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# “Beyond the Language of the Living”: The Voice of T. S. Eliot

CHARLES SANDERS

“It is impossible to say just what I mean!”<sup>1</sup> cries a frustrated J. Alfred Prufrock. “The word within a word, unable to speak a word” (*CP*, p. 21), laments another little old man, lightly dipped in Lancelot Andrewes. “For Thine is / Life is / For Thine is the” (*CP*, p. 59), the voice of “The Hollow Men” stammers to recall. “But I’ve gotta use words when I talk to you” (*CP*, p. 83), Sweeney Agonistes tries to explain. “It was (you may say) satisfactory” (*CP*, p. 69), the Wise Man barely manages to admit. “That was a way of putting it—not very satisfactory,” the exasperated spirit of “East Coker” ponders, then ponders again: “You say I am repeating / Something I have said before. I shall say it again. / Shall I say it again?” (*CP*, p. 127). I daresay there are few in Eliot’s audience who would argue that scarcely a poem or fragment of the poet’s exists which does not dramatize, in some significant fashion of technique or substance, his own statement that each venture into the expression of poetry

Is a new beginning, a raid on the inarticulate  
With shabby equipment always deteriorating  
In the general mess of imprecision of feeling,  
Undisciplined squads of emotion. (*CP*, p. 128)

Of course, no one would want to credit Eliot with inventing this brand of apprehending the “ineffable effable / Effanineffable” (*CP*, p. 149), although so adept was his manipulation that he could parody both the motif and his skill in “The Naming of Cats,” and usually make us feel the copyright was in Old Possum’s name. No, as reverent as Eliot was of tradition in general, so because of him and his personal practice are we at least more aware of the individual tradition to which “the raid

on the inarticulate" belongs: the Romantic Agony or *Weltschmerz*, and its Byronic or Pushkinian or Tennysonian counterpart, the "superfluous man"; its Dostoevskian "double"; its Jamesian "poor gentleman" Marcher or Brydon; its Conradian "papier-mâché Mephistopheles," whose tied tongue or inertia painfully signifies thin skin, knotted nerves, stifled emotions, a corrosive suspicion of one's inner vacancy, haunted feelings rent from fact or thought, bestialized.

The sheer wonder, however, is that encountering Eliot's repeated development of this stock tradition in a canon as relatively small as his, we seldom tire of it—at least in the verse he wrote for private contemplation if not that to be projected specifically from the boards. What mastery makes us feel that Eliot, like Richard Wilbur's "Juggler," has in his own way "won for once over the world's weight"?<sup>2</sup> What qualities of craft conquer our sense of familiarity so that on almost every occasion we recognize our old friend, he seems absorbing company?

Besides the acute sense of literary inheritance, there is Eliot's voice of authority, the effect of which has been given testimonials enough to have become a critical commonplace. And thanks to the imaginative efforts of Herbert Howarth<sup>3</sup> and Lyndall Gordon<sup>4</sup> we are better able to appreciate some of the conditions under which personal bewilderment was racked into symbolic art—an art in which one of the more remarkable tensions must arise from the poet's receptiveness to the subtlest inflections of speech shot through with a diffidence in the use of his own voice. The more we know biographically of T. S. Eliot, the more we understand how much there was to "juggle" and surmount if he was to win over several peculiar kinds of "world's weight"—for instance, that of being the seventh and last child of middle-aged parents with New England roots transplanted in the Southwest, the father growing deaf, the mother ruining half-realized literary ambitions. There was, in addition, the increasing sense of being "other," as on that climactic day in 1910, "while walking . . . in Boston, he saw the streets suddenly shrink and divide,"<sup>5</sup> and he glimpsed a world the thoroughfares of time "could hardly understand." There was the (mistaken) notion he must mute the visionary Eliot tormented by "bright angels" before the worldly Pound, whose prophecy for his "find" seemed of a strongly conflicting kind. There was the precipitous first marriage; and did not Vivienne characterize him as a writer the devil had taken, like Christ, "up into a high mountain and showed . . . all the kingdoms of the world," only to be abandoned by Lucifer himself, put out of all patience, because an American always wants "to be everything at once"?<sup>6</sup>

There was the crowning irony that as his disappointments ma-

tured and he openly acknowledged the partially realized goal of over seventeen years' struggle, the avant-garde that had elected him for what he deemed the wrong reasons now rejected him as its "lost leader." But there may be another irony of which Eliot was not totally aware when, in his 1940 lecture on Yeats, he cast his eye back on his adolescent taste and described it as "determined by personal needs. The kind of poetry that I needed, to teach me the use of my own voice, did not exist in English at all; it was only to be found in French."<sup>7</sup> In adolescence and even beyond—because of a conflict between permanent needs and changing general conditions—the voice of authority seemed to be surrounded by the aura of an unfamiliar or "foreign" language, or more than any Greek or Italian allusion or epigraph can amplify, to emanate from another world, or at least from another body, much as some accomplished singer's note, when suddenly floated, seems detached from the singer as it hangs in space.

But I grow too somber to be wholly fair to that ribald young man who also entertained Harvard friends with "Ballad for Big Louise," "Bullshit," and a narrative of "King Bolo and his hairy Big Black Kween who 'pulled her stocking off / With a frightful cry of Hauptbahnhof!'"<sup>8</sup> The connoisseur of Wagner delighted no less in comic strips and Groucho Marx, in American vaudeville and later in the British music hall, as the "turns" from "Prufrock" through *Old Possum's Book of Practical Cats* eminently testify. Even the sober "Journey of the Magi," with its "villages dirty and charging high prices" (*CP*, p. 68), gains something in relief by its not entirely escaping, at least in its first half, association with the old vaudeville *shtik* of the traveler, bandaged and on crutches, who deliriously recounts the tribulations of his foreign tour to places he might have dreamed of visiting but knows now he would never want to inhabit. Would Eliot not fit into "a great old vaudeville routine" as well as in the gallery of the opera house? Listen to Norman Dubie: "the curtain opens," he says, "and the ventriloquist is seated in a chair and has a large dummy in his lap. They do a funny routine together, and we watch in astonishment the ventriloquist's mouth and see that, in fact, it's not moving at all. We think that this man is awfully sharp. The routine is brief; it ends. And the dummy jumps out of the ventriloquist's lap to the floor and throws the ventriloquist over his shoulder and walks off the stage. . . ."<sup>9</sup>

The distinguishing trait of Eliot's rendition of the inarticulate superfluous man is its ventriloquism, his self-conscious manipulation of the "dummy" as a deliberate, elaborate, often parodic piece of theater, in a space whose dimensions are both of and not of this world; in which

all time is collapsed; and in which, after his example, it grows more difficult to separate lyric from dramatic poetry (if we ever could before), the speaker from the listener, the “construct” of the poem from the associations evoked within and all about us. “My words echo / Thus, in your mind” (*CP*, p. 117). If that perception ceases to shock, the discovery that Eliot’s routine is never actually the same twice is shock enough. The “invisible poet” Hugh Kenner<sup>10</sup> called him, and nowhere is Eliot more inventive than when observed in the act of disappearing or being reduced to that state so identifiable Henry Reed could parody it charmingly (and we would recognize its object without benefit of title) in “Chard Whitlow”:

I think you will find this put,  
Better than I could ever hope to express it,  
In the words of Kharma: “It is, we believe,  
Idle to hope that the simple stirrup-pump  
Will extinguish hell.”<sup>11</sup>

But the creature Reed parodies was over some thirty years in the making, and differs both in treatment and substance from the protean pilgrim of *The Waste Land* and the mouthpieces of some of the earliest poems Eliot preserved in “Prufrock.” At the outset of his career, from personal experience, study, and meditation, Eliot discovered his essential material: that of the individual who cannot enter the Kingdom but is forever ill at ease outside the castle walls, in a world that appears to amount to no more than a bald set of statistics or facts, “Birth, and copulation, and death” (*CP*, p. 80), or “Dung and death” (*CP*, p. 124). The gap between worlds invokes a corresponding gap in communication between individuals, a sense of difficulty in articulating even the simplest of feelings or thoughts. Always with a quizzical eye, not to say the ventriloquist’s talent to parody that verbal skill which supposedly distinguishes humans from their other animal kin, Eliot redeveloped his sense of the “inarticulate” in differing contexts so that when in “Little Gidding” he implores us to “See, now they vanish, / The faces and places, with the self which, as it could, loved them, / To become renewed, transfigured, in another pattern” (*CP*, p. 142), his statement points not only to a future beyond the last major poem he published but also back and inside the patterns of his major work preceding *Four Quartets*. “Portrait of a Lady,” “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock,” and “Preludes” more or less treat the theme of the inarticulate in the inherited modes of the dramatic monologue or soliloquy but indicate Eliot’s gradual dissatisfaction with a “persona” or Jamesian “central register.” Eliot, much later, told Leonard and Virginia Woolf that he

had experienced an upheaval after writing "Prufrock" which altered some of his earlier Jamesian inclinations;<sup>12</sup> and so he would present that upheaval most vividly in *The Waste Land*, a new "form" which must have struck its first audiences like some Cosmic Wireless, its Station Manager vanished, and all of its channels bleeding into one another with snatches of dial-spinning songs, melodramas, newscasts, commercials, editorials, and sermons. Over the dozen or more years following *The Waste Land* Eliot turned his parodic skills ever more consciously upon himself and the five-part "form" in *Four Quartets*, the "raid on the inarticulate" becomes paradoxically the dangers of the "articulated," the "patterned," as the contending "decomposed" flatness and lyricism of those poems dramatize, or as the final sections self-reflexively state. When in "East Coker" Eliot says "The poetry does not matter," or reflects upon the knowledge gained from experience as it "imposes a pattern, and falsifies" (*CP*, p. 125), he sets in motion a kind of *Götterdämmerung*. The parody is, in a very special sense, ultimately upon himself as poet and that lifetime's surrender to his art. "Pray," the alter ego of "Little Gidding" says; "pray for forgiveness." The forgiveness, however, is for "Both bad and good" (*CP*, p. 141).

"Both bad and good." As far as the writing of poetry is concerned, Eliot knew that with amazing precociousness in his college days; and he could quite often "de-compose" or produce a "wrong" turn in precisely the "right" place with a record of ingenuity unbroken right down to *Four Quartets*, a record differing less in degree than in kind.

Take the case of Eliot's little Miss Moffat, transformed titular heroine of "Portrait of a Lady," who bears a recognizable "music" to her talk wherever she goes, a music of clichés, all the more absurd for their silky cadence and the histrionic pose in the Lady's attempt at patterning unutterable emotion. "You do not know," she tells her "friend," "what life is, you who hold it in your hands." Her "carefully caught regrets" comprise "April sunsets," a "buried life," "Paris in the Spring," a "journey's end." She is sure "that across the gulf you reach your hand" (*CP*, pp. 9-10). On the three different occasions when she speaks, her speech is always formed in the same "cadence." In her first "set piece," not even a two-line parenthesis can deter the course of repetitions: "how, how"; "to find, to find"; "so much, so much, how much"; "who has, who has"; "friends, friendship, friendships"—finally punctuated with an exclamatory bit of French, the "bit part" or patronizing show for which we suspect our Lady has, albeit semi-

consciously, "composed" her entire speech, a speech, like her life, "composed . . . of odds and ends."

Eliot has, of course, provided the clue to the base of *her* "false notes." She has saved this afternoon for her "friend"; they have heard the Chopin Preludes transmitted by the "latest Pole . . . through his hair and finger-tips" (*CP*, p. 8). As Chopin practiced its composition, a prelude was usually a brief, abrupt, concise prefatory statement to something "left unsaid," to be surmised or imagined—the clue rather than the event. Mood was uppermost; it was all start and no finish. Our Lady's inarticulateness is a "bad" prelude, monotonous and self-inflicted, stuck upon one note, as her triple rhyming underscores (*relate to fate to rate back to late*).

In "Portrait," however, there is, as there should be and usually is in an Eliot poem, another kind of music, still a "prelude," but a counterpoint to the Lady's. The tale is told, after all, presumably by the Lady's "friend," whose precious phrasing—reminiscent of some very poor man's Tennyson—is riddled with "attenuated tones of violins / Mingled with remote cornets" and "afternoon grey and smoky, evening yellow and rose." On the other hand, and seemingly at odds with such purple patches, he stifles a cry to "take the air, in a tobacco trance" and "sit for half an hour and drink our bocks." His prelude he judges "at least one definite 'false note.'" Our "friend," anything but a "sport," reads the "comics and the sporting page," remarking, unconsciously, people caught as much out of their element as he.

The Lady's theme is static ("I shall sit here, serving tea to friends"); the "friend's," fragmentary and chameleon, perhaps pointing to the inner key—changes his exterior straight lines placidly hide. Whatever the case, when he "mounts" the stairs to their final interview—as if on "hands and knees"—our Lady suddenly reveals herself a powerful if provincial Circe, exposing his nambypambyness and mocking the street-piano that always shattered his self-possession in secret. Through her he is transformed into some semi-articulate animal that performs for whoever grinds the tune:

And I must borrow every changing shape  
To find expression . . . dance, dance  
Like a dancing bear,  
Cry like a parrot, chatter like an ape.  
Let us take the air, in a tobacco trance— (CP, p. 11)

Try as he may, he cannot "find expression," much less complete the chorus, even though he afterward attempts, at the thought of her

death, a smile. The Lady was right to note he had “no Achilles’ heel”—as much as to say he is not a “human” animal. Ironically, her insistent, if slightly out-of-tune, one “note” establishes her as the actual human manipulator, for better or worse. She may not dare to touch the “bloom” of intimate Chopin, but when lilacs are in flower, there is a bowl of them in her room, and she does not hesitate to twist their stalks “in her fingers,” and “slowly” at that.

In “Portrait” the Jamesian source of inspiration is everywhere apparent, in the kaleidoscopic point of view; the “poor gentleman” and his slightly soiled lady; the geometrical leitmotifs of hands, light, and music that, like “wing matching wing, and pilaster corresponding to pilaster,”<sup>13</sup> regulate its three-part structure; and all of these surrounded by the inverted seasons (December to October, embracing an abortive spring between them), reminiscent of “The Beast in the Jungle.” The “irregular rhythm of life” makes itself felt through the dialogue, the design, the tour de force of the maker.

A still Jamesian, if more paradigmatic, technique of Eliot’s in embryo, suffuses “Prufrock.” We can go round and round (and have) if we approach the poem as a narrative even more so than with “Portrait,” which is “disembodied” enough. Despite his distinctive name, despite the title’s pointer to a “song” (that may never really have got sung), who Prufrock is externally, what his specific question involves (proposal, proposition, or quite possibly neither), to whom he “speaks” (if he actually does), where he goes (if he moves at all) and in what locale, what his age is—we can only say or guess with diminishing returns. The rhetoric of this poem differs from that of “Portrait,” from the collision of rhymes (*ices, crisis*) to the evasiveness, indeed absence, of logical transitions. Whitmanesque catalogs swell, crest, only to sink into anti-climax. Parentheses enclose the revelatory and real, *not* the parenthetical. The question is never asked; the entire poem is designed to avoid its articulation. Among its many ironies one of the supreme must be that it requires eighty-five (out of 131) lines finally to admit with a devastating “in short”: “I was afraid” (*CP*, p. 6). The climax is a splendid piece of jugglery, endeavoring to counterbalance the negative with the positive: “No!” Prufrock protests more than his audience requires of him, he is “not Prince Hamlet, nor was meant to be.” (Who in his audience would have suggested it?) But, bucking himself up, he thinks he deserves some second billing in the play as an “attendant lord” who can “swell a progress, start a scene or two, / Advise the prince” (if we can possibly imagine Prufrock asserting anything more than the “simple pin” that “asserts” his necktie. The truth, however, will



ultimately out despite seven prefatory lines of hedging, in a mock neoclassical “turn”: “At times, indeed, almost ridiculous— / Almost, at times, the Fool” (*CP*, p. 7). As another character from a later Eliot poem says: “What a time that took. Will it be he now?” (*CP*, p. 86). A dramatic monologue? Perhaps; but with such a psychological and rhetorical fidelity as to be a vengeance.

But it is in the weaving of phrases throughout “Prufrock” from Andrew Marvell’s “To His Coy Mistress”—in a manner such that Marvell might become a candidate for the auditor in the monologue as much as anyone else—that the ventriloquial Eliot begins to emerge in a way that makes us wonder whether the present is being directed by the past or the past is being altered by the present.<sup>14</sup> Marvell, we know, Eliot admired for a species of wit which he designated as “a tough reasonableness beneath the slight lyric grace” (*SE*, p. 252). And Marvell’s “tough reasonableness” everywhere needles Prufrock’s sprawling and wriggling. Where Marvell’s “seducer” can suggest a magnificent, if askew, syllogism, Prufrock evades. Whereas one knows he has not “world enough and time,” the other temporizes. Where the cavalier addresses his mistress directly, she is, to the addled, only the impersonal pronoun, “one,” a part of speech. Where for Marvell’s speaker “the youthful hew / Sits on thy skin like morning dew,”<sup>15</sup> for the other, arms (not even an entire anatomy but either “arms” or “head” detached) “wrap about a shawl” and may be among those revealed by the lamplight as “downed with a light brown hair,” attractive, repellent, neither or both at once. And as for rolling up strength and sweetness into balls and sending them crashing through the “Iron gates of Life,” and compelling the sun into flight, well, Prufrock cannot even negotiate an entire flight of stairs. In short, so much is Marvell in the texture of the verse, and in Eliot’s marrow at least as maker of the poem, a reader or critic can sometimes forget he is talking about two poems as he thinks he is treating only one. Before and after Pound, there is always another comparably gifted poet or “familiar compound ghost” criticizing Eliot’s “work in progress.”

If understandably some doubt lingers about Prufrock’s role as an “observing consciousness” rather than as a persona, another poem of roughly the same period of composition, “Preludes,” offers stronger evidence of a loosening of Eliot’s work from the moorings of narrative consequence to fluctuations surrounding a core of conflicting sensuous associations, in a style, as the title indicates, emulating the conditions of music. If “Preludes” (like “Rhapsody on a Windy Night”) strikes us as not having resolved its internal tensions as substantially as “Prufrock,”

or "Portrait" for that matter, still it is seductive and pioneering; and it reveals, paradoxically, one source of Eliot's continual conflict and strength in composition: his working habits, his material, and his peculiar gestation of it as an artist seemed often to call for improvisational treatment; but the inability, as a critic, to rationalize a continuous schema after his intuitive, non-sequential leaps gave him pause to back away, reexamine, and doubt his inspiration and actual accomplishment. Even after Eliot had later achieved the "visionary unity" of *The Waste Land*, Hugh Kenner tells us that "he then went to bed with the flu, 'excessively depressed'"<sup>16</sup>—with good physical reason for doing so, to be sure, but partially out of anxiety over the structural coherence, or possible lack of such, in what remained of the monumental work after cancellation of so many of its passages and intentions. Whatever Eliot's feelings were, whatever critical consensus indicates, "Preludes" put down roots through which *The Waste Land* and *Four Quartets* across the years would draw some sustenance, not the least of which is a sense of the vacancy of modern urban life, viewed almost cinematically through a rapid series of interchanging frames, provoking a sense of inarticulateness as the poet leaps toward "some intangible mood emotion hovering nearby but strangely withdrawn."<sup>17</sup>

Point of view with Eliot at his most Jamesian—particularly as it relates to a "you" and "I"—had always been enigmatic to some degree, the "you" possibly signaling in "Prufrock," for example, the silent listener, the reader, another part of Prufrock's divided self, or all of these in combination. As if to parallel Chopin in miniature by ringing changes in all conceivable keys, Eliot in "Preludes" boldly shifted point of view from the first to the fourth and final part, and even within the parts themselves—oscillating from omniscient to third-person limited, then to "you," back to "he," culminating in a leap to first person combined with a puzzling final reference to "you," which cannot be entirely the same as before without including the poet himself in any explication. Images, seemingly freed of their maker and obvious structural anchors, are permitted to touch our senses, where they must make their points felt by association: "The winter evening settles down / With smell of steaks in passageways" (*CP*, p. 12). Indeed, the real protagonist, as much as the poet himself (if there is a distinction), seems to be the city, a kind of Parisian Boston suburb (Eliot wrote the poem under the working title "Preludes in Roxbury"), with its morning that "comes to consciousness," its night that projects "a thousand sordid images," its ambiguous "conscience of a blackened street / Impatient to assume the world" (*CP*, p. 13).

"Preludes" is important to our present purpose and to the Eliot canon in general for two other considerations, both, I hope to show, somewhat connected. It is in this poem that I feel Eliot was unconsciously developing what John Crowe Ransom<sup>18</sup> discovered to be Eliot's five-part Mahlerian "form" in "Gerontion," a "form" Eliot was to return to, under widely differing conditions and for different reasons, in *The Waste Land*, "The Hollow Men," and *Four Quartets*. True, "Preludes" is divided into four parts, but the finale contains not one but two conclusions, a double coda of antitheses that constitutes almost a fifth part resembling the practices of the future five-part poems. Having presented his episodes discontinuously, Eliot reaches for a comprehensive summation in which he may define their unarticulated dominant emotion. The source he finds gathered within himself as an artist, and so the poet reflects upon himself in the poem:

I am moved by fancies that are curled  
Around these images, and cling:  
The notion of some infinitely gentle  
Infinitely suffering thing. (CP, p. 13)

But Eliot is the kind of poet he projected onto Donne; he tries to apprehend his thought with the immediacy of a rose (*SE*, p. 247), then in the same instant presses back the petals to study its core. The pity of urban squalor is poignant; the cadence in which it has been expressed is exquisite. Perhaps too exquisite. Better to look again, reflect upon the "you" whose vision of the street "the street hardly understands," and then "you" the poet, an anti-Dante, would "Wipe your hand across your mouth, and laugh; / The worlds revolve like ancient women / Gathering fuel in vacant lots" (*CP*, p. 13).

Vivienne Eliot, we have seen, said of her American husband that "he wants to be everything at once." As an artist—Dandy or Dante?—that may certainly be true, if we remember Eliot's extraordinary sense of the mystery between appearance and reality, his sense of being suspended between worlds, his sense that allows Prufrock in "the moment of his greatness" to see "the Eternal Footman hold [his] coat, and snicker," or in his vision of Salome to bracket his own head upon the platter "grown slightly bald," or to rhapsodize upon "arms that are braceleted and white and bare," suddenly remembering the lamplight exposes them "downed with light brown hair" (*CP*, p. 5). It is the same sense that aligns the shelter-food-clothing essentials of life ("the number on the door," the toothbrush and shoes in "Rhapsody on a Windy Night") with the "last twist of the knife" (*CP*, p. 16). It is the same sense that permits "La Figlia che Piange" to turn away but to

compel the artist-poser's imagination to ponder the consequence had he "lost a gesture and a pose" (*CP*, p. 20). It is the same sense that will collar "Burbank with a Baedeker: Bleistein with a Cigar," or Grishkin and Donne in "Whispers of Immortality." Certainly, it is the sense that creates the tension between one who struggles to shore fragments against his ruin at the same moment the madness of Hieronymo encroaches. Does it not ultimately color the poet who, having composed four impressive parts of "East Coker," concludes that, like Gerontion, he has wasted twenty years merely articulating a "different kind of failure"? Both, one and the same, say, "Here I am" (*CP*, pp. 21, 128).

In the double-end of "Preludes" Eliot extracted the antithetical vision of a projected "observing consciousness" such as Prufrock and boldly applied it to himself in his role as the conscious craftsman. The sense of strong feelings, shattered by a suspicion of both the rightness and the expression of those feelings, increased the sense that every venture is "a raid on the inarticulate." Perhaps the only way a poet with such a dual consciousness can arrive at equilibrium is to discover a "form" that allows him to compare states of being in suspended succession; that allows him to present, affirm, question, pray, then take the final plunge to harmonize, if possible, his recessive and multiple contending perceptions. "Preludes" seems to initiate a pattern for which Eliot had a predilection, although the poem achieves a hastier harmony than we find in the larger works that were not merely to succeed but also to surpass it—more immediately within a decade when April, like midnight shaking "the memory / As a madman shakes a dead geranium," would mix "memory and desire" in a pattern no audience so far seems to forget.

Writing to Ford Madox Ford on August 14, 1923, Eliot said, "There are I think about 30 *good* lines in *The Waste Land*. Can you find them? The rest is ephemeral." As penetrating a critic as Ford was, we do not have to guess his answer. "As for the lines I mention," Eliot explained almost two months later on October 4, "you need not scratch your head over them. They are the 29 lines of the water-dripping song in the last part."<sup>19</sup>

If Eliot's choice startles, it comes as no surprise that the lines he liked occurred in Part V, the section which Eliot claimed, sincerely wondering at his own ease, to have written in one uninterrupted siege of exhilaration; the section which Pound penciled "O K from here on *I think*" (*WLF*, pp. 70–71); the section which, compared to what preceded it, seems a piece of continuous poetry, pulsing in positive up-beat and

ordering, one by one, the original “heap of broken images”—in fine, the section that was in a mode, as we have seen, most congenial to Eliot’s self-confidence, and customarily torching his inspiration.

Still, one may wonder, why this passage out of so many good from which to choose? this passage beginning at line 331 (“Here is no water but only rock”), including the resilient “Dead mountain mouth of carious teeth that cannot spit,” and concluding:

If there were rock  
 And also water  
 And water  
 A spring  
 A pool among the rock  
 If there were the sound of water only  
 Not the cicada  
 And dry grass singing  
 But sound of water over a rock  
 Where the hermit-thrush sings in the pine trees  
 Drip drop drip drop drop drop drop  
 But there is no water. (CP, pp. 47–48)

And very fine, I think we all feel, the passage is in its evocation of a parched, swelling, self-gagging tongue barely able to gasp out its anguish before total extinction. But could Eliot have still been pulling Ford’s leg? As with most of his pronouncements that strike us as absurd on a first reading, a little reflection “reveals a way of truth.” And besides, there is additional evidence that Eliot was sincere, in the otherwise superfluous footnote he supplied for line 357, the only footnote in which, after a bit of pedantry, Eliot waxes inexplicably enthusiastic: “This is *Turdus aonalaschkae pallasii*, the hermit-thrush which I have heard in Quebec Province. . . . Its ‘water-dripping song’ is justly celebrated” (CP, p. 54).

At the risk of appearing to subject the sublime to the ridiculous, I shall state outright that I believe Eliot’s letters and footnote, united with the dedication to his poem, provide us with a clue that not only clarifies our present analysis of the poet’s “raid on the inarticulate” but also helps explain a significant stratum of *The Waste Land*. When we reflect upon the water-dripping song of the hermit-thrush, we must be struck by the curious fact that a number of animals, inanimate objects, and supernatural creatures “speak” in *The Waste Land*. To name but a manageable but most outstanding few, there is Belladonna of the boudoir, whose hair superbly “glowed into words, then would be savagely still.” There is, also, the song of the nightingale, whose “Jug Jug” fills “all the desert with inviolable voice” (CP, p. 40). Her brother-in-

law, Tereus the rapacious hawk, has his "Tereu"; his wife Procne, swallow-sister of Philomela, her "Twit twit twit." There is not only the song of possible Sirens, "Weialala leia," but the thunder sounds three times its overmastering "DA," and the cock that stands upon the roof-tree shrieks "Co co rico" as the lightning flashes and finally a "damp gust" brings rain.

Of course, the correspondence between other animals and humans is public domain among poets, and Eliot exercises his privilege elsewhere magnificently. We have had occasion to see our lady force her "friend" to "cry like a parrot, chatter like an ape." Prufrock in agony proclaims he "should have been a pair of ragged claws, / Scuttling across the floors of silent seas" (*CP*, p. 5). Another crab haunts the side-walking consciousness of "Rhapsody on a Windy Night." And, obviously, at a later date Old Possum himself was to have a field day with some lively cats, Mr. Mistoffelees, Old Deuteronomy, and the Jellicles, in his bestiary, *Book of Practical Cats*.

In *The Waste Land* the speech or songs of creatures, objects, and phenomena other than human is certainly onomatopoeic, but when he is at his best Eliot is not easily contented with sound effects alone. The song of the nightingale and her kin descends from Renaissance lyrics. And Eliot may also be indulging in his beloved ventriloquial effects of the English music hall. My own belief, which does not cancel out any but incorporates all of the preceding possibilities, is, however, that these bits of articulation point more to the poem's burden of spiritual significance and the vindication of poetry as ritual and mystery. Especially is this so in the final cubistic collage or cinematic montage of 11.424-34 with which the poem "ends," and to which I shall ultimately address myself.

If we return to my list above and examine the context in which each "speech" or song occurs, we shall see that all emerge at moments of crisis when human articulation or communication blatantly fails. The nightingale sings "Jug Jug" to "dirty ears"; at the same instant Bel-ladonna's fiery-pointed hair prefaces her schizoid non sequiturs. The swallow, nightingale, and hawk form a strangling chorus (the terminal *-s* of Tereus is unutterable) immediately before the entrance of the ambiguous Mr. Eugenides, whose proposition whether hetero- or homosexual is of less importance than its utter sterility, as his invitation to a one-weekend stand, his "demotic French," and above all his pocketed, dried fruit (set to the rhythm of Mother Goose's four-and-twenty blackbirds) indicate. The song of the Sirens is that of the Thames Maidens, one of whom raised her knees "supine on the floor of a

narrow canoe," another who "made no comment," and a third who "can connect / Nothing with nothing" (*CP*, p. 46)—and this last just before the "collocation of . . . two representatives of eastern and western asceticism" (*CP*, p. 53). The cock guards the empty Chapel Perilous, where religious or spiritual purgation and continuity appear no longer possible. Then, suddenly by reversal, the thunder speaks, and a curious kind of articulation finally occurs.

To understand the nature of this articulation we must pause briefly on that mysterious "DA." Like its relatives, it is, of course, onomatopoeic; but the echoism here is not that of the thunder alone so much as a binding together of the entire poem, literally and figuratively. For it is literally a musical transposition of the drunken pubsters of the poem's second part, "Ta ta. Goonight. Goonight" (and note the elision of middle "d," which Ophelia's subsequent valedication only underscores); and it is a further transposition of the Sirens' "la la" in Part III. Musical transposition reminds us of *dō*, stemming perhaps from the first word of a Latin hymn, *dominus*, but certainly the syllable representing the first and last tones of the diatonic scale. Obviously DA is the root of the thunder's Sanskrit utterances: *Datta*, *Dayadhvam*, *Damyata*; indeed, it is a basic "root" binding into "one family" of humanity the languages called Indo-European. Our word *do*, or Eliot's of his former title, "He Do the Police," is its descendant. It is, then, a "root" that clutches and branches literally into Indo-Iranian through Teutonic. Literally and figuratively, it is the Son of man's first infant "word," the inarticulate Son of man who initially knew only a "heap of broken images" and could not "say or guess." In fine, there is a stratum of inarticulateness beneath the "heap of broken images" of the poem's first three fragmentary parts that is finally penetrated as man, after "Death by Water," is reborn, finds his voice, responds to the thunder, and articulates sounds together to form the sequence of speech and deductions therefrom that define him as human. This is a "raid on the inarticulate" that, obviously, differs from that of all the preceding poems in that here Eliot suggests a journey before history and presents to us, as immediately as Keats offered his dead hand, that moment when into our bodies, which are but astral residue, consciousness unaccountably entered, quickening cinders, sea, and slime to form symbolic thought and feeling, then "the perfect order of speech, and the beauty of incantation" (*CP*, p. 111).

That Eliot may have been at least semiconscious of this anthropological intuition we may deduce from the poem's final ten lines in which he made a significant alteration the holograph drafts

gratefully preserve for our inspection (*WLF*, pp. 80–81). Originally, Eliot had thought of including the line “Why then Ile fit you. Hieronymo’s mad againe” immediately after “*Poi s’ascose nel fuoco che gli affina*” as one of the fragments he had shored against the ruins. At some point he canceled the line and replaced it with “*Quando fiam uti chelidon—O swallow swallow.*” The canceled line he then inserted *after* “These fragments I have shored against my ruins” but *before* “Datta. Dayadhvam. Damyata.”

Why did Eliot make the change? After all, Philomela and Hieronymo have not a little in common, and Eliot did not hesitate earlier to clash Parsifal against Mrs. Porter and her daughter, who wash “their feet in soda water.” Philomela, in one version of the legend, we know, was raped by her sister’s husband, and her tongue cut out by her assailant so that she could not communicate the deed; in revenge the sisters served up Tereus’ son to him for dinner, and Zeus punished all three by transforming them into the nightingale, the swallow, and the hawk. Kyd’s Hieronymo seeks to avenge the murder of a son, rips out his tongue in madness, and devises a multilingual play to serve him in his goal. In its transposition Kyd’s line has a different effect. The legend now belongs among the fragments shored but is reenacted in the life and blood madness of Hieronymo, who must subsequently stand alone for man (and Eliot, who has also devised a multilingual “play”) and whose line “suggests not recovery but the babblings of encroaching madness.”<sup>20</sup> But before madness utterly annihilates, man’s observing consciousness, by magical incantation, articulates the talismanic words that had only to this point been discrete particles. “Datta. Dayadhvam. Damyata”—no longer separate, no longer italicized—he coordinates into one line of verse; and the benediction finally descends on the campaign against brute inarticulateness: “Shantih shantih shantih”—without terminal punctuation.

We have come a long way from the “drip drop” of Eliot’s hermit-thrush. I shall take leave of the subject before I have transformed the poet into Dr. Doolittle talking to the animals; but I shall assert that Eliot loved his twenty-nine lines because, among other considerations, they epitomized his poem, exemplifying what he was to describe later as a “condition of complete simplicity,” when the natural song of the bird is nearly indistinguishable from its human ventriloquist’s; when the voice of the bird-bard, completely at one with his subject, approximates that condition which poets call “music” for lack of another “word,” and which—to the *true* imagist’s way of thinking at least—is not metronomically measurable, nor definable, as verse or prose.



The modern poet, challenged Ezra Pound, would do well if he could but equal the bird songs of Arnaut Daniel,<sup>21</sup> that poet whom Dante, through the “voice” of Guinicelli, praised as “il miglior fabbro” in the twenty-sixth canto of the *Purgatorio*; that poet whose “L’aura amara” was singled out by Pound for the manner in which the sound “echoes the angry chatter of the birds in autumn”; that poet whose technique Eliot may be *doubly* “echoing” in his beloved passage, almost line by line (“rock / Rock,” “road / The road,” “mountains / Which are mountains,” etc.), and rung round by the initial “Here is no water” and the terminal “But there is no water.”

I would not wish to capitalize unfairly on Eliot’s appropriation of Dante-Guinicelli’s compliment to Daniel now to Pound in the dedication of *The Waste Land*. It is much more significant that, in the very essence or *Spirit of Romance*, Eliot paralleled, echoed, and embodied that compliment of “il miglior fabbro” in the poem’s fabric, in its emulation of Daniel’s echoing bird song. And the significance may extend, I am sure we are all aware by now, beyond its instance in *The Waste Land*. For if, subsequently, when we read in “Marina” of the “woodthrush singing through the fog” (*CP*, p. 72); in “Ash Wednesday” that “the bird sang down / Redeem the time” (*CP*, p. 64); or once more in “Cape Ann,” the song sparrow’s “O quick quick quick” (*CP*, p. 95); or still again in “Burnt Norton,” “Quick, said the bird, find them, find them” (*CP*, p. 117), and we have the sense of *déjà vu*, it can be no less of a shock than it must have been for Eliot, who was discovering on that final occasion the phrase’s final reincarnation, for him at any rate: “Quick now, here, now, always” (*CP*, p. 122).

“But our beginnings never know our ends!” Eliot had made his lady of “Portrait” say to her callow young “friend” in 1910. “The end is where we start from” (*CP*, p. 144), the voice of “Little Gidding” serenely asserts in 1942. “The way upward and downward are the same”—a fragment from Herakleitos of the eternal flux—collapses three decades into a meditation of elemental beginnings and ends, *Four Quartets*. Into that meditation went the accomplishments between those years only a small sketch of which the preceding pages have managed to trace. The words that “echo” in our minds are not only the words we presently read in the poems; for the private coalescence of history, literature, philosophy, and spiritual autobiography is a public re-assembly, made more convincing in Eliot’s and our experience by the poet’s confession of failures here and in his ventures into the theater (*OPP*, pp. 83–94) with “Choruses from *The Rock*,” *Murder in the Cathe-*

*dral*, and *The Family Reunion*. This sense of failure was deepened by the evidence of man's failure to avert a second world war. With conviction Eliot could claim "that time is no healer: the patient is no longer here." Through everything perhaps there lingered the subconscious memory of a figure from the poem that had enchanted him as a child, the bird of time from the *Rubáiyát*, that is forever "on the wing."

If there is a disagreement between Eliot and his critics on *The Waste Land*, there is as profound a one centering about *Four Quartets*. The latter work he considered his best; the sequence improved as it progressed. Many critics, of whom M. L. Rosenthal<sup>22</sup> is the most recent representative, to the contrary, are at least dubious. Whereas Eliot tended to think the end superior to the beginning, these critics find the initial "Burnt Norton" splendid, "East Coker" and "The Dry Salvages" falling below the level of the beginning, "Little Gidding" flickering on some of the first poem's fuel, only to disintegrate into ash. Considering this disagreement, could there be a more compelling example for the other fragment of Herakleitos with which Eliot wove his sequence? "Although the law of reason is common, the majority of people live as though they had an understanding of their own."

In a paradoxical sense, both Eliot and his critics are right. When he returned to his five-part structure with its roots, I believe, in "Preludes" as much as in "Gerontion" and *The Waste Land*, Eliot came with the sense everywhere implied and varied in statements like "Words move, music moves / Only in time; but that which is only living / Can only die" (*CP*, p. 121); or the "knowledge imposes a pattern, and falsifies"; or "we had the experience but missed the meaning"; or, as the "compound ghost" cruelly puts it: "Last season's fruit is eaten / And the fullfed beast shall kick the empty pail" (*CP*, p. 141). Eliot came, in short, with the increased sense that everything living must contain within itself the cells of its own contamination; incorruptible, it cannot live. We paint upon walls which must in the future give way to better access to the laundry or the kitchen; we compose scores that yellow between pages of unopened books of private libraries, or mildew in trunks, or provide rodents with nests or nourishment; we sculpt, sing, play, or write ultimately on the wind, for the flood, the earthquake, the holocaust. And, absurdity compounding absurdity, we cannot know or say "for what purpose," except out of sheer compulsion, we dare to stir all those deserts on deserts of dust. Who were; where are Apelles, Callimachus, Sappho, Herakleitos—and if time is a "box circle," dare I think—T. S. Eliot? The artist's triple agony is to preserve the articulated of the past, to articulate the present "under conditions / That

seem unpropitious," with no assurance there will be a future to articulate (so much as to mutilate), that his "remains" will be a part of it, or that they even should be. "We only live, only suspire / Consumed by either fire or fire" (*CP*, p. 144).

Eliot came to his work with the sense that something of the "cannibalism" of time must, with a macabre parodic intention, consume what had gone before. The formal pattern is born, loosens, merges, falls away, disappears. Dying to itself, it becomes "public domain," a fragment, a whisper, a memory, an element of the common garlic, the rarer sapphire, or that enchanted and enchanting whorl of rose leaves we call the mind of human beings.

The pattern is at its most "formal," literally and figuratively, at its birth; thus, in "Burnt Norton," what appear to be mutually exclusive, quasi-philosophical, patterned if subtle statements whose *four-period* punctuation "contains" and "mirrors" a  $3/2$  counterpoint. Metaphor, we are shown with the succeeding passage of footfalls, is more than a comparison; it is an echo, breaking not only "sound" but also "time" barriers, although one may not understand the present purposes any more than he can later judge the "limited value / In the knowledge derived from experience"; "know much about gods"; or "comprehend" the "familiar compound ghost."

For now there is the loosening of formal, rigid barriers, a fantasia, echoing in its verbs (*shall, said, find*, for example) all tenses of time, and some apprehension above time. And so the formal pattern is made to reveal within itself an alternating pattern seemingly permanent but fluctuating, intense then diffuse, affirmative yet negative. If there is what appears to be a reconciliation among the stars, of which our scarred bodies reconstitute their "dead" elements, there is also "here . . . a place of disaffection," a world that like the body moves also on its "metalled ways." The deceiving thrush makes us "quick" to "find"; and our discovery as the dust is momentarily "disturbed" in sunlight and laughter is to articulate the bird's command into a lyrical, talismanic fragment—"Quick now, here, now, always"—which is buried, for the time being, under the unlyrical perception of "reality": "Ridiculous the waste sad time / Stretching before and after" (*CP*, p. 122).

"That was a way of putting it—not very satisfactory," the voice of "East Coker" testily says; but his dismissal is not only of the lyric ("What is the late November doing?") immediately in context but also of the insights momentarily achieved before in "Burnt Norton." When Eliot says, "It was not (to start again)," he starts where "Burnt Norton" had seemed to end. Knowledge imposes a pattern, and falsifies, "For the

pattern is new in every moment / And every moment is a new and shocking / Valuation of all we have been" (*CP*, p. 125). And as an example he shows us that even an echo is not the same as its seminal articulation. He may hear a "whisper of running streams" or "laughter in the garden." "Echoed ecstasy" omits here, however, sunlight and the fragmentary phrase quickened by the thrush. If you charge me, he almost sputters, with repeating myself, "I shall say it again"; less sure, then, "Shall I say it again?" He does and he does not; what follows is a ventriloquial translation of St. John of the Cross. Later, obviously referring to "Burnt Norton" and consuming its end-pattern away, he can now speak of "a lifetime burning in every moment / And not the lifetime of one man only / But of old stones that cannot be deciphered" (*CP*, p. 129).

It was Donald Davie<sup>23</sup> who interpreted "The Dry Salvages" as a parody, an insight I have obviously absorbed, with the provision that parody is incremental in *Four Quartets*, and strictly in the sense that Eliot dramatizes man's inarticulate condition. Beginning with "Burnt Norton" in the present, Eliot travels back to his English roots in "East Coker," as the setting and quotations from Sir Thomas Elyot attest. "The Dry Salvages," the American quartet of Eliot's young manhood, amalgamates with a more Whitmanesque flavor the Southwestern Mississippi and the New England Atlantic. Is not Eliot, after all, the historical bond between our Mark Twain and our Emerson-Hawthorne-James? Our "innocent abroad," he is, of course, more, since Pound and he thought of poetry as "world" poetry. And East and West, as in *The Waste Land*, meet again, in the collation of the (I admit, creaking) Provençal sestina and the admonishment of Krishna to Arjuna. Eliot's British-American-international "remains" here nourish "the life of significant soil."

"Little Gidding" puts to the fire, symbolically, all that went before. "Midwinter spring is its own season" and no season; fire flames upon frozen earth and water in windless air. Eliot is no longer "here / Or there, or elsewhere"; for, in full maturity, "History is now and England." And as air, earth, water, and fire enter into the impending death, the innumerable dead poets who constitute the "familiar compound ghost" prepare the presently dying poet for the reduction of his lifetime's achievement into Herakleitean fragments, or its natural elements. Everything, including *Four Quartets*, must vanish "to become renewed, transfigured, in another pattern." It is not home but the end we start (begin and emerge reborn) from. We still do not know the place. But there is yet that brief glimpse—combining the garden gate,

the river, the waterfall, and those “children in the appletree / Not known, because not looked for”—when the bird’s one syllable, now articulated into a birdlike, lyrical phrase throws off the dust, passes through the flames, and like the unsinged rose of generous beauty, may communicate beyond death; for “what the dead had no speech for, when living, / They can tell you, being dead: the communication / Of the dead is tongued with fire beyond the language of the living” (*CP*, p. 139). Communication here is *not* the same as words and music that move only in time; it is freed of human patterns, and therefore of human articulation. It is not so much a “raid on the inarticulate” as a grace devoutly to be wished. Responding to the bird, and to some involuntary and inexplicable nucleus of images clustering children, waterfall, river, and “two waves of the sea,” did Eliot know, echo, hear, “half-hear . . . in the stillness,” the twenty-fourth fragment of Herakleitos? “Time is a child building a sand-castle by the sea, and that child is the whole majesty of man’s power in the world.”<sup>24</sup>

If I were to offer you, as my recent discovery, some unknown, unpublished lines of T. S. Eliot, such as the following—

At this point I can fancy the reader murmuring:  
“I’m sure he has said all this before”—

and you were already over-familiar with verses such as “You say I am repeating / Something I have said before. I shall say it again”; would you not, at least for one instant, be inclined to suspend your disbelief before you puddled your brow; cried “This will never do!” and consulted the critical essay “The Three Voices of Poetry” (*OPP*, p. 96) to document your charge against my duplicity? For the poet-critic who, at his best, maintained a tension between prose and verse in his poetry; for the critic-poet who characterized his criticism as emanating from his poetry workshop, the trumpety in my versifying his prose and then quoting from “East Coker” is simply a means of my acknowledging the integrity between Eliot the poet and Eliot the critic. I acknowledge; then I qualify: the integrity is there only if we recognize precisely that in T. S. Eliot’s poetry, as in his literary criticism, continuity is established, peculiarly in large part, by his charming vocal “discontinuities.”

Whatever Eliot is for us at present, whatever he will be for the future, he is a “voice”; and that voice is as immediate to our senses as that “lavender spray / Of wistful regret . . . / Pressed between yellow leaves of a book that has never been opened.” Fractious; dusty; extremely unctuous; but so rhythmically insistent, rhapsodic, and authoritative, if capricious, as to demolish our defense of judgment and

seduce our feelings into joining in the universal lament of the disconsolate Possum. We need no Cuscuscaraway or Mirza Murad Ali Beg to tell us that it is frequently "so nicely / Restricted to What Precisely / And If and Perhaps and But." The incendiary lyrics of *Four Quartets* ascend from a woodshed bed of prosaic critical kindling; the same elements "compose" and "decompose" both. Comparable perhaps in manner to Reilly quoting "poetry" amidst the "verse" of *The Cocktail Party* or to the Knights of *Murder in the Cathedral* who drop from "poetic" character to address the audience directly in prose, the flat, deliberate, explicatory passages of *Four Quartets* also correspond to the footnotes to *The Waste Land*, with the important exception that the passages are vocally integrated within, not appended to, the text.

The voice we recognize, even some of its conditioning, if not its sources. It is, all patently, the voice of the Jamesian American: diffident, hesitant, self-absorbed, therefore difficult to train, or to learn to use. It is easily intimidated, in immaturity, by what appears infinitely superior to it, especially if its competitor is of Continental cultivation. It is characterized—all irony intended—as that of a mere Traubel when Flagstad is very much around. This voice is also that of a seventh-born, who must feel he has at least eight "parents"; and the actual two were formidable enough, not to say a grandfather who Eliot later said "died before my birth. But I was brought up to be very much aware of him; so much so, that as a child I thought of him as still the head of the family."<sup>25</sup> Small wonder, then, this voice is "ghost"-possessed; diffuse, therefore fervent in its admiration of the succinct; stressing an impersonality or disembodiment at the pitch of a holy-roller painfully aware all the more how deeply buried it is in the individual "tatters of mortal dress." The voice needs a coach, not only a living Pound or Hayward, but a foreign, aged language, or every professional in the world with whom it can associate, especially if the "professionals" are deceased, since their speech is no longer words but communication from a disembodied "public domain." (For coach, this voice is likely, however, to prefer Laforgue over Baudelaire, or Shakespeare's contemporaries over Shakespeare himself, since, significantly, the French and English bards are, in Eliot's own words, "like distant relatives who have been almost deified; whereas the smaller poet, who has directed one's first steps, is more like an admired elder brother" [*TCC*, p. 126]). This voice is rhythm-based; penetrating in focus and attack; of a lyricist seeking to be dramatic; good in the high register but longing to be equal to the low; *not* quite as good, however, at legato because it is narrow in range and short-lived if intense. Above all, this voice is uneven, contradictory,

longing in the very act of its patterning the air to be put to rest. The longing to be put to rest is the condition of its discontinuity, an undertone which in the voice's supreme expressions of its art equally expresses a dissatisfaction with the limitations of its craft. From "Pru-frock" to *Four Quartets*, as from "Tradition and the Individual Talent" to "Johnson as Critic and Poet," the "overwhelming question" is the voice itself, in its multiple "elements" as connoisseur, raconteur, seer and sorcerer; the ventriloquial, confessional voice of the poet as self-critic—and, as self-destroyer as well.

I suppose it is preposterous to conceive, in an age of memory banks, retrievals, and satellites such as ours, of a universe in which almost all the physical traces of the life and work of T. S. Eliot had perished; a universe in which not even one telltale tatter remains of the Missouri-convert's tricolor of Anglo-Catholicism, Classicism, and Royalism. "No Possum, No Sop, No Taters." "In spite of which we like to think / That we are sound, substantial flesh and blood" (*CP*, p. 128)—we are told, frequently, that one finger upon one button, and in a flash, some portion of the world, perhaps an entire planet, might be reduced to less than "a handful of dust." Imagine that some catastrophe, comparable to if larger than, say, the burning of the Alexandrian library, should destroy all of Eliot except for scattered fragments some twenty-fifth-century Quintilian had stored as flowers of a tribal dialect—lines like "I have measured out my life with coffee spoons" (*CP*, p. 5) or "Blown hair is sweet, brown hair over the mouth blown, / Lilac and brown hair" (*CP*, p. 63); fragments become, like Herakleitos', part of our heritage whether we know Herakleitos or his phrases; markers of the way backward, like a glance over the shoulder, toward a once-recorded history now seemingly disengaged. Fancy one or more of those tropes touching a new mind, fingers functioning on whatever composing device, propelled by whatever power, then exists; someone moved to weave Fragments 1 and 6 of that lost or mythical poet T. S. Eliot into combinations satisfying to the modern temper. "Variations after T. S. E.," they might be called; "Quick now, here, now, always," they might begin, and . . . I sometimes wonder if that is what Old Possum meant (among other things, *to be sure*); his namesake is, after all, gifted for appearing ill, lying still, "playing" quite dead.

<sup>1</sup> T. S. Eliot, *The Complete Poems and Plays: 1909–1950* (New York: Harcourt, 1950), p. 6. Subsequent citations are to the same text and, abbreviated *CP*, follow the quotation. (I have used this text rather than the more recent

*Collected Poems: 1909–1962* because the latter omits material necessary to the present essay; the slight variations between texts do not impinge at any point upon my argument.)

<sup>2</sup> *The Poems of Richard Wilbur* (New York: Harcourt, 1963), p. 130.

<sup>3</sup> Herbert Howarth, *Notes on Some Figures Behind T. S. Eliot* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1964).

<sup>4</sup> Lyndall Gordon, *Eliot's Early Years* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1977).

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 15.

<sup>6</sup> Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 122.

<sup>7</sup> T. S. Eliot, *On Poetry and Poets* (New York: Farrar, 1957), p. 295. Hereafter cited as *OPP*.

<sup>8</sup> Gordon, *Eliot's Early Years*, p. 54.

<sup>9</sup> Julie Fay and David Wojahn, "Norman Dubie: Dark Spiralling Figures: An Interview," *American Poetry Review*, 7 (July/Aug. 1978), 7.

<sup>10</sup> Hugh Kenner, *The Invisible Poet: T. S. Eliot* (New York: Obolensky, 1959).

<sup>11</sup> *Parodies: An Anthology from Chaucer to Beerbohm—and After*, ed. Dwight Macdonald (New York: Random House, 1960), pp. 218–19.

<sup>12</sup> Gordon, *Eliot's Early Years*, p. 49.

<sup>13</sup> Austin Warren, *Rage for Order* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1947), p. 143.

<sup>14</sup> T. S. Eliot, *Selected Essays: New Edition* (New York: Harcourt, 1950), p. 5. Hereafter cited as *SE*.

<sup>15</sup> *The Poems of Andrew Marvell*, ed. Hugh MacDonald (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1952), p. 22.

<sup>16</sup> Hugh Kenner, "The Urban Apocalypse," in *Eliot in His Time*, ed. A. Walton Litz (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1973), p. 46.

<sup>17</sup> Gordon, *Eliot's Early Years*, p. 48. I am aware that my treatment of "Preludes" bears a resemblance to that of Robert Langbaum, "New Modes of Characterization in *The Waste Land*," in Litz, *Eliot in His Time*, pp. 119–25; I am interested, however, in extending the poem's form to include *Four Quartets* as well as *The Waste Land*.

<sup>18</sup> John Crowe Ransom, "Gerontion," *Sewanee Review*, 74 (1966), 389–414.

<sup>19</sup> T. S. Eliot, *The Waste Land: A Facsimile and Transcript of the Original Drafts*, ed. Valerie Eliot (New York: Harcourt, 1971), p. 129, n. 2. Hereafter cited as *WLF*.

<sup>20</sup> Gordon, *Eliot's Early Years*, p. 115.

<sup>21</sup> Ezra Pound, *The Spirit of Romance* (New York: New Directions, 1968), pp. 22–38; see, also, his *Literary Essays*, ed. T. S. Eliot (New York: New Directions, 1968), pp. 109–48.

<sup>22</sup> M. L. Rosenthal, *Sailing into the Unknown: Yeats, Pound, and Eliot* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1978), p. 195.

<sup>23</sup> Donald Davie, "T. S. Eliot: The End of an Era," *The Twentieth Century*, 159 (Apr. 1956), 350–62.

<sup>24</sup> Herakleitos, "The Extant Fragments," trans. Guy Davenport, *American Poetry Review*, 7 (Jan./Feb. 1978), 15.

<sup>25</sup> T. S. Eliot, *To Criticize the Critic and Other Writings* (New York: Farrar, 1965), p. 44. Hereafter cited as *TCC*.