palaces removed from their original European setting and rebuilt in
the *Traumreich*—and its destruction also fit into the pattern. In fact,
Eliot's "Song (for the Opherion)" in the miscellaneous leaves reads in
part like a lyrical digest of this terrifying book.

Few poets could be farther removed than Eliot from the strain of
nature poetry which had set the pattern for poetry in England through­
out the nineteenth century. Even when he uses natural imagery, it
bears the stamp of human hands; his roses and hyacinths are decorously
rooted in garden beds and bowls, and his woods are not English forests
but sacrificial groves. \* \* \* The modern city, as the concentrated
pool of barren humanity, is where he prefers to lay his scene; it was
left to him finally and decisively to reverse the ecstatic picture of Lon­
don which Wordsworth impressed on generations of English school­
children. In achieving this feat, he takes his place in the Symbolist
tradition which had already bred outstanding city poets in France, Bel­
gium, and Germany, to name but a few nations that witnessed poetry's
retreat from Nature and its subsequent entrance on the urban scene,
and which attained one of its high-water marks with the publication of
*The Waste Land*. In this poem the city is, in a sense, "the most im­
portant personage... uniting all the rest". The early poetry can (much
simplified) be said to describe the human condition in the modern city;
in *The Waste Land* the human condition and the modern city are one.
The later poems distance themselves from this vision, leaving the urban
setting as the sombre background to man's struggle to attain the Eternal.

A. D. MOODY

A Cure for a Crisis of Civilisation?†

'Shantih' thrice repeated is a strange ending to a poem so ambitious to
reform the mind in its own language. Whatever might be 'our equiv­
alent', those words to most of us must be quite meaningless. If we recall
that Hieronymo used strange tongues to mask his true intent, we may
suspect that the Sanskrit is meant not to be readily understood. Its plain
meaning may be just that it does pass beyond what we are likely to

7. Another of the unfinished, fragmentary pieces Eliot once thought of as potential parts of *The
Waste Land* [Editor].
Nineteenth Century English Poetry* (New York, 1956), pp. 554 ff., where Eliot is upbraided
for being "insensible" to natural beauty, and James G. Southworth in *Sowing the Spring* (New
York, 1949), p. 91. Rather unexpectedly, John Senior argues—on the basis of his study on the
sense of time in various literary works—that "the poet Eliot most resembles... is Wordsworth"
[p. 171].
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Press. All notes are by the editor of this Norton Critical Edition.
think and say. Its deeper meaning may be set dead against our likely turn of mind. In fact the ready way so many readers have taken to the poem makes me wonder if it has been seen for what it is. To most of us, in our customary minds and ways of life, it must be radically subversive. If it appears to confirm some of our ideas and emotions, it probably does so in a way we never meant.

This may become clear if we consider how The Waste Land is at once the fulfilment and the contradiction of the romantic tradition in English poetry. The wanting to cease to suffer, and to be at peace, pensive peace, is a main characteristic of the line of poetry which descends from Milton down to Arnold, to go no further. Il Penseroso and Lycidas are the obvious beginnings, but it is as much a motive in the major poems. Milton’s paradise is on the verge of eighteenth-century pastoral, and shades as easily towards the tranquil evening scene. The closing departure from Eden, resolving loss into sad harmony, completes the transposition of the epic ‘tale of the tribe’ into terms and feelings near to those of Gray’s Elegy. At the end of Samson Agonistes we find the key terms for an age of poetry:

His servants he with new acquist
Of true experience from this great event
With peace and consolation hath dismiss,
And calm of mind all passion spent.

The endings of Hamlet and Lear leave us lucidly facing what is beyond ordinary endurance. But in this later form of catharsis there is not that gathering up of agonising reality into an intelligible whole, nor the deepening of our capacity for experience. Rather there is a dissolving of the burden of existence in the comfort of ceasing to suffer. Submission, consolation, calm, and above all freedom from troubling passion, these are the states cultivated by all but the greatest poetry in the eighteenth century.

Gray’s melancholy musings upon mortality are a way of reconciling his sensitive soul to its failure to cope with the world; and his attitude in death—’Here rests his head upon the lap of earth’—is the one he had taken up in life. Even Johnson, who mocked the illusions of pastoral paradises, and for whom melancholy was a black dog to be fought off, could end The Vanity of Human Wishes with a prayer in the manner of the minor verse of the time

for a healthful mind,
Obedient passions, and a will resign’d;
For love, which scarce collective man can fill;
For patience sov’reign o’er transmuted ill . . .

The last line can be connected with ‘What the Thunder Said’; yet the quality of feeling is nearer to Cowper, ‘a stricken deer that left the herd
... To seek a tranquil death in distant shades'. That this form of mind was not abnormal, but was the dominant one, is demonstrated by Richardson’s Clarissa. Surely the most representative literary work of its age, and the one with the best claim to be regarded as its epic, it is at once the complete expression of the Christian-romantic sensibility founded upon Milton, and itself the determining form for the emotional and moral structure of the English novel down to James’ The Wings of the Dove and Conrad’s Victory.

Wordsworth gave a new strength and substance to the sensibility in poetry which he inherited, by developing the interest in the self and world which were to be harmonised. He did not want simply to escape the world that is too much with us, but to recompose a universe of being within the imagination. His tranquil mood is one

In which the burthen of the mystery,
In which the heavy and the weary weight
Of all this unintelligible world,
Is lightened;—that serene and blessed mood,
In which the affections gently lead us on,—
Until, the breath of this corporeal frame
And even the motion of our human blood
Almost suspended, we are laid asleep
In body, and become a living soul:
While with an eye made quiet by the power
Of harmony, and the deep power of joy,
We see into the life of things.¹

¹ 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...² That is Eliot, of course, and it suggests the profound correspondence, which goes with the profound difference, between his use of poetry and Wordsworth’s.

Arnold, at the moment when English romanticism was about to fall into decadence, has the special interest of being both an example of its weakness, and its diagnostician. His poetry, saturated with unresolved longing to be at peace within himself and with his world, resumes much of the elegiac verse of the preceding two hundred years. His Scholar Gipsy is in a direct line of descent from Milton through Gray and Keats. But Arnold felt how near the consolations of ‘Sad Patience’ could be to despair. He accepted with Wordsworth that the poet’s work was to master his oppressive world in vision; and he saw that the melancholy which haunted his own and so much romantic poetry came

¹ “Lines Written a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey” (1798), ll. 39–49.
² From “Poetry and Drama” (1951), included in On Poetry and Poets (1957), p. 87.
A Cure for a Crisis of Civilisation?

from a failure to see modern life clearly and to see it whole. When Eliot called Tennyson the great master of melancholia, and associated him with Virgil as Dante saw him, ‘among the Great in Limbo’, he could have been applying ‘On the Modern Element in Literature’ to the representative poet of Arnold’s own time. Tennyson’s doubt and despair made him ‘the most instinctive rebel against [his] society’, in Eliot’s view; but he ‘turned aside from the journey through the dark night’, and became ‘the most perfect conformist’—Tennyson seems to have reached the end of his spiritual development with In Memoriam; there followed no reconciliation, no resolution.”

That, I should think, places him with Gerontion.

The romantic poets did not know enough, according to Arnold. To Eliot the graver defect was that they did not feel enough. Tennyson should have felt the anguish of spirit in his busy world ‘as immediately as the odour of a rose’. Arnold, thinking it ‘an advantage to a poet to deal with a beautiful world’, did not penetrate beneath both beauty and ugliness to ‘the vision of the horror and the glory’. He did not comprehend that the new conditions of life required ‘a new discipline of suffering’. Eliot might have thought the same of Wordsworth’s always connecting wisdom with gentleness, serenity, tranquillity. It was because he had ‘no ghastly shadows at his back, no Eumenides to pursue him, that he went droning on the still sad music of infirmity’. In general, from his point of view, the romantic poets had consoled themselves with melancholy ruminations, when only keen and intense suffering could have saved them. They were at once weary of the world and resigned to it; if they could not master it spiritually, they would have been better broken or mined. They should have suffered more, instead of wishing not to suffer.

The Waste Land put an end to English romanticism by taking absolutely seriously the feelings it had soothed. Poets had listened to nightingales and been sad, or ‘half in love with easeful death’: Eliot meant to live the reality behind the myth. Arnold had found in Dante’s la sua volontade è nostra pace a touchstone of peace and consolation: Eliot set himself to practise the stern discipline of feeling which might bring him to that condition. What he found in the Vita Nuova was a practical sense of realities; and his anti-romanticism consisted in putting romantic feelings into practice. The oppression of the alien world, the withdrawal into the wilderness, the ecstasy of love sharpening the grief of loss: these were afflictions to be cultivated, once they were perceived

3. From “In Memoriam” (1936), included in Essays Ancient and Modern (1936).
4. From the chapter on Matthew Arnold in The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism (1933).
5. “And in His will is our peace” (Italian), Paradiso, Canto 3. The Vita Nuova (literally “The New Life”) is an autobiographical prose piece by Dante with inset poems.
to be not the opposites of perfect peace, but the very way to attain it. This was to fulfill the romantic tradition, but critically, as Christ's death fulfilled the hopes of the Old Testament.

Yet its readers received the poem as if it were expressing the old weariness with the world and the old hopes for its renewal. Civilisation was breaking down but might be restored to its former glory; the sterile would become fertile; the sexually exhausted might be mystically revitalised. Eliot reflected in wry understatement: 'I may have expressed for them their own illusion of being disillusioned, but that did not form part of my intention.' What had happened appears to have struck him as oddly like the reception of In Memoriam—whatever the prevailing beliefs and illusions there is always the same wish to have them confirmed:

Apparently Tennyson's contemporaries, once they had accepted In Memoriam, regarded it as a message of hope and reassurance to their rather fading Christian faith. It happens now and then that a poet by some strange accident expresses the mood of his generation, at the same time that he is expressing a mood of his own which is quite remote from that of his generation.

Beyond question he had his own similar experience in mind. The rest of that essay expresses his conviction that the poet must not submit to the mood or mind of his generation. When his poetry and criticism after The Waste Land made explicit how remote in feeling he was from most of his readers, there was a defensive tendency to find that he had betrayed his own real convictions as well as theirs. It is hard to accept that the poet who is using our language greatly is using it for purposes alien to us. Yet the simple truth of the matter is that Eliot had been working from the start for another world than the one men and women make up together.

The cause of the general misapprehension could be that modern readers, like romantic poets, do not feel enough. Certainly we hear the music of feeling—it is what most of us first respond to. But when we come to think and talk about the poem we put the music in the background, and ask 'what does the poem mean?' When we would be serious we grow rational, and regard feelings as less real than ideas and opinions. Yet the profound and original life of the poetry, which is the life of feeling, is all in its music. To neglect that is to miss the essential action, the patient dying in order to pass beyond death.

He was so conscious of what, for him, poetry was for, that he could not altogether see it for what it is. And I am not sure that he was

7. From "In Memoriam."
highly sensitive to the musical qualities of verse. His own occasional bad lapses arouse the suspicion; and so far as I can recollect he never emphasises this virtue of poetic style, this fundamental, in his criticism. What I call the 'auditory imagination' is the feeling for syllable and rhythm, penetrating far below the conscious levels of thought and feeling, invigorating every word; sinking to the most primitive and forgotten, returning to the origin and bringing something back, seeking the beginning and the end. It works through meanings, certainly, or not without meanings in the ordinary sense, and fuses the old and the obliterated and the trite, the current and the new and surprising, the most ancient and the most civilised mentality. Arnold's notion of 'life', in his account of poetry, does not perhaps go deep enough. 8

The last remark should make us realise, if we had not already been aware, that throughout the passage Eliot is talking of poetry and life as one thing. What he would remind us of is what Aristotle noted about the rites at Eleusis, that 'the initiated do not learn anything, so much as feel certain emotions, and are put into a certain frame of mind'. In spite of that, if published criticism is fair evidence of our more advanced reading habits, we mainly strive to be dull heads and dry brains. A superabundance of commentary and interpretation prevents the direct experience of the word in the ear. The critiques of the myth and the studies of the sources have perhaps seen as far as Tiresias, but no further. All our information and interpretation is vain unless it is caught up into the immediate, musical experience which carries us quite beyond it.

Eliot's interest in myth, old story and ancient ritual, was not for the sake of pure learning. It was intelligently practical: he wanted a *rite de passage* that would work. The ancient forms, as dug up and pieced together by scholarship, could not be revived. For the modern world a new form had to be found; and Eliot, in his poetry, did what he could. *If From Ritual to Romance* does elucidate the poem, it is less by glossing allusions, than by reminding us what kind of a poem it would be: a way of passing through death to a new life.

But is it a valid rite, will it work, for the civilisation of Europe in our time? It is a rite, I think, for the dying and the dead. There are other rites for the living, as that of Eleusis, 9 which enacted the love that sustains the vital universe. The discerning reader of Lévi-Strauss and of Ezra Pound will know that that is neither 'primitive' nor superseded. The rite of *The Waste Land* is one to save the self alone from an alien

8. From the Arnold chapter in *Use of Poetry*.
9. The rites at Eleusis, in ancient Greece, were mysterious initiation rituals. Pound believed that "a light from Eleusis persisted throughout the middle ages and set beauty in the song of Provence and of Italy" ("Credo," 1930).
world. The poet's negative relations, with his fellows and with his beloved, are improved only by being made nearly absolute, so that whatever is other (and therefore unreal) may be annihilated in the supreme I AM. There is no impulse towards a renewal of human love, and no energy is generated for that. Even less is there a movement toward a human city or civilisation. In short, this is the rite of Eliot's Saint Narcissus. Thus to act out love's negatives may be indeed a necessary and inescapable phase, especially in a world that does not live by love. In such a world as ours to save even oneself takes courage, even heroism, and Eliot's poetry shows him to have had enough for that. But the heroism of *The Waste Land* is of the kind which would end the human world, not give new life to it.

**RONALD BUSH**

**Unknown Terror and Mystery†**

On the evidence of the manuscripts collected by Valerie Eliot, "The Fire Sermon" was the first full movement of *The Waste Land* Eliot attempted.† Out of the fragments he had been collecting since 1914, at Margate Eliot chose a passage already several years old as a starting point:

> London, the swarming life you kill and breed,
> Huddled between the concrete and the sky,
> Responsive to the momentary need,
> Vibrates unconscious to its formal destiny,

> Knowing neither how to think, nor how to feel,
> But lives in the awareness of the observing eye.
> Phantasmal gnomes, burrowing in brick and stone and steel!
> Some minds, aberrant from the normal equipoise
> (London, your people is bound upon the wheel!)
> Record the motions of these pavement toys
> And trace the cryptograms that may be curled

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