Searching for the Gift in T.S. Eliot´s Ash-Wednesday

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1. Eliot and preexisting concepts on religion and literature.

Throughout this essay we would like to propose a reading of T. S. Eliot´s Ash-Wednesday. This reading intends to show the mythic structure of the poem in relation to the exploration of the religious consequences of knowledge and poetic creation. What is going to be exposed in our analysis, has no intention whatsoever of being an absolute theory about the poem or its possible readings. It is just an attempt to enlighten a mystic point of view; concept not unfamiliar to Eliot. There are, no doubt, many other poetic elements that will not be taken into consideration by this essay. This is a set of intuitions, it is a memory of the Gospels, a memory of Heidegger, where the word is verb, and as verb it is creation; it is also a memory of Dante and of romantic and pastoral poems.

Our interpretation diverges from the claims of some of the authors that will be mentioned since we attempt to include the significance of the title into the poem's analysis, which in other works is reduced to a mere explanation of the religious festivity that the term denotes. This innovation is perhaps acceptable considering that it attempts to incorporate additional interpretative elements which, as in the title´s case, would justify this line of interpretation since the notions of sin, punishment and possible absolution are consolidated in it. Elements that we believe are essential to that day in which we are reminded of our own mortality and of the Fall of man in the purgation of Lent, which eventually concludes with the resurrection of Christ after He has defeated sin and death, and Grace is retrieved to mankind.

In regards to religion, and contrary to his approach in other Christian poems like Family Reunion, Eliot presents the audience with the intricacies, contradictions and symbolism inherent to Christian liturgy and dogma (Leavis 1962: 111). Further proof of Eliot's development of religious themes and motives, as well as his own views and approach to this subject in relation to culture, literature and tradition can be thoroughly found especially in the author's late poetry, and on his numerous essays and books in which, according to Kearns, he struggled continuously with "words and meaning", trying to reconcile opposite elements like "knowledge and experience, dogma and literature, orthodoxy and feeling, scepticism and belief" of which he did not found a satisfactory explanation either for himself or for his readers (1994: 80). In this view scepticism and belief are of greater significance since Eliot strove to unify both in the cultivation of spirituality through rational inquiry (Kearns 1994: 90), moving from "two or more discordant viewpoints to a higher which shall somehow include and transmute them." (Eliot 1964: 147-148). But of particular interest to the proposal here developed is Kearns asseveration that the poet completely believed

Not only in hell and damnation but in the more salvific doctrines, in what he called the "fact of incarnation" and the atonement in what he took to be their corollary, the virgin birth. He also believed […] in the efficacy of prayer, the intercession of the Virgin and the communion of the saints (Eliot 1950 and Akroyd 1984 cited in 1994: 89)

Damnation is seen in Eliot's mind as a source of relief and a form of salvation, adding significance to "the ennui of modern life" (Eliot 1951: 427). Such doctrines, however, cannot account for the whole framework of the author's work, especially considering his praise of authors like Dante who "could draw imaginatively on a wide range of fully formulated doctrinal and ethical traditions in their work" (Kearns 1994: 79) when compared with other such as Blake and Milton whose production is more limited by their "sectarian allegiances", in reference to Eliot's claims that the ritual or religious myth cannot be completely explored or accounted, as the experiences of the believer and of the outsider are equally limited (Kearns 1994: 85).

Eliot's production is based on allusions and literary references (Longenbach 1994: 176), building his aesthetics upon the pillars of western culture, exemplified by the two opposed streams of thought […] one that includes Plato, Kant, Hegel (via Caird and Bradley), Bradley himself […]; the other comprising Aristotle, Augustine, Aquinas […] (Habib 1999: 161). Dante's influence in Eliot spread beyond aesthetic creation, since he saw in the Italian "the gift of incarnation", towards which he aimed but struggled, "as the recipient of the blessings of Christian faith and as the donor in turn of an articulation of these as immediate as the odour of a rose." (Kearns 1994: 89-90), a figure that understood and taught him the relationship between "sexual idealization, collapse of that idealization and the re-establishment of Eros only as mediated by realities beyond death" (Kearns 1994: 90); as Ellis quotes from Eliot, one in whose work we find the value of renunciation, which persist beyond the grave (1983: 213). Like in the work of its Italian counterpart, allegory enables Eliot and his poetical voice to escape from their sense of self and be able to reach "a common, external order" where the burden of solipsism present on his early work can be overcame. (Ellis 1983: 215)

One of the points of departure of our stance from the usual critical approach to the poem is the identity of the different female characters of the poem, since to Kwan-Terry "the blessèd face" and "the voice" of the "Lady" represent the equivalent "worldly woman" of Eliot's life (1994: 135), interpretation also shared by other scholars such as Martz, who regards the poet's dedicatory of the poem to his wife as an echo of

the role performed by Dante's Beatrice and Cavalcanti's lady in the production of both poets (1998: 150); or Daümer's approach that conceives the work and its female characters as the struggle to understand and explore motherhood in relation to Eliot's own mother (1998: 480). Perhaps the uncertainty regarding the identity behind each female figure may spring from the ambivalence of the poet's and speaker's attitude, confusing sensual and divine love in their mysticism, similar to the themes and attitudes explored in Gerontion and other poems (Childs, 1997: 84), and influenced by Dante (Ellis 1983: 211). Our interpretation, as we have claimed, though differs from that of the authors mentioned still echoes some of the elements that conform the framework of their analyses. In her exploration of the Italian sources of the poem, Martz sees in the "*gift*" and the reference to Shakespeare both the gift of "*poetical creation*" and "*religious grace*" (1998: 150), likewise in Kwan Terry's approach to the poem as an ongoing process of verification of a metaphysical truth that "*involves an interpretation, a transmigration from one world to another, and such pilgrimage involves an act of faith*" (Eliot 1964: 163), we agree with his perspective of the poem as the individual's struggle to reach the Absolute, one who is prepared and determined to be dissolved into it through a "*mystical death*" (1994, 133: 136) but is constrained by "*the world of timebound phenomena*" that "*offers no significance because it separates one moment from another, rendering everything relative*" from which he cannot escape but in the reasoning and repetition of the historical moment when the eternal and temporal are connected (1994: 132, 139), which in our view renders the poem as a metafictional and self-referential reasoning process. Knowing that some of the ideas we intend to develop have been found to a certain extent by the authors here acknowledged we feel that our premise is sound enough to go beyond what has been claimed so far by expanding them with different approaches that we find valuable to our analysis and to the understanding of the poem itself.

The proposed alternative reading intends to consider Ash-Wednesday as a metapoem about the poetic voice and how poetic creation is effected by the means of the word, here regarded in its mythical dimension and placed at the same level as the Word that created the world. Under this view, the quest of the poet and of the poetic voice is one of recovery, not only of the word as the element of creation but also of the reconstitution of "*old symbols, reclaiming them, redeeming them, setting them in context which will force us once again to confront their Christian meanings.*" (Brooks 1963: 72-73). An aim that is intrinsic to Eliot's approach to poetry and criticism, and that is reminiscent of Jung's "*fantasy activity*", as Gould explains, a process of recovering the "*religious significance to an event*" in which we are lead from "*an empirical reality*" to the world of the unconscious that controls the meaning of every act and interpretation that each individual performs (1981: 16). This process, he quotes is "*mythic*" and "*dialectical*", claiming that it constitutes "*an enticing version of the phenomenology of mythical thinking*" that attempts

> To make a link between theology and what Kenneth Burke has called logology: between mythos and logos, mythology and literature.
> Jung´s belief that he has joined heaven and earth, the unconscious and

the conscious, in the archetype is indeed what literary studies have found most interesting about his approach. (Gould 1981: 16)

After reading Ash-Wednesday, the first global intuition took us right away to the first verses of Genesis that talk about the Word of Creation, and to the first chapter of the Gospel according to John which more explicitly reads:

1. In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.
2. The same was in the beginning with God.
4. In Him was life; and the life was the light of men.
11. He came unto his own, and his own received him not. (*King James Bible*, John 1)

When we are confronted by the reading of the poem, we hear at least two voices. The first one, the poet's, tells the reader about the Fall, a tale of despair, loneliness and misery in a time-bound world separated from God's Grace and where mankind's inheritance is lost; eventually eased as the pastoral reverie of the third and four sections takes over the narration, endowing it with a sense of hope that tries to blossom from the barrenness of the first two parts. However, as the story is driven to an expected redemptive climax, in his argumentation the poet is reminded of the irreparability of the Original Sin that puts an end to his aspirations, which is why the poem ends with a prayer, a prayer of despair and acknowledgment of the loss. The fall of the poet, nevertheless, is redeemable or at least he thinks and hopes so thanks to the existence of the second voice in the poem, which represents his role as a speaker, as a creator, as the one that carries the voice. In his penitence the poet praises and evokes God in the different actions of the poetic word and of the Word of Creation.

God as the maker of the Word, and the Word itself:

> *Still is the unspoken word, the Word unheard,*
> *The Word without a word, the Word within*
> *The world and for the world;*
> *And the light shone in darkness and*
> *Against the Word the unstilled world still whirled*
> *About the centre of the silent Word.* (v. 152-157).

God as the giver of the gift: *Desiring this man´s gift and that man´s scope.* (v. 4).
God as the listener:

> *Lord, I am not worthy*
> *Lord I am not worthy*
> *but speak the word only.* (v. 117-119)

God as Grace and Life:

> *Where shall the word be found, where will the word*
> *Resound? Not here, there is not enough silence [...]*
> *No place of grace for those who avoid the face*
> *No time to rejoice for those who walk among noise and*
> *deny the voice.* (v. 159-160, 166-167).

This voice finds support on the image of Mary as a matrix of possibilities in which the Word is incubated, bringing redemption for the world.

> Redeem
> The time, redeem [...]
> The silent sister veiled in white and blue [...]
> But spoke no word,
> Speech without word and
> Word of no speech
> Grace to the mother
> For the Garden
> Where all love ends. (v. 84-88, 137-138, 141, 143).

The poet is then, asking for that word, the voice and language he thinks men had before the apple was bitten. He wants to spit *"the withered seed"* (v. 183) in order to regain the Word, thus regaining the Kingdom, because he thinks his words are silent, that they are no longer able to create in the faithlessness of the modern world. This poet is, in a certain way, a modern Prometheus as he has stolen the secret of the heavens, and with that purloined voice he creates, becoming a poet. In a similar way Dante had to create an artifice that allowed him to tell what he saw in his metaphysical journey, because God wouldn´t have given him permission to do so, since He foreboded Saint Paul to tell what he saw there (cf. II Corinthians 12: 1-5), and prevented Lazarus from doing so as well. When Dante is getting closer to the pits of hell (cf. *Inferno* II), he doesn´t invoke the name of God as in every other chapter; he invokes his *ingegno*. That is, his ability to be an artist, a liar; that is why he suffers plenty when he reaches the pit where he finds Ulysses, since the Greek hero is in hell because of the gift that the pagan gods gave to him, precisely the *ingegno* (cf. *Inferno XXVI).* Eliot is doing the same thing, or at least wishes to do so; the poet is the trespasser of those boundaries, and falls because he knows the Word that creates.

It is impossible to talk about the Word of creation without considering that there might exist a relation with the principles of Jewish kabbalah.

> Todo el material aquí reunido gira en torno al tema de la ambigüedad del lenguaje: lenguaje creador de mundos –concretos e imaginarios-, moldeador de conciencias y artífice del hombre y las cosas, lenguaje bondadoso y sagrado al abrigo del vasto amparo de la naturaleza, pero también, lenguaje caído en la arbitrariedad del signo, víctima, pero a su vez cómplice del nombre y verdugo de la naturaleza, profano y permanentemente profanado por la sobrenominación indefinida, lenguaje malvado y pecador que, al venir a menos en boca del hombre, se rebaja a mero instrumento de comunicación y pierde con ello su aura originaria, el resplandor del nombre pleno antes de su trágica caída. En esta ambigüedad se inscribe la concepción mística de la Cábala. (Cohen 1999: 7).

Thus starts the introductory chapter of *Cábala y Deconstrucción.* The Kabbalah acknowledges the existence of an inherent problem in human language, a system considered isolated from the true Word, but that is nonetheless necessary in the attempt to apprehend the sacred language. It is an imperfect and distortive mechanism based upon a defective tool, the sign and its arbitrariness, but it constitutes the only manner in which man may strive to reach illumination.

> El texto bíblico, cuya exégesis ocupa la vida toda del místico cabalista no es, aunque lo parezca, un monumento frío y estático que exija alabanza y ciego reconocimiento, sino un territorio que al ser explorado ciertamente se profana, que incluso solicita de su lector un mínimo de irreverencia para romper con su lenguaje como mero instrumento de comunicación. (Cohen 1999: 7).

Accordingly, the poem at hand receives the same attributes and characteristics that the Sacred Text but devoid of all its sacredness. By adopting the procedure through which the Kabbalah's ambiguity may be understood, we comprehend that if through the imperfect tools of the mechanism of human language the object of the sacred search cannot be reached, then it does not matter that the revelation is not an absolute Truth, even though the poetic voice intends it to be.

> La experiencia entonces frente a ese lenguaje huidizo y tramposo, «caído», diría Benjamin, define la postura, la inclinación hacia la escritura. Una escritura que comparte la ambivalencia del lenguaje es una irresistible celada que atrae justamente por su propio carácter inasible, atrapa en su fuga y se ausenta dejando al lector anclado en la densidad de su propio espacio […] La búsqueda es entonces el incansable rodeo, la permanente aproximación siempre diferida que conduce de nombre en nombre a un callejón sin salida […] En esta tensión irreductible se juega la «verdad» en la hermenéutica de la Cábala, donde toda palabra adquiere significación y realidad en la medida en que participa de este gran nombre: nombre de Dios. (Cohen 1999: 8).

Language is purely symbolic. Therefore Creation stands as a metaphor of the process that generates it. The impressiveness of this conception of the universe resides in its reduction of the sensuous world to mere language processes. The main concern of the Kabbalah is not so much the search of the origin of all things, or the Name of the Absolute One but rather its changes and movements, the manner in which it creates said name. If everything that man knows is seen as an expression of the process of creation, then the universe and language itself can be understood as parts of the enigma of the Name.

> Esto quiere decir que cada cosa, más allá de su propio significado, tiene algo más, algo que es parte de lo que brilla dentro de ella o, en una forma indirecta, de lo que dejó su marca en ella para siempre. El libro Yetzirah todavía está muy lejos de esta interpretación y, sin embargo, para los cabalistas, las Sefirot y las letras por las que se explica la palabra de Dios, eran simplemente dos métodos diferentes en los que la misma realidad podía estar representada en una forma simbólica. […] Para los cabalistas

esto no es más que una cuestión de elección entre estructuras simbólicas que están en sí mismas igualmente organizadas: el simbolismo de la luz y el simbolismo del lenguaje.

Por lo tanto, el movimiento en que la Creación se realiza puede interpretarse y explicarse como un movimiento lingüístico. Todas las observaciones y aseveraciones de los cabalistas alrededor de este tema se basan en esta tesis. Por supuesto que en la mayoría de los escritos cabalísticos, la doctrina de la emanación y el simbolismo de la luz estrechamente vinculado a ella, se entrelazan con el misticismo del lenguaje y la interpretación simbólica de las letras como los signos ocultos y secretos de lo divino en todas las esferas y etapas por las que atraviesa el proceso de la Creación. (Scholem 1999: 18).

2. The Purloined Voice.

The doctrine of Platonic archetypes contends that the external world is nothing but an imperfect copy of the World of Ideas. In one of his late works, *Parmenides*, Plato already sensed a possible objection towards such theory. Said objection makes the arguments about ideas inconsistent or places them into an *ad infinitum* regression. Aristotle's turn of the argument is, perhaps, more interesting to the theme here developed; the Third Man´s argument contemplates the separation of things from their own archetype to the point that the latter is rendered unnecessary or unrecognizable. It points to the lack of necessity of archetypes since they either do not exist or exist so remotely that they cannot affect man or his knowledge. Both options, which in the end come to the same, lead to their own invalidity since on the first the chain of degradation through millennia prevents the recognition and relation of a present human with that primeval Adam, his archetype; and on the second the connection between an object and its Ideal is based on similarity, which prompts the necessity of a midpoint of similarity (A) between said object and its archetype, as well as another midpoint (B) between the previous one (A) and the object, creating an infinite chain that has to be replicated for all instances and categories of every entity, in which the lines of separation between each object and its archetype have not passed yet that midpoint. (There is a reminiscence of Zeno, who put forward the impossibility of movement). The archetype then becomes unreachable and useless, ceasing to exist.

A second reading of the poem under this perspective evinces a flaw on the neoplatonic Kabbalah in which the poetic voice seems to belief. One of the definitions of Supreme Being, rejected by Aquinas is the premise of the ontological argument described by Saint Anselm in the *Proslogion* in which God is regarded as something beyond inconceivability. If there is, in fact, an archetypical word that accounts for Ideas, then the Word turns into the archetype of the archetype, and once again the argument of the infinite chain of regression returns, reaching the aforementioned conclusion. The Kabbalah as we have argued not only seeks God's language but His Name, the Verb in which God is encoded. If He is encoded then He is conditioned; if

omnipotence can be enclosed into something then it means that it is second to something of greater power. According to this perspective God is neither greater than the name that contains Him nor Omnipotence is omnipotent. If the Name is God's archetype, then God Himself is subordinated to the objection proposed in the Third Man's argument, separating Him from His Idea so He would be a degraded copy of it, and thus he would not be God, but a lesser version of the archetype. The World of Ideas therefore, stops being perfect, as Forms are just copies of their archetypes, that is, words; if we consider that the link between man and Truth is effected by the remembrance of the soul's visit to the World of Ideas then mankind cannot have the remotest idea of what is true as a result of that counterfeit. Similarly there cannot exist a word that encodes God, since the name would be God Himself, and in that process that name would become superior to God, which is, in itself, a contradiction. Thus, Christian tradition would have to include in the mystery of the Trinity this fourth attribute of the Supreme Being, which entails facing the failure already experienced by cabbalists, as no man can be greater than God.

On this situation of questioning and doubt we find the speaker, a person that is aware of how the power of the word of creation has waned as a result of the process already described, and ventures even to question the significance that this loss has upon him (v.7-8). The voice's individuality is emphasized in the preceding verses in his acknowledgement of the futility of his endeavour to master and recover the full capacities of the Word of creation, God's offering to Adam (v. 4-5). As a result of the impossibility of said endeavour the speaker in his despondency, in the reference to Cavalcanti's verses affirms to have no option but to move forward (v. 1-3), introducing the themes of renunciation (Kwan-Terry 1994: 134), and of exile (Ellis 1983: 214); but these verses of affirmation also replicate the movement of the polymorphous beings that draw God's chariot as described in Ezekiel, from whose imagery and verses the voice relies on to contrive several of the poem's conceits that will be addressed presently. These creatures are, moreover, characterised by blending together the body and the semblance of different animals and, among them, stands that of the eagle and man (Ezekiel 1: 5-12). The synthesis of both figures prompts us to suggest that the poetic voice aims to identify his own self with the eagle (v. 6), as an experienced being exhausted and impaired since its form of interaction with the world is constrained, from which the reader can establish a link between the eagle's burdened and contracted wings and the ineffectual words of the poetic voice, an intellectual self that feels lost his means of connecting with reality or of creating his own (v. 6).

In the subsequent stanza he continues his justification focusing this time on the mutability that has characterised the word as a consequence of time and the actions of mankind, in reference to the chain of degradation already explained. If we establish God's Word of Creation as the original, the gift entrusted to Adam would be a demeaned version of the same, therefore, by the effect of the *"positive hour"* the capacities of the word inherited by humanity are and would be diminished until its eventual complete loss of value (v. 10). An irreversible process that the poetic voice

establishes as a counterpart to the loss of both Paradise, and the Promised Land *"a land flowing with milk and honey"* (Exodus 33:3), the product and testimony of the word of creation's power, barred from human reach (v. 15). From the articulation of the thoughts that are tormenting him, we maintain, the poetic voice is gaining the confidence needed to prepare an act of defiance by the realization of the hopelessness of recovering the full creative capacities of the word expressed through his discontent and vindication.

The poetic voice's last argument resumes his assertion about the nature of time, addressing specifically its fleetingness and the notion of *"finitude"* and *"situatedness"* (Shusterman 1994: 42) that precludes the existence and realization of Ideals (v.16-19), reminiscent of Kwan-Terry's stance (1994: 135) but related, in our view, to the speaker's understanding that God's gift was and could only be valid in Eden, the place and time for which it was meant. And just as this last utterance is pronounced, the assurance and despondency of the voice reaches a *crescendo*, being absolutely convinced that the words he is about to utter are of no consequence as there is nothing to lose as a result of the intoxicating and apparent freedom ensued by despair, and by prevailing over the fear of losing what he most desires. In his arrogance he claims to *"rejoice"* over the state of things, a demonstration of the voice's hubris in which he carelessly commits the mortal sin of pride (v. 20); a declaration that precedes the climax of his tantrum: *"I renounce the blessed face/ And renounce the voice"* (v. 21-22), a statement between heresy and apostasy, perpetrating the eternal sin of forswearing God, His Flesh, and the Holy Spirit (Mathew 12: 31); reasserting his acts once more by revelling in his recently acquired liberty to establish his own beliefs through the construction of the voice's statement, in what we deemed represents a self-referential line (v.24-25).

But the moment after he has finished this act of bravado he quails, repenting and asking in prayer for God's mercy and pardon for a sin he knows is unforgivable, praying as well to relinquish the distrust and scepticism with which he has been assailing his own belief in the Catholic dogma (v. 26-28). It is noteworthy that in addition to this sudden burst of regret he partially resigns the individuality that has used for the whole vindication to adopt the plural, hiding his mistake behind the collective of humanity in which he hopes to be able to dilute his lack of faith (v. 26, 33, 38-41). But the poetic voice is not so naïve so as to expect that this demonstration of humility would be enough, he is aware of the repercussions of his insolence as the abjuration of Christ and the Holy Spirit would render him incapable of asking for the redemption that according to the Christian belief Christ has obtained for mankind; the Holy Spirit being both the messenger and message of His existence; and as the fear of the impossibility of absolution seizes the speaker's mind, he resorts with yet another self-referential line in which he attempts to justify his actions by arguing that if his words no longer have its complete potential of creation then they should not serve to condemn him either (v. 31); followed by what we understand does not only address his heresy but serves as a reference to Adam and the Fall, as the voice pleads in his prayer that such an event would never happen again, implying also the consequent and

further degradation of the word that would represent the complete destruction of the poetic voice and his form of communication in ultimate instance (v. 32-33).

As opposed to the first stanzas that developed the poetic voice's increasing frustration, we now find a voice who is gradually winding down, though still justifying his actions in the deterioration of the word, this time supported by the development of the already discussed metaphor of the aged eagle (v. 6) into now a full-fledged conceit, which consequently induces us to regard the image of the air in the succeeding verse as a reference to the surroundings in which those utterances occur, which according to the voice are now *"small and dry"* in contrast to the freshness of the springs and limitless verdure that he associates with Paradise and the Promised Land (v. 34-36). Now that he has resumed his defence he directs his final petition to God, asking that through his guidance he may be able to strike a balance between being actively engaged in the perusal and discussion of the dogma while at the same time not being troubled by the deviant conclusions that may arise from it, and in ultimate instance to remain calm and not to act rashly when this thoughts lead him to challenge God's authority (v.38-39). On the last pair of verses the poetic voice changes his object of adoration from God to the Virgin, praying for her intervention by reciting and repeating the last verse of the Hail Mary prayer, with the remarkable exception of forgetting the word *"sinners"* in the repetition of the verse, whether unconsciously or on purpose[1], from which we are led to presume that the poetic voice is reciting them before going to bed as the habit accustoms to do.

3. The sleep of the just

We believe that by assuming that the poetic voice falls asleep and the experiences expressed are part of his dreams the reader may comprehend to a greater extent the intricacies and implications that the metaphorical language and images bring to the text, a view inferred from the impressionistic nature and the vagueness that characterises the imagery of the successive sections, as well as by the shift in the verbal tense and the use of language resulting from the apparent confusion that takes hold over the poetic voice's frantic utterances. The subsequent interpretation, we admit, is ambiguous in that however exhaustive and profound the analysis of dreams may be its inaccuracy should be taken into account as a result of the distortion that operates between the images represented on the surface and their ambivalent meaning. The existence of different levels of consciousness in dreams has been acknowledged and thoroughly explored by the school of Psychoanalysis since the publication of Sigmund Freud's seminal work on dream analysis, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, in which he postulated the existence of two modes of expression in dreams: the *"dream-thought"* or the dream's subconscious essence and the *"dream-content"* its translation to consciousness that conforms the imagery presented (1913, 93). In his work he signalled the principal mechanisms and processes that intervene in that translation, carried out principally through condensation and displacement that are driven by repressive forces with the purpose of disguising the object of the dream-thought. The resulting rendition he argued is somewhat lacking of the representation of logical

relations between dream-thoughts, as dreams can only depict them by using several mechanisms based on the relationships between images like uniformity that encloses relations of similarity and opposition, simultaneity, succession, and inversion (Freud 1913: 103-105). In regards to succession Freud did not only refer to the succession of pictures that constitute a dream but to the sequence of different dreams on the same night as well, a relation that should not be overlooked as it can betray the subjacent implications that each episode shares with its counterparts (Freud 1913: 109); a claim that was also shared by some of his contemporaries like Otto Rank or Scherner, who ventured as well to assert that the latter sections help the interpretation of the preceding parts where the object is vaguely depicted *"when the graphic impulse becomes exhausted"* (Scherner 1861 cited in Freud 1913: 110). Accordingly we allege that the subsequent sections of the poem, notwithstanding their being parts of the same dream or constituting different episodes, have been experienced on the same night, Ash-Wednesday's night precisely since in its recollection of mortality, binding together the individual with the rest of the fold, the penitent stands in preparation for purgation, a departure from the sins of the old life into the purity of the new, regarded as a process of death and rebirth.

In fact, this is the only possible moment in which the poetic voice can dare to proclaim his irritated renunciation; if he believes in the effectiveness of the Catholic dogma, which states that after Lent, come Easter Sunday, all our sins would be forgiven; he has forty days to atone. His doubt comes from two different ways: if either his sins are unredeemable, or the dogma is worthless, he is condemned. Altogether this oneiric sequence represents the symbolic death of the poetic voice, who sets out on a journey through different levels of consciousness and the realms envisioned within them to gain the absolution for the unforgivable sin he has committed by resorting to any symbol or element associated with redemption that his literary and religious knowledge may recall, but especially clinging to the last hope that the Catholic dogma offers to him in the form of the death and resurrection of the Redeemer, mimicked by the poetic self's loss of identity.

In order to ascertain what elements constitute the core of the dream's significance Freud identified the intensity and recurrence of an image's representation as the factors that are revealing to the interpreter, since the elements of dream-thoughts that are subjected to their emphasis are rarely present in the dream-content, and if depicted they have been subjected to the most profuse work of condensation or displacement, which marks their value to the censorship (Freud 1913: 108). In that regard we focus our attention especially on the first two images, the Lady and the leopards, as they have underwent an extensive process of condensation. In the case of the latter they have experienced an identification, a form of condensation in which only one of the members of a group connected by a common feature is represented (Freud 1913: 105), as they spring from a metareference from Dante's *Inferno* (I, 30-50) to Jeremiah (5:6) in which the beasts represent annihilation for those who refuse to repent from their sins, which could be the reason behind their condensation within the poet's psyche. They also echo figures of classical literature and mythology, as a reference to Cerberus or, as Pinkney has claimed, to the panthers of Circe's Palace (1984: 27). Although we differ from Martz's understanding of the leopards as a symbol of God's grace, we accept her rendition of the juniper tree and its context as a reference to Elijah that underlines the motif of renewal (Kings 19:1-8), and to the fall of man (1998: 152) and its implications regarding the loss of the Word. As prophesied in the source text these creatures exert the destruction of the poetic voice's physical corrupted body, symbolising the depersonalization disorder and self-estrangement from his own identity that the voice is experiencing on this section, represented as well by the detachment that characterises the narration. It may be argued that the *"Lady"* is overtly distinguished from the Virgin by the poetic voice, but her figure as well as other variations (v. 84, 141, 168, 209) in truth refer to the same entity, Mary, a "*collective image*" that has been formed by condensation, as its presence in the *"dream-content"* serves to join the greatest number of *"dream-thoughts"* increasing the number of associations and meanings that each of these elements produce in the dream-material (Freud 1913: 97, 105), one into which other female figures like Dante's Beatrice have been added (Ellis 1983: 215). This perspective is reinforced by taking into consideration that the poetic's voice last thoughts were the verses of the Hail Mary (v. 40-41), and his concern with unification. In addition to amplifying the indefiniteness of the poem's imagery and the multiplicity of its associations, this process can also result from the poetic's voice censorship, as though asleep, he is still aware of the problems that the Virgin's intercession implicates in the Catholic dogma. The aim of the voice's invocation to Mary is rather straightforward as he intends her to intercede for his sins, cleansing the stain of his defiance by her "*loveliness*" (v. 50-53). However, this would entail a dogmatic issue inherent to Catholicism, and ultimately the sin of idolatry, as the intervention of the Virgin and the saints is differently regarded in the Roman Catholic and the Protestant doctrine, since the latter's closer reading of the Bible disregards the worship of any figure other than God and Christ. It is this sin that brings forth the remembrance and re-enactment of Ezekiel's episode of the Valley of Bones (37:1-14) since idolatry brings the Israelites' fall and punishment (6:1-8, 44:12) causing their demise and the death of the valley's life. But the episode's reference despite carrying these implications it also entails the promise of rebirth through redemption, as in Ezekiel's vision God offers them their last chance of redemption, resurrecting the fallen Israelites and producing the Valley's regrowth (Ezekiel 36: 25-27, 35; 37:12).

Afterwards the poetic voice recalls his identity, aware of his concealment in the dissociation he is experiencing, and realising the futility of his actions and words in an existence outside of Paradise, in juxtaposition with the image of the barrenness of the desert (v. 51-54). The symbol of the gourd in Western artistic tradition, as Wilson asserts, is closely linked to the prophet Jonah as a symbol of resurrection (1951: 152), representing the antidote for the Apple (Haig 1913: 260); element that serves as the vessel in which the remains of the poetic voice are collected. The Lady's withdrawal is effected once the voice has consciously recognised the hopelessness of his plea and

endeavour, from which in despair he resigns and submits to forgetfulness and oblivion while his dissociated lifeless remains are left as a token of expiation (v.57-62). As a result God's voice is heard once more, encouraging the voice to continue the process by offering him the role of prophet alongside its implications of rebirth, (v. 62-64) another reference to Ezekiel in which endowed with God's and the wind's breath the prophet is able to restore the life of the dead (37: 9-14). The bone's song is introduced by an allusion to Ecclesiastes (12: 5) that reflects upon fear and the satiation of desire in death and eternity, motives also developed in the bones' litany that mirrors the structure of the Litany of Loreto, a Marian litany that praises the Virgin as an intercessor. But in the case of the bone's chant Mary departs from her previous role, undergoing a process of division into the Roman Catholic and the Protestant view explored through the antithetical arrangement of a series of concepts that refer either to the former or to the latter (v 67-72), which the dream has *"reduced to uniformity"* (Freud 1913: 105); being now regarded as a *"Mother"* (v. 86), the means by which salvation would come in the figure of Christ. Mary's motherhood is explored by the addition of the rose's symbol to the work of condensation, since roses are central to Christian Marian symbolism as she was considered the blossom that springs from Eve's thorny shrub in order to repair the sin of the first virgin, as Sedulius wrote in *Carmen Paschale* (II v. 20-49), a notion that Dante used in a similar fashion (*Paradiso* XXXII, 1-36). The transformation of the *"single Rose"* into the *"Garden"* (v.73-74) represents Christ's deliverance, as the poetic voice assigns to them the figures of the Virgin and Jesus respectively, drawn from Dante's similar attribution (*Paradiso* XXIII, 71-75). The garden's identification with Christ is likewise driven by the poetic voice's hopes and desires of regaining the state of Grace and original capacities of the word thanks to the Saviour; from which the voice starts his reflections upon desire as Jesus's infinite love would quell the pangs of unsatisfied love implying, as the poetic voice's realises, *"The greater torment"* of the satiation of love and desire, and thus of his longings (v. 74-79), which being established upon a platonic ideal, they would put an end to what by definition is *"unconclusible"*, that is, not liable to be proved or deducted as it cannot be determined or limited, which in turn would interrupt his unattainable quest, his fixation on the Word of Creation as a platonic archetype, and the process in which both are developed, the poem itself.

Despite the gratefulness dedicated to Mary for her son in the end of the bone's song there is a subjacent sense of frustration and defeat in the cynical satisfaction shown by the bones in the return to the initial setting where the tainted remains of the poet are left behind to be forgotten (Ezekiel 6: 5, 22: 15-16), after which influenced by the scene of the division of the land in Ezekiel's vision, the poetic voice is conflicted once more by the contradiction represented by unity and division. This concern goes beyond a mere opposition of terms as it involves a pondering about the elements required for the construction of a new argument that overrides the effectuation of the Third Man's argument. The only manner of obviating the infinite chain between the archetype and the entity is by removing the separation that exists between the two

from the beginning, since even a single grade of division is enough to separate them indefinitely. The solution is to fully identify the object with its archetype, resulting in the perspective that the objects perceived are the actual archetype, implying that humanity actually lives in the World of Ideas. This approach obviates the Theory of Forms since it renders them, like in the case of Aristotle's objection, unnecessary. If objects are the archetype they neither have an archetype nor are the archetype of other element, they are what they are, and thus the fault is on human perception that in its imperfection distorts the perfect reality of things, and regards them as variable. By adopting this view into the Christian context we can connect it to the proposal that maintains that we still live in Paradise, implying that the Fall consists in ignoring that fact; a perspective shared by the poetic voice, who in his cynical and pessimistic attitude obviates temporarily the solution of the problem and focuses rather on the current state of affairs, the ineffectuality of such questions in a world where we are perceptually separated from Grace as a consequence of the loss of the Word, which is also a part of mankind's lost inheritance.

The frustration and sense of loss that pervades the conclusion of the preceding sequence is gaining hold over the poetic voice's psyche throwing him into the abyss of his own oneiric domain, now nightmarish and grotesque, founded upon the metaphysical plane created by Dante in *Inferno*, structured in different levels highlighted in the poem by the motif of the staircase (Ellis 1983: 214), in resemblance as well to medieval sermons in which the Seven Deadly Sins are represented as *"seven ascending staircases"*, a demon lurking in each of them waiting *"to take the human spirit out of this world"* (Hosbaum 2003: 449). As Hosbaum argues the concept behind those sermons is *"one of suffering as well as purgation"* as in the journey of ascension the human spirit is gradually stripped from its corporeal attributes, a similar process to the one that the poetic voice underwent in the previous episode. As a result the speaker abandons his detached perspective and is forced to experience this section of the journey in the first person, which increases the sense of fear that taints the visions of the speaker's nightmare as the attributes of his context are constructed around the concept of sickness and decay (v. 99, 103, 105) that can be regarded as the physiological representation of sin. The context of the dank stair also echoes Jonah, a figure already explored by his experience of a process of defiance, punishment and restoration; who also served as the reference to prophesy Jesus' resurrection (Matthew 39: 41). Purgation is the central motif of the final verses, drawn from the Eucharistic prayer (v. 117-119), in which the Word of the Lord is not only regarded as a source of absolution but also of physical healing (Matthew 8: 5-8); but according to the speaker's addition it needs to be directly requested, and more importantly, pronounced by the Lord. Thus, the poetic voice conceives the transgression he has committed and its purgation on both metaphysical and physical terms, the former as a result of the denial of the Holy Spirit, and the latter in connection to the Original Sin, which entails the loss of Paradise and the Word as a direct consequence of the Apple's seed that allegedly has hindered the capacity to use God's language and human perception, explored in the speaker's final realization in the previous poem and developed in the subsequent sections.

The development of the motifs subjacent to the speaker's nightmare is briefly interrupted by the pastoral scene, a symbolist and elusive fragment that constitutes a dream-within-a dream that though apparently disrupts the continuity of the theme and imagery, it still responds to two reasons, namely, to the overall structure and implications of the poem, as well as to the drives and ambitions of the poetic voice. The central element that knits together the fragment's imagery is the notion of renewal, a reverie of sensuous cleansing, hinted by the window's bellied form, the blossom, and the idea of spring time; a concept also explored and perhaps with more significance in the symbolism of the three plants mentioned. The fig which in pagan classical tradition is connected to Priapus, represent in Christianity the leaves that Adam and Eve use to cover their nakedness after the Fall (Genesis 3: 7), in addition to Jesus' parable of the barren fig tree that explores the notion of repentance achieved thanks to forbearance and suffering (Luke 13: 6-9). The hawthorn stands as a symbol of duality, contradiction and the unification of opposites; representing fertility, chastity and decay, as well as the primal symbol of the May Day in folk tradition. The lilac besides its connotations of love, innocence and mourning is part of the myth of the Syringa and Priapus, in which the nymph being chased by the god turns into a lilac bush to avoid capture. Moreover the figure of the *"broadbacked"* piper acts the role of Pan as through the displacement some of the deity's characteristics may have been assigned into it (Freud 1913: 101), creating a composite image that also includes the colours usually associated to the Virgin Mary. Although it may seem arbitrary and coincidental, we argue that the piper's amalgam and the reference to the myth previously mentioned points to the figures found in Keats' Ode on a Grecian Urn, which prompts us to regard the fragment as a self-referential reflection on artistic creation and the process of aesthetic reverie in its relation to the attempt to achieve and represent ideals as part and purpose of the poetic voice's quest. The speaker's reverie as the Urn's is constructed upon and appeals to the internal reproduction and representation of the images presented within the creative mind of the artist-spectator (Vendler 1985: 116-118), as the soundless melody of the poetic voice's dream points to the *"ditties of no tone"* that the Urn's piper plays not to the senses but *"to the spirit"* (Keats v. 15), to the world of imagination; implying for him a loss of self in the autonomous otherness of the work of art (Vendler 1985: 125), which can be seen in the speaker's momentary renouncement of his ego that allows him to experience the external and fleeting sensations that conforms his vision until its eventual fading. In addition, the meta-dream under this perspective can be regarded as a *"representation of universal or archetypal Truths"* (Vendler 1985: 119), the endeavour to reach an eternal prototype in which thanks to the workings of the imagination, Austin argues, sensuous experiences are not just repeated but refined (1964, 435), sequestered in a permanent reality that transcends the boundaries of time where the poet is able to reconcile *"life in its ever changing fullness"*, suggested in the dream by the spring time and the Maypole, and the apprehension of those *"ripe moments"* within the permanent representation of the work of art (Wigod 1957: 116); a unifying and eternally recurrent experience that nonetheless has served the poetic

voice to dispose of the temporal dimension, a step required in the expression and exploration of ideals as he previously realised. (v.16-19) However, as in the case of Keats' poem the timeless vision of this *"Cold Pastoral"* is essentially an illusion, as *"its permanence is sustained by its artificiality"* (Biswas 1977/8: 107), inherent to the pastoral genre; abruptly ending as a consequence of *"the necessary and constant obliteration inherent in the aesthetic process itself"* (Vendler 1985: 125); but also springing from the realisation that the form of cleansing he seeks requires more than the creative devices and the framework which that sensuous realm of artistic creation provides and is founded upon, it needs the verbalised formula, the expression of yearning and unworthiness in the yielding of one's pride in plea or prayer.

Although the distraction of the reverie has faded the idyllic setting remains, providing the perfect context where renewal and refinement can be finally received in this oneiric Paradise that constitutes, as Kwan-Terry claims, *"the reminder of the natural world where Time exists and is not redeemed"* (1994: 137). Renewal is not only highlighted in the vision of Paradise, but in the reference to episodes of Dante's *Purgatorio* (XXV-XXXIII) that also serve as the framework upon which the fragment is built. In *Purgatorio* Dante meets the poet Arnaut Daniel who is *"preparing for holiness by being purged in the flames of his lust"* (Ellis 1983: 214), hinting at the already mentioned connection between the sensuous and the mystic experience (Ellis 1983: 210-211). As Eliot's translation tells us, the fires of Purgatory are different than the fires of Hell in that the torment is desired an accepted by the penitent, and in that suffering lies their hope (1951: 216-17), a self-appointed torment that as Booth expresses "*represents the possibility of moving from Purgatory to Paradise"* (2015: 235). In this context Daniel pronounces the *"sovegna vos"*, a token and a remembrance of his identity but also of his pain and his effort that in the poem call us back to the abandoned remains of the speaker (v. 89-90), and to his present situation. Instead of flames, the renewal of the speaker is attempted to be effected thanks to the restorative presence of nature, and especially by the redemptive qualities of the composite image of the Virgin Mary, now clad in her usual colours, white and blue (v. 124, 141), which prompts us to include the character of the *"silent sister"* into the work of condensation, who shows certain characteristic of Dante's Beatrice (Ellis 1983: 218) when the light envelops her (v. 135). Given the section's dominant motif of redemption and how the poetic voice identified this aim with the Virgin's motherhood and the birth of Christ, the light may stand as a metaphor for the Annunciation or for Christ's birth, a moment of solemnity as the funerary procession in which the *"old life"* is escorted in pomp but also, as Ellis remarks, in the *"dignity, order and significance"* that the images confer *"to the experience of sin and wastage"* (1983: 215). The poetic voice's expectations of rebirth seem to be on the verge of finding fulfilment at last in the departure of the hearse and the relocation of the scene into a reinterpretation of Eden where the composite Virgin is praying *"between the yews"* (v. 142), a reference to the Tree of Knowledge and to the Tree of Life; and is accompanied by the piper, addressed now in his form of deity and identified with Pan. A paradise where creation is performed by means of a silence

that also underlines the solemnity of the moment when the time-bound world stretches out to meet the eternal (v. 145), seen respectively in the fountain and the bird (Kwan-Terry 1994: 137). But, in the end, it results being a fruitless moment as the true Word (v. 119, 152), the word of Creation and of healing is neither heard or pronounced, leaving the speaker to hear *"the whispers of yew"* (Kwan-Terry 1994: 138) that point towards the Original Sin, as well as to the promises of the Tree of Life. Promises are also part of the *Salve Regina*, as the hymn can be regarded as a request for the Grace and absolution of Jesus as a product of Mary's womb, but in the poem's shortened form it underlines the sense of absence, and acceptance of the exile from a sort of Paradise that the poetic voice, like the rest of the exiled figures drawn from the Scriptures, has to experience (v. 148). A re-enactment of Genesis (3:23-24) that alongside the section, as a whole, emphasises the sense of loss that the poetic voice feels in regards to Paradise, in connection with the natural qualities of the Word of Creation (v. 148).

4. The awakening.

The fifth section shifts the focus on the Virgin towards God and Jesus referred to in their representation of the Word, as the speaker constructs a justification in which the Word even if it not pronounced or heard is still a Word in itself, a Word whose existence preceded that of the world, whose birth is represented by the reference to *John* (1:1-5) and, as Longenbach notes in regards to Gerontion, to Lancelot Andrewes' sermon on Matthew (1994: 177). A verb of creation that gives existence to the world and to itself, a meta-word that even if unreachable in the silence of isolation is still venerated as the centre of the world in the figure of Jesus, the Word made flesh. This process of reasoning highlights the increasing awareness of the poetic voice and his ascension to a state of consciousness, followed yet by another exposition in the reference to Miccah (6:1-5), in which God expostulates to the Israelites their idolatry and their sins, and the redemption he offered to their fathers, as Matthew Henry comments (2004: 846), reasoning with them by teaching them how to reason with themselves, aim that is sought as well by the speaker (v. 38-39, 211). The speaker continues by questioning the appropriateness of the Word to exist in a *"unstilled"* world that suffocates its capacities and value as a result of the noise seen as a degradation, as we have argued, of the capacities of language as God's gift; and the suitability of said gift to those who like the poet, now hidden once again behind the collective, walk in the darkness of an existence outside God's Grace that severs them from the rest of humanity, as even the sons and daughters of Adam can still be redeemed, an isolation that springs from the defiance that he committed, indicated by the self-referential lines (v. 165-167) that point to their counterparts in the first section (v. 18-22). These lines of reassertion and self-reproach are followed by a further questioning, this time regarding the capacity of the Virgin Mary to intercede for the sins of the faithful, not just in terms of volition but if metaphysically she would be able to mediate for the people that the poet brings forth, and among which he again hides himself in an entreating outcry (v. 168- 175). People who, like Judas, have chosen to belief but also have decided to oppose the one who created them and gave them the faith they had adopted and even in heresy still follow; those who are divided between the different readings and understandings of the multiple dogmatic divisions regarding Christianity and Mary's figure (v. 170-171) as Ellis notes (1983: 218), but this lines may as well refer to the entrapment in the fulfilment of dreams as a reference to the *Odyssey*'s gates of horn and ivory (XIX, p. 271). Those regarded by the speaker as pitiable infants barred from Grace and the Promised Land, desiring it and unwilling to resign to it even when they are aware of the impossibility of such hope, as a result both of their renouncement to the *"face and the voice"* and the loss of the capacities of human language and the mastery of the word of creation (v. 168-174). The speaker resumes the speculative process by bringing on again the composite formations of the garden and the dessert already explored in his dreams, the former as a representation of the Garden of Eden where the condensed image of Mary is placed between the yews (v. 177), a reference to the Tree of Life and the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, and the latter as the refuge to the people that even when afraid are prone to question and challenge the dogma as well as God's impositions; ending in the acknowledgement of the desire of spitting the residue, the token of the Original Sin, the Apple's seed that is conceived as the responsible of obstructing the flow of breath, seen in Ezekiel and in the Valley of Bones' episode as the essence of life, which hinders the capacity of humans to communicate in the language of God, of using the Word of Creation (v. 182-183).

If a characteristic defines the final episode is its self-referential standpoint, recapitulating the different images and metaphors that the poetic voice has created in his dreams with the addition of new motives, but specially alluding the words that led to his heresy and brought his punishment on the previous night; endowing the metaphysical journey he has experienced with a sense of cyclicality, a full circle that leads him to the moment when he committed his mistake, granting him the opportunity of making amendments thanks to the new insight gained from his oneiric pilgrimage. The opening lines of the poem denote that change of the speaker's intentions and attitude as the modification of *"because"* for "*although"* indicates, according to Kwan-Terry, that the *"positive action"* and the *"affirmation"* that the former implied has been reduced to a weaker meaning, losing its former implication of choice to a stance that shows acceptance (1994, 138). In this manner a process of confession is started by the poetic voice, admitting his own hesitation in regards to what has been lost both as a consequence of the Original Sin and of his own defiance, juxtaposed with the knowledge that has resulted from them; followed by two self-referential lines that acknowledge the very context and essence of the poem, the day of Ash-Wednesday in its connection to the remembrance of Jesus' death and rebirth (v. 190); and finally the actual effectuation of catholic confession shown in the opening formula *"Bless me father"* (v. 191), but omitting the recognition of his state as a sinner, recalling his previous lapse when reciting the Hail Mary (v. 40-41), a substitution that responds to an attempt to make allowances for his heresy in a statement that integrates his desire to be absolved and the difficulty of desisting from the questions and incongruences that assail him (v. 38-39, 211). The perspective of the speaker is certainly hopeful in

respect to the prospects of his own case, as well as to the condition of the creative word that in the mind of the poetic voice undergoes a process of transformation by adapting itself to the maritime context upon which the section is based[2], and of renewal since the *"vans to beat the air"* (v. 35) have become *"unbroken"* sails (v. 193-194) that though forced to renounce to his own former glory in the skies are able to fulfill his function in this new, and less ambitious, medium. This renovation responds to the poetic voice's awareness of the creative word's remaining power that so far has enabled him to start and continue his quest in the development of the poem itself, a metaliterary approach that is continued in the reference to the *Odyssey's "gates of sawn ivory"* through which pass the dreams and words that cannot find fulfilment and are *"deceitful"* (XIX, p. 271), the speaker's acknowledgement that all the *"empty forms"* created that constitute his experience are just an illusion, similar to the case of the reverie as the creative process is based upon an artificial system, the degraded word (v. 201-203).

As the section develops the tone of admittance starts to evolve into one of yearning and request, preceded by his last assertion (v. 204-205) which represent a maturing of the conclusions about time that he had reached (v. 16-19), in that he is aware of the crucial instant and point in which he is established, the moment of preparation for death and rebirth that the celebration of Ash-Wednesday started, which will be continued throughout Lent (v. 205-206). This is followed by his first petition to the unified figure that on his dreams represented the Virgin Mary, in which even if we cannot know the position that each of Eden's trees represents in the statement we can be certain that it responds to the speaker's desire of unification, asking in the resolution of his case the inclusion of the connotations associated to both (v. 208-210). His prayer is continued by the reiteration of one of his first requests (v. 38-39), which leads to the formulation of his plea's ultimate purpose, the desire of unification that would prevent the effectuation of the Third Man's argument as we have seen, which has eluded the speaker throughout the entire process as he has not yet fully committed to it. This aim converges in his last two appeals, first in the reference to Dante the speaker yields all sense of restlessness and inquiry (v. 214), the surrendering of his own will and existence in the unifying essence of God, in which all yearning for a higher state, all desire, is quenched in *"that sea whereunto everything is moving which it creates and which nature makes."* (*Paradiso* III 67-96); which as we have argued would put an end to his quest, thwarting the effectuation of the Third Man's argument if his wish is finally granted. The certainty of such an event eludes us as it does to the reader, as the poetic voice's final entreaty, the answer in catholic mass to the priest's *"Hear my prayer, O Lord"* (Psalm 102) is never answered, since he is aware of the loss of the language that is capable of communicating with God. However the speaker is also conscious that regardless of the reply he has achieved one of his aims, poetic creation, that on his waiting for the restitution of the Word of creation, this process alongside his words, have enabled him if not to be redeemed at least to construct, undergo, and eternally re-experience the process through which that objective may finally be realised.

5. Vindication of the poet.

Ash Wednesday, as we have seen, brings together the mythical, the mystical, and the metaliterary in the effort of the poet and the poetic voice of bringing together elements that on first sight seem discordant. Although the efforts of the poet to reach the Absolute are far from being fulfilled he has achieved the means through which his desires may find if not satisfaction, at least some degree of transcendence. The ambivalence and uncertainty that characterises the poem prevents any asseveration regarding the attainment of the poetic voice's final aim, but given the religious thematic of the poem the resolution of its conclusion may require an act of faith. Consequently in the sixth and last part of the poem, between the dialectic of the loss of the Grace, the consciousness of the world and the nostalgia of all that we have lost, in that final cry for redemption, both voices come together. The two of them reunite in that prayer, which answers to very different reasons. The poet, expresses his desire to return to the state of Grace lost in Paradise long ago. The second one, the speaker, is just asking for the voice that allows him to be a poet, and to be able to create with his dreamed Word, for the moment expressed with his own vain but humble words. To be a poet is, in our opinion, to keep on fighting for lost causes, and in this poem, T. S. Eliot, makes a statement about that lost cause. What makes him a poet, in Ash-Wednesday, is the attempt to gain a voice that he has not, but while doing it, he becomes the recipient of the Gift that enables him to be a poet. It is in this single prayer where the voices of the poet, the man and the poetic voice come together to ask for the creation word to be restored, and if, as it has been argued, creation through words has been finally attained, then the word might finally reach his destination, and be redemptive.

And let my cry come on to Thee.

NOTES:

1   The lapse could be construed as a veiled suggestion to God that he is, in fact, already forgiven; hoping that God may take the bait and let his fault slip through.

2   We venture to claim that the context developed in section VI is based on Da Vinci's *Virgin of the Rocks,* specifically on the London's version, which would serve to explain the reference to the *"blue rocks"*, the *"bent golden-rod"*, and perhaps is connected with the reference to the Odyssey's *"gates of sawn ivory"* in that the elements depicted in the painting are idealized, not naturally accurate.

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