

REPETITION IN POETRY OF T. S. ELIOT THROUGH ASH-WEDNESDAY

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Stella Margaret Tente

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CANDIDATE: Stella Margaret Temte

I recommend acceptance of this seminar paper to the Graduate College in partial fulfillment of this candidate's requirements for the degree Master of Science in Teaching.

March 11, 1971
Date

Thomas A. Maik
Seminar Paper Advisor

This seminar paper is approved for the Graduate College:

Mar 12, 1971
Date

James H. Erickson
Dean, Graduate College

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ABSTRACT

With a background of study in the poetry, plays, essays, and literary criticism of T. S. Eliot, I was intrigued by his commitment to the potentials of language and the "music" of poetry. I particularly liked his use of repetition and realized it was a prominent rhetorical device in his poetry and plays.

To write a seminar paper about Eliot's use of repetition it was necessary to study the many kinds of repetition as identified in classical rhetoric and to study their uses as described by authors and critics. Very early I became aware that I would have to limit my field to the poetry, excluding the plays; further, to selected poems; and finally, to selected poems, excluding the long Four Quartets.

There were several ways of approaching the task. I chose to analyze the poems as individual entities and to analyze them with reference to the repetition as it directs the reader to meaning and to what Eliot called the "deeper, unnamed feelings . . . to which we rarely penetrate." I analyzed "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" rather completely and proceeded through other selected poems chronologically except for the Ariel Poems, which were placed before the major poetry: The Waste Land, The Hollow

Men, and Ash-Wednesday.

The study was rewarding and the amount of repetition greater even than anticipated. The casual reader accepts Eliot's skillful handling of repetition so naturally as to be partially unaware of its extent, even while it is indeed playing a most significant role in focusing attention and feeling.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

"The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" 11

"Portrait of a Lady" 19

"Preludes" 19

"Rhapsody on a Windy Night" 20

"La Figlia che Piange" 21

"Gerontion" 23

"A Cooking Egg" 25

"The Hippopotamus" 26

"Journey of the Magi" 26

"A Song For Simeon" 28

"Animula" 29

"Marina" 29

The Waste Land 32

The Hollow Men 35

Ash Wednesday 37

Glossary of Rhetorical Terms 45

List of Works Consulted 47

REPETITION IN POETRY OF T. S. ELIOT THROUGH ASH WEDNESDAY

T. S. Eliot once defined poetry as "excellent words in excellent arrangement and excellent metre."¹ In such prose discourse he achieved emphasis by repetition, just as he skillfully adapted repetition to many purposes in his poetry. His appreciation for words, with knowledge of their history, their evolution in usage, and their shades of meaning made his handling of words a serious business. In his last poetry, Four Quartets,² words and language were still his commitment:

Words move, music moves
Only in time; but that which is only living
Can only die. Words, after speech, reach
Into the silence. Only by the form, the pattern,
Can words or music reach
The stillness . . . 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. Shrieking voices
Scolding, mocking, or merely chattering,
Always assail them.

"Burnt Norton," p. 180

That was a way of putting it--not very satisfactory:

¹ T[homas] S[tearns] Eliot, "Preface to the 1928 Edition," The Sacred Wood: Essays on Poetry and Criticism (London: Methuen & Co., Ltd., 1960), p. ix.

² T. S. Eliot, Collected Poems, 1909-1962 (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1963), pp. 175-209. All subsequent references to Eliot's poems come from this edition and will be indicated within the text itself, using only line or page.

A periphrastic study in a worn-out poetical fashion,
 Leaving one still with the intolerable wrestle
 With words and meanings. The poetry does not matter
 It was not (to start again) what one had expected.
 "East Coker," p. 184

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

There is only the fight to recover what has been lost
 And found and lost again and again: and now, under conditions
 That seem unpropitious. But perhaps neither gain nor loss.
 For us, there is only the trying. The rest is not our
 business. "East Coker," pp. 188-189

For last year's words belong to last year's language
 And next year's words await another voice.

. . .
 So I find words I never thought to speak
 In streets I never thought I should revisit
 When I left my body on a distant shore.
 Since our concern was speech, and speech impelled us
 To purify the dialect of the tribe
 And urge the mind to aftersight and foresight
 "Little Gidding," p. 204

The end is where we start from. And every phrase
 And sentence that is right (where every word is at home,
 Taking its place to support the others,
 The word neither diffident nor ostentatious,
 An easy commerce of the old and the new,
 The common word exact without vulgarity,
 The formal word precise but not pedantic,
 The complete consort dancing together)
 Every phrase and every sentence is an end and a beginning,
 Every poem an epitaph. "Little Gidding," pp. 207-208

Eliot recognized, as others before him, that the poet is a cata-
 lyst, that "the poet's mind is in fact a receptacle for seizing and

storing up numberless feelings, phrases, images, which remain there until all the particles which can unite to form a new compound are present together. . . . [Then it is] the intensity of the artistic process, the pressure, so to speak, under which the fusion takes place, that counts."³ He said that "art never improves, but that the material of art is never quite the same."⁴ "The poet should be the servant of his language. . . . To pass on to posterity one's own language, more highly developed, more refined, and more precise than it was before one wrote it, that is the highest possible achievement of the poet as poet; . . . in developing the language, enriching the meaning of words and showing how much words can do, he is making possible a much greater range of emotion and perception for other men, because he gives them the speech in which more can be expressed."⁵ Scholes and Kellogg have said that "language itself may become the ultimate material of art, with all human experience contained in some form or another of existing linguistic structure."⁶

In writing of free verse, Eliot said, "There is no freedom in art. . . . Freedom is only truly freedom when it appears against the

³ T. S. Eliot, Selected Essays (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1960), p. 8.

⁴ Ibid., p. 6.

⁵ T. S. Eliot, To Criticize the Critic and Other Writings (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1965), pp. 133-134. Hereafter cited as To Criticize the Critic.

⁶ Robert Scholes and Robert Kellogg, The Nature of Narrative (New York: Oxford University Press, 1966), p. 158.

background of an artificial limitation."⁷ In the absence of strict versification he used sounds and rhythms, what he called "auditory imagination":

. . . 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 obliterated and the trite, the current, and the new and surprising, the most ancient and the most civilised mentality.⁸

Harvey Gross, in an essay, "T. S. Eliot and the Music of Poetry," says:

Eliot has given us unforgettable rhythms--rhythms which echo and re-echo in the mind's ear. We need only go to our memories for prosodical touchstones: lines grasped long ago by the "auditory imagination" and never lost. They recover an emotion from personal or racial origins, recall some shuddering gesture of the spirit, or catch the flat intonation of a bored voice.⁹

Karl Shapiro has said, "Poetic rhythm can be reduced to meter; . . . applied meter is as various as the words which make up the line."¹⁰ Elizabeth Drew calls poetry "rhythmically patterned

⁷ Eliot, To Criticize the Critic, pp. 184-187.

⁸ T. S. Eliot, The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1933), p. 111. Hereafter cited as The Use of Poetry.

⁹ Harvey Gross, ed., The Structure of Verse: Modern Essays on Prosody (Greenwich, Conn.: Fawcett Publications, Inc., 1966), p. 202.

¹⁰ Karl Shapiro, Beyond Criticism (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1953), pp. 31-32.

language,"¹¹ and Eliot says that "repetition of effect is a question of pattern."¹² He says, further:

The use of recurrent themes is as natural to poetry as to music; . . . it is a music of imagery as well as sound; . . . dissonance, even cacophony, has its place; . . . the music of a word is, so to speak, at a point of intersection: it arises from its relation first to the words immediately preceding and following it, and indefinitely to the rest of its context; and from another relation, that of its immediate meaning in that context to all the other meanings which it has had in other contexts, to its greater or less wealth of association.¹³

Gross explains:

Eliot's verse first establishes [universal] relationships through the articulating structures of syntax. Syntax, the order of words as they arrange themselves into patterns of meaning, is the analogue to harmony in music. Like harmony, syntax generates tension and relaxation, the feelings of expectation and fulfillment which make up the dynamics of poetic life.¹⁴

Again and again Eliot adds that the music of poetry is inseparable from the meanings and associations of words. This is echoed by critics Wellek and Warren: "Sound and metre . . . must be studied as elements of the totality of a work of art, not in isolation from meaning."¹⁵ Versified language has "various, unpredictable,

¹¹ Elizabeth Drew, Poetry: A Modern Guide To Its Understanding and Enjoyment (New York: Dell Publishing Co., Inc., 1959), p. 35.

¹² Eliot, To Criticize the Critic, p. 185.

¹³ T. S. Eliot, On Poetry and Poets (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1943), pp. 24-32.

¹⁴ Gross, p. 203.

¹⁵ Rene Wellek and Austin Warren, Theory of Literature (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, Inc., 1956), p. 173.

and profound" possibilities. "It is here that Eliot has been most influenced by his own poetic practice."¹⁶ I. A. Richards, referring to Eliot's "music of ideas," says:

The ideas are of all kinds, abstract and concrete, general and particular, and, like the musician's phrases, they are arranged, not that they may tell us something, but that their effects in us may combine into a coherent whole of feeling and attitude and produce a peculiar liberation of the will.¹⁷

"Liberation of the will" for the reader seems akin to Eliot's famous statement that poetry is for the poet "escape from emotion,"¹⁸ a transmuting of the poet's "personal and private agonies into something rich and strange, something universal and impersonal."¹⁹

In "Reflections on Vers Libre" Eliot describes great poetry as "the inexplicable line with the music which can never be recaptured in other words."²⁰ Laurence Perrine, in writing of the music of language, amplifies this:

The poet . . . chooses his words for sound as well as for meaning, and he uses the sound as a means of reinforcing his meaning. . . . An essential in all music is repetition. In fact, we might say that all art consists of giving²¹ structure to two elements: repetition and variation.

¹⁶ Delmore Schwartz, "The Literary Dictatorship of T. S. Eliot," Literary Opinion in America, ed. by Morton Dauwen Zabel (New York: Harper and Row, 1962), p. 583.

¹⁷ I. A. Richards, Principles of Literary Criticism (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1925), p. 293.

¹⁸ Eliot, Selected Essays, p. 10.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 117.

²⁰ Eliot, To Criticize the Critic, p. 185.

²¹ Laurence Perrine, Sound and Sense: An Introduction to Poetry (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, Inc., 1969), p. 177.

Repetition is effective. Don Geiger has pointed out that the only way Frost could resolve his "Stopping By Woods On a Snowy Evening" was by repeating the last line.²² We have Gertrude Stein's circular "A rose is a rose is a rose." Eliot mentioned his appreciation for Shakespeare's "Full fathom five thy father lies," and he repeated his reference to "Never, never, never, never, never" as "one of the most thrilling lines in King Lear" in his essay on Yeats.²³ He used Kipling's "Danny Deever" as an example of well-used repetition, after crediting Kipling with "a consummate gift of word, phrase, and rhythm" and describing his choice of form as "perfectly fitted to the content and the mood which the poem has to convey":

The regular recurrence of the same end words, which gain immensely by imperfect rhyme (parade and said) gives the feeling of marching feet and the movement of men in disciplined formation--in a unity of movement which enhances the horror of the occasion and the sickness which seizes the men as individuals; and the slightly quickened pace of the final lines marks the change in movement and in music. There is no single word or phrase which calls too much attention to itself, or which is not there for the sake of the total effect.²⁴

A poem, as numerous artists and critics claim, is a vehicle. Eliot continues, after referring to "Never, never, never, never, never,"

²² Don Geiger, The Dramatic Impulse in Modern Poetics (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1967), p. 13.

²³ Eliot, On Poetry and Poets, p. 305.

²⁴ T. S. Eliot, ed., A Choice of Kipling's Verse (Garden City, N. Y.: Doubleday & Co., 1941), pp. 13-14.

that "apart from a knowledge of the context, how can you say that it is poetry?"²⁵ He says: "The beautiful line for its own sake is a luxury dangerous even for the poet who has made himself a virtuoso of the technique of the theatre. What is necessary is a beauty which shall not be in the line or the isolable passage, but woven into the dramatic texture itself."²⁶ He repeats that "the music of poetry is not something which exists apart from the meaning"²⁷; poetry "is an arrangement and choice of words which has a sound-value and at the same time a coherent comprehensible meaning"²⁸; and without its philosophy there is only "the débris of poetry rather than the poetry itself."²⁹

Friedman and McLaughlin describe a poem thus: ".....it comes into being because the poet makes it; he applies his special powers to whatever means his mind or his period affords him, all in the service of some end or organizing design."³⁰ Once made, Eliot maintains, poetry "may help to break up the conventional modes of perception and valuation which are perpetually forming, and make people see the world afresh, or some new part of it. It may make

²⁵ Eliot, On Poetry and Poets, p. 305.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid., p. 21.

²⁸ Eliot, Selected Essays, p. 282.

²⁹ Eliot, The Use of Poetry, p. 89.

³⁰ Norman Friedman and Charles A. McLaughlin, Poetry: An Introduction to Its Form and Art (New York: Harper & Row, 1963), p. 4.

us from time to time a little more aware of the deeper, unnamed feelings which form the substratum of our being, to which we rarely penetrate; for our lives are mostly a constant evasion of ourselves, and an evasion of the visible and sensible world"³¹; it is "a new point of view from which to inspect [the actual world]."³²

Anyone reading Eliot's poetry is aware of repetition as a prominent rhetorical device in its construction. Because of his concern for words, the ways in which he used them in poetry were surely planned by him for effect; the repetition is intentional. John Press says of Eliot, "Few poets of his stature have so deliberately studied their art, and set out to write poetry with such calculation and assurance."³³ And Conrad Aiken, remembering Eliot in undergraduate years at Harvard (the Eliot who began "Prufrock"), said, "He was an extremely controlled, precise, disciplined person-- as much so in his own life as in his poetry."³⁴

One of several conclusions arrived at by William R. Veeder in his study of repetition as used by Yeats was that such study could provide a way of reading poetry, "the way in which concentrations can often help locate the thematic center of a poem."³⁵ With such

³¹ Eliot, The Use of Poetry, p. 149.

³² Eliot, Selected Essays, p. 136.

³³ John Press, A Map of Modern English Verse (New York: Oxford University Press, 1969), p. 76.

³⁴ Conrad Aiken, "T. S. Eliot," Life, LVIII (Jan. 15, 1965), 92.

³⁵ William R. Veeder, W. B. Yeats: The Rhetoric of Repetition (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968), p. 56.

concentration on the use of repetition by T. S. Eliot, it should be possible to realize more richly his meanings. The emphasis secured by verbal repetition and repetition can direct a focusing of attention just as it can create an atmosphere for emotion and emotion itself. It is my intention in this paper to examine repetition (not that of idea and image, but the verbal repetition of sound and word) in T. S. Eliot's poetry, to identify it in rhetorical terms, and to then point out its use in directing the reader to the underlying meaning, to "elucidate," as Eliot himself would say.

First, I shall attempt to analyze "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" rather completely as I find meaning or mood through the repetition. It is the only poem I shall analyze in its entirety. In other selected poems I shall point out representative instances of repetitive devices. I hope to show that Eliot, in spite of disinterest in rhetoric as such ("I have never been able to retain the names of feet and metres, or to pay proper respect to the accepted rules of scansion"³⁶), used repetition frequently, skillfully, and purposefully.

Writing in Poetry in June, 1965, Hayden Carruth said of the 1963 edition of Eliot's Collected Poems:

Reading it is a great pleasure, and a slow one; not only because the poems demand one's close attention, but because so many issues have consolidated around the poems that from line to line, sometimes from word to word, one must make new judgments. . . . ninety

³⁶ Eliot, On Poetry and Poets, p. 18.

per cent of the critical profusion surrounding
 Eliot's poems is wrong; . . . some passages . . .
 simply do not mean what most people think they
 mean.³⁷

It is this kind of reading of Eliot's poetry that I shall do, with close attention from line to line, from word to word, hopefully without dissecting its beauty. If, indeed, "some passages . . . simply do not mean what most people think they mean," I shall take the liberty in this paper to record meaning as it is revealed through a concentrated study of repetition as used by Eliot. Quoting Philip R. Headings' preface to his book, T. S. Eliot, I suggest "that the reader will follow the discussion with the texts of the poems in mind or at hand."³⁸ I shall use Eliot's own definitive collection, Collected Poems, 1909-1962.

If Eliot's first major poem, "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," is read with recognition of its rhetorical devices, it is apparent that it is a poem of repetition. Its very first words, "Let us go," are used twice more (lines 4 and 12) as beginnings of successive sentences. Such anaphora (repetition of the same word or group of words at the beginnings of successive clauses or verses)³⁹

³⁷ Hayden Carruth, "Upon Which to Rejoice," Poetry, CVI (June 1965), 240.

³⁸ Philip R. Headings, T. S. Eliot (New York: Twayne Publishers, Inc., 1964), p. [vii].

³⁹ Richard A. Lanham, A Handlist of Rhetorical Terms (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968), pp. 124-125. Subsequent rhetorical references come from this Handlist or from Corbett, note 40, pp. 434-438.

accomplishes a rhythm and also prepares an emotional setting. Edward P. J. Corbett writes:

Whenever anaphora occurs, we can be sure that the author has used it deliberately. Since the repetition of the words helps to establish a marked rhythm in the sequence of clauses, this scheme is usually reserved for those passages where the author wants to produce a strong emotional effect.⁴⁰

And Sister Miriam Joseph, in writing of repetition in Shakespeare, says such repetition enforces meaning.⁴¹ Here the repeated words seem to express the inevitability of Prufrock's proceeding--in spite of his doubts about going, or his possible conversion to Christianity, or his desire to change direction, or whatever--along the same tired course into which his life has fallen, with the titillating human exchange measured by "coffee spoons" in his day, by hors d'oeuvres, perhaps, in ours.

The refrain, or epimone (frequent repetition of a phrase or question),

In the room the women come and go
Talking of Michelangelo (13-14, 35-36)

juxtaposes the familiar weary scene upon Prufrock's thought, hinting first at his anticipated boredom of the same routine and people, later emphasizing the shallowness, the pseudo-intellectualism, of the company in contrast to the virile genius and commitment of such

⁴⁰ Edward P. J. Corbett, Classical Rhetoric for the Modern Student (New York: Oxford University Press, 1969), p. 435.

⁴¹ Sister Miriam Joseph, Shakespeare's Use of the Arts of Language (New York: Columbia University Press, 1947), p. 305.

as Michelangelo. Veeder says of similar epimone that "the refrain's changes of meaning are the meaning of the poem."⁴²

In the second stanza the opening lines (15-16) employ symploce (a combination of repeated beginning and ending words):

The yellow fog that rubs its back upon the window-panes,
The yellow smoke that rubs its muzzle on the window-panes.

We are not permitted to escape from "yellow" and "window-panes."

Some emphasis surely is intended, and there is, indeed, a feeling of stained cowardice and of a languid looking-in upon life, especially when "yellow" and "window-panes" appear still again (24-25).

This bears out Eliot's creed that poets should "find the verbal equivalent for states of mind and feeling."⁴³ The conduplicatio (repetition of a word or words in succeeding lines), "that rubs," adds to the image of a rubbing-up-against life without real participation. The alliteration (recurrence of an initial or medial consonant sound, and sometimes of a vowel sound--also called "paroemion," though I shall use "alliteration") of "licked" and "lingered" and "let" of the succeeding lines (17-19) reinforces the cat-like self-centered and enervated acceptance which help characterize the persona.

Within the twelve lines (23-34) of the next stanza, the word "time" is used eight times, insisting that it be noticed. The stanza begins with the clause, "There will be time," which is

⁴² Veeder, p. 20.

⁴³ Eliot, Selected Essays, p. 248.

repeated completely three times, twice (perhaps with the emphasis first on "time," then on "will") in the same line (26) that introduces the antistasis (repetition of a word in a different or contrary sense) which becomes so memorable because of the clipped, concise description of deliberate insincerity:

There will be time, there will be time
To prepare a face to meet the faces that you meet.

Prufrock continues to procrastinate as he considers and meditates that there "will be time for" and "time to," culminated by the poet in the homoioteleuton (using various uninflected words with similar endings in a sentence or line):

Time for you and time for me,
And time yet for a hundred indecisions,
And for a hundred visions and revisions,
Before the taking of a toast and tea. (31-34)

The added alliteration of the t's and even the many and's (polysyndeton--repetitive use of a conjunction) and the repeated hundred (diacope--repetition of a word with one or a few words in between) contribute to the indecisiveness, the unproductive putting-off of the man who always hesitates, allowing life's potential to slip away while relentless Time moves on.

Continuing with another "and" and another "there will be time," Prufrock confronts his indecision: "'Do I dare?' and, 'Do I dare?'" The questions, or *pysma* (series of rhetorical questions), suggest different inflections, different depths of meaning, from the simple self-consciousness of his appearance, with the emphasis on "my" and on what "they will say," to the possible shocking effect of "Do I dare/ Disturb the universe?" But it is so easy to do nothing,

unforgettable here because of homoioteleuton and polyptoton (repetition of words derived from the same root):

In a minute there is time (47-48)
For decisions and revisions which a minute will reverse.

The aura of indecisiveness is strengthened by the repetitions of "minute" (conduplicatio) and "there is time" (epimone). The play on words and sounds in the quoted lines permits much to be said frugally, tantalizing the reader to pause and contemplate.

Then Prufrock faces the ultimate and irreversible sadness (a climax unavoidable to the reader because of its reiteration) of realizing that since he has "known them all already, known them all" (note the effect of parechysis--repetition of the same sound in words in close succession--of the all sound in "all already"), how can he now "presume" that his peers are going to accept anything from him but continued condoning participation in life as they all use it. This inevitable and too-late sadness is emphasized by the all's, the dying's, the known's; by the repeated "how should I presume?"s and "how should I begin?"s; the "when I am formulated" and "when I am pinned" (49-69).

The fact that Prufrock is capable of more depth of character than his actions reveal, that he has given much thought, even prayer and tears, to his activities and to the direction of his life, is suggested by skillful uses of anaphora:

. . . though I have wept and fasted, wept and prayed,
Though I have seen my head (grown slightly bald) brought in
upon a platter,
I am no prophet--and here's no great matter;
I have seen the moment of my greatness flicker,

And I have seen the eternal Footman hold my coat, and snicker,
And in short, I was afraid. (81-86)

The additional repetitions of and, no, and wept should be observed also, as they help hammer home the feeling of inadequacy.

After all this, it is to be expected that Prufrock will try to vindicate himself (in commoratio--emphasizing a strong point by repeating it several times in different words or arrangements--and in epimone):

And would it have been worth it, after all, (87)

. . .
Would it have been worth while? (90)

It is especially easy for him to find an excuse when he considers that he will likely meet only responses like the versions of:

. . . 'That is not what I meant at all.
That is not it, at all.' (97-98)

(Note the consonance--resemblance of proximal consonant sounds--of "not it, at.") The impact of his self-justification comes in the many repetitions, in symploce (the beginning "and would"s, "would"s, "among"s, and "to"s; the ending "all"s); in diacope ("tell you all"s); in ploc (repetition of a word with new significance after the intervention of another word or words, such as the "after" followed by "after"); and in recurrent words like "some" and "come":

And would it have been worth it, after all,
After the cups, the marmalade, the tea,
Among the porcelain, among some talk of you and me,
Would it have been worth while,
To have bitten off the matter with a smile,
To have squeezed the universe into a ball
To roll it towards some overwhelming question,
To say: 'I am Lazarus, come from the dead,
Come back to tell you all, I shall tell you all'--
If one, settling a pillow by her head,

Should say: 'That is not what I meant at all.
That is not it, at all.' (87-98)

Particularly poignant are the after's used as anaphora in catalogue (a listing) and the repetition of "the" (called "the obtrusive 'The'" by Musgrove, who finds this use of repetition one of those common to both Eliot and Whitman⁴⁴):

And would it have been worth it, after all,
Would it have been worth while,
After the sunsets and the dooryards and the sprinkled streets,
After the novels, after the teacups, after the skirts that
trail along the floor.
And this, and so much more?-- (99-103)

Again, the and's are effective, accentuating the hesitancy, as are the following participles (homioptoton--use of various words with similar case endings) as they succeed one another:

If one, settling a pillow or throwing off a shawl,
And turning toward the window . . . (107-108)

Regardless of his defense, Prufrock's self-analysis is bitter when expressed in antimetabole (repetition of words in reverse order, akin to logical conversion):

At times, indeed, almost ridiculous--
Almost, at times, the Fool. (118-119)

Eliot refers often in his poems to growing old. In "Prufrock" the epimone "I grow old . . . I grow old . . ." (line 120, complete with ellipses) seems to have a particular and ironic meaning. There is first the recognition (baldness and thinness) of growing old and then the futile termination which it inaugurates. For Prufrock,

⁴⁴ S. Musgrove, T. S. Eliot and Walt Whitman (New York: Haskell House, 1966), p. 28.

growing old includes accommodation to the silly idiosyncrasies of age, such as "I shall wear the bottoms of my trousers rolled" and "Shall I part my hair behind?" But he is also aware of the frustrating realization that if only he could "dare," if only he could "presume"--then the simple courage of his convictions and honesty to the finer qualities in himself could possibly assure an old age which could crown his life, like Browning's "Rabbi Ben Ezra," exclaiming, "The last of life, for which the first was made." Instead, Prufrock's wistfully meditative "I grow old . . . I grow old . . ." is both a warning to the young and the vacillating and an endorsement of man's contempt for what old age too often is--the fair price paid for life unlived or modern dress for the old paraphrase that what one sows, he shall reap. Prufrock accepts the contempt. Even in the silly idiosyncrasies, his response is "Do I dare?" and six lines beginning with "I." With him we hear the lulling and luring music of human-relationship passivity in the assonance (resemblance of proximal vowel sounds), consonance, and polyptoton of the closing lines:

I have seen them riding seaward on the waves
 Combing the white hair of the waves blown back
 When the wind blows the water white and black.
 We have lingered in the chambers of the sea
 By sea-girls wreathed with seaweed red and brown
 Till human voices wake us, and we drown. (126-131)

There is scarcely a line in "Prufrock" bare of repetition, and each repeated sound, word, or group of words leads to clearer understanding. The poem is a portrait of a human being whose conflicts and tormenting inadequacy we are permitted to share.

In "Portrait of a Lady" Eliot uses refrain to create the man and woman. The man's uneasiness is expressed in "Let us take the air, in a tobacco trance" (36, 113), the woman's pose in "'I shall sit here, serving tea to friends'" (68, 108). "Friends," or some variation of the word, appears intermittently throughout the poem as line ends (epistrophe--repetition of a closing word or words at the end of several clauses, sentences, or verses), suggesting the unnatural alliance. Very effective is the nervous "dance, dance/ Like a dancing bear" (110) (employing epizeuxis--repetition of words with none in between--and polyptoton) to convey the young man's need to escape. We can feel uncomfortable with him.

Anaphora is a favorite device of Eliot in his poetry. In the third of the "Preludes," "You" opens the first three lines, giving form to the woman addressed:

You tossed a blanket from the bed,
 You lay upon your back, and waited;
 You dozed, and watched the night revealing
 The thousand sordid images
 Of which your soul was constituted. (1-5)

It recurs in "You had such a vision of the street" (10) and "You curled the papers from your hair" (13). Three lines describing the woman's awakening begin with "And":

And when all the world came back
 And the light crept up between the shutters
 And you heard the sparrows in the gutters,
 You had such a vision of the street
 As the street hardly understands. (7-11)

"Street," when repeated in place, shows the emphasis given to it and to the part it has had in molding the slovenly woman whom we see

awakening, already defeated, to continuing squalor.

In the fourth poem of the "Preludes" the lines

The notion of some infinitely gentle
Infinitely suffering thing

are made peculiarly haunting by the subtle change of meaning in "infinitely" accorded it by such repetition (plocé). Immediately, one experiences empathy for those of the "blackened street" whose souls are "trampled by insistent feet." This seems an example of Eliot's abiding pity for mankind within his identifying of mankind's ills, wretchedness, and unfortunate choices.

"Twisted" is used in a similar way in "Rhapsody on a Windy Night," creating a sordid background of both nature and remembrance:

The memory throws up high and dry
A crowd of twisted things;
A twisted branch upon the beach . . . (23-25)

"Lunar" is repeated in the same manner (3-4), giving a demented connotation to the night scene. Again and again clauses begin with "The street-lamp" and "The lamp" (anaphora and isocolon--repetitions of equal length and usually corresponding structure) as if they are an incantation (further emphasized by the utt sound):

The street-lamp sputtered,
The street-lamp muttered,
The street-lamp said . . . (14-16)

Lines using "She" and "And" in anaphora add an eerie watchfulness to the mood, like these describing the moon:

She winks a feeble eye,
She smiles into corners.
She smooths the hair of the grass. (52-54)

There is the reiterated admonition to "Regard that woman," "Regard the cat," "Regard the moon." There is parechesis in memory's "divisions and precisions" (7) and in the remembered smells "That cross and cross across her brain." Polyptoton invites scrutiny in lines like

I could see nothing behind that child's eye.
I have seen eyes in the street
Trying to peer through lighted shutters, (40-42)

where the I sound even in "trying" is intended, used in anaphora and assonance. Similarly, conduplicatio slows us to consider the recalled picture of a crab:

And a crab one afternoon in a pool,
An old crab with barnacles on his back. (43-44)

In later lines the "obtrusive 'the'" gives relevance to the small details of the life that has no significant tomorrow. And "twist" recurs throughout the poem until the final ironic line, "The last twist of the knife," which carries the burden of the futility of attempting to build afresh or abundantly on a foundation of memory that is no more than "a crowd of twisted things." Philip Le Brun recognizes Eliot's knowledge of the philosophy of Henri Bergson, quoted as "'consciousness means memory.'"⁴⁵

Like "Prufrock," "La Figlia che Piange" seems to muster its entire impact through repetition. G. S. Fraser calls it "one of

⁴⁵ Philip Le Brun, "T. S. Eliot and Henri Bergson," Review of English Studies, New Series, XVIII (1967), 156.

[Eliot's] most purely beautiful."⁴⁶ The poem records the glimpse of some girl who indelibly holds the persona's imagination:

Weave, weave the sunlight in your hair. (3, 7)

The epizeuxis of "weave" is effective in itself and is particularly captivating when the line is repeated as a refrain. Then the lines in anaphora,

So I would have had him leave,
So I would have had her stand and grieve,
So I would have left, (8-10)

are put in comparison with the parallels, or exergasia (repeating the same thought in many figures),

As the soul leaves the body torn and bruised,
As the mind deserts the body it has used. (11-12)

These are resolved in the musing contrast achieved by anaphora and consonance and the wistful use of "should" in conduplicatio:

I should find
Some way incomparably light and deft,
Some way we both should understand,
Simple and faithless as a smile and shake of the hand. (13-16)

These are examples of a common use for repetition--parallels for comparison and contrast.

The girl's effect on the persona is described in the word repetition and anadiplosis (beginning a line with the words ending the previous line):

Compelled my image many days,
Many days and many hours. (18-19)

⁴⁶ G. S. Fraser, "A Language by Itself," T. S. Eliot, comp. by Tambimuttu and Richard March (New York: Tambimuttu and Mass, 1965), p. 170.

She stands remembered in the antimetabole and the conduplicatio,
 "should have;" the f and l sounds in "full of flowers" add immensely
 to the richness of feeling:

Her hair over her arms and her arms full of flowers.
 And I wonder how they should have been together!
 I should have lost a gesture and a pose. (20-22)

The persona is prominent in Eliot's poetry. Leonard Unger uses "voice" rather than "style" to describe the quality of the poetry. "From 'Prufrock' to Four Quartets, the intimate voice presents . . . the states of awareness and the movements from one awareness to another."⁴⁷

"Gerontion" is a poem of hopeless introspection. The title means "old man," and through the poem "an old man" is part of the beginnings of four lines, suggesting an exhortation to listen respectfully to the wisdom of age. Five sentences begin at ends of lines (epistrophe) with the imperative, "Think" (34, 37, 44, 49, 51), urging an appraisal of a history which did include a God who became Man. The twentieth century's arid rejection of this God and its subsequent loss of a living faith are pressed upon us by the "think"s and by the further recital of man's history of misuse in the numerous "gives," set strategically and, again with an arresting awkwardness, as beginnings of clauses at ends of lines, and with various verb-endings throughout the passage beginning with

⁴⁷ Leonard Unger, T. S. Eliot: Moments and Patterns (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1966), p. 160.

line 34, through line 54.

Superb compression is accomplished with diacope in "The word within a word, unable to speak a word" (18). The line was inspired by a sixteenth-century sermon of Lancelot Andrewes, whose play on words Eliot appreciated along with his unwavering faith. In "Gerontion" the words are used as an answer to the Biblical pharisee's "'We would see a sign!'" (17). Anaphora in isocolon also achieves compression in "To be eaten, to be divided, to be drunk / Among whispers" (22-23), referring to the Eucharist and to its sterility among modern men, with possibly a second meaning if the early Christians hiding in the Catacombs are remembered.

Epanalepsis (repetition at the end of a clause or sentence of the word with which it began) suggests sad recognition in "My house is a decayed house" (7), expressing, perhaps, the old man's realization that, besides being worn, his body is not a living temple of the Lord. Many words in the complex patterning of this poem recur for emphasis, like "Nor fought . . . Nor knee deep . . . (4-5); Who walked . . . Who turned . . . (25-29); What will the spider do . . . will the weevil / Delay? (66-68); Thoughts of a dry brain in a dry season (76)" (my italics). There is alliteration, like "The woman keeps the kitchen" (13); "Vacant shuttles / Weave the wind" (30-31); and the anaphoric "Are fathered . . . / Are forced . . ." (46-47).

The very lostness of death approached without faith or hope is shared through the play on "lost" and "kept" and with sound (lose and use) and anadiplosis in the repeated "terror":

I that was near your heart was removed therefrom
 To lose beauty in terror, terror in inquisition.
 I have lost my passion: why should I need to keep it
 Since what is kept must be adulterated?
 I have lost my sight, smell, hearing, taste and touch:
 How should I use them for your closer contact? (56-61)

Gerontion's persisting skepticism prevails, in alliteration and
 assonance:

. . . whirled
 Beyond the circuit of the shuddering Bear
 In fractured atoms. Gull against the wind, in the
 windy straits
 Of Belle Isle, or running on the Horn.
 White feathers in the snow, the Gulf claims,
 And an old man driven by the Trades
 To a sleepy corner.

In discussing Eliot's verse form, John Betjeman says that he "looks
 so easy and he is so hard."⁴⁸ The same could be said of the inter-
 woven complexities of his repetition.

Significant repetition in "A Cooking Egg" is confined to the
 symplocic refrain which is the first line in each of four stanzas,
 lines which differ in only one word--climactic (catacosmesis--from
 greatest to least in dignity) parallelism:

I shall not want Honour in Heaven
 . . .
 I shall not want Capital in Heaven
 . . .
 I shall not want Society in Heaven
 . . .
 I shall not want Pipit in Heaven. (9, 13, 17, 21)

The four stanzas comprise the mid-section of the poem, set off

⁴⁸ John Betjeman, "The Usher of Highgate Junior School," T. S. Eliot, comp. by Tambimuttu and Richard March, p. 91.

before and after with dotted, or elliptical, lines. They seem to be a reflection on the part of the persona on all that he has been deprived of in life and for which Heaven can offer no consolation. Sardonicly, he says, "I shall not want" them, because he has made substitutions. None the less, he still yearns for the lost illusions, his youthful ideals, brought to attention by the repeated "where," the Latin "Ubi sunt":

But where is the penny world I bought (25)

Where are the eagles and the trumpets? (29)

The answer lies in the powerful epizeuxis in the last stanza,

Weeping, weeping multitudes. (32)

In "The Hippopotamus," the sarcasm which is the poem is carried in the words, "the True Church" and "the Church," used six times. It is delightful to be aware of a reference made to this little poem of his youth by Eliot in later years when as a devoted church member, he found how difficult it was to gather sufficient money for the operation of the Church.⁴⁹

The Ariel Poems are short ones, written for Christmas. "Journey of the Magi" gives a new picture of the journey itself, with details etched by the "obtrusive 'The'":

'A cold coming we had of it,
Just the worst time of the year

⁴⁹ "T. S. Eliot, the Poet, is Dead in London at 76," New York Times, Jan. 5, 1965, p. 1, cols. 1-4.

For a journey, and such a long journey:
 The ways deep and the weather sharp,
 The very dead of winter.' (1-5)

Strings of participles give further description of journey and regrets, while the weariness is drawn with more "the"s and "and"s in anaphora and polysyndeton:

And the camels galled, sore-footed, refractory,
 Lying down in the melting snow.
 There were times we regretted
 The summer palaces on slopes, the terraces,
 And the silken girls bringing sherbet.
 Then the camel men cursing and grumbling
 And running away, and wanting their liquor and women,
 And the night-fires going out, and the lack of shelters,
 And the cities hostile and the towns unfriendly
 And the villages dirty and charging high prices:
 A hard time we had of it. (6-16)

The message, that knowing Christ requires something, that Christ changes things ("But no longer at ease here, in the old dispensation" 41), is insistent, introduced at the end of a line, devoid of ornament:

. . . but set down
 This set down
 This. (33-35)

"Death" appears five times, "birth," four. The position of "death" in the gripping diacope, ". . . like Death, our death" (39), seems to balance the diacope near the beginning, "For a journey, and such a long journey." Sister Miriam Joseph describes diacope as a device which can express deep feeling.⁵⁰

⁵⁰ Joseph, p. 87.

"A Song For Simeon" also is rich in repetition, as it describes the old saint's readiness for death, "having seen thy salvation" in the person of the infant Jesus, as told in the Gospel of Luke, chapter two. Alliteration emphasizes Simeon's concern for his descendants,

Fleeing from the foreign faces and the foreign swords, (16)
and his self-analysis,

The stubborn season has made stand.
My life is light, waiting for the death wind,
Like a feather on the back of my hand. (3-5)

His recognition of Christ is striking, recorded in assonance and polyptoton:

Now at this birth season of decease,
Let the Infant, the still unspeaking and unspoken Word,
Grant Israel's consolation. (21-23)

Anaphora helps to show his acceptance, in the parallelism:

Not for me the martyrdom, the ecstasy of thought and prayer,
Not for me the ultimate vision. (29-30)

The grace accorded the faithful suffering of belief is emphasized with diacope, in "Light upon light, mounting the saints' stair."
(28)

Symploce and polyptoton in isocolon show Simeon's weariness in balanced lines:

I am tired with my own life and the lives of those after me,
I am dying in my own death and the deaths of those after me.
(34-35)

Part of the Nunc Dimittis is woven through the poem, with Simeon's supplication, "Grant me thy peace," repeated as a refrain.
(8, 18, 31)

The little poem "Animula" repeats its title meaning with its opening line, quoted from Il Purgatorio: "'Issues from the hand of God, the simple soul.'" With a slight change of word and complete change of meaning, it is repeated again, "Issues from the hand of time the simple soul" (24). We look at "the simple soul" of the little child bumping against life in its developing. We can feel the exasperating confusion as pictured in antimetabole, reinforced with diacope,

The heavy burden of the growing soul
Perplexes and offends more, day by day;
Week by week, offends and perplexes more. (16-18)

The youth emerges from "the hand of time," described in consonance, epanalepsis, homioptoton, and the's:

Irresolute and selfish, misshapen, lame,
Unable to fare forward or retreat,
Fearing the warm reality, the offered good,
Denying the importunity of the blood,
Shadow of its own shadows, spectre in its own gloom,
Leaving disordered papers in a dusty room;
Living first in the silence after the viaticum. (25-31)

"Marina," praised by a number of critics for its beauty, abounds in repetition, employed to build an engulfing emotion. The intensity of feeling is experienced even if the reader is unacquainted with Shakespeare's Pericles, Prince of Tyre, the story of the recovery by Pericles of his daughter, born at sea, lost, and supposedly dead. The strategic phrases, "O, my daughter," and "My daughter," are refrains placed near the beginning and end of the poem; the source and object of the feeling are the incredible mystery and

and miracle which are "my daughter" (expressed in polyptoton and assonance):

Made this unknowing, half conscious, unknown, my own. (27)

Dramatically used diacope in the lines,

What seas what shores what grey rocks and what islands
What water lapping the bow (1-2)

. . .
What images return (4)

. . .
What seas what shores what granite islands towards my
timbers, (33)

creates a throbbing, rapid march of reawakened memory in the tentative, wistful reaching toward "my daughter." In the possibility of his having found her, the persona, Pericles, renounces life's fleeting trivia and wrongs, which are measured in four pairs of lines of symploce:

Those who sharpen the tooth of the dog, meaning
Death
Those who glitter with the glory of the hummingbird, meaning
Death
Those who sit in the sty of contentment, meaning
Death
Those who suffer the ecstasy of the animals, meaning
Death. (6-13)

This surely is an arresting way of describing envy, pride, sloth, and lust.

Suddenly the futility of life is replaced for Pericles by the expectancy of continuity through his daughter, expressed in diacope, polyptoton, and alliteration:

This form, this face, this life
Living to live in a world of time beyond me; let me
Resign my life for this life, my speech for that unspoken,
The awakened, lips parted, the hope, the new ships. (29-32)

(Sister Miriam says poets use polyptoton "for the sake of the sound, which is pleasing in itself, even while it enhances the meaning.")⁵¹

New life is offered by Marina's youth and vitality in spite of the imperfection and frailty of his own humanness, in terms of his ship (revealed here in diacope within isocolon): "Bowsprit cracked with ice and paint cracked with heat" (22), and in similarly constructed lines.

Marina's reality comes to him in recollections, effectively woven into the poem in rearrangements of the repeated sounds and words, called commoratio:

And scent of pine and the woodthrush singing through the fog
 . . .
 A breath of pine, and the woodsong fog. (3)
 (15)

Her face becomes "less clear and clearer," her pulse "less strong and stronger" (diacope-polyptoton) until her precious identity is established in the joyous repetition,

And woodthrush calling through the fog
 My daughter. (34-35)

Lengthy individual studies could be made of the repetition in The Waste Land, The Hollow Men, Ash Wednesday, and Four Quartets.

When we begin to look for and identify the repeated sounds and words, we realize, as Winifred Nowotny says of poetry, that "our grasp of the principle of repetition . . . is strong enough to enable us to . . . make the proper response without thinking about

⁵¹ Joseph, p. 83.

it."⁵² There is so much more repetition in Eliot's poetry than we realize! Perhaps even the poet himself uses his devices almost unconsciously while aware of their effects. Matthiessen says Eliot "communicate[s] the exact pattern of his meaning not so much by logical structure as by emotional suggestion."⁵³ Baker says that "repetition of words or concepts helps bind the parts of the structure together . . . and alliteration . . . binds parts of individual lines together."⁵⁴ Perhaps only a poet with so great a genius as Eliot for structuring with words can also be so humble as to say, as quoted by Selden Rodman, "'I only pretend to know as much about versifying as my carpenter knows about woodwork.'"⁵⁵ Because the repetition is so profuse, it is impossible to do justice to Four Quartets within such a paper as this. The other three major poems will be analyzed briefly.

Even a casual study of The Waste Land reveals how very much of it is skillful use of repetition. The opening lines end with falling ing verbs (1-3, 5, 6), carrying the thought from line to line and

⁵² Winifred Nowotny, The Language Poets Use (London: The Athlone Press, 1968), p. 130.

⁵³ F. O. Matthiessen, The Achievement of T. S. Eliot (New York: Oxford University Press, 1947), p. 16.

⁵⁴ William E. Baker, Syntax in English Poetry, 1870-1930 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1963), p. 41.

⁵⁵ Selden Rodman, ed., One Hundred American Poems (New York: The New American Library, 1963), p. 28.

suggesting inertia. "And," used frequently in anaphora and polysyndeton, piles up the images; but there is "no shelter," "no relief," "no sound" (23-24). "Shadow" is repeated within lines (conduplicatio) but with antistasis so that man's "shadow" is his limited and vulnerable lifetime and "the shadow of this red rock" (25-29), repeated as line ends (epistrophe), his only savior.

The epimone, "HURRY UP PLEASE ITS TIME," of "A Game of Chess," juxtaposes the locale of the barroom upon the conversation of the people; but it also warns of the passage of time, even of how late it is in the span of one's lifetime.

"The Fire Sermon" is essentially a barren recital of burning lust, but it opens with "The nymphs are departed" (175, 179) and "Sweet Thames, run softly" (176, 183-184), gentle refrains describing the quiet beauty of autumn. "But at my back" (185, 196) twice interjects into the scene the rudeness of degenerate humanity. There is disillusionment born of the knowledge that these are soiled nymphs. In words reminiscent of warnings of the prophet Zechariah, "The Fire Sermon" closes with plaintive prayer in the midst of evil, repetitions of "O Lord Thou pluckest" and "burning."

"What the Thunder Said" opens with three descriptive lines beginning with "after" (anaphora), perhaps to remind us of Christ's "agony in stony places," to prepare us for a long look at our devitalized existence. In parallels and polyptoton:

He who was living is now dead
 We who were living are now dying; (328-329)

and in diacope, antimetabole, and climactic anadiplosis (which

here moves from dry rock to dry mountain):

Here is no water but only rock
 Rock and no water and the sandy road
 The road winding above among the mountains
 Which are mountains of rock without water
 If there were water we should stop and drink
 Amongst the rock one cannot stop or think, (331-336)

we can glimpse man's arid living and his continuous, fruitless struggle. The play on "rock" and "water" persists in emphasizing the sterile quality of civilization through another stanza (346-359).

There is a complicated passage in "What the Thunder Said":

Dayadhvam: I have heard the key
 Turn in the door once and turn once only
 We think of the key, each in his prison
 Thinking of the key, each confirms a prison
 Only at nightfall (412-416)

Considering that the opening word means "sympathize," the repetitions direct our thought to each one's aloneness but also run along into a kind of ambiguity, where we can read "each in his prison / Thinking of the key," or "Thinking of the key, each confirms a prison," or "each confirms a prison / Only at nightfall." This is rather a favorite trick of Eliot's and an economic one for line value! William E. Baker suggests that numerous such ambiguities formed by fusion and by punctuation or lack of it are intentional.⁵⁶

A lovely comparison is drawn with repetition:

. . . The boat responded
 Gaily, . . .
 . . . your heart would have responded
 Gaily, . . . (419-422)

And the "Shantih shantih shantih" close The Waste Land with a

⁵⁶ Baker, pp. 100-105.

kind of benediction instead of with despair, convincing the reader that this is a poem which points forward in optimism after an honest appraisal of western civilization's bleak corruption, offering for each individual in a depraved society the formula from the prophet Isaiah, "Shall I at least set my lands in order?" (426)

The Hollow Men holds contempt for the straw-like hollow men who, "leaning together" (3), seem purposeless to the choices that must be made in order to live wholly and to die with recognition of some hereafter. They are described as "behaving as the wind behaves" (35). Here epanalepsis is used effectively with polyptoton. This is an expressionistic poem, giving voice to immense attitudes about life. Harding says "some of T. S. Eliot's poetry . . . is a way of expressing a concept for which no word exists";⁵⁷ this poem, with what Louis MacNeice calls its "hypnotic [and] incantatory repetitions,"⁵⁸ seems an example of such poetry. There is an unreal lostness hovering about it.

The many repetitious parallels and balanced lines do have an hypnotic cadence, made of symploce, anaphora, conduplicatio:

We are the hollow men
We are the stuffed men (1-2)

Shape without form, shade without colour (11)

⁵⁷ D. W. Harding, Experience Into Words (New York: Harizon Press Publishers, 1964), p. 172.

⁵⁸ Louis MacNeice, "Eliot and the Adolescent," T. S. Eliot, comp. by Tambimuttu and March, p. 147.

This is the dead land
This is cactus land (39-40)

The eyes are not here
There are no eyes here
In this valley of dying stars
In this hollow valley. (52-55)

Incantatory are the series of stanzas composed of balanced lines beginning with "between" and "and" and concluding with the line, "Falls the Shadow" (72-90). These are placed on the page with stammering fragments of The Lord's Prayer. There is fear or inhibition or an intimation of God--or just an easy evasion of God or a paralysis of will. God is unknown or unsought; or guilt or uneasiness creates a barrier between man and God. There is need for prayer, but there is a hesitancy ("Life is very long") or an inability to pray, so The Lord's Prayer is only fractured prayer.

The word "kingdom," with a variety of adjectives, is repeated throughout the poem, hinting at something beyond mortal life for which man should prepare. Man's existence is compared to a parody of a children's game song:

Here we go round the prickly pear
Prickly pear prickly pear
Here we go round the prickly pear
At five o'clock in the morning. (68-71)

His death is compared to a jingled epimone, going round and round like a broken record with no choice and no inclination:

This is the way the world ends
This is the way the world ends
This is the way the world ends
Not with a bang but a whimper. (95-98)

These last four lines, according to the New York Times, are probably

the most quoted of any twentieth-century poem.⁵⁹

Ash Wednesday seems a much more personal poem. We cannot resist searching for the poet. It was written five years after The Hollow Men, after Eliot had formally joined the Anglican Church, and at a time when his wife's mental illness must have been a very sad burden for him. It is a poem of reflection and vision. It is penitential and almost ecclesiastical. And it is a poem of repetition; it is, indeed, a poem so interlaced with repetition that it defies unravelling.

Ash Wednesday can be read with several levels of meaning. There are undercurrents of the regret felt by a poet who has lost his voice (though this poet himself was barely forty-two years old), expressed in anaphora:

(Why should the aged eagle stretch its wings?)
 Why should I mourn
 The vanished power of the usual reign? (I, 6-8)

There is an undercurrent of sadness, as of mourning the loss of human love:

Because I cannot drink
 There, where trees flower, and springs flow, for there is
 nothing again. (I, 14-15)

Here, the "Because" is one in several series in anaphora, and the "there" sound recurs (parachesis). There is the turning to God, the emptying of self, the humility, the repentance of one who has experienced the death of his old ego and, exhausted and helpless,

⁵⁹ "T. S. Eliot, the Poet, is Dead in London at 76," p. 1, col. 1.

lies waiting only to do His will, voiced in diacope and anaphora, which, in the lines beginning with "teach," usher in parallelism:

And pray to God to have mercy upon us
 And I pray that I may forget
 These matters that with myself I too much discuss
 Too much explain
 Because I do not hope to turn again
 Let these words answer
 For what is done, not to be done again
 May the judgement not be too heavy upon us. (I, 26-32)

Teach us to care and not to care
 Teach us to sit still. (I, 38-39)

There is acceptance, emphasized with diacope and conduplicatio:

I rejoice that things are as they are and
 I renounce the blessed face
 And renounce the voice
 Because I cannot hope to turn again
 Consequently I rejoice, having to construct something
 Upon which to rejoice. (I, 20-25)

In the midst of the repeated words, how perfectly right the prosaic "consequently" and "construct" are!

The poem uses diacope liberally. Stephenson calls it "the doubling of a word" and says that it is "one most attractive device of Eliot's" and that it "enhances and propels the tone value of a line, giving it musical emphasis and the impetus of increased volume."⁶⁰ Further examples follow, which recall Sister Miriam's designating diacope with "deep feeling":

I no longer strive to strive towards such things (I, 5)

Because I know I shall not know (I, 12)

Because I know that time is always time

⁶⁰ E. M. Stephenson, T. S. Eliot and the Lay Reader (New York: Haskell House, 1966), p. 44.

polyptoton:

Let the whiteness of bones atone to forgetfulness.
 There is no life in them. As I am forgotten
 And would be forgotten, so I would forget. (II, 18-20)

Another complicated passage which is representative of the abstract difficulty of this beautiful poem is the first stanza of part V, lines 1-9:

If the lost word is lost, if the spent word is spent
 (tautologia--repetition of the same idea in different words--anaphora, diacope)
 If the unheard, unspoken
 Word is unspoken, unheard
 (antimetabole)
 Still is the unspoken word, the Word unheard,
 (diacope and epistrophe)
 The Word without a word, the Word within
 The world and for the world;
 (diacope, consonance, agnominatio, polyptoton)
 And the light shone in darkness and
 Against the Word the unstilled world still whirled
 (agnominatio, polyptoton, homonym)
 About the centre of the silent Word.
 (consonance and "obtrusive 'the'" as in several lines)

Here, as in "Gerontion" and "Song of Simeon," "Word" refers to Christ, and the word-play is magnificent. Such repetition of a common word rather than a proper name is called diaphora.

Words of the poem are lifted from the Bible, the Anglican Book of Prayer, the Mass. Some are used as refrains and carry powerful emotion in the context of the poem. Part I, in which the suppliant is accepting that "these wings are no longer wings to fly" (34), closes with a repetition from the "Ave Maria":

Pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death
 Pray for us now and at the hour of our death. (I, 40-41)

Looking back while fighting the "deceitful face of hope and of despair" (III, 6), his yearnings prompt him, even while attaining

"strength beyond hope and despair" (III, 20) to repeat from the communion prayer,

Lord, I am not worthy

Lord, I am not worthy

but speak the word only. (III, 22-24)

In concern for "Those who walk in darkness" (V, 21), he recalls the Old Testament plea,

O my people, what have I done unto thee. (V, 10, 28)

O my people. (V, 36)

Man's reluctance to give up the beauty and joys of temporal things, analagous surely to the anguish of facing untimely death, is said gently:

(Bless me father) though I do not wish to wish these things
From the wide window towards the granite shore
The white sails still fly seaward, seaward flying
Unbroken wings. (VI, 7-10)

The alliteration is played with diacope and antimetabole. Karl Shapiro says of alliteration,

[It] works in several ways at once: it adds a rhythm to the other rhythms of meter and sense; it heightens feeling in the reader's mind; and more important, it gives finality to the idea by setting it off as a separate figure. In a sense it traps the idea so that it can never again escape. Perhaps this is what people mean when they say that good poetry is memorable. I prefer to say that⁶¹ . . . the poet has proved what he thought and felt.

Throughout Ash Wednesday the wavering weak will and the overwhelming humility and acceptance, the striving and reaching are emphasized and echoed in repeated fragments:

⁶¹ Shapiro, p. 33.

Because I do not hope to turn again
 Because I do not hope
 Because I do not hope to turn (I, 1-3)
 Because I cannot hope to turn again (I, 23)
 Although I do not hope to turn again
 Although I do not hope
 Although I do not hope to turn (VI, 1-3)
 Teach us to care and not to care
 Teach us to sit still (I, 38-39; VI, 27-28)
 And spirit of the river, spirit of the sea
 Suffer me not to be separated
 And let my cry come unto Thee. (VI, 33-35)

Surely, Ash Wednesday has more of feeling than of meaning. Fashioned in very great part from sound, word, and phrase repetitions, it quietly expresses the soul's needs and leaves a halo of sanctity around humble man and his yearnings--even his gladness. Its naked humility makes Ash Wednesday for literature what Lent's Ash Wednesday is for the Christian church year.

"After such knowledge"⁶² from this study, I must conclude that T. S. Eliot makes extensive use of repetition. It is in the texture of each poem studied. Eliot harnesses it to his purposes in his very first poetry, and in the last he is still in command of it as a prominent and beautiful tool. In between, with his "muted cadences,"⁶³ as Rodman calls them, he manipulates it as he chooses, from satire to prayer. He does not limit himself in the free use of repetition but uses many kinds in numerous ways, with

⁶² Eliot, "Gerontion," Collected Poems, p. 30.

⁶³ Selden Rodman, ed., One Hundred Modern Poems (New York: The New American Library, 1953), p. xxiii.

the variation which Boynton and Mack say is essential in repetition.⁶⁴ I find that alliteration, anaphora, diacope, epimone, polysyndeton, and symploce are used especially often. Of the poems studied, Ash Wednesday is most intricate in repetition and least structured in conventional versification. "The Hippopotamus," conversely, has rhymed stanza form and very little word repetition; of Eliot's several poems employing the Gautier quatrain, "A Cooking Egg" is the only one with significant repetition--in the four central stanzas described on page twenty-five. In each poem Eliot's repetition seems right, so eloquently patterned that it captures and holds, so perfectly fitted, even unobtrusive, that "it seems to arise naturally, out of one's own unconscious."⁶⁵ "Eliot's supple line," according to MacNeice, "can so exactly and without fuss convey the slightest nuance, change of mood or variation on his theme."⁶⁶

Eliot, of course, is not unique in the use of repetition. Sam Meyer maintains that contemporary writers do use these figures of rhetoric and that interweaving such as I have described is "a conventional as well as integral part of the [poetic] lore."⁶⁷

⁶⁴ Robert W. Boynton and Maynard Mack, Introduction to the Poem (New York: Hayden Book Company, Inc., 1965), p. 93.

⁶⁵ James Reeves, "Cambridge Twenty Years Ago," T. S. Eliot, comp. by Tambimuttu and March, p. 41.

⁶⁶ Louis MacNeice, p. 149.

⁶⁷ Edward P. J. Corbett, ed., Rhetorical Analyses of Literary Works (New York: Oxford University Press, 1969), p. 153.

John Crowe Ransom says that "of all the pioneers who had looked for a suitable modern prosody, Eliot was best. He favored . . . keeping more or less the iambic pentameters of the blank verse he needed by 'counterpointing' them with smaller cross-rhythms."⁶⁸ This "counterpointing" is primarily repetition.

Fred B. Millett summarizes the evaluating of poetry: "The excellence of a poem depends finally on what is said, the manner in which it is said and . . . the relationship between the matter and the manner."⁶⁹ Finding this relationship is what I have tried to do in Eliot's poetry by showing how one well-used rhetorical device can function for emotional response and understanding. These goals, emotional response and understanding, fall within Dylan Thomas's definition of poetry--"the celebration of man, which is also the celebration of God."⁷⁰

⁶⁸ John Crowe Ransom, "Gerontion," Sewanee Review, LXXIV (1969), p. 390.

⁶⁹ Fred B. Millett, "The Vigilantes," Essays, ed. by Leonard F. Dean (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1955), p. 51.

⁷⁰ Dylan Thomas, "Notes on the Art of Poetry," Modern Culture and the Arts, ed. by James B. Hall and Barry Ulanov (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1967), p. 322.

GLOSSARY OF RHETORICAL TERMS

- Agnominatio: repetition of a word with change in letter or sound
- Alliteration: recurrence of an initial or medial consonant sound, and sometimes of a vowel sound
- Anadiplosis: repetition of the last word of one line or clause at the beginning of the next
- Anaphora: repetition of the same word or group of words at the beginnings of successive lines, clauses, or verses
- Antimetabole: akin to logical conversion in that it turns a sentence around; repetition of words in reverse grammatical order
- Antistasis: repetition of a word in a different or contrary sense
- Assonance: resemblance of proximal vowel sounds
- Auxesis: words or clauses placed in climactic order
- Catacosmesis: ordering words from greatest to least in dignity
- Commoratio: Emphasizing a strong point by repeating it several times in different words
- Conduplicatio: repetition of a word or words in succeeding lines or clauses
- Diacope: repetition of a word with one or a few words in between
- Diaphora: repetition of a common word rather than a proper name to signify qualities of the person as well as naming him
- Epanalepsis: repetition at the end of a line, phrase, or clause of the word with which it began
- Epimone: refrain; repetition of a phrase or question
- Epistrophe: repetition of a word or phrase at the end of several lines, clauses, or verses
- Epizeuxis: repetition of words with none in between
- Exergasia: Repeating the same thought in many figures
- Homoiototon: using various words with similar case endings
- Homoioteleuton: using various uninflected words with similar endings
- Isocolon: repetition of phrases of equal length and usually corresponding structure
- Parechesis: repetition of the same sound in words in close succession
- Ploce: repetition of a word with a new signification after the intervention of another word or words

Polyptoton: repetition of words derived from the same root

Polysyndeton: use of a conjunction between successive words,
phrases, or clauses

Pysma: asking many questions that require diverse answers, or
a series of rhetorical questions

Symploce: a combination of anaphora and epistrophe, q.v.

Tautologia: repetition of the same idea in different words

REPETITION IN POETRY OF T. S. ELIOT THROUGH ASH-WEDNESDAY

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