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ELIOT AND EMPSON: TWO SELF-ANNOTATING POETS

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Maria Dimitrova. ELIOT AND EMPSON: TWO SELF-ANNOTATING POETS

The study discusses the explanatory notes which T. S. Eliot (1888–1965) and William Empson (1906–1984) both added to their own poetry – notes which have come to be seen as inseparable from the poetry.

Unlike Eliot, who was reticent and evasive about the genesis and status of the famous notes to *The Waste Land*, Empson theorized and openly advocated the cause of self-annotation in modern poetry in general, and his own notes in particular. Unlike Eliot's self-annotation, too, which was limited to *The Waste Land*, Empson's extended to the majority of his poetry. These differences can be seen to derive, in large part, from the two poets' divergent views on several key issues related to the functions and methodology of literary criticism – the genetic approach to the literary text, inquiry into authorial intentions, and literary meaning and interpretation.

Along with these differences, however, the two poets also shared one important premise – that of the intimate connection between the creative and the critical activities. And despite the marked differences between the two poets' notes as types of text, it can be argued that Eliot's and Empson's notes share a number of important affinities. The study explores those to suggest that Eliot's notes to *The Waste Land* provided for Empson not just a general impetus for self-annotation, but also a specific workable self-annotation model – a model which Empson both challenged and assimilated.

Keywords: T. S. Eliot; William Empson; *The Waste Land*; 20th-century British poetry; authorial notes; para- and metatextuality.

Мария Димитрова. ЕЛИЪТ И ЕМПСЪН: ДВАМА ПОЕТИ И ТЕХНИТЕ БЕЛЕЖКИ КЪМ СОБСТВЕНИТЕ ИМ СТИХОТВОРЕНИЯ

Настоящото изследване разглежда пояснителните бележки, които и Т. С. Елиът (1888–1965), и Уилям Емпсън (1906–1984) прибавят към собствената си поезия и които са се превърнали в неотделима част от тази поезия.

За разлика от Елиът, който избягва да говори за обстоятелствата около създаването на прочутите бележки към *Пустата земя* и техния статут, или говори за тях уклончиво, Емпсън теоретизира и открито защитава както каузата на авторовата анотация в модерната поезия изобщо, така и собствените си бележки. Отново за разлика от Елиът, при когото практиката на авторова анотация се ограничава до *Пустата земя*, при Емпсън тя обхваща по-голямата част от стихотворенията му. Тези разлики могат до голяма степен да бъдат обяснени с различните възгледи на двамата поети по няколко ключови въпроса, свързани с функциите и методологията на литературната критика – генетичния подход към литературния текст, изследването на авторовите интенции и литературния смисъл и интерпретация.

Наред с тези различия обаче двамата поети споделят и едно фундаментално убеждение – това за тясната връзка между творческата и критическата дейност. И въпреки явните разлики между бележките на Елиът и Емпсън като тип текст, може да се твърди, че между тях има и редица важни сходства. След подробен преглед на тези сходства настоящото изследване предлага тезата, че бележките на Елиът към *Пустата земя* предлагат на Емпсън не просто общ стимул, а и конкретен модел на авторова анотация – модел, който Емпсън едновременно отхвърля и възприема.

Ключови думи: Т. С. Елиът; Уилям Емпсън; *Пустата земя*; британска поезия на XX в.; авторови бележки; пара- и метатекстуалност.

Empson's notes are "not at all like Eliot's"; Empson's notes "counteract [...] their reminder of Eliot" (Lecercle 1999: 273; Gardner and Gardner 1978: 24) – when Eliot's and Empson's notes to their own poetry are considered together, this is to draw a contrast between them. This may be a contrast in the kind of information the notes supply and their relative usefulness – unlike Eliot's notes, Empson's "do not indicate sources but provide explanations in the etymological sense of unfolding the meaning ... we do need them" (Lecercle 1999: 273). Or it may be a contrast in the manner and style – unlike Empson's notes, Eliot's are "entirely straightforward, even if slightly tongue-in-cheek at times", Lecercle suggests (273); for Gardner and Gardner, it is specifically the "matey ... helpfulness" of Empson's notes that negates the reminder of Eliot's (24). In Haffenden's formulation, Eliot offered his notes "in a mood of reluctant pedantry" – hence their "air of ... starchy antiquarianism" – while Empson offered his "as helpful exposition" (Haffenden 2005: 371–72).

But the relationship between the two poets' self-annotation[1] has not, in fact, received much critical attention (Gardner and Gardner's comparison, for instance, is made in a laconic parenthesis); and the attention that it *has* received

[1] In this study, the terms *self-annotation* and *authorial annotation* are used interchangeably.

tends to be limited to a few general observations. In this study, therefore, I would like to consider this relationship in greater detail. In particular, while acknowledging the broad validity of the critical opinions just cited, I would like to suggest that this is a complex relationship involving subtle affinities as well as obvious differences. I would like, in other words, to offer a more comprehensive and balanced picture.

To begin with, it seems reasonable to assume, as Haffenden and Willis do, that in annotating his poems Empson was taking his cue from Eliot's famous notes to *The Waste Land* (Haffenden 2005: 370; Willis 1969: 28). Eliot's landmark poem had a powerful impact on Empson's generation – according to his Cambridge contemporaries and friends Kathleen Raine and Muriel Bradbrook, the generation "inhabited" *The Waste Land* "as we inhabited no other poem", and were "decisively shaped" by it (Raine, *The Land Unknown* 39, qtd. in Haffenden 2005: 162; Bradbrook 1974: 9). Empson himself attests that "[w]e all solemnly admired" the poem (Empson 2006: 501).

Indeed, Empson "revelled" in *The Waste Land* (Haffenden 2005: 369). He marvelled at the way it had "shake[n] the literary world" and at the way it worked its mysterious effects (Empson 2006: 215; Empson 1984b: 189), and returned to it again and again in his critical writing. Some of the finest passages in his own landmark *Seven Types of Ambiguity*, Bradbrook argues, are those dealing with Eliot's poem (Bradbrook 1974: 9). He also built intertextual links with it in his poetry. Inspired by the Buddha's Fire Sermon, to which Eliot's poem had given currency, Empson wrote his own Fire Sermon epigraph (a page-long selection of quotations from the sermon) for *Poems*, and reprinted it in each subsequent edition of his *Collected Poems*. In fact, not only did he engage with the Fire Sermon as a direct consequence of reading *The Waste Land* (Empson 1993: 342), but he regarded his own epigraph as a kind of paratext, a note to Eliot's poem – the epigraph, he said, was the only available "recitable translation" of the sermon, "and a reader of the *Waste Land* needs one" (Empson 2006: 638).

Empson was also, in particular, fascinated by the poem's notes. In a piece of juvenilia, *Two songs from a libretto*, the characters (a Girl and her Aunt 1 and Aunt 2) argue about Eliot's notes – about their textual status, their provocativeness, and their degree of obligatoriness for the reader:

[Girl.] What did Professor Bradley say whom
T. S. Eliot quotes?
(1) Surely but only in the notes
(2) Why, should I have read *all* the notes?
Girl. His notes are *part* of what he quotes
(2) These modern writers get my goats
(1) The girl is overstrung and dotes
(2) Come, let's be daring, burn our boats,
Have you the notes here?

Read out the notes dear.
(*The note is intoned.*)
(2) Well if that isn't bonny.
(qtd. in Empson 2000: 154; emphases Empson's)

The argument is comic, yet it highlights some of the key literary-critical issues that the notes raise. Empson was to engage with the notes more directly in his criticism. Most importantly, the notes, and Wimsatt and Beardsley's treatment of them in *The Intentional Fallacy*, stimulated his thinking on the self-annotation of poetry – both in the pivotal early essay *Obscurity and Annotation* (which I will be referring to throughout this study: Empson 1987c) and much later, when he had practically stopped writing poetry (Empson 2006: 215).

But Eliot's and Empson's perspectives on their self-annotation diverged widely; as did the circumstances in which they produced their notes. In his one statement about the notes to *The Waste Land*, made over thirty years after the poem was published, Eliot offers a kind of apology. The notes, he says, are responsible for "stimulat[ing] the wrong kind of interest among the seekers of sources", sending "so many enquirers off on a wild goose chase after Tarot cards and the Holy Grail". They are a "remarkable exposition of bogus scholarship". In fact, he has considered "getting rid" of them, but now they "can never be unstuck" – they "have had almost greater popularity than the poem itself". The only reason he came to write the notes, he explains, was this: the poem had already appeared without notes in *The Dial* and *The Criterion*, but when it was about to be published as a book, it turned out it was "inconveniently short" – a few extra pages of printed material were required, and this was provided by the notes (Eliot 1957: 121–22).

This statement is not unequivocal; while Lawrence Rainey, for instance, argues that it was made in the spirit of "candid" confession, John Whittier-Ferguson reads it as "an agile defense masked as an apology" (Rainey 2006: 37; Whittier-Ferguson 1996: 9). Even so, Eliot's account of how the notes came into being is generally accurate – the writing of *The Waste Land* notes had largely been a matter of external exigency. As Rainey suggests in his painstaking reconstruction of the chronology of the poem's composition, Eliot probably first considered adding notes in response to Horace Liveright's (the poem's prospective publisher) complaint to Ezra Pound – a complaint that was certainly passed on to Eliot: "I'm disappointed that Eliot's material is as short. Can't he add anything?" (qtd. in Rainey 2005: 37). "Anything" is broad enough; and Eliot initially considered adding other types of material to the poem – a handful of minor pieces he had ready, or even *Gerontion*, which could serve as a kind of prelude – in order to plump it out for publication (Rainey 2005: 144, note 17). These proposals, however, were vetoed by Pound, and Eliot resorted to writing notes. Pound, who was intimately involved in the poem's composition and publication, is explicit about the notes' genesis: their publication was "purely fortuitous" (qtd. in Rainey 2006: 44, note 55).

But while the notes were thrust upon Eliot, it can be argued that in the end they came to fulfil a real need on his part – a need independent of any publishing exigencies. Eliot must have felt anxious about the outcome of a prolonged and complicated process of composition – *The Waste Land* took a year of active writing, having been contemplated for another year or so; begun in 1921, it incorporated material that dated from as far back as 1913; its final text must have fused around fifty individual drafts; and it underwent drastic revision by Pound.[2] Eliot's correspondence with Pound reveals that even after the latter had performed his heavy editorial surgery and the two had talked the poem through, Eliot was still not sure whether Part IV should not be altogether omitted, whether a short poem he had ready should not be grafted onto Part II, etc. (Eliot 1988: 504). Eliot seems to have been uncertain about the poem – about its coherence in particular – both in his own right and on behalf of his prospective readership. Thus, he considered using a particular Conrad epigraph because it was "elucidative"; and his suggestion to preface the poem with *Gerontion* (504) may have been motivated by a similar desire to elucidate. (Attaching that poem would have led to Gerontion performing much the same function as Tiresias now performs on the notes' cue: it would have provided a unifying consciousness or point of view, and lent quasi-realistic motivation for the range and wildness of the poem's visions – old age reviewing a life, the defective senses, etc.) Eliot thus must have found some relief for his anxiety in the notes, which he used to outline the poem's plan and to identify its unifying point of view; to trace its recurrent figures and themes; to bolster it with an intertextual base made explicit; and to highlight its intratextual echoes.

Still, *The Waste Land* notes as a literary fact run counter, as I will show, to some of Eliot's most fundamental critical convictions; and his self-annotation remained virtually confined to this poem.[3]

By contrast, Empson annotated not just an isolated poem, or a handful of poems, but the great majority of them; his notes were the product of deliberate

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[2] See Rainey 2005: 36 for the starting and finishing points of the poem's composition, and 198–201 for the dating of earlier material incorporated into the poem. For Eliot's first recorded reference to planning to write what became *The Waste Land*, see his letter to John Quinn of 5 November 1919 (Eliot 1988: 346). The number of hypothetical drafts cited is that of Rainey's calculations (Rainey 2005: 40). For Pound's cuts and revisions, see *The Waste Land: A Facsimile and Transcript of the Original Drafts* (Eliot 1971). A letter Eliot wrote just a couple of weeks before Pound's editorial intervention reveals he had imagined the poem would be about twice as long as it ultimately became (Eliot 1988: 496). So instrumental was Pound in making the poem what it is that critics have pondered to what extent this is Eliot's poem and to what extent it is Pound's.

[3] "Virtually", as there are a few exceptions, such as the compact note at the beginning of *The Dry Salvages* (this provides basic information about what the Dry Salvages are and the name's origin and pronunciation, as well as a gloss on a rare word used in the poem), or the brief, essentially bibliographical notes to *A Note on War Poetry* and *To Walter de la Mare* (Eliot 1963: 205, 229, 232). These annotations are obviously very different from *The Waste Land* notes.

authorial choice, not an afterthought or useful expedient. By contrast, too, Empson theorized his self-annotation practice. In both *Poems* (1935) and *The Gathering Storm* (1940), the notes to the individual poems are preceded by a prefatory Note justifying his own annotation and arguing the need for the authorial annotation of modern poetry in general; and the first of these manifesto Notes was reprinted in each subsequent *Collected Poems*. Empson also argued the general need for the authorial annotation of modern poetry in an extensive and elaborate (though unfinished) essay, *Obscurity and Annotation* (*c.* 1930). (According to the two Notes and the essay, authorial notes were necessary, in the first place, because they would provide a common field of reference between author and reader in a world of increasingly centrifugal, increasingly specialized knowledge. In addition, they would help to ensure the linguistic and intellectual concentration of the poems proper.) Finally, Empson explained the rationale of authorial annotation in general and the range he proposed for his own notes in two letters (dating from 1929) to Chatto & Windus's Ian Parsons, with whom he was negotiating the publication of his first book of poetry (Empson 2006: 6–7). Empson made it clear that he wanted to have such notes at the very outset of the negotiations, before he had even sent Parsons any poems. He was already planning, too, to write a prefatory note to act as an apology for the notes. (When *Poems* eventually appeared, the prefatory Note opened with the following mischievous remark: "There is a feeling, often justified, that it is annoying when an author writes his own notes, so I shall give a note about these notes" [Empson 1935: 39]).

Empson's commitment to self-annotation is evident not only in the sheer number of poems he annotated – over three-quarters of his entire poetic output – but also in the fact that he revised a number of his notes, usually by making additions. In fact, glosses could even be added from one impression of an edition to the next – a prefatory note to the 1956 impression of the 1955 *Collected Poems* offers some extra glosses on *Letter III* and *Bacchus*. This suggests that Empson reviewed the state of his annotation with each new printing of his poetry. Finally, when the 1984 edition of the *Collected Poems* was being prepared (the last in his lifetime), Empson offered to add some new annotation – a "shortened version" of the kind of leisurely comments he made at his poetry readings, where "I always talk a bit about each poem before reading it, giving the circumstances and what not" (Empson 2006: 678). Although the publishers rejected the idea (such extra notes would make the edition too expensive), Empson's willingness confirms once again the significance he attached to self-annotation as an integral part of his poetic practice.

The difference in the way Eliot and Empson viewed their self-annotation derives in large part from their divergent views on several key issues in literary studies – issues related to the function and methodology of criticism. In the first place, Eliot and Empson diverge in their position on the genetic approach to the poetic text. Generally speaking, though Eliot grants this approach some value,

he is more concerned to expose its limitations. Thus, an inquiry into a poem's "causes" "may be a necessary preparation for understanding", but to gain an adequate understanding of a poem, one needs, much more importantly, to "grasp its entelechy" (Eliot 1957: 122). In addition, genetic explanation is fraught with the danger of disruption and distraction – "too much information about the origins of the poem may … break my contact with it". Such information may not merely be irrelevant to, but also "distract us altogether from *the poem as poetry*" – biographical explanation "may open the way to further understanding; but it may also … lead us away from the poetry" (124, 129–30; emphasis Eliot's). Likewise, though Eliot acknowledges critical biography as a genre, he does so in negative terms – "Nor is there any reason why biographies of poets should not be written" – and hedges his acknowledgement with such qualifications, describing the writing of critical biography as a task of such delicacy, as to produce the impression that it may be a task best left unattempted (122–23). All in all, Eliot is not at all sanguine about the value of the genetic method.

Empson, by contrast, is convinced in its merits. To him, "a great deal of biographical information is very useful in understanding a poem", and "most poems gain … from a knowledge of their sources" (Empson 1987c: 80, 75). Throughout his critical career, Empson was happy to use biography – *Using Biography* is the last collection of essays he brought together, on subjects ranging from *The Marriage of Marvell* to the way Eliot's relationship with his American family informed *The Waste Land* (Empson 1984b). Nor does he share Eliot's anxiety about the disruptive or distractive potential of genetic explanation; to him, the poetic work has a fundamental independence – "[a] poem is a very independent organism" (Empson 1987c: 80; see also 75). By that, he seems to mean that a reader's interaction with the text, too, has a certain autonomy: he goes on to argue that "once people have got used to [a poem] they are not likely to be disturbed by information about its origins" (80).

Secondly, Eliot and Empson diverge on the status of authorial intention for the literary critic. The theory of poetry Eliot proposes in *Tradition and the Individual Talent* suppresses the ideas of expression and an active personal agency in the poetic process. On that theory, the poet's mind is not intentional but inert – "inert" and "neutral", like the filament of platinum in the chemical reaction the essay describes (Eliot 1932c: 54). Eliot also warns of the "danger" of "assuming that the interpretation of a poem, if valid, is necessarily an account of what the author consciously or unconsciously was trying to do" (Eliot 1957: 126). And again, from the combined perspective of poet and critic: "I wonder what an 'intention' means! ... I couldn't apply the word 'intention' positively to any of my poems. Or to any poem" (Eliot 1977: 97).

Empson, by contrast, has no qualms about using the word, and throughout his work as critic argues that the attempt to reconstruct the author's conscious and unconscious intentions is a crucial part of the critical-interpretative endeavour. (The title of one of the essays in *Using Biography*, *Ulysses*: *Joyce's Intentions*, states

this creed bluntly.) For one thing, to decree, as Wimsatt and Beardsley do, that authorial intention is neither available nor valuable to the critic is to posit a radical discontinuity between literary communication and all other acts of communication – a notion that Empson fiercely resists. "Estimating other people's intentions", he wrote in a review of Wimsatt's *The Verbal Icon*, "is one of the things we do all the time ... Only in the criticism of imaginative literature, a thing delicately concerned with human intimacy, are we told that we must give up all idea of knowing [the author's] intention" (Empson 1987e: 124–25). Besides, even though one's grasp on others' intentions can only be partial, it is "nearer completeness in a successful piece of literature than in any other use of language" (Empson 1984b: vii). Ultimately, since "the chief function of imaginative literature is to make you realise that other people are very various, many of them quite different from you, with different 'systems of value'", to refuse to inquire into intentions is to exile yourself into a wilful blindness (Empson 2006: 397, 477). Thus, though inquiry into authorial intention may be problematic and precarious, it is also, Empson insists, indispensable (Empson 2007: 297; Empson 2006: 404–406; Empson 1972: 15).

Finally, Eliot and Empson also diverge on the meaning of the poetic text and the status of interpretation in literary criticism. Eliot is concerned, in Stead's succinct formulation, with "the total 'being' of a poem rather than with its 'meaning'" (Stead 1967: 138). While he does warn against the aridity of extreme formalism – "if you stick too closely to the 'poetry' and adopt no attitude towards what the poet has to say, you will tend to evacuate it of all significance" – he also postulates a skilled, experienced reader "of ... *purity*" who "does not bother about understanding; not, at least, at first" (Eliot 1967: 64, 151; emphasis Eliot's). To Eliot, a poem's meaning – a word he often places in dubious inverted commas – is of secondary importance: ultimately expendable and inessential to poetry as poetry. "The chief use of the 'meaning' of a poem, in the ordinary sense, may be ... to satisfy one habit of the reader, to keep his mind diverted and quiet, while the poem does its work upon him: much as the imaginary burglar is always provided with a bit of nice meat for the house-dog" (151).

Eliot is, as he points out himself, speaking of some kinds of poetry rather than others, and these are the kinds he favours and practises himself. Similarly drawing on his own favourite, "argufying" type of poetry, Empson, by contrast, highlights the centrality of a poem's meaning, of the argument a poem makes, of the ideas it articulates. He has little respect for criticism that shies away from saying what a text actually means because to say such a thing would seem "low-class and philistine" (Empson 1987a: 168). To him, propositional meaning "in the ordinary sense" is never expendable – a good reader will read for it from the start – and a poem's argument is never secondary. In his own critical practice, Empson habitually uses paraphrase as a tool. He is also bent on uncovering the text's "story" – that is, the basic situation it presents, its narrative or logical order, and its characters' motivations, actions, and relations. He is sensitive to what he

sees as skewed readings, or downright misreadings, of classic texts that result from excessive attention to the text's more "aesthetic" aspects – for instance, its imagery – at the expense of story (Empson 1987d: 162–63; Empson 1987g: 117; Empson 2006: 481, 489–90, 495). Such aestheticist rarefication of the literary text ultimately has the disastrous effect of suggesting that literature is not "about anything real" (to borrow a phrase he uses in a related argument – Empson 2006: 552). Similarly, Empson insists that figures such as metaphors and similes must be considered in their entirety, with an attention to both vehicle *and* tenor. A figure consists in the relation between the two; to focus exclusively on the vehicle – as Empson finds much criticism does – is to reduce the figure to mere ornament. Like the critical neglect of a text's story, the neglect of a figure's tenor – of its main or literal subject – is to Empson a sign of intellectual hauteur, and suggests a belief that poetry "positively ought not to mean anything" (Empson 1987b: 116; Empson 1987d: 160–61). To Empson, such a belief predicates a dangerous discontinuity between literature and life, between poetry and other discourse.

Eliot's attenuation of the role of meaning in poetry is coupled, in his early career, with a distinct scepticism about the value of interpretation in criticism. In *The Function of Criticism*, he objects to interpretation's subjectivity – an interpretation is hard to verify through "external evidence" – and to its tendency to produce "fiction[s]" and Frankensteinian monsters. The healthy critical alternative to interpretation (in the essay, the word is invariably surrounded by quizzical inverted commas) are the objective tools of comparison and analysis, rooted as they are in fact: "'interpretation' ... is only legitimate when it is not interpretation at all, but merely putting the reader in possession of facts". Unlike interpretations, made up of "opinion and fancy", facts cannot "corrupt" (Eliot 1975: 75–76). The rest of Eliot's critical writing of the 1920s upholds the same objectivist ideal, sustaining the opposition between (falsifying) interpretation and (constructive) analysis. In *The Perfect Critic*, Eliot claims that as soon as you attempt to verbalize your impressions, "you either begin to analyse and construct ... or you begin to create something else" (Eliot 1932b: 5). And in *Hamlet and His Problems* he insists that "the work of art cannot be interpreted; there is nothing to interpret ... for 'interpretation' the chief task is the presentation of relevant historical facts" (Eliot 1932a: 96). In his later writing, Eliot's position undergoes a marked change. He comes to argue the value of bringing "all [your] convictions and passionate beliefs about life" to the reading of poetry – to try to strip yourself of these in pursuit of some "illusory" pure appreciation is to "cheat[...] yourself out of a great deal that poetry has to give to your development" (Eliot 1967: 97–98). He also comes to embrace interpretation's plurality and acknowledge its particular kind of verifiability – a valid interpretation of a poem "must be at the same time an interpretation of my own feelings when I read it" (Eliot 1957: 126–27). He even makes a self-conscious renunciation of his early scepticism towards interpretation, and declares interpretation's necessity (Eliot 2001: xv, xviii–xix, xxii).

And yet, the rhetoric of his renunciation indicates a conflicted attitude to interpretation, and hints at the necessity – or "instinct" – of interpretation as something to be stoically borne. As in his earlier, explicitly anti-interpretative writing, here too the words *interpretation*, *interpret*, *interpreter* are repeatedly surrounded by hesitant inverted commas. And the fruit which interpretation yields is judged in rather lukewarm negative terms – "Nor is the effort [to interpret] altogether vain" (xix); and, again, "I do not mean that *nothing* solid and enduring can be arrived at in interpretation" (xix–xx; emphasis Eliot's). The verbs Eliot uses to describe the interpretative activity are also telling – to interpret is to "seek to pounce upon the secret", to "pluck out the mystery" of a poem (xix). If interpretation is an instinct, then it is unmistakably an aggressive one. And the aggression is not only directed at the text, by us; it is also directed at us, by a power that, though residing within us, is experienced as alien to us – on Eliot's account, "[t]he restless demon in us drives us … to 'interpret' whether we will or not"; it is "necessary to surrender ourselves" to interpretation (xix). Finally, the essay ends on a note of wistful resignation: "The work of Shakespeare is like life itself something to be lived through. If we lived it completely we should need no interpretation; but on our plane of appearances our interpretations themselves are a part of our living" (xxii). Interpretation, in other words, is experienced not merely as necessary: it is experienced as a necessary evil – that of the substitute. It is endured as a separation.

Empson does not share this ambivalence about interpretation, nor does he posit an opposition between interpretation and analysis, between "pernicious ... emotion" and the "disinterested exercise of intelligence" (Eliot 1932b: 12–13). On the contrary: he believes that poetry considered "dispassionately", as "an external object for examination" is "dead" poetry; and the critic who has set out to be dispassionate, "repress[ing] sympathy in favour of curiosity", has incapacitated himself as critic (Empson 1953: 248). Empson is sceptical about the relevance of the objectivist ideal, of "the scientific idea of truth", to the study of poetry; and suggests a continuity (if not identity) between the cognitive and the emotive: "the act of knowing is itself an act of sympathising". The opposition between "appreciative" and "analytical" critics is thus false: any critic needs to be both at the same time (248–49).

To sum up: while Empson believes in the value of the genetic approach to the poetic text, in inquiry into authorial intention, and in meaning and interpretation, Eliot is at best ambivalent about them. Eliot's scepticism is at variance with *The Waste Land* notes as a literary fact: the notes are markedly interpretative and directly refer to authorial intentions and to experiences in the author's life. This conflict may explain why Eliot's self-annotation remained confined to this poem. By contrast, Empson's self-annotation is entirely consistent with his critical beliefs; and is itself a consistent practice.

Along with these important divergences in their critical beliefs, however, Eliot and Empson share one key premise that bears on the question of self-annotation – a

premise concerning the creative and the critical. Both poets posit a fundamental connectedness between the two activities; both welcome the particular poetic self-consciousness that, they suggest, marks their own time (the 1920s–1930s). Eliot declares the creative and the critical sensibility to be "complementary", and insists that a crucial element of all literary creation consists in the exercise of the critical ability (Eliot 1932b: 16; Eliot 1975: 73). Though he warns of the danger of the "overflow[...]" of the creative into the critical in the work of a critic who is an "unfulfilled" poet, he argues that criticism from a poet whose creative sensibility has found full expression in his poetry is the most trustworthy kind of criticism (Eliot 1932b: 7). Furthermore, directly relevant to the question of self-annotation, Eliot observes that some writers in whom the critical activity is not completely "discharged" in their creative work will, having completed the work, feel the need to "continue the critical activity by commenting on it", producing criticism of considerable value (Eliot 1975: 73–74). In his own case, Eliot believes, the best of his literary criticism consists of his writing on the authors who have influenced him; it is thus a "by-product" of his "private poetry-workshop", a "prolongation of the thinking that went into the formation" of his poetry. Indeed, so intimately are the two connected that the criticism can only be truly appreciated in relation to the poetry (Eliot 1957: 117). In effect, then, Eliot declares his best criticism a paratext to his poetry.[4] In broader literary-historical terms, Eliot posits a "significant relation between the best poetry and the best criticism of the same period. The age of criticism is also the age of critical poetry". And contemporary poetry in particular is "extremely critical"; the contemporary poet is no simple "composer of graceful verses" – he feels compelled to address head-on questions like ""what is poetry for?'; not merely 'what am I to say?' but rather 'how and to whom am I to say it?'" (Eliot 1967: 30).

Empson similarly offers the ideal of "the self-explanatory or critical poet" as opposed to "the poet as such" – poets, he suggests, "ought to explain themselves as completely as possible" – and argues that this self-explanatory, critical attitude is an important feature of his contemporary time. To him, "present-day sensibility" is marked by a "desire to understand one's surroundings, poems and states of mind, rather than to accept them"; poets in particular will become increasingly self-conscious (Empson 1987c: 83–84, 86). Like Eliot, Empson sees the "merits" of the age "among the critics rather than poets, or rather among the poets who are critics" (84). And the authorial annotation of poetry is one important form of the new poetic self-consciousness, one important junction of the critical and the creative. The various possible types of authorial notes Empson considers throughout *Obscurity and Annotation* involve a meticulous exploration of both the springs and

[4] By definition, the paratext is "a discourse that is fundamentally heteronomous, auxiliary, and dedicated to the service of something other than itself that constitutes its raison d'être" (Genette 1997: 12).

the effects of one's own poetry, a disinterested examination of "[one's] own mental operations" (78).

Ultimately, then, Eliot's limited practice of self-annotation and Empson's much more extensive one can be said to underwrite a shared belief in the importance of the critical within the creative. If Eliot came to feel uneasy about *The Waste Land* notes, but at the same time promoted the criticism that emerged as a by-product of his poetry as his best criticism, this may be because of the particular types of paratext the notes and the critical essays represent. The notes to *The Waste Land* are located immediately after the poem and are directly concerned with it. They thus threaten to encroach on the poetic text, and, as I have shown, clash with Eliot's position against genetic and intentionalist inquiry and against interpretation. The critical essays, by contrast, are physically separate from Eliot's poems and are only indirectly connected to them; in no way do the essays pose a threat to the poems. In Genette's terms, the notes are peritext and the essays are epitext.[5] Eliot felt, it seems, that where the notes shone a glaring spotlight on the poem, the essays offered discreetly diffuse illumination.

* * *

Having considered the circumstances in which Eliot and Empson wrote their notes, and the critical ideologies which their self-annotation practice derived from or contradicted, we now need to focus on the notes as text. Eliot's and Empson's notes strike the reader as very different types of text. To begin with, Empson's notes are much more obviously heterogeneous, offering a wide variety of information and commentary. While Eliot's notes consist predominantly of source references, Empson's notes typically contain, in addition, paraphrases of difficult passages (for instance, unravelling knotty or ambiguous syntax); explications of the poem's puns and ambiguities (in the form of succinct lists of the various relevant meanings); glosses and explanations of rare – for instance, etymological – uses, and of the various scientific terms and science-inspired images in which the poems abound.

All this information is offered in a single block of text, with Empson ranging freely from one level of commentary to another, and from one section of the poem

[5] Genette divides the diverse discourses comprising the paratext into two broad groups, according to location. The first group is the peritext, which includes the elements situated in close proximity to the text, most typically within the same volume (Genette 1997: 4) – e.g. titles, epigraphs, epilogues, notes. The elements that make up the epitext are at a greater distance from the text; at least by original design, they do not belong to the body of the book (5) – e.g. interviews with the author, letters, diaries. The degree of physical proximity, of course, affects profoundly the nature of the relationship between the paratext and the main text: greater proximity gives the paratext greater peremptory potential (to borrow a phrase Genette uses in another context [11]).

to another. Whatever logic governs the organization of Empson's notes is not immediately obvious – the notes strike us as haphazard or, at best, only loosely structured. Eliot's notes, by contrast, make up a tidy, vertically arranged list; employing the trappings of a quasi-academic apparatus, each note is neatly pegged to the respective section of the poem through a line number. The notes duly begin at the beginning (the poem's title) and end at the end (the poem's closing line); and the notes on the five parts of the poem are marked off from each other.

Finally, the two poets' notes are also markedly different in terms of language and tone. Eliot's notes are formal, austere, and scholarly; Empson's are colloquial, often effusive, and friendly. While Eliot, for instance, would offer a reference as "Cf. *The Tempest*, I, ii" or "V. Weston: *From Ritual to Romance*; chapter on the Fisher King" (82, 86), Empson would casually remark: "Dr Johnson said it, somewhere in Boswell"; or "It is true about the old dog, at least I saw it reported somewhere"; or "Darwin tried this, but I forget whether it was true or not" (notes to *Invitation to Juno* 94; *Missing Dates* 113; *Plenum and Vacuum* 94).[6] The precise references in Eliot are offered in impersonal, formulaic language; the vague references in Empson are made in a chatty tone. Broadly speaking, while Eliot's notes tend towards a written, quasi-academic model of commentary, Empson's tend towards an oral one.

And yet, despite all these differences, I would like to suggest that Eliot's notes provided for Empson not merely a general impetus, but also a specific model of self-annotation.

At first sight, it appears that Empson rejected Eliot's model. While he believed *The Waste Land* notes were necessary – he believed they "had to be written" (Empson 1987f: 98) – he was highly critical of what he regarded as their "schoolmaster's tone", of the way they mutely rebuke the reader for not being sufficiently well-read (Empson 1987c: 71). If the notes were serviceable to him, it was because they prompted him to formulate his own idea of the kind of notes he would like to write – as he told Chatto & Windus's Ian Parsons, negotiating the publication of his first book of poetry, his notes would "avoid the Eliot air of intellectual snobbery" (Empson 2006: 7). Any self-annotating poet, too, Empson argued, must be careful to avoid "grandios[ity]" and strive to write notes that are "casual[…]", "simple", and "good-humoured" (Empson 1987c: 80, 71).

The description of *The Waste Land* notes as schoolmasterly targets Eliot's source references. With their Latin *Cf*s and *V*s; with their meticulous references to the line (or act and scene, or chapter and volume) of the respective texts; with the quotations they provide, these notes do strike us as pedantic. But we find among them also a note like that to line 360:

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[6] All quotations from Eliot's notes to *The Waste Land* and to the poem itself are made from the 1963 *Collected Poems* (Eliot 1963). All quotations from Empson's notes to his poems and to the poems themselves are made from the 1984 *Collected Poems* (Empson 1984a).

> The following lines were stimulated by the account of one of the Antarctic expeditions (I forget which, but I think one of Shackleton's): it was related that the party of explorers, at the extremity of their strength, had the constant delusion that there was *one more member* than could actually be counted. (85; emphasis Eliot's)

The vague, colloquially parenthetic "(I forget which, but I think one of Shackleton's)" stands in striking contrast to, for instance, "Cf. *Purgatorio*, V.133: / 'Ricorditi di me, che son la Pia: / 'Siena mi fe', disfecemi Maremma'" (84, note to line 293). Unlike this note, the Shackleton note not only does not provide the relevant passage from the source text – or at the very least locate it – but does not even identify the source text. It does not make use of academic notation ("Cf."); it does not quote in alien tongues. In its manner, the note is positively genial. And it bears a strong similarity to such Empson notes as those cited above: "Darwin tried this, but I forget whether it was true or not"; "Dr Johnson said it, somewhere in Boswell"; "It is true about the old dog, at least I saw it reported somewhere". This, then, is my argument: the insouciant vagueness characterizing the source references in a number of Empson's notes may well be a rhetorical gesture that Empson adopted from Eliot. Taking his cue from what in Eliot is a rare, if not exceptional, type of note, Empson developed the casually indefinite reference into a consistent and conspicuous strategy. While he does not discriminate between *The Waste Land* notes in his blanket deprecation of their "schoolmaster's tone" and "intellectual snobbery", in his self-annotation practice Empson in fact reacts against one particular type of note (the dry academic one) and perpetuates another. He also intensifies the effect of geniality by employing a more casual language – in Eliot's Shackleton note, alongside the colloquial parenthesis there are also fairly formal expressions ("it was related that …", "at the extremity of their strength"); in Empson's notes, the phrasing is casual through and through.

Another of Eliot's notes which can be seen as prefiguring certain features of Empson's is the note to line 68 of *The Waste Land*, "With a dead sound on the final stroke of nine" ("And each man fixed his eyes before his feet. / Flowed up the hill and down King William Street, / To where Saint Mary Woolnoth kept the hours / With a dead sound on the final stroke of nine": 65, lines 65–68). The note reads: "A phenomenon which I have often noticed" (81). While I would not go as far as Sultan, who describes the note as "chatty" (Sultan 1990: 171) – "phenomenon" is not, after all, particularly colloquial, with or without its Bradleyan associations – I do think that it is fairly casual. It is casual in its elliptic syntax and especially in the kind of information it conveys – a fragmentary sliver of quotidian personal experience, thrown in without any further comment or explanation. In this, the note points the way towards the parenthetical asides that make one aspect of the overall informality of Empson's notes – as in the following gloss: "A bus is *under-roaded* when the road gives way under it and you spend hours digging in the mud and

spreading branches (my friends don't seem to know this word, which I thought was a common one)" (note to *China* 116–17; italics Empson's). While the parenthesis is not whimsical – it explains why a gloss is provided in the first place – it does take an abruptly personal turn. And as in the vague references discussed above, Empson intensifies the general effect of informality by employing a markedly colloquial diction.

It seems, then, that while Empson is generally right about Eliot's formal, ceremonial tone, he may be overplaying it. Eliot's notes do not really belong to one uniform type; and even the driest of them can be interpreted as, in fact, sophisticatedly playful, as self-ironic or "mock-notes" (Sultan 1990: 171; Matthiessen 1972: 52; Southam 1991: 22). Nor are these notes so pedantic – even the strictly technical source-reference notes may cite inaccurate bibliographical information; or use the supposedly punctilious "V." and "Cf." arbitrarily; or provide inconsistent or whimsical intra-textual cross-references (Southam 1991: 20–21; Sultan 1990: 171).

The Waste Land notes thus seem to have provided Empson with a productive model that, in his own annotation, he works against, but also, in some ways, within. But the most important cue which Empson may have taken from Eliot's notes is related to the metatextual dimension of his self-annotation. Much of Empson's self-annotation comments openly on the poem as construction, on the effects he was trying to produce through a particular device or verbal choice – for instance, "I cut out an intervening verse about Russia … because it seemed no use pretending I had anything to say about proletarianism" and "The grammar is meant to run through alternate lines; I thought this teasing trick gave an effect of the completely disparate things going side by side" (note to *China* 117); "*Gravely*, the spelling of the original, means 'of gravel' but suggests graves" (note to *Part of Mandevil's Travels* 98; italics Empson's); "Ether and chloroform smell to me much alike though only chloroform has got chlorine in it, so I swap drugs to bring in poison gas" (note to *Bacchus* 108). The notes also often remark on his overall performance in the poem or, rather, on the failure of particular intentions – "The unconfined surface of [the old lady's] sphere is like the universe in being finite but unbounded, but I failed to get that into the line" (note to *To an Old Lady* 98); "The intention behind the oddness of the theme, however much it may fail …" (note to *Camping Out* 99); "The two main ideas put forward or buried in this poem …" (note to *China* 115); etc.

In Eliot's notes to *The Waste Land*, too, the metatextual aspect is very important: even in what are formally source references, the notes serve to explain or defend particular poetic choices. Some of the notes are concerned with relatively minor elements of the poem – for instance, a couple of lines like "... the evening hour that strives / Homeward, and brings the sailor home from sea" (lines 220–21). These elicit the following note: "This may not appear as exact as Sappho's lines, but I had in mind the 'longshore' or 'dory' fisherman, who returns at nightfall" (83). What we have here, apart from the (casual) identification of an intertextual reference, is the

concession of a possible poetic flaw, followed, in turn, by a reassertion of authorial intention. Nor is the concession unequivocal: Eliot's lines "*may* not appear" exact, but this appearance is probably deceptive – a more sophisticated reader ought to see through it. In other words, the concession could amount to a pre-emptive deflection of criticism. The use of esoteric nautical jargon, too (note the deliberate inverted commas), brings home the point that the poet knows what he is about, and is meant to remove any doubts that happen to linger in the reader's mind. The note neutralizes the objection anticipated on the reader's part by inhibiting the reader – almost, one might say, by intimidating him or her into silence. Here we see, then, something of the magisterial manner that Empson attributed to Eliot's notes: one way for an insecure or authoritarian teacher to deal with a student's troubling question is to evade the question by overwhelming the student with unfamiliar terminology.

Other notes deal with much larger and more important elements of the poem. Formally assigned to line 46 with its "wicked pack of cards" (64), the following note in fact comments on an entire level of the poem – that of characters:

> I am not familiar with the exact constitution of the Tarot pack of cards, from which I have obviously departed to suit my own convenience. The Hanged Man, a member of the traditional pack, fits my purpose in two ways: because he is associated in my mind with the Hanged God of Frazer, and because I associate him with the hooded figure in the passage of the disciples to Emmaus in Part V. The Phoenician Sailor and the Merchant appear later: also the 'crowds of people', and Death by Water is executed in Part IV. The Man with Three Staves (an authentic member of the Tarot pack) I associate, quite arbitrarily, with the Fisher King himself. (80–81)

In a manner similar to that of the note discussed above, the note begins with an admission of authorial ignorance ("I am not familiar with the exact constitution of the Tarot pack of cards ...") and goes on to make a blunt assertion of authorial rights ("... from which I have obviously departed to suit my own convenience"). It foregrounds the degree to which the materials of poetry are subservient to the shaping authorial intention ("... fits my purpose"); and generally makes the author's presence very keenly felt, through the repeated use of the first person singular. (Note also the growing assertiveness in the transition from passive to active voice: "... because he is associated in my mind with ... because I associate him with....") And even as the declaration of ignorance is offset, to some extent, by the references to two figures that *are*, respectively, "a member of the traditional pack" and "an authentic member of the Tarot pack", the authority of the intention is reasserted almost imperiously – "to suit my own convenience", "I associate, quite arbitrarily". Yet, this declaration of authorial licence implicitly questions the poet's authority, the weight of his intention – the latter appears, after all, to be rather "arbitrar[y]": not a solid, carefully conceived design, but a web of precarious personal associations. The note, in other words, suggests the poem's contingency – it suggests that it did not have to be what it is.

In other of Eliot's notes, on the other hand, we see something very like the evasion of authorial responsibility. This is the case with the note on Tiresias (82–83), which opens with "Tiresias, although a mere spectator and not indeed a 'character', is yet the most important personage in the poem, uniting all the rest". In this key sentence, Eliot is groping "for a descriptive term for the voice Tiresias names" (Kaiser 2007: 241). And after the author's tentativeness about the textual status of Tiresias, the assertion that, whatever name one gives Tiresias, he unites "all the rest" (all the rest *what*? spectators? characters? personages?) may not be as convincing. But perhaps one could ignore this uncertainty. What one cannot ignore is the way in which, after declaring that "[w]hat Tiresias *sees*, in fact, is the substance of the poem" (emphasis Eliot's), the author adds, "[t]he whole passage from Ovid is of great anthropological interest", and quotes the respective passage. The quotation, in the original Latin and, at 19 lines, occupying two-thirds of the note, overwhelms the reader. Thus overwhelmed, he or she is less likely to question either the appropriateness of Eliot's exegetical procedure (the statement "What Tiresias *sees*", etc. sounds quite magisterial) or the significance of Tiresias as a figure, bolstered as it is by great Ovidian bulk. Introduced through a shifty reference to its "anthropological interest", the quotation is a diversion.

Eliot's headnote performs a similar evasion. After stating that the poem's title and "plan", and much of its "incidental symbolism", were derived from Jessie Weston's *From Ritual to Romance*, Eliot says: "Indeed, so deeply am I indebted, Miss Weston's book will elucidate the difficulties of the poem much better than my notes can do; ... I recommend it ... to any who think such elucidation of the poem worth the trouble" (80). Exegetic responsibility is, once again, shifted onto another authority. In addition, the sentence performs a *captatio benevolentiae* function – at the very beginning of the notes, the author suggests their deficiency (as well as the poem's: "any who think such elucidation ... worth the trouble"), and thus pre-empts criticism. The rest of the note acknowledges another debt, to *The Golden Bough* – more specifically to the two volumes of *Adonis, Attis, Osiris* – and concludes: "Anyone who is acquainted with these works will immediately recognise in the poem certain references to vegetation ceremonies" (80). In this case, exegetic responsibility is transferred – via Frazer – to the reader; and this is done in a pontifical manner that, again, justifies Empson's objections to the tone of *The Waste Land* notes. The rhetorical contrast between the peremptory absoluteness of "anyone" and "immediately" and the vagueness of "certain", too, is telling of an urge on the author's part to evade exegetic responsibility – while he also claims it, through the fact of self-annotation itself – and to place it firmly with the reader.

All in all, then, Eliot's metatextual notes both assert the authority of the author (and his intentions) and point to its limitations; they both claim authorial control and entrust responsibility for meaning to others. They suggest a conflicted attitude to his own annotation. Eliot's contradictory "I associate, quite arbitrarily" – at once affirming an authorial *I* and negating its authority – characterizes literary self-

annotation as compromise: a way both to propose and not to propose authorial meaning, a way to offer a "plan" and to withdraw it.

One last point needs to be made about Eliot's notes before we compare them with Empson's. One of the most important functions the notes are assigned is that of highlighting the coherence of the poem as a whole, bringing its large design into relief. (The circumstances of *The Waste Land*'s composition, described earlier in this study, well account for Eliot's concern to foreground the poem's structural unity.) This is the primary function of the headnote and of the notes on Tiresias and the Tarot pack. But other notes, too, serve that purpose in more oblique ways. Consider, for instance, the note to line 309, "O Lord Thou pluckest me out" (74): "From St. Augustine's *Confessions* again. The collocation of these two representatives of eastern and western asceticism [the Buddha and Augustine], as the culmination of this part of the poem, is not an accident" (84). In the first place, of course, the note identifies a source reference. But it is also anxious to point up a "collocation" the reader might otherwise miss; to stress the collocation's place within an overarching authorial design ("the culmination of this part of the poem"); and to stress, for good measure, that the Augustine allusion is not a one-off but part of an Augustine pattern ("again"; the previous reference to Augustine is in the note to line 307, "To Carthage then I came").

Other notes establish such intratextual connections more explicitly. The notes to lines 100, 115, and 126 in the poem's Part II read, respectively, "Cf. Part III, l. 204", "Cf. Part III, l. 195", and "Cf. Part I, l. 37, 48" (81). This close cluster of notes (only one other note intervenes in the series) make, together, two backward and two forward references; and thus suggest firm authorial control of the poem. (The author knows where he has been and where he is going.) At the same time, the notes may well strike us as a little too eager or punctilious. It is such cross-references, surely, that warrant Lecercle's remark about a "slightly hysterical need to dot one's i's" much more than Empson's self-annotation, to which in fact Lecercle applies the phrase (Lecercle 1999: 273).

Empson's notes are not, in fact, particularly concerned with bolstering the poems' structural unity. They do occasionally point to intratextual connections, but not, generally, in a way that suggests a firm, monolithic structure for the respective poem. Similarly, the source references do not suggest a solid intertextual substructure – for one thing, they are too sporadic. (These differences are of course due to the different nature of *The Waste Land* and Empson's poems; even so, they must be pointed out.) At the same time, some of the most significant metatextual gestures and effects in Empson's notes have important precedents in Eliot's. I have suggested about Eliot's note to line 221 of *The Waste Land* ("This may not appear as exact as Sappho's lines, but ....") that it neutralizes anticipated objections by a reference to authorial intention that inhibits and intimidates the reader. For all their informality and geniality, Empson's notes can sometimes produce a similar effect. This is the case with the note to *Courage means Running*, which explains:

"*Bard* and *hack* I suppose come in a bit oddly, but the point is to join up the crisis-feeling to what can be felt all the time in normal life" (113). In order to deflect potential objections, the note reveals the author's underlying intention – to "join up the crisis-feeling to what can be felt all the time in normal life". But the revelation is frustrating rather than enlightening – all doubts the reader may have had about the appropriateness of the words *bard* and *hack* are displaced by an urgent need to uncover the connection between those words, on the one hand, and crisis and normal life on the other. The idea of such a connection is thrown in casually, as if the connection were self-evident, which it is not; the reader feels not merely baffled but also insecure in the face of the author's apparent self-assuredness. If Eliot's note makes one think, as I suggested, of a teacher who tackles a student's bothersome question by overwhelming him with unfamiliar terminology, Empson's note evokes a teacher who frustrates an uncomprehending student by blithely suggesting that the problem does not exist in the first place.

The note sounds all the more imperious as the highlighting of *bard* and *hack* seems arbitrary – these two words "come in" no more "oddly" than other words in a poem that is altogether extremely opaque. The note's focus on those words compounds the reader's bafflement, as it presses on him or her the added problem of what makes those words, unlike other obscure elements of the poem, important enough to be addressed in the note. In the final analysis, reference to authorial intention in this note is, well, authoritarian: it inhibits and obstructs.[7]

There is also an affinity between Empson's self-annotation and Eliot's Tarot pack note. This note, I suggested earlier, couples an admission of authorial ignorance with an assertion of authorial rights, and highlights the subservience of poetic materials to the shaping authorial intention:

> ... I have obviously departed [from the exact constitution of the Tarot pack] to suit my own convenience. The Hanged Man ... fits my purpose in two ways: because he is associated in my mind with the Hanged God of Frazer, and because I associate him with the hooded figure in the passage of the disciples to Emmaus in Part V.... The Man with Three Staves ... I associate, quite arbitrarily, with the Fisher King himself. (80–81)

The rhetoric of this note is mirrored strikingly in two of the glosses within Empson's note to *Bacchus*. The first of these reads: "Ether and chloroform *smell to me much alike* though only chloroform has got chlorine in it, *so I swap* drugs *to bring in* [the idea of] poison gas"; and the second: "The snakes round [Mercury's] staff were also used for Bacchus, *as I remember*, hidden under the ivy, and *I connect them* with the serpent that gave knowledge of good and evil" (108; emphasis added).

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[7] Some of this commentary on the note to Courage means Running appears in my paper "A Poetry 'Cookery-Book': The Metatextual Aspects of William Empson's Authorial Notes to His Poetry", in Filologijata – klasicheska i nova (Sofia University Kliment Ohridski Press, 2016, pp. 483–97).

Like Eliot's Tarot pack note, these glosses are saturated with the author's presence; they affirm personal perceptions and associations, and declare poetic designs. They nonchalantly expose the inescapable workings of intention. In fact, the Tarot pack note may well have inspired Empson's metatextual annotation in general, with its typically open announcements of the author's intentions, choices, and procedures. At the very least, it certainly provided encouragement for it.

Finally, I would also suggest a general connection between Empson's self-annotation and *The Waste Land*'s headnote and Tiresias note. The headnote, we remember, adumbrates the entire poem's "plan" (derived, the note claims, from Jessie Weston's study of the Grail legend). The Tiresias note identifies an equally important structural level of the text: its point of view – "Tiresias … is … the most important personage in the poem, uniting all the rest.... What Tiresias *sees*, in fact, is the substance of the poem" (emphasis Eliot's). These two are examples of what we could call the overarching note – a note whose function is not to shed light on local difficulties, but to uncover the overall design or meaning of the poetic text, or of a significant dimension or portion of it. These overarching notes have not been universally welcomed. Early reviewer Charles Powell was distrustful: "The thing [*The Waste Land*] is a mad medley. It has a plan, because its author says so [in the headnote] …" (Powell 1997: 194). Lawrence Rainey also deprecates the headnote, though from a different standpoint: the note is all too easy to take at face value, with the disastrous consequence that the poem is "crushed into the Procrustean pattern furnished by Jessie Weston" (Rainey 2007: 108–109). And though a critic like James Longenbach finds the Tiresias note useful, he also recognizes that it provides an "overly schematic account of the poem" (Longenbach 1999: 121).

Unlike such critics, Empson did not object to Eliot's overarching notes as he did to his magisterial source-reference notes; or to his "Shantih" note, on the grounds that it "put … more into the poem" than was really there (Empson 1987c: 72). In fact, he openly claimed for himself the right to explain in his notes "not only particular references … but the point of a poem as a whole" (Empson 2006: 6). The notes to a number of his poems do indeed do just that. In *Reflection from Rochester*, for example, "[t]he idea is that nationalist war is getting to a crisis because the machines make it too dangerous and expensive to be serviceable even in the queer marginal ways it used to be" (112); in *This Last Pain*, "[t]he idea of the poem is that human nature can conceive divine states which it cannot attain" (102); and, more tentatively, "[t]he thought supposed to be common" to the three stanzas of *Plenum and Vacuum* is "that the object has become empty so that one is left with an unescapable system of things each nothing in itself" (95).

These overarching glosses are generally more casual than Eliot's, and are thrown in among other glosses, concerned with various local aspects of the text. Eliot's overarching notes, in contrast, refer more formally to the poem's general "plan" (distinguished from its "incidental[s]") or to "the substance of the poem" (80, 82). They also stand as solid, autonomous blocks and thus command greater

regard. Even so, at least one of Empson's overarching glosses has achieved the same kind of super-exegetic status in the interpretation of his poetry as Eliot's overarching notes have achieved in the interpretation of *The Waste Land*. The famous formulation in the note to *Bacchus*, "The notion is that life involves maintaining oneself between contradictions that can't be solved by analysis" (104–105), has been just as influential as a prism through which to read the entirety of Empson's poetry as the Jessie Weston and Tiresias notes have been in the reading of *The Waste Land*. In any case, what is important here is that *The Waste Land* notes may well have suggested to Empson the potential value of such comprehensive interpretative notes, and sanctioned and spurred his own explanations, in his annotation, of the main idea of a given poem.

At the same time, both Eliot's and Empson's notes also perform gestures that at least on the surface cast doubt on the author's authority. In the Tarot pack note, we saw earlier, Eliot begins by admitting – indeed, announcing – his own ignorance: "I am not familiar with the exact constitution of the Tarot pack of cards ...". But this blunt declaration is only made in order to be overthrown by the more powerful claim of poetic licence, of authorial intention and "convenience". Empson's note to *China* makes a similar point. The note begins by declaring the falsity of the poem's two basic premises, concerning the relationship between the Chinese and the Japanese (115); and ends by registering the inaccuracy of the poem's central metaphor of the liver-fluke (118) – a parasite which Empson uses to describe this relationship. At the same time, the detailed account of the liver-fluke (117–18), whose capacity for "demoniacal possession" is "so frightening", makes clear Empson's fascination with it. Despite their deficiencies, both poem and metaphor are allowed to stand as they are. In the final analysis, the note serves, like Eliot's Tarot pack note, to consolidate the status of authorial intention, to uphold the poet's prerogative to mould his materials according to his purposes. The same prerogative is also implicit in the relation between Empson's *Missing Dates* and its accompanying note: while the poem makes an important point through the image of "the Chinese tombs ... / Usurp[ing] the soil" (60), the note unabashedly points out that it is *not* true that a large part of China's land is taken up by tombs (113). And though in Empson's notes the assertion of this prerogative assumes a less direct form than in Eliot's, it is no less compelling.

Empson's notes also often seem to undermine his authority by registering an imprecision or uncertainty of knowledge, as in the already cited "Dr Johnson said it, somewhere in Boswell", or "Darwin tried this, but I forget whether it was true or not". And once again, as I have suggested, this gesture of authorial vagueness has a precursor in Eliot, in "The following lines were stimulated by the account of one of the Antarctic expeditions (I forget which, but I think one of Shackleton's) ...". Though such notes are not primarily metatextual, they involve issues of authority and control that are similar to those raised by metatextual annotation. They function as a version of the modesty topos – among all other possible effects, such notes serve to neutralize criticism through an open admission of inadequacy; they gain

the reader's goodwill through a display of human fallibility. Like Eliot's Tarot pack note and Empson's note to *China*, they undermine the poet's position in order to consolidate it.

* * *

I would like to conclude this discussion of the affinities between Eliot's and Empson's self-annotation by returning to Empson's objection to the snobbish, schoolmasterly tone of *The Waste Land* notes. This is not a minor complaint – it is a fundamental criticism. In the ideal of poetic self-annotation Empson sets out in *Obscurity and Annotation*, he attaches special importance to tone. To him, the tone of a poet's notes – the language they employ and the attitudes they convey – is crucial; the notes' substance, the type of information they provide, is a secondary matter. While he allows for an extremely liberal range of information that notes can legitimately supply, as far as language is concerned, he sees no alternatives – the only permissible language is language that is "simple", "casual[…]", and "good-humoured" (Empson 1987c: 80, 71). Tone alone, he believes, can overcome the problems that make self-annotation necessary in the first place, the most important of which are the new epistemological conditions, under which the idea of shared general knowledge is no longer viable. This lack of solid common ground, he argues, does not have to lead to communication breakdown – it "could be got over sensibly enough" if the poets supplied their own poems with notes and, in these notes, "were sufficiently sure of themselves to adopt the right tone" (71–72).

In this sense, Eliot's notes provided Empson with a useful anti-model for his own self-annotation. Yet there are also, as I have tried to show, important affinities between the two poets' self-annotation. Although Eliot and Empson approached the activity of self-annotation in different circumstances and impelled by different motives and critical attitudes, their notes often perform similar rhetorical gestures, enter similar interactions with the reader, and employ similar strategies of simultaneously subverting and asserting authorial authority.

Empson seems, then, to have transferred to his own self-annotation practice some of the rhetorical features of *The Waste Land* notes, while at the same time tempering and slackening into casualness their generally formal tone. (And the seeds even of some of the informality of his notes may, I suggested, already be found in Eliot's notoriously dry notes.) He also intensifies these features, making them a consistent and salient characteristic of his self-annotation, where in Eliot they are only occasional and often muted. *The Waste Land* notes can be said, then, to have offered a self-annotation model that Empson both challenged and assimilated – and, in assimilating, adjusted and extended. Empson's notes do not simply counteract Eliot's: they resist and replicate them at the same time.

The common critical view of Eliot's and Empson's notes as polar opposites – this study's starting point – thus seems too absolute. *The Waste Land* notes could

well be one of the smaller, more specific facets of Eliot's general influence on Empson – an influence of whose pervasiveness Empson was keenly aware:

> I feel, like most other verse writers of my generation, that I do not know for certain how much of my own mind [Eliot] invented, let alone how much of it is a reaction against him or indeed a consequence of misreading him. He has a very penetrating influence, perhaps not unlike an east wind. (Empson 1965: 35)

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