2

Prufrock observed

the only cure for Romanticism is to analyse it.[1]

Since he was growing up in the 1890s and 1900s, Eliot's first verses were naturally in the late romantic vein. Yet even the 'poems written in early youth' – that is, from his last year at Smith Academy when he was sixteen, to the end of his undergraduate years at Harvard when he was twenty-one – reveal the individual talent that was soon to cure itself of romanticism.

The half-dozen lyrics written before he discovered Laforgue, with 'At Graduation 1905', faintly evoke the poetical effects of Gray, of Blake's *Poetical Sketches*, of Wordsworth, Shelley, Keats, of Tennyson, Arnold, Swinburne, and of Fitzgerald's Omar Khayyám. The diction is drawn from these poets, and is undisturbed by the young author's own direct sensations. This makes the verse not impersonal but remote and artificial, its images not original but reproductions. In spite of that there is some distinctive character. The many borrowed voices are composed into one voice; and that voice *thinks through* the conventional images with a rare cogency. If the flowers are forever withering, at least they do so to some definite effect.

The two versions of the earliest lyric, after Jonson, attempt a metaphysical variation upon the *carpe diem* theme: but the dissolution of what is transient into the timeless 'divine' is hardly effective. However, 'When we came home across the hill' does transform the apparently idyllic into the elegiac. The still living landscape is first seen in terms of the suspended, imminent, withering and falling; then the close asserts, as a positive statement and with the rhythm enforcing the climax,

> But the wild roses in your wreath
> Were faded, and the leaves were brown.

It is a surprising fulfilment. Should the wild roses not have been plucked? Yet the same fate is only suspended for the leaves and flowers that are ungathered. And though 'wreath' becomes funereal, it is first festive. This order of argument, with its assurance that a specific emotion is being formulated,

and with such sensitive precision of rhythm, is most unusual in an adolescent's verse.

'Before Morning' further refines the poet's first sense of his world. The ordering of its images inextricably joins the blooming and the dying, so that the final 'dawn' opens as much upon death as a new day. This is quite minor verse; and yet it is individual, in the way it just stands apart from its images and feelings in a thoughtful inspection of them. Nor is it fanciful to hear Eliot's voice finding its authentic movement in the phrasing and the varying rhythm, just as in Blake's early poems the 'originality is in an occasional rhythm' [2] –

> This morning's flowers and flowers of yesterday
> Their fragrance drifts across the room at dawn . . .

These images will return, their values fully realised, in the sestina of *The Dry Salvages*, when this fashion of thinking lyrically has become the poet's trained habit of mind.

'On a Portrait' begins with the world-weariness of Tennyson's *In Memoriam* and *Maud*, and of Arnold's 'Scholar Gipsy'. The second quatrain might be related to Pater's vision of *La Gioconda*. However, the sestet – for this is a sonnet – resists all the romantic invitations. The irreducible otherness of the portrait puts a stop to the wearied yearning and self-satisfying fantasy. Pater imagined in the *Mona Lisa* 'a beauty wrought out from within upon the flesh, the deposit, little cell by cell, of strange thoughts and fantastic reveries and exquisite passions'. But this woman stands beyond the circle of such thoughts; and the poet attains the detachment of the parrot's 'patient curious eye'.

Eliot may have written that poem about the time he came upon Arthur Symons' *The Symbolist Movement in Literature*, which introduced him to Laforgue: that was in December 1908, and the poem appeared on 26 January 1909. Certainly he had not yet read Laforgue for himself. But his own instinct was already guiding him towards the Laforguian irony, which, as Symons put it, dried out the pathos of the passing world. In 'Circe's Palace', published in 1908, there was a movement in each of the two stanzas 'from highly coloured "decadent" statements to plain, terse statements'.[3] Eliot's natural impulse was to detach himself from feelings and experience, to be the coolly conscious observer, not the celebrant, of his sensibility.

The effect of his reading Laforgue[4] was that he was galvanised into being himself. Laforgue could rewrite *Hamlet*, which, for the romantic imagination, had been an irresistible invitation to self-dramatisation, with the ironic condescension of one who knows it all. His Hamlet reflects that at least he has saved Ophelia from a life worse than death; and then is himself saved from the banalities of a passionate elopement when Laertes stabs him. Eliot, in 'Nocturne',

applied that treatment to *Romeo and Juliet*, another classic of tragic passion. Seen as if from behind the scenes, Romeo appears the lovelorn Pierrot, and the affair just the usual stale romance. It calls for a merciful release for all concerned, and finds it in a risqué pun. This is high tragedy in dead-pan burlesque, with the poet as puppet-master, beyond illusion. There is no romance in it for his eye, which has seen it all before and plotted all the moves. His only relief from the boredom of the inevitable is to send it up by some witty transformation.

Laforgue was Eliot's master in this art of cosmic detachment, an art which contrives to stand outside the inescapable. One of his masks is Pierrot, hopelessly in love with the moon and fixed in the usual dull world. Another is a Hamlet with his five senses tying him to life, but with a sixth sense for the infinite. Such longings for the Ideal are of the essence of Romanticism. However, Laforgue feels them with a difference. Instead of making them a means of escape from the ordinary world, he uses them to sharpen awareness of the props and pretences, the habits and vanities which pass there for life. And the increase of that awareness only intensifies the distance from the unattainable ideal. The drama, the play of feeling, is the conflict of a mind conscious of an unknown ideal yet having to live in the realm of the commonplace. It does not simply oscillate from the one to the other, as Keats does in his 'Ode to a Nightingale'. Somehow the poet must place himself simultaneously within and above his experience; must hold together, in the double vision of his irony, the unreconcilable points of view.

Yet in Laforgue this attitude remains a development of romanticism, not a liberation from it. Because his personae yearn for the moon they only confirm their fate as trapped victims of earth. Their sole freedom is in being conscious of their fate, which they cannot master. This is the predicament of Prufrock; and Eliot's criticism of Prufrock may be read as a criticism of Laforgue also. The latter had turned its own romantic illusions against a too solidly materialised world, and exposed its vanity by the light of the unattainable. But to do only that was to arrive at the last impasse of romanticism, and to be the trapped intelligence of its dead end. By making that predicament itself the object of detached analysis Eliot was soon to save himself from it.

A measure of dissociation from Laforgue is apparent even in the first poem to acknowledge his influence: 'Humouresque'. The direct debt is to a stanza from 'Locutions des Pierrots: XII' which Symons had quoted:

> Encore un de mes pierrots mort;
> Mort d'un chronique orphelinisme;
> C'était un coeur plein de dandysme
> Lunaire, en un drôle de corps.

However, Eliot's marionette has no heart: he is simply the jumping-jack of the moment. And his moon is pasteboard; his only world the one in fashion. 'Where would he belong?' if not there. The effect of the question, and of the observations which prompt it, is to assume a point of view quite detached from earth, marionette and moon. Yet there is no ideal stated: the mind is wholly engaged in contemplating the actuality. The feat of detachment is therefore all the more extraordinary, for somehow the poet has contrived to stand outside his world without placing himself in the realm of the merely imaginary. Laforgue is never so objective. This is verse that really is hard and dry, with all trace of subjective pathos squeezed out. At the same time it is not much more than an 'imitation' of his master's style, expressing an attitude to Laforgue rather than his own feelings.

It is with 'Spleen' that Eliot begins to deal with his own world and to find his own voice. The title is after Baudelaire's *Spleen et Idéal*. Though the word is no longer current in English, the French sense is derived from a usage found in Pope's *Rape of the Lock* and many other English writings of that time, signifying 'excessive dejection or depression of spirits' (*O.E.D.*). It comes from being got down by banalities, from being baffled and dulled by the appearances most people keep up. Eliot's poem is almost wholly out of Laforgue, and the last stanza is a brilliant distillation of Symons' characterisation of him. Yet it is also his most original poem so far. The speech is living; the perceptions are felt; and the verse, freely over-riding the octosyllabic line, achieves significant harmonies of rhythm and stress. The rhymes are not only telling but structural: as in the dejected effect of *alley/rally*, and the clinching of the stanza and the irony with *suit/Absolute*.

What is most remarkable is the method of mind. If the Sunday procession displaces a would-be superior self-possession; and if there is no stay for the inner self in simple familiar things; yet there remains the final resource of becoming the alienated observer. From that point of view the complacent Sunday world is magnified into its own Ideal, seen as Life got up fit to meet its Maker; and thus, 'on the doorstep of the Absolute', it is put in its place. The wit is satisfyingly effective. The eye has been fixed steadily upon its object, unclouded by spleen; and by the end the spleen is purged.

'Conversation Galante' was probably Eliot's next poem.[5] Again there are direct debts to Laforgue, together with an increasing assurance in his own method and meaning. Its main interest, however, is in its adumbration of 'Prufrock' and 'Portrait of a Lady'. To personify the lover as Pierrot is some advance upon the puppet-master's detachment of 'Nocturne' and 'Humouresque'; and to allow him the elegant raillery of one perfectly in control of his

situation is greatly to increase his interest. At the least, his irony is an assurance of superiority, allowing him to patronise the lady's romantic taste. But then her imperviousness to it reduces him to a desperate explicitness, and forces him to concede to her viewpoint – 'it is I who am inane', 'our mad poetics'. Thus her indifference disarms his irony, and it is she who has the last word. So much for Pierrot as lover of the Absolute! This is a sketch of the predicament explored more fully, and with greater realism, in the two principal portraits of *Prufrock and Other Observations*. Its function, as an element in the composition of that collection, is simply to provide a contrast and setting for its conclusion, 'La Figlia Che Piange'; and to suggest the connection of that poem of strangely fulfilled love with the unsatisfactory *têtes-à-têtes* of the initial drawing-room and salon.

The transformation of Eliot's poetic personality under the influence of Laforgue can be seen in the development of his verse within the single year of 1909. In the difference between 'The moonflower opens to the moth', and 'Spleen' or 'Conversation Galante', there is all the difference between a romantic and a post-romantic state of sensibility. The development was confirmed in 'Portrait of a Lady' and 'Prufrock', the main works of 1910–11. In these the late romantic condition is made the object of a searching critique, from a point of view as much outside and above it as Joyce's in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*.

'Portrait of a Lady' is of course charged with romantic sentiment, yet the poem itself is not at all romantic. The sentiment is the lady's, and the portrait records it but does not necessarily share it. The *vers libre*, giving each thing said its own idiom and rhythm, creates the two characters and their worlds quite objectively; and it places the reader, with the poet, as the observer of the drama.

The young man, the narrator, begins a trifle heavily – with two lines of fourteen syllables each, in fact. Since each line has just five strong stresses, like sombre chords, the effect is of dragged-out pentameters. Is it through boredom, or gloom of spirits – spleen? The third line, though standard iambic, has the same time-value or felt weight: the lady's emphases are heavy with feeling. In the following lines it is her scene that is set, and her tone that comes through, in spite of the man's meaning to be ironic at the expense of the atmosphere and the preciousness. He is maliciously clever about the latest Pole; yet she counters effectively with 'soul', and flows on gracefully to a full rhyme. Her velleities may be transparent, but they persist insidiously in his very exposing of them. Indeed what else is there, while he and we are in her presence, but the appeal of those exquisitely caught hesitations and modulations?

However, they are so much hers that we are left free to observe rather than sympathise. Certainly the poem does not require us to make her subjectivity our own. In some of Arnold's poems – 'A Buried Life', 'A Summer Night', 'Dover Beach' – such nostalgias and vague longings are offered in a purely subjective form, and the only way to take the poems, if we can take them at all, is to enter into those feelings and to make them our own. Eliot is doing just the opposite of that: presenting a subjective state as an object for detached contemplation.

That, however, is more than the young man can do. The lady does oppress him, and his escape is unconvincing. His 'false note' is a sort of rude noise; his self-assertion a matter of clocks and bocks – banalities against her velleities. The drama is in fact very Jamesian: one in which the narrator, complacently assured of the adequacy of his point of view, turns out to be the spokesman merely for the commonplace and the conventional. His claims to superior strength of mind, and to the possession of a 'real world' to set against her over-refined one, are of course more defensive than assured. The trouble is that his world is no more proof against hers, than hers is against his.

While her sensibility is hypertrophied, his is atrophied. As she is at the mercy of gross things – for her world is not subject to her fine feelings – so he is at the mercy of unknown emotions: the street piano, and the smell of hyacinths recalling 'things that other people have desired'. Her end may be pathetic, but his is clownish or worse. Given his grotesque mimicry of the human arts, his feeling like a bear, a parrot, an ape, how should her 'dying fall' not prevail? Though she stands only for dying romanticism, he cannot conceive a better attitude to life or death. So he must capitulate at the last to her tone and terms. 'Afternoon grey and smoky, evening yellow and rose': it is a kind of tribute, in which his 'smoke and fog of a December afternoon' is resolved with her 'April sunsets'. Moreover, it was love-sickness that made Orsino remark 'This music is successful with a dying fall'. The final irony is that even as he acknowledges her advantage, he remains too self-possessed fully to comprehend it. He seems still unaware that, after all, there might be a virtue in romantic passion.

According to Conrad Aiken in *Ushant*, his fictional autobiography, Eliot had frequented the salon of just such a *précieuse* in his graduate year at Harvard, and had felt obscurely involved when he left for Paris in 1910. I do not know the truth of the matter, but the story is good for this at least, that it connects the poem with Eliot's own life.[6] Here he was not imitating Laforgue, but taking over what he needed to express his direct experience of decadent romanticism and dull realism.

At the same time the poem owes much to the English writers who were the moderns then, most notably to Browning and James. Their distinctive quality was to seek the soul in particulars, like the former's Fra Lippo Lippi; to cultivate the kind of mind which, as Eliot was to say of James, no Idea could violate.[7] Pater had called Browning 'the most modern, to modern people the most important of poets', because he took for his subject 'the individual, the personal, the concrete, as distinguished from, yet revealing in its fullness the general, the universal'.[8] Ezra Pound said much the same thing when placing the author of 'Portrait of a Lady' and 'Prufrock' as a successor to Browning:

> For what the statement is worth, Mr Eliot's work interests me more than that of any other poet now [1917] writing in English. The most interesting poems in Victorian English are Browning's *Men and Women*, or, if that statement is too absolute, let me contend that the form of these poems is the most vital form of that period in English . . . Browning included a certain amount of ratiocination and of purely intellectual comment, and in just that proportion he lost intensity. Since Browning there have been very few good poems of this sort. Mr Eliot has made two notable additions to the list. . . Art does not avoid universals, it strikes at them all the harder in that it strikes through particulars.[9]

The significant relation of 'Portrait of a Lady' to the Browningesque dramatic monologue, and to the Jamesian novel, is in its following their method of 'expressive particularisation' – a phrase James used to distinguish Browning's incessantly discriminating intelligence from Tennyson's Bardic afflatus.[10]

In 'Preludes' Eliot applied the method in its essential form, stripped of the conventional interest in character and story. They exhibit the mind of the poet operating directly upon his experience, and making up a vision almost exclusively from the data of his sordid and unromantic world. It is as if he were deliberately practising the virtue which he admired in Charles-Louis Philippe, whose *Bubu of Montparnasse* he read in Paris in 1910 and drew on in 'Preludes' III and IV:

> His great quality is not imagination: it is a sincerity which makes him a faithful recorder of things as they are, and of events as they happened, without irrelevant and disturbing comment. He had a gift which is rare enough: the ability not to think, not to generalise. To be able to select, out of personal experience, what is really significant, to be able not to corrupt it by afterthoughts, is as rare as imaginative invention.[11]

When he remarked that quality in James, 'the most intelligent man of his generation', Eliot significantly added that the really superior intelligence was the one able to maintain 'a point of view, a viewpoint untouched by the parasite idea' – which amounted, in James, to 'a merciless clairvoyance'.[12] That kind of vision, unclouded (as he said of Blake) by education or opinion or sentiment, is

surely what he is after in 'Preludes'. The fidelity to things as they impinge upon the senses is not for him a way of immersing in experience: it is rather a way of mastering it in the mind.

It is remarkable that the poet does not declare: '*I* am experiencing these things; this is what I see, what I feel.' Yet the objectivity is an illusion. It is not a world in itself that we are being given, but his consciousness of it. His ordinary egotistical self is suspended, while he exists, it seems, simply as the consciousness of the scene. However, what he observes is charged with his feeling and understanding –

> The winter evening settles down
> With smell of steaks in passageways.
> Six o'clock.
> The burnt-out ends of smoky days.

There is a definite emotion in the shaping of each phrase, and in the rhythm of the sequence, as well as a sensitive wit in the perceptions. There is a sense of structure, too, in the way the fourth line rhymes with the second in its movement as well as in the terminal sound. By the end of this first 'Prelude' a state of mind has formed distinct enough to make the purely subjective leap:

> And at the corner of the street
> A lonely cab-horse steams and stamps.
>
> And then the lighting of the lamps.

The last line has no objective connection with the one before; yet it follows as a right conclusion, because it realises the feeling that has been growing through the sequence of observations.

The second 'Prelude' presents the development of consciousness beyond immediate sensation. It is the world that is already known which comes into the waking mind. It is 'out there' no doubt; but it is in the mind's eye that the street is 'sawdust-trampled', and in the inner ear that the feet beat in a rhyme that comes too soon. Then the mind withdraws into generalisation –

> One thinks of all the hands
> That are raising dingy shades
> In a thousand furnished rooms.

To understand one's world, said Santayana echoing Arnold, to form a reasoned idea of it, 'is the classic form of consolation'.[13] Or one might say that the oppressive spleen is eased when it is expressed as an 'objective' vision of all the world.

At the next stage, in 'Prelude' III, the poet's object is the mind itself, or at

least that process of consciousness which has just been presented. Now he observes it from outside, and interprets the experience of the persona or alter ego –

> You . . . watched the night revealing
> The thousand sordid images
> Of which your soul was constituted;

and again,

> You had such a vision of the street
> As the street hardly understands.

This is to be the natural philosopher of the mind, studying how a soul is constituted, and how it expresses itself as a point of view. The 'vision of the street' is determined by experience, and yet is a criticism of it: so that the soul, which is a product of its world, may separate itself from it by the process of understanding. Nevertheless, it is only the mere observer who is detached from the contingent existence of

> Sitting along the bed's edge, where
> You curled the papers from your hair . . .

The soul of 'Prelude' IV appears not to have a vision of his world, but rather to suffer it – 'stretched tight against the skies', or (like the hero of *Maud* in his madness[14]) 'trampled by insistent feet/At four and five and six o'clock'. His 'conscience' goes beyond 'consciousness' into the realm of moral discrimination; and that presses 'Impatient to assume the world' towards religious overtones. While the philosopher would be thinking from the street to the world, from the particular to the universal, conscience might be taking the world upon itself, assuming responsibility for it. We seem to have progressed from the primary level of sensation, to an ultimate religious conviction.

At this point the poet speaks for the first time in his own person, and confesses to being more than the detached eye and mind:

> I am moved by fancies that are curled
> Around these images, and cling:
> The notion of some infinitely gentle
> Infinitely suffering thing.

This, I take it, is to *not* speak of Christ and the suffering which redeems. It intimates an ideal beyond the images afforded by experience, but places that as notional merely. For all that, the ideal moves him as nothing actual has done.

To the realist it is ridiculous. But then the real worlds, from the viewpoint of the ideal,

> revolve like ancient women
> Gathering fuel in vacant lots.

That of course is satire – the poet viewing the universe as if he were a god.

His strict fidelity to experience has been after all a way of approaching the Absolute; his objectivity terminates in a form of idealism. Life should reveal at least to reason, wrote Santayana, attacking Browning for remaining immersed in the flow of experience, 'the ideal which it fails to attain'.[15] For the poet that would mean being also a philosopher and epistemologist. But that is just what Eliot was studying to be. Like his Aristotle, but in the mode of poetry in which criticism of 'the objects of knowledge' is not separated out from immediate experience, he was looking 'solely and steadfastly at the object', and following the method 'of intelligence itself swiftly operating the analysis of sensation to the point of principle and definition'.[16]

The application of this method to Bergsonism, in 'Preludes' III and IV and 'Rhapsody on a Windy Night', was an important stage in his cure for romanticism. In the Paris of 1910–11 Bergson was 'the most noticed figure'.[17] From December to May he was lecturing at the Collège de France, on Personality on Fridays at 5.00, and on Spinoza on Saturdays at 4.15.[18] Eliot followed the Friday course at least, along with all the world it seemed. Later, if not at the time, he thought the enthusiasm of the audience excessive. The lectures presented ideas developed in *Les Données Immédiates de la Conscience* (1889), *Matière et Mémoire* (1896), and *L'Evolution Créatrice* (1907). Eliot once mentioned the second of these as a book which had deeply influenced his intellectual development, and he also said that he had closely studied the others.[19] What he took from Bergson, and used in his poetry right up to *Four Quartets*, was a way of thinking about certain problems of the mind in time, together with the conclusion that Bergson's answer to them would not do.

Bergson's *durée réelle* is 'simply not final', he wrote in a philosophy essay in 1911.[20] I should think that it was the exciting promise of immortality – as offered at the end of chapter III of *L'Evolution Créatrice* – that would least bear examination: a seductive appeal to the irrational, he called it in 1923.[21] In the Syllabus for the lectures he gave in 1916 – it is appended to this chapter – Bergson figured as a representative of the romantic tendency in France in 1910: that is, as one whose *vitalism* encouraged 'escape from the world of fact' and disbelief in Original Sin. Doubtless, Eliot's final fact would be Death, first fruit of Original Sin.

Eliot recalled in 1948 that he had undergone 'a temporary conversion to

Bergsonism';[22] but the disciple must have become the critic within a very few months. The third 'Prelude', dated July 1911 in the notebook now in the New York Public Library,[23] comes very near to certain of Bergson's conceptions. He too thought the soul constituted of its memory-images; he characterised the passive state of the mind as one in which life was like a ciné-film, a fixed sequence of flickering clichés; and he opposed to that the act of intuition, or the immediate consciousness of life-in-process which placed the mind within the absolute. However, Eliot's 'vision of the street' implies a point of view exactly opposite to Bergson's. And the vision with which the sequence closes presents the temporal world not as moving irresistibly towards its apotheosis, but as preparing for the final conflagration. So far as the poem bears upon Bergsonism, it would seem to be insisting upon the facts which Bergson wanted to transcend.

'Rhapsody on a Windy Night' gives an extended, and probably earlier, critique. Its draft is dated 3 March 1911, which places it before the fourth 'Prelude', and probably before the third also.[24] The month might account for the wind. But it is also possible that the title refers, not without rude irony, to the *élan vital*, which Bergson would have possess the mind otherwise fixed in the matter of memory. As it turns out, the rhapsody is not made up of divine inspiration; and the reason for this is that it keeps to the immediate data of consciousness.

Among the many passages in Bergson's writings with which the poem could be connected, there are three which are especially suggestive. This is from the conclusion to *Matter and Memory*:

> Between the plane of action – the plane in which our body has condensed its past into motor habits – and the plane of pure memory, where our mind retains in all its details the picture of our past life, we believe that we can discover thousands of different planes of consciousness. . . To complete a recollection [consists] . . . in going away from action in the direction of dream. . . The interest of a living being lies in discovering in the present situation that which resembles a former situation, and then in placing alongside of that present situation what preceded and followed the previous one, in order to profit by past experience. . . But, in order to understand the mechanism of these associations and above all the apparently capricious selection which they make of memories, we must place ourselves alternately on the two extreme planes of consciousness which we have called the plane of action and the plane of dream. . . And this double movement of memory between its two extreme limits also sketches out, as we have shown, the first general ideas, – motor habits ascending to seek similar images in order to extract resemblances from them, and similar images coming down towards motor habits . . .[25]

About the kinds of general ideas Bergson had more to say elsewhere. He ended his *Introduction to Metaphysics* (1903) with this declaration:

But metaphysical intuition, although it can only be obtained through material knowledge, is quite other than the mere summary or synthesis of that knowledge. It is distinct from these . . . as the motor impulse is distinct from the path traversed by the moving body, as the tension of the spring is distinct from the visible movements of the pendulum. In this sense metaphysics has nothing in common with a generalisation of facts; and nevertheless it might be defined as *integral experience.*[26]

Eliot's 'broken spring in a factory yard,/Rust that clings to the form that the strength has left' might be his comment upon that. The third passage comes towards the end of chapter III of *Creative Evolution*:

Consciousness, in man, is pre-eminently intellect. It might have been, it ought, so it seems, to have been also intuition. Intuition and intellect represent two opposite directions of the work of consciousness: intuition goes in the direction of life, intellect goes in the inverse direction, and thus finds itself naturally in accordance with the movement of matter. . . Intuition is there, however, but vague and above all discontinuous. It is a lamp almost extinguished, which only lights up now and then, for a few moments at most. But it lights up wherever a vital interest is at stake. On our personality, on our liberty, on the place we occupy in the whole of nature, on our origin and perhaps also on our destiny, it throws a light feeble and vacillating, but which none the less pierces the darkness of the night in which the intellect leaves us.[27]

But *integral experience*, Eliot would seem to be retorting, can be only an immediate apprehension of what the intellect already knows.

'Rhapsody' consists of an introduction, three episodes (discreetly marked – by the 'half-pasts' – 'one', 'two', 'three'), and a finale ('four'). In each of the three episodes memory adds to the lamp's epiphanies associated images which complete and interpret the present situation. In Bergson's view, this is the intellect at work; but Eliot seems to arrive at universals in this way, at what Bergson would call intuitions of the absolute. Only the absolute which Eliot perceives is already near to 'that which is only living/Can only die'.

The hallucinatory or surrealistic vision of the first episode might be on 'the plane of dream'. Memory matches 'And you see the corner of her eye/Twists like a crooked pin' with

> A twisted branch upon the beach
> Eaten smooth, and polished
> As if the world gave up
> The secret of its skeleton,
> Stiff and white.

Thus the particular is swiftly expanded into the universal, without loss of immediacy, and in a form that is both intellectually and musically final. The second episode might be on 'the plane of action'. Again the intelligent memory escapes the trap of materialism (or mere realism), by following the given image

with a sequence of like images – ('So the hand of the child, automatic') – which produce an intuitive recognition of their general *likeness*. In the third episode it appears that a dream world is breaking down into automatic habit – or is it the habitual response which is seeking its dream? Specifically, the Rose-maiden of Laforgue's lunar idealism has become withered and lunatic – a variation upon 'Complainte de cette Bonne Lune', with its 'rosière enfarinée'. There is a glamour still haunting the decay, and an aura of fascination and pathos, after the manner of the Decadents' clinging to the corrupted forms of romanticism. Here memory's associations simply dispel illusion: in cold fact all that remains of romantic moments are such aftersmells as these –

> Smells of chestnuts in the streets,
> And female smells in shuttered rooms,
> And cigarettes in corridors
> And cocktail smells in bars.

The finale might be the moment of integral experience, the moment of truth; and this proves the least transcendental of all. The lamp shows what memory knows already, the ordinary everyday reality. In this immediate perception intellect and intuition coalesce, and discover the *durée réelle* to be the boredom and horror of banality. That is the absolute of merely living.

Bergson had said, of course, that this was just what the intellectual memory would make of life: that being fixed in what had been it would see death everywhere in life, and miss the ever-moving *élan vital*. Eliot's poem accepts that; but maintains that to the best of our knowledge this really is a universe of dying matter, and that the final truth about it is that it is running down and getting nowhere. His use of memory is already a form, though only the critical and negative form, of what it will be in the Quartets. Not less of horror, is how one might put it, but expanding of horror beyond despair, and so liberation from 'the enchainment of past and future'; for to be conscious of 'the one end which is always present' is not to be in time. It is to be damned, so long as 'the one end' means only death – like Prufrock, whose clairvoyant consciousness knows, like Marlowe's Mephistopheles, that 'this is hell, nor am I out of it'.

Baudelaire, Eliot later wrote, was trying to express this, 'that damnation itself is an immediate form of salvation – of salvation from the ennui of modern life, because it at last gives some significance to living'.[28] In these poems of 1911, in which he is detaching himself from Bergson and romanticism, it is Baudelaire in particular whom he appears to be following. From him he learnt 'the poetical possibilities . . . of the more sordid aspects of the modern metropolis, of the possibility of fusion between the sordidly realistic and the phantasmagoric, the possibility of the juxtaposition of the matter-of-fact and the

fantastic.'[29] That is clearly one formula, and a post-Laforgue one, for this group of poems. But it is not merely in his use of such imagery that Eliot was following Baudelaire, but above all 'in the elevation of such imagery to the *first intensity* – presenting it as it is, and yet making it represent something much more than itself' – that is, 'something universal in modern life'.[30] This was already, in 1911, Eliot's way of seeking the Absolute: not by escaping from experience into anything else, but by so intensifying it that its particulars yielded its universal meaning. Thus:

> 'The bed is open; the tooth-brush hangs on the wall,
> Put your shoes at the door, sleep, prepare for life.'

'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock' is the leading poem in the 1917 volume of *Observations* not just because it is the most substantial, but because it gathers up the others written about the same time into a more developed and more fully resolved vision. Prufrock's consciousness includes the same streets and drawing-rooms, and can rhapsodise their horrors. But then he more than knows them: he knows that he knows them. He exists on the plane of the universals, and is aware of the overwhelming question that looms behind all experience. There should be no need now to insist that Prufrock is not Eliot. Within the poem, the poet is simply an intelligence contemplating and analysing its object. To appreciate this, to attempt to see beyond the character to the point of view from which he is being seen, is to discover in the poem more than its hero would reveal.

'The very metric tells the tale', in Karl Shapiro's words.[31] Our first significant impression of the poem is likely to be of a voice distinctively musical in its rhythms and cadences. Then will come the sequence of perceptions and reflections with their various charges of feeling. The musical voice composes these into Prufrock's consciousness. Yet, on another level than his, the successfully sustained harmonies and progressions and variations seem to express a more profound impulse, as if Eliot's own art, behind Prufrock's love song, were aspiring to the condition of music. There seems to be some connection with the aesthetic idealism of Pater and other late romantics, but it is not a simple one. Henry James too, in a sense, was a late romantic – but never simple. And Eliot's affinity with James, in this stage of his work, was close and deep. The limitation of the simpler sort of aesthete is that his aspiration is self-satisfying, his love ends in its own music. Prufrock's song perhaps comes to that in the end. Yet his attempt to fit the elements of his world to his music creates a larger interest. His lyrical impulse, though it closes with the forlorn hope of hearing mermaids singing, has before that applied its implicit idealism as a measure of

his world and of himself. The music of the poetry thus serves to operate a radical critique of experience. Instead of being a symptom of a persistent romanticism in Eliot himself, this music transforms its aesthetic idealism into an active force. Romanticism weakened when instead of criticising its world from the viewpoint of its ideal feelings, it sought to escape the world and indulge the feelings in mere dreams. But the feelings express something permanent and vital in human nature. By applying them to the actual world of experience Eliot was carrying romanticism through to conclusions that had been missed.

The technical basis of the music is the phrasing. Eliot had arrived at the *Imagistes'* basic principle before it was formulated, possibly with the aid of his *Symbolistes*: 'As regarding rhythm: to compose in the sequence of the musical phrase, not in sequence of a metronome'.[32] He has usually a metrical substructure, but the movement and feel of the verse are determined by the rhythmic shape of each phrase, and by the relation of one phrase to another in the musical sequence. The older prosody would scan

> Ín/the róom/the wóm/en cóme/and gó
> Tálking/of Mí/cheláng/eló.

However, that metre is overlaid by natural speech rhythms, which follow the phrasing, and in which the phrase is shaped by its pattern of stresses:

> Ín the róom/the wómen/cóme and gó
> Tálking/of Míchelángelò.

In the first line, the first and last phrases match, and the middle one is a variation. The second line, though apparently lighter in weight, is in fact precisely equivalent. The long phrase 'of Michelangelo' has the same duration and stress-pattern as the latter two phrases of the first line, which it accurately echoes. Thus we have a perfectly correct couplet, elegant, languidly drawled, and with the form in miniature of its social scene and ethos. One hardly notices the presumption of its being so much at ease with Michelangelo: rhythmically, in sensibility, he seems perfectly subdued to the drawing-room.

'The sequence of the musical phrase' is everywhere the best guide to the sense. One begins –

> Let us go then,/you and I,
> When the evening is spread out against the sky
> Like a patient/etherised/upon a table . . .

There is no distinct pause in the second line: it comes as a single extended phrase, a flight of feeling-in-perception. In the third line, however, sound, phrasing and sense together enforce slight but distinct pauses – which are also

weightings – upon 'patient' and 'etherised'. Thus the flow of feeling associated with the evening sky is broken, and by more than the rhythm. There is the shock of 'patient . . . upon a table'. That is intensified into a wholly new idea by the immensity of the pun: for in this context *aethereal* may lie just beyond 'etherised'. We may be teased into seeking their relation. Are the ethereal emotions generated by the evening sky – as in 'These April sunsets', or 'It is a beauteous evening, calm and free', and (Wordsworth again) 'a sense sublime . . . Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns' – are these feelings merely ether to the mind? Or are they a decadent form of something more remote and genuinely of heaven? Certainly the pathetic fallacy, the great resource of the romantic soul expanding itself into a cosmos, has been despatched with surgical sureness. Certainly, too, Prufrock's wit has found an image to express his own state. Yet against these reductive effects, which are dominant, there comes a subdued counter-suggestion that there may truly be, out there, a higher reality corresponding to his state as does *aethereal* to ether. The image, then, is a major chord, containing complex possibilities.

Whether Prufrock means them all is not clear, but he should not be underestimated. He surely knows what he is doing in deflecting the sentimentality of evening – and the invitation to the reader – into a pathetic fallacy to end them all. The wearily courteous cadences recall Laforgue's Pierrot, bored to devastating irony. Later in the poem the resources of his wit will include a crossing of Genesis with Hesiod (ll. 28–30), and very pertinent allusions to John the Baptist, Lazarus and Bunyan's Heavenly Footman. It might be best to assume that he is fully aware of what he is saying. That, after all, adds a further dimension of interest. If he knows all that is implied in being 'etherised', is he able to do anything about it, and does he mean us to take the point or to miss it? The epigraph, considered as an allusion to *Inferno* XXVI and XXVII, should perhaps put us on our guard. His name, moreover, might be a variant of Touchstone: how he rubs off on us is the vital question.

The poem develops as a dramatic monologue of an unusual kind. The love song which Prufrock is attempting seems to have something in common with Donne's more dramatic songs and sonets. Then there is the nearer likeness to the manner of Browning's personae. But where Browning's is an art of 'getting inside' his characters, Eliot's method is to remain wholly detached. Andrea del Sarto reveals all in a lucid light of regret and resignation, drawing the reader into sympathetic understanding. Within the poem, his tone determines ours, his consciousness circumscribes ours. Prufrock can be read in that way, but only by ignoring the perspectives and possibilities which open beyond those he submits to. 'The really fine rhetoric of Shakespeare', Eliot wrote in ' "Rhetoric"

and Poetic Drama' (1919), 'occurs in situations where the character in the play *sees himself* in a dramatic light'. But, he went on, 'it is essential that we should preserve our position of spectators, and observe always from the outside though with complete understanding'; by this means we gain the 'necessary advantage of a new clue to the character, in noting the angle from which he views himself'. What must be avoided are the degraded forms of the dramatic sense, which appeal to our sentimentality, or at least invite us 'to accept the character's sentimental interpretation of himself'. Prufrock, I think, is doing that, with skill and effrontery: at once frankly revealing his private hell, and seducing us into it. He needs to be analysed.

After the urbane wit of the first lines, the 'certain half-deserted streets' impose their restless sordid impressions, insistent in rhythm and mean in detail. In just a few lines an alien world is given, as much apart, and oppressive, as the first 'Prelude'. Prufrock's attention shifts from what it is, to what it means to him –

> a tedious argument
> Of insidious intent
> To lead you to an overwhelming question . . .

– which he does not care to face. His evasion breaks the pattern of the verse, for ll. 8–11 were shaping to parallel ll. 4–7. It then seems odd, that after thinking of the women to be visited, he should revert to a vision of the streets. This proves to be fantasy, however, in which the smoke and fog are domesticated, and the nightmarish and the seductive become confused. The cat is familiar, yet vaguely terrifying; the sordid images of the street are neutralised. Where is the intelligent memory? Prufrock, it appears, is putting to sleep those disturbing impressions, and gaining time from that other world in the drawing-room.

But the logic of time – and perhaps some imperative within the verse form to reach a full close – returns him to the inevitable room. He would use time to fend off tedium and its moral implication, would involve himself in mere flux of mind; but the couplet insists on the fixed facts he is approaching. In a reflex of self-consciousness he sees himself as he will be seen, and attempts self-defence in kind. But the rhymes are merciless; his pathetic correctness shrinks within the frame of what 'they will say'. Aware that he should disturb their little universe, he might well say with Hamlet, 'O cursed spite,/That ever I was born to set it right'.

By what though should he disturb them? Is it by a vision of their world such as they would hardly understand? But dare he speak out? As he enters the room, or as it enters his consciousness, Prufrock moves into a kind of lyric: three stanzas, rhyming and with a refrain. The refrain tellingly transposes 'Do I

dare?' into the polite form which is already a defeat: not to dare will be to fail, unambiguously; but in the drawing-room distinctions are blurred, and one simply does not presume. In that way Prufrock's whole vision of the women's world is muted and made powerless. He sings what it really means as it presses upon him, but in a form which might be that of a drawing-room aria. Up to a point he does express its tedium, terror and charm, yet the dominant impression is of its subduing power. He is the victim of the music he would parody, and his song becomes a form of homage to the world which is too much for him. His wit defines his defeats – 'I have measured out my life with coffee-spoons', 'eyes that fix you in a formulated phrase'. And what a complex of feeling there is in 'But in the lamplight, downed with light brown hair!' He is not in love with these women – his passions, if declared, would be closer to boredom and terror – but he is, in the literal sense of a word the drawing-room aria might play with, its 'slave'.

Of course he keeps this vision to himself, sings it only in his head. Then, withdrawing further into himself, he begins to rehearse what he dare not say. The three lines of plain statement come near to fact and objectivity. There might be something there to oppose to the drawing-room, some release from self in observation. Yet the lines are tinged with his own mood; and is he perhaps watching himself watching the lonely men, self-dramatising still? The sudden self-revelation tells all –

> I should have been a pair of ragged claws
> Scuttling across the floors of silent seas.

In Laforgue's *Salomé* there is the Aquarium to match that wish:

> O monde de satisfaits, vous êtes dans la béatitude aveugle et silencieuse, et nous, nous desséchons de fringales supra-terrestres. Et pourquoi les antennes de nos sens, à nous, ne sont-elles pas bornées par l'Aveugle, et l'Opaque et le Silence, et flairent-elles au-delà de ce qui est de chez nous? Et que ne savons-nous aussi nous incruster dans notre petit coin pour y cuver l'ivre-mort de notre petit Moi?'[33]

It is as if a certain kind of idealism, Prufrock's kind, were exposed as merely recessive egoism, motivated by the inversion of love, the death-wish.

Having attained his instant of self-knowledge, Prufrock appears less oppressed, better able to observe his little drama with a wit equal to his predicament. Perhaps he has found *his* point of view in acknowledging defeat. From that, at any rate, follows a new access of consciousness, and a new tone that is self-mockingly comic. The levity is perhaps a form of emotional relief, as Eliot said of Hamlet's – better to send himself up than be taken seriously. At the same time this levity is contained and damped down within a stanzaic form. The

verse paragraph which begins at 'And the afternoon, the evening' resumes a patterning rhyme; and the next two go with it, repeating the opening line and refrain, to compose something like a song of Donne's modified after Laforgue. This song is like a revision of the first one. It is for the speaking rather than the singing voice, and it effects an adjustment of the vision to a consciousness of failure.

The earlier stanzas had concentrated the impact of the room; these expand to contain more highly charged effects within soothing banalities. There are intimations of an order of things vaster than this world conceives – yet they do not disturb it. There has been a progression of such intimations from 'etherised', through 'all the works and days of hands', up to John the Baptist ('I am no prophet') and the 'eternal Footman'. That last neatly blends a bored phrase and petty fear with anguished suggestions of 'the doorstep of the Absolute'. Behind it could lie an uneasy recollection of the first sentence of Bunyan's work: 'Solomon saith that "The desire of the slothful killeth him". ' These intimations reach their climax in the allusion to Marvell and the association with Lazarus (Luke xvi, 19–31). Here is the overwhelming question at its most magnified. To squeeze his universe into oneness would be to conquer the tedium of time, and to put its life to the final test – to measure it by the annihilatingly objective vision of one who has passed beyond it. Laforgue's John the Baptist had initiated Salomé into that realm of the Absolute (*l'Inconscient*), and she has his head as the seal of the initiation and its meaning. Prufrock has undergone all that in parody, and remains the mere fool of banalities. His wit is so easily diminished by the mere reflection of what one might say, a woman's languid dismissal of some meaning which exceeds her interest. Her social phrase catches up the intensities of 'into a ball' and 'I shall tell you all', and dissipates them into nothing at all. As much had been done to Michelangelo, but Prufrock as good as asks for it. His wit is capable of that crescendo of great imaginative power – as Eliot said of Marvell's – yet his tone is perfectly in accord with the woman's. 'And would it have been worth it, after all' rhymes in every way with 'That is not it, at all.'

Moreover, he harmonises the very streets with the drawing room. There is no false note in

> After the sunsets and the dooryards and the sprinkled streets,
> After the novels, after the teacups, after the skirts that trail
> along the floor . . .

It is almost a vignette of the period: a little distanced and generalised, catching the local flavour appreciatively, and with the observer quite subdued to these

effects. However the tone is not quite certain, for the details come with a certain insistence, yet in falling cadences. It is as if they were fixed in his mind but he was no longer sure what to make of them. What has happened to the meaning they had for him at the start, to his immediate feelings in the half-deserted street? He had wished, in wanting to be 'a pair of ragged claws', to escape the imperatives of consciousness; and that wish is virtually realised. In Henry James' *The Jolly Corner* there is a character who in the midst of a 'dim secondary social success', projects himself beyond it 'into the other, the real, the waiting life'; and he thinks, 'It was all mere surface sound, this murmur of their welcome, this popping of their corks – just as his gestures of response were the extravagant shadows, emphatic in proportion as they meant little, of some game of *ombres chinoises*.' The difference with Prufrock is that he must fear there is no more to him now than the shadow of his nerves upon the social screen.

His final state is inward reverie – an expansion of ll. 70–4. In the mirror of self-consciousness he makes himself small and shuffles off responsibility. He has not played a hero's part, but if he has been merely the politic counsellor then he has played the fool indeed, a Hamlet being his own Polonius. Dreams and desires disturb him still. In the six lines from 'I grow old' he undergoes startling modulations of feeling and tone, as his romantic soul, defeated in its actual world, dreams of transformation. Yet the ministering sea-girls are simply the actuality reinterpreted according to feeble desires; and the actuality is stronger than the dream. In the last three lines the room, the women and his fate among them are all implicit; and the brief intensity of the illusion is lost – '*We* have lingered', not 'I have seen'. The human voices summon to the surface of existence where he fails.

The allusion to Arnold's 'The Forsaken Merman' is obvious, and ironic – a criticism of *his* elegiac defeatism as well as Prufrock's. For in the latter's defeat is implicated the general failure of nineteenth-century romanticism. To complete a remark of Santayana's which I quoted earlier, 'To understand oneself is the classic form of consolation; to elude oneself is the romantic.' That his love song should turn out an elegy for himself is very much in the spirit of the age of Arnold, and of Tennyson.[34] What was lacking was the ability to turn to account either the modern world or the unsatisfied longing for another. The one might be unreal and meaningless, yet it still oppresses; and while the finer feelings only go into escapist forms they confirm its power. 'To elude oneself' is not the way out. But Prufrock, like his historical antecedents, is incapable of drawing the conclusions Eliot was demonstrating in 'Preludes' and 'Rhapsody'.

In point of fact, he is the exact antitype of the poet himself. He resembles the

speaker of the poem's epigraph, Guido da Montefeltro, a politic counsellor whose hell is to be enclosed in the flame of self-knowledge; and who believes, having abandoned hope himself, that hell has no way out. Thus he reveals himself to Dante, who is of course not of the damned, but an observer of them as his love of Beatrice and his art as a poet draw him towards his ultimate vision of Love. Eliot's relation to his character is like that of Dante's to his. Moreover, he did not mean to give way to the unreal world: 'La Figlia Che Piange' is the love song of one whose idealism is as anti-romantic as he thought Dante's.[35] Later he would choose to identify himself with another figure enclosed in flame, the poet Arnaut Daniel, whom Dante placed near the summit of Purgatory. But that connection was already somewhere in his mind when he was drafting 'Prufrock', as a cancelled epigraph shows.[36]

In spite of the significant relation to Dante, the achievement of the poem might most relevantly be measured by the relation to Henry James. James was probably the obvious living writer for Eliot to read and study – the literary master of America and Europe. To read his later fiction alongside Eliot's earlier poetry brings out the clear fact that Eliot read him not dutifully but passionately, and to immense effect. In particular, James had perfected his method of surrounding his protagonist, some more or less forceful man or woman of the world, by an observing consciousness, often someone so ineffectual as to appear the mere passive observer; and yet to have this observer become, on the moral plane, the really interesting protagonist – the one who discerns good and evil, and actively chooses between them. In *The Beast in the Jungle* he stated this as the structural principle:

> He allowed for himself, but she, exactly, allowed still more; partly because, better placed for a sight of the matter, she traced his unhappy perversion through portions of its course into which he could scarcely follow. He knew how he felt, but, besides knowing that, she knew how he *looked* as well; he knew each of the things of importance he was insidiously kept from doing, but she could add up the amount they made, understand how much, with a lighter weight on his spirit, he might have done, and thereby establish how, clever as he was, he fell short.

That becomes a suggestive formula for 'Prufrock', where the poet, putting himself in the position of the observer, is the active moral protagonist.

Thus to follow James is to make the conscious imagination the principle of the moral life. Moreover, it is to make life, at its finest, a matter of ultimate discriminations and choices – of not only seeing all that should be seen, but of living by one's fullest perceptions. Now this involves, when the perceptions are those of a James or an Eliot, some renunciation of the usual hopes and fulfilments. Given that the actual falls far short of the ideal, then the moral effort

becomes a matter of learning detachment from what life offers, and of striving to keep open communications (Arnold's phrase) with the as yet unborn ideal. However, this idealism, as Eliot said of James' 'romanticism',

> implied no defect in observation of the things that he wanted to observe; it was not the romanticism of those who dream because they are too lazy or too fearful to face the fact; it issues, rather, from the imperative insistence of an ideal which tormented him. He was possessed by the vision of an ideal society; he *saw* (not fancied) the relations between the members of such a society. And no one, in the end, has ever been more aware – or with more benignity, or less bitterness – of the disparity between possibility and fact.[37]

Again one may be reminded of Eliot's own achievement in 'Prufrock'. But then there is the important difference, that he was not possessed by the vision of an ideal society in the sense in which James was. He gave much thought to the question, early and late; but the vision which imperiously possessed him was of the poet's relation to God, his own soul's ideal. His ideal society, as it emerges in his later writings, would be the City of God or Dante's Christian Empire.

That 'La Figlia Che Piange' *completes* the poems of 1905–12 is somewhat obscured in the *Prufrock* volume by its being separated from them by the half-dozen written in Oxford in 1915. These relatively slight studies – etched rather than painted – of New England *moeurs* helped to fill out the slim collection, and added a drily detached sense of comedy to its range of tones. But to appreciate the deeper structure we need to look back from the last poem to the first, and see how the poet in it is opposing himself to Prufrock and all he represents.[38]

By a *dédoublement* of personality, of a kind practised by Laforgue and by James in some of his later tales, the poet assumes a double presence, being at once the actor and the consciousness of his action. Moreover, as his consciousness develops in the poem, it alters from detached observer to an active, directing will. Thus he does not yield to his fate, as Prufrock does, but deliberately orders his feelings according to his vision. This is a love song in which the love and the poetry become a form of the moral life.

The passion so directly expressed in image and rhythm, not inhibited nor guarded by ironies, is a quite new force in the poetry so far. After the loveless or passionless aridities of the preceding poems here at last is the felt power of love. But then, that he should prefer 'a gesture and a pose' to their being together, comes as a sharp challenge to human feeling. Nevertheless, this strange fulfilment appears prompted by a deep impulse or instinct – not by principle, nor yet by anything in the immediate situation. However, that instinctive response has been forming in the two poems placed before this one.

In 'Hysteria' we are exposed to raw experience and disturbing emotion without benefit of aesthetic distance. It may be that the lady is hysterical – what *is* she laughing at? or is it at him? But the speaker plainly gives himself away: he is reduced to a state of nerves by her sexuality. Lost in the struggle for mere self-possession, simply the prose 'I', he is far below the mastery of poetic consciousness. 'Conversation Galante' presents a situation opposite yet equal. Its Pierrot is master of aesthetic distances and ironic perspectives, yet he is no better able to keep his lady in her place. Just to be amorous of the Absolute leaves him, as much as the ordinary man, at the mercy of its 'eternal enemy'.

'La Figlia Che Piange' finds a way out of these failures – and the related failures of Prufrock and the young man of 'Portrait'. It has taken the point also of the withering flowers of the poems of early youth. Accepting that ideal passion may not be satisfied in any actual world, nor yet in romantic dreams, the poet turns away from them. But he does not give up his passion. Indeed, that is in a way fulfilled in its immediate object; only it is not the girl in herself who satisfies it, but what she is *and* what she seems to stand for. But then things are so arranged, by fate or the poet, that he must lose the girl in the image. The verbs at once declare her actions and direct them; and this transforms them from mere reactions into responses, and establishes a kind of intimate relation. It is their very parting which unites them, and the images of that moment which remain to him become a satisfying expression of his love. The 'gesture and a pose' serve for that because they objectify the intense feelings in a form that is true both to the actual and to the ideal.

The poem finds support for its extraordinary ordering of its feelings in the examples of Dante, and of Virgil, Dante's guide. The epigraph is from Aeneas' meeting with Venus near Carthage: she appears disguised as a maid of the country, and only reveals her divinity as she leaves him. That meeting is echoed in his later encounter with Dido in Hades: his duty to found Rome has compelled him to leave her, renouncing her love; now she turns from him coldly, disdaining his regrets. The title may echo *Inferno* v, 126; and in any case the whole poem gains from a comparison with that most moving meeting with Francesca, who could not constrain desire, and is forever bound to her lover in the wind of Hell. Then there is a positive general relation with the visions and separations of the *Vita Nuova*, and the meetings with Matilda and Beatrice in the Earthly Paradise at the summit of Purgatory. The common meaning which the poem draws from these allusions is that a passion for the ideal can be fulfilled only by passing through and beyond the immediate occasions of love.

To affirm renunciation as a way of love for the poet was to be already

following after Dante, though with help also from James and from Baudelaire. And to place the affirmation at the end of the volume which began with 'Prufrock' was surely to indicate a conscious direction. Though *The Waste Land* and *The Hollow Men* come between 'La Figlia Che Piange' and *Ash-Wednesday*, the later vision of the love which makes perfect has its seed in the earlier. Moreover, the poet–lover's visionary experience in the hyacinth garden is an essential stage in its germination. The 'cure for Romanticism' was a long one – and became before the end 'a lifetime's death in love'.