INNER AND TRANSITIONAL SPACES IN T.S. ELIOT'S POETRY

Viorel STĂNESCU,
Ph.D., University of Craiova

Abstract: Where does the boundary between the individual and society begin and end? How much is "home" a state of mind and who does man turn into when he cannot be his true self? These are questions that the Modernist writer T.S Eliot tried to raise in his poems and whose answers we are now trying to decipher between the lines of his poetry. Two plans that T.S. Eliot uses to bring these questions to light are inner and transitional spaces – namely inner spaces such as private rooms, shared and public interior spaces and transitional spaces the likes of thresholds, windows, staircases, doorways, passageways, streets and half-deserted streets. The present study analyses these spaces individually, looking at their depictions within the author's work and discussing their relevance. The aim of the paper is to not only chart the multitude of inner and transitional spaces, but also to understand their place in the grand picture of T.S. Eliot's poetry and their importance to the everyday, contemporary reader.

Keywords: T.S. Eliot, Modernist Poetry, Inner Spaces, Transitional Spaces, Symbolism.

Introduction

If one were to browse the plethora of journals and critical essays on universal literature, and modern poetry in particular, they would no doubt discover that the American-born British poet T.S. Eliot continues to hold a firm grip on the attention and imagination of academics, critics and readers alike. On inquiring what exactly makes the poetry of T.S. Eliot so relatable for the contemporary reader, we have come across a theme frequently portrayed in the author's work, namely the relationship between inner and transitional spaces.

T. S. Eliot's concern for the inner and outer spaces of his poetry becomes very obvious after you have finished reading the first poem. Eliot's concept of space includes two streams which exist simultaneously, and intersect at significant moments. In his literary works, the inner spaces mingle with the outer spaces in an effort that the author makes to express his deepest ideas and emotions.

Using the concept of space, Eliot was able to portray the modern world as it really is: a fast paced society that has lost all its true values in order to gain technical progress. From the flowering ancient societies to the new ones, every action that humanity has taken was driven by greed and indifference and the result is an emotional waste land.

In T.S. Eliot's poetry, the differences between inner spaces and transitional spaces carry significant meaning, and so do the thresholds that exist between them. Eliot creates two parallel plans, one being the physical space occupied by his characters and their actions and the other plan occupied with the thoughts they have- and in the end connects the two plans to a level of humanity or meaning present in their lives. Regarding the inner spaces, Eliot finds them full of meaning and humanity because

people can escape through them from some of the conventions and conformity present in the society.

Of the many Modernist points of focus, it is perhaps the condition of the individual that has received the bulk of attention. T.S. Eliot chooses to tackle this very theme by masterfully constructing a dichotomy between inner and transitional spaces, between the quarters we inhabit, that hold so much of who we are, and the streets where he have to shield our true identity, to keep it from dissolving into the throng. By employing these physical markers to render the psychological dimension of human identity, the author makes a fortuitous attempt at pinning the ethereal down and using visual cues in order to make intimate thoughts and experiences shareable.

The present paper is structured into two parts, inner and transitional spaces, and analyses each constituent of these two categories for the purpose of understanding the particularities and meanings of the aforementioned portrayals. Finally, a set of conclusions will be drawn on the relevance of the inner and transitional spaces described below and on the immense impact this perspective has had on not only the Modernist scene, but on the reception of T.S. Eliot's poetry as a whole.

Inner Spaces

Private rooms

The private rooms that the reader encounters in Eliot's poems, offer an intimate space for the characters to analyze their own thoughts and actions and carry a positive meaning. The characters feel comfort inside the private rooms and can express their true emotions without holding back. Eliot uses the private rooms in order to present the reader the true soul of his characters, their intimate problems, their reactions to the outside world and the despair that brings them down from time to time in face of the numbness of everyday life. Private rooms are always in contrast to the social rooms where Eliot's characters are deployed of any human connection and feel the need to escape from their own life. Gabriel Zoran has pointed out the significance of space in drawing a character : "Every element in space…has to be regarded…as a juncture, in which patterns from all the textual planes may intersect: patterns of space together with patterns of characterization, idea, mythology, and so forth"[1]. Private rooms represent, in a way, the inner self of the characters.

Another private room is depicted in the third part of "The Preludes" and the reader is transformed into a character by the use of the second person: "You tossed a blanket from the bed,/ You lay upon your back, and waited;/ You dozed, and watched the night revealing/ The thousand sordid images/ Of which your soul was constituted"[2]. This intimate setting offers the reader the chance to think at his most deep thoughts in a meaningful manner.

In "The Waste Land" the private rooms are related to the female typist. Although a private room should be filled with the emotions of its owner, the typist's room is

[1] Zoran, Gabriel. "Towards a Theory of Space in Narrative." Poetics Today 5.2 (1984): 309-335.
[2] Eliot, T. S.. "Complete poems& plays". Faber and Faber, "The Preludes"

presented as rather void of any intimate feeling. The typist lives a mechanical life fulfilling her usual daily chores: clearing breakfast, lighting the stove, attending to laundry. She is not passionate about her life and even the romantic encounter of her lover doesn't awake any emotion. Eliot notes that even her sexual life is dull, by having her say: "Well now that's done: and I'm glad it's over"[3]. The typist lives in an emotionally waste land, having no real connection to true life.

Shared Interior Spaces

In his poetry, Eliot tries to create a connection between the inner spaces and his character's inner self. He uses rooms in order to allow the reader to form his own opinions about the characters – what they think, what are the reasons for their behaviors and how they fail in creating new human contacts. In these rooms characters don't usually have the courage to admit to themselves or to the other their real thoughts.

In the second part of "The Waste Land", the reader is confronted with the image of a woman in an opulent room: "The chair she sat in, like a burnished throne,/ Glowed on the marble, where the glass/ Held up by standards wrought with fruited vines/ From which a golden Cupidon peeped out"[4]. The author portrays her in her full splendor, describing in detail the magnificent room she occupies. But her glamorous life is filled only with objects, not with feelings so she is begging the narrator to discuss with her: "My nerves are bad tonight. Yes, bad. Stay with me./ Speak to me. Why do you never speak? ... I never know what you are thinking"[5]. Although she has all the wealth she could desire, she feels the need of another person's company to fill her inner space with joy. The outer space is seen as dangerous, a suggestion made through the unwanted wind at the door. Marianne Thormalen states in her essay "The City in The Waste Land" that Eliot's poetry is soaked in "urban imagery,[and] a small number of fixed topographical features keep cropping up… the most frequent one is the street motif…[which] looms as the only alternative to the closed room - ' I shall rush out as I am, and walk the street/ With my hair down, so' – and yet it constitutes no escape from private agony"[6]. Her interiority and private emotions are subjugated to the routine of the exterior realm of society. She will quell her sadness by a daily routine.

Public Interior Spaces

The second part of "Game of Chess" takes place in a pub. The scene is different, but the characters share parallels with the modern princess. The narrator talks to the reader and tells a story about Lil and her husband Albert trapped in a marriage that has become mechanical and stale. The interiority of the room allows for the discussion of this personal conversation, but the reader is continually reminded that this bar or restaurant is a public space. "Hurry Up Please It's Time" says a barman trying to close the pub who consistently interrupts the conversation. And while the narrator attempts

[3] Eliot, T. S.. "Complete poems& plays". Faber and Faber, "The Waste Land"
[4] Eliot, T. S.. "Complete poems& plays". Faber and Faber, "The Waste Land",pg.64, 2004
[5] Eliot, T. S.. "Complete poems& plays". Faber and Faber, "The Waste Land", pg.64, 2004
[6] Eliot, T. S.. "Complete poems& plays". Faber and Faber, "The Waste Land", pg. 65, 2004

to continue the retelling of the story the narrative voice ultimately conforms to the bartender's wishes and concludes with goodbyes. The last words from "Game of Chess" are the words Ophelia speaks as she goes mad after her desire and love for Hamlet have been thwarted. This can be read as a warning of what could happen if one conforms too much to the conventions of the public sphere of life. Interior public spaces allow enough interiority to raise personal issues, but not enough freedom to really delve in and solve them.

Transitional Spaces

Thresholds

The transitional spaces between inner and outer scenes are often found in Eliot's works. They are used to suggest things about his characters and their psyches. Elements like doorways, windows, staircases are used to make the transition easily from the outer world to the inner world and vice versa. Elnued Summers-Bremner states in the work "Unreal City and Dream Deferred" that "The Waste Land is fascinated by liminal states of all kinds, including seasonal ones conveyed by rain, frost and lack of water. But just as significantly, it is compelled by what these liminal states, taken more broadly as cultural markers or movements of unbelonging, make possible or what exceeds them, as though in an attempt to cover over a wound within language, and history, that is still burning".[7] Mikhail Bakhtin also wrote in "The Dialogic Imagination" that: "The word threshold itself already acts a metaphorical meaning in everyday usage…and is connected with the breaking point of a life, the moment of crisis, the decision that changes a life (or the indecisiveness that fails to change a life, the fear to step over the threshold)".[8] For Eliot, thresholds do not contain too much positive meaning because kept in a threshold the characters are not able to express themselves or fight for the small amount of humanity they have left.

Windows

"The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" expresses its liminality by the use of windows. Windows are transitional spaces, which carry an amount of uncertainty and in this poem, they are described by Prufrock himself: "yellow fog that rubs its back upon the window-panes"[9]. The fog resembles a dog that curls around the house before falling asleep and the windows become a barrier between the inner and the outer spaces, keeping the characters trapped in the house, like in a cage. Windows are also used in this poem in order to express the uncertainty of the characters which are not able to choose the inner or the outer spaces.

Staircases

[7] Summers-Bremner, Eluned. "Unreal City and Dream Deferred: Psychogeographies of Modernismin T.S. Eliot and Langston Hughes." Geomodernisms: race,modernism,modernity. Eds. Laura Doyle and Laura Winkiel. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005.

[8] Bakhtin, Mikhail. The Dialogic Imagination. Austen, Texas: University of Texas Press, 1981.

[9] Eliot, T. S.. "Complete poems& plays". Faber and Faber, "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock", pg. 13, 2004

Additionally, Prufrock wonders in Prufrock whether to take an intended action or not, thinking „"Do I dare?". He also considers exiting the building he intended to enter, thinking that there will be "time to turn back and descend the stair" and re-inhabit the exterior space of the street . Prufrock's position on the staircase is one of being in-between, of not being able to fully occupy an interior space or an exterior space. Likewise, the character of Prufrock is able to acknowledge his internal fear and hesitation about life, but cannot take any definitive external actions to resolve them. Thus, spatially and emotionally, Prufrock's indecision binds him to a liminal space and an indeterminate state.

Doorways

Like the other two liminal spaces I described above, doorways are also used in Eliot's poetry in order to confer different spaces a state of indeterminacy. In "A Game of Chess", the princess asks the narrator "What is that noise?" and she is answered "The wind under the door". This answer is seen as a threat by the princess who is afraid that the wind blowing outside might become a danger for her. Mainly, the wind is seen as a threat because it is an instance of the exterior space, a space that the princess chooses to ignore while she remains comfortably trapped in her opulent inner room. But after some moments of thinking, the princess starts wondering "I shall rush out as I am, and walk the street/With my hair down, so. What shall we do tomorrow?", a decision that she never takes, preferring to remain trapped in her gilded cage, suffering from her mechanical routine.

Passageways

In Eliot's poetry, passageways are usually spaces of "in between". In "Preludes", the narrator depicts passageways as spaces that are neither inside the house, nor outside on the street: "The winter evening settles down/ With smells of steaks in passageways". Not even the calm of a winter afternoon, inside the house, dining with the loved ones can make the narrator to take a decision, so he just remains outside describing the exterior space.

The passageways are motifs of conflict in the character's mind because there is a constant battle between the feeling of longing to be connected to something bigger and more important and the lack of actions that destroys their lives. In choosing to be stuck in a passageway, the reader can see that Eliot's characters choose a space that allows them to think, to ponder regarding their future actions, a space where they don't have to adopt "a face to meet the face".

Street Scenes

If, in the snapshot image Eliot creates of interior and exterior space, the interior spaces are the images, then external space becomes the images‟ negative. Exterior space counters interior space in every way. Because of this, because of the inherent lack of humanity in the exterior scenes, Eliot attaches to it a negative meaning. These instances

of exterior space typically occur in the form of street scenes in which any chance of introspection is lost completely and what we see are characters roaming through the streets, only conforming to the motions and routines of society. Thus, we find very empty and hollow characters inhabiting deserted street- scenes.

Half-Deserted Streets

In The Love Song of J.Alfred Prufrock, the narrator tells the reader "Let us go, through certain half- deserted streets," and describes them as "streets that follow like a tedious argument of insidious intent". The desertion of the streets mirrors the lack of true human connection present in the poem, echoed by the reference to a tedious argument, a way of communicating without relating to someone. The narrator acknowledges that this barren situation is an insidious trap to fall into. While feeling nothing and emotionally freezing over is attractive at first because it includes no sense of sadness or grief, even Prufrock's narrator acknowledges that this mode of living may be enticing but is ultimately harmful.

Later on, the first section of the Preludes includes further instances of empty and isolated street scenes. The narrator tells us that "at the corner of the street/ a lonely cab-horse steams and stamps/And then the lighting of the lamps"[10]. The exterior space is full of people moving to get home, walking or via cab, before darkness settles in. No one stops to talk to their neighbour, no one stays out in the street. Instead, the only occupant mentioned is not even a human, but rather a lonely cab-horse. Furthermore, the lighting of the lamps is not only an act to ward off the darkness of night, but it also serves as a somewhat isolating event. If one walks in a dark street at night, the only thing he or she can see is what is directly illuminated by the orb of light the street lamp puts out. Anything outside the sphere of light is lost, and his or her reality shrinks immensely.

Eliot offers the foil of the deserted night street scene in the second section of the Preludes. In a morning moment, the narrator describes a deserted street scene as the city wakes. As "the morning comes to consciousness," so do the "sawdust-trampled street/ with all its muddy feet that press/To early coffee-stands". People who did not linger in the streets the night before still do not linger to talk or interact in the street now. Instead, they rise and pass through city streets, alone, tired, needing a cup of coffee from a kiosk to wake them from their stupor before heading to work again and letting the same day as yesterday play out. This functions as a prime example of people in an exterior space eradicating all thoughts, emotions or longing and instead just going through the motions to begin another day: the walk to work with muddy feet, a crappy cup of coffee. Eliot echoes this with his sentiments that the journey to the coffee stand is not the only way people just move through the motions of daily living. He writes that in addition to the coffee-stands, there are "other masquerades/That time resumes," meaning that with morning, other instances of routine and a sense of mechanical living restart.

[10] Eliot, T. S. "Complete poems& plays". Faber and Faber, "The Preludes", 2004.

In addition to scenes of half-deserted streets, Eliot includes other instances of exterior street scenes. There are the vacant lots of the Preludes, as Eliot first describes "newspapers from vacant lots" and then mentions again metaphorically in the lines "The worlds revolve like ancient women/Gathering fuel in vacant lots". Additionally, instances of crowded city streets occur throughout Eliot's poetry, specifically in The Waste Land as the narrator depicts the image of "A crowd flowed over London Bridge, so many".

Eliot seems to suggest that people's actions and instances of thought are directly tied to their spatial surroundings. Interior instances of space in private rooms in Eliot's poetry typically give insight into a character's private thoughts and emotions. A shared interior space shows how people interact while still thinking their own thoughts. The thresholds that exist between interior and exterior space speak to characters who don't know what to do or what to think. And finally, in exterior space, Eliot describes characters that simply conform to societal routines and norms. In this constructed hierarchy of space that Eliot has created, the instances of human thought and emotion present in interior spaces is given the most value because it is the most meaningful. Yet these precious moments happen rarely. Much more common are the instances of masses of people mechanically existing in their daily routine. The lack of their introspection or their emotional response to life gives this mode of living in Eliot's eyes a negative meaning

Conclusions

In Russian literature, to visit a destitute man in his living quarters is to spit him straight into the face, as his true identity is frequently shown as unbearable to himself. In T.S. Eliot's case, what is truly unbearable is to renounce all that is warm, welcoming and familiar and venture into the modern wasteland of human progress, the bustling or half-deserted streets, a modern purgatory of sorts. Akin to the famous quote of Jean-Paul Sartre that "hell is other people", in his 1944 play "No Exit.", T.S. Eliot takes us on a journey of self-discovery by putting into words our fascinating relationship with our homes and the streets surrounding them.

In any case, Eliot sees the inner spaces, as a rarity in modern, and especially urban, life. Eliot's inner spaces usually express the sense of longing: longing for life in a different place or time, longing for change their way of being or longing for a life in a different reality. On the other hand, the inner spaces contain a degree of interiority and seclusion because they are still inner spaces and they are removed from society as a whole. Yet the presence of others in the shared interior rooms causes the characters to sometimes act or think according to social convention. With characters moving from inner spaces to outer spaces, a liminal space appears: the threshold.

The threshold is the area that separates the spaces and it becomes neutral so the characters can occupy it while putting on the mask of politeness, the conventional persona, they will present to a conforming society: "a face to meet the faces that you meet," as Eliot himself writes in "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock". Although Eliot's

characters have enough internal condition to think about their actions and about the manner they should proceed next, they never get to act in the way they desire. In this case, the liminal spaces of the thresholds obtain a negative meaning and all the characters stuck inside it are indecisive.

Windows are the boundary that instils the illusion of freedom, yet the outside image that it reveals is behind a hard, murky pane. Looking through the window, we are also laden with anxiety because of the chaos of the exterior world. In a sense, we can conclude that T.S. Eliot sees windows as bars of a self-imposed prison cell.

Staircases are the crossroads where we often find ourselves in life, points of transition from one state of being to a higher or lower one. To Eliot, they represent both risk and opportunity.

Doorways are similar to windows, but they open more often and reveal nothing of what is beyond them. Ready or not, we open them to grow and to explore new areas of life.

Passageways are points in time where we are either stuck, fleeing or pondering, and to Eliot they are vital points in character development, as inaction tells just as much about a man as action does.

Streets are a very bizarre rendition of a transitional space, as most would expect to find them under the category of outer spaces – yet, streets are not the true, natural world, but a crossing point between civilized human life and the vast wilderness sprawling beyond the outskirts of cities. When they are bustling, they teem with the will of the masses, a will so strong it can bend the identity of the eccentric individual and the artist. Thus, we can say that they are a threat to individuality. On the other hand, when they are half-deserted, they reflect the very same people rushing to their living quarters in order to be themselves, by themselves, once more.

To conclude, one may say that to T.S. Eliot the chambers of our homes are the chambers of our minds, separated by thresholds, offering only a glimpse into our lives through the windows of human contact. The transitional spaces we find ourselves traversing expose us and force us to disguise ourselves and protect our soft insides. The author's views on streets can be considered a small-scale rendition of his views on cities as a whole, places of depersonalization and confusion, of chaos and fatigue. We are inclined to believe that T.S. Eliot's perspective is none other than the perspective of the broken heart of his generation, fighting fiercely to preserve their true selves in a world hell-bent on changing them and using them as fuel for progress, trying to find sanctuary in the face of hectic transition of merciless change. We can say, then, that this as well is an integral part and reason for his work's on-going success and that the elements illustrated herein remain very much relevant for the contemporary man himself, who faces the great challenge of finding sanctuary and, most of all, just the right amount of solitude.

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