WARTON LECTURE

'WHERE ARE THEY?': THE AFTER-LIFE OF A FIGURE OF SPEECH

By J. S. CUNNINGHAM

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'HWER is Paris and Heleyne?' 'What is now Brutus or stierne Caton?' 'Wher is Tullius with his sugryd tonge?'

> Where be those learned wits and antique Sages
> Which of all wisedome knew the perfect somme:
> Where those great warriors, which did ouercomme
> The world with conquest of their might and maine?

'Where be now the warring kings?' 'Where are the eagles and the trumpets?' From Thomas of Hales, in the thirteenth century, to T. S. Eliot in the twentieth, by way of Boethius (in Chaucer's version), Lydgate, Spenser, and Yeats: this particular figure of speech is of remarkable longevity in a world which it insists is characterized by fallings from us, vanishings.[1] At each fresh occurrence, or stale recurrence, of the simple formula alone, editors note its antiquity, and even speak of 'the whole *ubi sunt* tradition'. To ask ourselves whether this succession of stylized rhetorical incidents constitutes a tradition is to raise questions which might have delighted the historian of English poetry whom we are met to honour. The full question *ubi sunt qui ante nos fuerunt* is commonly given editorially as the title to another thirteenth-century lyric, beginning

> Where beth they, beforen us weren,
> Houndes ladden and havekes beren,
> And hadden feld and wode?

The inquiry is roundly answered, in this particular poem, after a brief description of the delights enjoyed by these *amatores mundi*, 'now they lien in helle ifere'. Implied or explicit, the replies held out to the *ubi sunt* query over the centuries cover a wide

[1] Thomas of Hales, 'A Luue-Ron', *Early Middle English Tests*, ed. Dickins and Wilson (Cambridge, 1951), p. 105; Chaucer, *Boece*, Liber Secundum, Metrum 7; Lydgate, 'As a Mydsomer Rose', *Poems*, ed. J. Norton-Smith (Oxford, 1966), p. 23; Spenser, *The Ruines of Time*, ll. 59–62; Yeats, 'The Happy Shepherd'; Eliot, 'A Cooking Egg'.

field, mirroring a range of feelings about what is cherished in the temporal world, about whether to cherish it is culpable, and about the nature of loss and of transgression. Frequently, the implied answer depends for its effect on its intimidating commonplaceness—the lost are dead, as their mourners shall soon be. The commonplace, inevitably, risks declining into banality; and this in its turn invites ironic exploitation, as when Byron provides answers drawn from slang and scandal:

> Where's Brummel? Dish'd. Where's Long Pole Wellesley? Diddled.[1]

Mockery and reproach very commonly colour the *ubi sunt* incitement to regret. But there are many occasions when the rhetorical purpose of the *ubi sunt* is not to imply or pronounce an answer, but to evoke uninhibited feelings of nostalgia and loss. Homiletic in purpose or not, intended sincerely or exposed to ironic subversion, the rhetorical figure through its long history draws on the sense that renown and distinction, beauty and grace, are things of the past. Mnemosyne sings what these were, in the fabulous narrator's act of recreation; sharing her ideology but altering the consequence, her antique sister sporadically asks 'where are they now?'

Scholars have identified meditational and homiletic texts which form a basis for the prolific repetition of the *ubi sunt* formula in the Middle Ages. Beyond these texts, beyond *The Wanderer* (which does not depreciate what it mourns)—

> Hwaer cwon mearg, hwaer cwon mago?

our attention is drawn to the Apocryphal book of Baruch:

> Where are the princes of the heathen, and such as ruled the beasts that are upon the earth; they that had their pastime with the fowls of the air, and they that hoarded up silver and gold, wherein men trust; and of whose getting there is no end?[2]

The Old Testament itself not only lends its general authority to sententious reflections on the vanity of human wishes—

> What shall I cry? All flesh is grass, and all the goodliness thereof is as the flower of the field—

but is punctuated with rhetorical questions which exert their influence on the *ubi sunt* convention:

> Where are their gods, their rock in whom they trusted?[3]

Alternatively, we might move back along another route, looking

[1] *Don Juan*, c. xi, st. 78. [2] Baruch, 3: 16–17.
[3] Isaiah, 40: 6; Deuteronomy, 32: 37.

towards Nestor's antiquary times for the moment at which our figure of speech first emerged. If so, we might find ourselves listening to the abrasive dialogue in Lucian, where Menippus inquires after the lords and ladies of old times—

> Where are the belles and the beaux, Hermes?

and he is, of course, motioned towards a pile of skulls.[1] (The passage has been thought to provide an analogue for the *Hamlet* graveyard scene.) And there are Greek epigrams on the fall of famous cities which move us to ask whether the question they put would register in its own time as a formula as clearly stylized as the medieval *ubi sunt*. This is all the more intriguing for one concerned with the after-life of our old interrogator, because Ezra Pound rendered into modern-secular-antique one epigram apostrophizing Troy, written by the sixth-century Agathias Scholasticus:

> Whither, O city, are your profits and your gilded shrines,
> And your barbecues of great oxen,
> And the tall women walking your streets, in gilt clothes,
> With their perfumes in little alabaster boxes?
>
> Time's tooth is into the lot, and war's and fate's too.
> Envy has taken your all,
> Save your douth and your story.[2]

(The mixed decorum of this version—'barbecues', 'douth'—breezily emphasizes the specialized temporal balance of the rhetorical moment.) Antipater of Sidon, in the second century BC, asks Corinth what remains of her after her overthrow, in another epigram ending on a note of elegy:

> We alone, the Nereids, Ocean's daughters, remain inviolate, and lament, like halcyons, thy sorrows.[3]

Here, we are at a great distance, of course, from the Christian-homiletic spirit of the medieval *ubi sunt*, which proposes, by sending us for a dusty answer to the tomb, to redirect our attention from this world of transgression and mortality towards the spiritual life and towards Heaven. The more ancient draught

[1] Lucian, *Dialogues of the Dead*, xviii, tr. H. Williams (London, 1888), pp. 136–7.

[2] 'Homage to Quintus Septimius Florentis Christianus', *Collected Shorter Poems* (London, 1952), p. 175. See *The Greek Anthology*, ed. W. R. Paton (London, 1925), vol. iii, p. 79.

[3] *The Greek Anthology*, vol. iii, p. 79. See *The Oxford Book of Greek Verse in Translation*, ed. Higham and Bowra (Oxford, 1938), p. 619.

that comes from Homer, from the 'high funeral gleam' of Troy, is germane to Yeats's creative encounter with 'heroic reverie', and the apostrophe to the lost city (which has, of course, major Biblical analogues) finds a late echo in Eliot's 'Unreal city'. But it is the homiletic tradition that lies at the heart of Eliot's variant of the *ubi sunt* catalogue:

> O dark dark dark. They all go into the dark,
> The vacant interstellar spaces, the vacant into the vacant,
> The captains, merchant bankers, eminent men of letters,
> The generous patrons of art, the statesmen and the rulers,
> Distinguished men of letters, chairmen of many committees,
> Industrial lords and petty contractors, all go into the dark.[1]

Thomas of Hales inquired after Helen, Paris, Ydoine, Amadis, Tristram, Iseult, Hector, and Caesar; Boethius after Fabricius, Brutus, and Cato (Fabricius providing, perhaps, one of those embarrassing moments when the *ubi sunt* question is brought home accidentally to the would-be taxonomer, who reaches furtively for an encyclopedia); Lydgate asks for David, Solomon, Absalom, Jonathan, Julius, Pyrrhus, Alexander, Cicero, Homer, Seneca, the nine worthies, and then, bringing a decisive criterion to bear upon his technically inexhaustible catalogue, he asks after a legion of Christian knights, whose memory as martyrs is 'bilt on rihtwisnesse'. The common expectation in such catalogues appears to be that these figures of renown will spring to life at the mere touch of their names, hardly needing the stimulus of an honorific adjective or a stylized description. But the balance between revival and reinterment, between the excitation of nostalgia and the enforcement of a corrective moral, is hard to gauge. And the moral itself varies at its base. Boethius insists on death as the leveller—both the death of the individual, and also the death of his fame. Thomas of Hales redirects our thoughts from the world of change and fickleness to Heaven. Lydgate turns from the rose of alteration—

> Al stant on chaung as a midsomer rose—

to the Rose of martyrdom.

My preliminary inquiry today into the post-medieval survival of our ancient questioner will lead me to follow some major and some secondary lines of connection. For example, the minor post-Romantic tradition of the *ballade* looked back towards François Villon, as did T. S. Eliot, Louis Macneice, Robert

[1] *East Coker.*

Lowell, and other recent poets. Early in her career our queen of allusion could suffer inconvenient lapses of memory—

> Alas! and that good king of Spain,
> Whose name I cannot think upon?—

and five centuries later she grows quite scatter-brained:

What's become of Mr Gladstone and of grand-pa's roll-top desk?[1]

In broader terms, our theme has to do with a specialized variant of man's dialogue with death, in memory and in prospect; the adequacy of his institutional time-scales; the meeting-ground between revisitation and bereavement—re-hearsing the dead; man's dealings with the historical and literary past, seen as an imposing sarcophagus of self-isolating moments; and the figure's own dealings with itself, aware of its own history, contriving jokes at its own expense.

It seems clear that common to many variants of the old interrogator, in and out of her medieval graveyard, there is a basic decorum of temporal contrasts. We are directed towards a past of prowess, beauty, distinction, from a present moment wholly defined in terms of the lack, and the loss, of these ostensible riches. Within this frame, there are many possible images of glory, and many possible modes of invocation and evocative description. The fact of loss, itself, may be variously registered—as a bereavement, perhaps, or as a desirable purging of our love of this world, or as exemplifying the continuous depredation of Mutability. Outside the figure's own temporal decorum—'they *were*; we now know they are *not*'—each moment at which the question occurs is a different moment, in a changed relation to the past; and that past includes all of the occasions on which previous writers had recourse to the rhetorical figure. Even were the *ubi sunt* to repeat itself in 1979 exactly as it stood in 1589 with Spenser or in 1889 with Yeats, it would, of course, be a different event—as the fictitious Frenchman in Borges unwittingly demonstrated when he set himself, in the nineteenth century, to create Cervantes's *Don Quixote* word for word like the original.[2] Haunter of tombs, undertaker for those long interred, our questioner becomes a compound ghost herself. As we look back through our anthology of examples, curious

[1] Villon, 'Ballad of the Lords of Old Time', tr. Swinburne, *Poems and Ballads*, Second Series (London, 1895), p. 207; Louis Macneice, 'Les neiges d'antan', *Collected Poems* (London, 1966), p. 80.

[2] Jorge Luis Borges, *Labyrinths* (London, 1970), pp. 62–71.

effects emerge. Did the lost people inhabit no special time and place, and did they live in ignorance of the prospect of their own death? Were they all like Shelley's Ozymandias, whose broken statue brags permanently of his achievement? Are we ourselves, chastised by the homilist so many times, incorrigibly worldly, or, drawn by nostalgia towards 'yesteryear', inexhaustibly nostalgic? Where is the question which asks 'where is he?' about a hero specifically acknowledged to face death with the moral of the *ubi sunt* in his head?

The figure's own impulse to stand apart from its context, as a special kind of event, tends to encourage the reader to respond to it as an incitement to reverie. 'Dust hath closed Helen's eyes.' 'Hwer is Paris and Heleyne?' In the emphatic moment of the question, we simultaneously repossess the distinguished past, and are dispossessed of it; we simultaneously encounter a mystery, and acknowledge its baneful correlative, the fact of extinction; we simultaneously focus attention on the particular lost people, and receive them as mere instances of an everlasting general bereavement. Our emotional response to this moment may be compound—regret, nostalgia, awe, and dread—but these feelings readily blur into a condition of brooding. The moment is, in this generalized account of it, both disturbing and narcotic; and the narcotic effect is induced, or supported, by the stylized eloquence of the rhetoric. This is most clearly the case in Spenser, or in the after-life of the medieval *ballade*:

> Prince, with a dolorous, ceaseless knell,
> Above their wasted toil and crime
> The waters of oblivion swell:
> Where are the cities of old time?[1]

Man's achievements are 'wasted' here, not because worldly life is hollow in the perspective of eternity, but because oblivion continuously overwhelms them. Edmund Gosse is writing the music of mutability, described by Wordsworth as

> a scale
> Of awful notes, whose concord shall not fail;
> A musical but melancholy chime.[2]

In the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*, Wordsworth discusses 'the tendency of metre to divest language in a certain degree of its

[1] Edmund Gosse, *Collected Poems* (London, 1911), pp. 83–4. See also 'Wind of Provence', ibid., pp. 92–4. Cf. W. E. Henley, 'Of Dead Actors', *A Book of Verses* (London, 1888), pp. 138–9.

[2] 'Mutability', *Ecclesiastical Sonnets*, xxxiv.

reality, and thus to throw a sort of half-consciousness of unsubstantial existence over the whole composition'. The waters of oblivion toll harmoniously over what they obliterate. A feeling of soothed acceptance and resignation attends upon our acknowledgement of loss.

I have been describing in broad terms a condition of reverie of the kind that many readers might now bring to an *ubi sunt* question which lacked a homiletic purpose and had no subversive elements. Even this generalized response might draw vitality from the potent images invoked, however briefly or tritely, by the rhetorical question. And reverie need not be simply a mode of succumbing to sentimental reflection, as Wordsworth himself shows clearly when he asks his own version of our old question. In 'The Pillar of Trajan', written in 1825, he describes the detailed scenes depicted on the column, and exults in their survival and their informativeness about the Roman past. The poem's last paragraph runs:

> Where now the haughty Empire that was spread
> With such fond hope? her very speech is dead;
> Yet glorious Art the power of Time defies,
> And Trajan still, through various enterprise,
> Mounts, in this fine illusion, toward the skies:
> Still are we present with the imperial Chief,
> Nor cease to gaze upon the bold Relief,
> Till Rome, to silent marble unconfined,
> Becomes with all her years a vision of the Mind.

The rather ponderous elevation of style here does not wholly obscure the authentic intensity of concentration which allows Wordsworth to respond to the rhetorical question with an answer opposite to that which it assumes: the lost civilization is repossessed by the mind, in detail, by way of meditative ecstasy. This capacity for imaginative repossession is to be found again in Tennyson, indebted as both poets are in these instances to Keats's 'Ode on a Grecian Urn'. In a superb 'Fragment' of 1830, Tennyson asks

> Where is the Giant of the Sun, which stood
> In the midnoon the glory of old Rhodes,
> A perfect Idol with profulgent brows
> Farsheening down the purple seas to those
> Who sailed from Mizraim underneath the star
> Named of the dragon?

The poem was not finished to Tennyson's satisfaction. It does

not offer Wordsworthian reflections on the imaginative power it displays, but it does with surging vividness of detail enforce the paradox that in the moment when what is lost is fully conceived, it is repossessed. It is this double awareness that one French scholar complains he failed to find, when chafing under the discipline of reading some hundreds of examples of the medieval *ubi sunt*:

> Le moyen âge, ingénu et matérialiste, le moyen âge au front borné, se demande ou *Ils* sont. Et il ne s'aperçoit pas que, du moment qu'il les évoque, qu'il les remémore, qu'il les regrette, ils ne sont pas morts, mais qu'ils sont toujours vivants, immortels.[1]

This cry of the heart identifies the constriction and dullness behind the continual repetition of the figure; but the oppressive recognition of physical death is not wholly alleviated by acclaiming metaphorical life.

In Gosse's *ballade* 'Where are the cities of the plain?', the lost cities are described as exotic miracles, though more as a melodious depiction than as an imaginative act. Our response to the question here is oddly conditioned by the feeling that these cities, as here conceived, were always at a literary distance from us:

> Where is white Shushan again,
> Where Vashti's beauty bore the bell?

(the very converse of Pound's 'barbecues of great oxen'). The sense of literariness here is not convincingly overcome by Gosse's bringing in of circumstantial detail. The vogue of the *ballade*, particularly as a vehicle for the *ubi sunt* question adapted as an incitement to nostalgic reverie, was assisted by Victorian translations of Villon. In particular, there is Rossetti's misleading version of the most famous 'where are they?':

> Where are the snows of yesteryear?
> Mais ou sont les neiges d'antan?

The English Villonesque tradition partly obscured the inventiveness and the subversiveness of Villon's engagement with the great commonplace. But Robert Lowell's translation purges the decoratively poetic 'yesteryear', which it is hard to think of as a time ever lived in:

> Oh where is last year's snow?

[1] Italo Siciliano, *François Villon et les Thèmes Poétiques du Moyen Âge* (Paris, 1934), p. 261.

and Richard Wilbur reinstates the provocative 'Mais':

But where shall last year's snows be found?[1]

Recent French criticism has opened up questions about Villon's tone, allowing us perhaps to find a spirit of raillery resisting the indulgence of lament. The *ballade* from which this refrain comes is prepared for by stanzas within which Villon asks the *ubi sunt* question amid the unruly impulses of the *Testament*, denying the question the separateness conferred on it by the formally self-sufficient *ballade*. Villon asks

Ou sont les gracieux gallans

and the stanzas carry explicit answers: some have suffered dire poverty, some have prospered, some are perhaps in Hell. The diversity of the answers relieves the set rhetorical occasion of the suspicion that it lazily substitutes a dull, if admonitory, reductiveness for a genuine encounter with living and dying. Paris and Helen, specifically, are not just dead; they die in pain, as everyone does, says Villon, unless they rise miraculously in the flesh to Heaven. The quick immediacy of observation and reflection includes an attempt to school his response into some decorous gesture:

> They sang and spoke so well!
> Ah nothing can survive
> after the last amen;
> some are perhaps in hell.
> May they sleep in God's truth;
> God save those still alive!
>
> Some have risen—are grave
> merchants, lords, divines;
> some only see bread, when
> it's out of reach in windows;
> others have taken vows;
> Carthusians, Celestines,
> wear boots like oyster men—
> what different lives men have![2]

('Voyez l'estat divers d'entre eux.') Subverting the preconceived gravity and absoluteness of the occasion, Villon is in effect restoring its authenticity as an expression of loss, not as a single fact, occurring in an absolute past, but as a process of variable

[1] 'Ballad for the Dead Ladies', *Imitations* (London, 1962), p. 15; 'Ballade of the Ladies of Time Past', *Walking to Sleep* (London, 1971), p. 73.

[2] Lowell, *Imitations*, pp. 8–9.

complexion and pace. Most authentically, 'where are they?' can draw from this poet the reply 'I don't know'. Villon also explicitly, and recklessly, disavows the homiletic purpose of the medieval figure:

> Poor has-been lords, you die,
> you are lords no more, Look,
> King David's Psalter says,
> 'their place forgets their name.'
> I'll let the rest go by,
> it's not my business—
> teaching preachers the book
> is not my trade and game.[1]

The great *ballade* itself, beginning 'Dictes moy ou, n'en quel pays', has been sentimentalized. The title it commonly bears —in Rossetti's version, 'The Ballade of Dead Ladies'—is an editorial accretion, and does not represent at all adequately the range of the poem's regretted people. One critic who sets himself to redeem the poem from simplistic interpretation argues that the *ubi sunt* formula—what he aptly calls the 'question-leçon'—is deceitful in itself.[2] It wishes to show that all questions are vain, in the very act of demonstrating its own validity as a question. It seems to invite us to participate in an inquiry, a search, but without our being able to arrive at any conclusion other than that already enforced in the immediate context—the lost people have died. The question, David Kuhn argues, is not genuinely a question, but is arbitrarily limited in meaning—the very converse of opening on a mystery. He argues that the *ubi sunt*, as an appeal to the reader to confront his experience of loss, permits of three replies: sadly, 'they are not here, but gone'; shruggingly, 'one will never know—the question is pointless'; and, with horror, 'they are rotting in the tomb, eaten by worms'. Such a range of answers had already been adumbrated in the *Testament* immediately before the occurrence of the great *ballade*. But in Villon's formulation what might easily seem a mere tautological extension—'where, in what land' —this critic finds a spirited act of subversion: the authoritarian *ubi sunt*, designed to impose its own will exclusively on the reader, has been obliged to admit the possibility of another kind of answer—amusingly, a geographically informative one. This argument carries some conviction, though it seems clear that to ask 'in what country' could as well intensify the question

[1] Lowell, *Imitations*, p. 13.

[2] David Kuhn, *La Poétique de François Villon* (Paris, 1967), pp. 77 ff.

as undermine it: at what address will we find Eloisa or Andromeda now? We might well think Eliot's tone to be somewhat in tune with this:

> The nymphs are departed.
> And their friends, the loitering heirs of city directors,
> Departed, have left no addresses.[1]

For Kuhn, undermining the question by pressing it *au pied de la lettre* is complemented in the poem as a whole by Villon's introducing several kinds of complication at the cost of the traditional device of the catalogue with its reliance on firm, stereotyped conceptions of those who have been lost. The lost ladies have, each of them, a double identity, one historical, the other literary or mythical; and they are implicated in events in which the protagonists' fortunes alter sharply, sometimes in episodes of brutality (the castration of Abelard, the attempted drowning of Buridan) which are not glossed over by poeticism. More questionably, this critic finds in the poem a covert theme of transformation which confers on the *ballade* a more than merely formal integrity of purpose, with the key emphasis, at the end of the catalogue, on the Virgin, who presides over all transformations as one of whom the question 'where is she?' cannot be asked. The famous refrain, in this account—'Mais ou sont les neiges d'antan?'—ceases to stand as a mere decorative variant of the *ubi sunt.*

Given that this figure of speech typically prefers framing the question within conventional moralistic reflection, and itemizing rather than precisely describing the people who have been lost, any step into convincing circumstantial detail is likely to have an enlivening effect: the dead, revived, gather round with their lives in our heads. Villon's *ballade* 'Qui plus, ou est le tiers Calixte' has the formulaic reference, in its refrain, to 'le preux Charlemagne'. This may be no less evocative for being conventional. But it is offset by the startling individuation of (in Swinburne's translation)

> The Scot too, king of mount and mist,
> With half his face vermilion,
> Men tell us, like an amethyst
> From brow to chin that blazed and shone.[2]

The two modes of recall can interact intriguingly, as readers

[1] *The Waste Land.*
[2] *Poems and Ballads*, Second Series (London, 1895), p. 206.

of much epic and mock-epic literature, or of Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida*, would expect, setting in train reflections on how identities are transmitted and fixed. Many post-medieval examples of the *ubi sunt* find the writer challenging the constraints it imposes, in ways that sometimes recall the diversities and subversions now attributed to Villon. There are challenges to the absolute nature of its contrast between present and past —two tenses locked in mutual definition; to the evocation of people as fixed entities bearing little more than a name; and to the authoritarian nature of the question itself. Sometimes, especially in passages of regretful lyricism, our figure of speech conducts itself as if it had a changeless, oracular validity. More commonly, it responds experimentally to its own history in ways which strain against its assumptions and may even reduce it to travesty. To the larger history around it, out in the world, the figure may respond (for example) by finding the past to be inglorious or incoherent, or by finding the past to be no more than the continuous obsolescence of the present, or by showing it to relate variably and unclearly to the present.

Some years after the ritualized 'Where is thy husband now? Where are thy brothers?' of the bereft queens in *Richard III*, Hamlet addresses the skull thrown up at randon in a spirit of raillery, extending the scope of the *ubi sunt* theme, with whimsical opportunism, into an encounter with the grave-digger who, like our old questioner, prides himself professionally on knowing to what end we must come:

> There's another; why may not that be the skull of a lawyer? Where be his quiddities now, his quillets, his cases, his tenures, and his tricks? why does he suffer this rude knave now to knock him about the sconce with a dirty shovel, and will not tell him of his action of battery?[1]

Apostrophizing Yorick, a little later, Hamlet maintains the figure of speech in face of an intimate sense of personal loss. The rhetorical formula, and the accompanying sententious reflections on vanity, occur in the company of word-games and jingles—the psychological edginess and verbal play revitalizing the conventional trope, as they did in the Villon *ubi sunt* stanzas in the *Testament*. In a sense, the law had the last word, in that one of the latest truly felt elaborations of the traditional *ubi sunt* in English was spoken in 1625 by the Lord Chief Justice at the conclusion of a speech in defence of the claims of Robert de Vere to the Earldom of Oxford:

[1] *Hamlet*, v. i.

I have laboured to make a covenant with my self, that affection may not press upon judgment; for I suppose there is no man that hath any apprehension of gentry or nobleness, but his affection stands to the continuance of so noble a name and house, and would take hold of a twig or twinethread to uphold it; and yet time hath his revolution, there must be a period and an end of all temporal things, *finis rerum*, an end of names and dignities, and whatsoever is terrene, and why not of of De Vere?

For where is Bohun? where's Mowbray? where's Mortimer? &c. Nay, which is more and most of all, where is Plantagenet? they are intombed in the urnes and sepulchres of mortality.

And yet let the name and dignity of De Vere stand so long as it pleaseth God.[1]

By contrast, the homiletic *ubi sunt* all too often permits itself moralistic reflection at the cost of those who are, from the outset, tendentiously described as falsely impressive, and all the better for being lost. In her years as a great tomb-haunter with Robert Blair and Edward Young, the old questioner never tires of this dubious gratification: 'Where are the mighty thunderbolts of war?', 'Where, the prime actors of the last year's scene?'[2]

There is, however, a level at which Young's reflections on mortality convey, if tautologically, a disturbing sense of the world as being made phantom-like by bereavement:

> thy last sigh
> Dissolved the charm; the disenchanted earth
> Lost all her lustre. Where her glittering towers?
> Her golden mountains, where? all darken'd down
> To naked waste.[3]

Purged of the longer line's expletive syllables, the comparatively terse stanzas of *Resignation* interrogate, in old age, Young's 'second world' into which he survives, beset by desolation and estrangement. 'Where are we? whence? and whither?' Byron refers to this poem in preparing the way for his own radically inventive stanzas on the theme in *Don Juan*:

> 'Where is the world?' cries Young, at *eighty*—'Where
> The world in which a man was born?'[4]

[1] *The English Reports*, lxxxii, King's Bench Division xi (London, 1908), p. 53 (W. Jo. 96 at 101).

[2] Blair, *The Grave*, l. 123, *Poetical Works* (Edinburgh, 1854), p. 137; Young, *Night Thoughts*, Night IX, *Poetical Works* (London, 1853), p. 241.

[3] *Night Thoughts*, Night I, *Poetical Works*, ed. cit., p. 12.

[4] *Don Juan*, c. xi, st. lxxvi.

Byron himself had been fond of the set piece on loss and transience, not with Young's moralizing piety, but equally given to inert generalities:

> Ancient of days! august Athena! where,
> Where are thy men of might? thy grand in soul?

The shallow attention to loss which is found in lines like these hardly bears the heavy sententious reflection

> Gone—glimmering through the dream of things that were.[1]

We only know, Byron is fond of saying, that we know nothing. In weak palliation of this 'truth' he reflects that it would be sweet if we could, in an after-life, encounter 'each mighty shade' and the apostrophized 'thou':

> can I deem thee dead
> When busy Memory flashes on the brain?[2]

Canto vii of *Don Juan* had spent a few cordially resourceful moments with the homilists and their posterity:

> Ecclesiastes said, 'that all is vanity'—
> Most modern preachers say the same, or show it
> By their examples of true Christianity:
> In short, all know, or very soon may know it,
> And in this scene of all-confessed inanity,
> By saint, by sage, by preacher, and by poet,
> Must I refrain me, through the fear of strife,
> From holding up the nothingness of life?

Wit thrives here in the shifty territory between truth and platitude, between prophecy and plagiarism, between seeing life as inane and inanely saying so. In Canto xi, there are a few sententious lines, close to platitude, about the speed with which everyone vanishes, then a precipitate series of questions on the *ubi sunt* model breaks in. No decorum here but is quickly broken, in order to match the verse to the pace and indecorousness of change. The conventionalized reference to people as fixed entities, which in other contexts lures us into a corrigible respect for them, is for Byron a token of subservience to mere title or to false repute. The traditional implied answer to the question is displaced by a racy, worldly, half-amused knowingness which approximates the speaker to the society which he mockingly observes—he is an informant closely attuned to the papers and the gossipers. Political betrayals; the collapse of reputations; the deaths of public figures, some of them by suicide;

[1] *Childe Harold*, c. ii, st. 2. [2] Ibid., st. 9.

men and women with whom Byron did or did not feel partisan; the fickleness of the populace: the only exceptions to the incoherence of change are the Whigs, who are what they were, and are still out of office. The sensibility of the writer is moving with the pace of what he contemplates. A worldly lesson is to be learned, and of course we are not to trust the invitation to take it up as Byron's settled advice in this context of turbulence: 'Be hypocritical, be cautious.' W. W. Robson comments perceptively that Byron 'makes a virtue out of his inability to concentrate', adding that 'we are to feel his resilience to the solemn commonplace, in his capacity to organise a movement of so prodigiously long a wave-length'.[1] Although the people in his stanzas behave much as the worldly-wise would expect them to, the dizzy succession of alterations and dyings is not reducible to a pattern based on any general criterion. A maverick inclusiveness, breaking the decorum of the rhetorical figure, curiously strengthens it: the catalogue convention, which was so often tendentiously selective while moralizing about 'universals', becomes (except for the amusing exigencies of metre) genuinely random. We feel ourselves to be close to the facts of change (facts, and rumours, and obscurities), though shielded from distress by taking sides with a spirit of witty, cuffing disrespect:

'Where is the world?' cries Young, at *eighty*—'Where
The world in which a man was born?' Alas!
Where is the world of *eight* years past? '*Twas there*—
I look for it—'tis gone, a globe of glass!
Crack'd, shiver'd, vanish'd, scarcely gazed on, ere
A silent change dissolves the glittering mass.
Statesmen, chiefs, orators, queens, patriots, kings,
And dandies, all are gone on the wind's wings.

Where is Napoleon the Grand? God knows:
Where little Castlereagh? The devil can tell:
Where Grattan, Curran, Sheridan, all those
Who bound the bar or senate in their spell?
Where is the unhappy Queen, with all her woes?
And where the Daughter, whom the Isles loved well?
Where are those martyr'd saints the Five per Cents?
And where—oh, where the devil are the Rents?

Where's Brummel? Dish'd. Where's Long Pole Wellesley? Diddled.
Where's Whitbread? Romilly? Where's George the Third?
Where is his will? (That's not so soon unriddled.)
And where is 'Fum' the Fourth, our 'royal bird'?

[1] *Proceedings of the British Academy*, xliii, 1957 (London, 1958), 58.

Gone down, it seems, to Scotland to be fiddled
  Unto by Sawney's violin, we have heard:
'Caw me, caw thee'—for six months hath been hatching
This scene of royal itch and loyal scratching.

Where is Lord This? And where my Lady That?
  The Honourable Mistresses and Misses?
Some laid aside like an old Opera hat,
  Married, unmarried, and remarried (this is
An evolution oft performed of late).
  Where are the Dublin shouts—and London hisses?
Where are the Grenvilles? Turn'd as usual. Where
My friends the Whigs? Exactly where they were.

We are released from the lazy 'literary' reliance on the figure of Time as the absolute agent of human loss and change.

Eliot's line

Where are the eagles and the trumpets?

comes towards the end of a poem in which even the tone and status of the epigraph, taken from Villon's *Testament*, are perplexingly insecure. The question relates, across a few stanzas, to that most honorific of names, Coriolanus, which we find trapped in a stanza of bathetic jocularity, to the outrage of such ghosts as Edmund Spenser:

I shall not want Honour in Heaven
  For I shall meet Sir Philip Sidney
And have talk with Coriolanus
  And other heroes of that kidney.

Madame Blavatsky holds court in Dante's Paradise, and there is a Byronic bed-cover of five-per-cent exchequer bonds in which the speaker and Sir Alfred Mond, founder of ICI, may sleep sound. In this context of facile discrepancies, which would seem to *portend* much more than they *convey*, the *ubi sunt* makes two appearances, the first in yearning for a brittle childish Arcadia, the second peering after possibilities which sound as if they have always been archaic (an 'antique drum'). The first question is promptly confronted by an obscene urban apocalypse; the second gives way to a bathetic universal distress, the *angst* of the shoddy tea-room, in a debilitated version of the Mutability reverie:

But where is the penny world I bought
  To eat with Pipit behind the screen?
The red-eyed scavengers are creeping
  From Kentish Town and Golder's Green;

Where are the eagles and the trumpets?
Buried beneath some snow-deep Alps.
Over buttered scones and crumpets
Weeping, weeping multitudes
Droop in a hundred A.B.C.'s

The contextual discomfort imposed on the antique questions here is hard to disperse: we have no means of establishing their true human weight. (By contrast, Villon's own spirit of complication and subversion affords a basis of dramatized human candour and waywardness—Eliot valued him for his 'honesty'.) The collocation of Roman pomp, the anonymity of officialdom, and a desperate but ill-focused yearning, is later found in the Coriolan poems, bringing the *ubi sunt* motive into association with regression. However, the reticence of 'A Cooking Egg' seems particularly welcome by comparison with the turgid, self-travestied incoherence of Louis Macneice's exercise in apocalyptic *ubi sunt*, ironically entitled *Les neiges d'antan*.[1] Macneice himself as a lyricist frequently had recourse to the formula, most effectively to convey tinsel regret; satirically, the rhetorical questions in the present poem enquire after properties we are better off without:

What's become of all the glory and the grandeur of the gold-men and the gunmen,
The long breakers topped with silver of expanding power and profits,
Of the well-upholstered mansion, seven flights of stairs for the servants,
Carrying coal from six in the morning?

The collapse of a civilization of corrupt power and obsolete authority leaves a vacuum in which the sentimental old questioner shifts her ground and invokes obscure symbols of clarity and virtue:

What's become of the light of day, the golden spokes of the sun's wheels
What's become of the fingers of light that picked the locks of the dark places?

And the poem itself adopts the rather desperate expedient of expressing a rhetorically generalized but flatly contemporary alarmist prophecy:

Fire in Troy, fire in Babylon, fire in Nineveh, fire in London,
FIRE FIRE FIRE FIRE
The buckets are empty of water, the hoses are punctured.

[1] Macneice, *Collected Poems* (London, 1966), p. 80. Cf. also 'Château Jackson', ibid., pp. 519–20; 'Les Sylphides', ibid., pp. 171–2.

The second section of *East Coker* ends with two lines which stand a little apart from each other and from their immediate context, typographically. They are, as it were, two painful, measured replies to an implied 'where are they?':

> The houses are all gone under the sea.
> The dancers are all gone under the hill.

The poem has been disengaging us from the wisdom which is to be gained from experience: convictions based on such knowledge falsify the evidence, and each moment, if truly encountered, is

> a new and shocking
> Valuation of all we have been.

An affirmation of humility precedes the two lines imaging human loss. These in turn give way to the catalogue of the vacant—captains, merchant bankers, eminent men of letters—who perpetually disappear into vacancy. The offered instances are 'contemporary', as seen from a particular metropolitan vantage-point; and they emphasize social standing (rather than, for example, physical appearance, convictions, natural gifts) on a scale of rank and status reaching downwards from the heights of the Establishment to petty contractors (and no further). Many an *ubi sunt* catalogue invites us to receive it as if it were a random assemblage drawn from the inexhaustible rolls of the merely mortal or the reprehensibly mundane. Any such catalogue will, of course, to some extent disclose a given sensibility, a set of assumptions, a rhetoric. There is a risk that the selective nature of the particular list will inhibit our accepting it as enforcing the painful reflection that *all* human distinction whatsoever is perishable and vain. Another risk is that this general reflection will be pre-empted by the rhetorical procedure itself: described as hollow, the dead are declared to be so. In the example from Eliot these risks are certainly incurred to some extent. However, an expressive effect is derived from our promptly seeing through the figures in the catalogue as hollow men, and this relates to the dramatic aspect of the passage: worldly living is vacuous, *and* it is painful *to see it as such.* The catalogue presses upon the poet's consciousness, and it includes him among the vacant, both directly in the words 'we all go with them', and obliquely in the phrase 'eminent men of letters' —one thinks of the 1940 lecture on Yeats:

> There is another and even worse temptation: that of becoming dignified, of becoming public figures with only a public existence—coat-racks

hung with decorations and distinctions. . . . Yeats was not that kind of poet.[1]

As with Eliot, so Yeats rarely has recourse to the rhetorical formula itself: 'where are now the warring kings?' is a brief polemical sally on the part of the Happy Shepherd, who argues against the pursuit of mere deeds, not the 'certain good' of words, in the verses which stand first in *Collected Poems*. As with Eliot, Yeats's creative effort is closely associated with one branch of the *ubi sunt* tradition—not, for him, the homiletic Judaeo-Christian, but rather the nostalgic reinvoking of the heroes and heroines of myth and epic narrative. Looking from Eliot to Yeats with the classical perspective in mind, we turn from the braggart civic egotism of Rome to the 'great song' of Homer, and the legendary prototypes, centrally Helen. The distance to Yeats from 'Where is Paris and Heleyne?' is partly to be measured by the recognition that such a question is, for Thomas of Hales, an inquiry after people who had really lived, and whose experiences were recounted in Romance. The question has a wholly different meaning for the Yeats of 'Leda and the Swan', or for Edmund Spenser's Calliope. As early as 1902, Yeats shows himself to be particularly close to the poem in which Spenser gave fullest rein to the *ubi sunt* figure—*The Ruines of Time*. Spenser's three stanzas of rhetorical inquiry after the former ages are framed by passages of sententious reflection on the 'trustlesse state of miserable men'; and they are, tellingly, spoken by the ghost of a ruined city, Verulam. One time-scale folds in upon another. (Incidentally, Spenser remarks, in a delightful paradox, that two of the recalled oppressors whom he describes are now erased from our memory.) In Spenser's poem, what has been lost is repossessed with a fully imagined vividness, nourishing a sustained eloquence of nostalgia and lament—fully imagined, but thoroughly idealized ('where the cristall Thames was wont to slide'). He affirms, of course, the transcendent virtue of Christian knighthood, and the power of lyric and elegiac poetry to confer immortality on mortal men. In *Teares of the Muses*, Calliope condemns the contemporary world as one in which heroic poetry has disastrously fallen out of favour:

> Ne doo they care to have the auncestrie
> Of th'old Heroës memorizde anew,
> Ne doo they care that late posteritie
> Should know their names, or speak their praises dew.

[1] *On Poetry and Poets* (London, 1957), p. 257.

A metaphor expressing the decline of the heroic principle with the death of the Earl of Leicester catches Yeats's attention:

> At the end of a long beautiful passage, he laments that unworthy men should be in the Earl's place, and compares them to the fox—an unclean feeder—hiding in the lair 'the badger swept'.[1]

Yeats goes on to regret that Spenser did not continue to live as a 'master of ceremony to the world . . . instead of being plunged into a life that but stirred him to bitterness, as is the way with theoretical minds in the tumults of events they cannot understand'. Yeats is, indeed, reading Spenser with kinds of emphasis which anticipate dominant elements in his own later work. When he recalls the fox and badger image towards the end of his career, in 'The Municipal Gallery Revisited', it is in the course of a ceremonious and intense reverie summoning up lost images: the recent past has seen the emergence of exemplary human beings

> And I am in despair that time may bring
> Approved patterns of women and of men
> But not that self-same excellence again.

However, this despair is matched, in the immediate context, by the repossession of these luminous figures; and Yeats is prepared to allow space for the less than admirable attributes of the men he recalls:

> Griffith staring in hysterical pride,
> Kevin O'Higgins' countenance that wears
> A gentle questioning look that cannot hide
> A soul incapable of remorse or rest.

Yeats, it might be said, brings to his encounter with transience a will to affirm one sense of 'dream'—the visionary gleam of heroic prototypes—without wavering in his acknowledgement of 'dream' in another sense—the delusiveness of human achievement (as conveyed by the ghost of Plato, not Ecclesiastes). The drama of this opposition, with all its variations of emphasis, becomes a subject of his poetry as well as a source of its energy. What the poetry then affords is a gathered demonstration of creative consciousness and verve, within which the elegiac celebration of the past is obliged to meet a great range of challenges. 'Mere dreams, mere dreams'; 'All lives that has lived'; 'Man is in love and loves what vanishes'; 'All the Olympians; a thing never seen again';

> What's the meaning of all song?
> Let all things pass away:

[1] *Essays and Introductions* (London, 1961), pp. 359–60.

the heroic past decried as fantasy; all past life as perpetual; all lived experience an experience of rightly loved transient things; the classical heroism of the immediate past; the lyrical celebration of loss resourcefully faced. The range is wider than these instances indicate, of course, and it is irreducible. A radically disturbing challenge, in terms of our concern with the *ubi sunt*, occurs in the late poem 'A Bronze Head'. The poem concludes with a Spenserian disparagement of the contemporary world 'in its decline and fall':

> Heroic reverie mocked by clown and knave.

It has recalled many contrasting aspects of one dead figure, then moves to ask not 'where is she?' but (much more taxingly) 'who was she?':

> Here at right of the entrance this bronze head,
> Human, superhuman, a bird's round eye,
> Everything else withered and mummy-dead.
> What great tomb-haunter sweeps the distant sky
> (Something may linger there though all else die;)
> And finds there nothing to make its terror less
> *Hysterica passio* of its own emptiness?
>
> No dark tomb-haunter once; her form all full
> As though with magnanimity of light,
> Yet a most gentle woman; who can tell
> Which of her forms has shown her substance right?
> Or maybe substance can be composite,
> Profound McTaggart thought so, and in a breath
> A mouthful held the extreme of life and death.

In the *ubi sunt*, one knew, by her mere name, who Helen had been. Not so the lost figure here. And death happened, traditionally, to human beings: in Yeats, quite as emphatically, human beings happen to death.

Quite the most bizarre collisions of the *ubi sunt* retrospect with a sense of living human energy are to be found in a chapter of Carlyle's *Sartor Resartus*. There is the energy of the re-invoked heroic occasions:

> Where now is Alexander of Macedon: does the steel host, that yelled in fierce battle-shouts at Issus and Arbela, remain behind him; or have they all vanished utterly, even as perturbed Goblins must? Napoleon too, and his Moscow Retreats and Austerlitz Campaigns!

Was it all other than the veriest Spectre-hunt; which has now, with its howling that made Night hideous, flitted away?[1]

We are all, the high-flown Professor continues, walking ghosts. But we exhibit astounding energy as spirits, and by dint of this energy we leave perplexing traces of ourselves:

like a God-created, fire-breathing Spirit-host, we emerge from the Inane; haste stormfully across the astonished Earth; then plunge again into the Inane . . . But whence? O Heaven, and whither? Sense knows not; Faith knows not; only that it is through Mystery to Mystery, from God and to God.

> We are such stuff
> As dreams are made on, and our little life
> Is rounded with a sleep!

The platitudes, inflated and precipitate, are brought into odd relation with a sense of turgid energy, very different from the stable distancing of life commonly found in the *ubi sunt*. If meretricious, ironically offered as such?

It would be a pity to leave out of account a poem which in its way supports the Yeatsian recovery of the heroic, and does so by way of a striking re-direction of the *ubi sunt*. Edgar Lee Masters had himself deftly summarized the triteness of the *ballade* tradition:

> Ballades by the score with the same old thought:
> The snows and the roses of yesterday are vanished;
> And what is love but a rose that fades?

In contrast, he offers the human diversity which is to be found close at hand once the truisms have been discarded:

> Tragedy, comedy, valor and truth,
> Courage, constancy, heroism, failure.[2]

His poem 'The Hill' challenges the *ubi sunt* by inquiring not after the legendary, but after people of strictly parochial significance. However, they quickly achieve a folk identity, as if we stood at the inception of minor heroic reputations. The refrain introduces a note of gentle euphemism, but is displaced at the end by the emergence of a Yeatsian figure of zestful anarchy, whose narratives are incoherent. This superannuated anecdotist saves the poem from being a mere inverse of the *ubi sunt* inquiry after figures of renown. Our access to the past is,

[1] *Sartor Resartus* (London, 1893), pp. 183–5.

[2] 'Petit, the Poet', *The Oxford Book of American Verse*, ed. F. O. Matthiessen (Oxford, 1950), pp. 513–14.

it emerges, a matter of human transmission. We cast people, however obscure, in the image of one decisive moment, as did the daughters of Memory in recalling the famous. But the indiscriminate burbler presses forward amiably to answer our old questioner, not with an obituary, but with whatever anecdote, well-worn, rushes into his head. He is Mnemosyne's great-great-grandson, much removed.

The Hill

Where are Elmer, Herman, Bert, Tom and Charley,
The weak of will, the strong of arm, the clown, the boozer,
the fighter?
All, all, are sleeping on the hill.

One passed in a fever,
One was burned in a mine,
One was killed in a brawl,
One died in a jail,
One fell from a bridge toiling for children and wife—
All, all are sleeping, sleeping, sleeping on the hill.

Where are Ella, Kate, Mag, Lizzie and Edith,
The tender heart, the simple soul, the loud, the proud, the
happy one?—
All, all, are sleeping on the hill.

One died in shameful child-birth,
One of a thwarted love,
One at the hands of a brute in a brothel,
One of a broken pride, in the search for heart's desire,
One after life in far-away London and Paris
Was brought to her little space by Ella and Kate and Mag—
All, all are sleeping, sleeping, sleeping on the hill.

Where are Uncle Issac and Aunt Emily,
And old Towny Kincaid and Sevigne Houghton,
And Major Walker who had talked
With venerable men of the revolution?—
All, all, are sleeping on the hill.

They brought them dead sons from the war,
And daughters whom life had crushed,
And their children fatherless, crying—
All, all, are sleeping, sleeping, sleeping on the hill.

Where is Old Fiddler Jones
Who played with life all his ninety years,

Braving the sleet with bared breast,
Drinking, rioting, thinking neither of wife nor kin,
Nor gold, nor love, nor heaven?
Lo! he babbles of the fish-frys of long ago,
Of the horse-races of long ago at Clary's Grove,
Of what Abe Lincoln said
One time at Springfield.[1]

Our medieval, name-dropping, verbose sexton and preacher, the *ubi sunt*, his nostalgia for the most part firmly restrained by *contemptus mundi*, has enjoyed an after-life of adaptation, innovation, and heresy. He has removed from the church-door into less secure accommodation which looks back on a more complex past. His nostalgia, fed by a taste for the exotic and the revivalist-medieval, has tended to displace his moralism. He turned from trusted romances to the golden fictions of epic. He mocked his own threadbare procedures. As he lived on, many more painstaking activities were going on around him, which constitute kinds of answer to his dogged old question: the continuous reassessment of the nature of historical thinking, the scholarly recovery of the past, the creative engagement of major writers with the heritage, and with the idea of a heritage, and with the passing events of their own lifetime. Wordsworth's perplexed questions

Whither is fled the visionary gleam?
Where is it now, the glory and the dream?

resist being added to our catalogue of incidents.[2] With Arthur Hugh Clough, our questioner studied a tone of gentlemanly insouciance:

Whither depart the brave? God knows. I certainly do not.[3]

With Richard Eberhart, he turned from nostalgia for a past horizon—

Where be those high and haunting skies?—

to gesture towards (rather uninterestingly) mysterious abstractions:

Where stays
The abrupt essence and the final shield?[4]

[1] Ibid., pp. 510–11.
[2] 'Ode: Intimations of Immortality', ll. 56–7.
[3] *Amours de Voyage*, Canto V, Section VI 'Claude to Eustace', *The Poems*, ed. A. L. P. Norrington (Oxford, 1968), p. 217.
[4] *Reading the Spirit* (London, 1936), p. 53.

With Keats, he found a moment of simple energetic rejection:

> Where are the songs of Spring? Ay, where are they?
> Think not of them, thou hast thy music too.[1]

Were we to conclude by seeking to reinstate the old inquiry as a full formal occasion, we should seek out a rhetorician confident in his own powers and in the force and usefulness of the trope. Mr Walter Shandy has been plotting a journey through France, when a letter arrives with news of bereavement. His endearingly self-indulgent exercise in the *ubi sunt* provides unwittingly some entertaining critical points about it. Oblivion stoops from the absolutes of loss to the daily decline of accurate spelling, and the rhetorician, for all his exotic literary geography, has a commonplace reliance on an atlas of the real world which he seeks to impress:

'Kingdoms and provinces, and towns and cities, have they not their periods? and when those principles and powers, which at first cemented and put them together, have performed their several evolutions, they fall back.'—Brother Shandy, said my uncle Toby, laying down his pipe at the word *evolutions*—Revolutions, I meant, quoth my father,—by heaven! I meant revolutions, brother Toby—evolutions is nonsense.—'Tis not nonsense—said my uncle Toby.—But is it not nonsense to break the thread of such a discourse upon such an occasion? cried my father—do not—dear Toby, continued he, taking him by the hand, do not—do not, I beseech thee, interrupt me at this crisis—My uncle Toby put his pipe into his mouth.

'Where is Troy and Mycenae, and Thebes and Delos, and Persepolis and Agrigentum?'—continued my father, taking up his book of post-roads, which he had laid down.—'What is become, brother Toby, of Nineveh and Babylon, of Cizicum and Mitylenae? The fairest towns that ever the sun rose upon, are now no more: the names only are left, and those (for many of them are wrong spelt) are falling themselves by piece-meals to decay, and in length of time will be forgotten, and involved with every thing in a perpetual night: the world itself, brother Toby, must—must come to an end.

'Returning out of Asia, when I sailed from Aegina towards Megara', (*when can this have been? thought my uncle Toby*) 'I began to view the country round about. Aegina was behind me, Megara was before, Pyraeus on the right hand, Corinth on the left.—What flourishing towns now prostrate upon the earth! Alas! alas! said I to myself, that man should disturb his soul for the loss of a child, when so much as this lies awfully buried in his presence—Remember, said I to myself again—remember thou art a man.'—

Now my uncle Toby knew not that this last paragraph was an extract

[1] 'To Autumn.'

of Servius Sulpicius's consolatory letter to Tully.—He had as little skill, honest man, in the fragments, as he had in the whole pieces of antiquity.—And as my father, whilst he was concerned in the Turkey trade, had been three or four different times in the Levant, in one of which he had staid a whole year and an half at Zant, my uncle Toby naturally concluded, that in some one of these periods, he had taken a trip across the Archipelago, into Asia; and that all this sailing affair with Aegina behind, and Megara before, and Pyraeus on the right hand, &c. &c. was nothing more than the true course of my father's voyage and reflections.—'Twas certainly in his *manner*, and many an undertaking critic would have built two stories higher upon worse foundations.—And pray, brother, quoth my uncle Toby, laying the end of his pipe upon my father's hand in a kindly way of interruption—but waiting till he finished the account—what year of our Lord was this?—'Twas no year of our Lord, replied my father.—That's impossible, cried my uncle Toby.—Simpleton! said my father,—'twas forty years before Christ was born.[1]

Not 'post-roads' but 'post-cards', reads a recent edition of *Tristram Shandy*.[2] The accidental anachronism is absurdly felicitous.

[1] *Tristram Shandy* (London, 1967), pp. 349–50.
[2] Everyman edition (London, 1946), p. 260.