

The secular and the divine in T. S. Eliot's *Ash-Wednesday* and John Donne's *Devotions*

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this paper is to explore the meaning of the secular experience within the religious context in T. S. Eliot's *Ash-Wednesday* and John Donne's *Devotions*, drawing on a shared metaphysical dialectics. A parallelism can be traced between the progress of John Donne's illness reflected in the meditative structure of his *Devotions*, and accompanied by despair and the confrontation of waste and hope, and the different sections of *Ash-Wednesday* which attest to resignation tainted by a pattern of birth and dying. While conceiving their experience through similar images, T. S. Eliot's search for God mirrors John Donne's search for the Physician. In *Ash-Wednesday*, the speaker's weakness seems to be transformed through the interaction of the secular and divine love. He absolutizes woman, and overcomes spiritual dejection by contemplating nature. The search of God and man's conscious "turning away" from Him create both desire and acceptance, an intense self-scrutiny, and the intermingling of spirituality and sensuality.

Key words: T. S. Eliot, *Ash-Wednesday*, John Donne, *Devotions*.

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RESUMEN

El propósito de este artículo es analizar el significado de lo seglar en el contexto religioso de *Ash-Wednesday* de T. S. Eliot, así como en el de *Devotions* de John Donne y señalar una dialéctica metafísica común. La estructura meditativa de *Devotions*, acompañada de una oposición entre el decaimiento y la esperanza, permite trazar una analogía con las diferentes partes de *Ash-Wednesday* en las que se manifiesta una desolación teñida tanto de renovación espiritual como de agonía. La búsqueda de Dios en *Ash-Wednesday* refleja la búsqueda del 'médico' en *Devotions*, y ambos poetas conciben su experiencia a través de imágenes similares. En *Ash-Wednesday*, la vacilación del poeta es transformada mediante la interacción entre el amor seglar y el amor divino. T. S. Eliot define a la mujer en términos de lo absoluto y, supera el abatimiento a través de la contemplación de la naturaleza. La búsqueda de Dios y la conciencia de estar desistiendo de la identificación con él crean deseo y aceptación, el anhelo del conocimiento de uno mismo y una confluencia de lo espiritual y lo sensual.

Palabras clave: T. S. Eliot, *Ash-Wednesday*, John Donne, *Devotions*.

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1. INTRODUCTION

In a note published in the first number of Wyndham Lewis's magazine *The Enemy* in January 1927, T. S. Eliot claimed that he did not conceive poetry as separate from what he called belief (Sharpe 1991: 113). In *Ash-Wednesday*, this belief is revealed in religious terms, although these do not constitute devotional verse. Yet *Ash-Wednesday* evokes John Donne's *Devotions Upon Emergent Occasions*. In *Ash-Wednesday*, experience becomes meaningful and bearable within the religious context. In it, the search of God and man's conscious "turning away" from him create both desire and acceptance by "submitting to the facts" through the metaphorical turning into dust. T. S. Eliot's insightful "art of acceptance" by means of an intense self-scrutiny, together with the "plea to be understood" by an absent fatherly figure, recall John Donne's "art of dying" in his *Devotions*, and hint at shared metaphysical dialectics. Such dialectics seems to point to what T. S. Eliot defined as "the experience of a man in search of God, and trying to explain to himself his intenser human feelings in relation to the divine goal" (Southam 1968: 165).

In the *Devotions*, John Donne uses his illness to meditate about the state of his soul, drawing upon Christian mysticism. Each Devotion carries for its title a fragment of the *stationes* or steps, translated into English. Also, each of them is divided into a Meditation, an Expostulation and a Prayer. The individual segments of each Devotion vary in content, style and mood, ranging from the "agitated convolutions of the Meditations to the sonorously rolling periods of the Prayers" (Frost 1990: 3), reminiscent of the different sections of *Ash-Wednesday*. Both *Devotions* and *Ash-Wednesday* share a meditative structure, the fear of the final judgement by God, and the sense of anguish and of acceptance at the spiritual and physical death. In the first four *Devotions*, the poet falls ill, and he retreats to his bed. In the second Expostulation he says: "My God, my God, why comes thine anger so fast upon me? Why dost thou melt me, scatter me, power me like water upon the ground so instantly?" (Donne 1975: 12). This reminds the reader of the "bones scattered on the ground" (Eliot 1970: 88-89) in the second part of *Ash-Wednesday*, and of the loss of mental vigour in the first section of the poem. *Devotions* five to eight deal with the coming of the physician, and the speaker's anguished loneliness recalls the darkness and loneliness suffered by the poet in the third section of *Ash-Wednesday*. Throughout *Devotions* nine to twelve the poet examines the state of his soul, and describes his sins. This section parallels the fifth part of *Ash-Wednesday*, especially through the description of those who "walk in darkness" (92, 163) in the third stanza of the poem. The last two stanzas of this section reveal the most critical state of the poet's mind. He is "torn" (170), "terrified" (93, 179) and "cannot surrender." His fear matches *Devotions* seventeen through twenty: "I am dead, in an irremediable, in an irrecoverable state for bodily health [. . .] I am dead, I was borne dead" (Donne 1975: 96), which approaches the recurrent question in the fifth part of *Ash-Wednesday*: "O my people, what have I done unto thee" (Eliot 1970: 92, 158, 176; 93, 184). In *Devotions* thirteen through sixteen, the poet suffers from fever, and the sound of the bell reminds him of his sleeplessness. He closes the passage with the Prayer of the sixteenth Devotion: "Let

this praier therefore, O my God, be as my last gaspe, my expiring, my dying in thee" (Donne 1975: 85). His impending death recalls the prayer of the poet at the end of the first ("Pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death" [Eliot 1970: 86, 40]) and last section of *Ash-Wednesday* ("And let my cry come unto Thee" [95, 219]). Finally, through *Devotions* twenty-one to twenty-three, John Donne is warned of the danger of suffering a relapse. This could be linked to the fourth part of *Ash-Wednesday*, especially through the statement of *Sovegna vos* (90, 130).

In *Ash-Wednesday*, the speaker's weakness seems to be transformed through the power of interaction of the secular and the divine love. First, the poet experiences spiritual void and lack of hope. Later on, he lies under the tree, reduced to bones. Yet in the third part of the poem, he climbs the stairs, contemplates the Lady in the fourth part of the poem while absolutizing her, overcomes the spiritual dejection throughout the fifth section, and prays for being heard in the sixth. Thus, *Ash-Wednesday* can be viewed as an act of devotion, in a way similar to the *Devotions* by John Donne. As Samir Dayal indicates, in *Ash-Wednesday* T. S. Eliot uses the religious motif of the first day of Lenten fast to achieve multivalent meaning:

While the governing idiom of *Ash-Wednesday* is religious, Eliot's method once again is to employ traditional religious terminology in order to defamiliarize it and make it equivocal or plurivocal in the mind of the reader, simultaneously approximating and departing from the conventional interpretation of the religious rhetoric in question. (1998: 58)

T. S. Eliot converted to the Anglican High Church in June of 1927, and for the majority of his readers, this unexpected choice of highly institutionalized and conservative Anglo-Catholic faith was regarded as an unfashionable and abrupt resolution since his former work had earned him a reputation of "an iconoclastic innovator of literary form and language" (Strandberg 2002: 137). According to Strandberg, for T. S. Eliot himself, the adoption of the Catholic faith was the culmination of a process which was triggered by the breakup of his marriage to Vivienne High-Wood, his personal uneasiness with the family's heritage of Unitarian background, and by the need to create an identity as a public figure. This encouraged his decision in autumn of 1927 to acquire British citizenship (138). His conversion, he wrote, "gave him an extraordinary sense of surrender and gain, doubt and indecision as if he had finally crossed a very wide, deep river, never to return" (Jain 1991: 212). Yet, according to E. Knapp Hay (1982: 78) "The Death of Saint Narcissus" and *The Waste Land* attest to the fact that Eliot felt emotionally repelled by the faith to which he submitted himself. As suggested by Lyndall Gordon in her biography of the poet, he might have committed to the Anglican Church as last resort (1999: 211).

A parallelism can be traced between John Donne's and T. S. Eliot's personal circumstances at the time of composing the *Devotions* and *Ash-Wednesday*. Both John Donne and T. S. Eliot were well established in their profession. In 1623, John Donne was the dean of St. Paul's and royal chaplain to James I (Gosse 1959: Vol. 2, 148). Also, T. S. Eliot's reputation in terms of his career grew between 1926 and 1934. He

became the editor of his own literary magazine the *Criterion*, and Faber and Gwyer's publishing house was more solidly established (Strandberg 2002: 139). Thus, the former was a well established preacher, the latter, a well known poet. Both turned an exhausting personal experience of coming near death into a piece of art. For John Donne such experience was his physical illness, which he suffered in late November of 1623; in the case of T. S. Eliot, it was his spiritual and personal crisis. And it is possible that John Donne's meditations provided a source for the images and arguments found in *Ash-Wednesday*, for during 1919, T. S. Eliot read the sermons of John Donne and Lancelot Andrews, and took an interest in the sermon as "a form of literary art" (Gordon 1999: 167). By December 1923, John Donne was out of danger, but he spent one month of his convalescence writing a collection of twenty-three devotions, called *Devotions Upon Emergent Occasions and Several Steps in My Sickness, Digested into Meditations, Expostulations and Prayers* (Gosse 1959: Vol. 2, 189). T. S. Eliot composed *Ash-Wednesday* between 1927 and 1930, which coincided with periods of separations and reunions with his wife, and hence, the disintegration and healing of their relationship. Its first three parts were originally designed as separate poems.

Another similarity between both writers is that T. S. Eliot might have felt responsible for Vivienne's illness and unhappiness in a way similar to John Donne's, who might have felt that by marrying Anne More, he made her suffer material hardships. After the marriage he knew he could not hope for her father's blessing "since the act so gaily performed was one of the gravest indecorum" (Gosse 1959: Vol. 1, 99). As for T. S. Eliot, after his hasty marriage to Vivienne High-Wood, he would have to prove himself to his father, and regain the approbation of his mother (Gordon 1999: 138). Yet determined to marry the women they fell in love with, they arranged a secret marriage without the consent of their respective fathers. Such decision would result in the denial of financial support after their clandestine union became public. John Booty describes Donne's position from 1602 till 1615 as "out of the mainstream of society, living in a semi-dignified-poverty, supporting a growing family as best as he could, courting the good will of the wealthy and the powerful, still driven by ambition, and still seeking security" (1990: 15). For T. S. Eliot, the years that followed his marriage turned into a miserable trial, aggravated by financial insecurity. The continuous need of money for his wife's medical bills together with the struggle to improve their precarious living was exhausting (Gordon 1991: 138). It is also noteworthy that both John Donne and T. S. Eliot renounced their former faith. As he approached forty, John Donne published two anti-Catholic polemics *Pseudo-Martyr* (1610) and *Ignatius His Conclave* (1611), and embraced the Anglican ministry in 1615.

2. METAPHYSICAL IMAGERY: "VAPOURS" AND "STAIRS"

The pattern of 'surrender' to the Anglo-Catholic faith, already mentioned in the case of T. S. Eliot, can be noticed throughout the six sections of the poem: at some points hope and belief seem to faint and leap into despair, at others, they acquire intense strength and urge. The decision of turning to the Anglo-Catholic faith, of

separating from his wife, and of adopting public identity seem to embody the essence of *Ash-Wednesday*, reflected metaphorically through the three steps in the third and central part of the poem: "At the first turning of the second stair [. . .] / At the second turning of the second stair [. . .] / At the first turning of the third stair" (Eliot 1970: 89, 96, 102, 107). "At the first turning of the second stair" (96), the poet sees "a shape twisted on a banister" (98), and he "struggles with a devil that wears a deceitful face of hope and despair" (100-1). This might symbolize a terminal phase lingering between the painful failure of his marriage, and the surrendering to the present condition, complicated by the sense of Catholic guilt and compassion. Thus, despite the speaker's denying claims ("Because I do not hope" [85, 1]), most overtly notorious throughout the first section of the poem, he is led to the sense of not absolutely extinguished hope ("Although I do not hope" [94, 185]).

"At the second turning of the second stair" (102), the poet sees "no more faces" (104), and "the stair is dark" (104). This image evokes the darkness and depression of a soul to which the Unitarian heritage and the ideals of New England mean nothing except emptiness. Such hollowness of feelings arises as a result of the unfulfilling doctrines and sermons of the preacher described as "an old man whose mouth is drivelling beyond repair" (105). "At the second turning of the third stair" (107), the poet sees a "broadbacked figure" (110), which reminds him of a faun, and which is consequently reminiscent of a satyr or a poet. According to Alzina Stone Dale (1988: 117), "the broadbacked figure" (Eliot 1970: 80, 110) evokes the diabolical force which, as Eliot claimed, "operated in the modern world through men of excellent character, for whom original sin was not real." The figure enchants the poet with an image of "sweet brown hair blown over the mouth" (112). Within "the hawthorn blossom and the pasture scene" (109), which allude to the veiled appearance of art and the pastoral setting, "the figure" (110) results in the image of a "slotted window bellied like the fig's fruit" (108). Since the fig's fruit has sometimes been used in place of the apple as the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, and as a symbol of "lust or fertility" because of its many seeds, it might allude to some pattern of internal or external reality, which makes the speaker perceive the outside world as disfigured and repelling. Thus, the climbing of the stairs, surrounded by darkness ("There were no more faces and the stair was dark" [89, 104]), might reveal a period of professional progress yet of personal crisis. The alienating setting described in the first stanza of the third part of *Ash-Wednesday* seems to be recalled in the Expostulation of the eleventh Devotion, where John Donne talks about the vapours reminiscent of "the vapour in the fetid air" (Eliot 1970: 89, 99):

But yet as long as I remaine in this great *Hospitall*, this sicke, this diseasefull world, as long as I remaine in this leprous house, this flesh of mine, this Heart, though thus prepared *for* thee, prepared *by* thee, will still be subject to the invasion of maligne and pestilent vapours. (Donne 1975: 60)

Hence, just like the speaker in *Ash-Wednesday* who tries to surmount the "pestilent vapour" of the stairs, the poet in the *Devotions* prays to God to let him

climb the stairs of his illness so that he can leave behind the "diseaseful world" (60, 12). John Donne mentions the vapours several times in the Expostulation of the twelfth Devotion. Within one paragraph the word "vapour" (64-6) appears seven times. He constructs an impressive image of "ill" and "infectious" vapour, which contrasts with the "perfumed" and healing one:

So it is of that wherein thou comst to us, the dew of *Heaven*, And of that wherein we come to thee, both are *vapors*; And hee, in whom we *have* and *are* all that we *are* or *have*, temporally or spiritually, thy blessed *Son*, in the person of *wisdom*, is called so too; *she is* (that is, *he is*) *the vapour of the power of God, and the pure influence from the glory of the Almighty*. Hast thou, Thou, O my *God*, perfumed *vapor* with thine own breath, with so many sweet acceptations in thine own *word*, and shall this *vapor* receive an ill and infectious sense? It must; for, since we have displeased thee, with that which is but *vapor*, (for what is *sinne*, but a *vapor*, but a *smoke*, though such a smoke, as takes away our sight, and disables us from seeing our danger) it is just, that thou punish us with *vapors* to. (64-65)

This image reminds the reader of the setting in the third part of *Ash-Wednesday* where the "vapour in the fetid air" (Eliot 1970: 89, 99) counterpoints the "blown lilac" (112-3) associated with "the dew of Heaven" (Donne 1975: 64). John Donne also mentions the "vapours" (66) in the Prayer of the twelfth Devotion: "That so all *vapours* of all disobedience to thee, being subdued under my feete, I may in the power, and triumphe of thy *sonne*, treade victoriously upon my *grave*, and trample upon the *Lyon*, and *Dragon*, that lye under it, to devoure me." Here, the images of the "lion" and the "dragon" evoke the second part of *Ash-Wednesday*, where the speaker's body appears devoured by the leopards: "Lady, three white leopards sat under a juniper-tree / In the cool of the day, having fed to satiety / On my legs, my heart my liver and that which had been contained / In the hollow round of my skull [. . .]" (Eliot 1970: 87, 42-5).

The poet's attempt for serenity of mind in *Ash-Wednesday* may be linked to his view of himself as a writer, for the "slotted window" [108] might also suggest a troublesome passage towards the outside, that is, the struggle of the writer to find the words that would mirror what he perceives, and communicate the meaning of such perception. The search for peace of mind together with his yearning towards a more notorious accomplishment as a poet ("enchanted the public with the music of his verses"), seem to be expressed at the beginning of the third stanza in part three: "At the first turning of the third stair / Was a slotted window bellied like the fig's fruit / And beyond the hawthorn blossom and pasture scene / The broadbacked figure drest in blue and green / Enchanted the maytime with an antique flute" (89, 107-11). The longing for such achievement is already reflected in a poem entitled "At Graduation 1905," one of the earliest poems written by T. S. Eliot. Here, the experience of becoming a poet is braced as double-edged, and the speaker establishes a tone of sincerity comparable to the one in the third part of *Ash-Wednesday*: "Although the path be tortuous and slow, / Although it bristle with a thousand fears, / To hopeful eye of youth it still appears / A lane by which the rose

and hawthorn grow. / We hope it may be; would that we might know!" (1967: 12, 19-23). Later on, in his foreword to the posthumous *Collected Poems of Harold Monro*, written in 1932, T. S. Eliot would declare that "the compensations for being a poet are grossly exaggerated; they dwindle as one becomes older, the shadows lengthen and the solitude becomes harder to endure" (Sharpe 1991: 128).

3. DICHOTOMY BETWEEN ASCETICISM AND SENSUALITY

In the first part of *Ash-Wednesday*, the stanzas portray a mind contemplating the present condition, but reluctant to undertake any action, for the speaker seems to acknowledge the uselessness of any further struggle after "what has been done" (Eliot 1970: 86, 32), and also towards what cannot or will not be done. This prompts the poet to a partly unwilling and partly indifferent acceptance of reality: "Because I know that time is only time / And place is always and only place / And what is actual is actual only for one time / And only for one place" (85, 16-19). The stanza is tainted by despair, but at the same time it registers a shimmering pulse of renewal through the meaning of *Ash-Wednesday*. This meaning is expressed in the third chapter of Genesis: "to dust you shall return," modeled after God's address to Adam (Metzger & Murphy 1991: 6). These are words used by the priest to remind the faithful of their mortality, and of Christ's death. Yet at the same time, they recall his Resurrection. It seems however, that the speaker has lost his faith in any resurrection as connected to both his physical and spiritual life, which makes the acceptance of the reality even more challengeable. Searching for faith and hope, and thus for God throughout the different sections of *Ash-Wednesday*, the poet reminds the reader of the search for the "Physician" in the Meditation of John Donne's fourth Devotion:

Whats become of mans great extent & proportion, when himselfe shrinks himselfe and consumes himselfe to a handfull of dust; what's become of his soaring thoughts, his compassing thoughts, when himselfe bringes himselfe to the ignorance, to the thoughtlesnesse, of the *Grave*? [. . .] His *diseases* are his owne, but the *Phisician* is not; but hee must send for the Physician. (Donne 1975: 21)

Here, John Donne's words evoke the first stanza in *Ash-Wednesday*, where after having shrunk to a handful of dust, the speaker claims not to desire the "soaring thoughts" or the "flashing dives into experience" expressed in "this man's gift and that man's scope" (Eliot 1970: 85, 4). This brings to mind the unwilling-to-stretch-its-wings eagle (85, 6). Associated with the sanctuary of Apollo, god of poetry, the eagle might symbolize the renunciation of intellection, and the rejection of positivism (expressed in the "positive hour" [10]) that cannot lead to God (Ferguson 1979: 100-1). He also hopes that the judgment of his "Physician" will not be too harsh: "May the judgment be not too heavy upon us" (Eliot 1970: 85, 33).

When *Ash-Wednesday* was published in 1930, T. S. Eliot dedicated it to his first wife. However, there is indeed, as Sharpe points, no "matrimonial feel" (1991: 121)

to the poem (as there is, for example, in "A Dedication to My Wife" [Eliot 1970: 221]), and the woman invoked is reminiscent of the blessing figure of the Virgin Mary or Dante's Beatrice. Furthermore, the poem communicates dejection through desire, and it appears to be close to a lament at renunciation. The desolation that the speaker experiences makes him long for the amnesty of forgetfulness in order to defend himself from any further dealing with the situation:

Because I do not hope to turn again
 Because I do not hope
 Because I do not hope to turn
 [.]
 Because I do not hope to know again
 [.]
 Because I do not think
 Because I know I shall not know
 [.]
 Because I cannot drink
 [.]
 Because I know that time is always time
 [.]
 And pray that I may forget
 (85, 1-3, 9, 11-2, 14, 16; 86, 27)

Bush (1983: 131) argues that *Ash-Wednesday* presents a sway between the testing of the poet's devout calling and the different visions of life, dealing with self-examination, repentance, acceptance, and inquiry about his displaced change. Many interpretations of the poem establish a dichotomy between spirituality and sensuality as oppositional poles which the poet must reconcile (Hutchings 1996: 26). According to Hutchings, *Ash-Wednesday* attests to the speaker's realization that "the very convictions and emotions that constitute his motivation to seek spiritual salvation and union with God have the potential to prevent him from attaining these goals" (26). This idea is also supported by Dayal (1998: 55) who suggests that the narrator was probably torn between the human capacity of self-realization and the idea of Christian realization through God, and between Christian and non-Christian metaphysics. In the third stanza of the first section, the poet "rejoices that things are as they are" (Eliot 1970: 85, 20), and renounces the "blessèd face" (21) and the "voice" (22). Yet by the end of the fifth stanza he pleads for being taught to be able to recollect and manage his feelings, and admits doubt or weakness after his renunciation: "Teach us to care and not to care / Teach us to sit still" (86, 38-9). John Donne's Prayer of the third Devotion is informed by a similar yearning for "sitting still," for the poet asks God to "enable him to be still":

Now I have met thee there, where thou hast so often departed from me; but having burnt up that bed by these vehement heates, and washed that bed in these abundant sweats, make my bed againe, O *Lord* and enable me, according to thy command, *to commune with mine owne heart upon my bed, and be still.* (Donne 1975, 18-9)

4. SECULAR LOVE

But what kind of stillness is the poet in *Ash-Wednesday* praying for? In *Burnt Norton*, the idea of stillness is equated with the feeling of "love":

The detail of the pattern is movement,
As in the figure of the ten stairs.
Desire itself is movement
Not in itself desirable;
Love is itself unmoving,
Only the cause and end of movement,
Timeless, and undesiring
Except in the aspect of time
Caught in the form of limitation
Between un-being and being.
(Eliot 1970: 181, 167-76)

Is it appropriate then, to draw a parallelism between "Between un-being and being" (181, 176) and 'Between caring and not caring' ("Teach us to care and not to care" [86, 38])? In *East Coker*, the speaker presents a disconcerting idea of love, for he does not make it clear whether love is destined to surmount the "empty desolation" (190, 210), or if, on the contrary, it is aimed towards the destruction of the self, as the image of the bones in *Ash-Wednesday* would suggest:

Love is most nearly itself
When here and now cease to matter.
[.]
We must be still and still moving
Into another intensity
For a further union, a deeper communion
Through the dark cold and the empty desolation,
The wave cry, the wind cry
(189, 203-4, 207; 190, 208-11)

The notion of love evoked in the previous stanzas, especially in *Burnt Norton*, brings to mind another conception of love (and yet "an ever fixed mark" [1965: 269, 3-4]) by William Shakespeare (1564-1616) in Sonnet CXVI, "Let Me Not to the Marriage of True Minds": "[. . .] Love is not love which / alters when it alteration finds, or bends / with the remover to remove. Oh no! it is an / ever-fixed mark that looks on tempests and is / never shaken" (1-5). Therefore, does the poet in *Ash-Wednesday* turn towards a desire for permanent, "still" love, or does he (by the general tone of affliction) regret his plea for "teaching him God to sit still" (Eliot 1975: 86, 39)? In the fourth part of *Little Gidding*, T. S. Eliot gives a disturbing definition of love, which seems to reduce him to dust or to ashes: "Who then devised the torment? Love. / Love is the unfamiliar Name / Behind the hands that wove / The intolerable shirt of flame / Which human power cannot remove. / We only live, only

suspire / Consumed by either fire or fire" (207, 223-9). The association of "love" and "fire" evokes "an unnatural and rebellious heat" (Donne 1975: 56) in the Meditation of the eleventh Devotion, where John Donne ponders about the heart of man:

It is always in *Action* and *motion*, still busie, still pretending to doe all, to furnish all the powers and faculties with all that they have; But if an enemy dare rise up against it, it is the soonest endangered, the soonest defeated of any part. The *Braine* will hold out longer than it, and the *Liver* longer than that; They will endure a *Siege*; but an unnatural heat, a rebellious heat, will blow up the *heart*, like a *Myne*, in a *minute* [. . .] the *Braine*, and *Liver*, and *Heart* hold not a *Triumvirate* in *Man*.

Here, the disintegration of the speaker's body into "heart," "brain," and "liver" recalls the destruction of integrity suffered by the poet in second part of *Ash-Wednesday*:

On my legs my heart my liver and that which had been contained
In the hollow round of my skull. (Eliot 1970: 87, 44-5)

According to Dayal (57), the world made up in *Ash-Wednesday* offers solace from reality which results overwhelming, but it might also express the sublimation of the sexual impulse. Thus, the title of the poem is a metaphor that expresses an already existing state of spiritual and emotional deprivation, being *Ash-Wednesday* a new version of *The Waste Land* within the self (Bell 1988: 2). Bell's interpretation retraces the reader to "The Burial of the Dead," where a voice proclaims: "I will show you fear in a handful of dust" (Eliot 1970: 54, 30), which evokes the preacher's words in "Dust thou art," while celebrating the Ash-Wednesday Mass. Thus, Bell argues that the speaker in *Ash-Wednesday*, contrary to the speaker in *The Waste Land* who is looking for God in order to find God, might be in search of God in order to recover nature, for in the second stanza he says: "Because I cannot drink / There, where trees flower, and springs flow, for there is nothing again" (85, 14-15). In *Burnt Norton*, like in *Ash-Wednesday*, even "while the dust moves sudden in the shaft of sunlight" (181, 177-8), which suggests the opposite of the "unmoving" (171) or quiet yet straining love, the sense of the waste of time becomes profoundly ridiculous and causes a feeling of being undignified and even more condemned: "Sudden in a shaft of sunlight / Even while the dust moves / There rises the hidden laughter / Of children in the foliage / Quick now, here, now, always – / Ridiculous the waste sad time / Stretching before and after" (177-83). Thus, "the shaft of sunlight" (177) combined with the "ridiculous and sad waste of time" (182), recalls the "life departing with a feeble smile" (1996: 17, 12) from "love torturing itself" (5) in T. S. Eliot's "Opera." In poems such as *East Coker*, this sense of waste and ridicule is compared to the laughter in the foliage, described as "echoing ecstasy": "The laughter in the garden, echoed ecstasy / Not lost, but requiring, pointing to the agony / Of death and birth" (1970: 187, 139-41). The reader can notice a continuous shift in the definitions of "love," a shift which evokes the lingering between death and birth. These descriptions present a common conclusion not free from the feeling

of guilt, remorse, and the acknowledgment of the speaker's past deeds pervaded by the plea for mercy:

And pray to God to have mercy upon us
 [.]
 For what is done, not to be done again
 May the judgment not be too heavy upon us
 [.]
 Pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death
 Pray for us now and at the hour of our death. (86, 26, 32-3, 40-1)

Thus, the poet in *Ash-Wednesday* asks God to show clemency towards something "done not to be done again" (32) which suggests the opposite of stillness, and consequently the idea of sin. In the Prayer of the first Devotion, John Donne evokes the miserable condition of the man destined to die because of the imminent sin ("that which I was so hungerly, so greedily flying to" [1975: 10]), but like the speaker in *Ash-Wednesday* he also hopes for salvation and exhorts God to be merciful:

O eternall and most gracious *God*, [. . .] enable me by thy *grace* to looke forward to mine end, and to looke backward to, to the considerations of thy mercies afforded mee from the beginning; that so by that practise of considering thy mercy, in my beginning in this world, when thou plantedst me in the *Christian Church*, and thy mercy in the beginning in the other world, when thou writest me in the *Booke of life*, in my *Election*, I may come to a holy consideration of thy *mercy*, in the beginning of all my actions here: That in all the beginnings, in all the accesses, and approaches, of spirituall sicknesses of *Sin*, I may heare and hearken to that voice, *O thou Man of God, there is death in the pot*, and so refraine from that, which I was so hungerly, so greedily flying to. (9-10)

5. CORRELATION BETWEEN THE SECULAR AND THE DIVINE

In "Religion and Literature" Eliot wrote that it was the "business of honest Christians not to assume that we do like what we ought to like" (Hutchings 1996: 27). Thus, the gloom and penance conveyed through the fourth stanza in the first part of *Ash-Wednesday* seem to communicate the idea of not being enlightened and renewed after the confession, but of stumbling on the uncertainty of absolution. Yet, it hints at the idea of transformation of the suffering, and at the idea of making it meaningful by viewing it in Christian terms.

Due to the presence of liturgical elements, *Ash-Wednesday* has also been called *Purgatorio*, and T. S. Eliot himself described it as his Modernist version of Dante's *Vita Nuova* (Dale 1988: 105). It renders a sense of void and enacts the conflicting impulses of asceticism and sensuality. Although he seems to renounce desire in the life-denying statement of "Because I do not hope" (Eliot 1970: 85, 1-3, 9, 30), the speaker recognizes being pulled by the sensuality of the earthly world:

And the lost heart stiffens and rejoices
 In the lost lilac and the lost sea voices
 And the weak spirit quickens to rebel
 [.]
 Quickens to recover
 The cry of quail and the whirling plover
 [.]
 But when the voices shaken from the yew-tree drift away
 Let the other yew be shaken and replay.
 (94, 195-7, 199-200, 207-8)

The wording of T. S. Eliot's experience seems to be recalled in the *Expostulation* of the first *Devotion*, where John Donne claims to be "dust and ashes" (Donne 1975: 8). Yet at the same time he claims to be more than "mere ashes," saying that he is "soul." He explains that his ashes will be, metaphorically, claimed by God at the moment of his death. However, he does not say this about his soul. Thus, it seems that the poet desires to submit to God, yet he perceives himself as his own soul, evoking a very subtle and sensual spirituality, a spirituality of his own like that of the "yew" (208) that is being shaken and replies. At its core, such spirituality is a plea to God for being accepted despite the conviction of not belonging to Him. The speaker's spirituality also implies that both his spirit and his body are mutually affected or dignified. Hence, Donne's *Expostulation* is both a plea and a justification in an attempt to reconcile body and soul in God's eyes, and to show the absolute interdependency between them:

If I were but meere *dust & ashes* I might speak unto the *Lord*, for the *Lords* hand made me of this *dust*, and the Lord's hand shall re-collect these *ashes*; the *Lords* hand was the wheele, upon which this vessell of clay was framed, and the *Lords* hand is the *Urne* in which these *ashes* shall be preserv'd. I am the *dust*, & the *ashes* of the *Temple* of the *H. Ghost*; and what *Marble* is so precious? But I am more than *dust & ashes*; I am my best part, I am my *soule*. (Donne 1975: 8)

The six parts of *Ash-Wednesday* could be interpreted as the speaker's six attempts to come to terms with his faith, to come as close as possible to God. Hence, in the first part the poet claims that "he doesn't hope" (Eliot 1970: 85, 1-3, 9), but he ends with a prayer, which brings hope to his condemnation ("Pray for us now and at the hour of our death" [86, 41]). In the second part, he lays torn apart and abhors himself ("My guts the strings of my eyes and the indigestible portions / Which the leopards reject. / [. . .]" [87, 56-7]), but again, "with the burden of the grasshopper" (65), he says the litany to the Virgin Mary (66-73). In the third section of the poem, he is about to give up, feeling constantly pulled down, yet he climbs towards the third step, his third attempt ("At the first turning of the third stair" [89, 107]), and asks Christ to have mercy, "to speak the word only" (119). The fourth section intensifies his persistence in the phrase of *Sovegna vos* (90, 130), and the hope of redemption ("[. . .] Redeem / The time. Redeem" [137-8]), even though there is the possible death or restoration in the metaphorical meaning of "exile" (91, 148). This

part appears as the most positive one. However, it is followed by the most self-denying passage in the fifth part of the poem, which reflects collapse and lament ("If the lost word is lost, if the spent word is spent / If the unheard, unspoken" [92, 149-50]). There is only place for dejection and paradox ("Where shall the word be found, where will the word / Resound? Not here, there is not enough silence" [159-60]), and more suffering ("Those who walk in darkness, who choose thee and oppose thee" [169]). Yet there is a dim exhortation to be reconsidered in the phrase "O my people what have I done unto thee" (158; 93, 184). The final part of the poem, more than an attempt is an act of declaring his former intentions, those intentions "that walk between the years" (131), the intricate intentions of coming to Him ("And let my cry come unto Thee" [95, 219]). Although the speaker 'does not hope' (94, 185-7), his "lost heart stiffens and rejoices" (195). Thus, he asks not "to mock himself with falsehood" (95, 210), and asks God "not to be separated" ("Suffer me not to be separated" [218]) from Him.

At the same time, the different sections of *Ash-Wednesday* seem to evoke various elements or events associated with the Holy Week. Its metaphors or symbols recall Passion Sunday, Holy Thursday, Good Friday, Holy Saturday, and Easter Sunday. According to the Christian calendar, the Holy Week begins with Passion Sunday known as Palm Sunday. The Gospel of Mark tells about Christ's riding into Jerusalem on a road strewn with cloaks and leafy branches, as he set about to accomplish his paschal mystery (Metzger & Murphy: 1991, 65). This presents an analogy with the first part of the poem, in which the poet seems ready to accomplish God's will, and therefore, is praying to renounce this life, "to be taught to sit still" (Eliot 1970: 86, 39), and to "rejoice" (85, 24-5), although he knows that death awaits him: "Pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death" (86, 40-1). At his triumphal entrance into Jerusalem Jesus was greeted by people who waved palm fronds. Their green colour, suggestive of hope, reveals, however, apparent joy since Jesus came to Jerusalem to die. This is reflected by the content of the poem, for it has been defined as a poem of hope, yet it ends with a cry that comes to die in God ("And let my cry come unto Thee" [95, 219]). Holy Thursday is the day of Christ's Last Supper. Christ's awareness of the forthcoming suffering might be reflected in the image of the leopards devouring the body of the poet. They are white, suggesting purity, yet their appearance is deceptive like that of Judas Iscariot who betrayed Christ. As narrated in the Gospel of Luke, Jesus willfully and obediently allowed himself to be brutally sacrificed on a wooden cross ("Father, into your hands I commend my spirit" [Metzger & Murphy 1991: 120]), just as the speaker allows the leopards to feed inclemently on his body: "[. . .] having fed to satiety / On my legs my heart my liver and that which had been contained / In the hollow round of my skull" (Eliot 1970: 87, 43-5). In return for his sacrifice, Jesus made a simple request: to remember the act of love that he performed on men's behalf. As if identifying with Christ, the speaker of *Ash-Wednesday* claims: "[. . .] And I who am here dissembled / Proffer my deeds to oblivion, and my love / To the posterity of the desert and the fruit of the gourd" (53-5). The day after Holy Thursday is Good Friday, the most somber day for it commemorates Christ buried in the tomb. The

tabernacle is empty, the altar is bare, the statues of saints are removed from the church (or veiled), and the holy water fonts are dry. This might be evoked in the third part of the poem where "there were no more faces and the stair was dark" (89, 104), which recalls the removed faces of the saints, and where the darkness of the stair evokes emptiness. The dryness of the water fonts might be symbolized through the dryness of the air, "smaller and drier than the will" (86, 37) which points to the renunciation of the devil (and the desire) in the Sacrament of Baptism associated with the water fonts. Also, the apostrophe, "O my people" (92, 158; 93, 176, 184) in the fifth part of *Ash-Wednesday* reminds the reader of Christ's words in the Catholic liturgy for Good Friday. The pain of Christ's Passion is intensified on Holy Saturday, a liturgy that begins in total darkness. This is the mood of the fifth part of *Ash-Wednesday*: the "Word is lost" (149), "unheard" (151-2). The first two stanzas of this section communicate complete despair and chaos, until "the light shone in darkness" (155), like that of Jesus' glory signaled through joyful bells on Easter Sunday.

Both *Devotions* and *Ash-Wednesday* follow a similar pattern, since each Devotion and each part of *Ash-Wednesday* are complete even if isolated, and constitute an independent devotional and meditative exercise. The power of divine love seems to transform Donne's illness, who recovers his health, yet he doesn't forget the "twilight" (Donne 1975: 43-4) and the "voice" in the Expostulation of the eighth Devotion: "[. . .] the twi-light, of that day wherein thou, thorow him, hast shind upon me before; but the *Eccho* of that voice, whereby thou, through him, hast spoke to mee before." T. S. Eliot becomes witness of divine love through the contemplation of nature, which has a healing effect on his "lost heart that stiffens and rejoices" (94, 195). Therefore, a correlation can be traced between the secular and the divine love in both John Donne's and T. S. Eliot's writing. In a sermon to Queen Anne, at Denmarke-house preached on December 14, 1617, four months almost to the day, after the death of his wife (Frost 1990: 123), John Donne talks about his "turning" through the beloved to the love of God:

Now there are but two that can be loved, God and the Creature: and of the creatures, that must necessarily be best, which is nearest us, which we understand best and reflect most upon, and that's ourselves; for, for the love of other creatures, it is but a secondary love; if we love God, we love them for his sake; if we love our selves, we love them for our sakes [. . .] and all love of the creatures, determines in the love of our selves: for though sometimes we may say, that we love them better than our selves [. . .], yet all this is but a secondary love, and with relation still to ourselves and our own contentment. (Donne 1952-63: Vol. 1, 242)

Similarly, in *Ash-Wednesday* the "Blessèd sister, holy mother, spirit of the fountain, spirit of the garden" (Eliot 1970: 95, 209) becomes the counterpart of the Virgin Mary, the beloved who brings salvation. The constant antithesis in the image of bare bones and the lady clad in white or blue clothes, might point to the speaker's desire to become metaphorically enclosed / enclothed in her goodness, love and silence, for in a "Second Debate Between Body and Soul" T. S. Eliot wrote about the fulfillment that a "ring of silence brought him when it closed around his being" (Gordon 1999: 56).

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