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INTRA-POETIC RELATIONSHIP
T. S. Eliot's Dialogue with Tradition

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Abstract: If it is to be believed that no art exists in a vacuum and that it is in response to the preceding works of art, then the poetry of T. S. Eliot would prove more befitting, engaging and intriguing for the readers because of its relational approach and its connection with tradition. What Bakhtin proposed in his theory of dialogism was something that Eliot had already dealt with in his poetics. His awareness of the past, his consciousness of his place in time and his realization of not being able to get on without a literary tradition, compelled him to leave Harvard in search of a rich literary past, which could offer him the 'Whole'. His sojourn in Paris and London are suggestive of his aim to establish dialogues with the various literary traditions, right from French, English to Indic. His dialogues with his immediate predecessors can perhaps best be joined within the frame work of *Tradition and the Individual Talent*. In this paper, I demonstrate the ways in which Eliot endeavoured to come close to his precursors during his visit to Paris and London, partly for assimilation and partly for rejection. I will also probe into his historical sense to bring to the fore his intra-poetic relationships, particularly with the prominent Victorian poet, Tennyson and the way these influences were integral to his development as poet, critic and artist. His changing responses to his precursor made him a strong (in Bloomian sense) and major 'Twentieth Century English Poet'.

Keywords: Dialogue, Harold Bloom, Individual Talent, Intra-Poetic Relationship, Tradition, T. S. Eliot

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1. Introduction

Dialogue is an integral part of any creative process. All utterances emerge as responses,[1] so the dialogic field is boundless; it extends into the past and the future, and in the interpretation of the past lies a representative struggle for creation. Dialogism increases the individuality and creativity of any writer as it allows him to work through the text, to assimilate and appropriate, and "to create his own patterns of desire and adaptation",[2] that is essentially multi-voiced / heteroglossic.

T. S. Eliot's poetry is a complex web of invisible others, reflecting both autonomy and connectedness. It is a symphony of multiple chords and disparate ideas, which springs from a dialectic of opinion and carries reflection of his conflicting cravings for 'knowledge of the past' and search for his 'poetic voice'. In his early poetic career, Eliot realized the necessity of tradition and the creation of individuality. His transactions with the past and the present unfold the longings of a young-aspiring artist in performance for 'self-fashioning' and 'self-creation'. His openness to several traditions, his ability to borrow and assimilate cropped out of the compulsion to be valid only by existing in the Tradition. When Eliot said, "no poet, no artist of any art, has his complete meaning alone"[3] perhaps he was trying to inherit a 'Tradition' that rests on conformity between the past and the present. His reinvented notion of tradition reflected his desire for cultivating his poetic voice which could be obtained through 'great labour.' Eliot wrote: "Tradition ... involves ... the historical

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[1]Mikhail M. Bakhtin, "Discourse in the Novel," reprinted, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, ed., Michael Holquist, trans., Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist, Austin and London: University of Texas Press, 1981, 294. <http://www.rlwclarke.net/Theory/Sources Primary/BakhtinDiscourseintheNovel.pdf> (5 Jan 2016).

[2]Norman Holland, "Unity Identity Text Self," PMLA, Vol. 90, No. 5 (Oct., 1975), pp. 813-822, 816. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/461467> (6 March 2016).

[3]Thomas Stearns Eliot, "Tradition and the Individual Talent," <http://www.bartleby.com/200/sw4.html> (16 Feb. 2016).

sense ... a perception ... [that] compels a man to write not merely with his own generation in his bones, but with a feeling that the Whole of the literature of Europe from Homer and within it the Whole of the literature of his own country has a simultaneous existence and composes a simultaneous order."[4] Eliot strongly believed in a sense of continuity with those great writers who came before him. He moved into a dialogical relationship with them and this intra-poetic relation set him as a part of the 'Whole' alongside establishing him as a writer with a distinct voice.

2. Young Eliot's Longings for Tradition

Eliot was conscious of the fact that he has to re-construct a tradition for himself, which could assure him a place in time. The young Bostonian's growing anxiety for 'the historical sense' tempted him for cultural distillation. Eliot was well aware that America had very little to offer him and that his poetic impulses could never be wholly contained while being in Harvard.[5] In the preface to *From Puritanism to Postmodernism: A History of American Literature*, Richard Ruland and Malcolm Bradbury wrote: "... just 200 years ago, when Americans had just completed their Revolution and were proudly feeling their identity as the First New Nation ... there was America writing, but there was no American literature ... there was a *desire* for one."[6] Noah Webster expressed a similar concern when he said: "America must be independent in *literature* as she is in politics – as famous for arts as for arms."[7] Hugh Kenner informs that the

[4]Eliot, "Tradition and the Individual Talent."

[5]Despite being steeped in Emerson (through his mother), Eliot never wanted to join the emerging American line of Emerson and Whitman. Gordon informs: "During his junior and senior years at Harvard, he became aware that there was not one older poet writing in America whose writing a younger man could take seriously." Lyndall Gordon, *The Imperfect Life of T. S. Eliot*, London: Virago, 2012, 45.

[6]Richard Ruland and Malcolm Bradbury, *From Puritanism to Postmodernism: A History of American Literature*, New York: Viking Penguin, 1991, xi-xiii.

[7]Ruland and Bradbury, *From Puritanism to Postmodernism*, xi-xii.

creation of the American literary past became a significant pursuit of the 1920s.[8] Several American writers and critics took up the task of devising a viable American literary tradition. Ezra Pound's urge to 'make it new' opened up the spatial boundaries and channels for expression and exchange of ideas. Eliot's realization of not being able to get on without a literary tradition, compelled him to leave Harvard in search of a rich literary past, which could offer him the 'Whole'. His sudden attraction for Paris and detestation of the Bostonian life reveals his anxiety and passion of *becoming.*[9] In his sophomore year at Harvard, Eliot joined the philosophy course with compulsion from the family "to conform to the Eliot ideal," but his poetic impulse and the artist in him drove him to art alone.[10] The actual process of connecting with the past began at Harvard, which cultivated him and alongside his own intellectual impoverishment compelled him for immersion in aesthetic heteroglossia – to 'see more' and 'know more'. At Harvard, Dean Briggs' persuasive readings of Donne's poetry developed Eliot's poetic sensibility and it was through George Santayana that he came closer to Dante and later he wrote an essay titled *Dante* (1920). In "What Dante Means to Me," Eliot mentions how he shaped his poetic self with materials close at hand. He appreciated Dante's poetry for "being the most comprehensive, and the most *ordered* presentation of emotions that has ever been made."[11] His courses on French Literature and particularly on French criticism with

[8]Hugh Kenner, "A Homemade World," *The American Modernist Writers*, Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1989.

[9]Lyndall Gordon says: "Eliot had suffered from the inertia of his class, Harvard clichés and Boston Manners." The clatter and chatter of the society, the false delicacy and exaggerated solicitudes appeared to him no less than mediocrity. Gordon, *The Imperfect Life of T. S. Eliot,* 25.

[10]Gordon writes that Eliot's decision to visit Paris in 1910 and his stay in London in 1915 "puzzled and alarmed his parents because he was spending years writing poetry that was published only sporadically and in little-known magazines." Gordon, *The Imperfect Life of T. S. Eliot*, 17.

[11]Gordon, *The Imperfect Life of T. S. Eliot,* 32.

Irving Babbitt, introduced him to the classics and the intellectual bearings of Laforgue and Baudelaire in Eliot taught him to develop a voice, a precedence for the poetical possibilities. While from Baudelaire he learnt "of the possibility of fusion between the sordidly realistic and the phantasmagoric, the possibility of the juxtaposition of the matter-of-fact and the fantastic,"[12] from Laforgue he learnt the art of weaving into his poems the morbid adolescent experiences that he had in an American industrial city. Eliot once said, "Of Jules Laforgue, I can say that he was the first to teach me how to speak, to teach me the poetic possibilities of my own idiom of speech."[13] Erik Svarny mentions that Eliot learnt from Laforgue to be "original"; to create "a plethora of laconic personae"; he learnt the theme of "the painful failure of communication with the opposite sex"; and the art of *vers libre*.[14]

3. Intersection with Tradition: Eliot and the French Tradition

Eliot's sojourn in Paris in 1910-11 helped him in establishing a subterranean dialogue with French literature and art. His relation to some of the prominent French writers is intriguing. Among them Alain-Fournier and Jean Verdenal left an indelible mark on him.[15] Alain-Fournier helped Eliot in improving his French and also mentored him by introducing him to a host of writers like Charles-Louis Philippe (echoes of Philippe's *Bubu de Montparnasse* appear in "Preludes" (Part III), "Rhapsody on a Windy Night," and "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock"). The bleak urban landscape and sordid images of these poems are

[12]Nancy Duvall Hargrove, *T. S. Eliot's Parisian Year*, Florida: University Press of Florida, 2010, 7.

[13]Hargrove, *T. S. Eliot's Parisian Year*, 7.

[14]Erik Svarny, "The Men of 1914": *T. S. Eliot and Early Modernism*, Philadelphia: Open University Press, 1988, 47-48.

[15]Gordon writes: "The two young men played important roles during Eliot's year in Paris, providing him with close friends who shared his sensibilities, his passion for philosophy, literature, the arts, and many of his character traits." Gordon, *The Imperfect Life of T. S. Eliot,* 34.

borrowed from *Bubu*. Eliot had read Paul Claudel's (a French poet and dramatist) *Art Poétique*. He called him "already a great poet in the eyes of a younger generation – my own generation."[16] Claudel's influence on Eliot was long-lasting which is found in Eliot's own plays.[17] Claudel's verse in *L'Otage* bears 'a pictorial resemblance' to certain of Eliot's choruses in *The Rock* and *Murder in the Cathedral*. Further, on Alain- Fournier's instigation, Eliot read Charles Péguy, the noted French poet and philosopher[18] and André Gide, who was an admirer of Baudelaire's speakers.[19] Hargrove informs about Eliot's excitement on purchasing Gide's *Oscar Wilde*, *Isabelle*, and *Nouveaux Prétextes*.[20] Further, Eliot's literary acquaintance with Dostoevsky materialized in French translation through Alain-Fournier. Eliot learned from Dostoevsky how a writer can exploit his own weakness in writing: "he saw how Dostoevsky's epilepsy and hysteria cease to be defects of an individual and become as fundamental weakness can, given the ability to face it and study it – the entrance to a genuine and personal universe. Eliot exploited his own inhibition in Prufrock-the-prophet's stifling fears: his head brought in like John the Baptist's upon a platter."[21] Eliot's association with Jean Verdenal, a medical student, brought him closer to the modern art movements. There are references to Verdenal's interest in Cubism and Futurism in Nancy Hargrove, she says: "Verdenal clearly kept us up with current developments in art and comfortably shared with Eliot, through a bit of sarcastic wit, his disapproval of speed and ease with which new movements appeared on the scene to conflict with or displace prior ones."[22]

Eliot's Parisian year provided him with an opportunity to see the city and its life. Its literature, architecture, avant-garde

[16]Hargrove, *T. S. Eliot's Parisian Year*, 17.
[17]Hargrove, *T. S. Eliot's Parisian Year*, 18.
[18]Hargrove, *T. S. Eliot's Parisian Year*, 18.
[19]Hargrove, *T. S. Eliot's Parisian Year*, 21.
[20]Hargrove, *T. S. Eliot's Parisian Year*, 21.
[21]Gordon, *The Imperfect Life of T. S. Eliot,* 67.
[22]Hargrove, *T. S. Eliot's Parisian Year*, 21.

artists, art and art movements like Synthetic Cubism, Dada, Voriticism, and Surrealism, history, politics, economics, entertainment, fashion, and people all encouraged him to create something new and original. The unpublished poems of Eliot and the Prufrock collections (1917) harp heavily on the Parisian connection. In "Burbank with a Baedeker: Bleistein with a Cigar", the line "Tra-la-la-la-la-la-laire — nil nisi divinum stabile est; caetera fumus" is borrowed from Gautier's "Variations sur le Carnaval De Venise" where the city lives in a state of erotic madness. Moreover, the sources of Eliot's urban landscape for the early poems to "The Waste Land" are St. Louis of his childhood, Boston of his undergraduate years, Paris and London of his adult life. Preludes I, II, and III (Original title: *Preludes in Roxbury*) depicts the slums of Boston and squalor of Paris. The idea of bringing immoral material in high poetry, in *The Waste Land* (original title: *He Do The Police in Different Voices*) is something that Eliot borrowed from Charles Baudelaire. Eliot quotes from Baudelaire's *Fleurs du Mal* to deck up "The Burial of the Dead" (lines 60, 67). In the poem, there is also a reference to the French poet Paul Verlaine's 'Parsifal', a knight who has to resist all sorts of temptations so that he can drink from the Holy Grail. In the Mrs Porter episode, from lines 196-202, we find Verlaine – 'And those children's voices singing in the dome!" Hargrove writes "His [Eliot's] Parisian year gave him the foundation to become a major writer of the 20th century and the inspiration to produce his first masterpiece [*The Waste Land*] at the age of twenty-two."[23]

4. Eliot's Victorian Inheritance

If the French connection in Eliot's early poetry was strong, his connection with the English tradition became indispensable with his conversion to Anglo-Catholicism in June, 1927. In April 1911, he made a short visit to London. Then in 1914 he travelled back to England on a fellowship at Merton College, Oxford. In 1915, he left for Harvard, but for a short period. It was during this time he was preparing himself for the Prufrock poems. In 1915,

[23]Hargrove, *T.S. Eliot's Parisian Year*, 58.

Eliot again routed back to London, rushed into a marriage with Vivienne Haigh Wood, and joined the Bloomsbury group of intellectuals. Eliot was fascinated with London and aspired to be an English poet. It is interesting to note that Eliot's final years at Harvard (1908-1909) were also the formative years of his poetic career. Here the undergraduates read the English poets of the 1890s and idealized them.[24] Student poets in Cambridge, Massachusetts still looked to Tennyson and Browning as their role models. To quote Herbert Howarth: "A Tennysonian elegance, a fluency in oration and in rhapsody, and sometimes a consciously noble attitude, mark the work of the Harvard poets of this order. And it appears that Harvard in general regarded this order of poet as the most admirable."[25]

When the 16 year old Eliot was called upon to recite a poem on Graduation Day at Smith Academy in June 1905, he relied heavily on Tennyson:

Standing upon the shore of all we know
We linger for a moment doubtfully,
Then with a song upon our lips, sail we
Across the harbor bar-no chart to show
No light to warn us of rocks which lie below
But let us yet put forth courageously.
... Great duties call the twentieth Century
... And let thy [Smith's] motto be, proud and serene,
Still as the years pass by, the word "Progress!"[26]

The young Bostonian subtly wove the three major poems of Tennyson: 'Ulysses', 'Çrossing the Bar', and 'The Lotos-Eaters' to voice the progress of his time, which nevertheless echoed the Victorian concept of progress. Perhaps this poetic piece is the

[24]Gordon in *The Imperfect Life of T. S. Eliot* quotes Eliot: "... that was as near as we could get to any living tradition," 46.

[25]David Ned Tobin, *The Presence of the Past: T. S. Eliot's Victorian Inheritance,* Michigan: UMI Research Press, 1983, 84.

[26]T. S. Eliot, *The Complete Poems and Plays of T. S. Eliot,* 1-6, 25, 77-78, London: Faber and Faber, 1970, 592. All subsequent citations from Eliot's poems are from this book. Hereafter only line numbers will be given below the quoted lines.

first example of Eliot's assimilation of Tennyson. Eliot once said "a writer's art must be based on the accumulated sensations of the first twenty one years."[27] In 1909, Eliot was twenty-one, and during this period Tennyson's work was very popular. Eliot's unpublished poems written during 1909-1912 show the impact of Tennyson. "On a Portrait" (1909) resonates with Tennyson's 'Mariana'. Like Mariana, the lady lives among a "crowd of tenuous dreams, unknown" and is "beyond the circle of our thought." In "Circe's Palace" (1909), the men go in a state of trance (II.12-14) like the mariners in Tennyson's "Ulysses."

Eliot's inheritance of Tennyson is further noticed in his engagement with time. The two songs of Eliot: "If space and time, as sages says" and "When we come home across the hill" carry the Tennysonian yearning to escape the world of time by fleeing into some imaginary land – the land of the 'Lotos-Eaters'. One finds a constant recurring of 'Time' in Prufrock, who is trapped in his 'evening' and 'afternoon', and wishes to escape from his past and present by going into the sea-chambers. The ticking of clock in "Raphsody on a Windy Night": "Half-past one… Half-past two… Half past-three"; Gerontion's shrinking from the "corridors of time"; Cumean Sibyl's cry, "I would that I were dead," recall to mind the weariness of Tennyson's Mariana: "My life is dreary, / He cometh not,"… / She said, "I am aweary, aweary, / I would that I were dead!" ("Mariana," 63-72).[28]

Time is ceaselessly at work in the two poets. Eliot's contemplation of the tragedy of human life in "The Dry Salvages" has striking similarities with the voyagers of Tennyson's "The Lotos-Eaters" (II.57-60) who intensely long for an escape from the time-bound world:

Where is there end of it, the soundless wailing,
The silent withering of autumn flowers
Dropping their petals and remaining motionless,

[27]Tobin, *The Presence of the Past,* 89.

[28]Alfred Tennyson, *The Poems and Plays of Alfred Lord Tennyson*, New York: The Modern Library, 1938, 166. All subsequent citations from Tennyson's poems are from this book. Hereafter only line numbers will be given the quoted lines.

Where is there an end to the drifting wreckage,
… There is no end of it, the voiceless wailing,
No end to the withering of withered flowers,
To the movement of pain that is painless and motionless,
To the drift of the sea and the drifting wreckage.
("The Dry Salvages," 51-54, 81-84)

In his introduction to *Poems of Tennyson* (1936) Eliot mentioned that Tennyson was a "time-conscious" poet, "busy in keeping up to date." Eliot, too, in *Four Quartets*, presents a time obsessed world where "Men's curiosity searches past and future / And clings to that dimension" (Dry Salvages," V). There is no hold on "Permanent truths" in this world:

Or as, when an underground train, in the tube,
- stops too long between stations.
And the conversation rises and slowly fades into silence
And you see behind every face the mental emptiness deepen
Leaving only the growing terror of nothing to think about
("East Coker," 119-122)

Both the poets strongly believed that this time-ridden world could be transcended through mystical awareness. Like the personae of *In Memoriam* who gets a glimpse of reality behind the flux of shadowy images (Sec. LXXXXV) Eliot thought of transcending time through timelessness:

For most of us, there is only the unattended
Moment, the moment in and out of time,
The distraction fit, lost in a shaft of sunlight,
The wild thyme unseen, or the winter lightning,
Or the waterfall, or music heard so deeply
That it is not heard at all, but you are the music
While the music lasts. There are only hints and guesses,
Hints followed by guesses…
("Dry Salvages," 210-217)

Tennyson's *In Memoriam* is also about poetic craft as it exposes the poet's anxiety for self-expression and poetic artistry. Similarly, Eliot in the first half of Part V of "Burnt Norton" and

"East Coker" struggles for self-expression. He tries 'to learn to use words', but it is "a different kind of failure":

In words, like weeds, I'll wrap me o'er,
Like coarsest against the cold:
But that large grief which these enfold
Is given in outline and no more. (V, 73-76)

Indeed, *In Memoriam* was an important force in the creation of "Four Quartets". In his careful reading of the poem, Eliot was reviewing forms, images and themes that he would deploy in his own long poem.

The sea and sea-journey is indispensable in the two. In the original draft of "The Waste Land," "Death by Water," there were 70 lines of first person narrative describing a doomed voyage. In this original draft, which was removed by Ezra Pound, the reader can easily feel the presence of Tennyson's "Ulysses." Lines 42 and 43 of this draft bring to one's mind Tennyson's "Ulysses": "…the deep moans round with many voices" ("Ulysses," l. 56). The sailor in the original draft narrates about the women who sang "above the wind / A song that charmed my senses" (II.55-56). These lines echo Tennyson's "Sea Fairies." This image from Tennyson's "Ulysses" was used by Eliot also in part VI of "Ash Wednesday": "the lost sea voices" (196). In both *In Memoriam* and "Four Quartets", the sea becomes a symbol for destruction: "The houses are all gone under the sea" ("East Coker"). "There where the long street roars hath been / The stillness of the central sea" (*In Memoriam*, CXXIII). In "The Dry Salvages": "the sea howl / And the sea yelp," it has "many voices" which is also similar to "the moaning of the homeless sea" (In Memoriam, XXXV). In the "Four Quartets", one can hear the poet's cry: "But fare forward voyagers", this cry echoes "Ulysses" (II.58-60) where he insists his mariners to move on.

Further, like Tennyson, Eliot wished to create characters with 'split personality.' The influence of "Maud" on "Prufrock" is at the level of verbal details as well as style. Tennyson's technique of split characterization and multiple consciousnesses in Maud is deployed by Eliot in "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" and "The Waste Land". Eliot handles disjunctive rhythms of

consciousness of Prufrock and Tiresias as skilfully as Tennyson does.

5. The Eliot-Tennyson Relationship

The Tennysonian echoes in Eliot are not accidental. Drawing on the necessity for a discourse with tradition, Eliot wrote in the introduction of selected poems (1928 edition) of Ezra Pound that "the situation of poetry in 1909 or 1910 was stagnant to a degree, difficult for any young poet to imagine."[29] It is essential to note that from 1916 to 1918 Eliot was teaching Victorian literature to students associated with the University of London, and the London County Council.[30] And it would not be wrong to say that his close reading of Tennyson's art influenced him and resulted in his criticism of Tennyson. Interestingly, among the writers of the 19th century, Tennyson stood as a prominent figure even after 30 years of his death, which spanned from 1892-1922. Eliot could not avoid the influence of Tennyson as his very close friends and contemporaries like James Joyce, D. H. Lawrence, Virginia Woolf, Dylan Thomas, and Aldous Huxley were charmed by the Victorian bard and often alluded to him. In 1909, Eliot had read the 3rd edition of *Alfred Tennyson 1830-63*[31] and Paul Elmer More's essay on "Tennyson" (published in *The Nation*). He made random observations on Tennyson's poetry at different intervals. These criticisms unravel the connection between the two great poets. These remarks were hued with full-throated criticism, cold appraisals and loud acceptance. Perhaps in dialogic relationship there is a blend of reception, protest, promotion and integration. Eliot understood the fact that mere negation or rejection of his precursor would not help his creativity.

Eliot knew genuine creativity required the historical sense, therefore in 1917, he for the first time referred to Tennyson

[29]Tobin, *The Presence of the Past,* 75.

[30]Tobin, *The Presence of the Past,* 91-92.

[31]In the Houghton Library's collection of books owned and autographed by Eliot there is a copy of this book, purchased during his Harvard years.

where he criticized "The Princess" for its brooding over scientific opinions (ll.101-108) and for its sheer oratory. In "Rhetoric and Poetic Drama" (1919), he called *Idylls* as an unsuccessful work because Tennyson did not provide footnotes to the poem. But interestingly there was a cold appraisal for the poem. He said that it is a "cry from the heart – only it is the heart of Tennyson. The Idylls of the king sound often like Tennyson talking to Queen Victoria in heaven."[32] While commenting on the art of the Victorians in "Professional, or …" Eliot criticized Carlyle, Ruskin, Thackeray, and George Eliot for spoiling their work with mixed motives and for being anti-professional. However, he praised Tennyson for his professionalism and devotion to his language, and emphasized on the need to study the past: "In the long run … the continuity of the language has been the strongest thing, so that however much we need French or Italian literature to explain English literature of any period, we need, to explain it, the English literature still more."[33]

Eliot eulogized Tennyson, yet he never expressed his indebtedness to him. While reviewing a collection of essays by Alice Meynells in the April 'Egoist', Eliot largely concentrated on "Some Thoughts of a Reader of Tennyson" where he said:

> In the present tidy small volume she [Meynells] wins our hearts when she says that Tennyson is "more serious than the solemn Wordsworth"… Unaware of a separate angel of modern poetry is he who is insensible to the Tennyson note – the new note that we reaffirm even with the note of Vaughan, Treharne, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Blake, well in our ears – the Tennyson note of splendor, all distinct. He [Tennyson] showed the perpetually transfigured landscape in transfiguring words. He is the captain of our dreams. Others have lighted a candle in England, he lit a sun.[34]

On the contrary, in "Some Notes on the Blank Verse of Christopher Marlowe," he belittled Tennyson for his blank verse: "… the blank verse of Tennyson … is cruder (not 'rougher' or less

[32]Tobin, *The Presence of the Past,* 100.

[33]Tobin, *The Presence of the Past,* 109.

[34]Tobin, *The Presence of the Past,* 102-103.

perfect in technique) than that of half a dozen contemporaries of Shakespeare, cruder, because less capable of expressing complicated, subtle, and surprising emotion."[35] However, he appreciated Tennyson's syntax and technical perfection in "Come down, O maid," a song in *The Princess*: "Tennyson was careful in his syntax; and moreover, his adjectives, usually have a definite meaning…each word is treated with proper respect."[36] He also recognized the sound of syllables in Tennyson and compared him to Milton,[37] while in the essay "Blake" (1920) he tagged him as a time-ridden poet: "Tennyson is a very fair example of a poet almost wholly encrusted with parasitic opinion, almost wholly merged into his environment."[38]

In "The Possibility of a Poetic Drama," he degraded the poet by calling him a master of minor forms who "took to turning out large patterns on a machine."[39] T. S. Eliot had *In Memoriam* in mind as the product of Tennyson's "machine" in the above reference. In Wyndham Lewis's *The Tyro*, Eliot while comparing Tennyson to Baudelaire said that Baudelaire succeeded in establishing a point of view toward good and evil, but Tennyson only "decorated the morality he found in vogue."[40] Also, while expressing his dislike for long poems in "Prose and Verse" (1921), Eliot had the long poems of Tennyson in mind:

> … we do not like long poems. This dislike is due, I believe, partly to the taste of the day, which will pass, and partly to the abuse of the long poem in the hands of distinguished persons who did not know how to employ it … the general criticism on most of the long poems of the 19th century is simply that they are not good enough.[41]

Again, while comparing the Victorians and the Romantics with the seventeenth century poets in *The Metaphysical Poets*

[35]Tobin, *The Presence of the Past,* 110.
[36]Tobin, *The Presence of the Past,* 102.
[37]Tobin, *The Presence of the Past,* 111.
[38]Tobin, *The Presence of the Past,* 113.
[39]Tobin, *The Presence of the Past,* 114.
[40]Tobin, *The Presence of the Past,* 115.
[41]Tobin, *The Presence of the Past,* 115.

(Oct. 1921) he said that wit cannot be found in Shelley, Keats, or Wordsworth, and it is still lacking in the Victorian poets. Eliot exalted the seventeenth century poetic ancestry and distanced himself from his immediate predecessor; he said, "Tennyson and Browning are poets, and they think; but they do not feel their thought as immediately as the odour of a rose."[42] He once again criticized Tennyson in "Contemporary English Prose," 'Vanity Fair,' (July1923):

> Curiously enough, the most original talents in our literature of the greater part of that [nineteenth] century were prose talents; neither Tennyson nor even Browning – I speak with deliberation – can occupy the place of importance of Ruskin, Newman, Arnold or Dickens.[43]

Eliot's change in attitude to Tennyson can be seen in "Whitman and Tennyson," a review of a book on Walt Whitman published in *The Nation* and *Athenaeum* (18 Dec. 1926). Here he praised Tennyson and called him a 'born laureate,' and further exclaimed, "Whitman succeeds in making America as it was, just as Tennyson made England as it was, into something grand and significant. You cannot quite say that either was deceived, and you cannot at all say that either was insincere, or the victim of popular cant."[44] T. S. Eliot could sense the looming presence of Tennyson, who was the voice of Victorian progressivism and its optimism. Therefore he gradually turned soft to him. In his early responses to Tennyson, Eliot had condemned him for lack of wit and form; but, here he praised him for his poetic skills: "It is, in fact, as a verse maker that he [Whiteman] deserves to be remembered; for his intellect was decidedly inferior to that of Tennyson."[45]

In his essay "Dante" (1929), Eliot again expressed his admiration for the last three lines of Tennyson's "Ulysses" and called them a true specimen of Tennyson's Virgilianism. It is quite intriguing that Eliot wrote a preface to *Poems of Tennyson*

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[42]Tobin, *The Presence of the Past,* 117.
[43]Tobin, *The Presence of the Past,* 118.
[44]Tobin, *The Presence of the Past,* 118.
[45]Tobin, *The Presence of the Past,* 119.

(1936) which contained "Early Poems," "English Idylls and Other Poems," "The Princess," *In Memoriam* and "Maud." In the "Introduction," he talked about the three qualities of Tennyson – "abundance, variety, and complete competence, which are hardly found together except in the greatest poets."[46] He later revised the introduction for including it in his *Essays Ancient and Modern* (1936). He acknowledged Tennyson as a great poet and focused on his technical skills. He admired Tennyson's metrical skills and auditory innovations, and his knowledge of Latin and Greek versification. He said that in the works of Tennyson one can find "the auditory gift: the finest sense of verbal music of any English poet since Milton."[47] Further, he commended Tennyson's "Mariana" for the accuracy of vision and praised the poem for its visual, kinaesthetic, auditory and olfactory effects. Eventually, he came out of his anxiety of influence and expressed his warm approval of Tennyson: "The poetry of Tennyson is a whole work; and to read it and understand it is an important part of experience. We have read a good deal of him, and we have to read his long poems."[48]

Eliot's stress on the need to read the long poems of Tennyson probably carried his own hidden intentions of composing a longer poem ("Four Quartets" was written over a six year period, from 1936-1942). His appreciation of Tennyson's long poems was a justification for his own longer compositions which was in the offing then. Undoubtedly, Eliot was gradually turning to Tennyson, whose work could guide him. He also lauded "Maud" and *In Memoriam* and called the two works as a "series of poems, given form by the greatest lyrical resourcefulness that poet has ever shown."[49] In the 1936 discussion of *In Memoriam,* Eliot praised the poem full-throatedly:

> Its technical merit alone is enough to endure its perpetuity, while Tennyson's technical competence is everywhere, masterly and satisfying *In Memoriam* is the most

[46]Tobin, *The Presence of the Past,* 121.
[47]Tobin, *The Presence of the Past,* 122.
[48]Tobin, *The Presence of the Past,* 123.
[49]Tobin, *The Presence of the Past,* 125.

> unapproachable of all his poems. Here are one hundred and thirty-two passages, each of several quatrains in the same form, and never monotony or repetition.[50]

He was also fascinated with the form of the poem:

> We may not memorize a few passages, we cannot find a "fair sample," we have to comprehend the whole of a poem which is essentially the length that it is … it is unique: it is a long poem made by putting together lyrics, which have only the unity and continuity of a diary, the concentrated diary of a man confessing himself. It is a diary of which we have to read every word.[51]

In 1941, Eliot, at the request of Herbert Read to address on Masterpieces of English Literature on BBC, gave two talks. The first dealt with "The Duchess of Malfi," while the second was on "The Voice of His Time," broadcast on 20th January 1942 and later published in the *Listener.* This was the time when Eliot was completing his "Four Quartets." Here Eliot turned more humble and respectful to Tennyson than ever before:

> I want to put before you Tennyson as I see him... There is the really great classical scholar, with a strong affinity, not to the Greek, but to the Latin poets: for this side of him you should read the two beautiful poems 'To Virgil' and 'to Catullus,' among his later work. There is the craftsman who had the finest ear for verse, in my opinion, of any English poet since Milton. And there is the aspect of him which I wish to present in these few minutes: the poet of melancholia, passion, and despair.[52]

Eliot's changing responses to Tennyson show his systematic reading of his senior and also unravel his hidden intentions of inventing his poetic self. Though Eliot's overt homage to Tennyson is limited to a few quotations, his fidelity to his predecessor cannot be denied. The quotes reveal Eliot's manner of discussion on Tennyson, the borrowings from him, and his ability of appropriating and possessing him. The Eliot-Tennyson

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[50]Tobin, *The Presence of the Past,* 139.

[51]Tobin, *The Presence of the Past,* 139.

[52]Tobin, *The Presence of the Past,* 149.

connection seems to entwine distance and proximity, acceptance and rejection, thereby confirming the intra-poetic relationship between the precursor-successor, master / disciple dynamic.

6. Eliot's Emergence as a Strong Poet

Eliot's longstanding ties with Tennyson and his shifting stand on his art can be examined from the Bloomian perspective of poetic influence and interpretation. Bloom believes that all writers are influenced by their past writers who left a lasting mark on the history and development of the poetic form. This relationship between poets, Bloom defines as intra-poetic relationships. Further, he draws a distinction between the weak poet and the strong poet. In his view, the strong poet always advertently refuses to repeat or imitate influential works completely; rather he looks to influential poets for his own place to be original. So the creation of the individual poetic self requires the poet to deny the influence of previous poets by intentionally misunderstanding and misinterpreting these sources: "…since strong poets make that [poetic] history by misreading one another, so as to clear imaginative space for themselves...strong poets, major figures ... wrestle with their strong precursors, even to the death."[53] No doubt, Eliot's wrestling with his strong precursor proves true in many respects. Though Bloom's treatise of anxiety of influence is a Post-Eliotan development, the points risen by him fit well in the context of the Eliot-Tennyson relationship.

In his literary relationship with Tennyson, T. S. Eliot emerged as a strong poet (in Bloomian sense), who consciously followed his precursor, for rejection and for assimilation. Eliot's changing responses to Tennyson's work and art exhibit that he was not free from the anxiety engendered in him by the influence of his illustrious predecessor. He deliberately distanced himself from Tennyson and subtly borrowed from all materials close at hand to shape his poetic voice. The interpretations that Eliot made of

[53]Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973, 5.

Tennyson and the way he borrowed from him suggests the ways in which literary traditions are formed.

7. Conclusion

Eliot's poetry is less as a monologue and more of a dialogue with different literatures and cultures; it is heteroglossic and intertextual. His "continual surrender of himself ... to something which is more valuable"[54] resulted in a poetic voice that assimilated multiple voices through intersection and appropriation. His notion of impersonality in art resonates with Mallarme, Woolf, and even with Bakhtin who believed that "every utterance is born in a dialogue ... is half someone else's. It becomes one's 'own' only when the speaker populates it with his own intentions, his own accent, when he appropriates the word, adopting it to his own semantic and expressive intention."[55] While one may wonder whether Eliot and Bakhtin were aware of each other, the parallelism between the Bakhtinian dialogism and Eliot's idea of continuity in art cannot go unnoticed. In Bakhtin's ideas of dialogism and polyphony lie reflections that are similar to what Eliot espoused in his idea of tradition. Even if Eliot was concerned about the writer's position in the literary tradition and that Bakhtin's dialogism referred to texts alone, their ideas intersect. While Eliot recommended the writer's exposure to tradition for aesthetic purposes, Bakhtin emphasized the writer's immersion into social heteroglossia. Both believed that dialogue is an indispensible part of the creative process and that creativity cannot happen in vacuity. Eliot's poetry is a collage composed of allusions to different places, cultures and literary traditions. Interestingly, it is born out of responses to his great precursors – a point that I have tried to demonstrate in the Eliot-Tennyson connection. Thus in his construction and deconstruction of traditions, Eliot was engaged in selecting suitable frames for his art. He was receptive, retentive and assimilative. While interpreting the past, he was constantly engaged in creating his 'own'. If his appetite for new

[54]Eliot, "Tradition and the Individual Talent."

[55]Bakhtin, "Discourse in the Novel," 294.

developments in the artistic and intellectual realm was a legitimate cause for his stay in Paris, his readings of the great poets of the past helped him in shaping and developing his poetic voice. Thus, in Eliot's immersion into literary traditions there was the mingling of the self with the other for *becoming*.

Since the 'Whole' in one is someone else's; therefore it ought to be relational, dialogic and intertextual. The multi-voicedness in Eliot features the idea of literary connection and reveals the fact that a work of art does not speak in vacuum. Given the fact that creativity happens only dialogically, it can be said that all works of art exhibit the feature of addressivity and answerability, and embedded with intimate links that need to be explored and appreciated. Moreover, this dialogic feature, the interconnectedness in art establishes the point that no writer can stand alone and perhaps all literature is nothing more than a relay race. Thus all meaningful assertion, creativity, totality of values, and formation of a cultural heritage is achieved in dialogue. Dialogic relations facilitate expansion of one's own experiences, creativity and creative thinking.