, bears in its sentiments some relevance to this verse episode. Of war and humanitarianism in particular, the author was to say:

I have no more sympathy with the purely humanitarian attitude towards war than with the humanitarian attitude towards anything else: I should not enjoy the prospect of abolishing suffering without at the same time perfecting human nature.⁶

One of the reasons why this is a tacit assumption behind this verse sketch is that the author, a few pages later in The Rock has the Rock upbraid the 'faint-hearted' and 'easily unsettled' chorus (p. 52.), who had despaired of any help for the unemployed. The Rock says quite emphatically

I have said, take no thought of the harvest,
but only of proper sowing.

The Rock, p. 52.

- 1 After Strange Gods, p. 13.
- 2 Criterion, Vol XVIII, No 1XX, (October, 1938), p. 27.
- 3 The Idea of a Christian Society, p. 20.
- 4 Eliot's poetry is besotted with quotations about a society with a materialistic basis. The first eleven lines of East Coker III (O dark dark dark...) may serve as a good example of this concern, for there the poet, with prophetic criticism, depicts the decadence of men of rank and status only, who are all marching 'deathwards'.
- 5 This dismissal may seem as hasty as the author's in this verse scene, but Eliot's concerns here are adequately covered in the previous chapter.
- 6 Eliot, T.S. Essays Ancient and Modern (London: Faber and Faber Ltd), p. 133.

to which the chorus leader then replies:

Your words are hard, O Rock, and of bitter
consolation.

ibid.

But the Rock can only rhetorically ask:

Did HE promise the peace of this world to the
children of light?

ibid.

It may be said, therefore, that the author questions in this sketch the vanities of the totalitarian cults and the inadequacies of both the right and the left in their attempts to cure the ills of human suffering. Significantly, the temple and churches are used as symbols of fortitude and stoicism against which the fecklessness of these Pelagian creeds can be measured. However, what remains to be said about this section is the mode in which the author treated these rivals to the Church which will be in addition to what Grover Smith has already said in the quotations before.

oooOooo

The purification of the 'word' was definitely part of the author's intention in this sketch of the Redshirts, Blackshirts and the Plutocrat, for there is here a noticable renunciation of theatrical stage rhetoric in its then current form of 'expressionism'. Eliot's integrity to tackle this contemporary and alien mode may be seen to be in part, a personal apology for the plainness of diction in the accompanying choruses of The Rock and his own later plays. However, this expressionistic mode did have its purpose within the work and, as the following pages will indicate, it was not too distantly removed from the revue theatrical form on which much of The Rock is based.

Expressionism was an anti-naturalistic movement chiefly associated with Germany just after World War I. Its non-realistic qualities aimed at emotional distortion and these ingredients easily lent themselves to propaganda purposes:

it aimed not to present reality dispassionately imitated, but reality passionately felt. An early example of this form on the continent was Ernst Toller's Man and Masses (1921) which depicted, among other things, classes of people, as Eliot did with his trio, with their typical Masque-like labelling.

This actual form of drama was given some of its impetus in England under the aegis of Rupert Doone who, along with W.H. Auden and others, had founded the Group Theatre in 1932. Julian Symons comments that the Group and Unity theatres 'embodied the only new ideas of dramatic production in Britain during the decade'¹ and that their involvement with social verse-drama was biased towards a more theatrical propaganda than theatre and it was 'not so much artistic as arty'.² W.H. Auden, who was in the forefront of this movement, may well have influenced Eliot, for it was he who, as early as 1926, had said that 'the only remaining traces of theatrical art were to be found on the music-hall stage: the whole of modern realistic drama since Tchekhov had got to go'. Elsewhere, Auden had proclaimed that the 'music-hall, the Christmas pantomime, and the country house charade are the most living drama of today'.⁴ In point of fact, Eliot really anticipated Auden whose The Dog Beneath the Skin (written in collaboration with Christopher Isherwood) did not appear until 1935, but many of these techniques were pervasive in Auden's earlier The Dance of Death (1933), which was a rough expressionistic sketch of better things to follow. This early work pursued an allegory of political types (e.g. Chorus = Bourgeoisie; Manager = Capitalism; Angry = Proletariat) and it was, in many ways, just as much a propagandist work as Eliot's The Rock, but the latter work does have the artistic merit of different levels of significance, a point of comparison which will be taken up again in the last chapter.

1 Symons, Julian. The Thirties: A Dream Revolved. (London: Cresset Press, 1960), p. 85.

2 ibid.

3 Quoted by Ashley Dukes in 'The English Scene' Theatre Arts, XIX (Dec.) 1935, pp. 907-8.

4 Symons, p. 80.

Although one could confine the expressionistic qualities to this one verse-sketch in The Rock, and whole work is vaguely reminiscent of that mode in its music-hall and revue-like flavour. The genre inherently leads itself to propaganda and one does feel 'got at' in so far as their authors make us feel that we are all supposed to be in this together. Convictions are pushed to the fore, and so the playwright has to couch them in a suitable medium of 'expression'. It was, in fact, this milieu of the revue, music-hall and avant garde theatre which had attracted men like Auden and MacNiece to even write songs for performers in music-hall revues, in an effort to get across to as many people in society as possible, even though this was for theatrical as well as propagandist purposes. All this, of course, was somewhat innovatory and experimental in the 1930s, but it does evidence that growing concern from the Romantic poets onwards (Wordsworth had seen the role of the poet as a 'man speaking to men') for a more participatory and socially committed theatre as seen in its extreme in the theatre of the street today.

Nevertheless, it needs to be said again that Eliot only used this expressionistic form in this section of The Rock, to debunk and dismiss these adversaries, and so this rhetorical mode remains something of a cul de sac in his writings. In fact, even despite some of the rhetorical openings and passages of the early choruses, much of the verse in The Rock moves with such a puritan dignity that Eliot seems to be taking rhetoric and wringing its neck; and even although there seems to be an apparent compromising (and ideological bondage) of his earlier aesthetic pursuits, it will presently be shown that this new poetry was an attempt to purify, and not to adulterate, the 'dialect of the tribe'. From his highly allusive and often polygot The Waste Land through to his most poetical Ash Wednesday, there was a great change in his verse, but now he seems to be moving into another and different intensity of a starker and less consummate artistry. The author is perhaps, actually making his art now subserve reality and he himself

is committing an act of iconoclasm against his earlier idols.¹

This iconoclastic stance brings us to an important change in Eliot's poetry, for it seems to represent the author as being saddled with his religious preoccupations. More often than not, a poise between his artistic and religious concerns is adequately struck but there is, on occasions which will be noted in the forthcoming chapter, the old Arnoldian debate between Hellenism and Hebraism where Eliot is deferring to the latter consideration. The author had covered the debate almost twenty years before in "A Dialogue on Dramatic Poetry" (1928) where, to begin with, one of his interlocutors had averred an aesthetic preference for the Mass and a susceptibility towards religious liturgy:

When drama has ranged as far as it has in our own day, is not the only solution to return to religious liturgy? And the only dramatic satisfaction that I find now is in a High Mass well performed. Have you not there everything necessary? And indeed, if you consider the ritual of the Church during the cycle of the year, you have the complete drama represented. The Mass is a small drama, having all the unities; but in the Church year you have represented the full drama of creation.²

But another spokesman retorts with the other side of the argument:

You have no business to care about the Mass unless you are a believer. And even if you are a believer you will have dramatic desires which crave fulfilment otherwise....Literature can be no substitute for religion, not merely because we need religion,³ but because we need literature as well as religion.

1 There are various iconoclastic acts throughout history which are included in the prose passages of The Rock. It is true that the various aesthetic qualities of the completed church finally triumph over the rival iconoclasts, but these image-breaking obsessions of the author, as sometimes in dreams, mask themselves in their opposites and, for all his distaste for these destroyers, Eliot is writing his most puritanical poetry to date.

2 Selected Essays, p. 35.

3 ibid., pp. 35-36.

Religion was not, perhaps, the sine qua non of Eliot's poetry,¹ but his post-conversion verse and drama are certainly concerned with its vital place in men's lives. It is, of course, merely a matter of degree to which the poet allowed his religious beliefs to hold back his poetic 'inspiration', although The Rock is certainly not just propagandist and 'factual' realism - such an attempt would not only have been insufferable, but almost certainly self-defeating. In fact, these choruses of The Rock, and the method of Murder in the Cathedral of the following year, are of a very formal or ritual type which exist at the opposite extreme to realism. The choruses often rely for their effect on the ordered speech of verse, and also on a formal stage movement and decor which is almost balletic in its discipline and execution.² Certainly the author was 'haranguing' an audience in order to achieve some success for the project in hand, but this did not deny Eliot the conscious intention of attempting a work of art as well.

Such are the intentions and limitations of the medium which T.S. Eliot was to use, and so it remains to trace within the following ten choruses just what the poet, without his collaborators, did within the confines of a pageant-cum-music-hall revue.

1 Kristian Smidt had personally questioned Eliot on this very point twenty years after "A Dialogue on Dramatic Poetry" was written:

I asked him in 1948 if he thought poetry had any significance as a means of approach to mystical knowledge, and he replied that he did not think it had any direct significance, but that poetry could help us to approach an understanding of an ultimate reality, and it could give a sensitive reader the assurance that there is this kind of reality.

Poetry and Belief in the Work of T.S. Eliot, p.57.

2 One of the speakers had said in "A Dialogue on Dramatic Poetry":

If there is a future for drama, and particularly for poetic drama, will it not be the direction indicated by the ballet? Is it not a question of form rather than ethics? And is not the question of verse drama versus prose drama a question of degree of form?

Selected Essays. p. 46.

CHAPTER IVSubstance and Texture in the Choruses - sensuous embodiment

I

The scene is set when the opening chorus reveals the 'voice of the Church of God', and it confronts the audience with sustained admonition, and speaks in a formal rhetorical manner. The endless restlessness of man is halted at the end of the first movement with the reminder of worldly transience ('Brings us farther from GOD and nearer to the DUST' which echoes Genesis III 14:19), and this is immediately followed by a particularized eye-witness account of the business area of London, 'the time kept city' (recalling that 'Unreal City' of The Waste Land I). The Thames moves with 'foreign flotations' (a pun on foreign merchant ships and stock exchange speculators) and it is only restlessness or commerce which this speaker witnesses in this great financial centre of the world. The chorus leader interrupts the monologue with a hushed wonder at the imminence of another Witness, the Rock, who is led in by a boy. One can draw the incidental analogy between Tiresias and the Rock at this point,¹ and Grover Smith observes the comparison that they, *inter alia*, are 're-enacting the eternal martyrdom of history in the theatre of their own consciousness'.² It can immediately be observed that this Rock ('He who has seen what has happened/And who sees what is to happen'.) will join the author's previous assemblage of personae: Gerontion could expound upon the battle at Thermopylae ('I was neither at the hot gates....' 1.3.) and, at the same time, evaluate contemporary history ('History has many cunning

1 Cf. The Rock (p. 47)

I have known two worlds, I have known two worlds
of death.

All that you suffer, I have suffered before,
And suffer always, even to the end of the world.

and The Waste Land III

I Tiresias, though blind, throbbing between two
lives (1.46.)

I Tiresias, old man with wrinkled dugs
Perceived the scene, and foretold the rest. (11.56-7)

In The Rock (p.47) he appears again brooding on a pinnacle as Tiresias had brooded and reflected under the walls of Thebes (as in the above quotation).

2 Grover Smith, p. 176.

passages....' 1.33.); and Tiresias and Gerontion are physically blind and, although the Rock is not, he is significantly a mantled figure which would definitely disguise his eyes² (thus to symbolize a similar inner mind's eye).

The Rock, however, unlike his counterparts, is a type of perfected master who exhorts this chorus to 'Make Perfect your Will', and this particular injunction for right action was anticipated in the closing commitment of Ash Wednesday in that final resolve:

Teach us to care and not to care
Teach us to sit still
Even among these rocks,
Our peace is His will.

In both these instances the author seems to have been influenced by the words of Piccarda to Dante in Paradiso iii, 85-87, ('Our peace is His will, His will is our peace. It is that sea towards which moves all that it creates and all that nature makes'.): words which profoundly affected Eliot then.

If this instruction looks back to Ash Wednesday and Dante, it also looks forward to the opening of The Dry Salvages III, to those words of Krishna advising Arjuna to be disinterested and act as if there were no tomorrow. Similarly, the corresponding movement of Little Gidding opens with a discussion of the ways of 'attachment', 'detachment' and 'indifference' and these sentiments certainly redound upon these preoccupations in The Rock and Murder in the Cathedral; but, it must be said that, whereas these examples from Four Quartets drew their inspiration from Bhagavad Gita and other quasi-mystical

1 He is 'led by a boy' like the blind Samson and Sophocles' Tiresias, but his eventual identification as St. Peter does not really help much with his allegorical role. Martin Browne comments that "Eliot wanted to keep his identity undefined for as long as possible, and it was in keeping with the conception of the chorus that he should also be regarded rather as a symbolic than a historical figure". Martin Browne, p. 26.

2 There are also many Biblical injunctions to become perfect in one's resolution to serve God. Matthew 7:21. 'Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the Kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven'; and Hebrews 13:21. 'Make you perfect in every work to do his will' These, inter alia, are but two instances.

writings, The Rock generally did not attempt to transcend its orthodox confines with this instruction.

The Rock's introduction speech is the first instance of a common device which the author will use throughout the work. The implicit opposition between a Temporal and Eternal City, and the Logos and the common word, is now given a further dimension by a parodying of the high biblical sentiments of the prophets and their reduction, through a change of idiom, to a common cadence:

The lot of man is ceaseless labour,
Or ceaseless idleness, which is still harder,
Or irregular labour, which is not pleasant.
I have trodden the winepress alone, and I know
That it is hard to be really useful....¹

The Rock. p. 8.

Likewise, through the voices of the Unemployed (p. 10), God's promise to Jeremiah of a place where the faithful shall prosper² is off-set by its blatantly contemporary admixture:

In this land
No man has hired us.
Our life is unwelcome, our death
Unmentioned in 'The Times'.

This debunking, and distancing from the prophecies of fulfilment of the past, are shown most succinctly at the beginning of chorus III. There, the author effectively uses an antecedent, 'Word of the Lord', which had come to the prophets in dreams and visions (Kings 12:23; Isaiah 9:8.), and he then consciously perverts it by a grossly secular, twentieth century complement:

I have given you speech, for endless palaver,
I have given you my law, and you set up commissions,
I have given you lips, to express friendly sentiments,
I have given you hearts, for reciprocal distrust.
I have given you power of choice, and you only alternate
Between futile speculation and unconsidered action.

The Rock. p. 29.

1 Isaiah 63:3: 'I have trodden the winepress alone; and of the people there was none with me: for I will tread them in mine anger, and trample them in my fury; and their blood shall be sprinkled upon my garments, and I will stain all my raiments'.

2 Jeremiah 32:41 and 43.

Eliot's device of this deriding of the present through echoes of the past is, among other instances, reminiscent of his quatrain poems of the 1920s, but there is an important tonal contrast between them. The often wry and smirking pomposity of these meretricious quatrains definitely show a similar wit in their unpredictable rejoinders, but their tone resulted from the author venting his spleen against the shortcomings of the Church. As an example, the lukewarm Church had at that stage been contrasted with not so elegant water-horse:

The hippo's feeble steps may err
 In compassing material ends.
 While the True Church need never stir
 To gather in its dividends.

Collected Poems 1906-1962 p. 51

It was an objective correlative of the horse-laugh or a wry sneer which the author was trying to elicit, but he did represent these unrealized hopes and aridity of the present in conjunction with an irreversible and nostalgic past.¹ However, these nihilistic poems have now been replaced in The Rock by a more positive and humbled commitment on the part of the poet: the barks of wit are still most certainly there, but there is now a plainness and purity of language, almost to a point of being anti-poetic. It is this new 'domesticity' wherein the very source of intensity and strength of his new verse resides; a strength which had characterized the poetry of George Herbert who had once rhetorically asked in "Jordan" (I) what Eliot might have asked himself in The Rock:

Who says that fictions only and false hair
 Become a verse? Is there in truth no beauty?
 Is all good structure in a winding stair?

So when one comes across the following line of chorus I in The Rock, concerning those who 'neglect and belittle the desert',

The desert is not remote in southern tropics
 The desert is not only around the corner,
 The desert is squeezed in the tube-train next to you,
 The desert is in the heart of your brother.

one may feel certain misgivings about the poet who wrote The Waste Land a decade before and who is now producing such a seemingly barren and clumsy schematization. Yet these new

¹ The poems, "Sweeney Among the Nightengales" and "Whispers of Immortality" illustrate this point, a contrast quite clearly.

lines are emblematic of Eliot's own humility through their truthful and personal tone, and one may sense a purity of intention¹ behind the poet's words. It is a similar predicament which is found behind the following passage from The Confidential Clerk:

COLBY: If I were religious, God would walk in my garden
And that would make the world outside it real
And acceptable, I think.

LUCASTA: You sound awfully religious
Is there no other way of making it real to you?²

Indeed, Colby does sound 'awfully religious' with such a apparently bland and exoteric statement but this can hardly amount to a condemnation of the actual sentiments voiced.

In fact, the marked bareness of much of the first chorus is perhaps aesthetically justified by its precedence in the work, for even the elemental, whimpering, but poignant little chant of the Unemployed, and the Workmen's antiphonal reply, look forward to the last chorus where the language, as will be shown presently, is finally purified in its reaching a serene calmness. One could conjecture too, that this particular Workmen's chant has a rudimentary two line four-beat measure ('In the vacant places we will build with new bricks' p. 9.), which looks forward in its parallelisms to the more advanced, although not dissimilar, lyric of Little Gidding II.³ As for the Unemployed, they are not as optimistic: they

1 W.T. Nettlefold is one who is sceptical of Eliot's intention: 'There are such a few/Christian Poets so noble; indeed you/Must know it - You Do'. This sarcasm is perhaps parodic on the flattery in 'Portrait of a Lady' (For indeed I do not love it...you knew? You are not blind!/ How keen you are!) which makes his lines so much the more biting.

2 Complete Poems and Plays, p. 474. (my emphasis).

3 Cf. Little Gidding II:
Ash on an old man's sleeve
Is all the ash the burnt roses
leave.
Dust in the air suspended
Marks the place where a story
ended.
Dust inbreathed was a house -
The wall, the wainscot and the
mouse.
The death of hope and despair,
This is the death of air.

'shiver in unlit rooms' and, their standing in desolate places recalls that nadir of spirits in the intonation of "The Hollow Men."¹

However, as for the chorus as a whole, it sets the scene through the introduction of the Rock, who sets the will of the speakers (and the poet) to positive commitments ('We build the meaning' p. 11.). What one can now expect is a more affirmative and conscious striving by the author towards a stillness of the word (Word) which will, in actual fact, represent in the closing stages of the pageant, a dim abumbration of that 'epiphany' experienced in another connection in Little Gidding.

oooOooo

II

Of all that was done in the past, you eat the
fruit, either rotten or ripe.

The Rock, p. 20.

This second chorus is loosely related to the actual conversion of the Saxon Sabert by Mellitus, the first Bishop of London. Not only is this chorus concerned with the advent of Christianity in Saxon England, but there is the connection made that Ethelbert's church building is not to be seen as an isolated instance as there have been many such trials and tribulations, in this constructing, before him. Here the chorus, for the first time, is much less restrained and they expatiate, in long biblical-like verse, on the denial of 'the

1 Cf. The desolate images of spiritual flaccidity of the Unemployed and the Hollow Men:

We stand about in open places
And shiver in unlit rooms.
Only the wind moves
Over empty fields, untilled....

The Rock, p. 10.

Let me also wear
Such deliberate disguises
Rat's coat, crowskin, crossed staves
In a field
Behaving as the wind behaves....

The Hollow Men II

chief cornerstone'(p. 19.) Christ (echoing Psalm 118:22), upon whom this present Christian community must also be built as it was in the past. One can observe that Eliot's constant concern with this 'presentness of the past' is here translated into a theological belief, for it is the Community of Saints in Heaven (the Church Invisible) which is here, by direct implication, placed as the model and measure to which these present builders (the Church Visible) must aspire.

There is a right emphasis given in the four distinct sections of this chorus in which the first and last movements display a significant relaxation of prosody and a marked variation in rhythm; the second and last movements, on the other hand, have a much tighter and leaner prosody. Perhaps the principle involved here is that the more relaxed lines are made indicative of disorder (the 'frittered lives' and 'honeyless hives'), but they are strategically juxtaposed to the shorter lines which are expressive of stability (however limited) and values from the past. As for the last four lines which conclude the chorus ('Much to cast down, much to rebuild, much to restore....' p. 21.), they are aptly placed to assert and affirm the consequent resolution of building out of these perennial difficulties and limited hopes from the past.

What can be said about these less restrained opening verses, which flow together like reflections and distractions in the speakers' minds, is that they are perhaps essential prologues for those even looser conversational reflections on the past in Four Quartets,¹ but there is the vital difference that the author in The Rock was not attempting to manipulate these sentiments of past disintegration into any

1 C.f. The Dry Salvages III:

I sometimes wonder if that is what Krishna meant -
Among other things - or one way of putting the
same thing:
That the future is a faded song, a Royal Rose
or a lavender spray
Of wistful regret for those who are not yet here
to regret,
Pressed between yellow leaves of a book that has
never been opened.

particularly ordered whole. Instead, they serve to evoke a relaxed and meditative mood. The last section, on the other hand, which reflects on the theme of community, is much more precise and meticulous as choral verse: it is the voice of traditional authority speaking of this orthodox belief of the Community of the Church on earth, but only in ironical relation to the breakdown and restlessness of man in the contemporary setting.

III

(And Easter Day, we didn't get to the country,
So we took young Cyril to church. And they rang a bell
And he said right out loud, crumpets.)
"Triumphal March" (1931)

This chorus begins in a style which echoes that of the Old Testament prophets' accounts of the Word of God ('The Word of the LORD came unto me....' p. 29, which came to them in visions and dreams; thus connecting the vision which Rahere had of St. Bartholomew and his consequent endowment of that church at Smithfield. The irony is once again pervasive, for the author here satirizes the debased present by his use of these sentiments and echoes from the past. The formal repetitions ('I have given you...') are apt in their almost liturgical lines, but the antiphonal balance used in the complement ('I have given you hearts, for reciprocal distrust') almost verges on the blasphemous in its dry contempt.

This opening section is ideally suited to the occasion and intention of the work of admonishing in order to reinstate the heritage of the past to a contemporary city of 'designing' men. For here, an incongruous relation of disparate elements gives rise to a fresh and unhackneyed wit wherein an effective arresting quality to the verse relaxes to capture this modern unregeneracy:

Much is your reading, but not the Word of GOD,
Much is your building, but not the House of GOD.
Will you build me a house of plaster, with corrugated
roofing,
To be filled with a litter of Sunday newspapers?

The Rock, p. 29.

The rhetorical and ringing lines have a sternness and Hebraic quality, but they soon devolve into the sensational

or habitual which demand so little from man. Similarly, in the more respectable and poetic four-beat line, as used to signify the more prosperous middle-class suburbs of London, there is a falling off into the absurdities of materialistic monuments:

In the land of lobelias and tennis flannels
 The rabbit shall burrow and the thorn revisit,
 The nettle shall flourish on the gravel court,
 And the wind shall say: 'Here were decent godless
 people:
 Their only monument the asphalt road
 And a thousand lost golf balls'.

The Rock, p. 30.

Here is the author's device of a syntactic parallelism of balance as may be seen in the Psalm's prosody from the past but which here ironically offsets the contents of the verse to capture the present. These lines, therefore, are most effective, especially in the way in which the firmness of the lines is sustained throughout. They depict well the pettiness and the secularism of the twentieth century which the author felt so strongly about and, along with the two preceding choruses, they could hardly be improved upon in voicing a jeremiad against man's tireless propensity for evading the spiritual and grasping at the ephemeral. These choruses are quite fine catalogues of the vanity of human wishes, but always beneath this pointed satire there is a serious and positive hope, as may be observed in the final lines of this chorus:

Life you may evade, but Death you shall not.
 You shall not deny the Stranger.

The Rock, p. 31.

What probably facilitated the wit in these first three choruses was the poet's use of plunging rhythms, reminiscent of those used in the Jacobean and histrionic setting of "Gerontion". The author had actually feared a 'dull and lethargic audience'¹ to witness the performances, but

1 "A Personal Reminiscence", p. 83.

Bonamy Dobrée testifies, as does Martin Browne,¹ that the audiences seemed 'far from lethargic'.² This wit must have been partly the result of the poet's use of an internal half or slant rhyme in his frequent preference for three or four syllable words. (The opening movement of ~~cherus~~ cherus III abounds with such words: 'inventions', 'palaver', 'commissions', 'reciprocal distrust', 'futile speculation and unconsidered action'. The closing movement also: 'perfect refrigerator', 'rational morality', 'plotting of happiness', 'fevered enthusiasm' and 'humanity'). These satirical rhymes are inescapably vaguely comic,³ and one can observe this illustration again in another catalogue at the beginning of The Dry Salvages V. The satire, this time, is directed against the worthless supra-temporal deliverances from time:

To communicate with Mars, converse with spirits,
 To report the behaviour of the sea monster,
 Describe the horoscope, haruspicate or scry,
 Observe disease in signatures, evoke
 Biography from the wrinkles of the palm
 And tragedy from fingers; release omens
 By sortilege, or tea leaves, riddle the inevitable
 With playing cards, fiddle with pentagrams
 Or barbituric acids, or dissect
 The recurrent image into pre-conscious terrors -
 To explore the womb, or tomb, or dreams; all these
 are usual
 Pastimes and drugs, and features of the press.

1 Martin Browne says the wit 'proved barbed enough to raise general laughter from an audience of 1500 each night'. (p. 18). He observed further: 'What gave us all much pleasure was that the severity of the dressing did not at all inhibit the audience from enjoying the sallies of wit which issued from these impassive faces. Indeed, I think the costuming had the effect of concentrating attention to the words, and so allowed them to provoke laughter as hearty as I can remember at the description of the departed commuters:

"And the wind shall say: 'Here were...lost golf balls'"
Martin Browne, pp. 29-30.

2 Bonamy Dobrée, *ibid.*

3 Old Possum's Book of Practical Cats is an example par excellence of this, as in "Old Deuteronomy" and "Macavity: the Mystery Cat". One may also recall a poem like "High Talk" by W.B. Yeats where the triple rhyme throughout ('All metaphor, Malachi, stilts and all') definitely lends itself to this ludicrous and humorous mocking.

In addition to this similarity of satirical rhyme, one can also make the comparison among the openings of chorus I (p. 7.), chorus II (p. 29.) and its closing movement (p. 31), and the above quotation, for all these catalogues tend to have unpredictable endings of a syntactic form approximating that of a periodic sentence,¹ and it is through this state of abeyance that the desired emotional effect is finally elicited. However, the difference lies in the fact that, in the above quotation, it is a prim and subtle modulation of the voice which excites a witty and dry humour, whereas the passages from these two choruses of The Rock so far seem more remorseless in their schematization and denunciation. Of course it must be conceded that, within the framework and restrictions of the occasion, they certainly have their own merits, but the following contrast will serve to illustrate this difference between what could be achieved by a choir of voices in contradistinction to a single voice. Both examples are concerned with the vanities of man:

O weariness of men who turn from GOD
 To the grandeur of your mind and the glory
 of your action,
 To arts and inventions and daring enterprises,
 To schemes of human greatness thoroughly discredited,
 Binding the earth and the water to your service,
 Exploiting the seas and developing the mountains,
 Dividing the stars into common and preferred,
 Engaged in devising the perfect refrigerator,
 Engaged in working out a rational morality,

1 This 'psychological' predilection for a periodic construct is perhaps an obsessional personal pattern for Eliot's spiritual development. One could cite another author, Henry James, for the purpose of comparison, as his syntactic style is also revelatory of his own problems in a very personal way. But for T.S. Eliot the periodic sentence examines those various beginnings and ends with which most of his poetry was so very much concerned. The following quotation enacts this concern of a final coming into consciousness:

We shall not cease from exploration
 And the end of all our exploring
 Will be to arrive where we started
 And know the place for the first time.

Little Gidding V

Engaged in printing as many books as possible,
 Plotting of happiness and flinging empty bottles
 Turning from your vacancy to fevered enthusiasm
 For nation or race or what you call humanity....

The Rock, p. 31.

Let me disclose the gifts reserved for age
 To set a crown upon your lifetime's effort.
 First, the cold friction of expiring sense
 Without enchantment, offering no promise
 But bitter tastelessness of shadow fruit
 As body and soul begin to fall asunder.
 Second, the conscious impotence of rage
 Of human folly, and the laceration
 Of laughter at what ceases to amuse.
 And last, the rending pain of re-enactment
 Of all that you have done, and been: the shame
 Of motives late revealed, and the awareness
 Of things ill done and done to others' harm
 Which once you took for exercise of virtue.

Little Gidding II

This second example, by contrast, represents a very personal ultimate in confessional poetry, a linguistic 'incarnation' which Eliot probably achieves on a lesser scale in the final chorus of The Rock.

oooOooo

IV V VI

The thing that hath been, it is that which shall be;
 and that which is done is that which shall be done:
 and there is no new thing under the sun.

Ecclesiastes 1:9.

These three choruses will be grouped together as they are only short interspersings of comment and narration and, as they do not noticeably advance the theology and religious message of the work, their central concern is very much the same as those choruses preceeding them. It is still this poise between the past and the present which is telescoped not only to show the perenniality of the work at hand, but also to display that artistic approach which Eliot had retrospectively called in Little Gidding V, 'An easy commerce of the old and the new.'

One can see an immediate illustration of this in chorus IV where the cue is taken from the juxtaposition of Ethelbert's watchfulness over the church ('I've got this trowel in one 'and and I've got me fist in the other? p. 34.), with a parallel to the Book of Nehemiah for the purposes of portraying this theme throughout of the eternal struggle of good and evil. Nehemiah and his men, like the contemporary builders, had been laughed to scorn that they should fortify themselves against their more numerous adversaries, but, against unsurmountable odds they rebuilt the walls of Jerusalem, 'everyone with one of his hands wrought in the work, and with the other hand held a weapon'. (Neh. 4:17)

Eliot effectively manages this mediatation between the past and the present in these descriptions borrowed from the narrative of the Book of Nehemiah. The second line of the quotation has a contemporary ring to a timeless situation:

In the days of Nehemiah the Prophet
There was no exception to the general rule.
In Shushan the palace, in the month Nisan....

The Rock, p. 35.

Again, in chorus V, we hear:

Remembering the words of Nehemiah the Prophet:

"The trowel in hand, and the gun
rather loose in the holster".¹

The Rock, p. 39.

Whereas the short fourth chorus is plainly narrative and simplified by its succinctness, the succeeding chorus is a plea for deliverance from the perennial serpent whose head must be bruised by the undeterred church builders.

1 These lines are vaguely prophetic of Israel today and perhaps Eliot had truly feared that such a situation might even occur in England in 1934. Stephen Spender relates that, at a luncheon with Eliot in 1930, Eliot had answered the question of what he foresaw for Western Civilization in the following words:

"Internecine fighting....People killing one another in the streets...."

"Remembering Eliot", by Stephen Spender in Allen Tate
op.cit. p. 49.

Cf. a similar foreboding in the last line of the first epigraph to chorus VII.

The tenor of these verses from chorus V is reminiscent of those from the King James version of the Bible, but sometimes the verses reflect a distinctly perennial quality:

And they write innumerable books: being too vain
and distracted for silence: seeking every one
after his own elevation, and dodging his
emptiness.

If humility and purity be not in the heart, they
are not in the home: and if they are not in the
home, they are not in the City.

The Rock, p. 39.

It is this crucial complex of past and present throughout Eliot's poetry, plays, social criticism and even his literary criticism, which sums up the artistic and theological beliefs in The Rock, as shown in that rhetorical line from chorus VI:

Do you need to be told that whatever has been,
can still be?

The Rock, p. 41.

Here in this telling line (a variation of Ecclesiastes 1:9), the author could well be referring to the sin of Adam, unredeemed time, or the use or augmentation of tradition, and it is appropriately placed in chorus VI before the author qualifies and sets forth his answer to this biblical line at the beginning of Part II.

Before moving on to chorus VII, one can observe in chorus VI a certain falling off of intensity through the unbending authority in the verse. Here can be seen a certain stiffness and hollowness of ecclesiastical utterance, and one could even agree with R.P. Blackmur when he says of Eliot, apropos The Rock, that 'a mind furnished only with convictions would be like a room furnished only with light; the brighter the more barren'.¹ Here is an example of this:

Why should men love the Church? Why should they
love her laws?
She tells them of Life and Death, and of all that
they would forget.

¹ Blackmur, R.P. "T.S. Eliot: From Ash Wednesday to Murder in the Cathedral". Reprinted in Language as Gesture (London, 1948), p. 178.

She is tender where they would be hard, and hard
 where they like to be soft.
 She tells them of Evil and Sin, and other unpleasant
 facts.
 They constantly try to escape
 From the darkness outside and within
 By dreaming of systems so perfect that no one will
 need to be good.

The Rock, p. 42.

Although these convictions do not persist without some poetic merits to commend them, it is an example of the predicament Eliot was forced into as a poet by the propagandist nature of the occasion. Without wishing to deny the sense of disaffection evidenced throughout much of The Rock on the part of the poet, there is this occasional falling off of intensity commensurate to the didactic nature of the ideas entertained. This poetic harnessing had been expressed in a poem by W.B. Yeats whose involvement in public affairs (in that case, the Abbey Theatre in Dublin), had, almost by necessity, made his Pegasus hobble like Eliot's. Yeats begins:

The fascination of what's difficult
 Has dried the sap out of my veins, and rent
 Spontaneous joy and natural content
 Out of my heart. There's something ails our colt
 That must, as if it had not holy blood
 Nor on Olympus leaped from cloud to cloud
 Shiver under the lash, strain, sweat and jolt
 As though it dragged road-metal.¹

Both Eliot and Yeats would have wished their Pegasus could leap from cloud to cloud, but the pain of discipline involved in their relatively foreign undertakings held back any flight of imagination. However, it is with the next chorus where Eliot's verse soars, in another intensity, to describe something essentially ineffable and, therefore, above these present considerations.

oooOooo

1 The Collected Poems of W.B. Yeats, (London: MacMillan, 1967), p. 104.

VII, VIII

The World is trying the experiment of attempting to form a civilized but non-Christian mentality. The experiment will fail; but we must be very patient in awaiting its collapse; meanwhile redeeming the time: so that the faith may be preserved alive through the dark ages before us; to renew and rebuild civilization, and save the World from suicide.¹

"Thoughts After Lambeth" (1931)

The New Year's walk, restoring
Through a bright cloud of tears, the years,
restoring
With a new verse the ancient rhyme. Redeem
The time. Redeem
The unread vision in the higher dream....

Ash Wednesday IV

Chorus VII, which opens the second section of The Rock, begins with that darkness through which man groped for revelation and spiritual lodgement, until that moment in time when the Word became Incarnate. This fine opening choral survey of pre-Christian man, begins with Genesis 1:1-2 ('In the beginning GOD created the world....') through to the paradox created in the treatment of the birth of Christ, ('Then came, at a predestined moment, a moment in time and of time....') until it finishes with those effective clattering lines which question man's vain efforts to deny the spiritual ('What have we to do but stand with empty hands and palms turned upwards / In an age which advances progressively backwards?').

This contemporary apostasy from the Word, however, is not seen as final, for the presence of the Church here serves to remind men of the Incarnation; and the consequent introduction of Bishop Bloomfield, who is to initiate the action of Part II, shows that this work of endowing Churches in the past will fortify the hopes of these builders in the present.

The whole crux of this chorus is that passage which concerns the Incarnation where the poet is striving towards

1 Selected Essays, p. 387.

an inscrutable concept, as is signified by the frequent pauses he uses throughout:

Then came, at a predestined moment, a moment
 in time and of time,
 A moment not out of time, but in time, in what
 we call history; transecting, bisecting the
 world of time, a moment in time but not like
 a moment of time,
 A moment in time but time was made through that
 moment: for without the meaning there is no
 time, and that moment of time gave the meaning.

The Rock, p. 50.

The author saw this one moment as the one through which man could escape a successiveness and servitude to the temporal, and so all previous aims at the supra-temporal, as stated in this chorus, are made regressive and superfluous by this one moment of revelation. For Eliot, the Incarnation now made possible a spiritual unity between God and man which could occur within a moment of time, a moment not just of simple linear historical time, but as translated into this spiritual concept of time. At such an epiphany or mystical union, man is not one with God who is free from time in His eternity.

After this historical panorama, the Unemployed and the Workmen are heard once again. The chorus then despairs of the Church's efforts to allay the hardships of these groups whose presence cannot be denied, for their haunting voices demand attention. The Rock enters and reveals his identity (the stage direction reads 'with his cowl flung back'. p.51). He upbraids the chorus and, in doing so, elucidates Eliot's central concept of how time may be redeemed. His words are:

Remember, all you who are numbered for GOD,
 In every moment of time you live where two
 worlds cross,
 In every moment you live at a point of intersection,
 Remember, living in time, you must live also now in
 Eternity.

It is no wonder that the faint hearted chorus finally responds, 'Your words are hard, O Rock, and of bitter consolation' (p. 52), for the Rock seems to be demanding nothing less than the contemplation of sainthood. The only way in which one can 'redeem the time', and thereby

achieve this sanctity and sainthood, is

...to apprehend
The point of intersection of the timeless
With time....

as Eliot phrased it in The Dry Salvages V.

This was the one thing necessary, in Eliot's religious thinking at this time, and it comes as no surprise when one considers his uncompromising and stringent views on the fallibility of human nature. The deterministic and time locked world of past and present must be redeemed by this pursuit of sanctity and penitence. As for the needs of the chorus, Unemployed and Ethelbert and his men, the Rock only encourages this need for right action (the social problems of 1934 were, practically speaking, issues for politicians and economists, and Eliot can hardly be blamed for his refusal to comment on or correct them).

oooOooo

Martin Jarrett-Kerr prints an excerpt from this particular chorus in prose, (he admits doing this unfairly), to show how the 'religious denunciations read sometimes like those sermons about non-church-going, preached fervently to the handful of goers'.¹ His transcription reads:

"Men have left GOD not for other gods, they say, but for no god; and this has never happened before that men both deny gods and worship gods, professing first Reason, and then Money, and Power, and what they call Life, or Race, or Dialectic...The Church is no longer regarded, not even opposed, and men have forgotten all gods except Usury, Lust and Power."²

Jarrett-Kerr thinks that this choral verse is superficial, and he also quotes the passage from chorus II ('And now you live dispersed on ribbon roads...and daughters ride away on casual pillions.') to show how close it comes to a paragraph from the 'Vicar's letter in the Parish Magazine.'³

1 Jarrett-Kerr, Martin. "Not Much About Gods". Reprinted in March's Symposium, p. 117.

2 *ibid.*

3 *ibid.*

This critic's prose rendering (and judicious ellipsis) in the quotation above, taken from chorus VII, is a little unfair however. Eliot may have been influenced here by his translation of *Anabase* which he did in 1931 for in the Preface to that poem by St. John Perse he says:

...the declamation, the system of stresses and pauses, which is partially exhibited by the punctuation and spacing, is of poetry and not of prose.¹

Eliot went on to say that 'much bad prose is poetic prose; and only a very small amount of bad verse is bad because it is prosaic',² but he was not prepared on this occasion to stipulate any exact difference between verse and prose other than this. However, Jarrett-Kerr singled out this passage from chorus VII as ineffectual through its propagandist nature, and he may well have been right in doing so, but it does have an important merit which he overlooked. The relevance of this choric prosody is that it exists as a 'prototype' for the essentially prosaic and discursive mode used in Four Quartets;³ and in addition to the almost balletic quality to its movement, it represents an integrity of technique and diction and rhythm on the one hand, and a renunciation of rhetoric on the other (as it is used in the *Redshirt*, *Blackshirt* and *Plutocrat* sketch). It is this balletic representation in this chorus which is attempted again in those of Murder in the Cathedral but neglected thereafter in the 'realism' of the drawing room drama beginning with The Cocktail Party.

1 Anabasis, a poem by St. John Perse. Translated by T.S. Eliot (London: Faber and Faber Ltd, 1931), p. 10. Eliot keeps the Greek original, *Anabasis*, but the French poet used Anabase.

2 *ibid.*, p. 11.

3 The philosophic movements in Four Quartets are often syntactically expansive in order to enact the author's own treatment of essentially inscrutable ideas. The passage on the Incarnation in The Rock (p. 50.) is an early such striving within this mode.

Chorus VIII was included to comment upon Bishop Bloomfield's efforts, and to be preparatory to the anointing of the Crusaders. There is a baldness in its presentation of didacticism and a certain blandness in its remarks ('Our age is an age of moderate virtue / And of Moderate vice / When men will not lay down the Cross / Because they will never assume it' p. 57, but these clipped and succinct passages did represent the universality and persistence of the presentness of the past. Mediating between the success of Bloomfield and the 'broken standards' of the Crusades, this chorus is able to evaluate the limited but zealous faith and convictions of the Crusaders, but generally in verse which reflected the poet's whole-hearted giving, costing him not less than everything.

oooOooo

IX, X

A condition of complete simplicity
(Costing not less than everything).

Little Gidding V

For it is ultimately the function of art, in imposing a credible order upon ordinary reality, and thereby eliciting some perception of an order in reality, to bring us to a condition of serenity, stillness, and reconciliation; and then leave us, as Virgil left Dante, to proceed towards a region where the guide can avail us no further.

"Poetry and Drama" (1951).¹

Chorus IX follows the various iconoclastic episodes expressed in past and present times through the preceding prose passages. It is now that the chorus wait with humility and in penitence to 'learn the joyful communion of saints' for the final dedication of this new church. But this solemnity of the first movement is broken by a sudden celebration of cultural and natural forms of life in these following words of the poet:

The soul of Man must quicken to creation.
Out of the formless stone. When the artist
unites himself with stone,

¹ Reprinted in On Poetry and Poets p. 82.

Spring always new forms of life, from the soul
of man that is joined to the soul of stone;
Out of the meaningless practical shapes of all
that is living or lifeless
Joined with the artist's eye, new life, new
form, new colour.

The Rock, p. 75.

This small, but not great piece of writing, celebrates the evolutionary capabilities of life and the rhythms aptly enact the quickness of creation which the poet describes. These fresh and light dancing rhythms express a form completely alien to the early Eliot who was then concerned with usually debased cultural and cosmopolitan images and one could conjecture that there was perhaps a psychological symptom in these new rhythms of a certain spiritual development for the author.¹ The following quotation implicitly makes this analogue between an artistic and a spiritual form of 'enlightenment':

Out of the sea of sound the life of music
Out of the slimy mud of words, out of the sleet
and hail of verbal imprecisions,
Approximate thoughts and feelings, words that
have taken the place of thoughts and feelings,
There spring the perfect order of speech, and
the beauty of incantation.

The Rock, *ibid.*

This perfect order of speech and beauty of incantation is seen in chorus X. The Church becomes 'now visible and lighted' (p. 83.) and this sanctuary is as a city set on a hill to shine out against the darkness where 'The great snakelies ever half-awake, at the bottom of the pit of the

1 The only other passage with such a sense of fulfilment before this in Eliot's poetry is perhaps contained in Ash Wednesday III, in that Pagan and Edenic movement beginning 'At the first turning of the third stair.' Helen Gardner says this of the poetry:

The movement of the verse as the lines lengthen out makes us feel how powerful is this revival of the natural man and of the capacity for joy: how sweet and fresh the world appears.

Gardner, Helen. The Art of T.S. Eliot (London: Faber and Faber Ltd., 1969), p. 118.

world, curled / In folds of himself....'All those who 'prize the serpent's golden eyes' are to be reduced by the grace of this revelatory occasion. The theme of light which follows is taken from "The Kingdom of God" by the devotional poet Francis Thomas,¹ and Eliot enumerates a descending hierarchy from the light of God's presence to the 'Glow-worm glowlight on a grassblade'. The chorus then turns in the next movement to the lights of man's worship - light piercing through the coloured panes of windows; the light reflecting from 'the polished stone'; and the light refracting through 'unquiet waters'.

Dante seems to have been the author's mentor in these brilliant movement of chorus X, and that poet's realization of the Divine vision in the Divine Comedy had been to Eliot one of the greatest experiences in literature, as he expresses it on his essay on that poet:

Nowhere in poetry has experience so remote from ordinary experience been expressed so concretely, by a masterly use of that imagery of light which is the form of certain types of mystical experience.²

The pellucidity with which Eliot wrote this chorus shows his admiration for Dante's power to 'realize the inapprehensible in visual images'.³ As such it is a dim echo of Dante; and, in addition, the spiritual experience actually does look forward to that Pentacostal visitation of Little Gidding.

1 The first and last stanzas of this poem from "In No Strange Land" are appropriate here:

O world invisible, we view thee,
O world intangible, we touch thee,
O world unknowable, we know thee,
Inapprehensible, we clutch thee!

Yea, in the night, my Soul, my daughter,
Cry, - clinging Heaven by the hems;
And lo, Christ walking on the water,
Not of Gennesareth, but Thames!

(my emphasis).

2 Selected Essays, p. 227.

3 ibid., p. 228.

However, one can now sense a poetry notably free from that torment attested in The Waste Land for there those fires of carnality and purgation are here a glowing lighted fire of fulfilment:

"O Light Invisible, we praise Thee!
 Too bright for mortal vision.
 O Greater Light, we praise Thee for the less;
 The eastern light our spires touch at morning,
 The light that slants upon our western doors at evening,
 The twilight over stagnant pools at batflight,
 Moon light and star light, owl and moth light,
 Glow-worm glowlight on a grassblade.
 O Light Invisible, we worship Thee!"

We thank Thee for the lights that we have kindled,
 The light of altar and of sanctuary;
 Small lights of those who meditate at midnight
 And lights directed through the coloured panes of windows
 And lights reflected from the polished stone,
 The gilded carven wood, the coloured fresco.
 Our gaze is submarine, our eyes look upward
 And see the light but see not whence it comes.
 O Light Invisible, we glorify Thee!"

The Rock, p. 85.

This liturgical doxology of praise, and the closing movement of thanks for the 'little light, that is dappled with shadow', is a fitting conclusion. That struggle of good and evil, which was one of the central messages of The Rock, is still present in the final movement, for this experience is only a momentary one but, nevertheless, one that should fructify in the lives of others. The chorus finally speak with the voices of small children whose cycle of life is as a candle continually extinguished and rekindled, but by their setting their candles upon the altar their small though significant and temporal lights are joined to the Invisible Light of God. The hieratic and prophetic voice of the poet whose admonishment of the world with its vanities is now acquiescent and totally submissive to the cycle of ordinary life.

The simplicity and freshness with which the author dedicates this church in the final chorus of The Rock, does show, through its almost Quacker and puritan way, a conscious poetic and spiritual disciplining on his part. As Eliot manages to reach a major intensity of theme the writing becomes here eminently plain and direct, and all is thrown away to express this highest moment in poetry¹ in which a certain immanence of grace filters through the rarefied lyric splendour to give a fitting conclusion to his play.²

- 1 One could fruitfully compare with The Rock those Romantic lines of 'Our lingring Parants', at the end of Milton's Paradise Lost, who leave through the Eastern gate with a new warfaring fortitude. Eliot, similarly evoking a sense of humility and simplicity, brings his pageant to a close with a quiet and fulfilled ending.
- 2 Eliot had set forth an ideal just a year before which may have influenced his poetic endeavour within this chorus:

...to write poetry which should be essentially poetry, with nothing poetic about it, poetry standing bare in its bones, or poetry so transparent that in reading it we are intent on what the poem points at, and not on the poetry, this seems to me the thing to try for. To get beyond poetry, as Beethoven in his later works strove to get beyond music.

Unpublished lecture on "English Letter Writers" delivered in New Haven, Conn., during the winter of 1933.

Quoted by F.O. Matthiessen The Achievement of T.S. Eliot 3rd ed. (Oxford, 1958), p. 90.

CHAPTER V

An Evaluation

The only wisdom we can hope to acquire
Is the wisdom of humility: humility is
endless.

East Coker II

By indirections find directions out.

Polonius (HAMLET, II, i, 66)

As has been shown throughout, T.S. Eliot confronted this propagandist and occasional work, not with the view of leaving it primarily a tour de force, but rather, there was the conscious intention of making it a work of art. This he attempted, on the one hand, through his own principle of past and present (and the actual presentness of the past), in order that he could embalm his material with a timelessness which could then be transfigured into a collective 'epiphany' and serenity at the end. On the other hand, this music-hall revue, by its essential incompleteness just so happened to allow the author an enormous variation of levels in the prose passages and choruses, and it was this very quality which had attracted Eliot at the time. In The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism (1933) the author had set out the following ideal:

The ideal medium for poetry, to my mind, and the most direct means of social 'usefulness' for poetry, is the theatre. In a play of Shakespeare you get several levels of significance. For the simplest auditors there is the plot, for the more thoughtful the character and conflict of character, for the more literary the words and phrasing, for the more musically sensitive the rhythm, and for auditors of greater sensitiveness and understanding a meaning which reveals itself gradually. And I do not believe that the classification of audience is so clear-cut as this; but rather that the sensitiveness of every auditor is acted upon by all these elements at once, though in different degrees of consciousness.¹

1 The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism (London: Faber and Faber Ltd, 1933), p. 153.

To apply this schematization to The Rock is partially fruitful. On the naturalistic level there is the plot, and on a deeper level there is the Rock himself re-enacting the eternal martyrdom of the Church. The language ranges from music-hall ballads through the doggerel ideological military scene to the immense variations within the choruses. As for the 'conflict of character', there is this important struggle throughout between the forces of good and those of evil. Finally, there is a meaning which 'reveals itself gradually', for the final dedication of the Church after its various trials and tribulations is an obvious and very fitting climax to the theme of building the Church Visible. In addition to these points, Eliot's chorus frequently changes its status from Greek commentators to Jewish citizens¹ and, of course, to contemporary 'Everyman' figures from these new suburbs of London.

All this reflects the author's attempt at a universality or generality of art, and Eliot's following statement, which was particularly applicable to The Waste Land, is also quite pertinent to his intention for The Rock. In 1923 he had said this of Joyce and Yeats's artistic style:

In using myth, in manipulating a continuous parallel between contemporaneity and antiquity, Mr Joyce is pursuing a method which others must pursue after him. They will not be imitators, any more than the scientist who uses the discoveries of an Einstein in pursuing his own independent, further investigations. It is simply a way of controlling, of ordering, of giving a shape and a significance to the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history...Instead of narrative method, we may now use the mythical method.²

1 The Fascists (p.44.) scorn the chorus with anti-Semitic hate, and the Church is frequently referred to as a 'Temple' or 'House of God' (p. 29.). The Unemployed too in chorus I echo Matthew 20:7 and the labourer in the vineyard. The metaphor Eliot seems to be using throughout The Rock, is that of 'restoring the biblical to Israel' (London).

2 "Ulysses, Order and Myth", The Dial, LXXV,5, November 1923, p. 483.

It is this manipulation of a 'continuous parallel between contemporaneity and antiquity' which Eliot uses in The Rock; and the following comparison between a chorus from The Rock and one from W.H. Auden and Christopher Isherwood's The Dog Beneath the Skin (1935), displays how the latter is imprisoned in the present in its encompassing a thoroughly modern outlook, while Eliot could choose to write sub specie aeternitatas:

Son of Man, behold with thine eyes, and hear with
 thine ears
 And set thine heart upon all that I show thee.
 Who is this that has said: the House of GOD is a
 House of Sorrow
 We must walk in black and go sadly, with long-
 drawn faces,
 We must go between empty walls quavering lowly,
 whispering faintly,
 Among a few flickering scattered lights?
 They would put upon GOD their own sorrow, the
 grief they should feel
 For their sins and faults as they go about their
 daily occasions.
 Yet they walk in the street proudnecked, like
 thoroughbreds ready for races,
 Adorning themselves, and busy in the market,
 the forum,
 And all other secular meetings.
 Thinking good of themselves, ready for any
 festivity,
 Doing themselves very well.

The Rock, pp. 74-75.

Man divided always and restless always: afraid
 and unable to forgive:
 Unable to forgive his parents, or his first
 voluptuous rectal sins.
 Afraid of the clock, afraid of catching his
 neighbour's cold, afraid of his own body,
 Desperately anxious about his health and his
 position: calling upon the Universe to
 justify his existence,
 Slovenly in posture and thinking: the greater
 part of the will devoted
 To warding off pain from the water-logged
 areas,

An isolated bundle of nerve and desire,
 suffering alone,
 Seeing others only in reference to himself:
 as a long-lost mother or as his ideal self
 at sixteen.

The Dog Beneath the Skin, p. 156.

Even despite this universality through the Eliotic criteria of Original Sin and Christian orthodoxy, there is still a direct preachment of orthodox belief and the concomitant worn imagery of that tradition. But The Rock is a distinct stage, to use Blake's proverb, of the road of excess leading to the palace of wisdom; and this wisdom was eventually found in a shrinking from orthodoxy into those via negativa aspects of Christianity cultivated in Four Quarters.¹ However, one can see the sense of disaffection in The Rock in its call to renounce one's life in order to find it, and Eliot's profound impersonality within this music-hall revue seems a complete contrast to Auden's assertive social mewing. The then potentialities of the music-hall, as Auden and Isherwood envisaged them, never really had the roots or appeal to remain a theatrical form of depth for their Dog Beneath the Skin was too much impoverished by their openly contemporary Marxist-Freudian approach. Although Eliot's verse, on

¹ F.R. Leavis says this of Eliot:

Eliot's genius is that of the great poet who has a profound and acute apprehension of the difficulties of his age. One doesn't need to be able to share Mr Eliot's personal Anglo-Catholicism, or even to be able to sympathize with it, or anything akin to it, in order to feel indebted to Four Quartets, and to see that this poetry has the most important relevance to the interests of anyone fully alive in our time.

New Bearings in English Poetry (London: Cox and Wymen Ltd, 1967), p.181.

One could even add that The Rock, Murder in the Cathedral and the fourth movements of East Coker ('The wounded surgeon plies the steel....') and The Dry Salvages ('Lady, whose shrine stands on a promontory....') are perhaps inferior to the rest of Four Quartets in that the religious or oracular vocabulary is too didactic. But most of Four Quartets transcend any indictment of didacticism as we understand the word, for the author is there considering a way common to both the East and the West and, therefore, above any sectarian or racial considerations.

the other hand, is here preponderantly thinner than before, there is still the attempt to transform his own propagandist preoccupations into imperishable art.

In order to see The Rock in an overall perspective, it is important to stress that Eliot's attempt to 'purify the dialect of the tribe' was a theological and social, as well as literary, concern in 1934. Ash Wednesday had marked a major relaxation in the personal soliloquies of those poems, but The Rock had risen to challenge this 'hollowness of ecclesiastical utterances' by partly speaking the 'language of ordinary men'. Dedicated craftsmanship was certainly divorced from the reality of the occasion, but, nevertheless, there was still a determination in the poet to keep the noblest words for his poetry, like a Dante, and, to use 'the ordinary language, especially of rustic men', like a Wordsworth. It was this belief, that the vernacular gave strength to his verse while the careful discipline of traditional conformity gave accuracy, that Eliot could speak of in Little Gidding V as :

An easy commerce of the old and new,
The common word exact without vulgarity,
The formal word precise but no pedantic,
The complete consort dancing together -

which is, indeed, two way of insuring the health of poetic diction.

Thus, we have in The Rock a more democratic and less lapidary art which, in doing away with that mask which had served to impersonalize and discipline his earlier verse, we now have a more authentic, sincere and humanized document of a more humbled discipline.

Helen Gardner speaks this and Eliot's post Waste Land poetry in the following way:

Instead of looking out upon the world and seeing sharply defined and various manifestations of the same desolation and emptiness, the poet turns away from the outer world of men to ponder over certain intimate personal experiences. He narrows the range of his vision, withdraws into his own mind, and 'thus devoted, concentrated in purpose' his verse moves 'into another intensity'.

The intensity of apprehension in the earlier poetry is replaced by an intensity of meditation.¹

Miss Gardner was referring here mainly to Ash Wednesday and Four Quartets, but the generalizations are also relevant to the latter choruses of The Rock, where one can observe a more meditative and less desolate frame of mind. There, we do not see any distrustful 'simple soul' who is 'unable to fare forward or retreat', and who fears 'the warm reality' and the 'offered good',² but rather, there is a humility beneath the now emergent rhythm of a natural world. It is as if Eliot were now constructing something on which to rejoice, quite different from his derivative and traditional boat building³ before; and it is of a more sanguine humour rather than spleen-venting nature as it was before.

Throughout The Rock we have for the first time an iconoclastic distrust of rhetoric which gives Eliot's verse a Herbert-like touch.⁴ The quotation at the end of the previous chapter in which Eliot had said he had the ideal of writing poetry 'standing naked in its bare bones', was an actual reference to a passage in one of D.E. Lawrence's letters which runs:

The essence of poetry with us in this age of stark and unlovely actualities is a stark directness, without a shadow of a lie, or a shadow of deflection anywhere. Everything can go but this stark, bare, rocky directness of statement, this alone makes poetry, today.⁵

1 The Art of T.S. Eliot, p. 100.

2 "Animula" (1929)

3 "Marina" (1930)

4 George Herbert, of course, was a master rhetorician and casuist in his poetry like his fellow seventeenth-century poets, but this was in no way antithetical to his creation of a highly personal and seemingly stark poetry. The point at issue is that Eliot is moving away from his highly elegant and chiselled rhetorical language of his Parnassian period.

5 Letter to Catherine Caswell, 11 January 1916. The Collected Letters of D.H. Lawrence, edited with an Introduction by Harry T. Moore, 1962, vol. i, p. 413.

Eliot's admiration for this statement in 1933 may have been at the back of his mind in his formulation of The Rock, for the stone-like choruses were to speak with such a 'stark, bare, and rocky directness' to communicate that concern of reality with God, church and audience. Despite the highly ornate Latin sequence (pp. 61-64), the patterned prose of the latter choruses, and the conscious modelling of the final chorus on the Gloria of the Mass,¹ Eliot is generally transcending the manipulative skill of a subtle rhetorician for the sake of religious actualities. There is a masterly persuasion in the early choruses to communicate man's familial responsibilities to orthodoxy and tradition, but the author is now moving into an intensity of uncompromising honesty, away from the posturing of his earlier verse and into a condition of relative simplicity.

Despite the baldly-stated utterances of the early choruses there is a manipulative skill through metaphor, antithesis, paradox and rhythmical tension; and the emphasis and poise is usually well managed and sustained. The shorter lines which show 'man betrayed in his own ingenuity' have a memorable arresting and horatory quality on which D.W. Harding makes the following comments on The Rock:

Its interest lies rather in its experimentation with a tone of address. Innovations of 'tone' (in Richards' sense) are at least as significant as innovations of 'technique' in the restricted sense, and in the addresses of the chorus and The Rock to the decent heathen and the ineffectual devout, who are taken as forming the audience, Mr Eliot achieves a tone of address that is new to contemporary verse.²

One can agree with Harding and add that writing for a miscellaneous audience demanded such an innovation which was sometimes flat, prosaic and inexpressive for the purposes of communication and variation. Sweeney Agonistes, with its

1 E. Martin Browne says the final chorus of The Rock was based on the Gloria of the Mass as a ground-bass of choral order.

"The Dramatic Verse of T.S. Eliot", T.S. Eliot: A Symposium, ed. March p. 200

2 Scrutiny op. cit., pp. 181-82

primitive drum-beat rhythms, had been a start, but Eliot was groping to find a new kind of prosody in these ten musical exercises, whatever their dramatic flaws. The broad range of tone encompasses tempos of reproach, reflection, penitence and joy and, although Harding admires the declamatory choruses with their dry contempt, the Swinburnean ring to the longer more jubilant or reflective movements are definitely as important to Eliot as prologues for Four Quartets. The subterfuge of various masks with the habit of allusion to avoid direct statement is now disappearing, and although this must be partly owing to the recognition of an audience,¹ it is also emblematic of the author's commitment and humility. He is himself smashing his old icons of the objective correlative and traditional melodies and is now making his art serve reality in this complete and new acceptance of an authority outside himself. The choruses, almost as a direct result of this, can soar in this effort to rebuild, and not adulterate, the dialect of the tribe.

It was these considerations which George Herbert had spoken of in poem "Jordan"(II). That poem reads as follows:

When first my lines of heav'nly joys made mention,
Such was their lustre, they did so excell,
That I sought out quaint words, and trim invention;
My thoughts began to burnish, sprout, and swell,
Curling with metaphors a plain intention,
Decking the sense, as if it were to sell.

Thousands of notions in my brain did run,
Off'ring their service, if I were not sped:
I often blotted what I had begun;

1 Eliot had actually said the year before that he believed that:

...the poet naturally prefers to write for as large and miscellaneous an audience as possible, and that it is the half-educated and ill-educated, rather than the uneducated, who stand in his way: I myself should like an audience which could neither read nor write.

This was not quick enough, and that was dead.
 Nothing could seem too rich to clothe the sun,
 Much less those joys which trample on his head.

As flames do work and wind, when they ascend,
 So did I weave my self into the sense.
 But while I bustled, I might hear a friend
 Whisper, How wide is all this long pretence!
There is in love a sweetness ready penned:
Copy out only that, and save expense.²

oooOooo

It remains to include the significance of the Rock himself, and to trace briefly his forbears and mention his various antecedents in Eliot's poetry and plays. It has already been said that the author had been interested in the cult of the leader in his Coriolan poems, but it seems that the Rock was Eliot's first persona to represent this wholly other aspect to which he was temperamentally drawn. Ash Wednesday, on the other hand, had dealt with temptations in the wilderness and a persona divesting himself of all desire, thus being a saint in the making. This concept of martyrdom and sainthood is, however, clearly delineated by Thomas à Becket in his sermon preached in the Cathedral on Christmas morning, 1170. Here is an important extract:

A Christian martyrdom is never an accident, for Saints are not made by accident. Still less is a Christian martyrdom the effect of a man's will to become a Saint....A martyrdom is always the design of God, for His love of men, to warn them and to lead them, to bring them back to His ways. It is never the design of man; for the true martyr is he who has become the instrument of God, who has lost his will in the will of God, and who no longer desires anything for himself, not even the glory of being a martyr.

Complete Poems and Plays, p. 261.

The Rock, Mellitus and Rahere have already received this vocation as will Thomas in Murder in the Cathedral, Harry Monchensey in The Family Reunion and Celia Coplestone

1 Joseph H. Summers. p. 153.

in The Cocktail Party. As for the Rock himself, he is a pre-cursor of both Thomas and Sir Henry Harcourt-Reilly in The Cocktail Party who all have the common features of being intruders and saviours in the lives of others. Their charismatic natures make them aristocratic and somewhat aloof in relation to the people around them, but they do symbolize masters who have escaped (or are escaping) that ever revolving wheel of personal and worldly desire. For Eliot, in sainthood, and nothing less, lies true action, and the rest is merely blind movement and errancy.

In The Waste Land V a composite and mantled figure appeared in a single vision (ll. 359-365). Unwittingly beginning with this figure, and pointing towards that 'brown baked' and 'compound ghost' of Little Gidding II we have an array of figures who become Christ-like in their attempting reconciliation of time and eternity. There are definitely forces which move many of these figures and, by logical explication of this, they are pre-cursors of the fire itself which 'descends' and 'breaks the air' in Little Gidding IV.

The Rock is called the 'Watcher', 'Stranger', 'Critic' and 'Witness' and also 'The God-shaken, in whom is the truth inborn' (p. 8.), so one can feel a certain vocational quality to the conclusion of chorus III wherein the emphatic 'shall' offers the audience a charismatic and unctuous hope:

Life you may evade, but Death you shall not.
You shall not deny the stranger.

The Rock, p. 31.

All these figures in Eliot's poetry and plays are either life affirmers and redeemers of the time, or their martyrdoms are supposed to fortify the lives of others. Tiresias and Gerontion before them had seen and foresuffered all but,

unlike the Rock, they acted as a shabby apparatus to serve the poet's artistic needs. The Rock (like his chorus), although always present or near at hand as an all-seeing dramatic device, performs a different and more respectable function for he is plainly a St. Peter figure, as is revealed at the end.¹

To end, one must note a beginning, for The Rock represented for its author a return to the world; and in this sincerity, and social and literary obligations, he constructed, on ~~the~~ one hand, an affirmative and unhesitant prosody so different from the cunning and rhetorical mode before, and, on the other hand, he found a secure yet self-denying way preparatory to his less overtly Anglo-Catholic concerns in his later plays and Four Quartets. His unstinting generosity to undertake what was a patently commercial and popular pageant-revue (and writing to a set scenario as well), evidences a growing unselfish, personal concern for humanity at large; and although this concern may have been quite authoritarian in its nature, there is no sleight but only openness in the way in which Eliot tried to communicate what he thought were essential religious and societal needs. 'Thus devoted, concentrated in purpose',² T.S. Eliot and his later characters could now take the course that lead towards self-less love in the sense of love for something fully outside themselves.

oooOooo

1 Whether this was fortuitous or not (as mentioned before), the point remains that Eliot was evolving a figure to communicate something which, in his later works, was essentially ineffable.

2 Ash Wednesday II

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