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Car poétique rime avec musique

A Tomopoetic Reading of *Tristan* and *TheWaste Land*

Axel Nesme

RÉSUMÉ. Cet article se focalise sur deux écrivains modernistes qui présentent deux avatars d'un wagnérisme critique dans leur traitement de l'intertexte wagnérien. Je m'efforce de montrer que Thomas Mann et T.S. Eliot font échec à la fascination morbide que cherche à exercer la mélodie infinie en mettant en œuvre une poétique de la coupe intertextuelle ou « tomopoétique ». Dans *Tristan*, Thomas Mann illustre les dangers du wagnérisme mimétique, dont l'incarnation parodique est un écrivain manqué dont la fascination acritique pour le compositeur oscille entre paraphrase et mélecture. Dans sa propre *ekphrasis* du *Liebestod*, Mann isole les ruptures du tissu du drame wagnérien qui favorisent une lecture plus incisive de son œuvre. Déplaçant ensuite l'accent sur les citations de Wagner reprises dans *The Waste Land*, je cherche à montrer que le traitement éliotesque de l'intertexte wagnérien se traduit par une mise en abyme de la voix et sa progressive spectrification. Les emprunts d'Eliot à Wagner me semblent isomorphes du destin de la voix aussi bien dans sa réécriture du mythe de Philomèle que dans ses allusions au gramophone, instrument qui détache la voix de son origine secrète tout en préservant son « inviolabilité ». Je montre qu'Adorno et Lacan permettent d'éclairer cette mise au secret du « processus de production » vocal, avant de conclure que Mann et Eliot mettent tous deux en lumière ce que Lacoue-Labarthe nomme la « césure dans la continuité du discours musical » qui marque la place du sujet comme rythme.

ABSTRACT. *In this paper I focus on two modernist writers who, in their handling of the Wagnerian intertext, offer complementary versions of critical Wagnerianism. I argue that Thomas Mann and T.S. Eliot counter the morbid fascination that Wagner's endless melody seeks to achieve by developing similar poetics of the intertextual cut, or "tomopoetics." In Tristan, Thomas Mann illustrates the dangers of mimetic Wagnerianism, parodied in the character of a failed writer whose acritical fascination with the composer oscillates between the poles of paraphrase and misreading. In his own* ekphrasis *of the* Liebestod*, Mann singles out those breaks within the seamless fabric of Wagner's musical drama which foster a more incisive reception of his work. Shifting my focus to the Wagnerian quotes featured in* The Waste Land*, I argue that Eliot's treatment of the Wagnerian intertext results in a* mise en abyme *of the voice and its growing spectrification. I suggest that Eliot's Wagnerian borrowings are isomorphic with the destiny of the voice both in his rewriting of the myth of Philomel and in his references to the gramophone, an instrument that disconnects the voice from its hidden origin while keeping it forever "inviolable." I argue that Adorno and Lacan offer valuable insights into this concealment of the vocal "production process," then conclude that Both Mann and Eliot bring to light what Lacoue-Labarthe calls the "caesura within the continuity of musical discourse," which marks the space of the subject as rhythm.*

MOTS-CLÉS : césure, citation, Eliot, intertextualité, Mann, rythme, voix acousmatique, Wagner

KEYWORDS: *acousmatic voice, caesura, Eliot, intertextuality, Mann, rhythm, quotation, Wagner*

My contention in this paper is that if it is true that poetry rhymes with music, when it comes to T.S. Eliot's relationship with Richard Wagner's operas, it would be more appropriate to think in terms of slant rhyme, if not, on occasions, downright dissonance, as may be gathered from an early piece entitled "Opera" (*Inventions* 17) where Eliot seizes upon Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde* in order to inveigh in Nietzschean fashion against that "extreme emotionalism" that he later on called a "symptom of decadence." In certain instances, of course, Eliot's Wagnerian borrowings widen the spectrum of interpretive possibilities. Thus, in the closing lines of "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," the persona who hears "the mermaids singing each to each" has its mirror image in the buffoonish, lovelorn Alberich of Wagner's *Rheingold*, cursing love in order to avenge himself of the Rhine daughters' mockery— the same Rhine daughters' whose "Weialala leia" incidentally resonates in "The Fire Sermon" (Eliot 1978, 45, ll.. 277-8) as it does in the final scene of Wagner's *Götterdämmerung*, while the flames of the funeral pyre consume the thunder god's castle. When it comes to *The Waste Land*, however, Wagnerian references are not mere variations of the poem's main motifs, like the shepherd's "öd und leer das Meer" (l. 42) presaging the emotional desert where the personae of "A Game of Chess" interact. Instead, I hope to show that Eliot's treatment of Wagnerian intertextuality enacts a poetics of the cut that poses a direct challenge to the prototypical Wagnerian compositional device that is the "unending melody," vindicating vocal artifice in direct opposition to Wagner's striving towards natural speech. An interesting parallel may be drawn between Eliot's poetic treatment of the Wagnerian intertext and another modernist's attempt at exorcizing the demon of mimetic Wagnerianism using the specific resources of the novella, as Thomas Mann does in *Tristan*. As a preamble to my discussion of *The Waste Land*, I will attempt to show how Mann exposes the literary pitfalls of acritical Wagner worship, which easily translates into paraphrase or, at the very least, derivative writing. Instead, Mann advocates a parodic approach to the score and libretto of *Tristan und Isolde*, emphasizing the subtle discontinuities that break the flow of the melodic line. I will then examine how Eliot's textual borrowings from Wagner highlight the paradoxical status of the voice as the medium of absence and discontinuity and as the locus of a *caesura* at the heart of subjectivity.

"Modernism, as a phenomenon encompassing all the arts," Jed Rasula writes, "reflects the seismic impact of melomania, the nineteenth-century elevation of music to top-dog status." Long before Eliot's poem, that "last gasp of Wagnerism" (97), the German novelist Thomas Mann exposed what he felt to be the dangers of this melo-Wagnero-mania and of the *Gesamkunstwerk*'s hegemony threatening to silence the specificity of individual arts. Those concerns are reflected in the novella

Tristan where we find an interesting prose avatar of the poetics of the cut —call it a "tomopoetics"— that Eliot later on puts into practice in *The Waste Land*.

Thomas Mann's project, in writing *Tristan*, was partially to implement Nietzsche's tongue in cheek precept in *The Case of Wagner*:

> "But the content of the Wagnerian texts! Their mythic content! their eternal content!" — Question: how can we test this content, this eternal content? — The chemist replies: translate Wagner into reality, into the modern —let us be even crueler— into the bourgeois! What becomes of Wagner then? Among ourselves, I have tried it. Nothing is more entertaining, nothing to be recommended more highly for walks, than retelling Wagner in more youthful proportions: for example Parsifal as a candidate for a theological degree with secondary school education (the latter being indispensable for pure foolishness). What surprises one encounters in the process! Would you believe it? All of Wagner's heroines, without exception, as soon as they are stripped of their heroic skin, become almost indistinguishable from Madame Bovary! (175-6).

Thomas Mann follows this recipe to the letter by setting the action of *Tristan* in a sanatorium named Einfried. In the novella's incipit, we are told that "the director of the establishment… holds sway in his abrupt and reserved manner over his patients—over all these people who are too weak to impose laws upon themselves and obey them, and who therefore lavish their fortunes on Dr. Leander in return for the protection of his rigorous regime." In the German text, the expression translated here as "holds sway" is actually "hält… in seinem Bann" (*Erzählungen* 236), meaning more precisely that Doctor Leander, like Wotan summoning the fire god Loge to surround Brünnhilde's rock with flames, and like Wagner the sorcerer himself with his enthralled audiences, holds his patients *under his spell*. It is thus abundantly clear from the outset that Mann is embarking on a critique of Wagnerianism as a prosthetic aesthetics, so to speak, a makeshift alienating superegoic construct that its aficionados embrace as a tyrannical substitute for their own lost autonomy, i.e., their inability to legislate over themselves.

The sanatorium's name, Einfried, a transparent allusion to Wagner's own Wahnfried, the house in Bayreuth where the composer declared that his illusions had found peace, also suggests that Einfried might turn out to be a place where Bovaresque illusions will play out. Where Mann adds an extra twist to Nietzsche's recommendation to transpose Wagner's heroines into a bourgeois setting is in the novelist's opting to endow the story's chief *male* character with the features of Flaubert's heroin. As for the *female* protagonist, Gabriele Klöterjahn, she is a gifted amateur pianist suffering from a disease of the trachea that will prove fatal. The narrator describes the young patient's head as "ineffably delicate, sweet, languid, […] touching unearthly and lovely" (95)[1], thus betraying the influence on Mann's narrator of symbolist aesthetics reflected in Rilke's definition of art as "the reconciliation of the Individual and the All," a reconciliation best achieved by portraying diaphanous characters who, as Maeterlinck said about Ibsen, "are living

[1]All quotations from *Tristan* are from David Luke's translation.

in an atmosphere of the soul" (qtd. in Rasula 132). While her physical appearance may thus well appeal to *fin-de-siècle* sensitivity, Gabriele herself is actually quite down-to-earth. She is happily married to a businessman whose prosaic interests Mann contrasts with the decadent aestheticism of the novella's anti-hero, the writer Detlev Spinell. Nicknamed "the putrefied infant" (99) by some of the sanatorium's guests who have noticed his bad teeth, Spinell is portrayed as an odd bird whose "aesthetic sensibilities" (99) give rise to histrionic outbursts of poetic enthusiasm, and who is also a bit of a poseur, although a man of limited literary accomplishments, as we soon find out:

> On his desk, permanently on view to anyone who entered his room, lay the book he had written. It was a novel of moderate length with a completely baffling cover design, printed on the kind of paper one might use for filtering coffee, in elaborate typography with every letter looking like a Gothic cathedral. Fräulein von Osterloh had read it in an idle quarter of an hour and had declared it to be 'refined,' which was her polite circumlocution for 'unconscionably tedious.' Its scenes were set in fashionable drawing rooms and luxurious boudoirs full of exquisite objets d'art, full of Gobelin tapestries, very old furniture, priceless porcelain, rare materials and artistic treasures of every sort. They were all described at length and with loving devotion […]. (100)

Although Spinell turns out to be a devoted Wagnerian, his literary inclinations make him the polar opposite of the Wagnerian gymnast extolled by Nietzsche in his *Untimely Meditations*. Instead he qualifies as one of those backward-looking artists about whom Nietzsche writes that:

> they cannot serve life, and they are dead while they are still breathing: he who feels true, fruitful life within him, however, —and at present that means music — could he be misled for a moment into expecting anything further from something that exhausts itself in figures, forms, and styles? He has gone beyond all vanities of this sort; and he thinks of discovering artistic wonders outside his ideal world of sound as little as he expects great writers still to emerge from our exhausted and colorless languages. (217-8)

To readers of Eliot's *Waste Land*, Spinell's overwrought description of opulent interiors will no doubt be reminiscent of the elaborate backdrop against which the first section of "A Game of Chess" is set. Mann, whose perspective merges in this instance with that of one of the novella's unsophisticated secondary characters, implies that the "loving devotion" Spinell's writing exhibits is a symptom of its lack of actual inspiration. This lack is hinted at early on in the text when we discover the "rather surprising" fact that Spinell "had not written any other books but this one" (100). What Mann investigates in the novella is partially the cause of this sterility, which he traces back to the writer's Wagnerian idolatry, and more specifically, to the sycophantic literary mimeticism that it fosters.

In order to diagnose the dangers inherent in the would-be writer's embrace of Wagnerianism, Mann brings his story to a climax in chapter 8 where, while most of the sanatorium's patients have gone off on a sleigh ride, Spinell and Gabriele are

left practically alone, and the former talks the latter into playing on the piano some of his favorite extracts from *Tristan*. Blinded by his fascination with Wagner's music and his fantasized communion with Gabriele, Spinell indirectly causes the death of the woman whose disease takes a turn for the worse after her pianistic performance. That, we might say, is the diegetic expression of Mann's misgivings about the variety of uncritical Wagnerian worship Spinell embodies. No less important to Mann as a writer, however, is the literary impact of Spinell's devotion to the composer.

In a recent study on German modernism, Walter Frisch mentions Mann's often-quoted 1901 letter to his brother Heinrich where Mann referred to the story as a "*burlesque*." The critic then challenges Karsten Witte's characterization of the novella as a "comic *Imitatio* [with] its typical characteristic [of] a tension-filled opposition of subject and treatment, of elevated claim and baser effect. Incongruence shapes form." Frisch's conclusion, instead, is that "although Mann used the term burlesque, parody might be more useful to describe the range of techniques in *Tristan*" (200). Predictably enough, this demarcation does not hold up to scrutiny, especially in light of chapter 8, where the narrator's writing alternates between imitation, parody, and downright recitation. The two paragraphs beginning with "He sat beside her" (116-117) for instance, begin by offering a precise ekphrastic rendition of the prelude's first bars, which Mann makes individually recognizable at first, tracing the transition from the *Sehnsucht* motif to the love motif, then gradually compressing the remainder of the overture within the limits of the paragraph which, after capturing the story of "suffering and ecstasy" (117) contained in the prelude, ends with the parting of the curtain.

At the point where the sailor's barely audible voice marks the unlikely transition to the first act, Mann moves abruptly from the sublime to the trivial by shifting the focus on to Rätin Spatz's climaxing boredom and its potential gastric manifestations. Bathos thus follows imitation in quick succession before Mann resumes what Frisch calls his "multilevel integration of music and narrative" (196) in paragraphs where the narrator's style becomes gradually indistinguishable from Wagner's own grandiose idiom, either paraphrasing the opera's libretto, or citing it verbatim, though without quotation marks, as if the agency of "the sacred night which is eternal and true, and which unifies all that has been separated" (118) contaminated Mann's own text, where the limits of literary ownership themselves grow dimmer. This may be observed for instance in the invocation, "O sink down, night of love" (118) or in the paragraph ending with the transparent quote from Tristan and Isolde's love duet in which the narrator's stylistic self-alienation culminates: "nicht mehr Tristan, nicht mehr Isolde" (Mann 1986, 270). Even the dashes preceding the irruption of Pastorin Höhlenrauch mirror precisely the catastrophic ending of the lovers' tryst, when Melot and Marke break in on them unannounced, before Mann gradually restores the distance between hypertext and Wagnerian hypotext by zooming in on Gabriele's face as she is about to play Isolde's death, insisting on the motif of the "little blue vein over one eyebrow" that foreshadows Gabriele's demise.

Unlike act 2, Isolde's final monologue then gives rise to a paragraph that is less imitative and/or parodic than critical, in particular when Mann with great acumen

identifies that "almost shameless, sudden *pianissimo* in which the ground seems to slide away under our feet" (119), probably referring to the notation inserted between the lines "soll ich lauschen" and "soll ich schlürfen" leading up to the aria's grand finale. We know from Mann's *Reflections of a Nonpolitical Man*, that the adjective "ruchlos" —meaning godless, impious, blasphemous— carried Nietzschean, Dionysian[2] overtones which would have been utterly inappropriate here if parody had been Mann's sole objective. Instead, in analyzing Wagner's shamelessly unscrupulous *pianissimo* as signifying life's self-assertion beyond good and evil, Thomas Mann hints that Wagner's "spell" may trigger a whole spectrum of responses, from the caricatural homage of derivative writing so enamored with its model that imitation and/or pastiche eventually collapses into servile repetition of the hypotext, to Mann's own variably parodic handling of the Wagnerian theme as inspired by Nietzsche's fourth *Untimely Meditation*, written long before *The Case of Wagner* (1888), when Nietzsche, still a fervent admirer of the composer, wrote that:

> [b]y apparently succumbing to Wagner's overflowing nature, he who reflects upon it has in fact participated in its energy and has thus as it were *through him* acquired power *against him*; and whoever examines himself closely knows that even mere contemplation involves a secret antagonism, the antagonism involved in comparison. (223)

Mann's intervention is an instance of how such energy acquired through Wagner may ultimately be turned "*against* him": it is tantamount to a cut into the continuum of Wagner's soon-to-end "unendliche Melodie." By isolating the *pianissimo* from the rest, Mann disrupts the unity of Isolde's aria and makes it no longer entrancing, but aesthetically meaningful. Indeed, we realize with hindsight that Wagner's greatest appeal to the writer may lie in the temporary interruptions within the seamless fabric of his musical drama, as between the end of the prelude marked by the falling of the curtains and the departure of Rätin Spatz bored beyond recognition; the close of Tristan and Isolde's love duet broken up by the appearance of Pastorin Höhlenrauch wandering aimlessly in her semi-vegetative state; and finally, Mann's own sovereign literary gesture, troping Isolde's last *pianissimo* as a metaphor of Dionysian disregard for the established pieties of the day.

In thus placing the critical apex of the aria, not in Isolde's final F sharp, as one might expect, but just before the *crescendo* leading up to her surrendering to the "resonant spell of the billows," Mann reclaims a temporality that is no longer the mirror image of the aria's linear progression. This is particularly obvious in the sentences that immediately follow the clause "Tiefe Stille" (Mann 1986, 271) intended as the verbal —and therefore verb-less— equivalent of the opera's final chord and of the ensuing silence. At that moment, Gabriele and Spinell hear "the sound of bells" marking the return of the sleighing party. What is lost in the translation of "Das sind Schellen" ("those are bells") is an echo of Isolde's own "Sind es Wellen […] wie sie schwellen." Whether this echo is intended as parody

[2] See Thomas Mann, *Betrachtungen eines Unpolitischen*. 538-9.

matters little here: more intriguing, it seems to me, is the fact that it occurs *beyond* the limits of the paragraph that purports to be the novelistic equivalent of the final aria. Mann's writing thus *sublimely* transgresses the constraints to which it previously seemed to have surrendered itself, asserting its own regained ascendency in the very act of borrowing from the master-inventor of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*. In the process, he accomplishes the breaking of bonds that Susan Howe argues take place when, like the novelist reading Wagner's *pianissimo*, poets begin to "hear with their eyes":

> How do sounds speak to memory? I have brought you out of the land of Egypt and I have broken your bonds. Not true in music where the mind is chained to the vehicle of moving sound. Certain writers hear with their eyes are concerned in their poems and their prose with irregularities and dissipations with monster and mutation. (Howe 1998, 119)

Such "irregularities and dissipations," I now hope to show, are also what focuses Eliot's attention in his handling of the Wagnerian intertext.

The mix of memory and desire that famously characterizes April in the opening lines of *The Waste Land* places Eliot's poem under the thematic aegis of *Sehnsucht*, a German word for which there is no direct English equivalent, since it blends the forward-looking dimension of longing with the backward pull of nostalgia, thus prefiguring the Freudian insight that desire is haunted by repetition compulsion. In Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde*, "Sehnsucht" is a recurring theme in Tristan's soliloquies throughout act III: it is both the force that sustains him while he waits for Isolde's return, and the death drive that he embraces immediately thereafter. This suggests a fairly obvious parallel with Eliot's speaker who, in "The Burial of the Dead," declares, "I was neither/ Living nor dead, and I knew nothing" (ll. 40-1). Indeed, Eliot's quotes from Wagner's opera suggest a number of interpretive tracks that are easy enough to follow for whoever wishes to scrutinize possible thematic and structural correspondences between Wagner's and Eliot's composition.

What interests me primarily is not to speculate on how successfully Eliot emulates Wagner's compositional choices, notably in terms of leitmotif technique. Instead I would like to examine how some of the Wagnerian quotes contained in *The Waste* Land partake of the same anti-absorptive poetics that we have already observed in Thomas Mann's novella.

Why is it, to begin with, that in "The Burial of the Dead," Eliot singles out quotes from two passages that are dramatic low points in *Tristan und Isolde*, and whose melodic sparseness seems so markedly at odds with the hypnotic sweep of Wagner's orchestral and vocal hymn to the union of *eros* and *thanatos*?

In order to answer this question, we need to examine the destiny of another Wagnerian reference, namely the quote from Verlaine's "Parsifal" inserted in "The Fire Sermon": "Et, O ces voix d'enfants, chantant dans la coupole" (l. 202). Inherent in intertextual grafting is the ambiguity of synecdoche, where the part does, yet does not, stand for the whole. Likewise, severing a quote from its original context does not necessarily result in the host text being contaminated with the set of meanings attached to the intertextual transplant prior to its removal. Clearly,

insofar as this operation disrupts the continuity of the text from which the fragment is removed, it also modifies its role in the original's signifying economy.

Thus while Verlaine's sonnet condenses the diegesis of Wagner's opera in a way that leaves little ambiguity as to what passage in *Parsifal* the "voix d'enfants chantant dans la coupole" refer to, namely Parsifal's apotheosis in the seconds preceding the fall of the curtain in the third and final act, this may no longer be the case in the quote's new context. There seems, nonetheless, to prevail a critical consensus as to the specific passage at the end of Wagner's opera that Eliot alludes to *via* Verlaine, a passage where the children's voices are indeed heard singing from the very top of the dome. By means of Eliot's cut into the signifying fabric of Verlaine's sonnet, however, the line loses its semantic mooring; its reference is set adrift, with the result that, for readers unfamiliar with Verlaine's text, or perhaps more attuned to Wagner's opera, the children's voices are left to hover in an intertextual limbo pointing both to the opera's finale, and to the end of Act I — two moments which, by the way, turn out to be structurally related as milestones in Parsifal's transformation from "pure fool" to redemptive figure.

Now it so happens that the *first* occurrence of the children's voices offers at least one interesting similarity with the phenomenon that drew Thomas Mann's attention in his re-rewriting of *Tristan*. Indeed, immediately after the grail knights' martial-sounding choir, "Nehmet vom Brod," that Wagner instructs the conductor to perform "Sehr allmählich das Zeitmaß etwas bewegter" [literally: "in a very gradually somewhat more agitated tempo"], one witnesses an abrupt *change of pace* brought about by a bar-long "un poco ritenuto" immediately followed by the indication "langsam," meaning "slowly," whereupon the music comes to a contemplative halt, the children being the last voices we hear, from the top of the dome ("volle Höhe der Kuppel"), singing the line, "selig im Glauben" that brings the ritual to an end before Parsifal has had a chance to grasp its significance (whereupon Gurnemanz, "much irritated," kicks him out of doors).

By clipping the last line of Verlaine's sonnet and juxtaposing it with an allusion to a bawdy song allegedly sung by Australian troops during World War I, perhaps Eliot duplicates Wagner's own treatment of the children's voices as embodiments of a transcendental leap, as phonic figurations of the flesh-spirit dichotomy that resonates throughout the opera. More importantly, Eliot's intertextual allusion also singles out a moment that is doubly *rhythmical*: first in that, during this short interval, rhythm is felt as the pure differential gap between before and after the *ritenuto*; secondly, much as in biblical hermeneutics type is retroactively defined by antitype, because this moment exists based on the premise of its own iterability. Eliot's borrowing, in other words, makes palpable the overarching pulse that governs the opera's progress. He does so, furthermore, by means of an indirect quote evoking, not the children's voices themselves, but another poet's reminiscence of those, further removed from us by Eliot's quoting Verlaine in the original French. We are thus dealing with the echo of an echo referring to a moment in Wagner's opera whose very significance is a function of how it will reverberate in the final choir. Eliot's treatment of the Wagnerian reference thus results in a *mise en abyme* of voice, each step of which further contributes to its growing spectrification.

Regardless of Eliot's well-documented Wagnerian proclivities, the process I have just described may be instrumental in the askesis to which, according to Lacoue-Labarthe, Thomas Mann among others felt that Wagner's music must be subjected:

Schönberg sensed, —and Thomas Mann and Adorno followed him more or less lucidly and honestly— that not only would the twilight of Art be interminable […] but that it was urgent to attack the very principle of its monstrous culmination […]; to do one's utmost […] to submit music to a necessary askesis; to ban immediate musical "enjoyment," immersion in the manner of the death of Isolde; to cure music — that was the lesson of Aristotle and Freud — of its hysterical pathos and deprive it of its "magical" power. (Lacoue-Labarthe 2015, 106-7)[3]

In 1922, clearly, the concepts of "acousmêtre" and "acousmatic" voice developed by Michel Chion[4] in the 1990's in order to account for the disembodied voices that are heard in certain movie sound tracks could hardly be theorized. The gramophone, on the other hand, was a household fixture, as we are reminded in the section where the woman "smoothes her hair with automatic had, / And puts a record on the gramophone" (Eliot 1978, 44 ll. 255-6). Among the many obvious connections between this scene and the earlier ekphrasis on the rape of Philomela is the fact that the gramophone makes audible a voice detached from its point of origin, thus mirroring the fate of Ovid's character "so rudely forced" (Eliot 1978, 40, l. 100).

A number of possible intertextual references —including Shakespeare and Milton— have been adduced in order to account for the missing "a" in Eliot's spelling of the name Philomel. Bearing in mind, however, that the letter in question is a vowel, and that the word "vowel" itself is derived from its French equivalent meaning "vocal letter," this spelling may well be quite simply Eliot's way of commemorating in the character's very name the scenario she suffered at Tereu's hands. This tomopoetic move, however, is not reducible to a rather predictable mimesis of the cut. It is, in particular, indissociable from the paradoxical fact that Eliot vindicates the inviolability of the nightingale's voice at the very juncture where, in gramophone-like fashion, his spelling of the name inscribes the silent signature of her rape, i.e., at the location where, in the fabric of the poem, a vowel —i.e., etymologically, a voice— is found to be missing. In thus violating in the letter of the text what its discourse claims to uphold, Eliot unfolds the paradox of the gramophone, a machine which is both the repository of the "dead sound" mentioned in line 68, and the instrument of its revival. He also foregrounds the related aporia of violable inviolability involved perhaps in any attempt to capture presence by synthetic means.

"Synthetic," it so happens, is an adjective Eliot uses in "A Game of Chess" in order to describe the complex effect of the lady's fragrances:

> In vials of ivory and colored glass
> unstoppered, lurked her strange synthetic perfumes,

[3] Translation mine.
[4] Michel Chion, *La Voix au cinéma*. Paris: Editions de l'Etoile, 1993.

> unguent, powdered, or liquid—troubled, confused
> And drowned the sense in odors (ll. 86-9).

To the reader who has just been apostrophized as "You! Hypocrite lecteur!—mon semblable,—mon frère!" (l. 76), the blend of impressions triggered by those synthetic-synesthetic perfumes will no doubt bring memories of Baudelairian correspondences in perfect harmony with the symbolist mood this section of the poem seeks to create.

More surprising, perhaps, is the paronomasia that connects the prepositional phrase "in vials of ivory" with the adjective "in-viol-able" (l. 101) a few lines below, the signifier thus tying the fates of the woman's synthetic perfumes to that of Philomela's violated voice, as well as to the "violet hour" (l. 215) when the loveless encounter with the "young man carbuncular" (l. 231) takes place; and finally, in section V, to "the violet light" that serves as a backdrop to "voices singing out of empty cisterns and exhausted wells" (l. 385). The adjective "violet," one realizes, is a barely diminished echo of the verb "violate," whose spelling is almost identical, except for a missing "a" which may well be the same "a" of which the name "Philomel" was stripped —a detached letter whose wanderings may be traced, perhaps, all the way back to the "vials" in which Eliot's modern Cleopatra keeps her perfumes. If an "a" is a vowel, and a vowel is a voice, more specifically the voice of which Philomel has been robbed, its inviolability thus proves much more problematic than its *in-via-bility*, i.e., the poet's own effort to preserve its synthetic equivalent not in "vials of ivory" certainly, but within the limits of such passages as, for instance, the first quote from Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde*.

In "A Game of Chess," Eliot not only sets the folksy "Shakespeherian rag" (Eliot 1978, 41, l. 128) into sharp contrast with the Wagnerian references in the preceding and following cantos: within the limits of the canto itself, he also maximizes discontinuities and dissonances, notably between the cockney voices heard in the pub and the grand description of a boudoir or drawing room reflecting the decadent taste that Thomas Mann lampoons in his portrayal of the Wagnerian aesthete, Detlev Spinell. What connections one might be tempted to draw between Eliot's multilingual patchwork and Wagnerian *Sprechgesang* aiming to capture the genuine inflections of German are superficial at best. Indeed, as I just explained, the resolutely *synthetic* nature of Eliot's juxtapositions of idioms, quotes, and styles is woven into the network of signifiers that were examined a second ago. In his cultivated fragmentariness and artificiality, therefore, Eliot significantly diverges from Wagner's emphasis on authenticity and complementariness, as exemplified in the second act of *Tristan*, where the melody that Isolde takes up and amplifies in her grand finale makes its first appearance, evenly distributed between the soprano and the tenor so as to almost cancel the basic difference between the protagonists' vocal as well as sexual identities. Thus, whereas, in Adorno's words, "Wagner's orchestra aspires to a *continuum* of tone colors"[5] (75), Eliot's polyphony may hardly be said to achieve this level of integration.

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[5] All translations of Adorno's *Essay on Wagner* are mine.

Nor indeed does it attempt to do so, as may be gathered from close analysis of the very first Wagnerian quote featured in "The Burial of the Dead." As those familiar with Wagner's *Tristan* have no doubt observed, there occurs, at the junction between the end of the prelude and Act I, scene 1, a sudden drop in dramatic and musical tension when the sailor's unearthly ditty is performed *a cappella*. Issuing spectrally from a body that is supposed to remain invisible to the audience, this melody is heard "from above, as if from the top of the mast" ("aus der Höhe, wie vom Mast her venehmbar"). After the intoxicating experience of the prelude's orchestral pyrotechnics —aptly described by Lacoue-Labarthe in terms of "unfettered melocentrism"[6] (Lacoue-Labarthe 1991, 221) and "musical saturation" (*ibid* 224)—, the sparseness of this barely audible unaccompanied song (whose only equivalents in Wagner's operas are in *Tannhäuser* and *Parsifal*) is the very antithesis of Eliot's later quote, in "The Fire Sermon," of the Rhine daughters' meaningless but enticing babble as they sing each to each a melody that is the audible equivalent of the gold's shimmer among the waves.

The sailor's song, deserted by the orchestra much as Tristan will be stranded on the beach while Kurwenal and the sailor scan the empty ocean, foreshadows Tristan's final outbursts of longing for his own "Irish child." But it shows none of the grandeur and pathos of the third act. In other words, the sailor's song is more easily characterized by what it lacks than by its own intrinsic qualities. This may well be one of the reasons why, beside obvious thematic connections, Eliot singled out this quote. Besides capturing the lyrical voice's precariousness, its failure to manifest any lasting presence and indeed, to remain present to itself, it also redoubles the orchestra's prolonged silence, carving an empty space into what Nietzsche once called that "polyp in music, the 'infinite melody'" (Nietzsche 1967, 157).

Thus, not only does Eliot's tomopoetic intervention prefigure the emergence of the Philomela motif in "A Game of Chess," it also exposes the artificiality of the fantasmatic construct surrounding the acousmatic voice that Mladen Dolar describes as follows:

With the acousmatic voice we have "always-already" stepped behind the screen and encircled the enigmatic object with fantasy. The voice behind the screen not only fuels our curiosity, but also implies a certain disavowal epitomized by the formula "I know very well, but nevertheless…" "I know very well that the voice must have some natural and explicable cause, but nevertheless I believe it is endowed with mystery and secret power." It presents a puzzling causality, as an effect without a proper cause. (loc. 780)

In this respect, the previous observation that the sailor's voice is defined negatively needs to be revised. It would be more accurate to state that the lines quoted by Eliot are the ghostly negative image of their monumental instrumental counterpart, the invisible orchestra which, as is well-known, Wagner concealed in the pit at the Bayreuth Festspielhaus so that its sound could reach the audience while its point of origin remained untraceable. Karajan's handling of recording

[6] All translations of Lacoue-Labarthe's *Musica ficta* and *Pour n'en pas finir* are mine.

technique, incidentally, is symptomatic of this ambivalence, since while dampening the sailor's voice so as to make it sound more distant and unreal, he simultaneously amplifies it by adding a hint of studio reverb.

In his essay on Wagner, Adorno reads the composer's search for "absolute sound, isolated from its production, the idea of which governs Wagner's orchestration" (79) as the symptom of the repression of the division of labor that Wagner, "as an isolated individual, is incapable of abolishing effectively, to which he owes all his achievements, and of whose abolition he is only capable of producing the ephemeral appearance" (106). The sailor's hidden voice may thus be interpreted as duplicating what the concealment of the orchestra achieves on a grander scale: it "conceals the production process" (145).

A psychoanalytical reading of the quote that Eliot singled out because, as I have been implying, it uniquely problematizes the status of the voice, is not inconsistent with Adorno's remarks to the extent that "concealing the production process" adds to what Dolar calls "the mystery and secret power" of the voice. It is hardly a coincidence, in this respect, if Eliot's working title for *The Waste Land* was "He do the Police in different voices," a phrase Eliot borrowed from Dickens' *Our Mutual Friend*. That the police should be involved in Eliot's polyphonic experiment is perhaps related to the superegoic dimension of the voice, its collusion with the agency of the law when, rather paradoxically, it is no longer understood as the vehicle of melody, but as located at the caesura between the various personae's vocalizations where it acquires the power of the imperative, divine or otherwise. This is what Lacan suggests when he writes in *Seminar X* that:

> [O]ur voice, once detached from us, sounds foreign to us. It is part of the structure of the Other that it constitutes a certain void, the void of its lack of guarantee. Truth enters the world with the signifier, and prior to any kind of control. It is felt, it reverberates only by means of its echoes in the real. Now it is in this void that the voice as distinct from individual sounds resonates— not the modulated, but the articulated voice. The voice in question is the voice as imperative, the voice that demands obedience or conviction, the voice situated, not vis-à-vis music, but vis-à-vis speech. (320)[7]

In "The Burial of the Dead," this divide between modulation and articulation runs between the imaginary voice that carries the sailor's tune and the object-voice located at the point of articulation between the line "I will show you fear in a handful of dust" and the beginning of the Wagnerian quote, where nothing is audible except perhaps what Eliot calls "a dead sound on the final stroke of nine" (l. 68) that resonates in the interval Erik Porge describes as follows:

> As object (a), the voice is detached from sensory representations (for instance songs, hence the fleeting nature of the inner voice). Sonorization is always a more or less pleasant imaginarization of the voice. It functions as surplus enjoyment. What characterizes the voice as object (a) is the fact that it travels

[7] Translation mine.

> through one or two bodily orifices (the sources of the drive) and that there is a scansion, an interval between opening and closure, which serves as a cut. The real structure of the voice is temporal." (80-1)

As Lacoue-Labarthe has demonstrated in his study on Wagner, the composer's "unendliche Melodie" is designed precisely to preclude the possibility of such scansions. I would argue that Eliot's quote of the sailor's song —as of Verlaine's poem pointing to a rhythmic lapse in *Parsifal*—, runs counter to Wagner's aesthetic principles by selecting those moments where such scansions occur regardless of the composer's aesthetic program. Along the same lines, Lacoue-Labarthe, in his analysis of Baudelaire's Wagnerianism, suggests that the French poet may have obscurely sensed that, behind the recurrence of Leitmotifs that Adorno equates with the mere symptom of Wagner's vacantly self-perpetuating, atomistic, non dialectical, and anhistoric notion of time, there lay "beyond Wagner's most manifest intentions, something like the *rhythmical* essence of music," so that "the recurrent melody, in Wagner's 'mnemonic' system, might function as the letter, and music, as signifying, as a sort of writing" (Lacoue-Labarthe 1991, 89).

Eliot, in other words, spots and accentuates those cuts which occur in the allegedly seamless texture of the unending melody, which brings to mind the decisive moment in Lacoue-Labarthe's study of Wagner where the philosopher invokes Benjamin's dictum that "only that which shatters the work brings it to completion" (*Ibid.* 257) in order to show how Schönberg, unlike Wagner, understood the need to create a "caesura within the continuity of musical discourse" (*Ibid.* 256) reflecting what Lacoue-Labarthe identifies as the "spacing," the "rhythm" and the "scansion" which is the subject himself understood as the Heraclitean "One differing within itself" (*Ibid.* 149).

Lacoue-Labarthe's claim is that where Schönberg failed to meet the goal he had set for himself in *Moses und Aaron* was in indulging in excessive "melocentrism" (258), thus laying himself open to the accusation of hubristically attempting to deny man's tragic uncoupling from the divine (259). Following Hölderlin, Lacoue-Labarthe insists that there is no possible unmediated interpretation of the divine, although Schönberg's *Moses* is "secretly tempted by the possibility of presenting […] the true God, which is the unrepresentable itself" (260-1). This hubristic wish, Lacoue-Labarthe suggests, is inherent in the nature of musical language as Adorno described it:

> The language of music is quite different from the language of intentionality. It contains a theological dimension. What it has to say is simultaneously revealed and concealed. Its Idea is the divine name which has been given shape. It is demythologized prayer, rid of efficacious magic. It is the human attempt, doomed as ever, to name the Name, not to communicate meanings. (Adorno 1992, 2)

The divide between the language of poetry and the language of music, as Lacoue-Labarthe's reading of Mallarmé amply shows, resides in poetry's asserting its status as the "caesura of religion" (264), which is another way of naming that caesura which is the subject itself. Where Eliot parts ways with Wagner, therefore,

is that in echoing and translating "What the Thunder Said," in the final section of "The Waste Land," he diffracts and fleshes out the meaningless divine[8] syllable "da," encapsulating the object-voice in its most abstract form as a pure injunction, into the three complementary declensions, "Give, sympathize, control" whose Sanskrit equivalents form the *rhythmical* base of the poem's penultimate section.

This final caesura thus forms a diptych with Eliot's initial cut into Wagner's *Tristan*. Where by underscoring the discontinuities of the Wagnerian melody, Eliot sought to shelter the subject from what Heidegger —referring to Nietzsche— called "the dissolution of everything that is solid into a liquefying consent, a receptivity, a constantly impressionable passivity, all the way to final dilution; the surrender to the measureless, the lawless, the limitless, without clarity nor certainty, to the immense night of pure sinking into the abyss" (qtd. in Lacoue-Labarthe 1991, 199), the poet now once again resorts to a quote in order to stage the genesis, out of a single syllable, of the linguistic sign in its essential rhythmicity and/or differentiality, and locate the place of the subject in the caesura where it is represented by a signifier for another signifier.

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[8] This syllable is spoken by the "Lord of Creatures" in the Hindu *Upanishads*.

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