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ARCHETYPAL CRITICISM:
One Road to Understanding

Ву

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This paper was submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for Independent study--English 456

Fall 1972

Approved

Grade

Date

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December 15,1972

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# GENERAL HISTORY, MEANING, AND STRUCTURE OF ARCHETYPAL CRITICISM

There are as many ways to approach a piece of literature critically as there are roads to Rome. Each approach has its strengths and weaknesses; its advantages and disadvantages. In the twentieth century, renewed interest has been given to one critical approach which is based upon myth and the unconscious. Not until the turn of the century was the creation of the myth investigated and the subconscious mind explored. These studies lead to the identification of archetypal criticism as a system of literary analysis and interpretation. In my investigation of the archetypal approach, emphasis will be given to the general history, meaning and structure of archetypes as well as to the influences they have exerted on modern poetry. Because of his great interests in myth and in archetypal criticism, I chose the poetry of Thomas Stearns Eliot to demonstrate how the particular archetype of rebirth is manifested in modern poetry.

Many scholars feel that archetypes have existed since the earliest man. On the walls of his cave, he gave form and life to the unconscious forms which haunted his psyche. Although man has always been influenced by archetypes, not until the early 1700's did anyone recognize that these forms were viable forces exerted on man's creative abilities:

"Giambattista Vico in his Scienza Nuova in 1725 elaborated

the theory that myth was a kind of poetic language, the only language that man was capable of in his primitive stage of existence. Vico was unable to distinguish poetry from myth." (Wimsatt and Brooks, <u>Literary Criticism</u>, p. 700.) Because of his extensive study and research, Vico can be seen as one of the first pioners in the field of archetypal criticism. Unfortunately, his work is limited because he failed to see myth and poetry as two separate entities. Yet, Vico gave us a beginning by breaking the ice on the wonderful flowing river of the archetypal approach to literature when he established the fact that poetry and myth are definitely related.

Vico's ideas were studied and reviewed in the twentieth century by poets and writers. As these thoughts stimulated and encouraged their thinking, the idea of the relation of myth to poetry became more popular and was gradually developed to a greater extent. Such men as Nietzsche, Kent, Croce, and Cassirer recognized that man does indeed allow archetypes embedded in his subconscious to spill forth in his literature, religion, and philosophy: As Wimsatt and Brooks note, "Cassirer associated primordial language with intense emotional experience, we assume, arises man's imaginative creations, which include his poetry. If the poetry relies on the emotional experiences and the experiences rely on primordial language, then a definite relationship between poetry and myth can be detected.

Although much interest was aroused by these earlier philsophers, not until 1934 was the definite link between poetry and myth or archetypes successfully completed. this year, Maud Bodkin published her Archetypal Patterns in Poetry, which quickly became a literary landmark. For the first time, poetry was carefully studied and scanned to find evidence of the existence of basic motifs or patterns. Bodkin, in her brillant, intense study, proved that myth and poetry were related and that archetypes are manifested in poetry, whether consciously or unconsciously, by the poet. Archetypal Patterns in Poetry more than any other work established the validity of archetypal criticism in literary study. The noted critic, Northrop Frye, was especially impressed with Bodkin's ideas. In his An Anatomy of Criticism, he expresses his support of her views and acknowledges the value of archetypal criticism.

Suzanne Langer also support Bodkin's thoughts, but she felt Bodkin has missed one valuable point. In her Philosophy in a New Key, she carries Bodkin's views a step further: "Legend and myth and fairy tale are not in themselves literature, they are not art at all, but fantasies; as such, however, they are the natural naterials of art." (Quoted by Wimsatt and Brooks, p. 708.) Langer feels that myth, as such, is not poetry although it has the potential of shaping and influencing the art of poetry. While Bodkin sees myth or archetypal patterns as essentially poetic art, Langer

says that both are separate forces with the former influencing the latter.

No study of archetypal criticism would be complete without some discussion of Jungian psychology. Although many scholars and writers have been interested in archetypal patterns, few people actually understand where they originate or how they are formed: "Archetype is a term brought into literary criticism from the depth psychology of Carl Jung, who holds that behind each individual's unconscious - the blocked-off residue of his past - lies the collective unconscious of the human race - the blocked-off memory of our racial past, even of our prehuman experiences." (Holman, A Handbook to Literature, p. 40.) Dr. Jung gave literary criticism the tools to work with in talking about archetypal criticism. Without his concepts and theories, this literary approach could scarcely enjoy the popularity it does today. Jung's major contribution was his theory of "the racial memory which gave rise to the idea of collective unconscious." (Guerin, p.135.) Jung felt that the mind was equipped with the ability to know the ancient history and past of his ancestors. "Jung felt myth-forming structural elements are ever-present in the unconscious psyche." (Guerin, p.135.) Even before birth, the mind has the potential for formulating structures with the myth it will acquire as it matures. When the mind is finally introduced to the myth (some scholars feel this introduction begins at the time of conception), the

structural elements began to shape themselves into archetypes. "This collective unconscious consists of pre-existent forms, the archetypes, which can only become conscious secondarily and which give definite form to certain psychic contents." (Gordon, <u>Literature in Critical Perspectives</u>, p. 504.)

Within the collective unconscious lies the myth of the culture: "Myths are the means by which archetypes, essentially unconscious forms, become manifest and articulate to the conscious mind." (Guerin, p.136.) Therefore, we can assume that archetypes exist in the unconscious and through the working of myth they become manifest to the conscious. If the myth is the vehicle for the archetype and through it the archetype expresses itself, then archetypal patterns arising out of the myth certainly can become an intimate part of poetry as well as of other arts in a culture. As Guerin, Labor, Morgan, and Willingham, note, "Every people has its own distinctive mythology which may be reflected in legend, folklore, and ideology." (p.115.) As soon as a child is born into a particular society, acculturation begins and the child acquires the myth of that culture. He is conditioned by myths as they are reflected in the value system, religion, philosophies, and superstitions of his group. As time passes, his behavior, thoughts, and modes of expressing himself reflect the distinctive myths of his society. "Myths are, by nature,

collective and communal; they bind a tribe or a nation together in that people's common psychological and spiritual activities." (Guerin, p. 116.) The sharing of the myth ties the group together and distinguishes it from others.

Another aspect of myth which must be considered is that "Myth is fundamental, the dramatic representation of our deepest instinctual life...." (Guerin, p. 115.) This statement asserts the power of myth to shape and determine our life on almost all points. After acquiring the society's myths the member of the group acts, talks, expresses himself and thinks in ways which correspond with those myths. He is forever bound to their influences and demonstrates their existence in everything he does. An interesting point to make here is that no society can escape the influences of its myths. In America, for example, we are surrounded by symbols which manifest our myths. The gangsters and cowboys, whom we often choose as our heroes reflect the myth of the survival of the fittest which is so much a part of American life. Also the Statue of Liberty, the flag, and football games -- cach demonstrates the love for freedom and the admiration of physical endurance which have always characterized out people.

Although archetypal criticism has valuable possibilities for literature, it also has potential for other areas. At the turn of the century, a group of English anthropologists called

the Cambridge Hellenists conducted a study to apply their discoveries in myth and ritualistic origin to the understanding of classics. (Guerin, p. 123.) Through their studies on man and his development, the group became interested in ritual and religions. Sir James G. Frazer in his The Golden Bough, which arose from the Cambridge study, demonstrated that +ke "essential similarity of man's chief wants everywhere and at all times... are reflected throughout ancient mythology." (Guerin, pp. 123-124.) Since the myths of particular cultures have remained intact and relatively unchanged, archetypal patterns have remained relatively the same over countless centuries. Therefore, the patterns which were manifested in poetry years ago (as well as other literary forms) are identifable in modern poetry also. Man's deepest fears, desires, and aspirations are easily seen in his mythology and, thus, in his literature. Since archetypes are on an instinctual level, they would naturally reflect the deepest feelings and "instincts" of man. Because archetypes arise from myth, and because they are on an instinctual, unconscious level, they could easily become an integral part of a poem or other work of art without the poet or artist ever being aware of its existence or influence.

### THOMAS STEARNS ELIOT AND ARCHETYPAL CRITICISM

T. S. Eliot, besides being one of the most significant and influential poets of the twentieth century. was also a billiant, critic. His lectures and essays pertaining to poetry; are among the best that have ever been written. Eliot felt the critic has the opportunity of opening new doors and shedding new light on all works of art. To him, the critic acts somewhat as the "middle man" between the artist, his art work, and the observer. Although criticism is important to all areas, literature, specifically poetry, is especially dependent upon the critic's ability to awaken the sensibilities of poetry readers. Eliot had definite ideas concerning the critic's responsibility in analysing poetry. An essay entitled "Frontiers of Criticism," written in 1957 contains Eliot's thoughts concerning critics . He said, "So the critic to whom I am most grateful is the one who can make me look at something I have never looked at before, or looked at only with eyes clouded by prejudice, set me face to face with it and then leave me alone with it. From that point, I must rely upon my own sensibility, intelligence, and capacity for wisdom." (T.S. Eliot, On Poetry and Poets, p. 131.) Therefore, even with the critic's supreme effort, the final interpretation of the poem lies with the reader. As Eliot's interest in criticism grew, he began to explore the works of other

scholars in criticism. He became particularly interested in myth and archetypal criticism. In November of 1923 in The Dial in London, Eliot published an article in which he said, "The mythical method, I seriously believe, is a step towards making the modern world possible for art, towards...order and form." (Drew, p. 1.) Eliot began to search other references in dealing with myth and archetypes. Soon, he came across Sir James Frazer's The Goden Bough, which proved to have a profound impact on Eliot and his work. In "Notes on The Waste Land," Eliot acknowledged his indebtedness to this anthropological masterpiece. Not only did The Golden Bough influence the writing of The Waste Land, but it also helped shape the myth contained in many of his other poems. The ancient vegetation rites and the myth of the dying god particularly fascinated Eliot and influenced his treatment of the archetypal pattern of rebirth in his poetry.

Probably the greatest treatment of this pattern is exemplified in Eliot's best known work, The Waste Land which was published in 1922. The poem, divided into five sections, is a complicated interweaving and mingling of myth, legend, and plot. Because of its difficulty and complexity, the poem can be read on many levels. Since this paper is concerned with archetypal criticism, emphasis will be placed on the archetype of rebirth and its manifestation in the poem.

Section I, of The Waste Land, "The Burial of the Dead," opens with

April is the cruellest month, breeding Lilacs out of the dead land,

A statement which begins the manifestation of the rebirth pattern. April is the beginning or the awakening of a new life and the dying of the old. With the introduction of April as the time of the poem, the associations of Easter and the beginning of spring after the cold deadness of winter immediate evoke the rebirth theme. The reference to April as the "cruellest month" may be due to the fact that April as the beginning of a new cycle of growth and planting required change and new responsibilities of man. Since man basically resists change and hard work, April can be viewed as bing cruel.) Following this passage, Eliot includes such works as "mixing," "stirring," and "feeding" which all suggest action and life. Also the line,

stirring/ Dull roots with spring rain suggests a rebirth of vegetation in the springoften their long winter's sleep.

The second portion of the first section begins with references to Madame Sosostris, famous chairvoyante who had powers to predict the future. She relates the fate of the protagonist by showing him his card...

Here, said she, Is your card, the drowned Phonnician Sailor, (Those are pearls that were his eyes. Look!) From her words, one clearly knows that a change has occurred in the dead sailor. In death, he has undergone a change, a rejuvenation which has transformed his eyes into pearls. After death, he has been reborn into a different, but strangley beautiful and appealing immortality. Madame Sosostris continues her fortune telling and interprets the card.

Fear death by water.

"...She warns him against death by water, not realizing any more than do the other inhabitants of the modern waste land that the way into life may be by death itself."

(Brooks, "The Beliefs Embodied in the Work," p. 63.) The people of the waste land live in a dream, and lack the ability to face reality. They are crowds of people, walking round in a ring following the same patterns every day, not living, only existing. Like the Mariner in Coleridge's "Rime of the Ancient Mariner," they are caught in a never-ending curse of living yet being dead of the same time. Madame Sosostris's prophesy of death, although she does not realize it, offers a type of life. The water, with its purging affect, could serve as the force which would destroy the inability of the inhaditants of the waste land to end their ineffectiveness; therefore, bringing about a new life, a new growth, a rebirth!

Finally in "The Burial of the Dead" in the dialogue between Stetson and the protagonist another manifestation of the rebirth archetype is found.

"That corpse you planted last year in your garden, "Has it begun to sprout? Will it bloom this year?

Some scholars have speculated that the corpse represents a memory which the protagonist sacks to forget. Although this theory is a bit far-fetched, there is no doubt that the buried corpse, resembles the buried god of the ancient fertility rites described by Frazer in The Golden Bough. The cold corpse is expected to give rise to new life, hence exemplifying rebirth. In the final lines of this section, a warning is made.

"On keep the Dog far hence, that's friend to men,
"Or with his nails he'll dig it up again!

The Dog must be kept away from the buried god for if
allowed to do so, he will dig it up and stop the rebirth

cycle. In an essay entitled "The Homanism of Irving

Babbitt," Eliot himself commented on these line. He said,

"I am inclined to take the Dog as Humanitarianism and the

related philosophies which in their concern for man, extirpate
the supernatural-dig up the corpse...and prevent the rebirth

of life." 17 Eliot seems to believe that within man there
is a dire need to have hope in his ability to be reborn

or reincarnated into another form after his death.

Unfortunately, this hope of rebirth is constantly being
bombarded by science, reason, and history which seek to help

man, but often end up destroying his dreams.

The second section of <u>The Waste Land</u> is called "A Game of Chess." The rebirth pattern here is subtly suggested and only through careful scrunity can it be <u>detected</u>. Perhaps the first reference to the theme comes in the Philomel passage.

The change of Philomel, by the barbarous king So rudely forced; yet there the nightingale Filled all the desert with inviolable voice

Under the firelight, under the brush, her hair Spread out in fiery points Glowed into words, then would be savagely still.

The scene of Fhilomel, the beautiful damsel, after being assaulted by the barbarian king, is intensified by the voice of the nightingale crying out in the desert. But, in the last three lines of the passage, Philomel has been transformed into a supernatural force whose words have powerful potential. The passage repeats the theme of the dying god, the theme of the death which is the door to life.

Again in the dialogue passage the rebirth pattern is introduced.

I remember Those are pearls that were his eyes.

The line, repeated from the first section, "The Burial of the Dead," again infers a kind of rebirth. The dead are transformed into a weird but strangely appealing form.

Death becomes the passage to a new life with uncanny beauty and attraction. Death becomes an introduction to rebirth.

In section III, "The Fire Sermon," the famous Fisher King legend comes into play. In some ancient cultures, the fish was used as a fertility and life symbol; therefore, the Fisher King title connotes life and fertility. (Brooks, P. 71)

While I was fishing in the dull canal On a winter evening round behind the gashouse Musing upon the king my brother's wreck The narrator as he is fishing, is symbolic of the search for life. He seeks to find some hope which will awaken the sleeping dead of the waste land. Unfortunately every image in this section suggest sterile death with no hope for life or rebirth. Therefore, regardless of his efforts, he will fail to revive the dry bones.

The short fourth section called "Death by Water," suspends the reader between death and life, but still resounds the faith in rebirth as it ends on a note of the recurrance of the cycle of time.

A current under sea Picked his bones in whispers. As he rose and fell He passed the stages of his age and youth

O you who turn the wheel and look to windward, Consider Phlebas, who was once handsome and tall as you.

Cleanth Brooks in an essay concerning The Waste Land said
"'Death by Water' gives an instance of the conquest of
death and time, the perpetual recurrence of determined seasons,
the world of spring and autumn, birth and dying through
death itself." Death comes for all men, but through the
process of time and the cycle of life, rebirth into new
forms and shapes becomes possible. Probably the single
most important function of section IV, in terms of the
purpose of this paper, is that it serves to pave the way for
the rebirth archetype in section V.

In the final section, entitled "What the Thunder Said," the archetype of rebirth reaches its fullest and clearest manifestation. The section opens on a note of questioning and doubt.

After the agony in stony places
The shouting and the crying
Prison and palace and reverberation
Of thunder of spring over distant mountains
If there were only water amongst the rock
There is not even silence in the mountains
But dry sterile thunder without rain

When the protagonist asks when shall spring return, he also asks when will he be relieved from his suffering. He knows that spring brings with it hope and rebirth for the desolation and despair of the waste land, but it will also bring him out of his agony. He hopes that spring with its refreshing, reviving rains will soon arrive even though, at present all things are desolate and dry. The medicinal rains will come bringing relief to tired and suffering souls. A rebirth from the old to the new will come. In the middle of the fifth section, although it is ever so subtly done, the rebirth archetype is fully manifested.

Who is the third who walks always beside you? When I count, there are only you and I together But when I look ahead up the white road. There is always another one walking beside you

I do not know whether a man or a woman But who is that on the other side of you?

Brooks says that the third figure is the god who has returned, has risen, but the travelers cannot tell whether it is really he, or mere illusion induced by their delirium, ("The Beliefs Embodied in the Work," p.77.) He is dead and buried in section I, but he is alive and well in section V, reborn into a revived creature. Unfortunately the travelers

do not recognize him, for they have all blinded by insensitivity, passiveness, and buman conceit. The thunder, however, does realize who the reborn god is and he speaks to him in Sanscrit: Datta, Dayadhuam (Sympathize), Damuata (Control). (Brooks, p. 70.) The thunder pleas for the god to sympathize with man in his foolishness and the control his actions and his being which will amaken man to the reality around him. The rebirth pattern which began section I is carried throughout the poem and rises to its peak in section V. Both sections complement each other in developing different aspect of the pattern. Section I is truly the burial of the dead god, or, the tale, while section V is the reviving, rising god, of the Spring.

To demonstrate that Eliot's interests in archetypal criticism and the archetypal pattern of rebirth did not end with <u>The Waste Land</u>, two other poems, "Ash Wednesday" and "The Little Gidding" will be included here.

"Ash Wednesday," published in 1930, is divided into six untitled section. As are Eliot's other poems, "Ash Wednesday" is complicated and fuses several myths and themes into one framework. Because only sections I, II, and III deal with the rebirth theme, they will be the only sections included in this analysis.

Section I opens on a note of despair since the narrator sees himself as hopeless. He cries

Because I know I shall not know The one veritable transitory power. Although the narrator is despondent he still says
that there is hope if he can only find it. There is a
transitory power which can alleviate his sorrow and suffering;
a power which can give his rebirth to a new way of life.

In section II, this rebirth for the nerrator begins.

As the section opens, one knows immediately that the narrator has undergone a remarkable change or transformation.

Lady, three white leopards sat under a juniper tree In the cool of the day, having fed to satisty On my legs my heart my liver and that which had been contained In the hollow round of my skull.

Although the narrator has undoubtedly served as a feast for the leopards, he has not died for he still speaks.

"The three white leopards are in the tradition of all the devouring myths in which the hero is swallowed and emerges regenerated." (Drew, p.107.) The hero or the narrator, after the leopards have devoured him, does not actually emerge, but he undergoes a different type of regeneration.

Because of the goodness of this Lady And because of her loveliness, and because She honours the Virgin in meditation, We shine with brightness. And I who here dissembled Proffer my deeds to oblivion,

The Lady and her saintly spirit will bring renewed life to the remaining parts and dried bones. Through her loveliness and goodness, the narrator will again know life, hence he will be reborn. Before his transformation, the remains of the narrator do not mourn their condition for even if they remained separated, they say they are still in a better condition than they were before.

Under a juniper tree the bones sang, scattered and shining. We are glad to be scattered, we did little good to each other, Under a tree in the cool of the day, with the blessing of sand, Forgetting themselves and each other, united In the quiet of the desert.

Perhaps the bones realize that only through the death of their previous combination can they hope to be transformed or reborn into a new being. Now that the bones are scattered, they rejoice for the rebith process can now begin.

In section VI the narrator or protagonist is found in The dream crossed twilight between birth and dying

This is the time of tension between dying and birth. He is caught between death in his scattered condition, and rebirth with the hope of "the one veritable transitory power" coming to save him. Naturally the question arises as to what exactly is this power which has the ability to transform and rebuild destroyed life. In the final segment of this section, the protagonist/narrator makes a prayer or supplication which Elizabeth Drew describes as a supplication that he may not be separated from the knowledge of the one veritable transitory power which has been vouch-safed to him, that beloved and guiding figure who is the spirit of life and love...(p.117.) The protagonist addresses this transitory power or spirit as

Sister, mother And spirit of the river, spirit of the sea, Suffer one not to be separated

And let my cry come unto Thee.

He cries that he may not be separated from love but rather let him be united with it; hence, through the spirit of the Lady which is love and life he will be reborn.

Finally, Eliot employs the archetype of rebirth in his "Little Gidding" which is part of the <u>Four Ouartets</u> published in 1943. In sections I, IV, and V the rebirth pattern is especially evident. Section I opens on a note of celebration because of the rebirth of spring after winter.

Midwinter spring it its own season Simpiternal though sadden towards sundown,

The brief sum flames the ice, on pond and ditches, In windless cold that is the heart's heat,

These lines describe the renewed life brought by
the spring in terms of its marvelous beauty. As the
passage contrasts spring and winter, the hope of rebirth and
renewed life becomes more apparent and vivid. Spring comes
with transitory power bringing new life and change. This,
of course, is closely related to the ancient vegetation
myths and fertility rites. In addition to the celebration
of the coming spring and rebirth is the promise of
pentecostal fire.

And glow more intense than blaze of branch or brazier, Stirs the dumb spirit: no wind, but pentecostal fire In the dark time of the year.

The pentecostal fire symbolizes the fulfillment of the promise of rebirth. The fire captures the spirit of the spring. The life-giving, eternal power of pentecostal fire comes in the dark time of the year and transforms the

darkness into light. Although spring will bring the promise of rebirth, the fire of pentecost will be its symbol. The fire will come, but it will be a two-fold fire. In section IV one is faced with a choice concerning the fire.

The only hope, or else despair

Lies in the choice of pyre or pyre 
To be redeemed from fire by fire.

The fire may bring destruction or can serve to transform us into different human beings devoid of self-love and conceit. The fire can either be the force that destroys or the force that perserves: we must choose. This type of rebirth or rejuvenation comes only by the choice of the individual to suffer the pains of sacrifice which will give him a new life of concern and love for others.

In section V, the rebirth theme is stated in the first lines.

What we call the beginning is often the end And to make an end is to make a beginning. The end is where we start from.

These lines restate the continuity and co-existence of death and rebirth. A cycle which man constantly follows is outlined. It goes on whether by reincarnation of dead spirit, or through the daily purging of the soul which becomes a type of rebirth. Regardless of how the cycle continues, we must realize that our beginnings are often our ends and the end is where we start from.

Finally, in the stanza, another aspect of the rebirth pattern is developed.

We die with the dying: See, they depart, and we go with them. We are born with the dead: See, they return, and bring us with them.

Man will always be man, repeating the same foolish actions and making the same mistakes. "The dead are alive in the present, their actions can be reborn in us. (Drew,p. 197.) Contemporary man serves to prolong the "lives" of dead men because they become involved in the endless cycle and by refusing to break away from it, new birth is given to the dead ideas of the past. They will live forever!

#### EVALUATION

The independent study I did this semester has proven valuable in many different ways. I have profitted from it both as an English major and as student in general. Probably the most significant aspect of the study was that it proved to be a culminating force establishing ties between my other courses in English. In studying archetypal criticism, I was also able to see definite relationships between English and other disciplines. For example, before this study I had never realized that so much history, sociology, religion, and philosophy was incorporated in literature. In addition, through this work I have acquired a great deal of self-discipline which has improved my study habits. I am convinced that any student who is interested in graduate. school could greatly profit from an independent study.

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