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19. ELIOT'S THE LOVE SONG OF J. ALFRED PRUFROCK, Epigraph

In discussing "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," George Williamson suggests (in *A Reader's Guide to T. S. Eliot,* p. 58) that "likeness in situation" between that of Prufrock and that of Guido da Montefeltro, the spirit who speaks to Dante and Virgil, best accounts for the appropriateness of the epigraph from Canto XXVII of the *Inferno.* Grover Smith, on the other hand, emphasizes (in *T. S. Eliot's Poetry and Plays,* p. 17) the similarities between the characters of Prufrock and Guido. The two views are not incompatible, but it would seem that the similarities in situation result primarily from the fact that the characters of the two tormented and deluded souls are so very much alike. Such similarities, however, are to be discerned fully only when one contrasts the whole of the *Inferno* passage with the whole of Eliot's poem; the six lines of the epigraph alone do not contain the entire range of its relevance. It is only when one is aware of the context of those lines that one is able to perceive the full extent of the ironic function of the epigraph.

Guido is a fooled and betrayed soul who is much like Prufrock. In the very next line after the passage quoted by Eliot, Guido brags that he was a "man of arms" ("uom d'arme"), but he was really no more a man of arms than is Prufrock, who has "known the arms already, known them all—/ Arms that are braceleted and white and bare." (The phrase which Prufrock repeats, "known them all," is a direct echo of Guido's "io seppi tutte," which refers to his own shadowy ways of perception and deception.) In spite of his knowingness, though, Guido has been played for a fool. For, notwithstanding a praiseworthy decision to do penance for his former sins, he permitted himself to become, in Prufrock's words, the "easy tool" of Boniface VIII (who is referred to in the canto as "Lo principe"), to become Boniface's counsellor "glad to be of use." Guido's caution did not keep him from foolishly believing in Boniface's powers of absolution, and his obtuseness and procrastination

COMING NEXT MONTH — OR SOON*

BROWNING'S NATIONALITY IN DRINKS ... *Edward C. McAleer*

EMERSON'S BRAHMA ..... *Marilyn Baldwin, Gaylord C. LeRoy, John D. Russell, William Bysshe Stein*

HOPKINS' THE WINDHOVER ..... *J. D. Thomas*

JOYCE'S FINNEGANS WAKE ..... *Bernard Benstock*

KEATS' THE EVE OF ST. AGNES ..... *Evelyn H. Scholl*

POE'S AN ENIGMA ..... *W. T. Bandy*

SHAKESPEARE'S I HENRY IV, III, iii, 91-97 ..... *Ruth S. Perot*

STEVENS' LIONS IN SWEDEN ..... *Ramon Guthrie*

VIERECK'S DON'T LOOK NOW BUT MARY IS EVERYBODY ..... *Richard P. Benton*

*These articles are not yet actually set up in print, and exigencies of space may require changes.

CHRISTMAS GIFT SUGGESTION. May we modestly but seriously suggest that THE EXPLICATOR would make an excellent present for some special friend or relative? Maybe not for Aunt Hettie or Uncle Hiram—who never read anything—but surely for a host of others who pride themselves on keeping abreast of the latest in literary matters. Just send us the names and the money, and we shall gladly send the gift announcements.

eventually brought him to the eighth circle of hell. Guido (and Prufrock resembles him in this respect, also) had reached the time of life at which "each one ought/ to let fall the sails and take in the shrouds" ("ciascun dovrebbe/ calar le vele e raccoglier le sarte"), but he was persuaded that there was time left for penitence and salvation. In daring to meddle with the universe, he too learned that "In a minute there is time/ For decisions and revisions which a minute will reverse," for at his death he was snatched from the arms of St. Francis by a black and logical angel who insisted that his infernal claims be treated fairly. In hell, Guido circles forever enwrapped in a blinding flame, and his last words, "thus clothed, going and coming, I am eaten with rancor" ("si vestito, andando, mi rancuro"), look forward to the Prufrock who will walk forlornly upon the beach of his private hell.

Guido's blindness, which leads him to mistake Virgil and Dante for two other damned souls, anticipates Prufrock's own incomplete vision, but it is in his double desire to tell his story and not give himself away that Prufrock most resembles Guido. Prufrock, like the Guido who is under the assumption that his tale will not be carried back to earth, reveals himself cautiously, but he is also deeply concerned to tell his story properly. To a very great extent, Prufrock's primary aim is to establish communication with someone. At one point, he pettishly yearns to be a crab, but for the most part he is trying to reach out and talk to someone. He does not want to be misunderstood, and he does not want his message rejected. He wishes sympathy, but he fears scorn. He also continually fears that he will be unable to break through, that no one will answer, that the women will turn away, and that the mermaids will not sing to him. And his ultimate fear is that he will reveal himself utterly and then drown lost and alone—as Guido is awakened by the sound of human voices, only to drown in the silent contempt of those voices grown still.

—Robert White, *University of Kentucky*

20. Howells' A MODERN INSTANCE

A little noticed but quietly pervasive and ultimately significant theme in Howells' *A Modern Instance* is that of the alien versus the native. This is stated and several times reiterated in the opening chapter.

(1) The description of the fertile plain around the village of Equity calls attention to the "rich luxuriance" and "tropical riot of vegetation" in summer in contrast with the more familiar winter scene that lasts "full half the year" and occupies the entire second paragraph.

(2) The square white New England houses are "proper to its desolation, while some houses of more modern taste, painted to a warmer tone, looked, with their mansard roofs and jig-sawed piazzas and balconies, intrusive and alien."

(3) "At one end of the street stood the Academy" where the native population received its schooling and presumably set the pattern of its circumscribed existence (in the first sentence of the book, where we are shown the village on its plain, "around it rose the mountains"). "Midway," its very position hinting compromise, "was the hotel," stopping place for the alien and transient.