Chapter 10: The Quest for Meaning

The rhetorician would deceive his neighbours, The sentimentalist himself; while art
Is but a vision of reality. — W.B. Yeats.

Time past and time future
Allow but a little consciousness.
To be conscious is not to be in time
But only in time can the moment in the rose-garden ...
Be remembered; involved with past and future.
Only through time time is conquered. — T.S. Eliot.

"If we are moved by a poem, it has meant something, perhaps something important to us", says T.S. Eliot, in his essay on 'The Music of Poetry'.

In thus directing our attention to the fact that poetry has a 'meaning' to give, Eliot takes us back to the Symbolist concept of poetry as a form of knowledge. This was a new approach, a fresh view of the question of the value of poetry, for it had been a common belief through the ages that poetry gives emotional satisfaction, and that therein lies its right to exist. This view, in one form or another, has persisted right from the time of Plato, who found that poetry 'feeds and waters the passions', and Aristotle who valued, for its cathartic effect upon our feelings. Later, Sidney defended poetry for its capacity to delight us by making 'the too much loved earth more lovely'. The world of nature itself was not as delightful as that of poetry: 'Her world is brazen, the poets only deliver a golden'. In the eighteenth century, the Neo Classicists found that poetry existed to please us through wit:

True wit is Nature to advantage dressed,
What oft was thought, but ne'er so well expressed.

For Wordsworth, poetry was 'the spontaneous overflow of powerful emotions',
while for Keats it is something which pleases, by means of a 'fine excess'.

In modern times, it was perhaps I.A. Richards who directed critical attention to the problem of the value of poetry. His was a rational and systematic method. He examined poetry in its two aspects of form and content. Since we approach the content of a poem through its form or language, that was the aspect to which he gave attention first. He that poetry uses language in a special way: hence, his distinction between the two 'uses of language':

A statement may be used for the sake of a reference, true or false, which it causes. This is the scientific use of language. But it may also be used for the sake of the effects in emotion and attitude. This is the emotive use of language. Richards, of course, made qualifications. Not all expression of emotion was poetry, nor was all expression of emotion aesthetically valuable. Several attempts were made by others to specify what emotions were aesthetically valuable. There was the plainly hedonistic view that poetry was to be valued for the sake of the pleasure that it gives; one variant of this is the Freudian view that poetry causes pleasure through a sort of 'substitute-gratification'. Perhaps such pleasure could also be derived from 'empathy' which Theodor Lipps described as 'feeling something, namely oneself, into the aesthetic object'. But as pleasure can be caused by emotions which do not have any aesthetic value, these theories are not of much help.

Richards rejects the pleasure-principle of poetry as well as the claims

1 I.A. Richards: 'Principles of Literary Criticism', p. 267
of poetry to value through its aesthetic appeal or its identification of
beauty with truth. He advances a new concept of the effect or purpose of art.
He sees the creation and harmonization of tensions as the chief effect of
poetry. This is something like Aristotle's explanation of the effect of poetry
as 'catharsis', the resolution of the tension between the emotions of
terror and pity, by creating an excess artificially. The human craving for
emotion is thus vicariously experienced and purged away. Richards finds
the value of poetry in its power to create a sense of harmony and peace.
This effect, again, is emotional.

It is such a position that a critic like Yvor Winters opposes. He
would not restrict poetry to emotional expression or emotion only. He
claims that all good poetry has an important rational content: it can,
and should, be understood by the reader. In expecting poetry to convey
a 'meaning', Winters is closer to the Symbolists than to Richards; but, in
requiring that this 'meaning' should be of a rational order, he stands alone,
(though he would perhaps find support among some of the more recent British
poets.) The French poets were opposed to the view that the value of
poetry lay in its affective appeal: they claimed that poetry was a valuable
form of knowledge, and that through symbol it could give reality in all its
complexity and completeness, a thing science could not do. Hence their
efforts to discover and reveal realities. In much of modern criticism, we
find the same sort of distinction between poetry and science, and the idea
that poetry has some sort of reality to offer. All these are based on
the Symbolist concept that poetry is not merely emotive language but a
particular kind of presentation of knowledge. We may mention here the
views of the two great American poet-critics J.C. Ransom and Allen Tate. In 'The World's Body', Ransom argues that poetry conveys a sense of the particularity of the world: 'As Science more and more completely reduces the world to its types and forms, art, replying, must invest it again with a body'. Poetry gives 'body' or the quality of 'thinginess' by means of its 'rich local detail' or texture. The poem is regarded by Ransom as having 'a loose logical structure with an irrelevant local texture'. The structure or argument is what gives order and direction to the materials of the poem. Through its structure the poem gives knowledge of universals, and through the texture it gives knowledge of particulars. Science, by restricting itself to the former, can deal only with abstractions. Poetry gets its value from the rich particularities, the incidental details. By emphasizing this element of 'texture', the theory is in danger of suggesting a split, within the poem, between 'structure' and 'texture'. The theory also lays itself open to criticisms like that of Winters, who raised two objections:

1 If the 'texture' is irrelevant, why should one irrelevant detail be preferred to another? Would it not be possible to use the same texture in different poems?

2 If the texture is what distinguishes poetry from science, since the element of structure is similar both in science and poetry, why cannot we 'swallow our local detail neat', without the help of the 'argument'?

There are also other problems created by this conception of poetry. Ransom, by tying down the structure to logic, refuses to give it an independent status within the poem. One fails to understand why the structure is necessarily logical. Perhaps the point may be made that the texture is
irrelevant only in the sense that it is not necessary for the 'argument' to proceed along. In fact, the 'local details' may impede the progress of the argument. But the 'structure' and 'texture' may interact in another manner. The two come into conflict, and this tension itself may force our mind towards that complete reality which the poem presents. That reality is neither abstract nor local, and therefore rational exposition would not be able to bring it out. But the mind of the reader, meeting with a contradiction becomes restless, and will not be satisfied till that contradiction has been removed or resolved. To take an example, the 'argument' of Yeats's 'Sailing to Byzantium' may be expressed as the 'glorification of a death-wish'. This in itself would be an unpleasant subject, yet it is 'eagerly absorbed by the fit reader'. That is to say, the final effect on the reader of this poem is the opposite of unpleasant. The poet's zestful acceptance of the flesh (with all its attendant ills) and of the sensuous, supplies the necessary tension. The death-confronting and flesh-accepting impulses contradict to produce a resultant meaning which is far from the apparent irony brought out by the lines:

An aged man is but a paltry thing,
A tattered coat upon a stick ....

Neither the 'sensual music' nor the bemoaning of age is what the poem presents, but something which is different from both, and that is, the joy of the poet in the 'monuments of unageing intellect'. The presence of such tension in poetry, and the effect it creates is referred to by William Empson, when he remarks:

It seems to be a general rule ... that if the effect (of a poem) is beautiful, the lust for death is balanced by some impulse or interest which contradicts it.²

The value of such tension, and the reconciliation of the universal and the

² William Empson: 'The Structure of Complex Words'.
particular, has also been recognized by Coleridge. He considered the universal and the particular in a poem as necessary for each other. The particular is meaningless except as it is seen to reveal the universal—its self-sufficiency being only 'a framework which the human imagination forms by its own limits, as the foot measures itself in the snow'. The universal, on the other hand, is comprehensible only through the particular.

Allen Tate, like Ransom, values poetry for the knowledge of reality that it gives. He thinks science can give us only partial knowledge, as it deals with abstractions; abstraction violates poetry. Good poetry proceeds from a union of intellect and feeling, or rather from a tension between abstraction and sensation, and thus gives the whole reality. Tate regards the poem not as a statement about something (as Winters would have it) but as action rendered in its totality. However, this 'vision of the whole . . . is not susceptible of logical demonstration'; there can be no external verification. Here Allen Tate has stated the case for modern poetry, a case which has roots in the Symbolist tradition. Tate has given the reality presented by the poem almost the autonomous status that the Symbolists claim for it.

This shift in emphasis from emotion to reality in poetry is the outcome of the Symbolists' quest for Meaning. In spite of all their differences, the Symbolists were one in their search for Meaning, and in the claim they made that poetry gives a kind of knowledge (not given by science), and that it is to be valued for this, rather than for its emotional effect. This claim served the important purpose of giving poetry a status, a place, among the important 'mental' activities of man. This championship of poetry came at a time when poetry, unable to stand the competition of science, had ceased to be regarded as an important activity in life; it had come
be considered a mere toy, whose sole purpose was to give emotional satisfaction. Emotions themselves were not greatly valued: they did not contribute to the progress of man as did ideas. Reason was superior to emotion (as emotion could be controlled by reason), and as Science was based on the former it was more valuable than poetry. This general impression had been fortified by the poets themselves, who seemed to have no hold over reality.

The Symbolists started on the quest for the meaning of things. Science worked within the world of perception and of rational thought. Science was confident that reality could be found within these boundaries; nor had Science the equipment or willingness to explore what lay beyond these. The Symbolists were equally convinced that reality transcended reason and the physical facts of existence. Then what was the nature of this reality? And, what was its relation to the reality given by science?

As the Symbolists were convinced they had access to a reality which science could not reach, they found their own answers to the questions. To the first of these questions various answers were given. Baudelaire frankly said that Reality was spiritual. The Symbolists had all the same answer to the second question: that the reality of the Symbol was independent of Science. Mallarmé, however, was not satisfied with this; he tried to make the Symbol completely autotelic. It did not exist merely in order to give a spiritual revelation or to serve a pre-conceived purpose. It was something which existed for its own sake (and for the sake of the artist who identified himself with it.) We have seen how Mallarmé, in attempting to create such symbols, reached the abyss of nothingness, of "l'absence".
from which no return was possible. Mallarmé's later poems became increasingly
opaque in their approximation to the ideal; often they are riddles or
enigmas rather than poems. To demand that the Symbol should be
autonomous in this sense is to make it meaningless; what is totally
independent of our senses and intellect is, by its very nature, unintelligible.
The poem which symbolizes a completely pure and independent reality must
literally 'not mean, but be'. But in achieving such purity the poem
also attains self-extinction; it ceases to be a poem. The poem is
rather more like a human being, something which has a life of its own
and is ultimately mysterious and irreducible, but which can nevertheless be
known — with a knowledge which is not indeed rationalistic, but does
involve the activity of the discursive reason.

Mallarmé's position represents the 'ne plus ultra' of Symbolism. His
was a position of logical absurdity reached through logic. The poet
was to symbolize the highest reality, and the highest reality — Mallarmé
had found through long and careful reasoning — was "l'absence". And
this absolute reality was to be reached by the poet through deliberate
concentration, and by continual and systematic conquests of 'le hasard'
by the will of the poet. The idea of complete understanding of reality
coming through inspiration, like a flash of lightening, was not entirely
acceptable to the Symbolists. Graham Hough has remarked: 'The Symbolists
share with the Romantics the reliance on the epiphany, the moment of revelation;'
but the Symbolists, unlike the Romantics, were not prepared to submit themselves

completely to inspiration. Nor was inspiration to be an unexpected guest; the poet was always to be ready with a carefully cultivated receptivity. That poetry is a deliberate activity was a firm belief with all the French Symbolists. With the exception of Rimbaud, all of them believed that the poet should not reject reason; nor would they make Reason supreme. The concentration and deliberation that they spoke of was not the same thing as rational control, but something far wider. The poet was to be aware of what he was doing: this was their way of reacting to the Romantic concept of the poet, in a fine frenzy, becoming a receptacle through whom inspiration overflowed. The poet was not to be overwhelmed by the flood of inspiration and abandon the resources he had at his command. Nor was he to be a mere transmitter, as the Surrealists would have him be, relaying the images of the subconscious. The French Symbolists prided themselves on being creators. They firmly believed in craftsmanship, in training and practice. This active role that they ascribed to the poet may bring to our mind, as a contrast, what Eliot has said about the function of the poet in the act of creation, which Eliot compares to 'the action which takes place when a bit of finely filleted platinum is introduced into a chamber containing oxygen and sulphur dioxide'. The point of the chemical analogy is to show that the poet is not part of the created object which is the poem. The poet is like the agent which brings about the reaction without itself reacting:

When the two gases previously mentioned are mixed in the presence of a filament of platinum, they form sulphurous acid. This combination takes place only if the platinum is present; nevertheless the newly formed acid

5 T.S.Eliot: 'Tradition and the Individual Talent', p.17. (£££)
contains no trace of platinum, and the platinum itself is apparently unaffected: has remained inert, neutral and unchanged. The mind of the poet is the shred of platinum.  

But this is not the whole truth. The poet, unlike the shred of platinum, is not quite indifferent to what happens. He has to work hard. Eliot admits this elsewhere in the same essay when he says: "...there is a great deal in the writing of poetry, which must be conscious and deliberate". Eliot has also spoken, in another essay, of the need of the conscious cultivation of technical resources so as to be ready for inspiration when it comes, which may be only 'once in every five or ten years'. The poet has to make a dual progress: he must go on developing his receptivity as well as his technique:

... a poet's work may proceed along two lines on an imaginary graph: one of the lines being his conscious and continuous effort in technical excellence, that is, in continually developing his medium for the moment when he really has something to say. The other line is just his normal human course of development, his accumulation and digestion of experience (experience is not sought for, it is merely accepted in consequence of doing what we really want to do), and by experience I mean the results of reading and reflection, varied interests of all sorts, contacts and acquaintances, as well as passion and adventure. Now and then, the two lines may converge at a high peak, so that we get a masterpiece.

The insistence on technical readiness and excellence is one of the most marked features of modern poetic theory. The great influence Pound has had on all modern poetry — a tribute to which influence we have in T.S.Eliot's dedication of the 'Waste Land' to Pound, 'il miglior fabbro' — is mainly because of this respect for craftsmanship. The poet has to wait for the mood when he really has something to say,

... but in the meantime the poet must be working; he must be experimenting and trying his technique so that it will be ready, like a well oiled fire engine when the moment comes to strain it to the utmost.

Eliot speaks about this need for preparation to receive 'experience' quite often. The Symbolists, too, had similar ideas about the poet's need for

8 Ibid, p.xviii.
adequate technical equipment and conscious control. But these were only means towards an end, an end which was clearly defined by the Symbolists. The poet prepared himself to enter upon his true task, which was knowledge of truth. The Symbolists gave deep thought to the nature of Reality, and to the mode of grasping that Reality. Reality could not be grasped only through rational thinking; the Reason can at most grasp only part of Reality. Since the truth revealed by reason is partial, and since discourse proves an inadequate means of expression when the poet proceeds beyond the limits of reason, he seeks vision and symbol. In disclaiming the power of the rational faculty of man to know Reality, the Symbolists also set aside the Cartesian mode of gaining knowledge, with its two distinct entities of subject and object. In fact, Reality, they emphasize, can be known only when the subject merges with the object. Hence their preoccupation with 'le rêve', a state of consciousness in which the subject-object distinction no longer prevails. This state of poetic consciousness can perhaps be described best by quoting from a modern semanticist:

In the moment of knowing (or awareness) which is also the real moment of poetic creation, the knower ceases to exist as subject at all, and conversely, when he comes fully to himself, as subject, he ceases to know. Imaginations are generated in his consciousness as he passes from the former state to the latter, and the difficulty is, of course, to retain them in some form, in the memory. The analogy with dreaming is here very exact; for everybody knows how a dream which seemed vivid in every detail, while we were still only half-conscious, may vanish altogether during the last minute that is spent in waking right up. The special faculty needed to overcome this paradox of inspiration has been described with effective accuracy as "presence of mind".9

It was this sort of 'consciousness', such a moment of knowing, that the French Symbolists aspired for, and what is described above as 'presence of mind' was what they meant by 'control'. In this concept of controlled

dreaming, the Symbolists brought themselves in direct opposition to the prevailing Romantic view of poetry as the expression of feeling, of something to be valued for its power to communicate emotion. Personal emotion was not completely ruled by the Symbolists: it remained for them, as for the Romantics, the starting point for poetry. But whereas it was also an end in itself for the Romantics, it became a means for the Symbolists, of getting at something else. Deliberately avoiding the Hugo-esque tradition of wallowing in emotion, which had gained such popularity by the middle of the nineteenth century, they attempted to lead poetry in a new direction. The mistake that they avoided was great, and this can be observed clearly by comparing what they did with a similar endeavour on the part of the Imagists early in our own century. The Imagists, too, started with a strong anti-Romantic, anti-emotional bias. The 'images' they sought to present, in spite of all their theorizing, turned out to be more subjective impression rather than objective rendering. They gave us not really things as they were but the sensations of perceiving them. There was thus a return to subjectivity and emotion. It is perhaps this kind of possibility which sets off Eliot in pursuit of the 'objective correlative'. Eliot, like Flaubert who demanded that literature should not be made a 'deversoi' for personal emotion, expected a complete detachment on the part of the author:

Poetry is not an overflow of emotion. Poetry is not the turning loose of emotion, but an escape from emotion; it is not an expression of personality, but an escape from it.

But he realized that it was not always possible (though Mallarmé had done it)

to eschew emotion altogether. The poet, on the other hand, admits emotion to make out of it something valuable. He renders it more objective and universal by putting it in the service of a larger meaning, the 'situation' he is trying to present. Hence the need for finding an 'objective correlative' for emotion:

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 if the external facts which must terminate in the sensory experience are given, the emotion is immediately evoked."1

That the poem should be an impersonal embodiment of reality in which the poet's feeling has no place, is an idea put forth by many of the French Symbolists, even before Eliot. A typical instance of the French attitude is André Gide's view that the aim of the Symbol is to give reality in its final crystalline form: 'sa forme véritable enfin et fatale paradisiaque et cristalline'.

The Symbolists after setting aside the Romantic cult of emotionalism gradually brought about an abolishment of the 'I' by treating it as the object rather than as the subject of their creativeness. The 'Correspondances' sonnet of Baudelaire suggests that poetry is the contemplation of the relations of things which become the subject of the poem. But the relation between the artist and his material in this case is too close to admit his establishing the subject-object relationship. The subjective element is not marked in the Symbol because it disappears by coalescing with the objective.

To Mallarmé, language itself became a mode of approaching Reality. For him and for Valéry, his disciple, the poetic problem is that of knowledge through language. Creation is perfect knowledge, therefore language

can give knowledge: 'Inventer, c'est ce comprendre'. These symbolist approaches to knowledge were followed up by Yeats, according to whom, poetry has the power to give a special type of reality which can never be understood by:

... the levelling, rancorous, rational sort of mind
That never looked out of the eye of a saint
Or out of a drunkard's eye .............

It is this kind of knowledge of reality and of life, which gives poetry its great power. Poetry is superior to Science in that it does not restrict itself to 'externalities' or 'generalities' in that it does not give abstractions or arguments;

The abstract is not life, and everywhere draws out its contradictions. You can refute Hegel, but not the Saint or the Song of Sixpence. Yeats is again with the Symbolists in that he expects to attain this reality through a process of intense self-discipline. Before the poet attains the supreme cosmos-confronting power, he has to undergo a tremendous self-searching. He has to suffer and to sacrifice, and make the final severe choice:

The intellect of man is forced to choose
Perfection of the life or of the work.
And if it take the second must refuse
A heavenly mansion, raging in the dark.

And, he has also to suffer the contradiction of 'self' and 'anti-self' in his work: without the knowledge of both the poem cannot be complete,

By the help of an image
I call to my own opposite, summon all
That I have handled least, least looked upon.

This process of self-searching, this attempt to conquer 'Self' easily led

12 W.B. Yeats: Collected Poems, p. 236.
13 W.B. Yeats: Letter written to Lady Elizabeth Pelham, 4 January, 1929. (Letter, p. 236)
him to the Tower. There was every possibility of Yeats going the way of Mallarmé, towards an extreme esoterism. Of course, the poet cannot sever the connection with life; mainly because...

...emotions, generated collectively, persist in solitude, so that one man, alone, singing a song, still feels his emotion stirred by collective images. He is already exhibiting that paradox of art — man withdrawing from his fellows into the world of art, only to enter more closely into communion with humanity. 16

This was certainly true of Yeats: he never dispensed with the ladder connecting him with the concrete realities of life. Yeats finally achieved, in his own way, that synthesis of subject and object which the Symbolists had aimed at.

In their discovery that the process of knowing reality involves synthesis of various contradictory elements, the Symbolists had actually taken a step in a new direction. Another important step was taken when they began to strive for release from the accepted notions of time and space. As we have seen, the Symbolists believed in dreams as a means of knowing reality. Now the dream presents realities under quite different terms of reference, in which the usual space-time relations are violated: a fact which was arrived at scientifically by Freud years later. The difference between the reality presented by dreams and the reality of normal perception is described by Freud as follows:

The dream always turns temporal relations into spatial ones whenever it has to deal with them ... The laws of logic — above all, the law of contradiction — do not hold for the processes of the Id ... and we are astonished to find in it an exception to the philosopher's assertion that space and time are necessary forms of our mental acts. In the Id there is nothing corresponding to the idea of time, no recognition of the passage of time, and no alteration of mental processes by the passage of time. 17

In bringing about this changed attitude to time and space, was the dream

16 William Caudwell: 'Illusion and Reality', p. 15
17 Gustave Freud: 'The Interpretation of Dreams'.
taking us nearer reality? It was Gérard de Nerval who first gave serious
attention to this problem, during which he experienced moments when the distinction
between dream and the reality of concrete daily existence seemed to vanish.
By accepting actual phenomena and dream on the same basis, Nerval was forced
to revise his ideas of time:

Pour moi, déjà, le temps de chaque jour semblait augmenté de deux heures ;
de sorte qu'en me levant aux heures fixées par les horloges de la maison, je
ne faisais que me promener dans l'empire des ombres. Les compagnons qui
m'entouraient me semblaient endormis et pareils aux spectres de Tarbore,
jusqu'à l'heure où pour moi se levait le soleil. Alors je saluais cet
astre par une prière, et ma vie réelle commençait.

This distortion of the time element produces certain images in which the
past and the present, the dead and the living, are intermingled, and exist
simultaneously, on the same plane of reality. In one of his dreams, Nerval
sees a clock, and on the clock a bird who speaks of members of his family,
both dead and living, as if they were all present:

L'oiseau me parlait de personnes de ma famille vivantes ou mortes en
divers temps, comme si elles existaient simultanément.

In 'Sylvie' too, Nerval speaks of a moment when he has a simultaneous
vision of all the great happenings of the past and present: past and
present appear as a continuous present. He had also other experiences
of this simultaneity of past and present, when he was able to see 'se
presser en quelques minutes les tableaux les plus saillants d'une longue
période de la vie'.

Nerval, forcibly thrust into the world of dream by overpowering vision
and insanity, was at a loss to understand whether dream revealed to him

29 Ibid., p.21.
a new type of reality, or was it merely illusion. Aware of his personal limitations and his fits of insanity, he could not but hesitate on the threshold of this new world revealed by dreams:

... le rêve est une seconde vie. Je n'ai pu percer sans finir ces portes d'ivoire ou de corne qui nous séparent du monde visible.21

Nerval could not be certain about the reality of what he saw in dreams, but such doubts did not trouble another poet who was familiar with the world of dreams; Charles Baudelaire was sure that dreams often gave realities not perceptible in normal waking life. He identified what the dreams revealed with the Reality that lay behind the appearances of things which are, after all, illusions. To get at this Reality which transcended our concepts of time and space, became his constant endeavour. The Mind, which is preoccupied with appearances, which is imprisoned within the walls of time and space, has to be liberated if it is to grasp Reality. With this thought in his mind, Baudelaire defies the vigilant and deadly enemy, Time,

... l'ennemi vigilant est funeste,
Le Temps!

Anyone who wants to reach Reality has to struggle against Time, has to 'throw off the chains and martyrdom of Time'. What happens if time can thus be defied is shown in Baudelaire's curious prose-poem, 'La Chambre Double'. The poem presents an ordinary living room in its two aspects: with and without the time element. We have, at first, the room as it would be with the time element drained off. As a result

22 'Enivrez-Vous' from Baudelaire's 'Spleen de Paris', p.226.
of the absence of time everything, even the curtains and the furniture, appears strange to us. This view of the room given by the poet seems to be so different from anything we know of in ordinary life, and all only because the time-element to which we are so accustomed is absent.

As the poet himself says:

"Ce que nous nommons généralement la vie même dans son expansion la plus heureuse, n'a rien de commun avec cette vie suprême dont j'ai maintenant connaissance ... Non ! il n'ya plus de secondes ! Le temps a disparu ; c'est l'Eternité qui règne."

The magic of this atmosphere — the purity and the solitude that the scene had acquired through the freedom from time — is broken by the entry of a bailiff, that most earthly and concrete example of despicable humanity — The bailiff brings with him that sense of time, which tyrannizes humanity. The poet suddenly becomes aware of the ticking of the clock:

"Oui ! le Temps règne : il a repris sa brutale dictature."

Memory, through whose power Time operates, returns: that memory which makes us think of the past and compare it with the present.

The poet cries out

"Horreur ! je me souviens ! je me souviens !"

This tyranny of time is represented in poem after poem. In "L'Horloge", for example, he speaks about the clock as

"Horlogel dieu sinistre, effrayant, impossible,
Dont le doigt nous menace et nous dit : "Souviens-toi"."

And, in "L'Ennemi", he speaks of the destructive power of time

"— O douleur ! O douleur ! Le Temps mange la vie.
Et l'obscur Ennemi qui nous ronge le coeur
Du sang que nous perdons croit et se fortifie."

The desire to get free from the ordinary concepts of time and space is

25 Ibid., p.247.
almost an obsession with the Symbolists. It was Baudelaire who first gave expression to this desire, by writing of a voyage 'without steam or sail', and free from time and space. In the poem 'Le Voyage' Baudelaire repudiates the traditional mode of voyaging, in which we go from place to place, swayed by curiosity and pleasure.

Nous imitons, horreur! la touptie et la boule
Dans leur valse et leurs bonds ...

The traveller runs round the world like a madman, dreaming of splendid scenes, and always getting disappointed at the disparity between dream and reality:

Tel le vieux, vagabond, piétinant dans la boue,
Rêve, le nez en l'air, de brillants paradis;
Son œil ensorcelé découvre une Capoue
Partout où la chandelle illumine un taudis.

Baudelaire has nothing but contempt for this traditional mode of voyage without any serious purpose. He proposes a new kind of voyage:

Nous voulons voyager sans vapeur et sans voile!
Faites, pour égayer l'ennui de nos prisons,
Passer sur nos esprits, tendus comme une toile,
Vos souvenirs avec leurs cadres d'horizons,

The poet, undertaking this sort of voyage through realms of consciousness, arrives at knowledge of many things, of good and of evil, and finally comes face to face with Death. Undaunted he pushes on, into the abyss of the Unknown:

Plonger au fond du gouffre, Enfer ou Ciel, qu'importe?
Au fond de l'Inconnu pour trouver du nouveau!

For, it is not the destination but the journey itself that is important. The voyage, for Baudelaire, becomes a symbol of man's efforts to get at Reality. This voyage is possible only when man can make himself free from the usual restrictions of time and space that daily life imposes upon us. The Symbolist adventure in quest of Reality begins with Baudelaire; and the voyage is made in one form or another, by poet after poet. Rimbaud
wanders about the world over as a crazy boat, and finds peace only when he reaches a puddle of European water on which he floats as a child's boat:

... c'est la flache
Noire et froide ou vers le crépusule embaume
Un enfant accroupi plein de tristesses, lache
Un bateau frêle comme un papillon de mai.

Mallarmé makes the journey into the Unknown, groping his way in the darkness into 'le néant'. Passing through the tomb, Mallarmé's symbolic voyager, in 'Igitur' transcends time and space, reaching the Absolute. In this process Igitur loses his personality, the individual becomes abolished, in its union with the eternal and the absolute. Other Symbolists made this voyage, liberated from exterior reality, in phantom ships without sail, oar or captain!

... je rechois en enfance
Mon bateau de fleurs est pret ...
— Laforgue.
Las, la nef sans pilote ni cordages
S'en ira sombrer vers les horizons
et les pelerins ne sauront pas l'orage,
l'orage de nos désins.
— Kahn.
L'Ocean occupé par de plus beaux navires
Comme par des lys des pelouses et par comme des oiseaux
Laissera s'égarer au courent des ses eaux
Notre nacelle chavirée.
— André Gide.

What was the aim of all these voyages? To reach Reality (the 'essence' or the 'idea') and to create a symbol which would give us that reality. Indeed, creation gradually becomes identified with poetry. It is the power to create that distinguishes the poet from other men. The symbol revealed the inner quality of things: the 'idea' or 'essence' or 'thing-in-itself'. But what was the nature of this 'essence'? To Baudelaire, it was spiritual: it was something that the mystic reached through grace, and the poet through imaginative
vision. That is also, basically, the attitude of Eliot, as revealed in the 'Four Quartets'. Baudelaire believed, as Yeats did, that the poet could embody this truth in a symbol, without knowing it completely. The Symbolist, therefore, proved to be, in the last analysis, inscrutable, (as the poet himself did not know its complete meaning). The poet brought these truths out of the vast abyss of the Unknown ('le gouffre'), and gave it to the world in the form of symbols. Mallarmé was, however, not satisfied with this power of the poet: he tried to penetrate the mystery and to define the nature of this Unknown, and found it to be 'le meant' (= nothingness).

Mallarmé thus showed that complete knowledge also meant extinction (in the abyss). But most of the Symbolists were not prepared to go thus far: they, however, continued in their belief that the reality revealed by the Symbol was timeless. They tried to get free from ordinary conceptions of time and space because the reality they aimed at was free from these elements. Such a reality could be grasped by the poet in a moment of 'consciousness' when he was free from the restrictions of nature. The poems of the French Symbolists reflect the new attitude towards time and so do most modern poems. In this poetry we do not have that division between past, present and future which is made according to the ordinary scheme of things, nor is this sequence of ideas maintained. There is a new simultaneity and a vista of things not as extended but as co-existing in a series of parallel planes of reality.

There is a growing awareness of a new reality. The old ideas (space, time, ego, et cetera) are destroyed and replaced gradually by a new synthesis. Much of this 'reverse-order technique', in an extra-logical universe where causality and time are no longer certainties, is to be found in modern poetry. This reflects our awareness of the new Time. 26

The timeless reality that the Symbolists attained through dream or vision

finds a parallel in the intuitive reality gained through the 'durée' that Bergson speaks of. According to Bergson, man's intellect concerns itself with quantitative factors contained in a homogeneous environment, that of space, while his intuition experiences everything as absolute quality, and gathers every moment of such experience into an organic pattern, that of the 'durée'. ("Essai sur les données immédiate de la Conscience"). Bergson thus makes a distinction between two faculties: intellect and intuition, and points out that only the latter gives experience of reality. The 'durée' has no 'before' and 'after' in time. It allows no experience to lapse into oblivion, but whether we are consciously aware of it or not, arranges all of our past moments of experience in a simultaneous order which is always in the making:

La durée toute pure est la forme que prend la succession de nos états de conscience quand notre moi se laisse vivre, quand il s'abstient d'établir une séparation entre l'état présent et les états antérieurs ... il suffit qu'en se rappelant ces états ils ne les juxtapose pas à l'état actuel comme un point à un autre point, mais les organise avec lui, comme il arrive quand nous nous rappelons, fondues pour ainsi dire ensemble, les notes d'une mélodie.27

Reality is what we know through the 'durée'. The 'durée' is a moving present, which accumulates all the past and holds preparedness for the future. Experiencing the 'durée' is just like listening to a piece of music, where each note is separate yet dependent for its effect on all the others:

... la vérité est que chaque surcroît d'excitations précédentes, et que l'ensemble nous fait l'effet d'une phrase musicale qui serait toujours sur le point de finir et sans cesse se modifiérât dans sa totalité par l'addition de quelque note nouvelle.28

Bergson's philosophy of time and Einstein's Relativity Theory all indicate the truth (scientifically accepted) of many of the concepts of the Symbolists. In their quest for Meaning the Symbolists were not on the wrong path. In fact, many of the problems that modern science has struggled with, had been

anticipated by the Symbolists. Many of the ideas that the Symbolists held have been systematically expounded in the theories of Bergson, Einstein and Freud. But whereas the theories of science remained for long in the realm of abstraction, poetry worked upon the basis of new ideas. Modern Science has provided further amplification and support to Symbolist ideas. But Symbolism had arrived at these ideas independently and, far from being dependent, on philosophy or science, Symbolism had its own evolution, and established its own tradition.

The exploration of 'le gouffre' or the Unknown had begun with Baudelaire. When the poet makes the voyage beyond the 'forêts de symboles' towards the Unknown, 'le gouffre', and reaches the timeless Reality, he no longer finds a duality in the universe; he has risen beyond the concepts of the natural and the spiritual which are dependent on normal human perceptions, and is able to see both as aspects of a single reality. After this attainment of vision, the poet no longer sees the material and the spiritual, the concrete and the ideal, as antithetic. He is now able to bring about a new synthesis of these apparently contradictory elements. After reaching the realm of the absolute, the poet is anxious to make the connection with earthly reality. He cannot give us only the absolute reality, perhaps because 'human kind/ Cannot bear very much reality', perhaps because the Absolute cannot be grasped by the reader without visionary powers.

Mallarmé uncompromisingly followed the Ideal, and created poems, poems which

29 'Relativity, he (the scientist) claims, is a purely mechanical theory and can only be understood by mathematicians'. — Laurence Durrell: 'A Key to Modern British Poetry', p.32.
ceased to have meaning for the reader, (and perhaps even for the poet himself).
Rimbaud, after terrific effort, found the Absolute was beyond the reach of
human beings, and gave up the quest altogether. Valéry did not capitulate
like Rimbaud, but he too realized that the Absolute was "attainable":
Nous traversons seulement l'idée de la perfection comme la main impunément
tranche la flamme; mais la flamme est inhabitable.
This lesson was not lost upon the later Symbolists, who shifted the emphasis
to the lived experience, the 'journey' to the Unknown was in itself important:
and that 'journey' was what the poet tried to symbolize. The 'journey' itself
was reality. The poem symbolized the poet's vision and experience of the
truth. But what relation did this reality have with life? The Symbolist
answer was that the poem had a life of its own, and that such a connection was
not needed; it stood in its own right as an achieved truth, independent both
from the personality of its author and from any world of pure objects. Mallarmé—and later Yeats—was very fond of the analogy of the dancer: the poem, like
the dance, existed merely for its own sake. Such complete autonomy, as we
have already said, is meaningless. As Yeats himself suggested, there was the
possibility of the dancer dancing into extinction. The reality symbolized
could have meaning, therefore, only when it had relation to something that
had validity for all men; some degree of communication was necessary. The
symbols could be related to the past (as Eliot did in the 'Waste Land'), but
the Symbolists had a strong revulsion (probably under Hegelian influence) against
history and tradition. One way of making the symbols communicate was to relate
them to such experiences as were common to all people. The Symbolist felt the

30 Paul Valéry: 'Avant Propos' à 'Variété'
poet had no right to cut himself off from life as it is lived by men, and so he says: 'Quiconque n'accepte pas les conditions de la vie, vend son âme'.

Baudelaire thus resolutely accepted the actualities of life, imperfect as they were, and tried to integrate his vision with them. That was one way. The other way, often followed by Mallarmé, was to make the symbol share in some way the character of a myth: to give it a mythical aspect. Wagner had used myths which had wide currency in European culture: these myths were used mostly in his operas. Mallarmé, however, hesitates to accept the traditional myths, but tries to create his own. Thus in "L'Après-Midi d'un Faune" the principal character is not only an individual, but in some sort of way, a universal image of man facing a metaphysical problem of reality and illusion.

As Wyzewa, a prominent Wagnerite Symbolist comments:

I believe "L'Après-Midi d'un Faune" is an excellent example of true symbolist art. The Faune is a real person living under definite conditions. The emotions evoked are those of the Faune at a given moment, not abstract and general emotions. Yet the emotions of the Faune are also our emotions. They represent the universal regret of the human soul which follows a moment of ecstasy.

The mythical nature of these characters was the result of their correspondence with universal, human experiences, common to mankind through the ages. In his later poems, Mallarmé tried to find certain 'symbols' which would provide, as it were, an integrated language at a fairly complex level. But it is simply and formally impossible to invent a myth entirely out of the blue: one can recombine fragments of materials, one can create a new form, but only out of old pieces. Mallarmé's quest was for the material of "L'Oeuvre", the myth 'dégage de toute personnalité' provides a negative illustration of this point: for the attempt to devoid the myth of all 'contingency' whatsoever resulted in its never being created: all that he could do was to take up fragments of potential myth throughout his life —
'Herodiade', 'Igitur' and the shadowy symbols of 'Un Coup de Dés' — and leave each one more and more elusive and recondite than the last: the 'explication Orphique de la Terre' has its feet too securely placed on the ground of tradition for Mallarmé ever to achieve a final conquest.

Thus, theoretically each symbol was the embodiment of an individuated essence, of an independent, new, created reality: the meaning of each symbol was itself because it gave a timeless reality. But as practising poets, the French Symbolists realized that such isolated purity was not possible: there was the necessity to relate these symbols to the lived experience of human beings if the symbols were to have universal validity. Poetry could not afford to remain in the realm of the absolute because meaning is after all a relative affair, and its bearings have to be defined. The Symbol has its roots in some system of thoughts and beliefs, in philosophy or religion; or, it appeals to the accumulated wisdom of the ages, be it in the form of myth or tradition; or, it has a direct appeal to experience and is proved 'on the pulses'. Each poet has to find out his own way of realizing the wider pattern, and the Symbol becomes meaningful to the extent that it gives us a perception of the unity underlying and relating all phenomena. To Baudelaire this unity was to be found in a transcendental truth, the vision of which enabled him to see the correspondences of all phenomena. According to him, reality is both known and represented through external appearances. Externals are all linked up with, and given meaning to, by the one spiritual Reality of the Universe which holds 'les rapports intimes et secrets des choses'. To Mallarmé, the all-embracing reality was intellectual, something akin to the Platonic Idea. Rimbaud tried to realize the larger pattern through sensation.

31 This brings to mind Eliot's lines ('Burnt Norton', I): The trilling wire in the blood Sings below inveterate scars Appeasing long forgotten wars.
and dream. Yeats, after unsuccessfully experimenting with several philosophies, with magic, occultism, myth and legend, had to invent his own system, an elaborate exposition of which he gave in 'A Vision'.

To Eliot, meaning can be achieved (particularly in this modern world of disbelief) when the poet associates his symbols with tradition:

when the individual talent submits to the 'mind of Europe':

The poet must constantly be aware of the mind of Europe, ... a mind which he learns in time to be much more important than his own private mind.32

Eliot's anxiety to show that reality is meaningful only when it is seen in the context of a larger reality or tradition is not due to any distrust of material, physical reality, or of the mind of the poet. It arises out of his desire that poetry should express the permanent and the universal,33 which can be done only when the individual vision of the poet is set in the perspective of a larger scheme of things, a tradition, thereby gaining a universal validity. The reality that the poet presents can become meaningful only when it has a significant bearing upon the life of men. That is why Eliot insists that the individual talent cannot work in a vacuum, that it has to come to terms with life:

The struggle of our time is to re-establish the vital connection between the individual and the race.34

This connection can be made if the poet develops full consciousness of the tradition. The poetic mind gains by having a sense of the past, because 'no voice is wholly lost', and because this historical sense

33 T.S. Eliot: SE, p.46, where he writes: '... if we want to get at the permanent and the universal we tend to express ourselves in verse'.
'involves a perception not only of the pastness of the past, but of its presence'. Eliot believes that 'the whole of the literature of Europe ... has a simultaneous existence, and composes a simultaneous order'.

Whenever a new work arrives, he says, 'the whole existing order must be, if ever so slightly, altered'. Or, the moment of present experience which the poet symbolizes contains, in the words of Whitehead, 'the throbbing emotion of the past hurling itself into a new, transcendent fact'. Thus, Eliot recognizes that the 'timeless' reality of the Symbol can have meaning only when related to time. The same thing is expressed by Eliot in 'The Four Quartets':

Only through time, time is conquered.

The poem can take cognizance of time by being related to contemporary conditions when the physical realities of life are not neglected. This was the conclusion which had been reached by the French Symbolists too; they had found that the 'ideal' reality which they sought could be known, ultimately, only through the pragmatic facts of existence. As Valéry put it, there are two aspects of reality: the pure, potential, contemplated aspect, where all is absolute, and the impure, actual, acted aspect, where all is relative. Creativity in poetry is a balancing of these two aspects. Hence, the Symbolists constantly endeavour, in practice if not in theory, to synthesize the two aspects of reality: appearance and essence, the physical and the ideal, the transient and the timeless. In the Symbol the reader therefore finds a synthesis of the known and the unknown, and thus he arrives at meaning. Through the pragmatic facts of life, the reader is made aware of the new, unknown reality that the poet has brought for him. It is thus that the Symbol becomes significant in life, and contributes to it. The Symbol can become an intimate and vital part of
our experience as no theory or generalization can become.

The Ivory Tower of the Symbolists — 'Axel's Castle' — is more the creation of imaginative critics than a thing of reality, and no more forms the exclusive retreat of the Symbolists than of any other poets. The Symbolist is no doubt a seeker of the Absolute, but he does not become completely absorbed into the Absolute: he is fundamentally a 'man speaking to men', though a man speaking of strange things. The quest for Meaning is, ultimately, not a journey away from life, but a journey into life: like Keats's Hyperion, the Symbolist poet 'dies into life'. The Symbolist adventure in search of Meaning is thus not a mere fantastic experiment: it has been one of the brilliant victories of the human mind extending its frontiers into the realm of the Unknown, the great Beyond.

The Symbol thus aimed at presenting a timeless reality which was beyond the scope of any conceptual apparatus. The Meaning of a Symbol is, as we have seen, also something of great depth and complexity. In fact, we can recognize symbolic structure by the necessity of multiple statement when we try to render the meaning in rational or logical terms. The Meaning is thus resonant, but it cannot be identified with 'any of these readings, nor is it their arithmetical sum: it is the result of having all these in mind at one time, it is something of which these ... are aspects'. Various levels of meaning are brought together and harmonized in a Symbol. Hence, the multiplicity of interpretative possibilities which may be termed 'ambiguity', though ambiguity in this sense is of a welcome sort; or, we may use a term suggested by Philip Wheelwright: when

36 a term used by Empson, and which he has explained as meaning, among other things, 'an intention to mean several things', 'the fact that a statement has several meanings' (William Empson: 'Seven Types of Ambiguity', p.5-6). And, he has also given the sense that it is 'any verbal nuance, however slight, which gives room for alternative reactions to the same piece of language' (p.1)
because the word 'plurisignificance'. The multiple interpretations possible
in the Symbol or the dream was a fact recognized by Jung, when he remarked that
'true symbols are inexhaustible in meaning'. The Symbol is able to 'concentrate
the greatest amount of significance' and so is 'infinitely resonant'. Resonance
is also a result of the attempt of the Symbol to fuse heterogeneous elements into
some sort of unity.

One of the reasons for 'resonance' in a Symbol is that it makes use of language
in a special way in its attempt to get the utmost range and depth of meaning. In
his concept of 'overdetermination' or 'multiple reference' of accurately used
language, Freud comes close to the much more specifically Symbolist concept of
ambiguous verbal richness and complexity adding to, and not obscuring, the
structure of meaning. The poet cannot, and does not, build up his meaning 'as
a mosaic is put together, of discrete, independent tesserae'. The meanings of
the poet's words are not such fixed factors as these. Like life itself, the
Symbol is complex and ambiguous, and that character is reflected in the Symbolist's
use of language; it has also affected modern poetry and criticism. As Richards
has pointed out, in one of his later books:

... The old Rhetoric treated ambiguity as a fault in language, and hoped to
confine or eliminate it ..., the new Rhetoric sees it as an inevitable consequence
of the power of language and as an indispensable means of most of our important
utterances, especially in Poetry and Religion.

Symbolization, according to Mallarmé, is the way of getting the utmost complexity,
the farthest range and the most nearly complete degree of meaning into language:
and Richards's statement reflects that idea. Mallarmé looked to Music for the
ideal of art which could get such range of meaning.

It is significant that the Symbolist analogy of Music and of Dream finds
support in modern thought. According to Jung, great art is like dream: 'for all

37 Philip Wheelwright: 'The Burning Fountain'.
38 Cecil Day-Lewis: 'The Poetic Image', p.44.
apparent obviousness it does not explain itself and is never unequivocal'.
The poem does not claim to be a final statement, nor does it describe. Like
the dream, the poem requires us to make our own interpretation, for the poem
presents an image 'in much the same way as nature allows a plant to grow, and
we must draw our own conclusions'.

When Henry James once remarked 'Don't state, render', he expressed in concise
form, what the Symbolists found necessary to do. The vision or experience of
the poet cannot be put down in logical form or expressed in discursive language.
The richness, depth and complexity of the poet's experience resists direct
communication. The poet only tries to embody the experience in a symbol, but
the meaning of this symbol cannot be grasped as one would a logical proposition.
It is in this sense that the symbol is not a logical statement; it is only a
magic casement, through which we look at what is beyond. The poem is thus
only suggestive of the experience, not a complete statement.

An objection that can be raised against such a view of the Symbol is that it
would render criticism a vain and futile task. The critic's task is rendered
hopeless, if we say that it would never be possible for him to bring out the
full meaning of the symbolic poem for his readers. Most symbolist poems are
not, however, totally opaque. Interpretation may help us a great deal by
directing our attention to several significant details, though it can never
become a substitute for the poem itself. This may seem like a platitude, but
in an age when explication has become the most important critical activity,
it becomes perhaps necessary to emphasize the inadequacy of interpretation,
which, in the words of Wimsatt, 'is not that it could be, like the value of \( \pi \)
or \( \sqrt{2} \), a very useful approximation, but not the whole of it.'

As Jung has remarked the Symbol is the best way to express something for
which no verbal concept exists. Although its rational component can be made

41 W.K. Wimsatt: 'The Verbal Icon', p. 83
comprehensible; the symbol's irrational component, never to be fully explained or interpreted, can only be suggested. That is why Carlyle said, 'In a Symbol there is concealment and yet revelation'. The Meaning of the symbol cannot be fully stated:

It is of the very nature of Symbolist poetry... that it cannot be tied down to any single and simple interpretation, but however much of the intention one may think one has dredged up to the surface, retains a residue of mysterious suggestiveness.

This fullness of meaning, this power of the symbol to be inexhaustible in meaning is one of its most appealing aspects, but it has also given rise to the conception of the symbol as something deliberately recondite. This is however not true; obscurity is not one of the aims of the symbolist. Also, acceptance of the symbolic meaning of a poem does not exclude or involve rejection of the literal meaning. In fact, the symbol attempts to capture several planes of reality which it puts together in such a way as to create a sense of artistic satisfaction.

The law of correspondence which underlies symbolism assumes that 'all things are related and joined together in total, universal harmony which is, in its many guises, a reflection, as it were, of its own fundamental unity...: one result of this is the range of meaning contained in every symbol; as one thing may, indeed, be regarded as an illustration not only of metaphysical principles, but also of higher levels of reality'.

Resonance or multiple meaning is a quality which comes naturally to a poet who tries to make language give as much meaning as possible. A word may often be detached from its usual associations, placed in a new context, and thus be made to yield a new meaning. The symbolists concentrated on this power of

42 Thomas Carlyle: 'Sartor Resartus', Book III, Chapter III.
43 G.S. Fraser: 'The Modern Writer and his World'.
44 J.E. Crilot: 'A Dictionary of Symbols'.
45 René Guenon: 'The Crisis of the Modern World'.
language purposively and deliberately, though language had been exploited for meaning in this way even before. For instance, we have Keats writing in the 'Ode to a Nightingale',

Now more than ever seems it rich to die,
To cease upon the midnight with no pain,
and thus giving the word 'rich' a new meaning. A sense of tension is created between the usual associations that the word brings to our mind, and the associations created by the context of the poem. The tension gives a certain resonance and beauty to the word, while at the same time adding something to the mood created by the poem. It would be bliss for the poet to die at this hour when he is rapt in the melody of the nightingale's song. Death, coming at such a moment of ecstasy, would not be the painful cessation of life that it is usually considered to be, but a supreme fulfilment. Life may mean a return to his sorrows, after the nightingale's song ends; death would perpetuate the happiness, would make the moment of joy immortal. Thus, the poet makes the word 'rich' here richly significant.

Such use of language to yield a range of meanings is common in symbolist poetry. A symbol or word may also be made resonant, by making it echo a number of uses it had been put to before. The symbol of the Wheel, in Eliot's 'Burnt Norton', not only gets a number of associations from the rest of the poem, but bears literary echoes. It brings to our mind suggestions from many of Eliot's earlier poems, particularly because of the words which present this symbol. Eliot refers to the Wheel in a rather striking manner:

Garlic and sapphires in the mud
Clot the bedded axle-tree.

The lines brings to our mind the phrase 'tonnere et rubis aux moyeux' of Mallarme. But thunder and rubies, suggestive of the noise and fire presumably of the sun's chariot-wheel, also suggest another phrase of Mallarme, 'buvant boue et rubis', the sepulchral mouth of the Paris sewer slobbering mud and rubies of the 'Tombeau
de Baudelaire*. The symbol of the Wheel, like a shaken kaleidoscope, assembles the assorted references in a design suggestive of the worlds of both the Parisian poets. In Eliot’s poem, it brings all this and combines them with the idea of the perpetual struggle of the modern poet to reconcile the ugly particulars of his observation with the dazzling wealth of his imagination, fiery as jewels in lamplight or in sunset glow.

The suggestiveness of language gives a new depth to the symbol. The symbolist poet prefers ambiguity because of the multiple meanings he wants to give and which he finds he can give only in this manner. As Eliot has said, ambiguities are inevitable to the symbolist poet, because they are due to 'the fact that the poem means more, not less, than ordinary speech can communicate'. This also makes paraphrase and logical explanation difficult, and by these means the full meaning cannot be conveyed. Paraphrase making use of language in the normal discursive manner, is an inadequate instrument: 'If only a part of the meaning can be conveyed by paraphrase, that is because the poet is occupied with frontiers of consciousness beyond which words fail, though meanings still exist.'

The special attitude towards language, and such other related aspects of Symbolist poetry as organic form, tension, irony and meaning, have been influential in encouraging certain new trends in critical theory and practice. Symbolist poetry required a certain special approach: this was made use of in the criticism of older poetry. Symbolist principles worked even when applied to any poetry only because many of these have a general validity. That is, certain elements we have come to associate with symbolism are to be found in the poetry of the past to some extent; symbolism differs in the emphasis it gives to these elements, and the special way in which it makes use of them.

46 T.S. Eliot: 'The Music of Poetry'.
The approach and methods of modern critics have been influenced by the triumph of Symbolism in poetry. Much modern criticism concentrates on the elements at work within the poem, which is considered as an independent piece of language building up its own meaning and value, without presupposing an external tradition. It is interesting to note the shift of emphasis in critical considerations of value during the past few centuries. In the eighteenth century the emphasis was on the broad characteristics of poetic subject-matter controlled by principles signified in such words as 'true and false wit', the sense of 'the sublime and the beautiful', 'the picturesque', 'the ludicrous' and so on. In Romantic and Victorian criticism, the emphasis is on the principles drawn from the sources of poetry in basic faculties and operations of the mind signified by words like 'genius', 'imagination', 'emotion recollected in tranquillity' and 'high seriousness'. In our own century, the emphasis is on the relations of poems to the 'realities' they signify, and poetry has come to be regarded as a special kind of language giving us realities which cannot be rendered or made accessible to us in any other way. The critic's function is to show us the nature of this language, and of the significant structures it determines; we find I.A. Richards treating the poem as 'a fabric of meaning'. In order to justify these claims, there was the necessity to distinguish this mode of language from other modes of language which are not poetry. Hence the distinction made by I.A. Richards that the language of poetry differs from that of prose or science in being primarily 'emotive' or evocative of attitudes and feelings rather than 'referential'. There was also Empson's attempt to show that the essence of poetic language is not clarity but ambiguity, which he defines as 'any verbal nuance, however slight, which gives room for alternative

reactions to the same piece of language'. Poetry, in making use of language in this special manner, acquired a power and value not possessed by prose.

The nature of the poem as symbol or language is the moving cause of a number of theories identifying the principle of poetic structure with qualities such as 'tension', 'paradox', 'irony' or the fusion of 'logical argument' and 'irrelevant structure'. The French Symbolists, particularly Mallarmé, had regarded the symbolic poem as a structure of reciprocal tensions: the idea has been taken up by several modern critics. I.A. Richards finds that in the best poetry, the materials are such as tend naturally to generate oppositions and 'tensions' of all kinds: and the structure works them into a final 'equilibrium'. The poems which do not have such an 'equilibrium of opposed impulses' will not be able to bear an ironical contemplation. ... Irony in this sense consists in the bringing in of the opposite, the complementary impulses: that is why poetry which is exposed to it is not of the highest order and why irony itself is so constantly a characteristic of poetry which is.

Similarly, Cleanth Brooks finds the principle of paradox implicit in the structure of the best poems — in fact, in the structure of all poems. Indirection and paradox are almost inevitable in poetry: Cleanth Brooks finds the paradoxical element even in the simplest of poems. He goes so far as to say that even the apparently simple and straightforward poet is forced into paradoxes by the nature of his instrument. ... The method is an extension of the normal language of poetry, not a perversion of it.

These theories are illustrated particularly well by modern symbolist poems, which have an implicit dramatic element born of tensions of various kinds: and this dramatic element gives us a sense of 'action' or of 'movement' in the poem.

To critics like Eliot, Richards, Empson, Leavis, and the American 'New Critics', the focus of attention has been poetry in its qualitative unity. This qualitative

or organic unity is the peculiar feature of the Symbolist poem: it is what makes for the autonomy of the Symbolist poem, which is neither expression of subjective emotion nor objective description. Implications of this quality of symbolism are reflected in Eliot's theory of the 'objective correlative', in the various attempts to show the effects of the 'dissociation of sensibility', and in Kenneth Burke's attempt to interpret poetry in terms of 'symbolic action'. Modern critics, particularly the 'New Critics', emphasize the importance of certain elements which they find in modern symbolist poetry, and expect these elements in all good poetry, whether of the past or the present. While most of what they say applies specifically to symbolist poetry, it would be difficult to justify elements like 'tension' or 'paradox' or 'irony' as general principles of structure which would hold true of all poetry. Attempts at such justification have resulted in the tendency to modify our view of past literature so as to make it confirm with the new theory put forward: thus, Brooks by regarding Metaphysical rather than Romantic poetry as representing the tradition, is able to find a place for modern poetry in the true tradition. Also the close reading of texts which modern poetry requires, has, when used as a general method, encouraged 'revaluations' of past literature (— whether by Eliot or Leavis) leading to the neglect or disparagement of certain poets and periods. There is also the danger in such attempts of not being able to take into account the greatness or appeal of poems like Shakespeare's 'Blow, blow, thou winter wind' or some of Shelley's lyrical effusions, which in their directness and simplicity do not lend themselves to interpretations in terms of 'paradox' or 'tension'. In fact, the tendency towards generalization in many of the modern critical theories takes them towards excess: it is against such a tendency among the 'New Critics' that the 'Chicago School' of critics react. The 'Chicago School',
whose philosophical leader seems to be Richard McKeon, and which includes such
brilliant critics as Elder Olson and R.S. Crane, tends towards a more inductive
approach in criticism and towards an Aristotelian emphasis on subject or material
Their aim is to develop critical attitudes and methods whereby

... we can achieve a precision of differentiation in speaking of the structures
of different poems which is not glaringly incommensurate with the formal
inventiveness of poets. The only near approach to such a critical language,
however, is that made long ago by Aristotle; it would be foolish not to avail
ourselves of his contribution, in its methodological aspects, so far as possible;
... we can still profit, in practical criticism, by attempting to adapt to our
current needs the principles and analytical devices which he was the first and
almost the last to use.52

But neither the Chicago school nor the other critics who have reacted to symbolist
trends achieved anything comparable to what the 'New Critics' have done. It is
ture poetry in the future may develop in some other direction than that of
symbolism — for example, in the younger poets of today there is already a
trend towards simplicity of structure rather than complexity, and a rational,
discursive content — and this may bring about modifications and changes in
critical techniques and approach. The 'New Critics' may, after all, come to
represent a phase in the progress of critical thinking. But, at least, what
they have done, the techniques they have adopted, the awareness of problems
they have encouraged, are extremely useful in enabling us to make a more
meaningful approach to the great English symbolists, Yeats, Eliot and Dylan
Thomas.

52 R.S. Crane: 'The Languages of Criticism and the Structure of Poetry', p.149.