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Łódź

**"AN EASY COMMERCE OF THE OLD AND THE NEW"
THE SYMBOLIST ROOTS OF ANTI-RHETORIC,
MOCK-SENTIMENTALISM AND UNEASY
ROMANTICISM IN T. S. ELIOT'S POETRY**

In the closing section of *Sylvie*, Gérard de Nerval, a translator of Goethe and a poet suspended between the romantic period he lives in and the symbolist movement he foreshadows, implores his readers to forgive him his "style vieilli" (624), his outdated style. Followed by the narrator's perception of himself as an unfashionable figure *à la* Werther, Nerval's remark suggests a need for the new in a literature increasingly tired of romanticism. When in "Épitaphe" another French symbolist Corbière says of a poet that "Ses vers faux furent ses seuls vrais" (29), that his false verse was in fact truthful and genuine, it is obviously his own work that he has in mind. He thus argues for poetry which cannot be read *à la lettre*, which is by nature *à rebours*: rebellious, unconventional poetry, which the line "C'est le *vers solitaire*" (96) from "À un Juvénal de lait" so aptly describes. Corbière's "solitary verse" is *par excellence* contrary, and it is largely through the use of irony that this contrariness is achieved. Another poem from *Les Amours jaunes*, "I Sonnet", is a manifesto of the new poetry, anti-romantic, anti-verbose and anti-rhetorical, free from rules and conventions. The poem is an ironic depiction of how one goes about writing a sonnet. The very subtitles - "avec la manière de s'en servir" and "*Réglons notre papier et formons bien nos lettres*" (Corbière 39) - suggest a set of instructions, as if the poem were a set of technical instructions, devoid of artistic loftiness. Corbière describes his poetry as "vers filés à la main" (39), handmade poems, as if he were

talking about manufacturing. He goes on to compare the sonnet's metre and rhythm to a troop of soldiers. Other modern analogies – to railway tracks and the telegraph – seem to imply that rigid forms should be abolished as *passé* and that new times require new poetry. It is a mathematical formula, not a literary work, that Corbière devises when he concludes:

Je pose 4 et 4 = 8! Alors je procède,
En posant 3 et 3! – Tenons Pégase raide:
«Ô lyre! Ô délire! Ô ...» – Sonnet – Attenyion! (40)

Pegasus, the symbol of poetic inspiration, is thus to be controlled. On the one hand, the novel poetry means a rejection of established forms; on the other, a rejection of the romantic notions of inspiration and emotionalism by a poet who “*dédaigna de geindre*” (97), who mistrusts conventional lyrical poetry with its effusive and plaintive tone and is “*honteux de mon émotion*” (102). The modern attitude to poetry is supposed to be cold and clinical: it is the approach of the rational, pragmatic scientist rather than the inspired, exalted poet that Corbière postulates.

In his restrained, matter-of-fact stance, Corbière approximates Eliot, whose tendency to talk about poetry in scientific terms is manifested in his critical writings, the best-known example being the passage from “Tradition and the Individual Talent”:

The analogy was that of the catalyst. When the two gases previously mentioned are mixed in the presence of a filament of platinum, they form sulphurous acid. This combination takes place only if the platinum is present; nevertheless the newly formed acid contains no trace of platinum, and the platinum itself is apparently unaffected; has remained inert, neutral, and unchanged. The mind of the poet is the 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 mind which creates; the more perfectly will the mind digest and transmute the passions which are its material. (Sacred Wood 54)

One unfamiliar with Eliot's *œuvre* might mistake the above extract for a fragment from a chemical journal, and the analysis of the poetic process it contains for a report on a technological procedure. Importantly,

the passage has enormous relevance to what is considered the essence of Eliot's contribution to twentieth-century literature: a conception of the poem as a depersonalised construct, detached and self-contained, and hardly associable with the author's biography or the contents of his psyche. It is, on a larger scale, an argument for poetry which shuns grandiloquence and verbiage, direct expression of feelings, especially love and suffering, pompousness and emotionality underlain by vacuity and meaninglessness. Verse as conceived of by Eliot is meant to be devoid of pretentious artificiality, of language whose showy, elaborate nature fails to make up for the lack of clear ideas and sincere emotions. Stripped-down, indirect and ironic, poetry as understood by Eliot counters rhetoric, sentimentalism and the romantic legacy. Much of Eliot's imagery and technique, with the poet's particular focus on novel themes and language, poetic impersonality, suggestiveness and abstraction, seems to be devised with the above-mentioned poetic ideal in mind. Numerous examples of irony, contrast and mock-sentimental diction and images may be found in Eliot's poetry: it seems pointless to recapitulate them all in this essay. It is, however, worthwhile to set Eliot's irony and mock-sentimentalism against the background of French symbolism, the original source of anti-romantic, anti-rhetorical discontent, without which Eliot's "new" poetry might not have come into being.

The parallel preoccupations stem undoubtedly from a similar attitude to the notion of poetic tradition. For both Eliot and the symbolists, the poet does not exist in one time frame only: he always has to measure himself against the past, the present and the future. The poet-protagonist of Baudelaire's "Bénédiction" declares "il faut pour tresser ma couronne mystique Imposer tous les temps et tous les univers" (l: 9). By speaking of the poet's mystic wreath in which all the epochs and all realms are interwoven, the author of *Les Fleurs du mal* puts forward a concept of tradition which is non-temporal, in which the past and the present constantly merge and are rearranged. This conception is further elaborated in another Baudelaire poem, "Les Phares". The eponymous beacons are the great artists of former times: Rubens, Leonardo da Vinci, Rembrandt, Michelangelo, Puget, Watteau, Goya, Delacroix and Weber. Though dead, these masters are not a thing of the past: like the lighthouses they are compared to, they emit an ever-glowing light. Through their artistic contribution, they belong to the present which is nourished and fuelled by their vision: theirs is a cry repeated by a thousand sentinels, "un cri répété par mille sentinelles", and "un phare allu-

mé sur mille citadelles" (1:14), a beacon lit on a thousand citadels. The poem's closing lines express an Eliotesque view of tradition as a continuum of great artists: mobile, ever-growing, culminating in a present which acquires shape by responding to echoes of the past. It is the ultimate testimony to human dignity and greatness, a source of ecstasy transcending temporal as well as national borders, and enabling mortals to touch eternity. Tradition forms a maze, an elaborately connected system of echoes and correspondences, of influences and responses, which is never permanent and never conclusive, but *par excellence* open-ended and mutable. In this context, it is clear why the visionary speaker of Rimbaud's "Vies" presents himself as a reformer of art. What entitles him to such a conception of his role is his sense of tradition and how it should be continued: "j'ai eu une scène où jouer les chefs-d'œuvres dramatiques de toutes les littératures. Je vous indiquerais les richesses inouïes. J'observe l'histoire des trésors que vous trouvâtes. Je vois la suite!" (212). Having seen the dramatic masterpieces of all literatures performed before his eyes, the narrator is able to locate unheard-of riches, to observe the history of treasures found by others and to imagine the continuation. Like Eliot and Corbière, Rimbaud compares himself to a scientist, an inventor more deserving than his predecessors, a musician who has found the clef of love, the poetic and spiritual Absolute: "Je suis un inventeur bien autrement méritant que tous ceux qui m'ont précédé; un musicien même, qui ai trouvé quelque chose comme la clef de l'amour" (212).

It is thus hardly surprising that the speaker of Corbière's "Un jeune qui s'en va", a young poet on the brink of death, ponders the notion of poetic immortality and the great poets of the past: "À moi le pompon d'immortelle / Des grands poètes que j'ai lus!" (53). His reflection on how his eminent predecessors lived and died and on their work is ultimately a reflection on poetic tradition, and an analogy with Eliot inevitably comes to mind. Corbière's attitude to past masters is not one of glowing praise and uncritical admiration: on the contrary, he often speaks of them with irony. The great French romantic Alphonse de Lamartine is dismissed as a "Doux bedeau", a "pleureuse en lévite", an "*Harmonieux* tronc des moissonnés", an "Inventeur de la *larme écrite*" and a "Lacrymatoire d'abonnés" (54), the lengthy series of similes likening him to, respectively, a "gentle beadle", a "weeper in a frock coat", a "harmonious collection box for the dead", the "inventor of the written tear" and a "reservoir of tears for subscribers". Victor Hugo, commonly re-

garded as France's greatest national poet, is referred to as the "gardenational épique" (54), an "epic member of the national guard". Only Byron is treated somewhat more gently, in a stanza which humorously captures his demoniac character as well as the nature of his art:

Lord Byron, gentleman-vampire,
Hystérique du ténébreux;
Anglais sec, cassé par son rire,
Son noble rire de lépreux (54).

Given Corbière's overall attitude to romanticism, the speaker's ironic distance to the poets in question is hardly surprising. His irreverence does not, however, mean that he rejects tradition altogether. What the author of *Les Amours jaunes* seems to advocate is rather that tradition gives one scope for polemic: instead of cultivating blind adulation for the poets whose work he was brought up to admire, the French poet suggests looking at them critically and treating this criticism as a starting point for the creation of new poetry. Thus, he makes a point which echoes the view expressed by Eliot in "Tradition and the Individual Talent". It is view of tradition as an organic continuum rather than an immobile monolith, which ought to be subject to continuous scrutiny and constant rearrangement:

Tradition is a matter of much wider significance. It cannot be inherited, and if you want it you must obtain it by great labour. It involves, in the first place, the historical sense, which we may call nearly indispensable to anyone who would continue to be a poet beyond his twenty-fifth year; and the historical sense involves a perception, not only of the pastness of the past, but of its presence; the historical sense compels a man to write not merely with his own generation in his bones, but with a feeling that the whole of the literature of Europe from Homer and within it the whole of the literature of his own country has a simultaneous existence and composes a simultaneous order. This historical sense, which is a sense of the timeless as well as of the temporal and of the timeless and of the temporal together, is what makes a writer traditional. And it is at same time what makes a writer most acutely conscious of his place in time, of his contemporaneity (Eliot, *Sacred Wood* 53).

At the end of the string of poets he mentions, Corbière's speaker sees: "un tas d'amants de la lune, /Guère plus morts qu'ils n'ont vécu" (54). The emblematic "amants de la lune", "lunar lovers", "changeant de fosse commune /Sans un discours, sans un écu" (54), apparently represent the post-romantic, prematurely dead and unappreciated *poètes maudits*: it is thus with the likes of himself that the French symbolist closes his chain-like evocation of poetic tradition. He is thus aware of what Eliot calls in his essay "the importance of the relation of the poem to other poems by other authors" (*Sacred Wood* 53) and shares Eliot's "conception of poetry as a living whole of all the poetry that has ever been written" (53). Eliot points out that the interrelationships between the past and the present are two-way:

Whoever has approved this idea of order, of the form of European, of English literature, will not find it preposterous that the past should be altered by the present as much as the present is directed by the past. And the poet who is aware of this will be aware of great difficulties and responsibilities (50).

Corbière is precisely such a poet.

How the procedure works in practice is shown in several Corbière poems. In nearly postmodernist fashion, the poet of *Les Amours jaunes* incorporates into "La fin" a fragment from Hugo's poem "Oceano nox" dealing with the same theme: that of the sea and seamen. The aim is to showcase the difference between romantic poetry as represented by his celebrated predecessor and the "new" verse Corbière argues for. The symbolist's treatment of the theme is more "masculine," brusque and straightforward, as opposed to the romantic's gentle, sentimental and plaintive tone. The "new" language is strong, to the point and colloquial, adjusted to the content through the use of marine terminology, while Hugo employs elevated diction, full of pathos and exclamations. Not only does Corbière quote three stanzas by Hugo at the beginning of "La fin," but he also inserts phrases or specific motifs from his predecessor's poem into his own in order to depoetise them and deromanticise his own verse. Corbière counters Hugo's pathos with his own stoicism. In a reversal of roles, the author of *Les Amours jaunes* corrects, in a teacher-like manner and with a dose of almost contemptuous irony, the vocabulary of his romantic predecessor, the acknowledged teacher of generations of French poets. The symbolist criticises the feeble, inadequate

vocabulary employed by Hugo and testifying to insufficient knowledge of the sea and lack of first-hand experience. It is not merely the use of different idioms that the younger poet postulates. What he advocates is poetry which shows the reality, harsh as it might be, as opposed to its idealisation found in polished romantic verse. The "Vieux fantôme éventé" (197) mentioned in the poem might be the stale ghost of nineteenth-century poetry. "Ô poète, gardez pour vous vos chants d'aveugle" (198), Corbière advises Hugo in the poem's conclusion, suggesting the author of "Oceano nox" should keep his blind man's chants to himself and ironically exploiting a phrase taken from Hugo's own poem. The contrast between two poetic modes which constitutes the essence of "La fin" is emblematic of the overall critical attitude to one's predecessors' œuvre recommended by the symbolist poet.

In a similar vein, Corbière deals with another giant of French romantic literature, Lamartine. One of the "Italian" poems, in *Les Amours jaunes* "Le Fils de Lamartine et de Graziella," is a mock-romantic variation on *Graziella*, an "Italian" poem by his romantic predecessor. The setting of Lamartine's work is pitilessly exploited and, by extension, romantic literature, which favours the Italian scenery, is mocked as well. The Bay of Naples and romantic poetry ironically merge as "la mer de Sorrente / Scande un flot hexamètre à la fleur d'oranger" (120). The music of the waves complies with the rhythm of the hexameter, whose equivalent in French poetry is the alexandrine, the standard meter of French verse since the sixteenth century, used and transformed by romantic poets, notably Hugo. The scene takes place under the auspices of orange blossom, the symbol of chastity and a flower which romantic literature typically associates with Italy. Against this idyllic background, the locals tap tourists, picturesquely commenting on the attractions of the place and referring to the author of *Graziella* and the romantic heritage. In a typically symbolist manner - that is, indirectly - Corbière expresses his view on Lamartine's poetry: the French female tourist is "confite en Lamartine" (120), and the expression likens the eminent romantic's verse to candied fruit, thus dismissing it as sweet and sentimental. The guide, a cunning local peasant, is ironically referred to as the son of Lamartine and Graziella, the eponymous Italian heroine of Lamartine's poem. Thus, Graziella's virginity, extolled by the French romantic, is ironically questioned by Corbière. For Corbière, the heroine's dubious chastity is, obviously, only a means of mocking romantic idealism and opposing it to prosaic reality, just as he mocks the lofty, plain-

tive tone of Lamartine's verse, compared to "chants de sacristain" (121), "a sexton's chants". As in "La fin", the symbolist depoetises romanticism, which he sees as an unrealistic, purely literary construct, "pêchée au fond d'un écritoire" (122), detached from life. Lamartine's feeble verse is not forceful enough, not "male" enough: Corbière ironically points out that the Italian guide is Lamartine's "seule œuvre mâle" (122), his "only masculine work". Unsurprisingly, the orange blossom is degraded: "Le Poète-apothicaire en a fait sa tisane: / Remède à vers! remède à pleurs!" (121). As the flower becomes an ingredient of herbal tea, Corbière postulates new poetry, strong and sardonic, where there would be no place for complaining and no fear of the low, the vulgar, the down-to-earth. Dismissing the floral emblem, the author of *Les Amours jaunes* discounts the outdated notions of purity, virginity, platonic love and the Immaculate Conception, not because he resents them per se, but because they stand for what he loathes about the poetic legacy of the early nineteenth century. Even the romantic concept of inspiration, referred to as "la grâce divine" (122), divine grace, is ironically rejected. The poetry Corbière wants should be different: it is for this reason that the herbal remedy mentioned in "Le Fils de Lamartine et de Graziella" is, ultimately, a remedy for weeping as well as a remedy for verse.

Corbière's poem "ÇA?" which opens *Les Amours jaunes*, is at the same time a manifesto of new poetry. It is no longer "pretty", polished, conventional, but focuses on novel topics, with the ugly and the disgusting embraced by a poet of whom one might say that "Son goût était dans le dégoût" (30), he had a taste for the distasteful. It is poetry for whose repulsiveness and vulgarity the poet has to apologise, as Corbière ironically does at the end of "Déjeuner de soleil": "Peu poli. - Pardon" (115). It is poetry from which the banal is banished due to Corbière's "peur du plat" (29), fear of platitude. Its tone - colloquial, rough and impertinent - marks the beginning of an attack on rhetoric. The poem's dynamic rhythm and its brusque, telegraphic style, with nearly every line constituting a short-question-short-retort sequence, contribute to the overall effect. The very title is an ironic, dismissive statement on Corbière's poetic art: his seeming inability to define or classify his verse, referred to as an insignificant "this", expresses the poet's distance to his *œuvre*, fuelled by his fear of pathos. The French poet's distance to his own art is, at the same time, a distance to rhetoric, verbosity and overtly expressed emotion. In another Corbière's poem, "Paris", poetry is further dismissed: "On est essayeur, pédicure, / Ou quelqu'autre chose dans

l'art!" (24). Poetry being thus reduced to pedicure is characteristic of Corbière's tendency to cynically find a common denominator for phenomena which occupy very distant positions in traditional hierarchies of values. This lowest-common-denominator approach results in ideals being shattered and nothing being sacred any more. Corbière's iconoclastic attitude is both the cause and the result of his irony. On the one hand, the poet's lack, or seeming lack, of respect for something leads to it being treated ironically; on the other, his fear of not achieving the thing he wants or a desire to mask the importance he attaches to something prompt him to speak of it ironically. He achieves ironic distance and manages, at least partly, to convince himself and the reader that the object of such a treatment is worthless and insignificant. Thus, the speaker of "Paris" urges the poem's prota-gonist - his *alter ego* - to slander love, thereby diminishing it and protecting himself from pain. The aim of irony is to kill the pain, to help pretend that one is not too deeply hurt: "Et je ris... parce que ça me fait un peu mal" (70), the speaker of "Le poète contumace" explains. For Corbière, ironic laughter becomes a mask, which allows his speakers to, simultaneously, achieve distance and conceal suffering.

The author of *Les Amours jaunes* might be dismissive of Hugo and Lamartine, but the fact remains that he arrives at his own concept of poetry largely by measuring himself against the romantic heritage. His poetic practice confirms the view expressed by Eliot in "Tradition and the Individual Talent", the following excerpt from which has striking relevance to the Corbière poems discussed above:

No poet, no artist of any art, has his complete meaning alone. His significance, his appreciation is the appreciation of his relation to the dead poets and artists. You cannot value him alone; you must set him, for contrast and comparison, among the dead. (...) The necessity that he shall conform, that he shall cohere, is not onesided; what happens when a new work of art is created is something that happens simultaneously to all the works of art which preceded it. The existing monuments form an ideal order among themselves, which is modified by the introduction of the new (the really new) work of art among them. (*Sacred Wood* 50)

The fragment is significant not only because it is here that Eliot makes his most decisive statement on the question of tradition, but also

because it points to a contradiction central to his poetic *œuvre*. On the one hand, there is the urge to introduce "the new"; on the other, the need to "conform" and "cohere", combined with the profound belief that even "the really new" cannot exist in a literary and artistic vacuum. In being thus suspended between reverence for tradition and a tendency to depart from it, Eliot joins not only other exponents of high modernism, such as Ezra Pound, but also the French poets he is indebted to. Despite their innovative inclinations, both the modernists and the symbolists realise that "the past should be altered by the present as much as the present is directed by the past" (50), that even for the most rebellious artist a sense of tradition and belonging is inescapable. The "new" poet might turn to his literary heritage for support and inspiration, as Eliot does to French symbolism, or "for contrast and comparison", a motivation which characterises the way modernists and symbolists relate to romanticism. The really valuable poetry, it seems, comes into being at the intersection of tradition and novelty, and poetic innovation is never uncontextualised.

It is commonly believed that Eliot is the perfect exemplar of poetic classicism, a view to which he contributed by famously referring to himself as a "classicist in literature, royalist in politics, and anglo-catholic in religion" (qtd. in Baym 1369). Yet this classicist is the one who changed the face of contemporary poetry, one of the prime instigators of the modernist revolution and a keen proponent of poetic experimentation. This classicist is nowadays regarded as *par excellence* modern by such renowned critics as Marjorie Perloff, who refers to the poet of "Pruf-rock" as an *avant-gardist* even by early-twenty-first-century standards, and associates him with the Language poets of the 1980s (21st Century 7-43). Studying entries on Eliot in various critical sources, one almost has the feeling that they in fact deal with two different poets. This impression of a split literary identity is partly clarified by the customary division of his *œuvre* into the pre- and post-conversion phases, the innovative nature of the initial works being linked with the influence of French symbolism. However, the above-mentioned distinctions are not always clear-cut, just as the affinities between Eliot and the symbolist school are not limited to the output of his early years. Moreover, the very question of literary influence further complicates the issue: Eliot is, paradoxically, a poetic innovator renowned for his allusive practice and his preoccupation with tradition.

Nowhere do these contradictions come to light more prominently than in a discussion of Eliot's approach to romanticism. The adjective *anti-romantic* is commonly applied to the author of *The Waste Land*, to the bitter, ironic vision of the world which dominates much of his work and to his doctrine of objective, impersonal poetry. Upon closer analysis, however, it turns out that this classification might also be questioned as too simplistic. It would be a mistake to label Eliot a classicist pure and simple, just as it would be unthinkable to categorise him simply as a romantic. Infinitely more complex, the truth about Eliot lies in between, and is inextricably linked with the previously discussed concept of poetic tradition. The latter, the Anglo-American poet argues, is always relative and open-ended, subject to incessant rearrangement and revaluation:

The existing order is complete before the new work arrives; for order to persist after the supervention of novelty, the *whole* existing order must be, if ever so slightly, altered; and so the relations, proportions, values of each work of art toward the whole are readjusted; and this is conformity between the old and the new (*Sacred Wood* 50).

The explanation for the contradictory nature of Eliot's poetry might perhaps be found in applying the above theory to our understanding of classicism, romanticism and symbolism, and viewing them not as separate entities but rather, in an Eliotesque vein, as the constituents of a historical and literary continuum, organic and ever-changing.

To understand the complexity of Eliot's relationship with the romantic legacy, it is again advisable to refer to French symbolism. In this respect, particularly useful is Baudelaire's preoccupation with the same notion. It must be remembered that the author of *Les Fleurs du mal* started out as a fervent admirer of romantic poetry. Despite the poetic revolution he instigated, the father of symbolism was far from cutting himself off from the literary and artistic phenomena which dominated the first half of the nineteenth century. This somewhat paradoxical situation is paralleled by the fact that another precursor of the symbolist school, Nerval, had strong connections with romanticism: a translator of Goethe and a close friend of Heinrich Heine, it is frequently as a romantic that the author of *Aurélia* is classified in literary histories. Importantly, the smoothness of the passage between the two seemingly opposed literary movements is pointed out by Baudelaire himself. "Qui dit romantisme dit art moderne" (2: 421), declares the high priest of symbolism in his essay "Qu'est-ce que le romantisme?": to him, modernity,

whose beginning in literature, according to many, coincides with the advent of symbolist verse, starts with romanticism. Yet despite all his enthusiasm, the French poet is painfully aware of the fact that it is a romantic sunset rather than the dawn of the movement that he is witnessing, as is confirmed in "Le Coucher du soleil romantique". Permeated by a nostalgia for the vanishing greatness of romantic literature, the sonnet reveals Baudelaire's abhorrence at the upcoming realist movement, which cannot be resisted: "Mais je poursuis en vain le Dieu qui se retire; /L'irrésistible Nuit établit son empire" (l: 149). Realising the inevitability of the loss, the speaker of "Le Coucher" wishes to capture the last rays of the romantic sun: "Courons vers l'horizon, il est tard, courons vite, /Pour attraper au moins un oblique rayon!" (l: 149). Underlying the narrator's determination is Baudelaire's belief in the permanent values inherent in the romantic heritage, which ought to be cherished and preserved.

In the light of the overall evolution of Eliot's *œuvre*, it might be argued that the elusive, indefinable nature of his attitude to romanticism, which largely determines the shape of his poetry, results from the fact that in his case criticism and contrast are not tantamount to rejection. In Eliot, the classicist and the romantic coexist and do battle. On the one hand, we have to do with the poet's vision of conflicts and tensions, reflecting the crisis of confidence which marks the moral and spiritual condition of modern civilisation. On the other, there is the supreme longing for order and harmony in the world. The former tendency strikes one as a distant echo of the romantic upheaval, while the latter brings to mind the classical sense of balance and proportion. The result is a biopolar, multilayered poetry, underlain by a quest for an ideal reconciliation of opposites and for universal perfection, the ultimate aim common to both Eliot and his symbolist predecessors.

Importantly, when we speak of romanticism in the context of both Eliot and the French symbolist poets, we frequently fail to realise the multifariousness and complexity of the term, stopping at the connotations it typically has. However, when we penetrate beyond the surface, we are surprised to discover that the opposition between romanticism and the famously anti-romantic symbolists and Eliot is not as sharp and clear-cut as we are led to believe. It seems that the movement which dominated literature in the first half of the nineteenth century has two facets, that it diverges as if into two parallel but distinct lines. On the one hand, there is, on the level of form, the tendency towards direct, spontaneous expression of feelings, towards mournful reflectiveness and self-indulgent

sentimentality. It is this explosion of subjectivism and outpouring emotionality, which, when it comes to form, translates itself into pompous wordiness, that Eliot and his symbolist predecessors wish to resist. On the other hand, however, there is a set of ontological and axiological beliefs which is behind the romantic attitude, and which, I would argue, is compatible with what both Eliot and his symbolist predecessors ultimately arrive at. Of these two aspects, only the former is taken into account when the anti-romantic tendencies of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century are discussed.

A review of the philosophical background of romanticism helps to prove the above point. The romantics are, it must be remembered, aware of being faced with a deep, multilayered reality, which defies rules and eludes the intellect: hence their tendency towards the irrational, the unknown and the unknowable. The primacy of intuition perceived as a means of delving beyond the tangible reality entails the search for symbolic equivalents of the spiritual. The romantic quest for an insight into the secret meaning of the universe results, on the one hand, in a marked interest in nature, and, on the other, a longing for transcendence. It also leads to the creation of polysemous symbols, which mediate between the two layers of reality, connecting the palpable with the ethereal. The romantic worldview is suspended between a sense of crisis and disorder, due to a rejection of the Enlightenment's optimistic faith in progress and the world's harmonious development, and a belief in the inner unity and parallelism of man and nature. Thus, it is in romantic thought that may be found the roots of the dilemma central to both Eliot's and the symbolists' *œuvre*: a sense of being trapped in the imperfect, the incoherent and the fragmentary, which spurs the urge to reach the transcendental, the perfect, the Absolute. In order to convey this complex, tragic condition of the modern man, the Anglo-American modernist and his French mentors opt for an art which is elusive, equivocal and suggestive, on the verge of esoterism. The symbolist-modernist concept of hermetic, evocative and apparently inaccessible poetry may therefore be traced back to the romantic view of verse as a means of decoding the secret symbolism of nature and transcending the tangible by attributing a perspective of symbolic infinity to each concrete element. Thus understood, poetry enters the realm of symbols and myths, turns into an instrument of cognition and comes to be identifiable with religion. The ideal of poetic universality and comprehensiveness emerges, inevitably accompanied by the poet's interest in the fantastic, the mystical and the infinite.

Similarly, the question of tradition, which preoccupied Eliot and the French symbolists to such an extent, harks back to early-nineteenth-century thought. The romantics believe the historical process to be fuelled by the spirit endlessly creating new forms: therefore, inherent in the process is a sense of continuity, which implies a connection between tradition and novelty, with the past and the present constantly interweaving. Romantic individualism precludes the cultural and literary tradition from remaining static and intact, prompting the urge to introduce originality and innovation. Thus, romanticism reassesses the cultural and literary heritage of its predecessors, distancing itself from the hitherto accepted classical models, the legacy of antiquity and the South, and turning towards the North, gothic literature, Shakespeare, oriental and biblical references: in short, towards literature which is perceived as symbolic, and thus able to reveal the secret meaning of being. It must not be forgotten that with the advent of romanticism starts an interest in popular, folk and primitive art, which incarnates the sentimental ideal of emotional sincerity, naturalness and simplicity. Many of the above-mentioned influences are traceable in Eliot's poetic output and in symbolist verse. The desire to "make it new" is as applicable to the romantics as it is to the symbolists and the modernists: it is the early nineteenth century that sees the dawn of tendencies such as the mingling of hitherto distinct genres and aesthetic categories and a penchant for fragmentariness and open-ended composition. It is, importantly, the romantic poets who first postulated the introduction of simple, everyday language into verse, thereby opposing the unauthentic, ossified character of the Age of Reason and rebelliously elevating the low and the common to the level of high culture and supreme art. The question which inevitably presents itself is why the symbolist school and the author of *The Waste Land* react so strongly against a movement whose key postulates might in fact be associated with their own. The answer lies perhaps in the previously discussed understanding of tradition: what was novel and even iconoclastic to the romantics is deemed insufficient by their successors. The inevitable relativity inscribed into Eliot's theory of tradition turns out to work in poetic practice.

Therefore, it is as if romanticism had to oppose classicism to be in turn questioned by the symbolists, who paved the way for the modernist revolution. All these movements and tendencies converge in Eliot, whose bitterness and disillusionment are not the end of the road, but merely a transitional stage. If the poet of *The Waste Land* is to be called a clas-

sicist, his is a classicism which knows better, enriched with bitter but precious knowledge and oriented towards the Absolute. The ultimate direction is thus the same as in romanticism, but it is arrived at via the ordeal of scepticism and despair. Observing the line that begins with romantic poetry and ends with Eliot, one cannot help thinking that in it yesterday's romantics are replaced by today's sceptics and cynics to pave the way for tomorrow's transcendentalists and mystics. The romantics' belief that no harmonious relationship is possible between the individual and society is combined with their conviction that there is a spiritual identity uniting man and the cosmos. This view resurfaces in Eliot's and the symbolists' overall tendency to move away from the artificial and towards the natural, and to replace the failed communication with one's fellow human beings by a communion with the Absolute and the divine, which ultimately enables human communion as well.

In this way, Baudelaire's statements from "Qu'est-ce que le romantisme?" that "le romantisme ne consistera pas dans une exécution parfaite, mais dans une conception analogue à la morale du siècle," and that romanticism is inextricably linked with "les aspects de la nature et les situations de l'homme" and is to be equated with "intimité, spiritualité, couleur, aspiration vers l'infini" (2: 421) turn out to be self-fulfilling prophecies. The form might be changed, but the basic moral views and ontological conceptions remain the same. Emotional naivety is rejected, and a more mature poetic and philosophical vision of the world is achieved. The "easy commerce of the old and the new" (Eliot, *Complete Poems* 144), combined, as the present dissertation sets out to prove, with the borrowed, is in fact an "uneasy" commerce: both Eliot and the French poets eventually return to the values underlying the movement they initially undermined, making a pact with romanticism the way Ezra Pound makes his pact with Whitman. The necessity of the exchange is, in Eliot's case, anticipated in "Tradition and the Individual Talent," and poetically commented on in *Four Quartets*. In the final section of "East Coker," the poet sums up his evocation of a lifetime's struggling with words by stating that "what there is to conquer (...) has already been discovered (...) by men whom one cannot hope /To emulate" and that this is no cause for concern because "there is no competition" (128). When reflections on the nature of the poetic craft recur at the end of "Little Gidding," the circular pattern is presented as applicable to the evolution of poetry: "What we call the beginning is often the end /And to make an end is to make a beginning" because "The end is where we start

from" (144). Perceiving the literary work as an inherent element of the socio-historical process, subject to the same temporal and ontological laws which govern man's existence, Eliot concludes that "Every phrase and every sentence is an end and a beginning, /Every poem an epitaph", just as "any action" constitutes "a step to the block, to the fire, down the sea's throat /Or to an illegible stone: and that is where we start" (144).

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**„PRZETARG ŁATWY POJĘĆ NOWYCH I UTARTYCH”.
SYMBOLISTYCZNE KORZENIE ANTYRETORYKI, ANTYSENTYMENTALIZMU
I NIEŁATWEGO ROMANTYZMU W POEZJI T. S. ELIOTA**

Streszczenie

Do największych osiągnięć T. S. Eliota należą bez wątpienia doktryna poezji bezosobowej oraz słynna koncepcja tradycji literackiej. Korzenie obu tych teorii można odnaleźć w praktyce poetyckiej i eseistyce symbolistów francuskich. Twórczość tych ostatnich stanowiła często gwałtowną reakcję na poezję francuskiego romantyzmu. Jest to szczególnie widoczne w wierszach Tristana Corbière'a, który w sposób bezpardonowy rozprawia się z dziedzictwem takich gigantów literatury francuskiej jak Victor Hugo i Alphonse de Lamartine. W utworach zaskakująco nowoczesnych i ocierających się o intertekstualność symbolista wyśmiewa poezję romantyczną, którą postrzega jako nazbyt emocjonalną, sentymentalną i płacziwą. Polemizując z Hugo i Lamartinem Corbière postuluje odejście od romantycznych klisz w kierunku „nowej” poezji, wolnej od patosu, wielosłownia, retorycznych obciążeń i utartych konwencji poetyckich. Zbliży się tym samym do Eliotowskiej koncepcji poezji chłodnej, precyzyjnej i pełnej rezerwy, w której i o której należy mówić językiem oszczędnym, niemal naukowym. W tej poezji, która broni się przed pompatycznością i bezpośrednim wyrażaniem uczuć, osobowość autora staje się niemal niewidzialna. Również Eliotowska koncepcja tradycji, zawarta w słynnym eseju „Tradycja i talent indywidualny” jest pokrewna sposobowi, w jaki o dziedzictwie literackim i artystycznym myślał Baudelaire, Corbière i Rimbaud. Jest to tradycja rozumiana nie jako nieruchomy monolit, lecz raczej jako ponadczasowe, organiczne continuum, ulegające nieustannym zmianom i przekształceniom, w którym przeszłość i teraźniejszość oddziałują na siebie nawzajem w skomplikowanym systemie korelacji, analogii i opozycji. Złożoność tak definiowanego pojęcia tradycji powoduje, że również stosunek Eliota do romantyzmu naznaczony jest ambiwalencją. Z jednej strony formalny aspekt jego obiektywnej, bezosobowej i często ironicznej poezji sprawia, że zasługuje ona na miano antyromantycznej. Z drugiej jednak strony poezja Eliota – szczególnie ta późniejsza – z jej kluczowymi postulatami powrotu do natury, transcendencji i poszukiwania Absolutu grawituje, podobnie zresztą jak twórczość symbolistów, w kierunku ontologii i aksjologii właściwych tradycji romantycznej.