

Prufrock and After: The Theme of Change

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THE TRANSFORMATION of T. S. Eliot from skeptic to religious believer was a public event and to the literary world quite a spectacular one. Criticism has been busy with it ever since, following often at considerable length—now and then at considerable distance too—the course of his journey from a view of the Church as Hippopotamus “wrapt in the old miasmal mist” to a Christian faith that “all shall be well, and / All manner of thing shall be well.” The substance of his later belief he made explicit in his writing, and the change has been welcomed, denounced, scoffed at, and analyzed from many angles, with or without sympathy. Interesting as much of this subsequent discussion is, one element has been largely ignored that seems to me of even greater interest and certainly of equal importance to the reader of Eliot’s poetry. It is his preoccupation, which appears markedly in the poems, with the process itself of subjective change. A concern, that is, not only with what one may change *from* or *to* but with change itself: how possible it is, how easy, how subject to the will; what the experience may be like of attempting to transform wish into will, will into belief and then dedication. Thinking of these questions, one realizes that the subject has not often been touched by other poets. Among the Victorian “poets of doubt” we do not find quite this; and one has only to think of Donne or Hopkins to realize how special the theme is in Eliot. “Batter my heart,” Donne will say; and Hopkins, “Thou heardst me truer than tongue confess / Thy terror.” But when Eliot says, “I rejoice, having to construct something upon which to rejoice,” though the mode of the paradox may remind one of Donne, the meaning does not. Here God does not, either, as in Hopkins, seize possession of man’s self and will; in Eliot the “rejoicing,” such as it is, is willed within the human self. Change *as process* I am inclined to believe may have engaged Eliot at a deeper level even than did its content or result, that is, than the actual Christian view of life arrived at, in saying which I do not in the least

belittle the importance or reality of his Christian commitment. The problem of change, at any rate, is consciously and intimately followed through a succession of major poems beginning, unpromisingly it might be thought, with *Prufrock*. There the question is first posed.

The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock is many things, and it should not be distorted merely to prove a point. Yet at its most abstract level it does ask a central question, “Is inner change possible?” and answers No, not anyhow for Prufrock or his kind. Within the poem, the answer is final though ultimately it was not so for Eliot. In dramatic terms Prufrock’s question is of course not nearly so broad, and his individual case is too sharply presented to be felt as the mere shell for a nut of abstraction. The poem is therefore not primarily a symbolic representation of this or any theme; on the contrary, it reads as though it has sprung directly from a wish to set down as precisely as possible what it feels like to be Prufrock; but as this does not feel comfortable, the question of possible change is inherent in the subject.

Prufrock speaks at a moment of decision. “Let us go and make our visit,” he says, and the Browningsque immediacy of time and place, given a new dimension by the foreshadowing image of the sky “like a patient etherized,”¹ leads to the central question: Shall he or dare he propose to a woman? The answer being no, the title is ironic: he will never sing his love song, nor will the mermaids ever sing to him. The rise and fall of the merest possibility of action, dramatized through imagery and the changing moods and tenses of verbs, provide the structure of the soliloquy from the initial “let us go” through the hesitations: “there will be time . . . time to turn back . . . Do I dare disturb the universe? . . . And how should I begin? Shall I say. . . .” With the shift in these last words to a future indicative verb a little more than halfway through the poem, Prufrock having now brought himself to contemplate action not as reverie but as actual possibility, the question of *whether* ad-

vances for a moment to the question of *how*: "Shall" he say he does not wish to spend a lonely life looking on at others' lives from a window-ledge, an empty room behind him? His vacillations of will have moved cautiously toward this possible if still somewhat meager affirmation, the subjunctive *should I* giving way to the more vivid future, *shall I*. But the will's approach to action generates its own reversal and flight in the automatic reaction expressed through the grotesque central image of the poem, which embodies Prufrock's recognition of what essentially he is:

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

a subhuman crustacean, doubly dehumanized by the synecdoche of claws even beyond its identity as crab or lobster; and moving, a cold solitary being, in armored solitude on the sea floor.²

From this point on, contemplation of change does not again enter the world of possibility in indicative verbs. Prufrock thinks in subjunctives and then in contrary-to-fact constructions: "Should I . . . have the strength . . . ? . . . in short, I was afraid"; and then, "would it have been worth *it* after all . . . ?" The question of possible action now answered negatively and for good (the answer is conveyed entirely by the moods and tenses of verbs), Prufrock turns to contemplate the twilight existence that such a man as he may look forward to: more of the teas, the white flannel trousers de rigueur for resort wear, the thinning hair (never thick), the care of digestion (in 1910 peaches were indigestible, to be eaten with caution). But love is not for him. He knows its lure, at a distance only, and with its back turned, for the mermaids are "riding seaward." Below, in the chambers of his silent sea, he may still dream of "sea-girls" wreathing him but they are dreams; the reality of a human relationship he cannot stand: "human voices wake us, and we drown."

The *Love Song* is more than a retreat from love, however; it is the portrait of a man in Hell, though until this truth is clearly realized, the hell appears to be merely the trivial one of the self-conscious individual in a sterile society. Prufrock does not analyze himself, and we are not led into peripheral guessing in Freudian or other terms about what may be wrong with him; we simply come to know directly *what it feels like* to be Prufrock. (The phrase is Eliot's in another context.)³ By certain

critics the poem has been read, with a quite different emphasis, as an ironic picture of society presided over by ennui. Certainly trivialities abound: proper neckties, "artistic" small talk, and the rest. That is the kind of society in which Prufrock moves, and obviously there is boredom in the empty fullness of its life. Moreover, it suits Eliot's purpose to set the scene superficially on this level. But within the poem the most individually significant images are of a different order; they are violent metaphors which would be out of place if ennui alone were the theme. The social images are lightly ironic, but these extreme ones are not; they form a pattern of which the two main components are objective correlatives for a self-divided state and a state of paralysis or stagnation. Self-consciousness is a split state: descending a staircase, the painfully self-conscious man is both himself descending and those above observing his thin hair; and it is this double or split consciousness that is the center of his discomfort; he is simply not all in one piece. Acute self-consciousness, furthermore, through this division of the self, paralyzes the will and the power to act and feel, produces "the partial anaesthesia of suffering without feeling" of which Eliot speaks, in a different context, in the opening scene of *The Family Reunion*.

Perhaps never again did Eliot find an epigraph quite so happily suited to his use as the passage from the *Inferno* which sets the underlying serious tone for *Prufrock* and conveys more than one level of its meaning: "S'io credesse che mia risposta . . .," lines in which Guido da Montefeltro consents to tell his story to Dante only because he believes that none ever returns to the world of the living from his depth. One in Hell can bear to expose his shame only to another of the damned; Prufrock speaks to, will be understood only by, other Prufrocks (the "you and I" of the opening, perhaps), and, I imagine the epigraph also hints, Eliot himself is speaking to those who know this kind of hell. The poem, I need hardly say, is not in a literal sense autobiographical: for one thing, though it is clear that Prufrock will never marry, the poem was published in the year of Eliot's own first marriage. Nevertheless, friends who knew the young Eliot almost all describe him, retrospectively but convincingly, in Prufrockian terms; and Eliot himself once said of dramatic monologue in general that what we normally hear in it "is the voice of the poet, who has put on the costume and

make-up either of some historical character, or of one out of fiction."⁴ As such a statement can be made only with considerable straining about Browning, who was his ostensible example in the passage where this sentence occurs, I suppose it to be one of the many indirect clues to his own poetry planted with evident deliberation throughout his prose. "What every poet starts from," he also once said, "is his own emotions," and, writing of Dante, he asserted that the *Vita nuova* "could only have been written around a personal experience,"⁵ a statement that, under the circumstances, must be equally applicable to Prufrock; Prufrock was Eliot, though Eliot was much more than Prufrock. We miss the whole tone of the poem, however, if we read it as social satire only. Eliot was not either the dedicated apostle in theory, or the great exemplar in practice, of complete "depersonalization" in poetry that one influential early essay of his for a time led readers to suppose.

Within the poem, then, are two distinct orders of imagery: there are the limited and literal details of Prufrock's daily concern, the neatly combed hair or the stylish trousers with cuffs;⁶ but against these stand out sharply the extravagant images to which I have referred—highly imaginative and for the most part violent images—and it is through these latter, which reflect back to the epigraph, that we know we are visiting a kind of hell. The once notorious opening simile is no proper description of any evening sky known to man; the "patient etherized upon a table" indeed extinguishes the sky, leaving only shock, with the residual thought of illness and paralyzed faculties, a thought evoked again, less spectacularly, by the stagnant smoke and soot, which are literal, and the afternoon that "malingers," which is figurative. Literal and figurative are joined when the trivial self-conscious fear of servants' contempt is universalized into the "eternal Footman's" snicker.

But more violent images convey the extremes of self-shattering consciousness: "the eyes that fix you," pin you to the wall like a specimen insect impaled, to be stared at in its death agony as it ejects its insides at both ends—"spitting out the butt-ends of my days and ways"; and the other image of exposure, seeing one's own nervous system projected "in patterns on a screen." Most extravagant of all these images of the agonized split self is that of John the Baptist: Prufrock has "seen" his own head brought in upon a platter.

And finally, there is the figure that recalls the epigraph from Dante, occurring just as Prufrock is thinking once more of how it might have been if he had attempted to establish an intimacy: "Would it have been worth while / . . . To say: 'I am Lazarus, come from the dead, / Come back to tell you all.'"⁷ She would not understand: "That is not what I meant at all. / That is not it, at all." What have the dead to communicate that the living could understand?

The doom is real though the tone is dry, kept so by the absence of direct expressions of feeling, by the trivial details of life, by Prufrock's reminding himself that he is no great tragic protagonist ("I am no prophet," "I am not Prince Hamlet"), and sometimes by undercurrents of other allusion, as when the lady's repeated "That is not what I meant at all" stirs (and very likely was meant to stir) an egregiously inappropriate echo in one's mind of Kipling's "rag and a bone and a hank of hair," who "never could know / And did not understand," for "it wasn't the least what the lady meant." The poem is at once both a highly subjective and a fully dramatic portrait of a man who on the surface is correct, well-dressed, over self-conscious, a trifle pathetic, and a trifle absurd. Prufrock, however, knows he is all this, and the acceptance of this knowledge dignifies him; he is no figure of fun. And there is something of him in most of us.

"The whole of Shakespeare," Eliot once wrote, "is one poem . . . united by one significant and developing personality";⁸ the words characterize his own work more sharply than they do Shakespeare's. His recurrent imagery, of which there is more than in any other writer I can think of, repeated exactly or with variations, and his repeated observations ("Human kind cannot bear very much reality" is the first that comes to mind) may originally have sprung from a narrow range of sensibility but if so he made a virtue of the limitation, deliberately unifying his work by means of these "patterns in his carpet"; the repeated images enrich, rather than impoverish, his work by a concretion of associative values for the reader that carry from one passage to another. And the continuity derived from "one significant and developing personality" which he ascribed to both Shakespeare and Dante was certainly also a deliberate aim of his own work. His Christian commitment is the most obvious unifying factor in the later work,

but through the related theme of change as process, the early and the later work are held in a single developing pattern. In the Prufrockian world, change, which there means becoming able and willing to enter into a living human relationship through love, is, as we have seen, impossible; the word *love* does not even enter after the title, and the hell is felt to be permanent.

The Waste Land is very different from *Prufrock* but in some respects it looks more different than it is. Its canvas is no longer confined to a single figure; poetic range and technique reach the opposite extreme as microscope gives way to cinema-scope. The terms of the question are different and the answer is different, yet the question itself at its most abstract level remains similar: now, for the world at large, is change possible? In contrast to Prufrock, the answer here, at least as I understand it, is "Perhaps."

I say this under correction, for I have never quite made out the conclusion of *The Waste Land* because of what appears to be uncertainty in the chronology, with the order of events and tenses of verbs shifting back and forth bewilderingly. The life-giving rain appears to have come, yet at the end the land is still arid, London Bridge still "falling down," and *give, sympathize, control* still I think hortatory rather than achieved.⁹ Nevertheless, the end does clearly suggest a hope.

Certain features of *The Waste Land*, those which once in fact appeared most novel, are employed in the service of a quite different idea from the theme of possible change or rebirth, an idea inherited directly from Matthew Arnold, that of the loss in modern times of a "unity of culture" such as once blessed the world, or at any rate as much of the world as then seemed to matter, Western civilization.¹⁰ Eliot, and before him Yeats and Pound, owed more to Arnold than they were sometimes disposed to acknowledge and in particular consciously, I think, owed to him much of their formulation of the idea of tragic loss suffered by the breaking apart of that "bright girdle" once furled about the world, the "sea of faith." These three poets are in their different ways the true Sons of Dover Beach. Their solutions, when they had any, as Eliot did after his accession of faith, were different from Arnold's when he had any, but they all took from Arnold seriously that central idea and they all, in consequence, felt responsible in their role as poets, for serving as bearers of tradition

and unifiers of culture. Though Eliot's lifelong admiration was for Dante and probably at some stage, not early, he saw certain in of his own poems a distant parallel to the *Inferno*, *Purgatorio*, and *Paradiso*, that analogy was in the nature of a tribute rather than of attempted rivalry; he never was and never thought himself to be the modern Dante. On the other hand, he did, I think quite consciously, in prose as well as poetry, set himself to become Arnold's rival, successor, and improver, the influence coming down chiefly from Arnold's prose, not his poetry. Eliot did in fact succeed in becoming Arnold's successor as a fountain of certain kinds of ideas. On one level, what are all the quotations and allusions in *The Waste Land* doing but carrying out literally Arnold's injunction to know and propagate "the best that has been known and thought in the world," demonstrating the relevance of the past to the present, exemplifying the value that a unified broad culture may have in giving power to what one has to say, and, in passing, showing its author equipped, as Arnold believed the critic if not the poet also should be, with knowledge of more than one's own language and literature? *The Waste Land* in one of its aspects is a going demonstration, really an exhibition, of the ideal unity of culture and was surely meant to be so. This, as well as her concern with the theme of death and rebirth (the specific form that significant change so often took in Eliot's thought), is why Jessie Weston's *From Ritual to Romance* was so much to Eliot's purpose, tracing as it does a significant myth through many forms and many cultures and ages.

"Unity of Culture," however, provides not the theme of *The Waste Land* but its method or technique, one assisted into being also, no doubt, by the example of the cinema's kaleidoscopic handling of time and space, as well as by certain aspects of Pound's and Symbolist poetry, and of *Ulysses*:¹¹ London metamorphosed into ancient Rome, the living dead crossing London Bridge on their way to work in Dante's city of the lost dead, inconclusive romance in the Hyacinth garden sandwiched between passages out of *Tristan und Isolde*; the modern lady of the boudoir recalling Pope's Belinda and Shakespeare's Cleopatra; Tiresias foreseeing the dreary seduction of the typist. Eliot is not romanticizing or urging a return to the past; on the contrary, he takes care to remind us of brutal lusts of the past in Tereus and the violated

Rhine maidens and of the sorrows of Tristan as well as the delights of Spenser's "Sweet Thames" daughters. Other times and places mingle with the present throughout the poem essentially as a *technique* conforming to an ideal unity of culture, while thematically the other, the central question is posed: Is there any hope for civilization? how can it be saved? is it worth saving?—"What are the roots that clutch, what branches grow / Out of this stony rubbish?," the immediate rubbish in these lines at the beginning being fragments of conversation heard or overheard in the Hofgarten, where the bored and the displaced put in time, living in the past, denying their identity, "A heap of broken images." At the end of the poem, these unfertile fragments of the present are replaced by other "fragments" of positive value out of the past, some of them of hope: Arnaut Daniel in the refining fire of Purgatory; the *Vigil of Venus* with its message of spring and "Tomorrow shall be love for the loveless"; and the more equivocal fragment from Gérard de Nerval's *El Desdichado*, "I am the dark, the widowed, the disconsolate," the Prince of Aquitaine in the ruined tower, who has crossed Acheron *twice* ("Are you alive, or not?" the lady of Part II asks; and one recalls the allusion to Lazarus in *Prufrock*). These are significant "fragments" out of the past—Arnold's "touchstones" perhaps—which the speaker has "shored against his ruins." But the answer to the poem's question of what the modern world can do to be saved is not "unity of culture," it is "Da"—of which more in a moment.

The poem is thus woven of almost countless patterns and cross-patterns through which the central theme makes its way.¹² The subject, on its public level, is society, but not society conceived as a system, and it is this latter circumstance that places *The Waste Land* properly in the sequence that begins with *Prufrock*: the ills of the world are not represented as curable by any change in organization of church or state, not by social, economic, or political means, not by choosing new leaders or instituting new forms of government. The illness is of the sum of individual souls, just as in *Prufrock* it is of one representative soul, and their cure can be wrought, if at all, only by change in those souls. The formula for this is "Da"—"Datta" (give), "Dayadhvam" (sympathize), "Damyata" (control, especially self-control), the choice of words from the Sanskrit being logically (whether or not

effectively) justified in that they represent the ancient linguistic link between East and West and so symbolize the unity of culture, while their substance advances the main theme of possible salvation for the waste land—through change in the individual.

Eliot's picture of the waste land is unified by recurring imagery of drought, of city superimposed upon city, river upon river, and most of all, by variations played upon the theme of sexual failure, episodes and imagery that aside from such personal significance as they may have, nearly all reflect the emphasis of Jessie Weston's study of the Grail myth. But the sexual variations also serve Eliot's particular ends by focusing the ills of the modern world within the context of the individual soul and out of reach of sociopolitical questions: sexual episodes spring from lust or boredom, running the gamut of seduction, rape, homosexual solicitation, all without love; romantic love is unfulfilled, marriage fruitful where the fruit is unwanted. In this second major poem, then, the question again ultimately concerns subjective change dependent upon the individual will. *The Waste Land* does not actually explore change; even Prufrock, imaginatively projecting what the impossible experience would be like if he could undertake it, comes closer to doing this.

The split state of paralyzing self-consciousness is not incompatible with either pride or a certain kind of self-confidence, by which I do not mean merely the self-bluffing that half conceals from a man his knowledge of his inadequacy; solid confidence in one's own value, even a confidence of superiority, can coexist with fear that one's value has no meaning for others or will not be recognized; self-respect may be accompanied by fear of the want of respect in others. I am not certain that Prufrock possesses this confidence—there are indications that he does not—but Eliot clearly did, and it was not achieved only during his elder-statesman days. In the gifted man who is solid when alone but shattered in company, the solidity may even mount to arrogance or to the "egotistical sublime"—to draw a phrase from another context—of the vulnerability of which he may like Keats be fully aware or like Wordsworth may not, but which in some degree is probably a precondition for creative accomplishment of any magnitude. Prufrock could not have become a poet of stature. When Eliot advanced to explore the

process of change, having dealt with the question of its possibility and even offered a first prescription for it in *The Waste Land*, he set himself to confront pride and arrogance, which enter into his work as a secondary theme, most strikingly through the extravagant symbolic figure of Coriolanus, and also later in that of Beckett. What Eliot seems to have confronted, as he set out into "the vale of soulmaking," was this unlikely sounding but by no means impossible union of Prufrock and Coriolanus.

Locked in the prison of the self, "I have heard the key / Turn in the door once and turn once only."—to lock, not to unlock. In his Love Song, Prufrock is listening to the echo of that key; the meaning of that sound is his discovery, the acceptance of it his conclusion. Yet for his author, eventually the key turned a second time and the door opened, or partly opened; and this, a process rather than an event, becomes a significant theme in the poems dating from and immediately following his official admission into the Anglican Church in 1927.

Eliot's conversion may have had an emotional origin, but, if so, at least in any usual sense of the word *emotion*, it was well concealed. The man we know, through either the poetry or the prose, as the earlier Eliot does not suggest a temperament longing to throw itself into a wholehearted devotion or even longing for a safe haven. Eliot appears to have been led through mainly intellectual channels of influence from the thought of Irving Babbitt, T. E. Hulme, Maurras, and others—with no little help also from a certain Prufrockian rigidity in his own temperament—first to the Augustinian, anti-Rousseauist conviction of the sinful nature of man. This was a major teaching of Babbitt in his attacks upon Rousseau and the Rousseauist aspects (which were all he saw) of Romanticism. Babbitt, however, held that man's imperfect nature might be held in control without doctrinaire religion by a "new humanism," through development of what is commonly called conscience and what he called an "inner check." The conception is essentially a development from Arnold's ideal of culture through which the Christian ethic and classic grace and "light" might be preserved and indeed strengthened, without the outworn aspects of Christian dogma. Eliot's essay of 1928 on "The Humanism of Irving Babbitt" attacks that position—attacks, that is, reliance upon any "inner

check" not grounded in religious authority—and in the process records, partly by implication, a significant stage of his own thought though this had been glanced at the year before in a review of F. H. Bradley. (Both essays are reprinted in *Selected Essays*.) In the following year (1929) he directed a much sharper attack—indeed for Eliot an exceptionally ill-natured piece of writing, exhibiting none of his earlier urbanity—"Second Thoughts about Humanism," this time against Norman Foerster, from whom he quotes a paragraph only to characterize it as "a composition of ignorance, prejudice, confused thinking and bad writing," adding presently with something approaching a sneer, "And if he [Foerster] thinks that religion depreciates science and art, I can only suppose that his religious training took place in the mountains of Tennessee" (*Selected Essays*, pp. 483, 484). Eliot's own position followed that of Hulme, and in this essay he quotes a passage from *Speculations* in which Hulme had asserted the importance of the dogma of Original Sin and had concluded, "It is not, then, that I put up with the dogma for the sake of the sentiment, but that I may possibly swallow the sentiment for the sake of the dogma." Hulme's general position was that nothing short of dogmatic religion could serve to control man's evil nature. Eliot concluded this second attack on humanism: "Rational assent may arrive late [he himself was forty-two that year], intellectual conviction may come slowly, but they come inevitably without violence to honesty and nature. To put the sentiments in order is a later, and an immensely difficult task: intellectual freedom is earlier and easier than complete spiritual freedom" (p. 491).

Humanism, Babbitt, the human will, the need for an "absolute" and "authoritative" church, and the value of increasing rather than reducing the power of the church within the state were much debated on Eliot's invitation in *Criterion* during these years, by others as well as himself, though as editor he was scrupulous in affording space to opposing views; even Foerster had his say at length, and the debate spilled over further into political and literary articles written from various angles. But Eliot's own position was made clear in *Criterion* as well as elsewhere, in repeated sharp attacks on Bertrand Russell (to whom as mathematician he usually first made a perfunctory bow) and milder ones on the humanism of Ramon Fer-

nandez, in signed reviews of books on religion, in certain of the essays collected in *For Lancelot Andrewes* (1928). Though the ideal of unity of culture underlies much of this writing, it is often well buried under authoritarian views on Church and State.

The tone of Eliot's prose at this time has the certitude of Papal pronouncements though from time to time he protests his ignorance pro forma ("I know nothing whatever of economics, but . . ."); and in nearly all this polemical writing emphasis is laid upon the institutional—Church, State, Monarchy—and the philosophical-dogmatic, with rarely a word about the individual soul, his own or others'. Reading through these and other writings of the period, one finds Eliot becoming convinced, like Hulme, that society needs orthodox Christianity for moral and civilizing reasons; there is at first no indication that he himself is in any real sense a believer: "Few people are sufficiently civilized to afford atheism," he remarks once, in passing.¹³ This position, however, is ultimately untenable for a man of conscience who aspires to honesty and for one with Eliot's awareness of his own strain of arrogance: if others need religion to make them decent human beings, who am I to think myself an exception? The imperative that this leads to is clear, one must *will* oneself into believing; and we are hereupon returned to the question of change in the inner man, in oneself not others, and to change that is not intellectual only. We are also returned from the prose back to the poetry. Studded though it is with clues to the poetry and occasional clues even to his private experience, the prose of Eliot is always prose of the public platform; there is no intimacy in it. Neither is there much intimacy in the earlier poetry—none, that is, of tone though we need not doubt its personal origins. Dating from the time of his formal admission into the Church, however, a new tone appears in the poetry, and with it a new style.

Indissoluble in the final effect of these poems, the new tone and new style cannot be characterized together or in similar terms, for the key to one is intimacy, to the other what would seem nearly the opposite, ritual. The later poems are intimate and personal as none of Eliot's earlier poetry is. *Ash Wednesday* is even confessional; and through others, in spite of expressly named dramatic personae, the poet's personal voice is heard and

clearly meant to be heard. Yet the style is less markedly individual, less idiosyncratic than before; it is in fact *impersonal*, deriving largely from the language and rhythm of church ritual and the poetical books of the King James Bible—a language universal in its associations, for the most part lofty, and highly poetical in the traditional sense of that term. Though *The Waste Land* had contained passages of "poetical" poetry (notably the "son of man" and the hyacinth-garden passages in Pt. I and the opening of Pt. v), as a whole Eliot's style in verse up to the time of his conversion had been deliberately antipoetical; afterwards it rarely descends from the "high" poetical, though it retained much of the living sinew of speaking inflections. It is in this new style that *Ash Wednesday* and the Ariel poems come to explore the inner reality of a changed and changing self.

It may be remarked in passing that Eliot provides an object lesson to those critics disposed to take the esthetic doctrine of organic form in too mystical or absolute a sense. Though unity seems sufficiently organic in the final form of his poems, it was frequently not achieved through anything discernibly resembling organic growth but often, instead, by shuffling of counters from poem to poem and by a thrifty way with leftovers and fragments: I think of the transfer of one of "Doris's Dream Songs," for example, to *The Hollow Men* or the reappearance of part of "Dans le Restaurant" in English as "Death by Water" in *The Waste Land*. Eliot himself alluded to this mode of composition in his *Paris Review* interview (Second Series, 1963). *Ash Wednesday* in its final form is one work, and I wish to speak of it as a poetic whole, but as it was not at first a whole, something is also to be said of its parts.

The first three sections appeared originally as separate poems published a year apart, the second section first, in 1927, under the title "Salutation," the new Christian presumably saluting the world. The Poundian aura makes the title a trifle wry, but there is nothing either wry or Poundian in the poem itself. Still, the tone is not quite throughout the tone of the later Eliot.

Lady, three white leopards sat under a juniper-tree
In the cool of the day, having fed to satiety
On my legs my heart my liver and that which had
 been contained
In the hollow round of my skull. And God said
Shall these bones live? . . .

The grotesque imagery here rather takes the edge off the seriousness as if the speaker hesitated to commit himself entirely. So the tone, but the substance is fully serious: it represents a negative stage in the progress of the Christian soul, the dissolution of the old self that has been held together by individual will and desire. Here the dry bones in the desert, the dismembered remains of the old self, speak accepting their dismemberment, and the acceptance now enables them to sing their lyric hymn to the Virgin. Thus the Rose garden may flower in the desert.

The apparent immediacy of this poem (Pt. II, that is, of the final work), unlike the rest of *Ash Wednesday*, is essentially unreal, is indeed purely nominal. Though the bones speak directly of themselves in the first person, "I" and "we," in the language of Ezekiel and Isaiah, and of Elijah sitting under a juniper tree: "I who am here dissembled / Proffer my deeds to oblivion," and "We are glad to be scattered . . . / with the blessing of sand, / Forgetting themselves and each other, united / In the quiet of the desert," and although the corresponding passage in Ezekiel is used in liturgy to represent the regeneration of baptism and the poem belongs to the year of Eliot's own baptism—in spite of this and much else that is nominally personal, the actual tone is not so. The lines seem to be asserting more than is really true, as if the speaker were seeing a distant though vivid and hallucinatory vision of the dissolution of the old willful self rather than experiencing it. The directly physical legs, liver, skull, the "three white leopards," the bones, the address to the mysterious "Lady," all have an extraordinary brightness but also a visionary quality, the remoteness of which is not due merely to the fact that they are symbolic. It is partly a result of the grotesquerie but probably even more a result of stillness: no conflict is implied, no effort, no strain, no hint that the self has experienced any difficulty in dissolving his will; and the song the bones sing to the Virgin is all praise and no asking. This peace is in contrast to nearly all the rest of *Ash Wednesday* in which there is conflict and little serenity, and in which all the prayers are pleas.

The place of this desert-and-rose-garden scene in the final poem is somewhat ambiguous, for in Christian thought that influenced Eliot, notably that of St. John of the Cross, this dissolution of the individual is an early stage after repentance; in *Ash Wednesday* it quite logically precedes the stage

of toiling up the stairs. Its unreality remains so strongly felt in the context of the whole poem, however, that it may best be read as an as-if, a vision, at this stage, of the peace that the speaker of the preceding section imagines but does not experience; without quite having the happiness of that will-less state, he nevertheless is enabled to struggle on. Subsequently he confesses the incompleteness of his "turning."

Part I, though a year after "Salutation" it too appeared as a separate poem, sets the prevailing tone for the larger final work. Its tone and not, as in Part II, its pronouns only, is personal, removed from immediacy only by the liturgical language and rhythms and only so far as is needed for the esthetic decency of poetry. It also provides the formula for enclosure of the final poem, setting off a single cycle of change: "Because I do not hope to turn again," presently reinforced—"Because I cannot hope"—that becomes in the conclusion "Although I do not hope . . .": an essential turning accomplished, but a change barely perceptible, and barely more than a beginning.

The experience of conversion presented by Eliot is poles distant from the easy evangelism of "come to Jesus and he will take away your troubles"; Eliot's Christianity belongs to the very different tradition of a long and narrow and difficult but necessary Christian way, in which there may be more pain than joy, and very little ease. In his thought, as far as we can follow it, the will plays a double role. For the individual will must be dissolved through identification with the will of God: "Teach us to care and not to care" is his paradoxical formulation of this. It is what he prays for at the beginning of *Ash Wednesday* and what he is still only praying for at the end, where its meaning is placed beyond dispute by the addition of Dante's words "Our peace in His will." In absolute terms no human will, however devout the Christian, is ever completely dissolved and so all need to pray, but as the context shows, Eliot means more than that: even in relative terms his humility has far to go. It is the individual will also, however, that, cooperating with supernatural grace, must will itself out of existence. Thus in the opening part of *Ash Wednesday* the old self, out of despair, undertakes to change by pure force of will: "Because I cannot hope to turn again / Consequently I rejoice, *having to construct something / Upon which to rejoice.*" Though despair, Eliot explains elsewhere, is "a necessary prelude to, and

element in, the joy of faith,"¹⁴ what the opening of *Ash Wednesday* presents does not in fact resemble that "blessed" and fruitful despair of St. John of the Cross; it is a more ordinary despair grounded in a sense of failure or frustration. The despair itself may be real enough, but the rejoicing that one still *has to construct* is more paradox than experienced joy. It may lead the speaker to that distant vision of peace and gladness in the dismembered self of the scattered bones but not to the real experience of such a state.

The spiritual struggle of *Ash Wednesday* has its center in Part III. When published alone the year after Part I, its title was "Al som de l'escalina," from which we know that we are to think of the *Purgatorio*, for the title comes from a passage already drawn to our attention in Eliot's notes to *The Waste Land* ("Now I pray you, by that goodness which guides you *to the summit of the stairway*, be mindful" ['sovegna vos'—these words appear in the next section of *Ash Wednesday*] in due time of my pain"). Visually the scene is the stair of a dark medieval tower up which the climber toils, at each turn leaving part of himself, or his former self, behind still "struggling with the devil of the stairs who wears / The deceitful face of hope and of despair"—perhaps specifically the "demon of doubt," which in the essay on Pascal (p. 411) Eliot described as "inseparable from the spirit of belief." As this is surely not true of all Christians, we may suppose that he spoke from his own as well as Pascal's experience of doubt. At the third stair, looking out, he sees at a distance the sensual world, focused in the broad-backed Pan-like figure (who reappears as "the garden god" in the following section), a world of beauty and enchantment; but he sees it only through the narrow slotted window of the tower and climbs on through the strength of pure will alone, the "strength beyond hope and despair." This division of the poem concludes with what I take to be a solemn pun embodying a confession.

In his prose, Eliot could be doctrinaire, illiberal, condescending; he displayed no hesitations and few self-doubts. He was under no obligation to make public confessions of his flaws, and he gave few hints of there being any. For some years, indeed, beginning with his initial attacks on humanism, his prose was often colored by a repellent intellectual and moral-sounding arrogance. Prose, however, one writes for the world, poetry largely for oneself; and in his poetry Eliot subjected him-

self to a more rigorous and self-critical criterion of sincerity than he seems to have done in his prose.¹⁵ Hence, as *Ash Wednesday* moves toward the final reversal of the opening "Because I do not hope," which will complete the change, acknowledgments that the change will not be complete, or quite pure, begin to appear. Yet now the tone itself becomes more pure; the hint, which perhaps I only imagine I feel, of posturing in Parts I and II disappears. Part III concludes:

Lord, I am not worthy
Lord, I am not worthy

but speak the word only.

In the account of the miracle in the gospel, the centurion says to Christ: "Lord, I am not worthy that thou shouldst come under my roof: but speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed (Matt. viii.5-8; cf. Luke vii.1-7). *Speak* is grammatically in the second person, a petition; and Eliot is using it no doubt in this sense, asking, though unworthy, Christ's help. But I cannot escape from the other meaning also which the words bear as they stand, laid open by the period and by omission of the centurion's concluding words: Lord, I am not worthy but *speak* the word only—that is, I only speak it, I do not (or not yet) truly believe it. The passage then is at once an affirmation and a denial of the centurion's humility and faith and constitutes a preliminary half-offered confession of what is said explicitly in the fifth division of the poem. It is a painful confession.

Part IV returns to the desert-and-garden imagery of Part II, but with the desert now remaining only as a memory in the garden. Though the scene is more pageant-like and processional than that of Part II, and though there is no "I" or "we" to make it personal, and though the Lady has been rendered even more symbolic by the indeterminate pronoun and the tapestry-like flowers—"Who walked between the violet and the violet"—still the mood is somehow realized and experienced, not distantly beheld; the unmentioned speaker is in it, not imagining it from elsewhere.

This is the scene of the poem (three of the sections are "scenes" in the technical sense, the other three are not) that most nearly approaches the mood of beatitude; there is repose and no struggle. Yet it has not the stillness, the motionless picture-like quality of Part II; it is all movement, a circumstance that may contribute to its greater reality and immediacy:

Who walked between the violet and the violet
 Who walked between . . .
 Going in white and blue . . .
 Who moved among the others as they walked . . .
 Who then made strong the fountains . . .
 Made cool the dry rock. . . .
 Here are the years that walk between, bearing
 Away the fiddles and the flutes, restoring
 One who moves. . . .
 The new years walk, restoring. . . .
 The silent sister . . .
 . . . behind the garden god,
 Whose flute is breathless . . .

spoke no word

But the fountain sprang up and the bird sang
 down. . . .

This is a kind of royal progress, a formal procession. But through the symbolism, as the figure of the Lady, the veiled "Who," becomes presently "the years" and finally "the new years," real transformation is wrought in the subjective self: the sensual is purified (Pan's flute no longer is heard); the desert has become garden, the soul is restored and with it the creative spirit in a new vein ("restoring / With a new verse the ancient rhyme" may refer to this as well as to spiritual restoration). So the effect of this, the last "scene" in the poem, is a remarkable combination of the inner and the outer world, processional yet experienced. The poem does not end in beatitude, however, and this scene does not suggest that the end is won: it repeats the hortatory "redeem the time" and "redeem the dream"; the "word" is not yet quite "the Word," it is not yet quite heard or spoken, and so the soul is still in exile, but with hope, for he has had his moment in the garden.

The last two parts of *Ash Wednesday* are again, like the opening, meditations and not scenes. The scene of the fourth has led without a break into the quite extraordinary syntactical whirling about of *word* and *world* and *whirl* and *Word* that opens Section v. The syntax of this passage can be unwound, but I am not sure that it remains unwound; I find myself on most readings having to think it consciously all over again; and in any case, it seems to me too mannered to be poetically quite successful even with the precedent behind it of the Gospel of St. John and Lancelot Andrewes. Its substance, however, is essential to the poem: it is an assertion of the truth of Christ as the Word, an assertion that this is *the* Reality even if one has not brought oneself to acknowledge it fully. The statements are made in general terms, but the whole has

the tone of determined personal honesty as the poet goes on to describe the state of those who have espoused Christianity officially without their souls being fully committed. The indirect confession is reiterated some half-dozen or more times. First it is merely "those who walk among noise and deny the voice"; then the contradiction becomes more specific: will the sister "pray for / Those who walk in darkness, who chose thee and oppose thee"; for "children at the gate / Who will not go away and cannot pray," like Herbert's (*Affliction 1*) "I could not go away, nor persevere"; "Pray for those who chose and oppose." At last, in the most nearly self-damning words, "pray for those who . . . affirm before the world and deny between the rocks." Before the world Eliot had been "affirming" sometimes loudly in his prose, mainly by attacking skepticism, liberalism, and secularism in others; these words establish beyond doubt that in the poem he is not merely describing the Christian's inevitable human imperfection in living up to his religion; he is deliberately confessing that his own public avowals are not, or not yet, entirely matched by private belief.¹⁶ This clear denial of belief, however, takes place "in the last desert between the last blue rocks / The desert in the garden the garden in the desert"; hence, the direction is at least forward—"fare forward" was a phrase he came to love—and the red rocks of the waste land have become blue rocks, of "Mary's colour."

The following sixth and final section marks the change since the beginning: a change that is real but a good deal less than he has seemed publicly to claim for it—that was the burden of Part v; the new turning has been made by the will but not yet by the whole self. "Although" he does not hope or even quite wish to turn back to the old life, still he is full of nostalgia. The narrow "slotted window" through which he had seen the hawthorn and maytime and Pan becomes now, for he is no longer shut up in his dark tower of intense struggle, a "wide window towards the granite shore," from which in a passage freighted with nostalgia for the loved Massachusetts coast of his youth, he sees the white sails and all that the "lost heart" had loved, the "lost lilac and the lost sea voices," the "bent goldenrod" ("bent" an extraordinarily vivid and economical word for the flower form of the finest of the goldenrods) and the "lost sea smell." This lost world of the senses enriched by the emotional freight of memory—the passage has a power of

transference that has grown far beyond the earlier "smell of hyacinths across the garden," recalling only the desires of "other people"—is purified, one supposes, for broad-backed Pan is gone and the "brown hair" that distracted the climber of the stairs; and perhaps for this reason, perhaps also because it is all felt as "lost" and no longer hoped for, it is a memory that may be indulged through the "wide" window. Its spirit—"spirit of the river," the Mississippi of his childhood, "spirit of the sea"—even becomes part of the new life at the end of the poem as he invokes the "blessed sister" and "holy mother." It is a new life, yet the substance of his prayer is what it was at the beginning: "Teach us to care and not to care . . . Our peace in His will," preceded by a significant plea for sincerity. In the light of the dogmatic and somewhat arrogant assertions he was concurrently making in prose, this prayer must be seen as more than perfunctory: "Suffer us not to mock ourselves with falsehood." *Ash Wednesday*, then, though its theme is appropriate enough for the day that marks the beginning of Lent, is not merely the self-examination and repentance prescribed for the occasion. It contains these, but they fall within the framework of another theme, for the poem as a whole is a history and in the end a meticulously honest examination of one man's inner change and a weighing of that change to know how great it is, how genuine, how small.

One essential observation remains. The poem is not a sequel to *The Waste Land*, not even to the individual, as separated out from the social, aspect of the earlier theme, for the whole direction of the will in *Ash Wednesday* is now different, and Da—"give, sympathize, control"—has very little to do with it. These are not now, in the human terms in which they were set forth earlier by the thunder, the means to salvation or even the way to set one's lands in order preparatory to salvation. Though there is a Lady and for all one knows she may have had a real human counterpart and may not be simply a formal equivalent for Dante's Beatrice and Matilda, still, so far at least as the poem goes, she is a purely formal and instrumental figure, an aid to the speaker on his path toward consecration. The way he has chosen is subjection of the will to *belief* and *impersonal* devotion; his goal is thus removed not only from humanism but from human relationships; emphasis has shifted toward ritual and dogma, thus toward the institutional; this is the kind of change that is examined in the

poem. It is a solitary direction to have taken, and one not inconceivable for Prufrock.

The four Ariel poems, composed during the same years as *Ash Wednesday*, all deal with some aspect of subjective change, but I shall be concerned mainly with the two best of them, the "Journey of the Magi" and "Marina." "A Song for Simeon" is a fairly simple and touching prayer bringing together the themes of birth and death. "Animula" departs from the usual pattern of Eliot's thought by the fact that, opening with a line paraphrasing Dante, "Issues from the hand of God, the simple soul," the poem appears to at least skirt the Rousseauist or even the Godwinian doctrine of natural innocence corrupted by a corrupt society. Here, however, it is "time" rather than society that corrupts, and the conclusion carries the poem safely back to the poet's more usual line of thought. It is in the sources of the other two poems, however, the story of the Magi and Shakespeare's *Pericles*, that Eliot found symbols through which to embody more particular things he had to say about inner change. The truths are commonplace: that change may be difficult, even severely painful, that one may be reluctant to accept even a desired change—this is all they amount to. Yet when Eliot has finished with them they have become new truth, with a reality unfelt before.

The suggestion for the first came to him from a sermon of Lancelot Andrewes, and what he said about Andrewes in introducing a quotation that subsequently became, almost unaltered, the opening lines of the "Journey of the Magi" shows that Andrewes' method, as well as his theme, gave him something he could use. "Before extracting all the spiritual meaning of a text," Eliot wrote, "Andrewes forces a concrete presence upon us"; and then he quoted Andrewes' passage beginning, "It was no summer progress. A cold coming they had of it,"¹⁷ and the rest of what appears, word for word but slightly abridged, as the opening lines of the "Journey." Accordingly, in the poem Eliot forces upon us a concrete presence and a concrete situation. The whole original conception was Andrewes', for it was he who had set himself to imagine afresh what the Magi's journey would really have been like, and the popular or folk tradition of easy joy was no part of it, not even so cheerful a spirit as that of the carol "We three kings of Orient are, / Bearing gifts we come from afar." No, it was a hard journey "in the dead of

winter"; and the sequel was no easier, though this neither Andrewes nor tradition tells us.

Eliot presents the hard journey in concrete, realistic yet also partly symbolic detail that foreshadows the Crucifixion, three trees outlined against the sky, hands dicing for silver. The moment of recognition at the end of the journey is almost omitted, as if it were too sacred for speech: "It was (you may say) satisfactory" (Eliot's equivalent for "the rest is silence" though not so grand). There are no gifts and no greetings. The colorless understatement, grossly inadequate at first glance, serves as a formal sign that the indescribable recognition has occurred. The words have been criticized as a failure on Eliot's part to rise to the occasion, but this is a mistake; it is not an occasion to rise to in language. An attempt to be expressive must have fallen short or rung a false note, and the flat verbal equivalent for a typographical row of periods to signal omission of what is unsayable is superior.

Nothing in Andrewes' sermon suggests what follows in the poem as Eliot proceeds to extract what to him is of primary significance in the story, the sequel that tradition omits: for one who has seen the Truth, to live afterwards as a changed man, solitary among familiar but now alien people, is harder than dying.

There was a Birth, certainly,
 We had evidence and no doubt. I had seen birth and death,
 But had thought they were different; this Birth was
 Hard and bitter agony for us, like Death, our death.
 We returned to our places, these Kingdoms,
 But no longer at ease here, in the old dispensation,
 With an alien people clutching their gods.
 I should be glad of another death.

From the beginning, Eliot had thought of change in terms of birth (or life) and death, an obviously natural, universal association, since birth and death do literally represent change in its most universal and extreme forms; hence its constant symbolic use in Christian, and not only Christian, thought. But with Eliot there is in addition always present what does not commonly appear in others' handling of the symbols, the consciousness of the pain and difficulty that may be a condition of the change not only when its direction is toward death, but almost equally when it is toward life, birth, or rebirth: "April is the cruelest month," we remember, and "If I should say, 'I am Lazarus,

come from the dead.'" In the "Journey of the Magi," the pain of this change is shown, with paradoxical but deadly serious wordplay upon Christ's birth and death and their own birth to a new life so bitter that "we should be glad of another death." The vividness of the preceding narrative should not obscure this central theme of the poem, the continuing agony of spiritual change.

"Marina," the fourth of the Ariel poems, is not unrelated to the "Journey" in theme, though its poetic method is very different. The "Journey" is a simply, rather conventionally constructed monologue in which one of the Magi tells his story pretty much as he really might, in his own voice, aloud. "Marina" is an interior monologue, heightened into incantatory poetry. None of it would conceivably ever have been said. It is the distillation of moments of a dawning recognition so crucial as to fill a remaining lifetime; it is the anatomy of the moment of change, a moment of oscillation, alternating retreat and advance toward irrevocable choice between present death and longed-for life.

Eliot has been quoted as saying in an unpublished address on Shakespeare that he considered "the finest of all the 'recognition scenes' " in the plays to be that of Act v, scene i of "that very great play *Pericles*."¹⁸ It is difficult not to agree with his judgment of the recognition scene if not of the whole play. The actual story of the partly Shakespearean *Pericles* is a farrago, conspicuous even among Elizabethan plots, of fairly nonsensical improbabilities which had better be glanced at, since not everyone reads this play on the fringes of the Shakespearean canon. *Pericles* of Tyre, having left his kingdom, sails the seas in desolate mourning for his beloved wife whom he had long before buried at sea, and for his infant daughter Marina, born at sea and now believed dead. In a distant port an unknown girl—Marina, now grown up and escaped from murderer, pirates, and brothel (where she has been bad for the business of the house because none can bear to harm her, she so purifies the spirits of all who come)—is brought to the ship in one last hope that her beauty and goodness and her lovely singing voice may rouse *Pericles* from his despair. Unreal in terms of actual characterization, Marina has nevertheless by Shakespeare's magic strayed through the play like a wandering ray of light or a transparent angel. Brought before *Pericles*, she sings, and then speaks

of her past. It is, as Eliot says, an unforgettable scene.

In Eliot's rendering, the emphasis is changed slightly, in a direction characteristic of the Eliot I have been discussing, but the hint is in Shakespeare where incredulity in Pericles alternates with dawning recognition as Marina tells her story. At one moment he seems half unwilling as well as unable to believe she is really his living daughter. In Eliot's poem this alternation between willingness and unwillingness to advance becomes the substance of the key lines, the imagery of which—and the oscillation of feeling is presented entirely through images and never otherwise stated—derives from the scene of the play. In the poem, recognition is attended too by a paradoxical but profoundly real mingling of strangeness and familiarity: "What is this face, . . . / The pulse in the arm, . . . / Given or lent? more distant than stars and nearer than the eye." Sentence by sentence (Eliot's punctuation is always significant) the alternation continues between the old dead self, the ship, "bowsprit cracked with ice," and the new soul "my daughter,"

I made this, I have forgotten
And remember.
The rigging weak and the canvas rotten
Between one June and another September.
Made this unknowing, half conscious, unknown,
my own.

Though several eminent critics (Leavis, Helen Gardner, and George Williamson among others) refer "I made this" to the ship, supposing Pericles to say he has built his old ship, such a reading strikes me as most improbable. "This" is surely his daughter. For one thing, anaphora is continued in "This form, this face." And the alternation, if one follows the periods, is exact: one sentence for the ship (bowsprit cracked . . .), one for the daughter (I made this . . .); again one for the ship (the rigging rotten . . .), and one for the daughter (made this unknowing . . .); the ship (the garboard strake leaks . . .) and finally daughter,

This form, this face, this life
Living to live in a world of time beyond me; let me
Resign my life for this life, my speech for that un-
spoken,
The awakened, lips parted, the hope, the new ships.

In this last sentence recognition is complete and accepted, the inner change has occurred, the old

self with rotten rigging is transformed in "the new ships." There is a clarity in this progression by comparison with which a reading that refers "I made this" to the ship renders the whole passage shapeless and comparatively meaningless. I emphasize the point because the ambivalence in the recognition and rebirth seems to me the most distinctive and perceptive aspect of the poem's statement. Except for the beautiful incantatory lines at the beginning and end, it is what makes the poem. (The "I made this" formula may owe something to lines in Shakespeare's scene, though the resemblance is not close. Pericles addresses Marina: "O, come hither, / Thou that beget'st him that did thee beget," followed shortly afterwards by "Rise; thou art my child. / Give me fresh garments.")

Through the epigraph from Seneca's *Hercules Furens*, Eliot introduces another dramatic recognition antithetical to that of *Pericles*. It is the scene in which Hercules recovers from a madness inflicted by Hera, during which he has killed his wife and children. He awakens, at first not knowing where he is ("*Quis hic locus*"), to recognition of the horror he has committed. Eliot is quoted as having said that he used the two recognition scenes in order to form a "crisscross" between them.¹⁹ One can speculate upon further meanings possibly conferred upon the poem by the *Hercules*—a reminder, perhaps, that one may awaken to Hell as well as to Heaven or a reminder, not emphasized by the Pericles story, that the old self has been a sinful self—but the allusion to the *Hercules* does not get caught up into the poem. Even the opening line, which partly echoes the Senecan line, is translated from the terrestrial scene of Hercules' awakening to the marine of Pericles (and of Massachusetts), seas, shores, rocks, islands, fog. Once one knows the context of the epigraph, the allusion injects a little grit into what might be conceived as a too smoothly happy conclusion; in life, one does have to live with the consequences of one's past, which Pericles in the play does not. In this way, peripheral though it is, the allusion I think may have the value of casting a vague sort of shadow over the whole.

The poem contains one passage, however, that no amount of effort on my part enables me to feel as anything but an intrusion. The lyrical opening is followed by eight stiffly formal, oracular lines in a different, often huddled rhythm (huddled as words are in a chant when many must be sung to one

note) and spoken in a voice which is not the sublimated inner voice of Pericles that speaks the rest of the poem; nor is it in any other relevant voice that Eliot marshals some four of the seven deadly sins, all "meaning Death." The passage is presumably meant to register unequivocally, in case it might be mistaken, the fact that the recognition and turning toward life that follow are to be understood in a specifically Christian sense. Both the imagery and the statements, however, as well as the style, force upon us matter that does not grow naturally out of the rest of the poem. It may have been superimposed for the sake of bringing "Marina" into more explicit conformity with the occasion of the Ariel series, which was associated with Christmas, and Eliot may have hoped that through his old cinematic technique of abrupt juxtapositions a link not explicit would be felt and an effect created something like that of the thunder's voice speaking Da in *The Waste Land*. But it is not like that, because the poet's own imagination is felt to be absorbed (as the reader's is) for the duration of the poem in the pure process of recognition and change, both abstractly and as distilled out of the scene in the play. The poem thus unites something narrower than the Christian Church, the drama of a human personal recognition, and something more universal—subjective, chosen change itself—leaving the oracular voice of the preacher with his list of arbitrarily selected sins a false note, a perfunctory insertion:

Those who sit in the sty of contentment, meaning
Death
Those who suffer the ecstasy of the animals, meaning
Death

Even so, even, that is, granting so serious a flaw as this appears to me, "Marina" stands among Eliot's memorable achievements.

A time of poetic sterility followed completion during these years (1927–30) of *Ash Wednesday* and the Ariel poems. "I seemed to myself," Eliot wrote of it long afterwards, "to have exhausted my meagre poetic gifts, and to have nothing more to say," and this stagnation was only dispelled by a commission several years later to supply verse for *The Rock*, which moved his pen if not all his poetic power to renewed activity (*The Three Voices of Poetry*, p. 11). That same year, however, he wrote one other poem that for him was unique.

"Rannoch, by Glencoe" is the only great short lyric of Eliot; it is also among the best, and most somber, of modern times though, lying half buried in the group of minor "Landscapes," it has rarely been noticed. Its exceptional lyric intensity suggests that, impersonal though its ostensible theme is, the historic scene it presents so fell in with the gloomy sterility of the preceding years as to become for him partly their objective correlative. The actual "landscape" of "Rannoch" is a high bleak Scottish moor near a wild glen whose pass was the scene in 1692 of a treacherous massacre, the bitter memories of which have never been extinguished nor its origins fully exposed though its vaguely known connection with the "pacification" of the highlands gave it more than local meaning. Eliot usually required space to move about in. Here, however, twelve lines suffice for an effect of very considerable magnitude (one remembers a sonnet on the Piedmont massacre).

Here the crow starves, here the patient stag
Breeds for the rifle. Between the soft moor
And the soft sky, scarcely room
To leap or soar. Substance crumbles, in the thin air
Moon cold or moon hot. The road winds in
Listlessness of ancient war,
Languor of broken steel,
Clamour of confused wrong, apt
In silence. Memory is strong
Beyond the bone. Pride snapped,
Shadow of pride is long, in the long pass
No concurrence of bone.

This is the dark side of "unity of culture," a Waste Land contracted into the single scene of a present indelibly but invisibly marked by the past. Through grim metaphorical distortions of the natural world mere geological infertility and customary activity of hunter become the external marks of ancient wrong, a desert antithetical to that of *Ash Wednesday* where the bones were "glad," the garden would bloom, and time could be "redeemed." Here there is and will be "no concurrence of bone": the past cannot be expiated or forgiven, links of time are unbreakable, all change is denied. "If all time is eternally present, / All time is unredeemable," Eliot was to write soon afterwards in "Burnt Norton", where, however, serenity becomes possible in the face of the unredeemable past because of spiritual moments that transcend time. But in "Rannoch, by Glencoe"

the past is forever unredeemable and there is no serenity. Though a short lyric may represent but a mood, often short-lived, the complete submergence in this one, its power to obliterate all else, creates a universe of desolation that in spirit includes the personal with the geographical and historical. In "Burnt Norton" this desolation, as well as subsequent recovery, are recapitulated, the former through the Homeric "twittering" Waste Land of the living dead in the London Tube of Part III, the latter in the convalescent-springtime lyric of Part II in which

The trilling wire in the blood
Sings below inveterate scars
And reconciles forgotten wars.

As one sees it in the *Four Quartets*, the sterile regression of the years after 1930 ended in a change far more complete than the imperfect one of *Ash Wednesday*, for the sustained tone, the pedal point, of the *Quartets* is reconciliation and serenity; these are the continuum, robbing change of its immediacy so that it is apt to show now as history or historical process, or is dissolved in half-mystical, half-historical meditations on time, the "time present and time past" of "Burnt Norton" or "in my beginning is my end" of "East Coker". Or individual change becomes generalized: "Fare forward, travellers," he bids us:

Fare forward, you who think that you are voyaging
You are not those who saw the harbour
Receding, or those who will disembark.
(*"The Dry Salvages"*, Part III)

Throughout the *Quartets*, change is remote enough to be mainly a kind of dreaming meditation upon time as change willed or passive, counterpointed against its opposite, the timeless moments of the rose garden or the church at "smoke-fall," moments of full consciousness which are felt to transcend or to contain all time. These would be moments too of undivided consciousness in which the old split self of a Prufrock must be at length wholly transformed—wholly, yet even now not so much through ostensibly human-centered "Da" as through the more solitary spiritual avenue open to the self from which he had started. The dominant spirit of the *Quartets* is this serenely solitary spirit of one who is past all urgent change.

The plays of Eliot, having but a little to say for

my purpose, need not detain us. That he had not lost interest in the subject is apparent from the fact that in all but *Murder in the Cathedral* inner change is the central theme. But, its immediacy gone for him, he failed to give life to it in action and tended to fall back on mere talk; even this failed, sinking often to flat unrevealing chitchat. An unchanged house "only makes the changing of people / All the more manifest. . . . / You have hardly changed at all. . . . / Well, I must go and change for dinner" (an abridged but not unfairly mutilated conversation in *The Family Reunion*, sc. ii). Or in *The Confidential Clerk*: "Lucasta: I think I'm changing. / I've changed quite a lot in the last two hours. / Colby: And I think I'm changing too," with more in the same vein (Act II). Assertion of change replaces felt experience throughout the plays. Though Eliot stuck by it stubbornly for more than a decade, the theme was now dead, and it is fortunate for his poetry that the *Quartets* have a different focus. They are meditative explorations of the new self, of present consciousness, of the ground of his present being. And as the consciousness is now without urgent struggle, it is capacious enough to contain thoughts of past and future, history of self and race, memory—freighted with emotion—of places loved, the recalcitrance of poetic language.

The poetry of Yeats, as everybody knows, is running autobiography undisguised. That of Eliot is not. Yet, his early (and subsequently disclaimed) doctrine of the "extinction of personality" notwithstanding, by the time he was beginning to write *Ash Wednesday* he could say frankly and as sweepingly as he had previously said almost the opposite, "What every poet starts from is his own emotions."²⁰ Criteria by which he came to judge the greatness of a poet's work were that very "personality" he had once banished, continuity, and growth: great poetry presents "a developing personality," he said. He valued this in Shakespeare and Dante; he clearly aimed at it himself when he deliberately bound his major work together by means of recurrent imagery and, as I think, by means of his enduring concern with change in the individual soul, as felt in the one soul he knew.

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Notes

¹ Quotations from the poems are from the *Collected Poems 1909–1962* (New York: Harcourt, 1963). As several other editions are widely used and as the bulk of Eliot's poetry is small, I have not provided page references. Occasional italics have been added in the quotations.

² I do not think the image represents, as some writers have maintained, the desire for instinctual or predatory animal life; it is merely a stronger poetic equivalent for the commonplace metaphor of a person's retreating into or being drawn "out of his shell."

³ From an uncollected essay, quoted in Kristian Smidt's *Poetry and Belief in the Work of T. S. Eliot* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1961), p. 58.

⁴ *The Three Voices of Poetry* (New York: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1954), p. 21. The whole passage, pp. 19–24, is of great interest in this connection. Laforgue, of course, provided part of the poet's "make-up" for Prufrock, but the tracing of sources is not my present subject. Laforgue's influence is treated extensively by Hugh Kenner (*The Invisible Poet: T. S. Eliot*, New York: McDowell, Obolensky, 1959), and by Herbert Howarth (*Notes on Some Figures behind T. S. Eliot*, London: Chatto and Windus, 1965); and Grover Smith, Jr. (*T. S. Eliot's Poetry and Plays*, 3rd ed., Chicago, Univ. of Chicago Press, 1961).

⁵ See his *Selected Essays*, 3rd ed. (London: Faber and Faber, 1951), pp. 17, 137; also pp. 272–73, where he discussed the *Vita nuova* as neither strictly truth nor fiction.

⁶ Referred to at the time as "rolled." A trivial detail, but one that has led to some comically ingenious interpretations. Robert Llewellyn solved the difficulty some years ago in the *Explicator*. But notice also (near the end of the Lestrygonians episode in *Ulysses*) that Blazes Boylan was wearing "Tan shoes. Turnedup trousers." Boylan, too, dressed well.

⁷ Either of the two biblical Lazarus stories may be referred to, or the allusion may be composite, both having to do with the return of the dead. See Luke xvi.20–31 and John xi.1–46, xii.1–18.

⁸ Quoted without reference in Georges Cattai, *T. S. Eliot*, trans. Claire Pace and Jean Stewart (New York: Minerva Press, 1969), p. 26. I have seen the passage somewhere in Eliot but cannot now locate it. Something similar is said in the essay on Dante about the "relation between the various plays of Shakespeare, taken in order" and "the pattern in Shakespeare's carpet" (*Selected Essays*, p. 245). Cf. also "this unity is a lifetime's work" (pp. 193–94).

⁹ Through the courtesy of Mrs. T. S. Eliot and Mrs. L. L. Szladits, Curator of the Berg Collection of the New York Public Library, I was enabled to see, before publication of the facsimile, the MS of *The Waste Land*, which I had hoped might throw light on the sequences of "What the Thunder Said." Both Eliot and Pound, however, left the original version here nearly untouched. In her notes to the now

published facsimile, Mrs. Eliot confirms the absence of any material revisions in Part v.

¹⁰ Eliot refers to Arnold often, not always favorably. See, e.g., the Introd. to *The Sacred Wood*, the essay on Bradley in 1927 (*Selected Essays*, pp. 449–53), the editor's "Commentary" in *Criterion* for Jan. 1925, and scattered references elsewhere in *Criterion*. See also the discussion of Arnold's influence in Howarth, pp. 253–56.

¹¹ Published in the same year as *The Waste Land* but known to Eliot and admired by him earlier. See the account in Howarth, pp. 242–45.

¹² One of the minor cross-patterns may perhaps lie in the old Greek division of matter reapplied to govern the first four divisions of the poem: Earth ("Burial of the Dead"), Air (all mere talk without substance; for, as Chaucer says, sound "is nocht but air y-broken, / And every speche that is spoken . . . / In his substaunce is but air"), "The Fire Sermon," and "Death by Water," all arranged in the customary order. If this is indeed intentional, it is one of the more arbitrary of the patterns, representing a leaning, which Eliot later outgrew, toward an omnium-gatherum of allusion.

¹³ "The Literature of Fascism," *Criterion*, 8 (Dec. 1928), 283. The article, incidentally, is not an espousal of fascism, but is polite criticism of it rather than denunciation.

¹⁴ This statement concludes a significant passage in "The 'Pensées' of Pascal," 1931 (*Selected Essays*, p. 412). Much in that essay throws light on Eliot's own experience as an intellectual convert.

¹⁵ In *After Strange Gods* Eliot justified other "apparent incoherence between my verse and my critical prose" differently: "In one's prose reflexions one may be legitimately occupied with ideals, whereas in the writing of verse one can only deal with actuality" (London: Faber and Faber, 1934), p. 28.

¹⁶ The few statements having to do with doubt that I remember seeing in Eliot's prose appear deliberately ambiguous or, if one is unsympathetic, even sophistical: e.g., "doubt and uncertainty are merely a variety of belief" ("A Note on Poetry and Belief," *The Enemy*, 1 Jan. 1927, 16); and see the statement on doubt and belief quoted earlier from the essay on Pascal.

¹⁷ "Lancelot Andrewes," dated 1926 in *Selected Essays*. "Journey of the Magi" appeared in 1927, the same year as the "Salutation" section of *Ash Wednesday*.

¹⁸ Quoted by Elizabeth Drew in *T. S. Eliot: The Design of His Poetry* (New York: Scribners, 1949), p. 127.

¹⁹ Grover Smith, Jr., cites this statement from a letter of 1930 (p. 131). In 1927 Eliot had written the introduction to a new edition of Thomas Newton's *Seneca: His Tenne Tragedies*, in which the *Hercules Furens* stands first.

²⁰ "Shakespeare and the Stoicism of Seneca," *Selected Essays*, p. 137. The essay is dated 1927.