

**HOW MUCH SHOULD HISTORY WEIGH?
MEDIATING CRITICISM AND THE DISCOURSE OF
CONFLICT**

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Plenary paper

1 THE TWO PARADOXES

This paper deals with two most striking paradoxes. First, there is a paradox connected with the discourse of conflict: namely, that although this discourse arises in, and because of particular historical circumstances, it is actually very selective and even unrealistic in the way it refers to them. As a result, conflicts become more intense and long-drawn-out. Secondly, there is a paradox connected with the discourse of mediation: namely, that although mediation will never be successful unless the facts of history are squarely faced, they cannot be regarded as entirely binding either. The mediator has to have a sense that the course of history is very powerful, but that it can nevertheless be partly re-directed by human volition. The conclusion to be drawn from a consideration of both paradoxes together, then, is that human beings cannot afford to let history weigh either too little or too much.

The discourse of conflict is by no mean confined to politics, propaganda or generals' pep talks. Here I shall mainly be dealing with its consequences for interpretations of literature. Mediation, similarly, can be just as necessary a role for a literary critic as for a diplomat.

2 LITERATURE AND THE DISCOURSE OF CONFLICT: *THE SPIRIT OF MAN*

I begin with a literary illustration of the discourse of conflict. By way of introduction, I need only recall two dates: 1915 and 1940. By 1915, the First World War was already well under way, and the Second World War was the major fact of European life by 1940.

In 1940, a little book was published in London, a reprint, actually, of a book first published in 1915. This is clearly stated on the title-page (Figure 1 – see page 293), which itself repays a few moments' thought. The book's main message is partly suggested by Michaelangelo's image of the creation of Adam, who reclines on the earth, yet receives the touch of life from God. As Bridges' Preface explains,

man is a spiritual being, and the proper work of his mind is to interpret the world according to his higher nature, and to conquer the material aspects of the world so as to bring them into subjection to the spirit.

The spiritual/material antithesis is crucial. Like any imperialist male who is worth his salt, the reclining Adam has the world, to put it crudely, very much under his backside. But if, in the year 2000, we were wondering about the title page's promise of texts in only English and French, if we were afraid that something might be lost by the exclusion of, say, Immanuel Kant and Goethe, the point was not just that, in both 1915 and 1940, Germany was the enemy. Becoming the enemy was a matter of forgetting God's touch of life, of making oneself insensible to the breath of the spirit, and of becoming too involved in matter. To quote the Preface again,

The progress of mankind on the path of liberty and humanity has been suddenly arrested and its promise discredited by the apostasy of a great people, who, casting off as a disguise their professions of Honour, now openly avow that the ultimate faith of their hearts is in material force.

Up until now,

[w]e had accounted our [German-speaking] cousins as honest and virtuous folk; some of us have well-loved friends among them whom we have heard earnestly and bitterly deplore the evil spirit that was dominating their country.

But now it is impossible not to suspect that Prussia has not only subjugated, but infected and morally enslaved the various Teutonic states, and that "a vision of world-empire" is deluding or tempting them. We, meanwhile,

turn to seek comfort only in the quiet confidence of our souls; and we look instinctively to the seers and poets of mankind, whose sayings are the oracles and prophecies of loveliness and lovingkindness.

We are not as perfect as we might be, perhaps. “Our national follies and sins have deserved punishment.” But we are still free and true at heart, and can “take hope in contrition, and in the brave endurance of sufferings that should chasten our intention and conduct.” We soundly desire “brotherhood and universal peace to men of good-will”, and in fighting for our country are fighting for freedom and honour.

That fairest earthly fame, the fame of Freedom, is inseparable from the names of Albion, Britain, England: it has gone out to America and the Antipodes, hallowing the names of Canada, Australia, and New Zealand; it has found a new home in Africa: and this heritage is our glory and happiness (Bridges 1940: Preface (unpaginated))

The *British* imperialists, in other words, have a very great chunk of the earth under their backside, but without forgetting the higher things of the spirit. There is more than a suggestion that their solid terrestrial seat is their reward for being at least a bit purer in spirit than the Germans.

Bridges’ Whiggish talk of progress and his Enlightenment ideal of universal brotherhood give his text a particular period flavour. But this blends in very smoothly with the far more ancient rhetoric of conflictual disjunction. On the one hand there is spirit, eternity, humanity, universal brotherhood, friends, relatives, loved-ones. On the other hand there is matter, history, bondage, inhumanity, diabolic monstrosity, enemies -- enemies who insert wedges of greedily nationalistic difference between themselves and the universal humanity. Here is a discourse which envisages no *media via*, no *tertium quid*. Michaelangelo’s Adam might look as if he is striking a compromise between God and Mammon. But the rhetoric quickly rules out any such idea.

Fully in keeping with this, Bridges’ selections of uplifting verse and philosophy are themselves presented as a-historically disembodied. As the book’s Table of Contents (Figure 2 – see page 294) makes very clear, they are arranged according to theme rather

than chronology. For purposes of identification, each extract is merely headed with number. The authors' names, and the titles of the texts from which the extracts are taken, are listed only at the back of the book. Number 83, from Wordsworth's "Preface to the Lyrical Ballads", itself states the underlying idea:

In spite of difference of soil and climate, of language and manners, of laws and customs, -- in spite of things silently gone out of mind, and things violently destroyed, the Poet binds together by passion and knowledge the vast empire of human society, as it is spread over the whole earth, and over all time Poetry is the first and last of all knowledge -- it is as immortal as the heart of man (Wordsworth 1950 [1802]).

Still buying into this in 1940, Longman Green and Co. Ltd. and the Readers' Union Ltd. saw no reason why the same spiritual treasures should not remain just as applicable as they had been in 1915. Historical differences were neither here nor there.

This idea of the essential oneness of all humanity was not peculiar to the British and their allies. For all I know, there could have been close German-language equivalents to *The Spirit of Man* itself. Certainly the German soldiers with whom Henry Williamson was chatting during the 1915 Christmas truce believed that "they were fighting for the same causes and ideals as we were" (quoted in Glover and Silkin 1990:151). Despite the idea's usefulness to imperial propaganda, it was indeed still capable of evoking the thought-world of Enlightenment egalitarianism. It was likely to be embraced by any free-spirited European living during the period 1789 to 1945, and for the poets who most strongly reacted against the horror and injustices of the First World War it was a key stimulus. They figured the war as providing absolutely no benefits, except in finally intensifying the sense of common humanity which it had begun by disrupting. Addressing first British, and then German womanhood, Siegfried Sassoon wrote,

You [the British women] can't believe that British troops 'retire'
When hell's last horror breaks them, and they run,
Trampling the terrible corpses -- blind with blood.
O German mother dreaming by the fire,
While you are knitting socks to send your son
His face is trodden deeper in the mud ("Glory of Women", in Parsons 1965:97).

What the British and German wives, mothers and daughters experience and feel is fundamentally the same. Difference of soil and climate, of language and manners, of laws and customs might just as well not exist. In Wilfred Owen's version: "I am the enemy you killed, my friend" ("Strange Meeting", in Parsons 1965: 169-70), almost as if real historical reasons for an armed conflict are simply unimaginable.

As long as everybody in a conflict -- not only the people fighting on both sides, but those opposed to fighting -- are locked into this mental separation between a timelessly universal spirit of humanity and something altogether more material, historical and evil, the conflict will continue, even at the cost of enormous suffering and loss of life, until both sides are exhausted or one is beaten. Nor does this rhetoric suddenly come into being with a formal declaration of war. The outbreak of physical hostilities merely sets the seal on an antagonism which has already made itself felt, and which has been no less real for being verbal. Indeed, the conflictual discourse will have been so powerful that attempts to defuse the potential for armed combat have simply made no headway. As the war historian Kalevi J. Holsti so bluntly puts it, "there are no cases on record where formal mediation actually prevented a war" (Holsti 1991:112). Although, since the eighteenth century, mediation has been regarded as a special branch of diplomacy by which prestige accrues to the mediating powers themselves, it has not been thought of as an undertaking calling for much creativity and foresight. Its perceived scope has rather lain in the sorting out of conflicts that have already begun to take their toll of warriors' and innocent victims' lives.

In postmodern multicultural societies, the ancient dichotomizing mind-set lives on with renewed vigour. On the one hand, the pressure to regard all true human beings as basically the same is in some respects more powerful than ever. Knowledge, praxis and values are in several important areas tending to be globalized. If economic, information-technological and environmental developments are anything to go by, then human beings are now linked together on a scale quite unprecedented. On the other hand, the centrifugal forces clearly are now very strong indeed. People representing different economic interests, classes, ethnic origins, religions, cultures, sub-cultures, gender identities and sexual orientations are so sharply aware of themselves and of each other that there is a widespread scepticism as to the grand narratives of earlier political teleologies, and the political scepticism

involves far-reaching problems of identity and legitimation. Judging by the jeremiads of some and the jubilation of others, any sense of a common human nature has now been seriously destabilized, and there are times when almost any grouping can seem to be every other grouping's enemy.

3 MEDIATING CRITICISM: ITS IMPORTANCE AND DIFFICULTIES

Any serious attempt at war prevention would have to break out of the discursal disjunction. What would be needed would be a language in which an ideal of peaceful human co-existence would *not* be incompatible with the historical facts of difference between one human grouping and another. Then the opposed parties might be persuaded to engage in a genuine attempt to negotiate each other's otherness.

Recent studies of water disputes already suggest that cultural differences, instead of their more traditional role of causing obstacles to agreement, can actually suggest clues to conflict resolution (Faure & Rubin 1993). It is all a matter of improving mutual understanding, which is impossible as long the unbridgeable dichotomies of spirit/matter, God/Devil, friend/enemy, eternity/history, universal/local continue. And in point of fact, the centrifugal fragmentation of postmodern society has become a main stimulus to Western liberal philosophers, who tend to endorse the more jubilant response to it, by speaking in Heraclitean or Blakean terms of the energies which can flow from a conflict of powerful opposites. Conflict, says Stuart Hampshire, makes for life and liveliness, both within the individual soul and within societies; it is quite frankly the normal and most healthy condition of human life. Hampshire's only proviso is that the hostilities must be controlled by rational justice (Hampshire 1992:189). What is needed is a politics of recognition. This will suggest a way of ordering society that will be egalitarian and therefore blind to difference, yet with no hegemonic encroachment on the rights and human dignity of the many kinds of people who nevertheless do differ from each other.

So if, in a particular society or in the world as a whole, mediation between the centrifugal and the centripetal were to be successful, then diversification would be energizing and constructive, and dialogue across perceived lines of difference would be illuminating and

non-coercive. Hampshire, for his part, pins his hopes on “a recognisable basic level of common decency”, which can feed into “a minimum procedural justice”. On such a view, “evil, in the form of the drive to domination, consists in the uncompensated violation of this basic justice” (Hampshire 1992:186). I should add, too, that both within individual states and internationally, there are many bodies of arbitration that presuppose that some such replacement of conflictual dichotomies by a procedural justice is humanly possible.

Not least within the field of literary activity, the importance of mediation is very real (cf. Sell 2001). Readers who venture on texts from alien milieus may well need help. Also, a sociocultural difference is *always* a difference, regardless of whether its main axis is diachronic or synchronic. Whether we realize it not, we can have problems with texts from some earlier historical period of our own tradition, and we can be just as strongly challenged by texts belonging to some other communal canon within contemporary multicultural society. Edward Said has recognized this, and refers to his own literary criticism in terms of mediation quite explicitly (Said 1993:xxvi, xxxi). That he has upset people on both sides of the cultural divisions he seeks to explore merely suggests his urgent sincerity.

There are not many critics like him, however, and he can draw little support from the main traditions in twentieth century literary theory. Especially in the earlier part of that century, a great deal of literary theorization and criticism was carried out within the de-historicizing paradigms of New Critical formalism, Leavisian moral criticism, and so-called practical criticism in general. I. A. Richards’ seminal *Practical Criticism* (1929) de-contextualized and de-authored poems in exactly the same manner as Bridges’ *The Spirit of Man*. The student guinea-pigs whose wayward interpretations prompted Richards to recommend the discipline careful close reading had been told nothing about the provenance of the poems they were asked to discuss, and many teachers drew the conclusion that the literature classroom could be a kind of laboratory, hermetically sealed off from society and social change. Then in the later twentieth century, Marxist, post-Marxist, new historicist, cultural materialist, feminist, queer-theoretical, and ecocritical approaches to literature brought history back into the picture, but perhaps a bit too forcefully. There was sometimes an element of social determinism of the kind developed

within, say, Barthesian or Foucauldian structuralism. This was to the general effect that human individuals are completely circumscribed by their milieus or language. So whereas the earlier approaches had seen literature as so universal and unworldly that mediation could never even be *necessary*, there were now approaches that, by throwing doubt on our intellectual, imaginative and moral ability to get beyond our own social formation, tended to suggest that mediation between different situationalities was not *possible*. This contrast between early and late twentieth century paradigms was itself just one more example of the counterproductive dichotomy between eternal spirit and historical materiality.

4 A HISTORICAL BUT NON-DETERMINISTIC PRAGMATICS OF COMMUNICATION

In order to mediate, whether in a pub brawl, between warring nations, between different historical phases of the same tradition, or between different reading communities in postmodern society, the dichotomy must be replaced by an account of human beings that represents a *media via* or *tertium quid*. For a start, history cannot simply be disregarded. Men and women are social animals who are very much shaped by the cultures within which they live and move and have their being. But on the other hand, they are not completely determined by society, and in at least four respects.

First, existentially speaking, people in all times and all places do have some fundamental things in common. They are born. They live, and have certain primary needs. They live in social groupings, and have certain secondary needs. In the end, they die. Of course even these basics will be perceived and valorized in different ways in different social groupings. But they do represent a kind of launch-pad for flights of empathy with the myriad forms of human otherness.

Secondly, individuals may be to a certain extent “other” within their own society, not least by virtue of their temperament, an area in which people do have a certain autonomy. Admittedly, their temperament may be of a kind which happens to be *à la mode*. People who were benevolent and optimistic were very much of their time in the age of Sir Roger

De Coverly, the Vicar of Wakefield or Mr Pickwick. In the twentieth century, benevolence and optimism were not socially scripted to anything like the same extent. Yet some people were benevolent and optimistic even so, just as in the age of Mr Pickwick a Scrooge was not inconceivable, however grotesquely unfashionable.

Thirdly, people do have the imagination and intellect to view their society's rationality from the viewpoint of some different rationality, quite possibly with a view to social reform, which would otherwise be inexplicable. They can empathize, as I am putting it, with otherness.

Lastly, they have a certain moral autonomy as well. They operate within the frameworks of their society. But as de Saussure (1978 [1916]:14) put it, although "language [*langue*] is not a function of the speaker ... [but] a product that is passively assimilated by the individual[,] ... [s]peech [*parole*], on the contrary, is an individual act. It is wilful and intellectual." This is what Lévi-Strauss obscured from view, for instance by claiming that a culture's myths think themselves out in men without men's knowledge (Lévi-Strauss 1970 [1964] 46). From Lévi-Strauss, the deterministic version of structuralist thought spread to Barthes, Foucault and others. As Raymond Tallis (1997:228) has argued, what all such thinkers refused to admit was that human beings, no matter whether the structure in question be the psyche, language, society or culture, *operate* the structure.

So even while people are adjusting to society, they can bring about changes in society itself, which thereby adjusts to *them*. They are social beings, but they are social individuals, and this kind of co-adaptation can take place between the individual dimension and the social dimension. The change can be both within themselves, and ultimately in society as a whole, as when Dickens, by kowtowing to Mrs Grundy, started to cut the ground from under Mrs Grundy's feet. The art of rhetoric is always co-adaptive in precisely this sense. As Aristotle explained, the truth is of course the truth; but if you know your audience really well, you can see ways in which the truth can be, as it were, helped. You can meet your audience half-way.

This is an account of human nature that breaks the dichotomy of eternal humanity versus

historical materiality, by being at once humanizing and historical. It is not nineteenth-century liberal humanism, because it does not conceive of the human being as totally autonomous. The facts of sociocultural formation are not swept under the carpet. But it is not late twentieth century historical determinism either, because human beings are seen as having certain existential common denominators, plus a certain autonomy of temperament, intellect, imagination and will. In a nutshell, it recognizes not only the potentially dangerous facts of sociocultural difference, but the human capacity for negotiating them. It sees negotiation as both necessary and possible.

Although many linguists have tended to assume that people engaged in communication can actually share a single context, even two people ostensibly belonging to the same sociocultural formation will come to the communicative interchange with different knowledge, perceptions, attitudes and interests, so that their ways of interpreting and evaluating the words used will be different as well. Beyond a certain level of generality, communicants are always disparately sited, and the situational disparity can be thought of as the major cause of communicative difficulties and even conflicts. At the same time, it is also the stimulus to communication in the first place. Our confrontation with difference is what makes life interesting.

Functional communication can be thought of as a historical process by which contextual disparities are narrowed down. We explore the human other in its own situationality and allow the human other to explore us in ours. As a result, our perception of the world, of the other, and of ourselves can change. We shall have seen ourselves through the eyes of the other. We may even become more *like* the other, so that communication will have been a process of self-discovery by self-alienation. Otherness is always charged with suggestion for our own future lives.

Dysfunctional, conflictual communication, by contrast, is not interested in the other's point of view at all. The other is diabolic, is materialistic, is inhuman and so on. It has to be destroyed, and we ourselves have to hold on to our positions, so remaining always the same, quite unchangeably, because God is on our side. Perhaps our follies and sins have deserved punishment, as Bridges puts it. But our own thought-world, our own

community's empire, is closer to purity and truth than anybody else's.

When communication is functional, the communicative situation consists of the disparately sited communicants in communication about some third entity. The basic situation can still be thought of in this way even when the two parties are the two halves of one and the same self-communing individual, as when we talk to ourselves or write a diary, and even when the third entity also includes one or both of the communicating parties, who in that case speak of "me" or "you" or "us". Equally well, the third entity can be somebody or something quite unconnected with the communicants themselves, and can actually involve an element of hypotheticality or downright fiction, as with many jokes about celebrities, or as with most literature. But regardless of the precise way in which the communicational triangle happens to be realized, any change to the status quo will begin as a change in the communicants' perceptions and evaluations of this real, hypothetical or fictional entity under discussion. The communicants compare notes about it, trying to come to a shared understanding, but reasonably agreeing to disagree if necessary.

This is Gadamer's account, at any rate (Gadamer 1989 [1969]). Linguists and semioticians, by contrast, have often merely endorsed the rhetoric of conflictual disjunction, by talking in terms of a sender sending a message to a receiver. What this does is to disguise the situation's essential triangularity, and to prioritize an initiating communicant over one who responds. By shortcircuiting the element of dialogic negotiation, it marginalizes the historical differences between one person and another.

Even the structure of a communicative act – of the actual words used – is a model of the triangular communicative situation itself. The disparately sited participants produce language that of course describes and discusses the something or somebody under discussion, but which, over and above that, also offers communicative personae. There is an I-persona and a you-persona, personae that are given a local habitation by means of time-, space- and social deixis, and which, explicitly or implicitly, are endowed with encyclopaedic knowledge and value systems as well. The real communicants invite each other to project themselves into the dialogue between these two persona constructs, so that they can try it out for size, as it were, and in types of communication with a feedback

channel we can even negotiate the personae themselves: “Wait a minute. You’ve got me wrong. I don’t think like that”, we can say. But even if we do not protest, even if, as with most written communication, we *cannot* protest, we can still project ourselves into personae whom we do not recognize as adequate representations of what we are. We do so for the purpose and duration of communication.

Or perhaps we carry on for a bit longer. This is the crux of communicative pragma: of communication as deed. When communication is not conflictual, when it is not locked in the dysfunctional and rhetorically buttressed disjunction between me and him/her, us and them, it is a form of action which changes the world by allowing people to try out each other’s difference. This applies to literary communication as much as to any other. To use T.S. Eliot’s terminology, a reader’s act of provisional poetic assent can sometimes become an element of the reader’s more permanently embraced philosophical belief (Eliot 1951 [1929]:257-8). Furthermore, these changes which result from communication can represent a co-adaptation of a socially scripted way of thinking with some mind-set that is less socially dependent. In the long run, social scripts themselves may change.

Communicative ethics and the task of a mediation are very much a matter of guaranteeing the right conditions for this. About Bridges’ anthology, a mediating critic will say that it fuelled the fires of war precisely by preventing the dialogicality between self and other. This was not just a matter of excluding German writers. There was the still more fundamental disjunction introduced between the texts actually quoted and their history. The way the extracts were presented conveyed the impression of a “vast empire of human society, as it is spread over the whole earth, and over all time”. Wordsworth’s phrasing here reflects the egalitarian inclination to overlook the historical facts of difference altogether, whereas Shelley, despite his reputation for lofty idealism, was at times more realistic: “A man to be greatly good must imagine intensely and comprehensively; he must put himself in the place of another and of many others” (Shelley 1954 [1840]). This imaginative going-out from the self and its positionality is what Bridges’ unchronological and depersonalizing arrangement of his extracts does *not* encourage. If anything, he is urging readers towards an exercise in solipsism. The various writers’ co-adaptations with the world of their own particular time are obscured.

To point this out is not to argue for interpretations that are historically or culturally puristic, as if a text's significance were for ever frozen within its original context of writing. To repeat, readers of literary texts are participants in a communicative act where both sides are equal. They will have their own situationality, their own values and attitudes, and as a result of the communicative process will compare notes with the author about whatever it is that the author presents for consideration. So although the interpersonal charge of a text's historical co-adaptation can last on through time, its precise valency will never remain the same.

Yet even granting all this, the author's communicative co-adaptation with history does have to be seen for what it was. Otherwise there will be very little continuing charge at all. Readers will be reading their own messages *into* what they read.

5 MEDIATING CRITICISM IN ACTION: *THE WASTE LAND*

To wish that Bridges' anthology had been otherwise than it was would risk the same error of which I am accusing Bridges himself. It would be to read his book as if it had not belonged to a particular phase of history, during which people's mind-set simply was what it was. By the same token, to suggest that *The Spirit of Man* was *not* inspiring to his contemporaries, or that that they *ought not* to have been inspired to it, or that it would have been *far more* inspiring if it had been put together in some other way, or that a book like this could never be published in the twenty-first century – all such claims would be absurdly arrogant in their solipsism.

Yet if Bridges had indeed allowed his writers to retain more of their difference from their readers, then and now, and also from each other, the net result would definitely not have been the same. Above all, the inspiration would *not* have been to keep up the war effort. The book would have offered readers a dialogue with a fundamental human "sameness" which nevertheless retained some historical differences -- rather like the experience enjoyed by Henry Williamson when he chatted with the German soldiers, who did not thereby lose their German identity.

The dialogic type of reading experience can be encouraged and reinforced by mediating criticism. The chief hallmark of mediating criticism will be a genuine solicitude for the human parity of the writer under discussion and every new reader of that writer. It is a criticism that, moving sharply away from conflictual dichotomies, will help us adjust both to the multicultural present and to the different phases of our own cultural history. In order to suggest how this can work in practice, I close with a few possible lines of approach to T.S. Eliot, arguably the most important English poet to emerge between 1915 and 1940, yet still of course excluded from the second edition of *The Spirit of Man*.

The reading glasses available in the here and now must not be allowed to blind us to the there and then. Time and time again, the so-called culture wars of postmodernity are fuelled by literary criticism which is fundamentally uncircumstantial and/or anachronistic, with critics of opposed parties aggravating their quarrels by a solipsistic disregard of fundamental considerations of context. Given the postmodern politics of recognition, one of the discourses within which Eliot now figures is that surrounding anti-semitism. That Eliot used anti-Semitic topoi and clichés, did not apologize for doing so, and never campaigned against anti-Semitism is all true enough. Especially from our own position in time, we can readily grant that the example he set was unenlightened here. If a figure of his stature had taken a stand against anti-Semitic attitudes, the world would have been a somewhat better place, in which those nurturing and acting upon such sentiments would have had even less excuse. Anthony Julius speaks of passages of Eliot which “make a Jewish reader’s face flush”, and which “insult Jews: to ignore these insults is to misread the poems” (Julius 1995:1-2). But in this reaction the pragmatics of reception is fundamentally distorted by Julius’s use of the present tense: “*make* a Jewish reader’s face flush”, “*insult* Jews”. Eliot has been dead for thirty years; the passages and poems in question were written even longer ago; and times and attitudes have changed. Without question, the expressions to which Julius objects, written or spoken today, would not only insult Jews, but would attract widespread condemnation for doing so. But Eliot did not write or speak them today. When he wrote them, they may well have been insulting to Jews but, however regrettably from Jews’ own point of view, and from the point of view of any responsible person today, they would not have been generally regarded as

reprehensible, and even many Jews might have taken them in their stride. From a moral point of view, the case of Ezra Pound needs to be distinguished as fundamentally different, not only because his anti-Semitic statements were more blatant, comprehensive and vituperative, but because he was still making them in what could already be called our own epoch, at a time when the naivety or ignorance or hate or self-confidence which knew no better was even more obviously misplaced, as he himself may eventually have recognized -- "Too late came the understanding" (Pound 1963).

In trying to encourage a fuller empathy with Eliot's achievement, a mediating critic has to attempt something very difficult: to see twentieth century culture before Eliot had left his lasting mark upon it. A good way to begin would be by asking why, if Longman Green and the Readers' Union had tried to bring the 1940 edition of *The Spirit of Man* up to date by including *The Waste Land*, the poem would have looked so odd there. Of its first 41 lines no fewer than 6 are in German, and this is only the beginning. *The Waste Land's* many different languages and many different voices leave readers with no choice but to "try out" difference, allowing no stable subject position for either the I-persona or the you-persona. The fragmentation, the decay of imperial hegemonies is explicitly thematized, the fragments shorn against the ruins, and new juxtapositions, new potentialities for human sensibility and identity constantly explored, in constant co-adaptations between cultural tradition and the present moment. In particular, the illusion of a golden world of poetry that is universal and eternal, the kind of illusion sustained by *The Spirit of Man*, is at once re-created and destroyed. On the one hand: "Sweet Thames run softly till I end my song". On the other hand: "A rat crept softly through the vegetation". The Shakespearian iambic pentameter does keep turning up. Yet it can also collapse into a ragtime parody of bardolatry. There are certainly passages that could have been included in *The Spirit of Man* under "Idea of God", "Ideal Love" or "Spring and Lovers":

...when we came back, late, from the hyacinth garden,
 Your arms full, and your hair wet, I could not
 Speak, and my eyes failed, I was neither
 Living nor dead, and I knew nothing,
 Looking into the heart of light, the silence (Eliot 1969:62).

But there is also the flushed assault of the young man carbuncular on the bored typist. True, the writing could be almost excessively polite in the self-abasement of some of its I-personae – from Prufrock hearing the footman snicker behind his back to the Christian humility of *Four Quartets*, Eliot's texts abound with masochistic deferentiality. But *The Waste Land* blatantly offended polite preconceptions as to what poetry ought to be about, what language it ought to use, and the narrative or discursive structures by which it should be organized. Not only that, but the co-adaptation between the old and the startlingly new extended from the writing itself to Eliot's public image. Nothing could be more outrageous than a brash young American. And the author of *The Waste Land* was surely that. Yet he also became even more of an establishment figure than Bridges himself. In every aspect of his career, he made the old buffer thought-world of *The Spirit of Man* less viable, while actually deferring to its powerful sway.

So much for empathy with the historical co-adaptation. The mediating critic's other kind of task is to help readers in the here and now re-interpret a writer's continuing interpersonal charge, in this case the charge of Eliot's sheer creative energy, his ebullience of style, a style, as Empson might have said, created from despair. This, though, is not the place for critical dogmatism. Leavis's "This is so, is it not?" would be quite out of place. The precise valency must vary, as I say, from one context of reading to another, and no single critic can claim to speak for every reader everywhere. But at the very least, *The Waste Land* provides an example of a response to chaos, a response to a world in which values have been fundamentally challenged, in which old identities, social scripts and legitimacies are falling away, a response which involves a new mode of discourse developing in co-adaptation with the old. For many different cultural groupings within postmodern society, this could be highly suggestive.

Then there is an even more fundamental consideration. What I have in mind here is not something peculiar to Eliot's poem, but something which underlies any genuine communication whatever. Here I am about to say something that is as potentially inspiring as anything Bridges could have said about his anthology. But my reasoning is not at all like his. My point is not that literature embodies gems of spiritual purity that will help us

to maintain our battle against the materialistic otherness of an enemy. It is rather that literature, and all other genuine communication, not only call upon a willingness to *negotiate* otherness, but imply a hope that everybody, no matter how various their positionalities, would wish to enter into the spirit of this, and would also like to live a life of joy and happiness, even if the chances for it seem very slim. When Wordsworth spoke of “the native and naked dignity of man” as a “grand and elementary principle of pleasure, by which he knows and feels and lives and moves”, he was surely right (Wordsworth 1950 [1802]). Whether Freud was right to say that Thanatos is just as basic as Eros I shall not at present ask. But the mediating critic will certainly encourage readers to be responsive to writers’ fundamental hopefulness, a hopefulness that underlies even the grimmest of texts, in that to publish any text at all is to invite readers into dialogue and fellowship. So if somebody were now to offer a literary and philosophical anthology which squarely faced the facts of difference in all their potentiality for discord, this could perform a signal service. It would be localizing the timelessly universal hopefulness of human communication bang in the middle of human history’s real difficulties.

Yet even today, could this actually happen? Well yes, perhaps it could. But to believe that the discourse of conflict is a thing of the past would be wishful thinking. Mediators still have their work cut out for them, in the literary sphere as much as in any other. Bridges’ separation of a purer and more spiritual literary sphere from spheres which were more historical and everyday was after all the central ploy in his discourse of conflict.

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