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The Function of Epigraphs to T. S. Eliot's Poetry

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Abstract
It is very hard to see Eliot's poems without having a quotation or two that precedes it. The quotation is an epigraph that is completely an insight into the content of the poem "Mistah Kurtz-he dead," or "however that was in another nation. . ." are two citations every now and again offered in token of the real thing. Evidently readers of Eliot's verse comprehend an exceptional wellness in the citations which head Eliot's poems; they perceive that the quotation, not exactly the title, has a place characteristically to the content which it serves. Notwithstanding when the inclination of the quotation is not superbly comprehended, its power is obviously felt.
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Introduction

Sometimes the epigraphs that Eliot used in his poetry are not clear enough that is why some readers might not understand them easily and to make connections between the epigraph and the poem. Yet, as Matthiessen notes in *The Achievement of T.* S. *Eliot,* an epigraph may brighten an entirety of the poem, and is intended to create an vital fragment of the outcome of the verse (Matthiessen 52). In this study my main object is to specify by simple, yet exact, references the bases for the epigraphs that Eliot utilised in his poetry. Anywhere the original milieu of the epigraph appears to bear carefully upon the entire verse, I shall provide a summery of that context. I shall endeavour to demonstrate what relationship the poem has with the epigraph, and henceforth what role it has in an explication, or criticism, of the entire poem.

The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock
S'io credesse che mia risposta fosse
A persona che .mai tornasse al mondo, Questa fiamma staria senza piu
scosse. Ma perciocche giammai di questa fondo
Non tor no vivo alcun, s'i'odo il vero,
Senza tema d'infamia ti rispondc.' [1]
(Dante, *Inferno,* Canto XXVII, II. *61-66)*

Dante portrays one of the flares that appeared to him in the eighth circle of damnation in canto twenty-seven of his Inferno. He saw the purpose of the fire shake, and he heard a voice issuing forward and requesting news of Romagna. In answer Dante depicted quickly the despondent state of that land, and thus asked the fire to tell his name and for what valid reason he was in this manner being rebuffed. The soul, later recognized as Count Guido da Montefeltro, introduced his answer with the words which Eliot has utilized as the epigraph to "Prufrock" in actuality his, answer was: If I believed you were alive, I would not talk; but rather since you are dead and cannot rehash my story to the living, I have no trepidation and I shall respond you. Thus did apprehension of the world's judgment and utter carelessness for the judgment of the dead condition the reaction of Guido da Montefeltro.

Prufrock also was hesitant to talk; he feared remarks, of chuckles, of not being caught on. The incongruity, obviously, lies in the way that Prufrock fears the remarks, not of the living, but rather of the dead. The ladies who travel every which way, talking of Michelangelo, the ladies whom he sits alongside after tea and cakes and frosts they are the ones who might remark upon his words, and they are all dead. We sympathize with, but then grin at, his pickle. Incongruity and emotion are both heightened by Prufrock's own acknowledgment that the ladies to whom he would talk about affection, of the contrasts in the middle of life and passing, are themselves all dead. By setting Guido's apprehension of notoriety among the living against Prufrock's trepidation of a chuckle from among the dead, Eliot has emphasized the irony of the poem.

Portrait of A Lady
Thou has committed: Fornication: but that was in another country,

Roberta Morgan and Albert Wohlstetter in "Observations on 'Prufrock,'" [2] According to their explication, the epigraph builds the incongruity of the poem in light of the fact that it introduces a verse wherein the speaker admits to himself as somebody Who will stay away for the indefinite future to the world and in this way in certainty. Matthiessen (op. cit, 52) moreover, accentuates the confession booth nature of the poem, and considers the epigraph as underlining "the closed circle of Prufrock's frightened isolation."

[1] The epigraph is translated by J. s. Carlyle, *The Inferno,* Templle Classics. 303: "If I thought my answer were to one who ever could return to the world, this flame should shake no more; but since none ever did return alive from this depth, if what I hear be true, without fear of infamy I answer thee."
[2] *Harvard Advocate,* cxxv, 27-40 (Dec.,1938).

And besides, the wench is dead."
(Marlowe, *The Jew of Malta,* Act IV, scene i, 11. 41-43)

This is one of Eliot's least difficult and most splendid epigraphs. The remarkable difference between the tone of the epigraph and that of the poem delivers a fine incongruity and makes conceivable a clearer impression of the entire poem.

In the sight from which the epigraph is derived, Barabas entertainingly overcomes the Friars who are vainly attempting to criticize his wrongdoings. At whatever point both of the ministers approach anything like an immediate allegation, Barabas hinders and supplies one for them. Daintily he expects a huge number of violations. He is a Jew, a usurer; he has conferred sex however who cares about that? "That was in another country, and besides, the wench is dead."

Towards the end of "Picture of a Lady" the hero ponders what might be his mentality if the woman were to pass away while he is in another nation. To her anxious, yet bashful, propels he had challenged no reaction. His wrongdoings have all been sins of oversight, but then he feels that on the off chance that she ought to kick the bucket, he couldn't take her passing softly. Confounded, stressed, tangled in his own particular meekness, the saint concerns himself over a circumstance that has not emerged. On the off chance that she ought to die, would he "have the right to smile?" Inevitably one complexity this tired and pale cast of thought with the unpleasant dialect and unfeeling attitude of Barabas; one is left with an undeniable incongruity and a more honed view of two extremes.

MR. APOLLINAX

'Ω της καινοτητος 'Ηρακλεις, της παραδοξολογιας ευμηχανος ανθρωπος'. [1]
(Lucian, *Zeuxis or Antiochus,* I)

In Zeaxis or Antiochus Lucian conveyed a tender, all things considered telling, censure to the pundits of craft of his time. He noticed the compliment that individuals conceded him, and accordingly, with evident good fortune, uncovered the triviality of their comprehension. They had extoled him for the freshness of his work; where they started anything novel or uncommon, there they clapped loudest. His own experience recalled him of a story about Zeuxis and the estimable contempt which Zeuxis had revealed to people who dealt him silly compliments on his image of the centaurs. Zeuxis, as Lucian, was honoured for the newness of his work, while his technique was traditional, full of grace and skill his fancy and his accord of colours went unnoticed.

The quotation which Eliot preferred for the epigraph to "Mr. Apollin ax" is an observation made by one of Lucian's lovers. It was as relevant to Lucian as were the remarks made of Mr. Apollinax. "'He is a charming man' 'But after all what did he mean?'" Actually, Mr. Apollinax was as old as the satyrs and centaurs of Zeuxis, but his different behaviour at tea was all that draw attention. Mrs. Phlaccus, Professor Cheetah, and their friends ignored the diversity of expression, the inspired life of Mr. Apollinax, and instead fixed their respect upon his pointed ears.

It is altogether likely that Charles Whibley, whom Eliot so massively appreciated, was to an extensive degree accountable for the reference from Lucian. In one of his articles Whibley reproved at long last the Zeuxis of Lucian. It is essential that in his composition the fundamental Greek cite from Lucian is the one that later served as epigraph to "Mr. Apollinax." Whibley introduced the quote by remarking that the shouts of the populace were as silly "then as to-day.?" There, no doubt, is the subject of "Mr. Apollinax.

La Figlia Che Piange

o quam te memorem virgo
(Virgil, *Aeneid,* Book I, 1. 327)

The perfection of "La Figlia che Piange" is made all the more delightful by the citation which presents the poem. The request was at first asked of Venus, loveliest of all goddesses. She was met by Aeneas for two or three minutes on the Libyan shore; she talked rapidly to him, and he asked her name, regardless of the way that he immediately believed her to be a goddess. Like Aeneas' meeting with Venus, the transient vision of the young woman who laments was flawless, exasperating, and since quite a while ago reviewed. The epigraph, then, enhances the officially excellent picture.

The epigraph may similarly suggest, however at an inclination, the eager isolating of Aeneas and Dido. Such a proposal would make significantly more pitiable the speaker's technique for isolating, a way uncommonly "light and deft'... Direct and sneaky as a smile and shake of the hand. : The verse insults the over-refined, the palely up-to-date, the people who know the hobbies in workmanship however turn from them in life. In comparable poems, "Prufrock" and "Portrait of a Lady," Eliot preludes with startling, ridiculing epigraphs.

Gerontion

Thou hast nor youth nor age

[1] Lucian, Opera, ed. Carolus Jacobitz(Leipzig, I864), I, 395. The line can be translated as: "O the novelty! Hercules, what a tale of wonder! [or, what use of paradox?] An ingenious man!" The Lucian text has been rearranged.

But as it were an after dinner sleep Dreaming of both. (Shakespeare, *Measure for Measure,* Act III, scene i, II. 32-34)

The theme of "Gerontion" is given in the first half line of the epigraph, whereas the tone and atmosphere of the poem are suggested in the following line and a half. Such completeness is rare in Eliot's epigraphs. Usually they gain in value when they summon up in one's memory their whole context.

The reference stems from the Duke's lengthy dialogue to Claudio in which he requests Claudio to "Reason thus with life." To get the topic into the epigraph Eliot might have chosen dissimilar lines from the identical speech:

Happy thou art not;
For what thou hast not, still thou strivest to get, And what thou hast, forget'st.

"Gerontion" makes particular that truth: we can observe a sign, and when it is given, we neither see nor get it. In any case, no place could Eliot have found in so short a space both the topic and tone of his poem. The psyche of Gerontion moves over history with simply that broken, sudden sort of development that the brain follows in a half-waking dream. Managed sections of thinking are instead of a scene which the speaker can just envision, a scene wherein the partner would clear out, "As the soul leaves the body torn and bruised."

broken by peculiar, fragmentary glimpses of personal history. The dream state, suggested by the epigraph, directs the movement of the poem, and is, I think, consciously emphasized in the conclusion. Consider the epigraph as a part of the poem, and then observe the symmetry achieved by the poem's, last one and a half lines.

Sweeney Erect
And the trees about me, Let them be dry and leafless; let the rocks Groan with continual surges; and behind me Make all a desolation. Look, look, wenches!
(Beaumont and Fletcher, *The Maid's Tragedy,* Act II, scene ii, 11.74-77)

The scene in *The Maid's Tragedy* from which Eliot chose the epigraph for "Sweeney Erect" is a scene of lamentation. Aspatia, forsaken by her lover, calls her women about her and bids them "be sad." With an almost voluptuous delight in grief, she lingers over the sorrows of the lovelorn. She examines a tapestry of Ariadne which one of her ladies has worked, and finding the colours "not dull and pale enough," she offers herself as a model.

Suppose I stand upon the sea-beach now,
Mine arms thus, and mine hair blown with the wind,
Wild as that desert; and let all about me Tell that I am forsaken. Do my face (If thou had'st ever feeling of a sorrow)
Thus, thus, Antiphilia: strive to make me look
Like Sorrow's monument: *and the trees about me, Let them be dry and leafless; let the rocks*
Groan with continual surges; and behind me
Make all a' desolation. Look, look, wenches!

When this scene from *The Maid's Tragedy* is set against "Sweeney Erect," the effect is at first shocking. In the opening lines Eliot forces an immediate connection. He orders a scene of wild desolation where the winds shall "tangle Ariadne's hair/And swell with haste the .perjured sails." Suddenly the poem shifts to the sordid bedroom scene-Sweeney standing erect in the morning sun, the epileptic, stretched out upon the bed, "clawing at the pillow slip." The epigraph and the introductory lines of the poem have recalled to the reader the familiar, poetic laments of the forsaken; now he hears the forsaken one cry out in 'epileptic screams. The effect of such violent juxtaposition is shocking, but at the same time it suggests a new criticism of both past and present societies.

The central problem in *The Maid's Tragedy* lies in the con- flict between love and honor. The drama ought to be a noble and exalted one, dealing as it does with such high matters of ethics. Actually, the play has a kind of mustiness; for all its splendid pas- sages of poetry, it leaves a bad taste. The moral tone of *The Maid's Tragedy* is debased because the poets consider the conflict not in terms of the individual (his character and action), but in the terms of an artificial society. The same criticism can be made of "Sweeney Erect"-with one important reservation. It is not the poet who regards the affairs of Sweeney from the point of view of society; instead, the "ladies of the corridor" speak for society.

The ladies of the corridor
Find themselves involved, disgraced, Call witness to their principles
And deprecate the lack of taste.
Observing that hysteria
Might easily be misunderstood; Mrs. Turner intimates
It does the house no sort of good.

In the end, Eliot's clear criticism of such values paradoxically raises his poem to a higher moral level than that reached by *The Maid's Tragedy*. Surely his brilliant, yet indirect, attack upon the evaluation of honor made by a large section of modern society is superior to the easy acceptance given by Beaumont and Fletcher to the standards of a degraded court society.

The Hippopotamus

Similiter et omnes revereantur Diaconos, ut mandatum Jesu Christi; et Episcopum, ut jesum Christum, existentem filium Patris; Presbyteros autem, ut concilium Dei et conjunctionem Apostolorum. Sine his Ecclesia non vocatur; de quibus suadeo vos sic habeo.[1]

(S. Ignatii epistolae interpolatae, "Ad Traillianos," 3)

And when this epistle is read among you, cause that it be read also in the church of the Laodiceans.

(St. Paul, Colossians IV:16)

"The Hippopotamus" opens with two quotations drawn from times so remote in the history of the church as to be almost out of mind. They come from that period, historically known as the Apostolic Age, when the foundations of the church were still to be laid. At first glance it is apparent that the poet intended to remind us in some striking way of the labour which was done by the earliest churchmen.

In his epistle to the Colossians St. Paul spoke of the "great conflict" he felt not only for the church at Colossae, then being beset by vain philosophies and Judaic heresies, but also for its neighbor church, the church at Laodicea. At the conclusion of his epistle Paul turned again to the Laodiceans, a people notoriously unstable in their practice of Christianity; he ordered that his epistle be read also to them. Similarly, the threat of heresy, this time Docetian, inspired the epistle of St. Ignatius to the Trallians. Igna .. tius urged the Trallians to observe a strict obedience to the authority of the organized church that they might become a united body and thus enjoy a sure protection against the inroads made by heretical doctrines. When the two quotations are put side by side, as they are at the beginning of "The Hippopotamus," they show the diffidence of the early church and the need for a citadel to be erected against the threats then facing the church. Both ideas are relevant to the poem that follows.

Together the quotations have the effect of undercutting the complacent remarks made about the church. The words of the poem read: The hippopotamus "Although he seems so firm to us... is weak and frail,/Susceptible to nervous shock." They suggest something else: the church, which "seems so firm to us," was once a body "weak and frail,/Susceptible to nervous shock."

The quotes are pertinent to the poem in different ways. The missionaries composed the congregation into a ministerial pecking order, or, as they liked to call it, into one body with Christ its head. St. Ignatius especially jumped at the chance to stretch the natural way of the congregation. In the ballad the physical existence of the congregation is stood out from the regular history of the hippopotamus, another vast body, and in this way subjected to a crazy tragedy. Toward the end of the lyric the feedback turns out to be immediate, even cruel, albeit still passed on with mind. The association of the congregation, shaped about the diocesans, the ministers, the presbyters, and initially considered as a method for assurance, has brought about making the congregation a dead weight, more dormant, and more generous than the hippopotamus. By the finesse of God the hippopotamus is conceived overhead and "quired" by sublime heavenly attendants, while the body of the genuine Church "remains below/Wrapt in the old miasmal mist."

The Waste Land

"NAM Sibyllam quidem Cumis ego ipse oculis meis vidi in ampulla pendere, et cum illi pueri dicerent;
Vj3vXXa TL 6&XL1; respondebat illa: d.1To9«v (LV (Haw."14 (Petronius, *Satyricon,* sec. 48) [2]

At the well-known supper party depicted close to the begin of

Petronius' Satyricon, the host asks in his brash, uninformed route for a story out of Homer. He would be entertained with a story, for example, he read when he was a child something about Hercules or Ulysses, maybe. Notice of these astonishing individuals advises him that he himself once saw a surprising individual: he gloats that with his own eyes he saw the Cumaean Sibyl hanging in a confine and heard the young men calling to her, “Sibyl, what do you want?" She responded, "I want to die." Additional argument of such outrages is cut short by the coming of an huge pig, which in almost no time at all the chef had murdered, prepared, and stuffed with sausages and desserts.

The appropriateness of Eliot's epigraph is effectively detectable. The social orders of the Satyricon and *The Waste Land* are correspondingly portrayed by foulness, desire, and insatiability. In such social orders learning of good and wickedness is lost, and the expressions of the divine beings are no more caught on.

[1] To see Eliot’s version, look at Migne's Patrologia Gracca,V (I857), 779, n n. 28-29: "And likewise let all the deacons be reverenced, as commanded by Jesus Christ ;and let the bishop be reverenced, as Jesus Christ, the living son of the Father; also to let the presbyters be reverenced, as the council of God and the assembly of the apostles. Without these there can be no church; of these things I persuade you as I can."

[2] Translated by Michael Heseltine, Petronius, Loeb Classical Library, p p. 85-87: "Yes, and I myself with my own eyes saw the Sibyl hanging in a cage; and when the boys cried at her: 'Sibyl, Sibyl, what do you want?' 'I would that I were dead,' she used to answer." The epigraph has been identified W. Thomas and S. G. Brown, Reading Poems (New York, 1941), p. 720.

Diviners and prophets talk nonsense. They squander away, and, at long last, are viewed as fit just to be hung in enclosures, and corresponded at by young men. Between the Cumaean Sibyl and Tiresias of *The Waste Land* there exists a reasonable partiality. Both have been allowed godlikeness without youth, and both have "fore suffered all." The Sibyl communicates their normal yearning:"1 would that 1 were dead."

Marina

Quis hie locus, quae regio, quae mundi plaga ?' [1]

(Seneca, *Hercules Furens*, 1. 1138)

Although the title, the manner, and the content of Eliot's poem evidence the direct inspiration of Shakespeare's *Pericles."* the epigraph comes from a play far removed from *Pericles* in spirit and in content. "Quis hic locus"quae regio, quae mundi plaga?" These words are from Seneca's *Hercules Furens;* they are spoken by the hero as his saneness haltingly returns. He looks about him, bewildered and afraid; suddenly he learns the atrocious act which he himself has committed. In a fit of madness he has exterminated his wife and children.

The horrendous sadness of Hercules is in striking direct opposite to the awesome delight of Shakespeare's Pericles. Pericles stirs from a stupor to discover before him the little girl whom he thought dead. The main likeness between the two sensational scenes is a comparability of style, yet it is in any case effective and moving. Despicable discharges, half-shaped inquiries, and broken expressions frame the Ian... guage of the two saints. Shakespeare's late style is, obviously, honorably suited to such expression, and in this vein Seneca too periodically accomplished incredible feeling and appeal. Eliot has somewhere else remarked upon the discourse of Hercules and noticed how expressions of it "haunt us more than we should expect?" It is, then, similarity of style that connects the Senecan passage with Shakespeare's *Pericles,* and hence with "Marina," a further progress of that style. But the epigraph also serves to point up a inquisitive fact in human behaviour: the bafflement and disorganized feelings attendant upon an awakening to reality may, at first, form themselves into expressions fundamentally similar no matter whether the veracity be cause for misery or for joyfulness.

Burnt Norton

τοῦ λόγου δὲ ἐόντος ξυνοῦ ζώουσιν οἱ πολλοί ὡς ἰδίαν ἔχοντες φρόνησιν [2] (Heracleitus, Fragment 2)

ὁδὸς ἄνω κάτω μία καὶ ὠυτή [3] (Heracleitus, Fragment 60)

There is nothing oblique or peripheral in the epigraphs attached to *Burnt Norton,* and later used by Eliot to preface the wholemof *Four Quartets.* Because the philosophy of Heracleitus is central to the *Quartets,* critics of Eliot's poetry have not failed to comment upon the intimate connection existing between the pre-Socratic philosopher and the modern poet. Further comment by me on the connection between Heracleitus and Eliot would be repetitious and out of place."

It may be mentioned that the central principle of Heracleitus is also the central theme of *Four Quartets,* though fascinatingly adapted by Eliot's own skill and thought. Both writers perceive in all things an incessant instability and movement, and both are worried with finding a compromise of the opposites prevailing in the physical and nonphysical orders. Heracleitus writes of the road up and down as being one and the same, as all things live in the death of their opposites as fire lives in the death of air, and air in the death of fire. The two believe that everything continually moving perhaps perceived beneath the aspect of the wheel. "At the still point of the turning world" is reconciliation.

To sum up, Eliot's wide reading and his high degree of intellectuality enabled him to choose from the past events and works to build up his modern pieces of poetry. His choice was always unique and was quite an insight into the poem; even some times it is hard to understand the poem without the existence of the epigraph. Eliot, intends to demonstrate his strong interest in the essential works and events that modern readers must have knowledge about that is why he insert them into his works in the form of flash back and allusion or reference in his poems.

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[1] It is translated by F. J. Miller in Seneca's Tragedies, Loeb Classical Library , I , 99: "What place is this? What region, what quarter of the world?"

[2] Eliot refers to Die Fragmenteder Vorsokratiker, ed. Hermann Diels. Translated b y W. H. S. Jones, Heracleitus, Loeb Classical Library, Fragment9 2: "But though the Word is common, the many live as though they have a wisdom of their own."

[3] Translatedb y W. H. S. Jones, Heracleitus, Loeb ClassicalL ibrary, Fragment6 9: "The road up and down is one and the same."

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