
THE HIP'S "VIRTUAL SELF" AND THE TRADITION OF THE ENGLISH ROMANTICISM

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Abstract: The purpose of this paper is to comparatively investigate the use of literary devices such as rhythm and imagery in the poetry of English Romanticism, T. S. Eliot and in the lyrics of North Macedonian band – The Hip. In particular, the specific focus is allocated to the use of Eliot's critical inventions of *auditory imagination* and *objective correlative* that summarize the conceptual link between all these disparate literary and musical traditions. Additionally, the reflection on the key English Romantic lyrical contributions by Wordsworth and Coleridge reveals the key aspect of The Hip's lyrics – that of a quest that will symbolically place the poet to the level of Gods, of the ones that having upgraded their creative power to the levels above the ordinary humans are able to command and legislate the world. The way humans praised Gods wary of their power, now they should similarly be in awe of the poets whose souls are fed with the fruits of eternity. This essential insight reveals the fact that the creative genius of the artists from different periods of time and different traditions does not perish in time but has been systematically revived over and over again in a format of a spiritual quest. Its revival will continue as some future artists will *once again* surely step on the same path.

Keywords: English Romantic Literature, T. S. Eliot, The Hip, poets as Gods

1. INTRODUCTION

English Romanticism from the late 18th century stemmed out of the discontent and anxiety born with the rise of the Industrial Age. The poets reacted against the blunt mechanization of the everyday life that seemed to have lost the spiritual connection with nature once the tradition of traditional mythological narrative got suppressed by the new all-encompassing myth of progress. Wordsworth and Coleridge were the most adamant in the insistence to have the old narrative still viable, albeit with poets in the position of new prophets. At the eve of the Great War, the Romantic credo was still alive. T. S. Eliot – for many the best poet of the 20th century – retained the sensibility of romantic quest for the lost grace. His most famous poem "The Waste Land" centers on the difficulty of obtaining a clear contact with the tradition amidst the noise of the modern world. In his last great poem "Four Quartets" he returns back to the topic but now with a certain confidence of a poetic seer that has passed the stages of spiritual awakening and reached the ultimate regions of his soul. At the start of the 21st century, The North Macedonian band - The Hip recuperated the same discernment but now in the context of the rock music. "Virtual Self", the opening song of their sophomore album clearly demonstrate its connection with the tradition of English Romanticism. The purpose of this paper is to reflect on this relation both at the level of the rhythmic structure and on the level of the imagery.

2. FOOTFALLS IN THE MEMORY: THE RHYTHM AND THE IMAGE OF THE LOST PARADISE

Declaring that "all time is eternally present", Eliot devises a scene, reminiscent of the *hyacinth garden* episode from "The Waste Land", where the memory of the fullness of life experienced in the past, reveals its meaning and is vividly felt now,

*Footfalls echo in the memory
Down the passage which we did not take
Towards the door we never opened
Into the rose-garden.*

Notice the subtle use of spatial adverbs and prepositions: **down**, **towards** and **into**. It is as some guiding hand is leading the quester towards the garden. Compare the use of the same principle in The Hip's "Virtual Self",

*Down I have to go.
Through these corridors*

...

Into the garden, and into the pool

The same principle was followed regarding the use of the four stress syllables,

*Down the passage which we did not take
Towards the door we never opened*

gets reflected in "Virtual Self",

Down I have to go, through these corridors

Once again, have to follow the path

Regarding the rhythm, Eliot's final three syllable structure, "**Into the rose-garden**" is spread into a four-stressed line, "**Into the garden and into the pool**". That was a rhythmical intervention that, following Eliot's concept of *auditory imagination*, should make the listeners deeply feel the song without knowing anything about the content of the song. Speaking about the imagery, it is instructive to delve for a while into Eliot's concept of *objective correlative*. Here is how Eliot defines the term,

The only way of expressing emotion in the form of art is by finding an "objective correlative"; in other words, a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events which shall be the formula of that particular emotion; such that when the external facts, which must terminate in sensory experience, are given, the emotion is immediately evoked.

What objective correlative proposes within the reader is the mental image of an object or of several connected events that always brings to light certain well-defined emotion. The poet in fact does not express his emotion (Eliot is against any personal emotion being expressed in the poem) but uses the images to express "emotion in general", be it exhalation, fear, despair or fulfilment. For example, the image of the vegetation in the hyacinth garden, the arms full and the hair wet after the rain in "*The Waste Land*", indicates sexual fulfilment. In the case of "The Four Quartets", the similar set of correlatives: the image of the garden, of the pool and of the children hiding in the shrubbery, denote the sense of spiritual fulfilment. In the case of "Virtual Self", the broken statues from ancient times are in contrast to the garden and the pool of Eliot's "The Four Quartets". The images of the garden, the pool and the broken statues symbolize the need to revive the dead poetic sensibility by setting yet another quest. That is why the central line is,

Once again, have to follow the path

What the perfect tetrameter denotes is that the journey is on until you live, or as Blake states. "I shall never cease my mental fight".

3. POETS AS CREATORS OF THE WORLDS

Following the argument, the line "Once again", taken from the famous Wordsworth's poem "Tintern Abbey", suggests the same emotional state. Written in a single day on 13th of July, 1798, the poem is the peak of the English Romanticism (along with S. T. Coleridge's "Kubla Khan", written a year before). After five years of creative deadlock, the poet feels "the inland murmur" of the mountain springs, suggesting that the muses of inspiration are overflowing his soul again. The renewed urge finds the power under the spell of some invisible, shocking force. Commenting on this, Sarah Kennedy states, "The compulsion felt by the poet under the power of the Muse is experienced as an external pressure, a terrifying visitation."

As soon as the old sensation overwhelms the poet again, all the prosaic tensions and the wears and tears of his quotidian life pale in significance. So, "once again" his soul opens a window towards the experience that is,

*Of aspect more sublime; that blessed mood,
In which the burthen of the mystery,
In which the heavy and the weary weight
Of all this unintelligible world,
Is lightened:—that serene and blessed mood,
In which the affections gently lead us on,—*

The serene mood makes his time-attached body abstain: as the soul starts progressing he is able to perceive the truth/the joy of life,

*Until, the breath of this corporeal frame
And even the motion of our human blood
Almost suspended, we are laid asleep
In body, and become a living soul:
While with an eye made quiet by the power
Of harmony, and the deep power of joy,
We see into the life of things*

He feels the presence of something disturbing but elevating (the precise definition of the sublime),

*And I have felt
A presence that disturbs me with the joy
Of elevated thoughts; a sense sublime
Of something far more deeply interfused*

Wordsworth can only sense that there is an invisible movement that encompasses all, the silent spirit behind all, including his thoughts,

*A motion and a spirit, that impels
All thinking things, all objects of all thought,
And rolls through all things.*

In a similar vein, Coleridge in “Kubla Khan”, describes the newly felt overflowing inspiration: surrounding the pleasure dome palace of Xanadu, the gardens proffers a plethora of pleasing incenses. The palace is placed on a steep cliff where the mighty fountain ejaculates tremendous blend of water and rocks; the fountain water plunges onto the sacred river Alph that moves through the corridors and caves, before leaping into the bottomless ocean. The whole set of imagery serves to announce the aggrandizement of a massive surge of inspiration. The neat description of the enormous potency of the creative act would later be evoked by Eliot as a gigantic “geothermal force”. Being under the spell of a “spirit-guide”, the poet gets transported on a visionary plane where he sees and hears his guide – an Abyssinian maid, playing a dulcimer. Very much in the manner of Shakespeare’s *Bottom’s dream*, after the vision is gone, the enchanting music of the maid still lingers in poet’s psyche. He sets a task – to try to revive her music that brings “such a deep delight” into his soul,

*Could I revive within me
Her symphony and song,
To such a deep delight ’twould win me,
That with music loud and long,
I would build that dome in air,
That sunny dome! those caves of ice!*

It is evident that the pleasure dome of Xanadu (The Paradise) is his mental construct that he could only recover by restoring the song into his soul, so that the soul and the maid can sing within the same harmonic congruity. Endowed with the God-like power, his song will restore the magical palaces so that every man can see them. Experiencing the other-worldly miracle, people will dread his presence,

*And all who heard should see them there,
And all should cry, Beware! Beware!
His flashing eyes, his floating hair!
Weave a circle round him thrice,
And close your eyes with holy dread*

Coleridge famously states that the commoners should surrender to the authority of the poets as they are of different breed, as their souls,

*...on honey-dew hath fed,
And drunk the milk of Paradise.*

Commenting on the poet’s encounter with the supernatural force that made him expel the verses, Sarah Kennedy comments, “there is a sense of the poet as more than human, both blessed and maimed by the confrontation.”

4. CONCLUSION

To sum up: “Virtual Self” is a palimpsest of some of the central themes of the English Romanticism and its pursuance in the poetry and criticism of T. E. Eliot. The mythological quest leads the traveller underground, through the corridors of history where the spirits of the dead poets assist him apprehend the secret of life and death. The secret being, everything that you have read or experienced in art penetrates and affects your mind. As Eliot comments, “In art there should be interpenetration and metamorphosis.” If one cares to be a good artist, one needs to be at the same time a good critic, a solid interpreter of the past; in other words, it all depends on your ability to explicate how the great works from the past are a reflection of your own choices in life. By using all the aggravated experiences of the ages, one can design his real self, the self of his own making – the virtual self. This explains the title of the song and the philosophy utilized by The Hip. One can surely conclude that through their creative output they have very precisely read and interpreted all the basic tenets of the Romantic ethos which places them at the forefront of artistic rock acts of the new millennium.

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