

his fourth volume, *Poems*, with "Gerontion" as its leading poem, again developed the same general pattern of ideas. It is remarkable that he excluded almost no poem of his early volumes from his later collected works. In 1920 also appeared *The Sacred Wood*, containing, among other essays, "Tradition and the Individual Talent," the earliest statement of his aesthetics. The aesthetic principle which he first elaborated in this essay provided a useful instrument for modern criticism. It relates primarily to the individual work of art, the poem conceived as a made object, an organic thing in itself, whose concrete elements are true correlatives of the artist's imagination and experience with respect to that poem. The degree to which fusion and concentration of intellect, feeling, and experience were achieved was Eliot's criterion for judging the poem. Such ideas he developed in other essays which have been influential in promoting the intrinsic analysis of poetry.

Also in 1920, Eliot began *The Waste Land*, one of the major works of modern literature. Its subject, the apparent failure of western civilization which World War I seemed to demonstrate, set the tone of his poetry until 1930. Such poems as "Pru-frock" and "Gerontion" had suggested the spiritual debility of modern individuals and their culture while in satirical counterpoint his Sweeney poems had symbolized the rising tide of anticultural infidelity and human baseness. It is likely that in his abundant use of literary reference in *The Waste Land* he was influenced by Pound, a close friend whose advice, as Eliot declared, he followed strictly in cutting and concentrating the poem. *The Waste Land* is the acknowledged masterpiece of its sort. It also introduced a form—the orchestration of related themes in successive movements—which he used again in "The Hollow Men" (1925), *Ash-Wednesday* (1930), and his later masterpieces, *Four Quartets* (1936–1942; 1943).

The Waste Land appeared as a volume

in New York and London in 1922, but it had been published earlier that year in *The Criterion*, an influential London literary quarterly which Eliot edited from 1922 through 1939. His second volume of criticism, *Homage to John Dryden* (1924), was much admired for its critical method. In 1925 Eliot became a member of the board of the publishing firm now known as Faber and Faber, and he was long in that association. He collected *Poems, 1909–1925* (1925). In 1927 he was confirmed in the Anglican Church and became a British subject.

A year later, in connection with the publication of the critical volume *For Lancelot Andrewes* (1928), he described himself as "a royalist in politics, a classicist in literature, and an Anglo-Catholic in religion"; and he manifested an increasing reliance upon authority and tradition. His later poetry took a positive turn toward faith in life, in strong contrast with the desperation of *The Waste Land*. This was demonstrated by *Ash-Wednesday*, a poem of mystical conflict between faith and doubt, beautiful in its language if difficult in its symbolism. In 1932, in *Sweeney Agonistes*, he brought Sweeney to a deserved and gruesome death in a strange play that fascinates the attention by mingling penitence with musical comedy. In "The Hollow Men" he satirized the straw men, the Guy Fawkes men, whose world would end "not with a bang, but a whimper"; also in this period he produced the "Ariel Poems," including the exquisite and tender "Marina" (1930). *Murder in the Cathedral* (1935), a poetic tragedy on the betrayal of Thomas à Becket, has been successfully performed, and is a drama of impressive spiritual power. His *Collected Poems, 1909–1935* (1936), and the collected *Essays, Ancient and Modern*, which in the same year gave perspective to his criticism, brought to an end this first period of spiritual exploration.

Eliot's next major accomplishment, the *Four Quartets*, originated during his visit to the United States (1932–1934), his first

return to his native country in seventeen years. During this period he wrote the small "Landscapes," some of them drawn from American scenes, which are spiritually connected with the theme of the *Quartets*. His lectures at Harvard University in 1932 resulted in the influential volume *The Uses of Poetry and the Uses of Criticism* (1933). In 1934 he lectured at the University of Virginia, and produced the study of orthodoxy and faith entitled *After Strange Gods, A Primer of Modern Heresy*. Presumably it was during this year that he conceived the subject of "Burnt Norton," the first of the *Quartets*.

The four poems that eventually resulted provide a reasoned philosophical discussion of the foundations of Christian faith, involving the nature of time, the significance of history, the religious psychology of man, and the nature of his experience; most importantly, perhaps, they attempt, by means of lofty poetic feeling and metaphysical insight, to suggest the actuality and meaning of such Christian mysteries as Incarnation and Pentecost. To some readers, these poems have seemed deficient in breadth, based as they are upon an authoritarian tradition of Christian philosophy; but they have been of unusual interest for an age desperately seeking to resolve the conflict between spiritual and material reality. The four poems, which had all been previously published, were brought together in *Four Quartets* (1943).

Eliot dramatized domestic life in terms of his philosophy. *The Family Reunion* (1939) was not generally considered successful as drama. *The Cocktail Party* (1949), *The Confidential Clerk* (1953), and *The Elder Statesman* (1958) created interest as experimental theater.

Few men of letters have been more fully honored in their own day than T. S. Eliot, and even those who strongly disagreed with him seemed content with his selection for the Nobel Prize in 1948. *The Complete Poems and Plays* is a relatively small volume, but it represents an artist whose

ideas are large, whose craftsmanship is the expression of artistic responsibility, and whose poems represent the progressive refinement and illustration of his aesthetics.

Collections are *The Collected Poems, 1909-1962*, 1963, and *The Complete Poems and Plays*, 1969. Separate volumes of poetry and criticism are mentioned in the note above. *Poems Written in Early Youth*, 1967, was compiled by John Hayward. Valerie Eliot edited *The Waste Land: A Facsimile and Transcript of the Original Draft*, 1971. Frank Kermode edited *Selected Prose of T. S. Eliot*, 1975. Earlier essay collections are *Selected Essays, 1917-1932*, 1932; *Essays, Ancient and Modern*, 1936; *Selected Essays*, new edition, 1950; *Essays on Elizabethan Drama*, 1956; *On Poetry and Poets*, 1957; and *To Criticize the Critic and Other Writings*, 1965. Later volumes of critical importance are *The Idea of a Christian Society*, 1940; *The Music of Poetry*, 1942; *Notes toward the Definition of Culture*, 1948; *The Three Voices of Poetry*, 1953; and *The Frontiers of Criticism*, 1956. Valerie Eliot edited *The Letters of T. S. Eliot*, Vol. I, 1898-1922, 1988.

Biographies and biographical studies include Lyndall Gordon, *Eliot's Early Years*, 1977, and *Eliot's New Life*, 1988; James E. Miller, Jr., *T. S. Eliot's Personal Waste Land*, 1977; and Piers Gray, *T. S. Eliot's Intellectual and Political Development, 1909-1922*, 1982. Memoirs are William Turner Levy and Victor Scherle, *Affectionately, T. S. Eliot: The Story of a Friendship, 1947-1965*, 1968; and Robert Sencourt, *T. S. Eliot: A Memoir*, 1971.

F. O. Matthiessen, *The Achievement of T. S. Eliot*, third edition, 1958, remains a fine introduction. Other useful studies are in Edmund Wilson, *Axel's Castle*, 1931; F. R. Leavis, *New Bearings in English Poetry*, 1932; R. P. Blackmur, *The Double Agent*, 1935; Allen Tate, *Reactionary Essays on Poetry and Ideas*, 1936; Cleanth Brooks, *Modern Poetry and the Tradition*, 1930; Clive Sansom, *The Poetry of T. S. Eliot*, 1947; Elizabeth A. Drew, *T. S. Eliot: The Design of His Poetry*, 1949; Helen Gardner, *The Art of T. S. Eliot*, 1950; George Williamson, *A Reader's Guide to T. S. Eliot*, 1953; Grover Smith, Jr., *T. S. Eliot's Poetry and Plays: A Study in Sources and Meaning*, 1956; and Hugh Kenner, *Invisible Poet: T. S. Eliot*, 1959.

More recent studies include Northrop Frye, *T. S. Eliot (Writers and Critics, Series)*, 1963; Eric Thompson, *T. S. Eliot: The Metaphysical Perspective*, 1963; Genesis Jones, *Approach to the Purpose: A Study of the Poetry of T. S. Eliot*, 1965; Leonard Unger, *T. S. Eliot: Moments and Patterns*, 1966; Fei-Pai Lu, *T. S. Eliot: The Dialectical Structure of His Theory of Poetry*, 1966; Harry Blamires, *Word Unheard: A Guide through Eliot's Four Quartets*, 1969; E. Martin Browne, *The Making of T. S. Eliot's Plays*, 1969; Marion Montgomery, *T. S. Eliot: An Essay on the American Magus*, 1969; Russell Kirk, *Eliot and His Age*, 1971; Roger Kojecky, *T. S. Eliot's Social Criticism*, 1971; Bernard Bergonzi, *T. S. Eliot*, 1971; Louis Simpson, *Three on the Tower: The Lives and Works of Ezra Pound, T. S. Eliot, and William Carlos Williams*, 1975; Derek Traversi, *T. S. Eliot: The Longer Poems*, 1976;

The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock

*S'io credessi che mia risposta fosse
a persona che mai tornasse al mondo,
questa fiamma staria senza più scosse.
Ma per cio che giammai di questo fondo
non tornò vivo alcun, s'òdo il vero,
senza tema d'infamia ti rispondo.⁶*

Let us go then, you and I,
When the evening is spread out against the sky
Like a patient etherised upon a table;
Let us go, through certain half-deserted streets,
The muttering retreats
Of restless nights in one-night cheap hotels
And sawdust restaurants with oyster-shells:
Streets that follow like a tedious argument
Of insidious intent
To lead you to an overwhelming question . . .
Oh, do not ask, 'What is it?'
Let us go and make our visit.

In the room the women come and go
Talking of Michelangelo.⁷

The yellow fog⁸ that rubs its back upon the window-panes,
The yellow smoke that rubs its muzzle on the window-panes,
Licked its tongue into the corners of the evening,
Lingered upon the pools that stand in drains,
Let fall upon its back the soot that falls from chimneys,
Slipped by the terrace, made a sudden leap,
And seeing that it was a soft October night,
Curled once about the house, and fell asleep.

And indeed there will be time
For the yellow smoke that slides along the street,
Rubbing its back upon the window-panes;
There will be time, there will be time
To prepare a face to meet the faces that you meet;
There will be time to murder and create,
And time for all the works and days⁹ of hands
That lift and drop a question on your plate;
Time for you and time for me,
And time yet for a hundred indecisions,
And for a hundred visions and revisions,
Before the taking of a toast and tea.

6. "If I believed my answer were being made to one who could ever return to the world, this flame would gleam [*i.e.*, this spirit would speak] no more; but since, if what I hear is true, never from this abyss did living man return, I answer thee without fear of infamy" (Dante, *Inferno*, XXVII, 61-66). The speaker, Guido da Montefeltro, promised absolution by Pope Boniface VIII, advised that prelate how to betray and destroy the Colonna family of Palestrina, and died unrepentant.

7. The lines suggest the futility of "arty" talk by dilettantes.

8. The yellow (or brown) fog of the sordid city was a familiar detail in French symbolism. See *The Waste Land*, ll. 60-61 with Eliot's note, there referring to Baudelaire.

9. *Works and Days*, by Hesiod (eighth century B.C.), "father of Greek didactic poetry," was an account of daily life and husbandry, intermingled with moral precepts.

In the room the women come and go
Talking of Michelangelo.

And indeed there will be time
To wonder, 'Do I dare?' and, 'Do I dare?'
Time to turn back and descend the stair,¹
With a bald spot in the middle of my hair—
(They will say: 'How his hair is growing thin!')
My morning coat, my collar mounting firmly to the chin,
My necktie rich and modest, but asserted by a simple pin—
(They will say: 'But how his arms and legs are thin!')

Do I dare
Disturb the universe?
In a minute there is time
For decisions and revisions which a minute will reverse.

For I have known them all already, known them all—
Have known the evenings, mornings, afternoons,
I have measured out my life with coffee spoons;
I know the voices dying with a dying fall³
Beneath the music from a farther room.
So how should I presume?

And I have known the eyes already, known them all—
The eyes that fix you in a formulated phrase,
And when I am formulated, sprawling on a pin,
When I am pinned and wriggling on the wall,
Then how should I begin
To spit out all the butt-ends of my days and ways?
And how should I presume?

And I have known the arms already, known them all—
Arms that are braceleted and white and bare
(But in the lamplight, downed with light brown hair!)
Is it perfume from a dress
That makes me so digress?
Arms that lie along a table, or wrap about a shawl.
And should I then presume?
And how should I begin?

Shall I say, I have gone at dusk through narrow streets
And watched the smoke that rises from the pipes
Of lonely men in shirt-sleeves, leaning out of windows?

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

1. Dante's figure of the stairway from Hell to Heaven (*Purgatorio*, XXVI, 145-148) recurs in Eliot's poems; see, for example, l. 428 of *The Waste Land*, and *Ash-Wednesday*, Part III.

2. Echoes Laforgue's *Le Concile féerique* (cf. ll. 54

and 62).

3. Cf. Shakespeare, *Twelfth Night*, I, i, 1-4: "If music be the food of love, play on; / Give me excess of it, that, surfeiting / The appetite may sicken, and so die. / That strain again! it had a dying fall."

And the afternoon, the evening, sleeps so peacefully!
 Smoothed by long fingers,
 Asleep . . . tired . . . or it malingers,
 Stretched on the floor, here beside you and me.
 Should I, after tea and cakes and ices,
 Have the strength to force the moment to its crisis?
 But though I have wept and fasted, wept and prayed,
 Though I have seen my head (grown slightly bald) brought in upon a platter,
 I am no prophet⁴—and here's no great matter;
 I have seen the moment of my greatness flicker,
 And I have seen the eternal Footman hold my coat, and snicker,
 And in short, I was afraid.

And would it have been worth it, after all,
 After the cups, the marmalade, the tea,
 Among the porcelain, among some talk of you and me,
 Would it have been worth while,
 To have bitten off the matter with a smile,
 To have squeezed the universe into a ball
 To roll it toward some overwhelming question,
 To say: 'I am Lazarus, come from the dead,
 Come back to tell you all,⁵ I shall tell you all'—
 If one, settling a pillow by her head,
 Should say: 'That is not what I meant at all,
 That is not it at all.'

And would it have been worth it, after all,
 Would it have been worth while,
 After the sunsets and the dooryards and the sprinkled streets,
 After the novels, after the teacups, after the skirts that trail along the floor—
 And this, and so much more?—
 It is impossible to say just what I mean!
 But as if a magic lantern threw the nerves in patterns on a screen:
 Would it have been worth while
 If one, settling a pillow or throwing off a shawl,
 And turning toward the window, should say:
 'That is not it at all,
 That is not what I meant, at all.'

No! I am not Prince Hamlet,⁶ nor was meant to be;
 Am an attendant lord, one that will do
 To swell a progress, start a scene or two,
 Advise the prince; no doubt, an easy tool,
 Deferential, glad to be of use,
 Politic, cautious, and meticulous;
 Full of high sentence, but a bit obtuse;

4. Cf. Matthew xiv: 3-11. The head of John the Baptist was brought to Queen Herodias on a "charger." Prufrock is "bald," quite unlike John the Baptist as represented in Richard Strauss's opera *Salome* (1905) or Oscar Wilde's play (1894) on which it was based, both emphasizing the passion of Salome for the prophet.

5. For the resurrection of Lazarus see John xi: 1-44. Cf. the note on the epigraph to this poem.

6. In the following passage (to l. 119) the speaker,

Prufrock, indicates his own futility by comparing himself with Hamlet and a number of other literary characters. The "attendant lord" might be Polonius, or Rosencrantz or Guildenstern, in *Hamlet*. Chaucer, in the *Canterbury Tales*, ll. 303-306, describes the speech of the Clerk as terse, and "full of high sentence" (i.e., pithy wisdom). Eliot (l. 117) employs the phrase differently, with the implication of empty pompousness. The court "Fool" (l. 119) was a conventional fixture of Elizabethan drama.

At times, indeed, almost ridiculous—
Almost, at times, the Fool.

I grow old . . . I grow old . . .
I shall wear the bottoms of my trousers rolled.

Shall I part my hair behind? Do I dare to eat a peach?
I shall wear white flannel trousers, and walk upon the beach.
I have heard the mermaids singing, each to each.

I do not think that they will sing to me.

I have seen them riding seaward on the waves
Combing the white hair of the waves blown back
When the wind blows the water white and black.

We have lingered in the chambers of the sea
By sea-girls wreathed with seaweed red and brown
Till human voices wake us, and we drown.⁷

1917

Gerontion⁸

*Thou hast nor youth nor age
But as it were an after dinner sleep
Dreaming of both.*

Here I am, an old man in a dry month,
Being read to by a boy, waiting for rain.⁹
I was neither at the hot gates¹.

Nor fought in the warm rain
Nor knee deep in the salt marsh, heaving a cutlass,
Bitten by flies, fought.

My house is a decayed house,
And the Jew squats on the window sill, the owner,
Spawned in some estaminet of Antwerp,
Blistered in Brussels, patched and peeled in London.²

The goat coughs at night in the field overhead;
Rocks, moss, stonecrop, iron, merds.³
The woman keeps the kitchen, makes tea,
Sneezes at evening, poking the peevish gutter.

I an old man,
A dull head among windy spaces.

7. According to legend, the sirens had the power to lure men to visit them in caves beneath the sea; but when their singing stopped the spell was broken, and the men would drown.

8. A coined word, from the Greek *geron*, "an old man." The epigraph is from Shakespeare, *Measure for Measure*, III, i, 32-34. The poem is related in theme with *The Waste Land*, for which Eliot at first intended it to appear as an introduction (Pound's *Letters*, 169-172).

9. Water (or rain) is here used as symbol of fertility or rebirth; see "Prufrock," ll. 124-131, and *The Waste Land*, *passim*.

1. A literal translation of the Greek word *Thermopylae*, the name of the pass where three hundred Spartans under Leonidas defeated the Persian host of Xerxes (480 B.C.).

2. The "Jew" (l. 8) then frequently symbolized the merchant class, or trade in general, long disdained by British society as a vulgarity basely born "in some estaminet" (shady tavern) of a continental city, and there disgraced ("Blistered"); but now being made acceptable ("patched and peeled") in London.

3. French for "dung."