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**"THIS MUSIC CREPT BY ME UPON THE WATERS":
THE MUSICAL QUALITY OF ELIOT'S *THE WASTE LAND*
AND *FOUR QUARTETS***

Almost all attempts to place the work of T. S. Eliot in a larger intellectual context look to the poetic tradition. Affinities can be found with the Metaphysicals, whom he revived, with Dante, whom he regarded as Christian Europe's culmination, but mostly with the French symbolists. Eliot acknowledged the importance of the latter to modern poetry and the fact that he was himself one of the main heirs of the symbolist movement outside France. In December 1908, while Eliot was still a student, he discovered in the library of the Harvard Union *The Symbolist Movement in Literature* (Ackroyd 24). Eliot subsequently described this well-known book by Arthur Symons as one of those which had a major influence on his oeuvre. Symons' monograph introduced Eliot directly to Laforgue, Rimbaud and Verlaine, and indirectly to Corbière (Eliot 1947, 63, 71-73). Eventually, he was to be influenced by several of the French symbolist poets, from Baudelaire to Mallarmé.

One of the links between the works of the symbolist poets of nineteenth-century France and the poetry of T. S. Eliot is the musicality of the verse. The equation between poetry and music became one of the tenets of symbolism, as the music of the words provided the element of suggestiveness that the symbolists were looking for. Verlaine's *Art Poétique*, written in 1874 and considered to be one of the manifestos of the movement, clearly expresses this point of view:

De la musique encore et toujours!
Que ton vers soit la chose envolée
Qu'on sent qui fuit d'une âme en allée
Vers d'autres cieux à d'autres amours. (Verlaine 1964, 36)

Music lacks the element of precision which words possess and which the symbolists wanted to dispose of. Verlaine's poem ends with a dismissal of everything that does not possess this vague, suggestive, musical quality as mere literature. The symbolists wanted to do with words what Wagner had done with musical notes. They regarded this as a new call, a return to the lost tradition of the song, to the very heart of poetry.

In his celebrated monograph on T. S. Eliot entitled *The Invisible Poet*, Hugh Kenner refers to *The Waste Land* as a poem which might be said to "approach the condition of music" (198). Another critic, Bernard Harris, writes in his essay on the presence of Shakespeare and Wagner in *The Waste Land*:

There is probably no end to the fruitful annotation of *The Waste Land*, and there, no doubt, its greatness lies. But ... its "meaning" is approached most certainly by reference to music. (116)

If the two critics are right, and a closer examination of the poem seems to support their claims, one might perceive the musicality, in the broadest sense of the word, of Eliot's opus magnum as yet another trace of French symbolism in his oeuvre, in particular of the influence of Verlaine, by far the most musical of all symbolists. Harris also points to this French legacy when he accounts for why he claims that *The Waste Land* needs "to be heard":

I say "heard" rather than "read" deliberately, since some of the early response to *The Waste Land* drew upon a musical sensitivity appropriate both to the state of critical comprehension about the relationship of the arts in that whole phase of "modernism" and to the evident musicality of Eliot as a poet. This musicality is, of course, related to the whole system of symbolism. (106)

Eliot seems to have had in mind Verlaine's oft-quoted line "De la musique avant toute chose" when he wrote *The Waste Land*, a poem in which, as Thomas R. Rees points out, music is one of the dominant images (170). Rees also refers to the five sections of Eliot's poem as "movements" (170), which is the musicological term for one of the main divisions in a long musical work. *The Waste Land* as a whole can thus be likened to a piece of music, a symphony in five movements. Again, to quote Harris (107):

...it has become customary to describe the five sections as movements, and it has been found appropriate to extend the musical comparison invited by the later poetry back to the earliest work.

Helen Gardner, one of Eliot's most influential critics, speaks of "the symphonic richness of *The Waste Land*" (37) and claims that the five

movements of the poem, along with certain structural patterns within each movement, give it a form similar to that of *Four Quartets*, a work regarded as the culmination of Eliot's musicality:

As the title shows, each poem is structurally a poetic equivalent of the classical symphony, or quartet, or sonata, as distinct from the suite. This structure is clear when all four poems are read, as they are intended to be, together, and is essentially the same as the structure of *The Waste Land*. (36)

Like most of the dominant images, the musical imagery makes its first appearance in the opening movement of the poem and continues to appear at irregular intervals throughout the remaining sections. The musical images in *The Waste Land* are initiated by the Wagner lyrics in the first movement:

Frisch weht der Wind
Der Heimat zu
Mein Irisch Kind
Wo weilest du? (Eliot 1961, 52)

In the second movement they assume the form of a ragtime fragment:

O O O O that Shakespeherian Rag – (Eliot 1961, 55)

In the third movement the musical motif takes on varied and contrasting forms:

Sweet Thames, run softly till I end my song,
Sweet Thames, run softly, for I speak not loud or long. (Eliot 1961, 58)

O the moon shone bright on Mrs. Porter
And on her daughter
They wash their feet in soda water
Et O ces voix d'enfants, chantant dans la coupole! (Eliot 1961, 59)

This music crept by me upon the waters'
And along the Strand, up Queen Victoria Street.
O City city, I can sometimes hear
Beside a public bar in Lower Thames Street,
The pleasant whining of a mandoline. (Eliot 1961, 60–61)

In this movement the music is soft and seductive, then vulgar and jerky, then serious and religious, then it is once more soft, and finally it assumes the sentimental whining quality of a mandolin being played in a public bar, a distant echo of Verlaine's *Mandoline*, with its graceful and nostalgic air:

Les donneurs de sérénades
Et les belles écouteuses

Echangent des propos fades
 Sous les ramures chanteuses.
 ...
 Leurs courtes vestes de soie,
 Leurs longues robes à queues,
 Leur élégance, leur joie
 Et leurs molles ombres bleues

Tourbillonnent dans l'extase
 D'une lune rose et grise,
 Et la mandoline jase
 Parmi les frissons de brise. (Verlaine 1985, 508)

There is also in *The Waste Land* a more direct allusion to Verlaine's poetry – a quotation from his sonnet *Parsifal*:

'Et O ces voix d'enfants, chantant dans la coupole!' (Verlaine 1985, 505)

which is at the same time one of the many musical references in the poem, significantly linking the concept of musicality and the French symbolist who is seen as its main propagator.

In the last movement of *The Waste Land*, the music takes on the strangeness of the setting, in keeping with the overall tone of the final section:

A woman drew her long black hair out tight
 And fiddled whisper music on those strings
 And bats with baby faces in the violet light
 Whistled, and beat their wings
 And crawled head downward down a blackened wall
 And upside down in air were towers
 Tolling reminiscent bells, that kept the hours
 And voices singing out of empty cisterns and exhausted wells. (Eliot 1961, 66)

Later in the same movement, *What the Thunder said*, the speaker hears the dry grass singing and a chanted version of *London Bridge is Falling Down*.

We can thus find in *The Waste Land* musical fragments from Wagner's opera *Tristan und Isolde*, a ragtime tune, a soldier's ballad and a nursery song, all melted together in a collage or potpourri. But Eliot does not merely include musical references in *The Waste Land*. The whole poem is in many respects reminiscent of a musical composition. It is, as Rees put it:

...a complex exercise in theme and variation, with the dominant images symbolically projecting at different times the different aspects of the themes of sterility, sexual love, and fertility or rebirth. Each image in the repetitive scheme is a thematic motif, or fractional component of the theme: it is only a salient component of a theme which strongly implies the whole. (171)

The Waste Land is thus composed of a series of intertwined motifs. Motifs from all three above-mentioned themes are frequently woven together in a single passage by means of a technique called "thematic fragmentation," which consists in breaking up individual themes into recurring components or motifs (Rees 172). As Paul Chancellor put it in his study *The Music of "The Waste Land"*:

...the form of *The Waste Land* ... may be seen as that of a symphonic poem in sonata form using the chief symbols as its themes, and with a declaiming voice woven with it, partly to supply related but dissonant leitmotifs. (107)

The motifs of *The Waste Land* can be divided into leading and subordinate, the function of the latter being to bring out and support the former, operating either independently or in conjunction with them. According to Rees, this mode of composition has its genesis in the Wagnerian "leitmotif", in which "individual motifs are subjected to successive transformations in meaning as they appear in changing contexts" (172). Hugh Kenner also points to the influence of Wagner on Eliot in his monograph, where he writes:

"A master of miniature," wrote Nietzsche of Wagner, intuiting the method of the long Eliot poem. (198)

Rees suggests that because of its multiplicity of motifs *The Waste Land* also bears a close resemblance to the compositions of Stravinsky, a musician whom Eliot greatly admired and whose work represents a modern elaboration on Wagner's method. Rees thus comments on the Russian composer's technique in the context of Eliot's poem:

...Stravinski's *Le Sacre du Printemps*, for example, utilizes large numbers of rhythmical and melodic fragments, each of which is a thematic component of the several musical themes. The mixture of diverse truncated phrases in Stravinski's work makes it appear superficially disjointed and even chaotic; yet it is unified by the incessant interlocking repetitions of these fragments. The mingling of the most advanced dissonant harmonies with atavistic rhythms, moreover, corresponds to the mythical-anthropological configuration which underlies Eliot's conception of the modern waste land. (173)

Eliot may thus be said to be endowed with as distinctly a twentieth-century sensibility as Stravinsky's, and to introduce the new and the startling into poetry in a way which is similar to what Stravinsky did in music.

Bernard Harris discerns a relationship between the form of Eliot's poem and the technique of yet another composer, Béla Bartók, in particular his E-type quartet form, in which the first and the fifth, the second and the fourth movements are set in complex relationship to each other, and the

third movement is both a pivot for and a summary of those relationships. Harris sees a parallel between such a musical composition and the structure of *The Waste Land*, in which "Eliot so frequently sets beginnings against endings that one is prompted to look for 'meaning' at the centre" (108). In Harris' view, *The Fire Sermon*, section three of *The Waste Land*, is its culmination, containing and expressing the essential experience of the poem.

In his treatment of the different themes of *The Waste Land*, Eliot shows the skill of a modern symphonic composer. Many of the themes and motifs are implied rather than stated, but, according to Babette Deutsch, "the suggested idea is introduced, counterpointed, repeated, complicated, transposed and developed with musicianly skill and symphonic effect" (132). Even apparently irrelevant motifs, such as for instance the Tarot pack, are later related to the central symbolism of the work, as the court cards are transformed into the characters of the poem. Eliot also complies with the symphonic technique by making sure that each theme is treated in at least four out of the five movements. This is a device borrowed from Hector Berlioz, whose cyclical mode of composition consisted in one theme, referred to as the "motto-theme," being common to all the movements of a symphony. Eliot applies a similar technique to his poem, thereby giving it a dense and coherent thematic structure, in which themes and images are used cyclically (Rees 173). As the critic Jacob Korg shows, every part of the poem is "connected with the others, not in a conventional way, but by means of a complicated system of echoes, contrasts, parallels, and allusions" (456). Rees subscribes to this point of view, saying of *The Waste Land*:

Eliot has brought unity to this poem by means of a musicological mode of repetitions and variation, or interlocking thematic motifs, all of which relate to the central idea of modern sterility. (177)

According to Bernard Harris, the Song of the Thames-daughters, which closes *The Fire Sermon*, is a musical culmination of this unifying technique, and is at the same time central to the experience of *The Waste Land*:

There is nothing in modern poetry to equal the scale of what is attempted here, where the cities of Augustine, Dante, Shakespeare and the London of everyday acquaintance are reconciled. That they are so related is due to the power of the music here specifically invoked. (114)

He also suggests that the "evidence of Eliot's knowledge and use of musical form should cause us to approach the music in *The Waste Land* with high expectation of its importance" (107).

Harris is thus aware of the extent to which Eliot's celebrated concept of "the music of poetry" is applicable to *The Waste Land*. He also sees in the musical quality of the poem "the transformation of human experience beyond the capacity of human utterance to express it, for which the language of music is necessary" (108). It may thus be claimed that Eliot aspires almost to "poésie pure," to sound above sense, in his attempt to add a purely lyrical sound effect to the poem. It seems that he is trying to summon to the reader's ear the music itself. The sweet Thames runs softly till the song is done, and music flows through the whole poem, as though it were "creeping by us upon the waters," in the form of either direct allusions or structural principles which liken the composition of the poem to that of a musical work. The references to Wagner, which recur in the poem, starting with quotations from the libretto of *Tristan und Isolde* and culminating in the Song of the Thames-daughters modelled on Wagner's Rhine-daughters, send the reader back to the French symbolists and the emphasis they placed on the musicality of the verse and the primacy of sound over meaning. Eliot referred to Wagner, the symbolists' favourite composer and the ideal of Mallarmé, whose ambition was to achieve in poetry what the German composer had accomplished in music (Mallarmé 174). In accordance with the symbolists' call to return to the musical origins of poetry, Eliot developed the musical element in *The Waste Land*, adding Verlaine and Mallarmé to the number of French symbolist poets who influenced him. He incorporated into *The Waste Land* the melody of Verlaine's verse and Mallarmé's attempt to purify and "musicalise" poetry, endowing his most celebrated work with a musical quality which twenty years later was to find richer and more varied realisation in *Four Quartets*, a poem which, as its very title suggests, is par excellence musical.

The year 1942 was, for several reasons, a landmark in Eliot's poetic career. It was the year in which he published his famous essay *The Music of Poetry*, usually considered to be a summing-up of his oeuvre. It was also the year in which, a few months after the publication of the aforementioned essay, Eliot wrote *Little Gidding*, the last poem in a series entitled *Four Quartets* and at the same time the last poem he wrote in his life. Both the essay and Eliot's last poetic work, to which A. D. Moody refers as "a musical organisation of the mind's resources" (1996, 180), and which, according to Bernard Bergonzi, contains "a true musicalization of thought" (Moody 1996, 167), give ample indication of what the poet's debt to the art of music was, and, consequently, how he dealt, in theory as well as in practice, with one of the main tenets of French symbolism.

In *Four Quartets* the very title makes it impossible to escape musical associations. As A. D. Moody remarks:

The compact title plays upon severalness and singularity: four works, and yet one work. Not just four works either, but four to the power of their four instruments; and still the title declares them to be a single work. Further, the title declares the words on the pages before us to be musical compositions, like those of Haydn or Beethoven or Bartok. What then are the instruments of these "quartets" which are actually composed of words? And are they truly written in quartet form? Thus the title proposes its own questions and perspectives. (Moody 1996, 161)

Bernard Bergonzi makes a similar point when he writes:

As the title suggests, the *Quartets* invoke the ideal of musical form that had attracted Eliot ever since he wrote the "Preludes" and the "Rhapsody on a Windy Night" at the beginning of his career, and his 1942 lecture on "The Music of Poetry" provides a useful background to the *Quartets*. Indeed, it has been suggested that Eliot had one or more specific string quartets in mind as models, and works by Beethoven and Bartok have been suggested. However this may be, the point is worth making that the quartet is a more intricately organized form than the prelude or the rhapsody, and in the *Quartets* Eliot attempts to stiffen and support the articulations of pure musical expression with a regular and predictable form, based on a five-fold division. (164)

A closer examination of the poem itself enables the reader to see how Eliot used music in his solution to the problem of finding a form for the long poem. *Four Quartets* was by no means the first work in which Eliot made such attempts, but it was doubtless the one which most closely approached the condition of music. Thomas R. Rees thus summarises Eliot's development in this respect:

From the time of his earliest compositions Eliot has continually exploited the musical idiom as a source of formal organization in his verse. In "Portrait of a Lady" and "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," the unity and progression of images is based on interlocking patterns of repeated words and symbols, which approximate the progression of interweaving motifs in the impressionistic music of Debussy and Ravel. The numerous false starts and broken phrases of Prufrock's dialogue follow an incremental development pattern similar to Chopin's deferred resolutions. The confused and fragmentary development of themes in *The Waste Land*, combined with the use of recurrent patterns in the dominant image-groups, reflect the fused influences of Stravinski and the Wagnerian leitmotif. Finally, in the composition of the *Four Quartets*, Eliot moulds his deepest religious feelings into a broader format for thematic organization suggested by the sonata-allegro form of Beethoven's string quartets. It is a format ideally suited to the orderly and sustained development of contrasting themes. (303)

It may thus be said that there is an analogy between the form of *Four Quartets* and that of a musical quartet. In the first movement of a conventional quartet three main sections can be discerned: the exposition

section, which introduces two contrasting themes or subjects; the development section, in which these two themes are subjected to variations, extensions, inversions and counterpoint; and the recapitulation section, where the original themes, having been resolved and transfigured in the preceding section, are restated in final form. Such a mode of composition is used not only in quartets, but also in other types of musical works, such as sonatas, concertos, overtures and symphonies.

The main subject of *Four Quartets* is the poet's search for "the point of intersection of the timeless / With time" (Eliot 1990, 275–276), or, to quote Rees, „through mortal time, for eternal reality" (304). The poem presents, according to Helen Gardner, „a series of meditations upon existence in time" (44). Eliot adapts this material to the above-mentioned musical form, splitting the subject into two opposing but connected themes – eternity versus temporal mutability. In each of the *Four Quartets*, namely *Burnt Norton*, *East Coker*, *The Dry Salvages* and *Little Gidding*, these two themes are introduced, developed and recapitulated in such a way that the poet's ideas are expanded and amplified from quartet to quartet. The two contrasting themes are synthesised in the idea that eternity can only be perceived through one's experiences in the temporal world (Rulewicz XCIII).

Even though most critics agree that *Four Quartets* can be seen as a literary adaptation of a musical form, they differ in their analysis of the poem's structure. According to Helen Gardner, each of the four poems is composed of five movements (37). She therefore suggests that each poem is a separate quartet, an interpretation which is in keeping with the title of the entire work. Rees, on the other hand, proposes a different approach:

...the reading time for all four of Eliot's quartets is about the same as the playing time for a string quartet or short eighteenth-century symphony. The four poems of the *Quartets*, moreover, correspond to the four movements of a conventional quartet or symphony, except for the fact that the sonata-allegro form is repeated in all four of Eliot's poems. It might be preferable, therefore, to consider the entire work as *one quartet*, for all of the poems are united by interlocking patterns of dominant images which project the two themes of eternity and temporal mutability. (305)

Gardner claims that each of the movements has "its own inner structure" (37). The first movement in each poem immediately suggests a musical analogy, as "it contains statement and counter-statement, or two contrasted but related themes, like the first and second subjects of a movement in strict sonata form" (Gardner 37). In each poem, the treatment of the two subjects is slightly different. In *The Dry Salvages*, the river and sea images stand for two different kinds of time: the rhythm of the microcosm-human life, and the rhythm of the macrocosm – eternity (Rulewicz, XCVI). The two subjects are presented successively and contrasted. A similar

twofold division may be observed in *Burnt Norton*, in which the contrast is between abstract speculation and an experience in the garden, the former being a meditation on consciousness, the latter a presentation of consciousness. In *East Coker*, however, the first movement falls into four parts. The first theme of the time of the years and the seasons, the rhythm of birth, growth and death, is resumed in the third paragraph, and the second theme, the experience of being outside time, of time having stopped, is briefly restated at the close. In *Little Gidding*, which, according to Gardner, is "the most brilliantly musical of the four poems" (38), the third paragraph develops the first two, weaving together phrases taken from both and forming a kind of counterpoint. Despite these differences, however, it might be claimed that the opening movement introduces the contradictions the poem is to reconcile.

The construction of the second movement is guided by a different principle: here a single subject is treated in two contrasting ways. The effect, to quote Gardner, is

...like that of hearing the same melody played on a different group of instruments, or differently harmonised, or hearing it syncopated, or elaborated in variations, which cannot disguise the fact that it is the same. (38)

This analogy with the use of different instruments in the quartet form is also emphasised by Moody:

...in quartets in sonata form the definition and the development of the themes are effected by using the distinctive characteristics of the different instruments. The formal structure is designed to allow the instruments to remain distinct from each other while yet performing together, and so to treat different themes in different ways while weaving them into "a new whole." (Moody 1996, 163)

The second movement opens with a highly lyric passage, which is followed by an extremely colloquial passage. Thus, the same idea is first handled by means of metaphors and symbols, and then developed in a conversational manner. This is particularly conspicuous in *The Dry Salvages*:

...the beautiful lament for the anonymous, the endless sum of whose lives adds up to no figure we can name, and leaves little trace but wrecks and wastage on time's ocean, hints in its last stanza where meaning can be found, and the hint is then developed directly, at first with little metaphor, but at the close with a full and splendid return to the original images of the river and the sea. This return to imagery in *The Dry Salvages* comes with wonderful power and force after the purging of our minds by the colloquial and discursive passage in which the poet has deliberately deprived himself of the assistance of imagery. It is a poetic effect comparable to the moment when, after a long and difficult passage of musical development, the original melody returns with all its beauty. (Gardner 39)

As in the first movement, the relation between the two parts varies with the character of each poem. However, it can generally be said that the first part is symbolic and lyrical, whereas the second part is discursive, colloquial and meditative.

The third movement is the crux of each quartet, out of which reconciliation grows. It is devoted to the exploration of the ideas of the first two movements, accompanied by sudden changes in meaning. Helen Gardner thus comments on this part of the poem:

At the close of these centre movements, particularly in *East Coker* and *Little Gidding*, the ear is prepared for the lyric fourth movement. The repetitive circling passage in *East Coker*, in particular, where we seem to be standing still, waiting for something to happen, for a rhythm to break out, reminds one of the bridge passage and leading passages between two movements which Beethoven loved. The effect of suspense here is comparable to the sensation with which we listen to the second movement of Beethoven's Violin Concerto finding its way towards the rhythm of the Rondo. (41)

A brief lyrical movement follows the third part and precedes the fifth one, which recapitulates the themes of the poem and resolves the contradictions of the first movement. As in the second movement, a division into two parts may be observed, though it is slighter and reversed. The colloquial passage comes first, and then images return in quick succession, without any clear-cut break. The last lines of the fifth movement echo the beginning of the whole poem or use images from other poems, and make up a conclusion which is characterised by "tender gravity" and "lyric sweetness" (Gardner 37-42).

In a different approach to the analogies between the structure of *Four Quartets* and that of a musical work, Thomas R. Rees argues that since a single movement of a musical quartet constitutes a separate, autonomous composition with its own distinctive themes and style, it is each of the four poems rather than each of the five divisions within one poem that should be treated as a "movement" in the musical sense of the term. According to Rees, "like a movement in a musical quartet, each of Eliot's poems contains a full exposition, development and recapitulation of themes" (306). Thus what Gardner terms a "movement" is merely a segment or section within the movement to Rees. However, the latter's analysis of the structure of these "sections" is consistent with Gardner's.

The composer Gardner refers to in her study of the musical quality of *Four Quartets* is Beethoven. Rees, on the other hand, claims that as Beethoven selected different subjects and styles for each of the movements within his quartets or symphonies, Eliot might be said to depart from Beethoven's form inasmuch as most of the important images interweave and overlap from poem to poem. It is true that a different set of leading

images dominates each of the poems, but it is also true that the principal image patterns occur in two or more of the poems. The image of the garden, for instance, is found in all four poems. That of the sea is predominant in *The Dry Salvages*, but appears also in *East Coker* and *Little Gidding*. This, according to Rees, suggests an analogy with another composer:

Because of the recurrence of dominant image patterns throughout the four poems, the true form of the *Four Quartets* in many respects resembles the format of Hector Berlioz's *Symphonie Fantastique*, which represents an elaboration on the traditional sonata-allegro form. In addition to the regular introduction, development, and recapitulation of themes, Berlioz introduces a *motto-theme* to unite all the movements of his symphony, and owing to the recurrence of this theme in each movement, the form is called *cyclical*.

...the structural organization of the *Four Quartets* bears at least as much resemblance to Berlioz's cyclical form as it does to the form of Beethoven's string quartets. ...Eliot exploits the motto-theme device and thereby enhances the continuity of his work, for all of the poems are threaded together by means of motto-images. These images, in projecting the two themes of eternity and temporal mutability, create a highly integrated thematic texture. (307)

Whether the structure of *Four Quartets* is more reminiscent of the form of Beethoven's quartets or of the cyclical organisation of Berlioz's symphonies is open to dispute. However, what is more important is that, as Rees puts it, "Eliot's poetic dialect conforms to the dialect of musical discourse" (307). Not only opposing themes, but also opposing voices can be found in *Four Quartets*. Eliot varies his voices like instruments used in a musical quartet, and in *Burnt Norton*, for example, one may distinguish two voices, the lyric and the didactic. *Four Quartets*, however, lacks the multiplicity of dramatic voices that may be found in, for instance, *The Waste Land*. The voices in Eliot's last poem are in fact various manifestations of a single voice in different moods. These oppositions in voice and theme result in tension. Again, to quote Rees:

Tense moments are often followed by sudden resolutions and resolutions dissolve into conflicts, with lyric smoothness alternating with the roughness of unresolved dilemmas. This flow of tensions and resolutions resembles the changing harmonic progressions in a musical composition in which dissonances resolve into harmonies. (308)

In a word, even though various commentators might differ in their views of the source of the musical influences in *Four Quartets*, none of them denies Eliot's success in exploiting the musical idiom. Eliot's method might be compared with the work of a composer, as Helen Gardner does:

The form is inspired by the composer's power to explore and define, by continual departures from, and returns to, very simple thematic material. The "thematic material" of the poem is not an idea or a myth, but partly certain common symbols. The basic symbols are the four elements, taken as the material of mortal life ... *Burnt Norton* is a poem about air ... *East Coker* is a poem about earth ... *The Dry Salvages* is a poem about water ... *Little Gidding* is a poem about fire. ... (44-45)

In *Four Quartets*, however, the analogy with music goes much deeper than a comparison of the sections with the movements of a quartet, or than an identification of the four elements as "thematic material." The treatment of images in the poem is conspicuously reminiscent of music, and thus remains in keeping with Eliot's view that the music of poetry is "a music of imagery as well as sound" (Eliot 1976, 30). The images reappear, but with constant modifications and in different contexts, and are combined with other recurring images. Eliot does with imagery what is done with a phrase in music. These recurrent images seem obvious and familiar when one first encounters them, but, as Gardner suggests:

As they recur they alter, as a phrase does when we hear it on a different instrument, or in another key, or when it is blended and combined with another phrase, or in some way turned round, or inverted. (48)

The more one reads *Four Quartets* the more these recurring images fix themselves in the mind, and through them and the changes in them one can understand the alterations in the subject and its development. One of the many instances of this is the image of the yew-tree, which occurs only three times in *Four Quartets*, but each time with great and different significance. It appears in the fourth movement of *Burnt Norton*:

Time and the bell have buried the day,
The black cloud carries the sun away.
Will the sunflower turn to us, will the clematis
Stray down, bend to us; tendril and spray
Clutch and cling?
Chill
Fingers of yew be curled
Down on us? After the kingfisher's wing
Has answered light to light, and is silent, the light is still
At the still point of the turning world. (Eliot 1990, 220)

In the above-quoted passage, the yew image is suggestive of death, with connotations of the coldness of the grave and a vague sense of foreboding. By contrast, the yew-tree as presented in the closing stanza of *The Dry Salvages* gives a sense of security:

Here the impossible union
 Of spheres of existence is actual,
 Here the past and future
 Are conquered, and reconciled,
 Where action were otherwise movement
 Of that which is only moved
 And has in it no source of movement –
 Driven by daemonic, chthonic
 Powers. And right action is freedom
 From past and future also.
 For most of us, this is the aim
 Never here to be realised;
 Who are only undefeated
 Because we have gone on trying;
 We, content at the last
 If our temporal reversion nourish
 (Not too far from the yew-tree)
 The life of significant soil. (Eliot 1990, 278)

Here the yew-tree becomes a symbol of both mortality and immortality, beneath whose shade one may rest in peace. It stands for harmony. Finally, the image reappears at the end of *Little Gidding*:

Every phrase and every sentence is an end and a beginning,
 Every poem an epitaph. And any action
 Is step to the block, to the fire, down the sea's throat
 Or to an illegible stone: and that is where we start.
 We die with the dying:
 See, they depart, and we go with them.
 We are born with the dead:
 See, they return, and bring us with them.
 The moment of the rose and the moment of the yew-tree
 Are of equal duration. (Eliot 1990, 307)

The rose and the yew-tree, the understanding of love and the understanding of death are linked together. They are both equally valid and essential to the understanding of life.

In the same way as images and symbols recur, certain words are used again and again, their meaning deepened or expanded by each fresh use. It could be claimed that what Eliot does in *Four Quartets* is to explore the meaning of certain words. These words resemble the images and symbols in that they are common and obvious. One takes these words for granted when they first appear in the poem. However, through their recurrence in some or all of the quartets, these apparently familiar words take on new meanings and different dimensions are added to them. The most striking among these words are “end” and “beginning”, which sometimes occur together, and sometimes separately. It is apart from the

word "beginning" that "end" appears in the opening lines of *Burnt Norton*:

What might have been and what has been
Point to one end, which is always present. (Eliot 1990, 215)

Here the meaning of "end" is still vague, even though it is plain that it stretches beyond "last part" or "termination". Yet, when the word is repeated in the fifth movement of the first quartet and is connected with "beginning", its sense is clarified:

...Only by the form, the pattern,
Can words or music reach
The stillness, as a Chinese jar still
Moves perpetually in its stillness.
Not the stillness of the violin, while the note lasts,
Not that only, but the co-existence,
Or say that the end precedes the beginning,

And the end and the beginning were always there
Before the beginning and after the end.
And all is always now. (Eliot 1990, 220)

The word "end" now stands for "completion", "purpose" and "final cause." In *Burnt Norton* the focus is on the word "end", and "beginning" is merely an addition. In *East Coker* it is the other way round. The poem is all about "beginning". The poem opens with the words "In my beginning is my end" (Eliot 1990, 243), which is an inversion of Mary Stuart's motto "En ma fin est mon commencement" (Rulewicz XCIV), and ends with the statement "In my end is my beginning" (Eliot 1990, 251), a faithful translation of the Scottish queen's precept. In both cases emphasis is placed on the word "beginning". In *Little Gidding*, not only are the words reiterated many times, but synonyms for both are frequently used, and are combined with various meanings. As in *Burnt Norton*, the words "beginning" and "end" are used to generate paradoxes:

What we call the beginning is often the end
And to make an end is to make a beginning.
The end is where we start from. (Eliot 1990, 306)

Numerous other words recur in this way in *Four Quartets*, such as, for example, "past", "present" and "future", "movement" and "stillness", and also common prepositions, like "before" and "after", "here", "there" and "now". Thus not only symbols and images, but also certain words are part of the poem's "thematic material."

In *Four Quartets*, images, phrases and words receive musical treatment, which, due to variation and turning, brings out hidden meanings and different senses, and makes it impossible to fix the symbols in the poem. As Helen Gardner puts it:

Here one must not hunt for meanings and precise correspondencies ... It is better in reading poetry of this kind to trouble too little about the "meaning" than to trouble too much. If there are passages whose meaning seems elusive, where we feel we "are missing the point," we should read on, preferably aloud; for the music and the meaning arise at "a point of intersection," in the changes and movement of the whole. (54)

When Gardner suggests that while reading *Four Quartets* one should pay attention to what she terms the "music of meaning," which "arises at 'the point of intersection,' where word relates to word, phrase to phrase, and image to image" (55), she in fact refers to the view expressed by Eliot himself in his essay *The Music of Poetry*. In it, the author of *The Waste Land* claims that the music of poetry and the music of the word lies in the intersection of words. The word itself, like the note in music, has meaning only in relation to other words. It exists in time and in usage; and since contexts and usage change, the life of a word is a continual death. However, within a poem the word's life is preserved and it is there stable, not in itself, but in its relations to all the other words in the poem, which in turn are held to their meaning by their relations to it. The word used in a particular context is also associated with all the other meanings it had in other contexts. The musical pattern of sounds is superimposed onto the pattern of meanings, and the two layers become inseparable (Eliot 1976, 25). As a result, the poetry eludes rigid classifications, and its music cannot be clearly defined. *Four Quartets* is based on this principle, and the meaning and value of the poem stem from what A. D. Moody calls its "verbal music" (Moody 1996, 161).

One might of course wonder how conscious Eliot was of these analogies with music. Although it is possible to perceive such analogies as something of a confusion of arts, it would probably be too far-fetched to claim that Eliot literally copies the effects of a different medium. It is, however, obvious that Eliot, much like the French symbolists, believed that poetry was closer to the condition of music than to that of, for instance, painting or sculpture, and that it was a temporal art rather than a spatial one (Bergonzi 182). The author of *Prufrock* is, in any case, someone who has thought a lot about the affinities between poetry and music, as this oft-quoted passage from *The Music of Poetry* shows:

I think that a poet may gain much from the study of music: how much technical knowledge of musical form is desirable I do not know, for I have not that technical knowledge myself. But I believe that the properties in which music concerns the poet most nearly, are the sense of rhythm and the sense of structure. I think that it might be possible for a poet to work too closely to musical analogies: the result might be an effect of artificiality; but I know that a poem, or a passage of a poem, may tend to realize itself first as a particular rhythm before it reaches expression in words, and that this rhythm may bring to birth the idea and the image.... (Eliot 1976, 32)

Eliot insists that "the use of recurrent themes is as natural to poetry as to music," and works on this assumption throughout his quartets, in an attempt to show that "there are possibilities of transitions in a poem comparable to the different movements of a symphony or a quartet" (Eliot 1976, 32).

A. D. Moody claims that *Four Quartets* is "dedicated to the ending of everything human and to silence" (Moody 1996, 161). He thus seems to suggest that Eliot attempts to approach an ideal the French symbolist Stéphane Mallarmé vainly pursued. On the other hand, Moody also states that:

...the poem breaks the absolute silence it aspires to, and breaks it with a virtuoso mastery of verbal music. The mastery of course is directed towards the discovery of the spiritual sense of things. But because the spiritual sense is beyond any sense which words can make, the art has to work in a mainly negative way, creating space for "the dumb spirit" by excluding whatever is not in accord with it. (Moody 1996, 173)

According to Moody, *Four Quartets*

...aspires to an absolute beyond words and speech, but, caught "in the form of limitation," it must use words and speech to reach towards the silence of the divine Word. (Moody 1996, 179)

He also observes that:

Getting the better of words is of the essence of *Four Quartets*. Its major design is to so use words as to make them mean what is beyond words.... (Moody 1996, 168)

Eliot's aspiration to what he himself termed "musical elaboration" (Eliot 1976, 33) should not give rise to the mistaken belief that the author of *The Waste Land* thinks the music of poetry could exist independently of the content. On the contrary, he knows this would lead to beautiful musical poetry that makes no sense. Nevertheless, he does believe that "there are poems in which we are moved by the music and take the sense for granted" (21). In *The Music of Poetry* he writes:

It is a commonplace to observe that the meaning of a poem may wholly escape paraphrase. It is not quite so commonplace to observe that the meaning of a poem may be something larger than its author's conscious purpose, and something remote from its origins. (22)

The view expressed here by Eliot is in keeping with Helen Gardner's opinion. Gardner claims that it is pointless to desperately hunt for the meaning of *Four Quartets* and that the beauty of the poem is that part of this meaning is doomed to remain elusive. *Four Quartets* is not a poem "in which one 'finds values for x, y and z' and then can make the whole work out" (Gardner 54). Instead, she suggests one should "find the meaning in the reading" as:

Reading in this way we may miss detailed significances, but the whole rhythm of the poem will not be lost, and gradually the parts will become easier for us to understand. (54)

The "music of meaning" (55) in *Four Quartets* is therefore close to what the symbolist Stéphane Mallarmé achieved in his poetry: a poetic vision which, though blurred and ambiguous, conveys something transcendental for which words hardly exist. Like Mallarmé's verse, *Four Quartets* is based on suggestion and allusiveness, and thus eludes precise interpretation. It is also reminiscent of the French poet's work in that it is the kind of poetry that aspires to possess the direct appeal of music. Mallarmé carried the idea of musical effect to an extreme, and went too far in his attempt to purify poetry and transform it into a kind of music. His ideal was silence, a kind of unheard music, an absent perfection. He disregarded the fact that words are never devoid of meanings, which is the main reason why his doctrine failed. Eliot, however, is aware that such a method is dangerous as it could easily lead into the false identification of poetry with music which caused the vague obscurity of so much of Mallarmé's verse. The Anglo-American poet is sure that poetry could approach the condition of music without sacrificing its definite core of meaning. Eliot knows that he must not sacrifice either sense to sound, or sound to sense. He summarises this in an essay on Ezra Pound:

Words are perhaps the hardest of all material of art: for they must be used to express both visual beauty and beauty of sound, as well as communicating a grammatical statement. (Eliot 1947, 126)

This concern with words is also voiced in *Four Quartets* itself:

Words move, music moves
Only in time; but that which is only living

Can only die. Words, after speech, reach
Into silence.

...

Words strain,
Crack and sometimes break, under the burden,
Under the tension, slip, slide, perish,
Decay with imprecision, will not stay in place,
Will not stay still.

(Eliot 1990, 220)

In Eliot's case, however, this strife with words is not a losing battle. In *Four Quartets*, he manages to realise his ideal of "the music of poetry," which, according to him, does not only lie in the melody of the verse, but also in the music of words, imagery and of the whole poetic structure (Eliot 1990, 24–30). He makes good use of the French symbolists' legacy and inherits the regard they had for the musical quality of poetry, without falling into the trap of making his verse musical at the expense of meaning. On the contrary, Eliot makes meaning with the music of his verse.

The musicality of poetry, an important aspect of the symbolists' work, was much appreciated by Eliot. The author of *The Waste Land* learnt from his French predecessors, and created his own music of words and images. He applied one of the main tenets of symbolism to modern poetry, showing the skill of a modern symphonic composer. The music of Eliot's poetry comprises the melody of the verse, but also the music of words, imagery, meaning and of the entire poetic structure. Music helped Eliot solve the problem of finding a form for the long poem. But for the emphasis the French poets placed on musicality, Eliot might not have been able to exploit the musical idiom with such mastery, giving images, words and phrases musical treatment and providing them with a structural framework resembling that of a musical composition. Moreover, by making his poetry musical Eliot intensified in it the element of suggestiveness that was of crucial importance to the symbolists. The French symbolists taught their Anglo-American heir the art of vagueness and indirectness, which surely made his own poetry hermetic and elitist enough to discourage the mass reader, but at the same time contributed to the profundity and complexity of Eliot's verse in a way that can hardly be equalled by any other twentieth-century poet.

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