

Epic and Empire: Voices of Imperial Rhetoric in Francis Ledwidge and Wilfred Owen

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Abstract: This essay examines the implications of writing out of an Imperial setting when trying to speak against it. The analysis is introduced with a general theoretical and historical framing. An initial foray is made through a brief poem by Francis Ledwidge that – though related to a different conflict – reveals a paradigm that can be applied to the War Poets, specifically to Wilfred Owen. A close reading of *Strange Meeting* makes up the core of the examination; the line-by-line commentary hopes to elucidate and gloss the poem where critical editions have failed to do in the past. The overall argument posits that through the appropriation of epic sources Owen is able to construct a brilliant critique of the War itself – yet he fails to overcome the very language that permitted the War to appeal to young men in the first place. This conclusion is highlighted by a look at Siegfried Sassoon's *Song-Books of the War* and Louis MacNeice's *Autumn Journal*, suggesting perhaps that having lived out the Great War the latter might have been in a better position to do what Owen hoped to do – and seems to have made some initial efforts in the 'Irish' Canto of his work.

Keywords: Epic, War Poetry, Imperial Rhetoric, Dante

I. The Hegemony of Imperial Discourse

Writing after the Great War T. S. Eliot felt the rhetoric he inherited was flawed, and that his predecessors were composing a, 'raid on the inarticulate/with shabby equipment always deteriorating'. (Eliot, 1968, 189) Paul Fussell notes, the problem for the writer trying to describe elements of the Great War was its utter incredibility, and thus its incommunicability in its own terms [...] unprecedented meaning thus had to find precedent motifs and images,'that suddenly, the poetic material – i.e. what the poet experiences and uses to form the poem and to perform the poetic process – was no longer suited to express the experiences of modernity (Paul, 137). Poets engaged with developing, an appropriate rhetoric; and [this effort] implies the larger question of what style is suitable for history' (Paul, 171-172). The British Empire had bred generations of poets under a wide-spanning Imperial rhetoric, which like the Roman Imperial rhetoric depended on calcified images and motifs, a set of ancient myths chosen and excised from their democratic origins. It allegorised them as far as it could into its own hierarchic interpretive structures, and then celebrated the new plastic unity as superior. The development was uncontested, born out of an aristocratic and *bourgeois* heritage; its rise precisely approximates Nietzsche's description of 'active

force'.¹ We see that Milton, whose allegories develop ancient sources (both Greek and Biblical) under this heading, lacks the vibrant energy of his classical antecedents, and becomes a poet of aural importance, 'artificial and conventional' (Eliot, 1968,12). The active force of British Empire re-worked myth to suit its agenda; it oppressed dynamism, making it appear a weakness. Throughout the years of Empire's dialectic and ideology, the position of mythology as genealogical origin was supplanted by a plastic, circular and self-serving justification of Empire. The dynamic origin of civilisation was forcefully shifted to the material and discrete historical process of the Empire's birth, and mythology was made to appear a 'reactive force'. Two illustrative examples of this trend are translations of *The Odyssey* that tended to display strongly politicised colonial tones (with a shift in emphasis from the original); and continental epics from phases in which French and Spanish culture met with Arab and other foreign influences were forcefully shadowed. In their stead, English 'classics' became canonised, treated by Empire as if they could be displaced from history to an absolute level.²

To escape this, and unknowingly form the unpolished beginnings of Modernism, the poets discussed below looked back upon the classical phases of rhetoric, where democratic societies did not permit hegemony of interpretation. It soon became clear that those writers who inherited the tradition for what it was had a more dynamic poetic lexicon available. Dante, for one, does not fit the schema of his time and resists a critique like that levelled against Milton by Eliot. He wrote the *Commedia* in the vulgar so the Everyman could read it – presenting himself as immediately more democratic – and his subversion of material elitism, fuelled by a somewhat unorthodox religious agenda, engaged with the Church's corruption. His reaction starts from the origin, looking back to Biblical and Greek archetypes. His respect for Virgil, a poet who witnessed the transition from Republic to Empire, is consequently of no surprise, even though he revised his work extensively – and his defence of Statius, who lived through the beginnings of Europe's religious conversion, is a further example of dissidence as apparatus for truth. This appreciation for the reactive actualization of classical ideals made Dante (as a representative of the Epic tradition) an excellent source poet for the writer trying to evade or subvert the language of Imperial hegemony, for he and his predecessors tried to re-conceive the collective imaginative origins of their own civilisations.³

Classical rhetoric presents its archetypes as pure matter (to use Thomistic terminology) and that Imperial rhetoric is in comparison purely rhetoric, form left empty of potential (Aquinas, 67-80); Wolfgang Iser applies Aquinas to this dualism most precisely when he states, 'myth is like a potentiality of meaning awaiting actualization' (Iser, 1974). In Ireland and Britain, in the colony and in the monarch's homeland, reactive actualisations were diametrically opposed. But the creative impulse of Irish nationalism and the critical perspective of the British toward their own culture have this in common: a return to first principles and the use

of classical rhetoric as a subversive tool implies an entire upheaval of the poetic evolution – a metamorphosis out of and back into language, returning through symbols and archetypes that are (being as yet unformed) narratively remote, and that need to be reconstructed as dynamic objects able to support autonomous development. Here we are interested in defining the difference between the Irish writer's revolutionary call to arms, and bid for a new national image, and the British writer's (or better still, the soldier's) reaction to a reality that was the opposite of what he had been taught to expect.

Francis Ledwidge observed both the Irish Civil War and the Great War, and an analysis of two poems leads neatly from the former position to the latter, though not without contradictions here and there. A reading of Wilfred Owen's *Strange Meeting*, aims to develop the thesis that in undermining the calcified constructions of Imperial hegemony a whole Epic tradition needs to be challenged and re-formed under humanist (instead of totalitarian) optics. Finally, a brief look at Siegfried Sassoon's 1918 *Song-Books of the War* will reveal the fatal flaw in Owen's approach, and help contextualise the parallel progression made by Ledwidge. Sassoon's critique is that the writing of this period, regardless of its subversive inclinations, failed – in the manner Nietzsche warned it might – to transgress and transcend the language of its masters, conceptually failing to overcome the hegemony, even if it was able to briefly destabilise the dominant discourse.

II. Irish Notion & Nation: Francis Ledwidge

The deployment of classical rhetoric in Irish poetry of the Civil War develops a theme of reconstruction towards a new national unity. The impetus in Francis Ledwidge's *O'Connell Street* is that of a rally; it underlines the impact symbolic upheaval can have on the collective imagination even if the physical landscape is barely altered.⁴ The poem calls for an evaluation of the noble intent, even if the failure has its own separate symbolic weight. The 'nobility' is notional (i.e. non-essential to the described) and representative of Ledwidge's demands upon his people. 'A noble failure is not vain, / but has a victory its own' precisely because even if the event fails to have the desired material consequences, it effectively reforms the landscape of the mind providing potential for future action (Brearton, 81). Only in this return to first principles, as both a literal result of the bombing and a shift in focus to the notional and moral structure of action, can the reconstruction of a national image begin. Throughout the poem, Ledwidge is suggesting a collective social development like that presented in *The Odyssey*: the battlefield expands from the specific context of one battle to encapsulate the general predicament of life as a moral struggle. This state of constant embattlement which the Greeks adopted, though they were not the first to do so,⁵ is notional and, like Ledwidge's 'victory,' develops moral codes into a revolutionary idealism (Brearton, 81). Later, Ledwidge's reversal of an Homeric image (white ships that 'crowd her strands' replace the black

ships that sailed to and from Troy) presents the concept of notional (non-essential) modification as pivotal to constructing an identity from basic rather than immediate precedents – the archetypes exist as patterns to be moulded softly, not as totems needing (or capable of sustaining) violent appropriation. (Brearton,81) ⁶ The question is in fact an aesthetic one, for it becomes important to question how one's new image will be *perceived*, and how collective consciousness reforms around this new construction. In this specific image, the drastic change from black to white is enough to suggest that the impulse is more than revisionist, and fully revolutionary.

In *O'Connell Street*, Dublin (and by extension Ireland as a territory), is personified as 'her,' – the idea of motherland, and the feminine figure of Cathleen ni Houlihan spring immediately to mind – but the context also indicates Ireland's affinity to Ithaca, or Penelope, in awaiting the rallying lord's return home to scourge the colonial interference of other suitors(Brearton,81). The strength of the poem lies then not in an historical appraisal but an internal and reflexive allusion to poetic developments. The metonymic shift and the personification are examples of the poem's self-contextualisation into the history of poetic images and *poetic* history – defined through the theories of Giambattista Vico. He claimed the basis of social history is not ideology and dialectic, but mythology and narrative. In line with this, instead of attempting to re-write material history the poem tries to engage with the social imagination; it cannot be read solely as an historical document for that would imply a final correlative that linguistic hegemony could control. Instead, stylistic techniques need to converse with archetypes to establish a new voice out of 'dead men's dreams'(Brearton,81).⁷

Dreams that, like the very myths they contain, rely on a semantic unity that is less causal (temporal) than allegorical (spatial) (Jung, 73). The new voice is then able to spring from a non-materialistic past present in our imaginations; a past that is immeasurably distant from the poetic 'vuv' ('now'), and approximates a truer precedent than material speculation over an immediate precedent. The voice must be channelled through the collective imagination such that the deferral of the past into a remote retrospective 'down the generations thrown' becomes a transcendent and liberating act. (Brearton,81).

Only in momentarily abandoning material historicism in favour of the content- and context-based development of poetic meaning Ledwidge is able to come full circle, and therefore define the fabric with which to weave his new national image. Yet, he still needs to deconstruct the hegemonic presence of the British Empire to give full impact to his rallying call.

The poem does not only rely on modification to attack colonial presence but operates against it in a mode of dispossession. The hegemony is explicitly challenged when Ledwidge states that 'more than Beauty understands, / Has made her lovelier here, it seems'(Brearton,81). He is challenging the Romantic Beauty (finding her wanting); and he is

refuting a pre-produced (Imperial) sense of aesthetics, and a calcified and pedantic etymological string, forwarded by Imperial doctrines, that ties Beauty to the late (i.e. imperial) Latin *bellus*, that allows approximation to *bellum* ('war'). (The adjectival form of *bellum* is *bellus*.)

While Ledwidge's 'it seems' clearly suggests there is something beyond what Beauty can understand (or beyond what can be understood as or by Beauty), refusing to specify he is proving his new aesthetic placing it in action (Brearton, 81). The displayed want of specificity – its absence of concrete form (Aquinas, 69) – is the replacement. This replacement destabilises rhetorical expectations, and is also freshly poetic, for it develops an ambiguity that appears echoed in daily experience where an uncomfortable finite image had been provided to represent an infinite ambiguous concept.

In contrast, Ledwidge re-develops the connection of soldiery to manhood in notional terms through a call to specificity, rejecting the absolute status of any one man. Without doing so this juxtaposition would create (for Ledwidge) an inadmissible issue of identity that is present, for example, in Yeats. In *Soliloquy*, where the morally 'higher' roles of men are always temporarily assumed, Ledwidge resolves this dilemma by showing a return to basic principles is necessary for man to resist entirely absolute, abstract thinking that would cripple the possibility of action. For this reason he challenges William Butler Yeats directly, revising the schemata whereby a poet can affect history;

A keen-edged sword, a soldier's heart,
Is greater than a poet's art.
And greater than a poet's fame

A little grave that has no name. (Gardner, 29)

Though a certain irony surfaces immediately for Ledwidge's name most surely did appear on his grave, and though he commits a fatal mistake establishing a new hierarchy, this instant of *prosopoeia* goes beyond the ironic boundary, for Ledwidge is not only giving voice to the voiceless, he is creating a monument to those made voiceless through premature death and not out of weakness. Having come out of youth Ledwidge realises that he has,

[grown] weary doing well, [and that]
Besides, 'twas sweeter in that hell,

Down with the loud banditti people. (Gardner, 28)

Becoming tired of the moral path and accepting that at time the notional needs to be abandoned, creates a compromise where contemplation, or 'care,' can be transformed into some kind of action. (Gardner, 28).

In contrast to Ledwidge, Yeats would have seen a Platonic unity in man's ascension to the role of perennial 'Poet'. Similarly, his criticism of the events of 1916 are characterised by a request for the reader to choose his moral and political allegiances. His stress on personal pronouns in *Easter, 1916* are not simply an addition to the psychological structure of the poetic persona speaking, but also an interview for the reader to establish which side of 'our' and 'them' s/he stands on. (Yeats, 202). Ledwidge

refuses to interpolate the reader directly, maintaining the organic poetic evolution that leads to a re-evaluation of myths as mobile origins of society. He engages with the 'fallen dream' that 'it is too late now to retrieve'; (Gardner, 29) and he modifies all that which his experience has outlived – i.e. that to which the tools of his predecessors proved inadequate – as a way to provide no grounds for the reader to refute him. And through this very optic he justifies raising the soldier above the poet, for the soldier assumes the very shape of original poetic material by becoming the remembered unremembered, a nameless motif, the essential material awaiting actualisation into form.⁸

III. Wilfred Owen's "Strange Meeting" with the Epic tradition

The 'bright delectance of the slain [...] down the generations thrown' found in *O'Connell Street* is diametrically opposed to Owen's own experience of human degradation in the Great War, where we see 'a tension achieved between material that is itself repulsive, and the natural craving for as well as the Romantic belief in the beautiful' (Davidso,92). As he mentions in his famous (unfinished and unpublished) preface, 'all a poet can do today is warn,' there can be no space for the Imperial institution of hatred, and the calcifying of oppositions onto fixed axes. The material brutality of war demolishes the ideas in Owen that survive in Ledwidge. For this reason, 'Strange Meeting' should be read as both revisionist and subversive– a challenge to the development of the Epic tradition in English poetry in order to undo the perversions of hegemonic interpretations. Its ultimate aim is to demonstrate that 'the pity of War' stands at the centre of experiencing conflict and communicating its incommunicability (Owen,98).English poetry is not fit to speak of [heroes], because it has only now discovered the flaws in its heroic values; the useless *a priori*, circular and ultimately paradoxical structures of Imperial hegemonic discourse(Owen,98). For Owen there is no merit in just sounding the names of the eternal heroes (his personae remain nameless), a constant re-evaluation of values has to take place. Jon Stallworthy and Owen Knowles are somewhat deficient in their annotated editions; for they recognise the internal genetic relation of Owen's poetry to Romantic verse, but do not even mention the evincing reconstruction of Epic and Biblical influences under Owen's particularly humane optic.⁹

It is important to note that Owen's reconstruction meticulously covers the ground between the cold Epic vastness and the relative warmth of minute personal horrors. While Book V of *The Iliad* presents minute descriptions of inter-personal combat it remains insensitive (except in a few brief moments) to the type of internal suffering Owen is so careful to prize. *Strange Meeting* becomes in this regard a ground for the cross-examination of the individual conscience against the Empire's ideology.

The first line of the poem delivers the speaking persona into the 'reality' of an internal vision, a Dantean technique,¹⁰ in order to highlight the co-existence of a personal and exterior world. The use of the modifier 'seemed' brings this point home; and the reader can imagine the persona

in a state of shock where one's self-consciousness is heightened, having spliced the physical battle from the mental one.¹¹

The second line is a modification of line 237 in Book VI of *The Aeneid*, which describes the appearance of Sybil's cave to Aeneas, *Spelunca alta fuit vastoque inmanis hiatus*.

It is likely that Owen's source for 'profound dull tunnel' is Theodore C. Williams' 1908 translation, as it is the first to use the word 'profound,' rather than a variation on 'high ceilinged,' for *spelunca alta fuit*.¹² Williams' choice gives rise to a much richer set of interpretations that Owen must have appreciated, such as the suggestion of a figurative *gravitas* and a literal depth or quality of displacement. The term 'dull' refers more to the state of mind the persona, and its mental displacement, than to the tunnel itself, for the descriptions in the following lines of *The Aeneid* and in the third line of *Strange Meeting* complement each other to complete the Virgilian image.

Initially, the persona of the poem can be compared to Aeneas, for it is Virgil being cited. As we enter Dante's *Inferno* the persona approximates Dante the Pilgrim, and Virgil becomes therefore an internal guide, becoming assimilated into the poem. Dante the Pilgrim makes a humble statement in *Inf.* II, ll. 32, *Io non Enëa, io non Paulo sono* ('I am neither Aeneas nor [St.] Paul') – but in *Strange Meeting* the persona *has* been Aeneas, and in becoming Dante the Pilgrim it is disarmed of its authorial modesty such that Dante himself (as the poet) is brought into the poem too. In the chthonic silence, the persona begins to speak, recognising the victim as a *metoikos* – 'strange friend,' a resident alien.¹³

Critically, the oxymoron falls apart when the encounter is viewed as a human one, and not one of ideology. The 'undone years' call to our *pathos* with immediate efficacy, for it is a reminder of our own mortality.¹⁴ The second stanza presents a scene from Canto VI of Dante's *Inferno*;¹⁵ the circle where the gluttonous lie in eternal suffering.¹⁶ Looking at Dante's description, certain inflexions of style and content that connect the two texts become noticeable.

*Noi passavam su per l'ombra che adona
la greve pioggia, e ponavam le piante
sovra lor vanità che par persona.
Elle giacean per terra tutte quante,
fuor d'una ch'a seder si levò, ratto
ch'ella ci vide passarsi davante.
"O tu che se' per questo 'nferno tratto,"
mi disse, "riconoscimi, se sai:
tu fosti, prima ch'io disfatto, fatto."
[...]*

*Li diritti occhi torse allora in biechi;
guardommi un poco e poi chinò la testa:
cadde con essa a par de li altri ciechi.
(We passed over the shades covered
By the heavy rain, and placed our soles
On their image that seemed their person.*

They all lay on the ground
 But one that was seated rose quickly
 When it saw us pass before it,
 'O you that are traversing this hell,'
 He said, 'recognise me, if you can:
 You were made before I became unmade.'
 [...]

His straight eyes he turned askew;
 Looked at me a little, then he bowed his head:
 and fell with it to the level of the other blind ones).¹⁷

Stanza four of the poem opens with an encounter from Canto XXVI of *Inferno* – the meeting with Ulysses.¹⁸ Then the attention turns to a rumination on Pity, which is followed by an exposé of estranging Biblical accounts which Owen included to highlight visions that induce such *pathos*.

Ulysses' speech to Dante matches seamlessly with the speech that composes stanza four of *Strange Meeting*.¹⁹ The same three core statements are made; 1) hope of great discoveries leads men through perilous journeys, forsaking a life that in its domestic calm is the absence of life; 2) even to fail is to have succeeded in trying, restlessness is a sign of man's constant wish for higher goals; and 3) these goals have an essence that is eternal, but their beauty exists as a result of the perceiver's mortality.

In opposition to this pithy statement, the glory of the Imperial wanderer lay in the scorn of pity which 'discredited' the attempt, believing it to underline a weakness and thus a moral failure. If Imperial discourse is active force, then *pathos* is its 'affectation' (Deleuze, 62). Owen's statement that 'the Poetry is in the Pity,' can then be read as a claim that Poetry rises from the reactive Will to Power, whose tendency is nihilistic and eschatological, and aimed at the active force's affectation. Owen takes the reader on a tour of the epic mode to demonstrate what is individually human about absolute epic constructions, how the pity underlies each thing individually though it may be impossible to generalise it, and moments of weakness give rise to great humanity. As Virgil's underworld gave way to the Dantean, *Strange Meeting* chooses to hold fast to the message of Ulysses, a damned man who wished to live his life as fully as possible.²⁰ Owen finds space for Pity where Dante could not, for in the *Commedia* Virgil is always there to rebuke the Pilgrim for pitying the damned. This trope is so ancient that its refutation in Owen's poem is highly significant; even in the *Arjuna-Visada yoga* of the *Bhagavad-Gita*, Arjuna is faced with a similar problem and is scolded by Krishna for not affirming his active force as immortal all-knowing warrior.²¹ Owen is criticising the schemata of a totalitarian system which suggests that, because evil can be given a fixed objective correlative, there is a code by men can know what is the absolutely righteous choice. The Great War revealed to him that fighting does not resemble moral absolutism or idealism in any way when it is reduced to individual encounters; and this is the true strangeness of *Strange Meeting* – the ease with which ideology

falls apart when the human body's fragility is so repeatedly and brutally displayed, and most importantly, reflected upon the assailant.²²

The second part of stanza four develops a theme of Imperial misleading, and the eventual retreat of those with wisdom and courage from the Imperial cause to 'vain citadels that are not walled'. The Biblical image becomes less ambiguous when contextualised: Owen harkens to the Israelite Exodus, and the 'clogged [...] chariot-wheels,' at the very (literal) turning of the Red Sea's tide.²³ The true critique implied in Owen's lines is however not historical but poetic; he expects his readers to misappropriate this line as a quotation from Book I of *Paradise Lost*.²⁴ The story being told is the same, but the reader is forced into a realisation of Milton's confusing gloss. Milton's sophist reading is an attack on God's violence towards the violent, and perhaps a general criticism of the Old Testament Yahweh.²⁵ But Owen is suggesting the Israelites' plight is enough to call to our *pathos*, regardless of God or Empire, for they are escaping into a 'vain citadel' whose lack of walls (we know) will lead them into centuries of war (Owen,35). Owen develops a greater criticism of the reactive/active juxtaposition, and the warring minorities' constant subjugation up to and beyond the point of military or moral victory. In underlining the independence of the dominated from domination (as an abstract concept) he reveals in premature form precisely those Nietzschean 'truths that lie too deep for taint': the slave creates himself as dominated by engaging in a reactive activity.

In the closing phase of the poem Owen attempts to push through this crisis. The Ulysses persona will continue to speak through to the end of the poem aligning itself with Christ or an idealised figure of redemption that can liberate by literally turning the other cheek, refusing to engage in 'the cess of war'(Owen,35). Line 39 is a rendition of Luke 22:44, the depiction of Christ on the Mount of Olives (immediately after the Last Supper). His prayers are sincere to the extent that the sweat from his brow appears to fall like drops of blood. The sweat of Genesis, God's punishment to man for his disobedience ('you will earn your keep from the sweat of your brow'), is here turned back to God in supplication by his son-made-man. When, as it hits the ground, the sweat transubstantiates, an agenda of willed (and *desirable*) subjugation is submitted by the poet. For, following Schopenhauer, the persona realises that we do not want something because it is good, but it is good because we want it (Schopenhauer,1939). Owen does achieve (as Christ did, in Nietzsche's view) the *pathos* of the dominant figure to become expressed – the position of dominance, however, remains unchanged (Deleuze,58-64).

In the final stanza a final attempt to break through is made: the speaking persona adopts for the first time a voice that is uniquely Owen's creation. It recognises the silent persona as its dominator through the frowning. First 'yesterday[']s' frown, perhaps of disbelief, towards his own actions; second, a frown aimed at the ironic retort (that composes the majority of the poem) to the statement, 'here is no cause to mourn'(Owen,35). The persona remarks on his wish to have not been killed, and so reveals that

the first persona, that only *seemed* to have escaped battle, may have escaped into a brief afterlife full of moral considerations: a space lacking in physical action, but rife with rumination. Losing possibility of concrete action, the complementing figures in the dominator/dominated juxtaposition are not inverted, but equalised – the two figures can begin their eternal sleep.

IV. Sassoon's Critique, and a point for further study

Owen notionally clears the ground for a poetic upheaval, through a humanist reduction of absolutism. Regardless, the 'truths that lie too deep for taint,' prevent a significant overhaul. The Imperial discourse, although displaced remains dominant. In *Song-Books of the War* Sassoon captures the reason for their inability to arrive at a convincing refutation of war,

In fifty years, when peace outshines
Remembrance of the battle lines,
Adventurous lads will sigh and cast
Proud looks upon the plundered past.

[...]

Their hearts will kindle for the fight,
Reading a snatch of soldier-song

[...]

They'll envy us the dazzling times
When sacrifice absolved the earth

[...]

And dream of lads who fought in France
And lived in time to share the fun. (Sassoon, 115).

The mistake lay in attempting to fight Imperialist discourse on its own terms, through the use of its language. In the reactive poems an element of 'dazzling' rhetoric remains infused, that shines through the 'blind regret and haggard mirth' (Sassoon, 115). Ledwidge too, read in retrospect, appears to replace the Imperial constructions with an equally ineffective hierarchy, and disarms his own 'revolutionary ardour,' through 'the cynical knowledge that war accomplishes nothing except to leave behind it a fine memorial,' that will be admired – but not notionally, as he intended (Davidson, 16). It is important to remember, however, that had these poets lived beyond the War, they might have seen (like Sassoon) beyond these limits, had they been allowed to inherit each other into their own tradition.

Perhaps, and this is starting a point for further study, the tables were not turned until Louis MacNeice's staunch ridicule of war. In his satirical representation of those who 'bind [their] heirs to continuance of hatred,' he refused to even engage with Imperial discourse (MacNeice, 52). And in refusing to joust with Empire, in favour of ridiculing it, he achieves a much more absolute elevation of the individual.

Endnotes:

1. "Active force is: 1) plastic, dominant and subjugating force; 2) force which goes to the limit of what it can do; 3) force which affirms its difference." See: Gilles Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy* (New York: Columbia UP, 1983), 61
2. These were the very texts Matthew Arnold suggested should not be placed on a

- pedestal but constantly be the subject of re-appraisal. See: Matthew Arnold, *Essays in Criticism* (London: Macmillan, 1905), 1-10
3. Homer 'united' the Greeks under a pan-Hellenic Epic, where all Greek factions fight together against a common enemy.
 4. O'Connell street and its surroundings did sustain damage in this specific incident, but not much was sustained by Nelson's Column itself.
 5. There are sources for this allegorical mode in ancient Indian religious texts like the Upanishads.
 6. Active force necessarily develops organically from immediate precedent; revolution must choose reactive over active status. See Deleuze, references Eliot, *Milton: Two Studies*.
 7. Originally, the politicised issue related the Greeks and their antagonists, the Trojans, see EN 3 above.
 8. Note that the massive size of the forces, and the thousands of unnamed graves, are emblematic of the fact that soldiers were no longer treated as individuals, but as constituents of the body politic.
 9. Stallworthy does have a note on the excerpt from Luke discussed below. This is the only relevant exception.
 10. Dante's journey through Hell, Purgatory and Paradise is specifically described as corporeal yet at removes from material reality. It is not a vision *per se* but a superimposed alternate reality. Just like the representations of the Orpheus myth, the archetype of descent to the underworld grounds poetry through Epic roots.
 11. There is documentary evidence that suggests Owen truly experienced this, and that this poem is a description of an analogous scene. I mention this in case my interpretation of the line seems to be reading too much into the poem. See: Owen (2007), xxxvi. The ambiguity of perception resurfaces here as in Ledwidge – perhaps a starting point for further study.
 12. Since Williams' translation, "A cave profound, of entrance gaping wide," the word 'profound' has remained in current usage for this passage. C.f. Robert Fitzgerald, *The Aeneid* (New York: Random House, 1983), 168; Theodore C. Williams, *The Aeneid* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1910)
 13. Princeton Dante Project, Hollander, ed.
 14. It is significantly also recalled in Eliot's *The Waste Land* where Dante is quoted in translation: "I had not thought death had undone so many"; Eliot, 55
 15. Owen read – as can be deduced from specific choices in his vocabulary there is not space to go into here – Cary's 1805 translation (famously illustrated by Gustave Dore) however, even in its time, it was not the most literal translation available. Therefore I have provided my own translations hoping to strike a balance between literal and readable, I have made no effort to embellish or clean up the English (as Cary did) to achieve a poetic value.
 16. Often this encounter is compared to Dante's meeting with Brunetto Latini in Canto XV, but a close reading of the Italian shows that then the image would then be reversed, for Dante fixes his eyes on Brunetto Latini. *ficcai li occhi per lo cotto aspetto, sì che 'l viso abbrusciato non difese la conoscenza sua al mio 'ntelletto*; ('I fixed my eyes on his scorched appearance Such that his burnt face did not hide the recognition of him in my mind') Regardless, the similarities between stanza two of "Strange Meeting" and the Canto VI encounter with Ciaccio are such that it could be considered a loose translation.
 17. Princeton Dante Project, Hollander, ed.
 18. The specific line-by-line similarity between the Ulysses meeting and the beginning of stanza three is so great that it is not worth examining here, where space is limited. The Ciaccio encounter justified more space, for its relative looseness needs greater defence, and it has rarely been noted appropriately.
 19. Up to the middle of line 24.
 20. A concept particularly resonant to Owen because thousands of young men of his time were denied this by the war.
 21. *The Geeta: The Gospel of the Lord Shri Krishna*, (1973). trans. Shri P. Swami, London:

Faber and Faber.

22. There is an affinity here with D. H. Lawrence's short story "England, my England," which presents the same problematic.
23. Exodus. 14:25
24. John Milton (2004). *Paradise Lost*, Oxford: Oxford UP.
25. Eliot notes, "the complication of Miltonic sentence is an active complication, a complication deliberately introduced into what was previously simplified abstract thought," and more explicitly, "the result with Milton is, in one sense of the word, *rhetoric*" [original italics]. His voice can be approximated to Aquinas' inanimate 'form'.

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