T. S. ELIOT'S IMPERSONALITY:
A STUDY OF THE PERSONAE IN ELIOT'S
MAJOR POEMS

by

DAVID S. MCNEAL
M.A., Purdue University, 1963

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in the Department
of
English

We accept this thesis as conforming to the
required standard

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA
August, 1975

© David S. McNeal, 1976
In presenting this thesis in partial fulfilment of the requirements for an advanced degree at the University of British Columbia, I agree that the Library shall make it freely available for reference and study. I further agree that permission for extensive copying of this thesis for scholarly purposes may be granted by the Head of my Department or by his representatives. It is understood that copying or publication of this thesis for financial gain shall not be allowed without my written permission.

Department of English

The University of British Columbia
2075 Wesbrook Place
Vancouver, Canada
V6T 1W5

Date March 30, 1976
ABSTRACT

This thesis is a study of T. S. Eliot's "impersonal" theory of poetry, particularly as it affected his own poetic work. To this end it focuses upon Eliot's personae in order to demonstrate the extent to which his concern with personality influenced his poetry and, in addition, how the theory and the poetry developed together throughout his career.

Eliot's original distrust of personality in poetry was based upon two distinct, though related, tenets. First, he held that poetry (indeed, all art) is—or should be—"ideal" in the classic sense. That is, it should reflect the type, not the individual, the form, not the personality, the absolute, not the transient. Second, he distrusted human nature itself, and therefore doubted the value of the individual human personality. The first of these tenets, the poetic theory, received its first and most extreme airing in "Tradition and the Individual Talent"; the second, the view of human nature, coloured most of the early poetry.

The resulting distrust of human personality, combined with Eliot's clear knowledge of the temptations of romantic self-expression, led him to develop a series of personae and other poetic devices with which he could disguise his own voice. At the same time, however, Eliot was concerned with exploring the limitations of the human personality. Consequently, most of the early major poems—"Prufrock," "Portrait of a Lady," and "Gerontion," for example—employ impersonal narrators in order to examine, in part, the excesses and failures of personality.
In *The Waste Land* Eliot's characteristic dramatic narrator began to become less distinctly apparent, though Eliot was still reluctant to use his own voice. And although in the *Ariel* poems he returned to the genre of the dramatic monologue, he began to investigate the possibility of human salvation rather than of human hopelessness. At the same time, in *Ash Wednesday* he began to record his own personal record of spiritual doubt and hope. This development reached its conclusion in the *Four Quartets* where by reconciling his own limited human experience with an absolute and eternal world, he was finally able to speak freely of his own life in his own voice without lapsing into the romantic fallacies he feared as a young man.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>The Eternal Enemies of the Absolute: Prufrock and Some Others</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>No Contact Possible to Flesh: Impersonality as Lost Passion</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>And Each Confirms a Prison: Impersonality as Anonymity</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>And After This Our Exile: Looking to Death for What Life Cannot Give</td>
<td>152</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>You Are the Music While the Music Lasts: Life of the Spirit Among Men</td>
<td>199</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Selected Bibliography</td>
<td>256</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank many people who contributed to my interest in and understanding of Eliot's poetry and who assisted in the preparation of this thesis through discussion, advice and criticism. I am particularly grateful to my thesis supervisor, Professor Keith Alldritt for his patient encouragement and guidance, and to the members of my thesis committee, Dr. James A. Hart, who saw me through much of the final preparation of the thesis, and Dr. Paul G. Stanwood, whose advice about the *Four Quartets* was particularly helpful. I would also like to express my thanks to Dr. Robert Tener of the University of Calgary for his advice about Robert Browning's dramatic monologues.
CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

When early in his career Eliot wrote for the readers of the *Egoist* that:

Poetry is not a turning loose of emotion, but an escape from emotion; it is not the expression of personality, but an escape from personality;

he announced an "impersonal theory of poetry" which has been associated with his own poetry ever since. His assertion that "Honest criticism and sensitive appreciation are directed not upon the poet but upon the poetry" has become a central tenet in modern literary criticism. Undoubtedly the shift of attention from the poet to the poetry is one of the most important contributions Eliot has made to modern criticism, and it has been, quite rightly, studied in great depth by critics of Eliot's work. However, this impersonal theory of poetry has often been oversimplified and misunderstood. That Eliot's own attitude about the relationship between the poet and his work changed continually throughout his life is an indication that the question is a complex one.

This study proposes to investigate Eliot's concept of the poetic personality, both in general terms and in relation to the creation of his own poetry. The primary emphasis will be upon the major poetry, and particularly upon Eliot's use of the persona. The purpose of such a
study is to arrive at a clearer understanding of the poet's attitude toward his work, and, of course, to help in achieving a more thorough understanding of the poems themselves through an examination of the role of the personae in the poems.

We may begin with a preliminary set of definitions and distinctions. Eliot clearly used the term "personality" in a number of different ways. At times "personality" is used to distinguish relatively superficial characteristics of each individual: those habitual gestures which can be altered with relative ease. In this sense the term is used interchangably with "idiosyncrasy" (almost always a pejorative word to Eliot). At other times Eliot used the word to denote an individual's most profound identity, and at least once he identifies it with the soul--that which gives a man "strength of character." The only real consistency in his use of the word is that it always implies that which relates to the individual being, that by which he is distinguished from the collective association of other beings. And often, though not always, it carries implications of the emotional life of an individual. Beyond this, Eliot's own conception of "personality" seems to have been indefinite. It appears to be one of several terms he habitually used in a loose manner. Its definition depends upon the context in which it appears. In "Tradition and the Individual Talent," for example, "personality" is used to mean that part of the poet's private life which is unconnected to his poetry. In the 1920 essay on "Philip Massinger," on the other hand, it is more complex; Eliot asserts that Massinger's characters are "not wholly
conscious" because of a deficiency in Massinger's own personality. That Eliot himself was obviously aware of the difficulty in finding adequate definitions for the terms is made clear in the Introduction to The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism. He argues that the "development of genuine taste, founded on genuine feeling, is inextricable from the development of the personality and character." And he adds a note to this: "In making this statement I refuse to be drawn into any discussion of the definitions of 'personality' and 'character'."

It seems wisest to take Eliot's cue and avoid trying for a clear definition of the word at this point. It is a term that he found useful for many purposes (it appears often in his writing), but perhaps because of his own distrust of the pseudoscience of psychology, what it meant for him was indefinable, although real. Thus in investigating Eliot's use of and attitudes toward personality it is necessary to allow definitions to arise out of the contexts, in much the same way as the important connotations in Eliot's verse come from the contexts. Any other kind of definition would have to be either so inclusive as to be almost no definition at all, or so limited that there will be found enough exceptions to cast the original definition into doubt.

There is, however, one general distinction that can be made at the beginning of the discussion. Eliot's use of the term "personality" occurs in two major contexts. The first of these is the most specific; it has to do with the relationship between the poet and his work or sometimes as the relationship between the poet and his personae. It is
in this context that the word most often occurs in Eliot's theoretical prose. In all of the essays I mentioned above (and in many more) Eliot is concerned with the question of the relationship between the artist's personality and his work—the extent to which the poet actually enters into his poetry, how he uses his own personal experience and how that experience is translated into art.

The second context concerns personality in a more general sense, the proper use and place of personality in relation to other personalities and to moral and social values. On the most elementary level that can be seen as a question of the individual's own importance in context with other individuals, traditions and values. This is a major theme in much of the poetry from "Prufrock" to the "Four Quartets," but it also receives Eliot's attention in such prose works as After Strange Gods and the thesis on Bradley. Quite naturally, these two levels are related, and at times the line between them is indistinct. My purpose in introducing them is simply to facilitate discussion of Eliot's sometimes ambiguous and always shifting attitudes toward the complex question of the personality in art.

It is, in fact, partly due to this ambiguity and change in Eliot's pronouncements about the personal in art that a study such as this is bound to begin somewhat tentatively. The essays help in formulating Eliot's attitudes, but they also introduce problems. In them Eliot often seems to be striving to explain either what he felt he had done, or more often what he felt he needed to do. In either case the prose can do little more than to give hints and clues to our study of the poems. Eliot clearly was thinking of this imperfect relationship between his
prose and his verse when he wrote in *After Strange Gods*:

> in one's prose reflexions one may be legitimately occupied with ideals, whereas in the writing of verse one can only deal with actuality. (p. 28)

In addition to this, the essays, particularly the early essays (which contain Eliot's most widely-known deliberations on personality in art), are often written with a polemic purpose: to correct errors in public taste. Consequently they often present ideas more extremely than a more purely disinterested and objective situation would occasion. The later essays often modify the earlier extreme positions. For example, in 1934 Eliot wrote:

> Some years ago I wrote an essay entitled *Tradition and the Individual Talent*. During the course of the subsequent fifteen years I have discovered, or had brought to my attention, some unsatisfactory phrasing and at least one more than doubtful analogy. But I do not repudiate what I wrote in that essay more fully than I should expect to do after such a lapse of time. The problem, naturally, does not seem to me simple as it seemed then, nor could I treat it now as a purely literary one. *(After Strange Gods, p. 15)*

In 1940 the terms are stronger:

> I have, in early essays, extolled what I called impersonality in art, and it may seem that, in giving as a reason for the superiority of Yeats's later work the greater expression of personality in it, I am contradicting myself. It may be that I expressed myself badly, or that I had only an adolescent grasp of that idea—as I can never bear to re-read my own prose writings, I am willing to leave the point unsettled. *(On Poetry and Poets, p. 299)*

And in 1964 he wrote what seems to be some sort of repudiation of "Tradition and the Individual Talent:"

> Just as any student of contemporary literature putting pen to paper about my criticism, is certain to pass an
This progression clearly shows Eliot becoming increasingly anxious to suggest that the point of view expressed in "Tradition and the Individual Talent" was not that by which he wished to be known. Consequently it becomes necessary to explore in some detail the nature of the change in Eliot's ideas about personality and art over the years, and the resulting changes in the personae in his poetry.

One of the most important conclusions that emerges from such an examination is that Eliot's ideas underwent more of a solidification than a change. For in the early essays there is far more ambiguity—even contradiction—than appears in his later criticism. During the period which produced "Tradition and the Individual Talent" Eliot was also exploring other points of view. At the same time that he was writing that poetry is "an escape from the personality" he was also suggesting that:

> The creation of a work of art . . . consists in the process of transfusion of the personality, or, in a deeper sense, the life, of the author into the character[s].

The pronouncements made in "Tradition and the Individual Talent" (and perhaps the complementary thesis of the "objective correlative" in "Hamlet and His Problems") have received more attention than any of
Eliot's other statements on this theme, yet Eliot argues far more often in his early prose for the importance of personality (and specifically a strong personality in the artist) in the creation of art. After reading his essays on the Elizabethan dramatists one cannot but conclude that Eliot believed the most successful playwrights were without exception those who displayed the strongest personality in their works, and moreover, as the essay on Massinger clearly shows, the failure of the lesser dramatists is attributed directly to a failure in personality.

Two preliminary conclusions may be drawn from these brief observations on the essays, both of which will help in arriving at an understanding of the poetry. First Eliot's earliest views on the relationship between the poet's personality and his art may be summarized generally and perhaps tentatively as follows. As "Tradition and the Individual Talent" makes clear, the Romantic, nineteenth-century notion that poetry is a vehicle by which a poet expresses his own personal feelings--"confesses himself" in the most literal sense--is rejected. Poetry is an escape from personality mainly in the sense that the creation of it requires the poet to go outside of himself to find "objects" by which emotion and personality may find "impersonal" or universal expression. Eliot tried to describe the process by which this objectification occurs first in the catalyst analogy in "Tradition and the Individual Talent" and then, perhaps more successfully, in the theory of the "objective correlative." Yet there is always a recognition that the poet's own personality, his own feelings and emotions, play an important
part in the creation of his poetry ("Tradition and the Individual Talent" notwithstanding). This helps to explain Eliot's judgment of Swinburne's poetry, that it is successful because "it is impersonal, and no one else could have made it" (The Sacred Wood, p. 149). The apparent paradox between its impersonality and the implication of its personal nature inherent in the phrase "no one else could have made it" is resolved when we recall that according to these early essays art is made impersonal not by a literal escape from the personality, but by a transformation of it into art.

The second conclusion has to do with the development of Eliot's ideas during the course of his life. There is a dual movement in this regard. In the first place Eliot saw the whole question of the personality in art becoming increasingly complex. That is, as he said in After Strange Gods,

The problem, naturally does not seem to me simple as it seemed then, nor could I treat it now as a purely literary one.

The complexity arises from the fact that in his later criticism he does not treat it as a purely literary problem; it becomes associated with a number of ideas about religious and moral problems. Indeed, in After Strange Gods the term "orthodoxy" is used in much the same context in which "impersonality" was used in "Tradition and the Individual Talent," just as the "purely literary" thesis of the relation between the poet and a literary tradition in "Tradition and the Individual Talent" is expanded to include the relationship between the writer and his cultural-religious
tradition in *After Strange Gods.* At the same time, however, a good deal of the early ambiguity is resolved in the later essays; that is, while the question becomes broader in its implications, it also becomes more settled and clearly defined. Thus, all of the later essays in which the question is treated emphasize not only the importance of a strong personality in the artist, but also the necessity of that personality being present in the art. (Eliot's comments on Yeats's later poetry quoted above provide a typical example).

Of course, there are many points on which the early and the later ideas agree. It would be untenable to suggest that Eliot ever rejected his early condemnation of the notion that poetry is a means for the poet to confess his personal whims and desires, or that he ever suggested that idiosyncrasy or even the presence of a strong personality for its own sake in art are permissible. But within the context of these constant notions, the direction of Eliot's thought is toward an increasing place for the personality of the artist in his work. One has only to compare the "fictional" narrator of "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," with the narrator of the *Quartets* who speaks with a voice that is often very like Eliot's. The most certain difference between the personae of these two poems is that in "Prufrock" Eliot makes a conscious effort to create a narrator who is clearly separate from him, while in the *Quartets* he has arrived at a position in which this is no longer necessary.

Before going on to the early poetry, Eliot's association with the thought of two English philosophers, F. H. Bradley and T. E. Hulme
should be noted. Like Eliot in "Tradition and the Individual Talent," I propose to halt at the frontiers of metaphysics; nevertheless both of these men had a profound influence on Eliot in the area proposed for this study. Bradley's influence has received attention from such critics as Hugh Kenner and Anne Bolgan.  

Hulme's influence has received less attention, although it is certainly equally pervasive. Bradley, of course, exerts his influence in an obvious way; much of his work concerns the nature of the personality and its relationship to objects around it, both physical objects and cultural traditions. Hugh Kenner, particularly, has demonstrated the impact of Bradley's ideas on Eliot's poetry. Hulme, too, said much about the individual's relation to history, tradition and religion. In fact, the similarity between the ideas set forth in After Strange Gods and those in most of Hulme's work suggests that perhaps it was Hulme more than anyone else who caused Eliot to recognize that the question of personality could not be seen as a "purely literary" one. (It is significant that when Eliot's friend and co-editor, Herbert Read, published Hulme's Speculations, in 1924, that book won glowing praise from Eliot in a review in The Criterion.) Therefore, although this study proposes to content itself with an examination of how Eliot's views on the personality affects the poetry and helps to give us a clearer understanding of many of the poems, attention must be given to Eliot's understanding of the thought of these two men.

2 See pp. 35-60 of Hugh Kenner's *The Invisible Poet* (New York: McDowell, Obolensky, 1959), and Anne Bolgan's introduction to *Knowledge and Experience in the Philosophy of F. H. Bradley*. 
CHAPTER 2

THE ETERNAL ENEMIES OF THE ABSOLUTE:
PRUFROCK AND SOME OTHERS.

Eliot's most successful early poems are monologues. In the monologue the problem of the poet's personality in the poem is in a sense avoided; although there is a personality present in the monologue, it is distinct from the poet's own. The dramatic narrator may be a "mask" or a voice for the poet, but the poet's personality is not necessarily identical, or even related, to the persona's personality. The persona is a character in the dramatic sense, and it is his, rather than the poet's, personality that dominates the poem. The poet undeniably directs and controls the persona, but it is the persona who appears in the poem. This relationship might be likened to a puppet show. We know rationally that the puppets are not real, that they are moved and made to speak by someone we do not see. But since we do not see the puppeteer, we begin to believe in the personality of the puppets if we are caught up by the show at all. And the reason we believe in the puppets (or in the dramatic narrator) is that they have been given personalities of their own. The relationship between these created personalities and the creator's personality is a matter of indifference. Such is the case in the monologue; the relationship between the poet and his personae is rather technical (i.e., of interest only to those who wish to know how
the thing is made to work) than immediate.

I have chosen the analogy with the puppeteer advisedly, for it is the nature of dramatic art to fill the stage so completely with characters of such definite personality that the creator, the director and all others connected with the presentation are forgotten. Eliot's early monologues are dramatic in this sense. The personae in his monologues are always characters of distinctive (if not strong) personality, and these created personalities dominate what we see in the poems, almost to the exclusion of everything else. That is, the narrators' consciousnesses are pervasive in the sense that everything in the monologues is seen in terms of them.

To illustrate this let us turn to the best known of the early monologues, "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock." Like the other monologues, this poem is dominated by the reverie of the narrator. In one sense all that exists in the poem is the reverie; all other elements of the poem are seen not only in relation to Prufrock, but through his consciousness. Therefore, everything that appears in the poem is modified by the way Prufrock sees it. By the same token, Prufrock himself is modified by the things he sees. He is, in a very real sense, what he sees; but also, what he sees is partly determined by what he is. Hugh Kenner described the results of this phenomenon in these terms: ¹

Prufrock is strangely boundless; one doesn't affirm at a given point with certainty, "Here is where his knowledge would have stopped," or, "These are subtleties to which he would not have aspired." . . . he is the centre of a field of consciousness, rather
yours than his: a focusing of the reader's attention, in a world made up not of cows and stones, but of literary effects and memories prompted by the words.

There are three different points made here. The first deals with the character of Prufrock himself, that he is "strangely boundless," in the sense that he is not as empirically concrete as are, say, Browning's narrators. The second concerns Prufrock's world, which is not made of definite concrete objects. And the third deals with the kind of reverie Prufrock engaged in, a reverie made of "literary effects and memories prompted by the words." It is the second and third of these observations with which I am concerned for the moment; I will return to the first--the nature of Prufrock's character and personality--after that.

To say that Prufrock's world is made not of cows and stones but rather of literary effects and memories is clearly true, although the statement seems at first to deny more than it really does. For there is certainly a world in which Prufrock exists, and this world bears some specific relation to the world we all see about us. While there are not cows and stones, there are "certain half-deserted streets," as well as a flight of stairs, a beach and some women. That these objects of Prufrock's reverie are "literary effects" cannot be denied in one sense; but in the context of the poem--that is, to the dramatic character who is narrating the poem--they are as real as any cows or stones. One might speculate, in fact, that if Prufrock were inclined to think of cows and stones he would think of them in much the same way as he thinks of the streets or the women. These objects all exist, and we can recognize in them specific
objects which our own experience has taught us to recognize. What separates them from things we know empirically to exist is not the nature of the objects themselves, but rather Prufrock's attitude toward them. His point of view controls how they are seen, hence, within the context of the poem, their natures. The objects in the poem might--undoubtedly would--be described differently from another point of view, but what is important is that this is how Prufrock remembers them. The emphasis in the poem, in other words, is upon Prufrock's consciousness--how he sees things--rather than upon the things that are seen. We do not say with certainty "This is the setting of the poem," but rather, "this is how Prufrock sees the setting." This of course does not deny Prufrock a personality or a point of view; on the contrary, it demonstrates that Prufrock's personality and point of view dominate the poem to a greater degree than would exist if the objects he describes were given a more independent existence from him. Thus, although the objects which occupy the poem are not representations from an empirical world, there exists in the poem a world more real than the phrase "literary effects" seems to imply. The world in which Prufrock exists is not absolute, but it is nonetheless specific and concrete within the context of the poem.

The "literary effects and memories," then, are produced because Eliot's narrators so dominate the poems. To demonstrate this one has only to compare Eliot's monologues with those of Browning. First, there is a difference in the amount of accidental information about the
narrators. In Browning there is always implicit in the poem an objective and empirical (often historical) setting, a set of objects which Browning manages to make us see not just through the persona's eyes, but also objectively. The painting of the last Duchess, the nightwatch that catches Fra Lippo Lippi, the funeral of the Grammarian are all external "facts" that have a kind of implicit empirical existence that is separate from the persona. On the other hand, Eliot's narrators generally create their own worlds. That is, they create a setting that is usually "imaginary" or private, and then they respond to this created setting. But again, it does not follow that Eliot's narrators have less personality than do Browning's. In at least one sense they have more, or at least the focus of the poems is rather more upon the personality in Eliot than it is in Browning. For in Eliot, even the physical setting is an extension of the persona.

Also in Eliot's monologues there is a new emphasis upon the "voice" of the narrator. In Browning the narrator responds to something external; quite often his monologues are in reality only one half of a dialogue. The Duke of Ferrara, Fra Lippo Lippi, The Bishop of St. Praxedes, all make specific answers to obviously implied questions or gestures which in turn are responses to things they have said or done. In Eliot, if there is implied dialogue (as in Prufrock's, "Shall I say," it takes place entirely within the consciousness of the narrator; he formulates all of the responses, those of others as well as of himself. The correspondent is, in other words, only another element
in the persona's consciousness.

This special relationship between the narrators and their worlds alters the language in two important ways. First, Eliot's narrators speak in terms that are more "private" than is usually expected ("literary effects" perhaps). That is, their language is private in the sense one might expect when a person talks to himself about things he knows well. Second, these narrators speak in a manner that is highly rhetorical, and again the nature of this rhetoric is distinguished by its privacy. This special combination in Eliot's poetic language has long been a source of study, and the usual approach has been to trace its historical sources. Genesius Jones' study in this area is probably the best. Jones shows that Eliot found in the French Symbolistes a great interest in the possibilities inherent in the private, subjective use of words which resulted from their declining interest in the 19th century phenomenal, empirical world view. I have already suggested that Eliot's dramatic narrators seem to have only a minimal interest in the empirically perceived world around them--their interests lie in the "effects" of this world on their own consciousnesses. It would follow, then, that their use of the language might naturally be described in the same terms that Jones uses to describe the French Symbolistes, who "were concerned not so much with what was denoted by a word, or even a word's normal connotations, but rather with what a word could be made to connote through special handling of that word in poetry" (p.33), and further, that the best field for this kind of experimentation with the subjective use of words was in
the "world of the imagination or memory." As a natural consequence, Jones continues, the poet learns to use words in new combinations that may be denotatively nonsensical, but which in context form definitions among themselves. The reader of such poems "will be aware first of panoramas of connotation; then of delimitation; then, from each formulation, of a clearly outlined but alogical meaning" (p. 37). In addition, specific symbols may assume private and arbitrary meanings for the poet, and in such cases these meanings can be understood only by tracing the symbols through all the poet's work. For example, symbolic bells and flights of stairs recur often throughout Eliot's work.

It is difficult to find the language in "Prufrock" as obscure as Jones's description would seem to indicate (although records show that some early critics did), but the central points he makes are consistent with the way Eliot manipulates the language in "Prufrock." Just as the setting in the poem is conveyed entirely through Prufrock's own consciousness and is modified in a very personal (to Prufrock) way, so too is the language he employs highly personal. And just as the personal view of the setting focuses the reader's attention onto the personality of Prufrock, so does the use of a highly personalized language. The term "certain half-deserted streets" provides a striking example. Along with the other landmarks Prufrock recollects in the first stanza, these streets are undoubtedly to be taken as places he has visited, perhaps knows well. But he does not feel required to specify beyond the vague adjectives "certain" and "half-deserted!" The implication is clearly that in
Prufrock's own consciousness these streets are real and that this
description suffices for the purposes of his reverie. The streets are
perhaps clearly pictured in his consciousness, but the description of
them generalizes them in such a way that they represent not any particular
location but rather a mood or a feeling. This private use of language
serves to shift our attention from the streets to Prufrock's description
of them. Thus the language forces us to look not so much at the world
about us, the empirical world all men share, but rather at the way in
which Prufrock remembers his world and responds to it. We are made
aware both of the manner in which this world is seen and of the way in
which it is modified from the world we know (we all know our own certain
half-deserted streets, after all). Once again, Prufrock is what he
sees, and what he is also determines what he sees and how he sees it.
This is of central importance to the poem.

There is yet another way in which Eliot's use of language directs
our attention onto Prufrock's personality, and particularly onto the way
in which he sees himself in relation to other things. Eliot himself
gives an apt description of this kind of rhetoric in his essay "'Rhetoric'
and Poetic Drama." This essay begins with the assumption that rhetoric,
used judiciously, is a useful poetic technique, and that modern condemnation
of "rhetoric" is too simple-minded and therefore not wholly just. He gives
as an example of a fortunate use of rhetoric those passages in Shakespeare
"where a character in the play sees himself in a dramatic light" (Selected
Essays, p. 27). Eliot continues:
A speech in a play should never appear to be intended to move us as it might conceivably move other characters in the play, for it is essential that we should preserve our position of spectators, and observe always from the outside though with complete understanding. . . . And in the rhetorical speeches from Shakespeare which have been cited, we have this necessary advantage of a new clue to the character, in noting the angle from which he views himself. But when a character in a play makes a direct appeal to us, we are either victims of our own sentiment, or we are in the presence of a vicious rhetoric. (p. 28)

Although Eliot is speaking specifically of the drama, the application of the principle of "self-dramatization," or "seeing oneself in a dramatic light," is clearly applicable to the dramatic monologue, and can, in fact, be applied with few changes to most of the poetry Eliot has written. That is, in Eliot's monologues--in most of Eliot's poetry--there is an apparently conscious effort to create a situation in which the character, or the persona, sees himself dramatically. In the early poetry this usually takes the form of irony, which is perhaps the most "dramatic" way of looking at oneself. Prufrock, sees himself in a dramatic light, and it is largely from this dramatic attitude of his narrators toward themselves that Eliot's characteristic irony derives. This is true not only of the monologues; the same sort of "rhetoric" pervades "La Figlia Che Piange," for example, when the narrator concludes:

And I wonder how they should have been together!  
I should have lost a gesture and a pose.  
Sometimes these cogitations still amaze  
The troubled midnight and the noon's repose.

In the monologue, however, where the central character is developed sufficiently, it is especially appropriate for him to be concerned about
how he should regard himself and how others should regard him. Prufrock, for example, is continually trying to establish an appropriate point of view towards himself. This appears most obviously in outbursts such as:

No! I am not Prince Hamlet, nor was meant to be;
Am an attendant lord, etc.

But it extends beyond these explicit passages; the entire poem consists of various roles Prufrock tries out on himself, as well as various roles Prufrock imagines others might see him in. Eliot's use of a private and rhetorical language is eminently suited to the rapid shifts in moods and attitudes which result from Prufrock's self-examination. Since the language is so personal to Prufrock he is able to adjust it to suit his many-faceted reverie, and the language itself allows Prufrock to be more fully self-conscious and personal than the use of a more objective language would allow.

Both the setting and the use of language, then, direct our attention away from the poet and toward the persona, for both the manner in which the setting is perceived and the way in which the language is used are intensely private and personal to the narrator. This eliminates the personality of the poet from the poem in all but the most subtle levels, for although we know that somewhere behind the poem is the poet, directing and manipulating his creation, we do not know where to find him. We are forced to look at Prufrock if we are to look for a personality in the poem, and when we do look at Prufrock we are immediately faced with his own personality; there is nothing else to look at. Everything in the poem
is coloured by Prufrock, and Prufrock is dominated and circumscribed by his own image of himself. This is why the poem can shift so rapidly in mood, from despair to irony, and from self-pity to confession. For the focus of the poem is always upon the consciousness of the narrator, not on the external world, not even in the usual sense upon the effect of the external world upon the narrator. For since the external world in this poem is dependent upon the narrator's perception of it, it is no more stable than he is himself.

When we look at Prufrock himself we are reminded of Kenner's description of him, that he is "strangely boundless, . . . a centre of a field of consciousness, rather yours than his: a focusing of the reader's attention." Again, this description seems to deny more than it does in fact. Because his reverie is so private, it cannot be taken in quite the same way as we might take Browning's. I have suggested that the world which Prufrock inhabits is not absolute, but that it is, nevertheless, definite and concrete within the context of the poem. The same observation can be made concerning Prufrock himself. He seems boundless to us because we have little concrete information about him. We know that he is balding and that his arms and legs are growing thin, although we are not really certain that we know even this. What we know is that Prufrock is worried about his thinning hair and about his physical appearance. Even this, however is not quite accurate, for Prufrock is worried, as he tells us, about what the ladies will think about his physical appearance. As it turns out, we know almost nothing specific
about Prufrock in any public sense. But we do know what Prufrock thinks of himself from moment to moment, and what he thinks others might think of him. Thus, it is only in the objective sense that we do not know much about Prufrock; we have a good deal of subjective information about him. We are unable to say "Here is where his knowledge would have stopped;" we can not even say with any certainty, "Here is where his knowledge does stop." But we can say with certainty "This is the knowledge Prufrock uses at this moment."

This is not to suggest that Prufrock does not have a specific personality; or that the personality does not dominate the poem; or even that we cannot apprehend his personality. It only means that the personality in the poem must (just as in any poem) be taken on its own terms and that these terms are created within the context of the poem itself. And since the poem consists for the most part of the consciousness of the persona, it is Prufrock who sets out the terms on which we are to take him. Once again we are drawn into a situation in which there are no absolute contexts in the ordinary sense. Prufrock himself, like the poem, can be seen only as subjective. This is why discussion about the real identity of the "you" and "I" or of which Lazarus Prufrock has in mind is bound to be inconclusive. Prufrock's reverie is important wholly for its revelation of Prufrock's own subjective perception and consciousness--his personality.

But if the external objects in the poem (including Prufrock's appearance, history, etc.) cannot be apprehended directly, Prufrock's
personality can, for his personality is revealed by the way in which he sees the world. It is in this regard that Kenner's assertion can be misleading. Prufrock is surely "the centre of a field of consciousness," but it is not as certain that this consciousness is "more yours than his." There are, after all, a number of things that can be said with certainty about Prufrock: he is full of doubt, not only about how others will see him, but about how he should see himself. He is intensely concerned with his place in the universe, his own importance. He is intelligent enough to recognize with some clarity what is troubling him. And finally, he is concerned with establishing a point of view which will enable him, if not to come to terms with his weaknesses, at least to minimize their importance. Almost half the poem, in fact, is taken up with Prufrock's efforts to convince himself that perhaps it would not "have been worth it, after all."

It is Prufrock's concern with finding comfortable attitudes and masks that finally directs the reverie. Throughout the poem he endeavors to "see himself in a dramatic light;" he prepares faces, he poses, he directs various kinds of irony toward himself—all in an effort to find an angle from which he can view himself without self-recrimination but still with some element of accuracy. And these poses he tries are only secondarily meant to satisfy or delude others; they are primarily intended to provide him with a complementary view of himself.

In attempting to do this, Prufrock begins by attempting to establish some sort of relationship between himself and external objects
(either people or things or ideas). These relationships are important to him for they allow him to define himself through external objects. But in order to do this he must be able to manipulate both these external objects and his relation to them. It is in this sense that the character of Prufrock is developed not only by what he sees, but by how he sees it. Everything is present in his mind; nothing has any other independent existence. His own personality depends upon his ability to control what he sees and how he sees it, and when he loses that ability his personality is shattered. This characteristic is prefigured in the first stanza. From the beginning Prufrock invents (or recollects) a set of objects by which he can define himself, and he attempts to manipulate these objects in a way that will permit him to view himself in a dramatic light. He describes his journey, the setting and the route in terms which are at once personal and objective. They are objective in the sense that they are objects—the sunset, the streets, etc.—with which he can associate specific actions and poses. They are personal chiefly in his description of them. The evening is "spread out against the sky/ like a patient etherized upon a table;" the image describes Prufrock's attitude toward the sunset more clearly than it describes the sunset itself. Likewise, the "certain half-deserted streets," the 'one-night cheap hotels" are described in terms (as I suggested earlier) that represent mainly Prufrock's apprehension of them. But everything described in the first seven lines (to, "sawdust restaurants with oyster-shells") is described from a relatively detached, impersonal point of view. That is, Prufrock's
description of his imagined journey does two things. First, he describes everything in a way that links it to the narrator; everything becomes an extension of, or symbol for, Prufrock himself. Second, he manages to describe everything in an impersonal tone, as if he were only observing, and not participating in it. The result of this dual movement is that Prufrock succeeds in viewing himself objectively, impersonally. And as long as he can do this he can not only control his attitude toward himself, but in a very important sense, he can control his own personality--what he is really like (or at least his masks--what he seems to be like).

Of course Prufrock is not able to maintain complete control over his reverie. For in line 8 the streets which earlier were only "certain half-deserted streets" (a fairly neutral description) become,

Streets that follow like a tedious argument
Of insidious intent
To lead you to an overwhelming question. . .

The adjectives used here are more definite than the adjectives used earlier to describe the streets. They tend to be more personal to Prufrock, in the sense that they point toward the weakness in his personality; they force him to look upon himself without benefit of external symbols. For throughout the poem one of Prufrock's central concerns is to avoid the "overwhelming question," which, although it is not specified, clearly has something to do with himself, with his fundamental nature. Prufrock is unwilling to look at himself as he is, without creating some sort of dramatic situation in which he can be defined by his attributes or his actions or his surroundings. In short,
he is afraid.

Thus, as soon as the "overwhelming question" is introduced, he immediately attempts to avoid it by returning to his original set of objects, in this case his projected journey:

Oh, do not ask, "What is it?"
Let us go and make our visit.

And this is followed by a picture of the destination of that "visit":

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

The development of this first stanza (which prefigures the larger development of the poem itself) depends upon an intricate interplay between the things Prufrock thinks about and Prufrock's own consciousness of himself. Prufrock takes a number of objects--streets, etc.--and creates symbols from them, and he manipulates these symbols in a way that permits him to think about himself in a dramatic way--he sees himself in relation to a set of symbolic objects which represent to him a mood he wants to hold. Thus, the streets, etc., initially strike a mood of knowing cynicism with which Prufrock presumably wants to identify himself. And it works as long as he can control in his reverie the symbolic functions of his objects. But then the streets begin to change, becoming part of a web of metaphysical speculation about Prufrock's own purpose and meaning, and this new symbolic attachment is not as safe as the original one, where the streets had led him away from himself, not into himself. And as the "certain half-deserted streets" become "streets of insidious intent" that lead "you" (and "you" is again Prufrock's
attempt to objectify himself) to a personal question, Prufrock feels it necessary to stop the reverie abruptly with an almost direct admission that he cannot go further.

What happens in this process is that Prufrock is so concerned with his own mind (and personality) that he is unable to keep objects objective. He begins by trying to use these objects as symbols which will control a pose he wants to assume himself (as he prepares his face). If he can create the proper mood and feeling, and then modify himself to fit the mood and feeling, he will have been successful. Instead, his own uncontrollable personality is so strong--or at least so important to him--that it takes over the symbolic objects and alters the moods Prufrock has given them so that they begin to represent him not as he would like to be but as he is afraid he really is. Therefore he is obliged to stop, discard the first set of symbols (although they will pop up in his reverie again) and begin with another, hopefully safer, set--the yellow fog. But as happens again and again in the poem (particularly in the first half) the yellow fog slips into other symbols which return once more to the "overwhelming question." The poem is full of things, and these things, from streets and fogs to teacups and novels, are all used by Prufrock to try to escape out of himself into an objectified pose which will prove to be manageable.

Of these "things," the most important are the women, who are twice introduced and dropped before Prufrock finally takes them up for consideration. By the fifth stanza, however, ("for I have known
them all already...") they have become the most important symbol used by Prufrock; from this point they recur with increasing frequency until they become the sirens in the final lines of the poem.

That the women are central to Prufrock's reverie is made clear by the title of the poem itself, Prufrock's love song. But, it is a strange love song, primarily because the women to whom Prufrock is "singing" are used in the same equivocal way in which Prufrock uses all the other objects. They are merely symbols to be manipulated to suit Prufrock's need. There is no question, I think, but that the entire poem takes place only in Prufrock's mind; the women never appear in fact. It is also plausible to conclude that Prufrock never really intends physically to make his visit. In fact, the entire reverie develops in such a way to suggest that one of Prufrock's central concerns is to find a rationalization for not making a visit which he is convinced would be unpleasant. Of course this is what he does when half way through the poem he begins to suggest that the visit would not have been worth making.

If the women are taken as symbols of some journey--mental or physical--which Prufrock feels ought to be undertaken but even more must be avoided, their role in the poem becomes clearer. Like the streets and other objects in the first stanza they serve two functions for Prufrock. First, they allow him to look outside of himself because they are external to him. They are in the strictest sense objects to Prufrock. They possess no definable personality in themselves; they are faceless in
much the same way that the Hollow Men are faceless. They are described in collective terms, as "the women" or, when one appears individually, as "someone" (who is fully interchangeable with any of the others). And in most cases they are also described by the rhetorical device of synecdoche— they are arms, or voices, or gestures. Clearly Prufrock has created them, and he manipulates them for his own needs. But these women, like the streets, are objects by which Prufrock can define himself by means of his relation with them— his responses to them and theirs to him. What is significant in this is that not only Prufrock's responses but also the women's exist only in Prufrock's mind; he directs them all, and he tries to direct them in such a way that allows him to avoid an "overwhelming question."

This "overwhelming question" (and the similarly rhetorically phrased term, "to disturb the universe") is another of Prufrock's equivocations. It is hardly a novel suggestion that there is no way in which we can know for certain what Prufrock means by these phrases. Perhaps the question which will presumably disturb the universe is one to be put to the ladies. Perhaps it rather concerns Prufrock's identity. Or perhaps it is finally merely whether he dares to eat a peach. But the ambiguity of these terms is more profound than this. For there is nothing in the poem to suggest that Prufrock himself has any definite conception of what he means. Indeed, these phrases are used in the same manner in which Prufrock uses everything else in the poem. They mean everything and nothing. They too are symbols which Prufrock uses to
avoid making any specific comment upon himself. They sound grand, but they mean anything Prufrock wishes them to mean. They are like his description of "certain half-deserted streets;" and when they take on a meaning (or even suggestion of meaning) that is too personal to Prufrock, he drops them. An excellent example of this may be found in the third stanza in which Prufrock introduces the concept of time into his reverie. The whole tone of this stanza is one of evasion. It begins with the phrase,

And indeed there will be time

and this phrase is repeated six additional times. The force of this repetition is primarily to create a mood of passivity (a mood that was introduced in the sleepy "yellow fog" section). But even within this context of passivity Prufrock finds his reverie becoming again increasingly personal. First there will be time for the "yellow smoke that slides along the street" (and the association in Prufrock's mind with the yellow smoke, which is also making its pilgrimage along the street, is significant). Then there will be time to "prepare a face to meet the faces that you meet." And finally:

There will be time to murder and create,
And time for all the works and days of hands
That lift and drop a question on your plate;
Time for you and time for me.

This progression from the positively impersonal and objective smoke to the more immediate task of preparing masks to the sudden dropping of the "question" on the plate and the resulting emphasis upon "you and me" is one of increasing personal confrontation. Yet the whole passage is
phrased rhetorically in such a way that even the most personal dropping of the question is ambiguous. It does not need to be a question of personal significance; conceivably this question could concern anything. Yet there is no doubt that the question does represent to Prufrock something that is uncomfortably personal. This is made clear in two ways. The first is that every time the question is introduced its context suggests personal connotations. And secondly, Prufrock always reacts by dropping the question himself. The conclusion of this stanza accomplishes this neatly. The lines following the introduction of the question of "you and me" quickly re-establish the passive mood:

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.

The manner in which the three key terms--indecisions, visions, and revisions--are manipulated, first by rhyme and then by transforming the term "visions" with its subjective personal connotations into the term "revisions" is masterful not only in the poetry but also in the psychology of evasion. And the mundane "taking of a toast and tea" is the perfectly appropriate conclusion to such an escape. And it brings Prufrock back to the faceless room of faceless puppet-women talking of Michelangelo.

The next stanza repeats the pattern with one significant variation; it is more specific in Prufrock's mind--the picture is clearer. Rather than the highly ambiguous "preparing of faces" or "hands that lift and drop a question," the scene is clearly the room of women which
Prufrock, attired in specifically described finery, approaches by the (typically Eliotic) flight of stairs. However, the verbal ambiguity and equivocation remain. Still "there will be time" even if the time is associated with more specific actions than are present in the preceding stanza.

However, even the increasing specificness is manipulated. For, in the first place, Prufrock is specific only about superficial (even trivial) things: his clothing is described with more detail than anything in the poem. And when he describes his actions, they are all movements of retreat. He descends the stairs. The view the women have of him is from the rear. Even the lines,

And indeed there will be time
To wonder, "Do I dare?" and, "Do I dare?"

are marked by a certain ambiguity; one is led to ask if Prufrock is thinking of two separate things, or of a continual indecision. Is one of these "darings" different from the other. Again the probable answer is that not only are we unable to tell, but Prufrock himself is waxing rhetorically but meaninglessly. Does he dare risk uncomplimentary judgments from the women, or does he dare risk looking directly at his own personality? Or, perhaps, does he wish to avoid saying anything which is significant? What Prufrock is doing here, in fact, is again saying something which sounds significant and appropriate without meaning anything at all specific. And again when any suggestion of significant and specific meaning arises, Prufrock immediately shifts the focus of his rhetoric to escape:
In a minute there is time  
For decisions and revisions which a minute will reverse.

The nature of all of these special "literary effects"—the dramatic rhetoric, the private language, the symbol making—imply that they are all part of Prufrock's conscious lexicon. He introduces and manipulates these rhetorical techniques purposely, partly I have suggested to manufacture poses or masks that will both hide his real weaknesses and still appear credible enough to believe in. Another way of saying this (using terms which Eliot himself often used) is to say that Prufrock, throughout his reverie attempts to formulate a self-confession which will avoid confessing any of the weaknesses (and there are many) in his personality. All his literary effects are aimed toward this end, a fact which helps to explain both why he always stops short of real confession and why he always seems to be saying more than he really is. In this sense, Prufrock represents much of the worst in what Eliot saw as the vice of Romantic self-confession. By examining Prufrock's attempts at confession (even to himself) we can see clearly Eliot's objections.⁵

Throughout the first half of the poem, Prufrock makes a number of abrupt statements which look like confession. For example when he says:

I have measured out my life with coffee spoons, it appears that he has looked at his life and is confessing the weakness that he has found. On the surface this appears to be an accurate assessment of himself, but examination shows that it is not fully true.
In the first place, this statement is not literal; it is another piece of rhetoric, another symbol. Likewise when he describes his existence with the metaphor:

\[ \ldots \text{all the butt-ends of my days and ways,} \]
or when he exclaims:

\[ \text{I should have been a pair of ragged claws} \\
\quad \text{Scuttling across the floors of silent seas,} \]

we cannot take him literally. These are all rhetorical and symbolic exclamations. Just as we do not finally believe that anything he does will "disturb the universe," we do not believe that he literally wishes to be a crab. Further, Prufrock himself does not believe these things in a literal sense. They are all part of the rhetoric and self-irony that dominate his reverie, and they are all more dramatically appropriate than true. This is all part of Prufrock's attempt to see himself in a dramatic light. These exclamations are poses; and the poses are not really attempts to create any true or accurate picture of himself, but rather attempts to create poses that are suitable to the dramatic situation. The irony that arises from these exclamations is not that the assertion is true, or even that Prufrock thinks they are true. It arises from the fact that they have little to do with the truth. They are merely dramatically appropriate things to say and the test (to Prufrock) of their fittingness is not truth but dramatic appropriateness. That exclamations such as these are more true than false is irrelevant except that they show Prufrock is sensitive enough not to allow a complete falsehood to enter into his reverie.
That these exclamations are primarily attempts to escape a meaningful examination of his condition is made further evident by the fact that in most cases they are digressions from the central development of his reverie. The phrase, "I have measured out my life with coffee spoons," for example, breaks up a stanza that would possess a more perfect logical development without it:

For I have known them all already, known them all--
Have known the evenings, mornings, afternoons,

I know the voices dying with a dying fall
Beneath the music from a farther room.

Both the syntax and the sense of this stanza and the two that follow it, focuses directly upon the women who constitute Prufrock's symbol of the destination of his pilgrimage. Of these three stanzas in which Prufrock considers the women he wishes to visit, only one does not contain such a digression. This is the last of the three, the only one to deal exclusively with the women. However, it is the only one of the three in which Prufrock says he is digressing. It is ironic that the digression which he points out is not a digression at all. This stanza is about the women's arms (the first is about their voices and the second, their eyes) and the digression, as Prufrock calls it, concerns itself explicitly with the subject of the stanza, the women's arms.

The explanation for this (deliberate, it would seem) twisting of what is true by Prufrock lies in his continuing attempts to avoid commenting directly upon his own personality. The women, we have seen, represent to him an objectification of his own conception about himself,
an objectification which he attempts to control. That is, if the women represent to him something of his own weaknesses, the futility of his "presuming" or "beginning" with them undergoes a kind of transferral in his mind; if it is futile to approach the symbol of his personal failure, it is also futile to examine the failure itself. This kind of fatuous reasoning is most obvious in the poem whenever Prufrock finds himself closest to direct examination of his own personality. And by the same token, when he finds himself closest to true self-confrontation, such evasions as the "digressions" he uses in these stanzas become most obvious.

In addition, these three stanzas in which Prufrock argues for the futility of reconsidering what he has "known already" reveal an increasing sense of desperation. Quite clearly Prufrock is more comfortable dealing with things than with people. He attempts to create objective symbols of the women; again he does this in part through the rhetorical device of synecdoche. The women are in turn voices, eyes and arms, all of which are defined by gestures only. I have suggested the irony involved in Prufrock's labelling of his comments about the women's arms a "digression." But there is an additional irony involved in this, for we are able to see that in a sense which Prufrock himself perhaps does not understand, it is a digression; everything about the women is digression, for Prufrock's real pilgrimage is a personal one, and everything that is used to help him avoid that is a digression of sorts.

In the first half of the poem, then, Prufrock deliberately
attempts to create a reverie which looks like self-confession but which actually avoids it. Prufrock manages to combine rationalization with just enough truth to accomplish this, and the result is a dramatic, rhetorical pose which in most cases avoids making the final step into simple analysis of his personality. In fact, Prufrock has created a personality for himself which is a highly complicated rationalization for weaknesses which he does not wish (or dare) to admit. At the same time, however, there exists in the reverie a sense of desperation as Prufrock is driven more nearly back into his most basic self. The imagery signifies the increasingly personal nature of the reverie. The images which open the poem—the streets, cafes, smoke, etc—are chiefly impersonal and objective, more or less completely external to Prufrock. Because the images are "safe" for Prufrock to handle, he can associate himself with them in an impersonal manner. He can define himself by them and yet control them, consequently maintaining fairly full control over the personality which he creates for himself. But as the poem progresses the images divide into two categories. On the one hand they become more directly personal—from the apparel he wears to the insect "sprawling on a pin." And on the other hand they become even more externalized, particularly the women. Although the women are invented by Prufrock to suit his needs, they are also creatures over which he has less control than the purely material objects such as streets because they too are personalities, even if only small ones. This polarization of imagery is indicative of
Prufrock's increasing desire to keep his confession impersonal. The two short stanzas that follow this question, "how should I presume?" are in a sense the final desperate attempt that Prufrock makes to remain impersonal. After asking himself how he should begin, he answers with another rhetorical question:

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? . . .

Prufrock is attempting, first, to reintroduce the original symbols—the streets, the smoke, etc. But in this case the formulation is broken off because of its obviously unsatisfactory nature, unsatisfactory not only because this is clearly not the way to a woman's sensibility, but also because it is the way to Prufrock's own. For in addition to the streets and smoke, Prufrock has added the lonely men in shirt-sleeves, leaning out of windows, an image which clearly approximates Prufrock's own condition (it would be tempting to suggest that this is Prufrock's own posture during his reverie). Indeed, the image of the lonely men prompts the most highly self-dramatizing lament in the poem:

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

This, more than any of the similar "confessions" in the poem, has a sense of urgency about it, not necessarily because Prufrock actually wishes it, but because such a lament is necessary to rescue Prufrock from the image he has created of himself. He has come closer than he wishes to real self-confrontation, so he creates a dramatic image which serves
to drive out the more immediate one.

Immediately after this the poem breaks and Prufrock appears to make a whole new start, with an image that recalls the opening images of the first two stanzas, with their qualities of sensual passiveness (here sensual to the point of being sexual--although passive rather than active sexuality).

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.

It appears that the entire progression is about to begin again, with a created world of external symbols--the afternoon, the fingers, the floor--by which Prufrock can define himself. But the following lines reveal that Prufrock is at this point incapable of recovering his impersonal point of view for long. The lines,

Should I, after tea and cakes and ices,
Have the strength to force the moment to its crisis?

are abrupt in ways that suggest that Prufrock has lost control of his point of view. In the first place, the rhyme, which has previously been used exclusively to work back to objectivity, leads him now more deeply within his own underworld. That is, previously rhyme has been used in a sense as if Prufrock were conscious of it, as if he were manipulating it. On the other hand, the "ices-crisis" rhyme seems to upset and reverse Prufrock's conscious meditation. It recalls him suddenly and abruptly into a world--a point of view--he has been at pains to avoid. The irony in this rhyme is for the first time not
primarily an irony that Prufrock directs upon himself. And the remainder of the stanza works quickly and inevitably toward Prufrock's "crisis."

However, there is a final effort to create external symbols, to view himself and his situation ironically. But the symbols he chooses are radically different from those preceding. They are not from his own personal experience--his own private imagination--but rather are historical heroic figures who we see (but Prufrock apparently fails to see) are only half appropriate to the role Prufrock assigns them. John the Baptist and, in a sense, the "eternal Footman" bear certain ironic resemblances to Prufrock; but they leave no room for the kind of evasion of self that has marked his reverie to this point.

In addition the explicit use of a concept which has been centrally avoided to this point hurries the crisis. When Prufrock says,

Should I, after tea and cakes and ices,  
Have the strength to force the moment to its crisis? [my italics],

he, apparently unwittingly, involves himself in a complex of ironies that he cannot handle. In the first place, the term, "strength" involves him in a consideration of his own personality, for the dominant characteristic of his personality is its lack of strength. Consequently, he does force the moment to its crisis, ironically not because of his strength, but because of his weakness. In this sense, particularly as it comes immediately after four lines of pleasant daydream, it adds to the sense that the central confession, the point of lowest descent into his personality, is actually unintentional. The use of the word
"strength" has the appearance of a slip of the tongue. Thus, even if Prufrock is thinking only of his imagined visit to a room full of women when he says this, his words become so personal to him, so close to his own personal character, that the whole set of objective symbols he has constructed breaks down. Neither the women nor any of the familiar symbolic objects appear again in this stanza. Instead we get John the Baptist, whose death came through strength, not weakness, and Prufrock dissociates himself from John the Baptist with the weary (although still somewhat dramatic) disclaimer, "I am no prophet--and here is no great matter," a statement patently untrue in the second part, for here is a great matter to Prufrock. Likewise, the symbolic eternal footman represents almost entirely Prufrock's own personal failure and lack of character:

I have seen the moment of my greatness flicker,
I have seen the eternal Footman hold my coat, and snicker,

This is so personal that it is Prufrock's final dramatic and rhetorical pose, for following comes the only line in the poem that possesses absolutely no quality of self-dramatization, or irony; the only straightforward statement Prufrock makes about himself in the entire poem:

And, in short, I was afraid.

The force of this line is of central importance in the poem. It contains no self-deception, no self-irony; consequently it is the only line in the poem in which Prufrock actually confronts himself with a fact of his own condition without describing it in terms of external
objects or symbols. In this context its bareness and directness conveys a sense of terror, but also of purpose, that is absent from the rest of the poem. It is his confrontation with the "boredom and the horror" (The Use of Poetry... p. 106), but it is also the point of recognition which in all of Eliot's poetry is necessary for salvation. But here arises the final irony in the use of the term "strength." It has taken Prufrock some 85 lines to state this truth about himself, but instead of using it, Prufrock immediately begins to rationalize back to the "safety" of his dramatic (though false) poses.

Before we look at these final rationalizations, however, it will be necessary to examine one more aspect of the relationship displayed in this stanza between Prufrock's most personal consciousness and the world of objects to which he attaches himself. We have seen that the poem before this stanza is marked by a world that is entirely self-created. That is, everything is seen through the point of view that Prufrock establishes, and that, further, it is the point of view, not the external world, that finally occupies our attention. I have suggested that with the introduction of John the Baptist, a historical figure that has a real existence in its own right, this world Prufrock has created begins to crumble. And it crumbles because it cannot stand up to the implied world of moral values represented by John the Baptist. Thus, the final irony of the stanza is one which Prufrock does not see at all. In grasping for some sort of external symbol, Prufrock is led directly to his own personality, which he is forced to admit is weak.
This is what marks the essential difference between his confession—"and in short, I was afraid,"--and others, such as "I have measured out my life with coffee spoons," and "I should have been a pair of ragged claws." In these others there is a self-conscious mockery carried out by the persona upon himself, and a sort of artificial pose, a sense of dramatic appropriateness. Thus, these confessions are in a sense "impersonal." They are also false. Prufrock, in other words, as a dramatic character is capable of dealing with himself only in terms of external objects. We are reminded of Eliot's comments on the personality in *Knowledge and Experience*: "The more of a personality it [i.e., the "self"] is, the more harmonious and self-contained, the more definitely it is said to possess a "point of view" (p. 148). Prufrock is neither harmonious nor self-contained in this sense. He is divided in his point of view and the first half of the poem concerns itself with the tension caused by this division. And he is not self-contained in the sense that he finally does not possess the strength to look directly at himself, to be personal, in fact. In short, Prufrock himself lacks a strong personality, and his continual efforts to "escape from personality" must fail, for "of course, only those who have personality and emotions know what it means to want to escape from these things" ("Tradition and the Individual Talent.").

The remainder of the poem consists primarily of a number of rationalizations through which Prufrock attempts to decide that any decisive action would not "have been worth it, after all." There is a
shift into the past tense, suggesting that, as expected, Prufrock has indeed decided not to take any action. Instead of, "And indeed there will be time," or, "Shall I say," questions which anticipate a future, there is the rhetorical question, "And would it have been worth it, after all." The question is repeated four times, and it is phrased in such a way that to Prufrock the only answer is that which he finally gives: "NO!"

To arrive at this answer Prufrock adopts his old habit of thinking in terms of objects. The two stanzas which precede the final "NO!" contain long lists of the things that have filled the first half of the reverie: cups, marmalade, tea, porcelain; sunsets, dooryards, sprinkled streets, novels, teacups, skirts that trail along the floor, "and so much more." This, of course, is merely part of an attempt to avoid looking critically at the self, and instead to see the self in terms of objects and roles. These two stanzas in effect argue that the most intimate experiences and feelings of an individual are after all unimportant; the woman is not expected to take any interest in Prufrock's "buried life" or in the patterns of his nerves. What is important in these stanzas are the things, the objects which have to do with social patterns and, presumably, social roles. This is confirmed in the Prince Hamlet stanza in which Prufrock seems content to define himself wholly in terms of roles—-even more emphatically, in terms of dramatic roles. He is not suited, he tells himself, to play the heroic role, so he must be content to play the supporting role. Yet
whatever peace of mind is brought by the recognition of a fixed place in
the order of things is tinged with the regrets which accompany the
knowledge that it is a second rate position. It may be comforting to
know you have a secondary (at times foolish) role; it would be far more
satisfying to know you deserved the heroic role. Nevertheless, it is
significant that Prufrock finally chooses to define himself in terms of
acting rather than of being. This fact is emphasized by the fact that
the long description of his role is done without the personal pronoun.
He says "I" when he describes what he is not, but when he describes the
role he will accept he begins:

Am an attendant lord, etc.

This is highly unusual in a monologue in which the first person pronoun
occurs more frequently even than the definite article.

In the Prince Hamlet passage Prufrock finally reveals what he is
afraid of. He is afraid that his own personality is unimportant: he
imagines "the woman" dismissing both the confession of his most secret
and bitter personal experience as well as his deepest and most individual
psychological make-up. His imaginary woman is not only uninterested in
his being "Lazarus, come from the dead," but when his nerves are exposed,
thrown in pattern on a screen, the woman does not wish to observe, as
Prufrock imagines her, "turning toward a window" as she tells him, "That
is not it at all."

In addition, he knows that his social role is both hollow and
ill-played. It is really the role of clown, or at best, fool, satisfied
with "swelling a progress" and concerned mainly with such trivial matters as the cuff on his trousers or the part of his hair. Thus, having recognized that his attempts at self-definition through both private and social personality have failed, it is not strange that Prufrock should sink into a romantic dream to conclude his reverie. That the final lines are largely a romantic escape from Prufrock's recent discovery is made clear, I think, in a number of ways. Most obviously, there is an abundance of equivocation. Even the first denial of the mermaids is not definite: "I do not think that they will sing to me," suggests that, on the other hand, they might after all, and the final six lines have almost nothing to do with their singing to him; in fact, the lines:

We have lingered in the chambers of the sea
By sea-girls wreathed with seaweed red and brown,

implies at least two separate ambiguities. First, the lines suggest that even if the girls are not singing to Prufrock, they are sharing their chambers with him. Even more ambiguous is the syntax of this statement. At first sight it seems straightforward enough; he has lingered by (i.e., next to) the sea girls who are wreathed with seaweed. But the statement is phrased in such a way that it could possibly mean that Prufrock is suggesting that "We have lingered in the chambers of the sea" and while there, have been wreathed with seaweed by the sea-girls. Clearly this secondary possibility is not to be taken too literally, but it is consistent with Prufrock's habit throughout the poem of suggesting much that is largely rhetorical, of leaving an out
for himself. Taken together with the dreamlike, lyrical tone of the final lines (a tone missing from the rest of the poem) and the fact that the sea and the sea-girls seem to have little relationship with the imagery of the rest of the poem, this would seem to suggest that Prufrock cannot cope with the reality of his self-analysis and is consequently forced into a daydream. This surely is consistent with everything that Eliot ever said both about the personality and about romantic escape. Romanticism, in fact, was always to Eliot a result of too much reliance on the personality, hoping it will produce a kind of satisfaction it is not capable of bringing. Prufrock in part suffers from living in a time in which, to use a phrase from Eliot's essay on Dante, "it is difficult to conceive of an age (of many ages) when human beings cared somewhat about the salvation of the "soul," but not about each other as personalities." (Selected Essays, p. 233).

Prufrock lacks the "sense of intellectual and spiritual realities that Dante had" and consequently he does not seem to know what Dante (according to Eliot) knew: what use to make of his personal experience, particularly his experience with women.

What is particularly ironic in "Prufrock" is that Prufrock seems to recognize something of the importance of caring about "the salvation of the soul," but his values and ideas are so thoroughly "modern" that he takes this concern as another of his weaknesses. It has been suggested that he is an idealist without the strength to match his ideals. But even if he did possess the strength it is doubtful if he sees his
situation clearly enough to know what to do about it. He is no
prophet, not only because he does not have the strength to force the
moment to its crisis, but also because he does not possess the necessary
vision. He has only a vague feeling (hardly an idea at all) that his
personality might be important in some way that touches on spiritual
values. This expresses itself most clearly when he considers:

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 towards some overwhelming question,
To say: "I am Lazarus, come from the dead,
Come back to tell you all, I shall tell you all."

But the context in which this is put is clearly all wrong: Prufrock is
formulating a "love song" for an afternoon tea. This kind of comment
in that setting would have an effect like that of Carrie Nation on
America's taverns: it might break up the party but it will never revise
patterns of behavior. What is wrong in Prufrock's understanding of his
situation is that he confuses spiritual and social matters: spiritual
rejuvenation may be in order, but not as a remedy for his social
failure. This is a "love song," and a superficial one at that, and
Prufrock seems uncertain about the difference between dealing with a
social crisis and a spiritual one.

This confusion is associated with a theme that pervades most of
Eliot's work: the failure of human relationships. In specific terms,
the confusion between spiritual and social matters may be paraphrased
into terms of personality. Prufrock feels something is lacking, and
he senses, rather vaguely, that the lack is a spiritual one. But most
of the expression of this failure is made in terms of social personality. He also seems to recognize the superficiality in the conventions of the social world to which he aspires. He clearly knows that what he aspires to socially is superficial, (though he likes to describe it occasionally in spiritual terms), but all of his efforts are directed towards gaining those superficial and hollow goals he satirizes. In short, Prufrock feels that his personality is weak, but he thinks at the same time that those whom he would woo (or whom he would emulate) are flawed by personalities which are superficial and false. He vaguely senses that this condition is somehow indicative of a spiritual failure, but because the spiritual is so alien to his world, all his efforts towards "disturbing the universe" are also superficial, from preparing a face to rolling his trouser cuffs. And as he recognizes that these superficial remedies, all of which are merely refurbishings of the "personality," are bound to fail, his final remedy is escape into a pleasant romantic dream, a poor substitute for any real spiritual consolation.

One important result of this process in Prufrock's reverie is what it does to people. I have suggested that all of the secondary "characters" in the poem are seen only as objects; they have no independent life of their own apart from Prufrock's conception of them. The women who are presumably the objects of Prufrock's contemplation are not really women at all. For the most part they are arms or eyes or voices that exist only as they affect Prufrock. They are also mostly collective; when an individual appears he is always indistinct, always
merely "someone." I suggested also that Prufrock seems to think of the
women in this way deliberately because it permits him to manipulate them.
The women never speak; we hear only what Prufrock imagines (or fears)
they might say. Consequently it is really always Prufrock who is
speaking. The women are completely reduced to objects which are
extensions of his own personality. Perhaps he does this because it is
safer for him to reduce all personalities to his own level, perhaps it
is merely that he is incapable of doing anything else. But whatever
the reason, the result is clear. Prufrock's view of the world is
solipsistic: he is clearly most comfortable when his is the only
personality present, and this is clearly because his personality is
incapable of bringing him the satisfaction or fulfillment he desires.
In other words, the result of his weak personality is the reduction of
other personalities to nothing wherever possible, and this is possible
chiefly when one is alone. Thus Prufrock must decide not to make his
visit, just as the young man in "Portrait of a Lady" must escape to
Europe.

There is a chapter in Eliot's thesis on F. H. Bradley that
concerns itself with just this problem, and it is instructive to look
at it in terms of "Prufrock" (and many of the other earlier poems).
In Chapter 6, Eliot treats the question of the relationship between the
solitary individual with his own absolutely unique point of view and
other individuals with their various points of view. The argument is
that each individual possesses a point of view, a perspective, which
is absolutely private. In addition there is no standard objective criterion by which any individual's point of view may be measured or judged. Therefore, each man is, in a sense, an island, totally dependent upon his own subjective point of view (or in the jargon of Bradley, his own "finite centre"). Each individual's perception of his world, then, is for him the only possible "real" world. Now, this kind of subjective individualism must somehow be reconciled with a "social" world--a world that consists of many other individuals who all possess their own points of view. In other words, an individual must learn both that he sees things differently from every other individual and yet that he is part of a larger structure which is also a unity.

Reconciliation between these two worlds depends upon what Eliot calls "strength of personality." In Bradley's world of finite centres and immediate experience, the only way in which human relationships can be formed at all is through the "good will" of individuals, and this good will arises only when individuals are certain enough of their own points of view to be willing to accept the fact that others possess different and equally valid points of view. A strong personality, as Eliot uses the term, is most willing to accept the existence of other personalities; a weak personality, such as Prufrock's, feels that the existence of other personalities is a threat to his own. Consequently, in Eliot's words:
The more of a personality [the individual] is, the more harmonious and self-contained, the more definitely it is said to possess a "point of view," a point of view toward the social world. (Bradley, p. 148)

Prufrock does not, in this sense, possess a point of view toward the social world. Instead he attempts to deny its existence, or failing that, at least his relationship to it. So he concludes by creating a dream world in which everything as far as possible, operates from his own point of view.

Central as this question of the relationship of one personality to another is to "Prufrock," it is even more obviously treated in "Portrait of a Lady," written at about the same time as "Prufrock." One of the chief differences between the two poems is that "Portrait" deals with two specific and clearly delineated (for Eliot) characters; "Prufrock" with only one. The narrator of "Portrait," who in spite of the title is the central character, is similar to Prufrock in some respects. Although he is perhaps more humble about his lack of strength (he asks if he is "right or wrong" in several places), he is distinguished primarily by the fact that he cannot deal with other personalities. Whenever the Lady makes any kind of personal demand on him he retreats into a pose: his first concern is always to maintain his "self-possession," and when this becomes too difficult, he runs like a primitive animal. This pattern recurs in each of the three scenes. In the first, the narrator begins with a tone of superiority (reminiscent of the first stanza of "Prufrock") as he sets the scene. The tone is that of Laforgue--tired, cynical, yet with the understanding that the cynic is also part of the action. But
this is not the poet's attitude; it is the young man's. For when the Lady begins to make personal demands, when she sets the emotional trap for him—"How much it means that I say this to you"—he recognizes the "false note" and begins to suffer a primitive, perhaps panicky, reaction: "Inside my brain a dull tom-tom begins." And his only recourse is escape:

--Let us take the air, in a tobacco trance,
Admire the monuments,
Discuss the late events,
Correct our watches by the public clocks.
Then sit for half an hour and drink our bocks.

These last two images are particularly appropriate. In a situation in which one personality has been threatened by another,\[11\] what could be more reassuring than the "public clocks," which provide some sort of objective standards; and what better escape than the half hour in the pub?

In the second scene the relationship has already begun to sour. The Lady continues to set her emotional snare, cajoling, threatening, anything that might force the narrator to commit himself. He of course is equally determined to avoid commitment. When she begins to confess her private feelings and her "buried life" he "smile[s], of course,/ and go[es] on drinking tea." (This is reminiscent of Prufrock's attempts to confess himself being met with indifference. Eliot's characters are not interested in the buried lives of their acquaintances--only their own.) The social poses at least give a show of self-possession. At least the Lady interprets them that way and says that the young man is invulnerable. But this is really just another attempt to make him commit
himself emotionally through arousing his pity. As a result he must escape once more to his public activities, reading comics and noticing public scandals and murders (ironic crimes of passion). However, a new dimension, one which was not present in the first scene, is introduced at this point: the young man concludes by asking if his recollections of desires are right or wrong. This prefigures the last line in the poem—"And should I have the right to smile?"—and again suggests the sixth chapter of the Bradley thesis. In discussing the relationship between personalities Eliot comments that there can be no right or wrong, truth or error, from any single point of view:

I have tried to show that there can be no truth or error without a presentation and discrimination of two points of view. (Bradley, p. 142)

Since the young man's understanding of the Lady is only partial and superficial he does not really have any standard to measure truth or error. However, since at least he recognizes that there are two points of view present, he knows that he does not have the ability to judge right and wrong. Consequently, he is left in a kind of limbo typical of many of Eliot's characters, feeling that something is not quite right but not knowing exactly what it is, and consequently being forced to throw up his hands in despair and escape into some sort of isolation. Thus, his announcement in the final scene that he is going abroad is similar to Prufrock's decision to take his walk along the beach instead of visiting the women. It seems to me to be highly significant that
in this third section of "Portrait" there is far less description of settings and of the woman, and relatively more space devoted to describing the subjective feelings and moods of the narrator. Except for brief references to the stairs and the bric-a-brac, the room is ignored; all that is present are the demands of the woman--"Perhaps you will write to me"--and the narrator's panicky attempt to retain his self-possession. As a result, all that remains from the beginning of the poem is the basic conflict between personalities, and the resolution of the conflict is not a resolution at all, but rather an escape. The narrator appears to recognize that the conventional masks will not work:

> 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--

This is a disconnected and largely illogical parody of the earlier escapes into public activities, and it is introduced by a "confession" which again reminds us of the central theme: what constitutes the individual, isolated personality. How, in other words, does one know if the social smile or the personal terror is the more real. The narrator has already commented on this explicitly:

> I feel like one who smiles, and turning shall remark
> Suddenly, his expression in a glass.
> My self-possession gutters; we are really in the dark.

The ironic paradox which lies behind all this uncertainty is made quite clear in the concluding stanza. The narrator imagines himself abroad, having escaped the physical presence, but not the
influence, of the Lady, and hearing of her real death before he has come to terms with her demands as a personality--he is still sitting pen in hand,

Doubtful, for a while
Not knowing what to feel or if I understand
Or whether wise or foolish, tardy or too soon . . .

These of course are fine philosophical questions, civilly phrased, about the universal questions of man's relationships with others, but they are not the real question finally; that is suggested by the revealing line:

Would she not have the advantage, after all?

It is the personal terror that lies behind everything in this poem (as in most of the early poems), a terror that one's personality, one's individuality, might be eradicated. Like Prufrock, the young man in this poem is possessed by fear of being counted a nothing, of losing his personality. And he fears losing it because it is not strong and self-sufficient. The weakness of the personality makes human relationships merely a matter of "advantages" and of domination. The narrator cannot but think in terms of "having the right to smile"--a right that can come only when one is in a superior position. If it turns out that the Lady has the advantage, then the narrator loses his right to smile, and this loss is symbolic of a loss of individuality. Fear leads to egotism, and egotism gets confused with personality. This confusion is in part a confusion between the public masks and the individual life, and it results in the breakdown of human relationships in Eliot's poetry from
Prufrock and his women to the clerk and the typist in *The Waste Land*. The narrators of all the poems before *Ash Wednesday* suffer from an isolation that comes because they are afraid to admit the presence and the validity of other personalities equal to themselves. They are all, in one sense or another, solipsists; consequently they all suffer from moral confusion.

This theme can be seen in most of the early poetry. Usually the narrator or central character is, in spite of his efforts to remain inviolate, drawn into the "action" of the poem and as a result feels challenged or uneasy or afraid. This is what happens in "Preludes," where after the four little fragments consisting in the impersonal rendering of feeling and emotion, the final seven lines involve a response, and therefore involvement, in the action:

I am moved by fancies that are curled
Around these images, and cling: . . .

The "fancies" cannot but be the narrator's own responses. In addition, the interplay between the romantic and the anti-romantic in this poem is telling. Ostensibly the play on the "prelude" form—which is typically romantic—to describe an unromantic urban existence is intended to be in part a satiric comment on romantic sensibility. But this satirical effect is muted by the final lines, in which the narrator is unable to maintain the satiric stance, and is drawn sympathetically to his subject.

The same sort of pattern can be seen, even more clearly, in "La Figlia Che Piange." This poem opens with the persona clearly playing
the role of observer, a poetic stage-manager, placing his characters in appropriate poses. It then introduces a feeling that there remains something incomplete in this kind of pose:

So I would have had him leave
So I would have had her stand and grieve,
So he would have left.

The verb mad3 in these lines is ambiguous, suggesting that the pose and the action in the first stanza was not in fact satisfactory. And just as in "Preludes" and perhaps somewhat in "Portrait of a Lady" the initial pose smacks of romantic, melodramatic feeling. The final stanza then turns away from the melodramatic and describes, apparently, we are to believe, the actual parting: simply,

She turned away.

And as the melodramatic becomes the actual, there is a consequent emergence of the persona as an actor in the drama. Whether this is meant to represent a real experience of the persona, or only an image in the imagination, the pattern is clear. The persona is drawn into the action as the action becomes less "posed," less melodramatic, and rather more "real."

In short, the common element in these earliest poems is their subjective bias: the manner of perception that informs all of them is personal, in most cases so pervasively personal as to omit any attachment to "real" external things. Whether the influence of Bradley was strong or not in these years, the poems all deal with the fusion of perceiver and "object"—usually paying more attention to the perceiver than to the
perceived. Even in a poem such as "Mr. Apollinax" (which was written later than the others we have considered, 1915) where the central character is apparently Mr. Apollinax, the descriptions are all couched in terms of personal response: we know Mr. Apollinax only by the responses he invokes in the persona of the poem. In fact, several of the poems contemporary with "Mr. Apollinax" are informed by similar assumptions. "The 'Boston Evening Transcript'' and "Morning at the Window," for example, contain hardly any objective "things;" they are composed entirely of moods and responses of their personae.

However, I have also tried to suggest that there is pervading this early poetry a sense, usually a vague sense, that this kind of subjective manner of perception is not finally sufficient. There is a spectre of something outside, something "absolute" always lurking at the fringes of the personae's consciousnesses, and indeed of the poet's consciousness. It is this unwillingness to dismiss completely the presence--or possibility--of an external absolute outside the perceiver's consciousness that led Eliot to the next stage of his development, and possibly that led him to his careful study of Bradley. For throughout that thesis are continual references to the "approach to the absolute."
The thesis concludes,

And this emphasis upon practice--upon the relativity and the instrumentality of knowledge--is what impels us toward the Absolute.

And Eliot comments upon this final sentence (which concludes the present form of the work because of the loss of the final pages) that "it is
suitable that a dissertation on the work of Francis Herbert Bradley should end with the words 'the Absolute.'" The fact is that the first years in Britain (1914-1917, or so) saw Eliot increasingly occupied by external "objects of knowledge" and by non-human (strictly speaking) absolutes: the absolutes of "tradition," of "culture," and of "religion." Indeed, an essay such as "Tradition and the Individual Talent" could not have been written by the poet who was writing "Prufrock" and "Portrait." It represents a further stage in his development, a stage toward which Bradley very conceivably impelled him, and which was certainly influenced by Ezra Pound and T. E. Hulme.
CHAPTER 2 FOOTNOTES

1 The Invisible Poet, p. 35.

2 Elizabeth Drew's description of Eliot's dramatic characters is interesting in this context:
   It is their states of mind and not their social status which matters: attitudes not actualities.
   (T. S. Eliot: The Design of His Work. [New York, 1949], p. 33.)
Miss Drew, I think, exaggerates in the same way Kenner and many other critics do. The characters are "actual" enough--so are the social matters. It is chiefly that they are not treated in the fashion of the nineteenth-century novelist that leads to this sort of exaggeration.


4 One of the least fruitful literary debates arising from this (or any) poem raged in Notes & Queries for several months in 1950 and 1951 and finally failed to resolve the question whether the Lazarus mentioned by Prufrock is the Lazarus Jesus raised or the Lazarus from the Parable of Lazarus and Dives.

5 I am drawing for the most part on Eliot's long essay on "Dante," although there are numerous other references throughout his prose writings.

6 This unwitting telling of the truth by a character in the poem is used often by Eliot. For the most thorough explanation of how it works, see Cleanth Brooks' essay, "The Waste Land: Critique of the Myth," which appeared as chapter 7 in Modern Poetry and the Tradition (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1939) and has been reprinted a number of times.

7 For example, see my comments above on the lines,
   And time yet for a hundred indecisions
   And for a hundred visions and revisions.

8 One of the most common critical comments about Prufrock is that his idealism, in which he is similar to these heroic figures, exceeds his powers to act--a theme, incidentally, common to most of Eliot's work. See for example Grover Smith's suggestion that Prufrock's "tragic flaw" is his inability to act, and his "tragic curse" is his idealism; together they make him wretched. (T. S. Eliot's Poetry and Plays, [Chicago, 1956], Part I, Ch. 2).
See Grover Smith.

Hugh Kenner says that the relative lack of success of "Portrait of a Lady" is due to its uneven characterization (The Invisible Poet, p. 26). The lady, he says, is given specific characterization, the young man is not. This is true, of course, but it is not unusual for anyone to have a more specific idea of an acquaintance than of himself, and since the young man is the narrator, he will naturally be more specific about the lady, whom he observes more objectively than he does himself. So it is not really a question of uneven characterization; it is a question of different kinds of characterization.

It seems significant that Eliot chose his title from a novelist whose central themes include what happens when people try to dominate other people.

Kenner says that Eliot did not buy his own copy of Bradley until 1915, suggesting that Bradley's influence before that time should be discounted. However, it seems to me unreasonable to conclude that Bradley's influence could not have begun before Eliot purchased his book.
The personae of the earliest poems have several qualities in common. All are self-centred; all seek some way to bolster their egos, and in varying degrees all turn away from the outside world to accomplish this. Prufrock escapes into his own dream world; the narrator of "Portrait of a Lady" imagines himself escaping to another country; the narrator of "Rhapsody on a Windy Night" loses himself in a kind of adolescent cynicism, which is another kind of escape. In one way or another all are trying to deal with the difficulties that arise from living in a world in which others do not agree with our intuitive feeling that we are important. It is quite natural that we should want to think ourselves significant; and if acquaintances do not also think so, then there must be some kind of rationalization to compensate. The easiest way to do this, of course, is to discount contrary opinions. Thus, Prufrock suggests to himself that the ladies' lack of regard for him is connected with their superficial social world; so in varying ways do the rest of the personae. And once other's opinions are safely out of the way, then these personae are free to enter into their own private worlds in which everything radiates from, and returns to, themselves.
This, I think, accounts in part for the distinctive mood in all of Eliot's early poems, for whatever the means of escape, it is always somehow unsatisfactory, resulting in the "slight ache" which Kenner says marks the early poetry.\(^1\) Besides the obvious problems, it is too exhausting to be always creating a dream world, and one of the ways in which poems such as *Ash Wednesday* and the *Four Quartets* differ most strongly from the early poems is in their relative peacefulness and serenity of tone (although they deal with many of the same themes).

Much of the poetry between *Prufrock And Other Observations* and *Ash Wednesday* is concerned with the search for ways to resolve this human dilemma, and the poems written between 1915 and 1920 (chiefly the quatrain poems and "Gerontion") explore a number of possibilities (some fairly radical) regarding the personality. It is during this time that Eliot wrote "Tradition and the Individual Talent" suggesting that poetry should aim for the "extinction" of the personality. And several of the quatrain poems--notably "Sweeney among the Nightingales" and "Burbank with a Baedeker . . ."--nearly manage to do this. These poems are impersonal in the same way that Joyce's work is; it is witty and intellectual (but not sterile) and there is always the sense that the artist creates but does not enter into his work. The sense of the impersonality of these poems is increased by the fact that there is no distinctive narrator-personality as there is in the monologues, but even "Gerontion" is more impersonal than are any of the earlier monologues.

But whatever the similarities, "Gerontion" and the quatrain poems
are obviously different enough to prevent many meaningful generalizations. In general, the quatrain poems focus attention pretty squarely upon objects rather than upon a consciousness or personality which perceives these objects. In "Gerontion" Eliot returns to the individual narrator, and consequently there is more emphasis upon the consciousness (and personality) of the narrator. Gerontion, one might say, is Prufrock with a sense of history; that is, a more specific knowledge of what cannot be ignored. What Eliot tried in the formal quatrain poems stands between Prufrock and Gerontion, but even though some of the quatrain poems are very fine, they are in a sense a dead end; the major development moves from "Prufrock" and the other early monologues, through "Gerontion" to The Waste Land.

In saying this I do not wish to imply that the quatrain poems are unimportant; on the contrary they allowed Eliot to see how far his "theory of impersonality" could be taken, and in what directions it could be made to work. For that reason it is necessary to look at some of them in detail.²

The quatrain poems (and to some extent the poems written in French) explore certain possibilities for the poet's voice. While it may be dangerous to generalize about a group of poems whose only obvious similarity is a formal one, there are some things which may be said about these poems as a group. First is the form itself. The regularity and the restrictions imposed by the short-lined, rhymed quatrain stanza foster objectivity. It prevents a voice inclined to stray off the
point; it discourages the use of a personal narrator at all (the one quatrain poem which uses a personal narrator, "A Cooking Egg," is the least successful of all Eliot's monologues). In most of the quatrain poems, Eliot is content to use an impersonal voice, a voice which is more apt to think than to feel, to describe than to engage in introspection. It is generally satirical, intelligent and clever rather than passionate or emotionally charged. This is apparent not only in the numerous intellectual twists, barbs and jokes, but also in the uneasy mixture which results when satire is combined with a direct passionate appeal. For example, in "A Cooking Egg" the narrator's lament, "Where are the eagles and the trumpets," is not really compatible with such satirical passages as the "I shall not want . . . in Heaven" passages. The freedom allowed by the irregular form of most of Eliot's monologues is far better suited to a personal narrator's mental, psychological and spiritual contemplation. Prufrock, for example, uses long, sonorous lines to escape the rigours of thinking; he uses rhymed couplets to escape emotional traps; he uses blank verse to play Polonius' dramatic role; and he uses a lyrical free verse to wander inconclusively off at the end. This range is simply not present in the quatrain poems; they do a different thing. The short line and the rhyme work best in an objective manner--to describe, to set together disparate facts or ideas for satirical effect. The following stanza provides an excellent example of the quatrain's strength:
The couched Brazilian jaguar
Compels the scampering marmoset
With subtle effluence of cat;
Grishkin has a maisonette.

That Grishkin is described as feline is not unusual, but that her maisonette is connected with the jaguar's subtle jungle skills is, and the comparison is made in a witty and sophisticated manner. The "voice" which makes this comparison is not at all the kind of subjective personality present in the monologues. And the mood of the poem is created by playing one more-or-less objective fact against another, not by the manipulation of objects by a definable personality.

Perhaps the specific manner in which the quatrains strive toward impersonality can best be illustrated by comparing some of them with such earlier non-dramatic short poems as "Cousin Nancy," "The Boston Evening Transcript," or "Preludes." The quatrains place a diminished emphasis upon the personal response and a corresponding increase in emphasis upon certain external and apparently incontrovertible facts, and there is a corresponding change in the kind of imagery and the way in which it is used. First, the imagery used in the quatrains usually appears to be more objective, more factual, and less dependent upon a personal narrator for effect. Partly this is due to the method of the poems which is one of presenting side by side two or more different ideas or points of view. The fact that there are different points of view within a single poem prevents any one subjective point of view from dominating. On the other hand, many critics have complained about the more outrageous imagery found in the early short poems, images such as
the "damp souls of housemaids/ sprouting" like potatoes, or the wave
to La Rochfoucauld as one enters the door, or the final seven lines of
the "Preludes" in which a voice--presumably the poet's, but we are never
quite sure--intrudes with the highly personal,

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

It should be noted, however, that in themselves, none of these images is
any more outrageous than several images from "Prufrock" or other mono-
logues: nothing can compare with "the evening spread out against the sky/
like a patient etherized upon a table." The reason that the Prufrockian
image is acceptable is that it is made by Prufrock himself, and is in
keeping with the character of Prufrock. However, in the shorter poems
there is no specific narrator to whom the image can be attributed, and
therefore the image is in a sense too "personal" for the poem. In the
quatrain poems this problem is avoided by keeping the imagery straight-
forward and factual. If there is anything unusual or striking about the
imagery in the quatrains it is, first, that it is absolutely accurate to
objective observation, and second, that the dissimilar images are often
thrown together in order to accentuate the two points of view. In
"Whispers of Immortality" for example, one might well wonder what
Grishkin is doing next to Donne and Webster, or in fact, what Grishkin's
maisonette has to do with the manner in which the Brazilian jaguar compels
the marmoset. Of course, when one understands the method of juxtaposition
that Eliot is using one is no longer troubled by this unusual kind of abbreviation, for the images themselves are always objective and straightforward.

To take another example: if we compare the Emerson image from "Cousin Nancy" with the Emerson image from "Sweeney Erect" we see a similar result. In "Cousin Nancy," Emerson, "guardian of the faith," represents the aunts' attitude toward their niece, the narrator's attitude toward the aunts, and perhaps even the narrator's attitude toward Emerson. His irony is not really very clearly directed: is it Emerson, the aunts, cousin Nancy, the narrator—or any number of possibilities—who finally, 

... were not quite sure how they felt about it?

The imagery does not really call in any theory of history or any historical fact for consideration. "Waldo" has merely become a symbol for old womanish New England conservatism. However, in "Sweeney Erect" the reference to Emerson, more clearly a calling in of history, indicates a central theme in the poem. The stanza in which this occurs is placed centrally in the poem, and requires us to compare Sweeney, the man, with a theory of history that attempts to explain man's relationship with tradition:

The lengthened shadow of a man
Is history, said Emerson
Who had not seen the silhouette
Of Sweeney straddled in the sun.

The insertion of this stanza in the middle of the poem raises two questions. First, it asks us to question Emerson's concept of history and of human
nature: is the history of man, all man has achieved and recorded, to be summed up by Sweeney in a brothel, by Sweeney erect, in both the sexual and the Miltonic suggestions implied by the term. And second, it suggests that Sweeney is man "uncorrected by tradition" (or history). This suggestion then recalls the first two stanzas of the poem which imply, among other things, both an alternative view of history and something of the permanence of a flawed, violent human nature. Thus, the reference to Emerson in this poem introduces the theme of tradition for serious (although still ironic) consideration.

This kind of imagery found in the quatrain poems depends, as I said, partly on the fact that there are always at least two more or less objective points of view presented. It also depends upon the fact that there is a stronger and more objective sense of tradition present in these poems. Often it is history itself—or a view of history—which provides at least one of these points of view. In many of the quatrain poems the two points of view are really two views of history set side by side for inspection. "Burbank with a Baedeker..." perhaps illustrated this most clearly and completely. The two central views of history belong to Burbank and Bleistein, but suggestions of other views are also present: Ruskin's seven laws, the Greek mythology again, etc. The poem begins with an ironic contrast between Burbank's tryst with the Princess Volupine and the heroic, mythical terms in which it is rendered:
Defunctive music under sea
   Passed seaward with the passing bell
Slowly: the God Hercules
   Had left him, that had loved him well.

The horses, under the axletree
   Beat up the dawn from Istria
With even feet. Her shuttered barge
   Burned on the water all the day.

Cleopatra become prostitute; and while

   She entertains Sir Ferdinand

Klein,

Burbank meditates upon

   Time's ruins, and the seven laws,
another view that attempts to explain the tradition. But the final
stanza, in which Burbank thus meditates, the view of history is one of
decline from a heroic age:

   Who clipped the lion's wings
And flea'd his rump and pared his claws?

Bleistein on the other hand brings with him connotations of an
"evolutionary" view of history. His

   lustreless protrusive eye
Stares from the protozoic slime
At a perspective of Canaletto.

Yet he too is representative of a decline:

   The smoky candle end of time
Declines.

The implication must be either that Bleistein represents a coming full
circle of history, or more likely the suggestion that the individual is
always capable of declining; he is never far from the protozoic slime
from which he first crawled.\textsuperscript{5} The next line, however, puts both views into perspective, and incidentally introduces the germ of a symbol that is to become increasingly important in Eliot's poetry.

On the Rialto once.

Here is the condensation of history, that of Bleistein, of Burbank, of Ruskin or of the Greeks, into an instant of time. The birth, maturation and decline of Bleistein, and the decline from a heroic age are reduced to the fragment, "On the Rialto once." All actions and all types exist in every age; everything can be found in any instant of time. Because things and people do not change, history and tradition become more important.

The religious tradition is used in similar ways. Like the historical tradition in these poems there is no formulated view toward it; it is just there, objective and transcendent of any single view. The emblematic motto in the epigraph to "Burbank with a Baedeker . . ."--"nothing is permanent unless divine; the rest is smoke"--indicates the manner in which tradition and religion are used in all of these poems.

"Mr. Eliot's Sunday Morning Service" illustrates this clearly. The pictures on the church windows are symbolic of the permanence of the religious facts, and are ironically juxtaposed with the history of a "controversial, polymath" theology. The poem begins with a picture of the "Word," the fact of Christianity:

In the beginning was the word.

But the word--or rather the human understanding and perception of the
word is altered by the "enervate Origen," an early theologian whose "heresy" was to begin the humanising of Christ. But the following two stanzas carry the implication that the polymath speculations of men or of schools ("A painter of the Umbrian school" designed the window) do not alter the fact of Christ. These two stanzas describe the picture representing the baptism of Christ, a picture that has cracked and faded with age.

But through the water pale and thin
Still shine the unoffending feet.

It is the work of man, and it fades. The use of the word "still" with its connotations of both quiet and permanence emphasizes this.

The first half of the poem deals with the contrast between the permanence of the external fact and the shifting views of the fact through history. The second half contrasts the modern service with another picture of permanence. Situated between the modern "sable presbyters" taking the offertory, the bees (new priests of the epicene), and Sweeney in his "baptismal font" appears the description of another scene from the windows:

Under the penitential gates
Sustained by staring Seraphim
Where the souls of the devout
Burn invisible and dim.

The "souls of the devout" provide another image suggesting permanence. Like the "Word" and the picture of the baptism of Christ, the importance of this picture is not so much that it is affirmed as true, but that it is a standard that can be used to make judgments. It is the presence
of this kind of absolute, external standard that creates the central difference between these poems and the earlier ones. Without these pictures one would have to make all judgments upon Origen and the modern "sable presbyters" and upon Sweeney in his bath from standards brought from outside of the poem. This is really how the earlier poems work; they depend upon the assumption that, for example, the reader will recognize what Prufrock's character is lacking merely from the description of his character (the result is the "slight ache" Kenner mentions). There is only a sense of failure and frustration in the earlier poems, but nothing definite and provable. In the quatrain poems the points of view become more specific; the poems themselves contain the standards (often a number of different kinds of standards, in fact) by which things, ideas and characters are to be judged. (One recalls the remark from Eliot's thesis on Bradley I quoted in the previous chapter:

there can be no truth or error without a presentation and discrimination of two points of view.)

Thus, "Mr. Eliot's Sunday Morning Service" does not so much affirm the "truth" of Christianity as it explores the possibility of judging human and institutional values by external forms. It represents a possibility of combinations of facts and attitudes and suggests that (unlike Prufrock's world) changing human attitudes may not change the truth. Thus, in these "impersonal" poems, poems in which the poet and the personae both tend to disappear from view, the "points of view" (as Eliot uses that term in the
thesis on Bradley) become increasingly specific and definite. In a sense, the personae of these poems fade before large numbers of specific and external facts. Instead of the personal consciousness of the personal narrator contemplating itself and other individuals, these poems make use of less personal, more rational voices, looking outward for hard facts. And these facts are in a sense larger than the individual consciousness, and more permanent.

As I mentioned before, all Eliot's poems exhibit grave distrust of human relationships and of the individual as a reliable moral arbiter. But where poems such as "Prufrock" suggest these human weaknesses in terms of a feeling of emptiness (a "slight ache"), the poems we have just considered represent them in a more objective manner by setting several alternative, historical, religious and social points of view side by side for comparison. Thus they have become less personal because more objective. But they have also become in a way less human. There is always a danger for the poet (particularly one trained in philosophy) to lose sight of the individual in his search for universal truths. But although Eliot often seems about to lose his sense of compassion for the individual, something (perhaps his dramatic temperament) seems to check him, to cause him to return to the individual. After the relatively objective quatrains poems he returned to the monologue in "Gerontion."

Before going on to "Gerontion," however, we should look for a moment at Eliot's one attempt to combine the personal perspective of
the monologue and the objective form of the quatrain form. "A Cooking Egg," if not really successful, is yet one of the most interesting and ambitious of the quatrain poems since it is also a monologue. Instead of the usual impersonal voice which presents different points of view, its persona is a dramatic personality with a specific point of view. It is different in this even from "Mr. Eliot's Sunday Morning Service" since in the latter poem the persona, as we have seen, represents an ironic view of several positions; if it were not for the title, we would have no reason to see the poem as any more "personal" than, say, "The Hippopotamus." However, in "A Cooking Egg" the persona-narrator is clearly relating and considering a personal experience which has affected him in the way we see Prufrock and others being affected.

There are in "A Cooking Egg" two rather disturbing shifts of tone which are due, I think, to the mixture of the impersonal and the personal. The poem would flow more smoothly and be more unified if the four "I shall not want . . . in Heaven" stanzas were omitted. The first two and the final two stanzas are personal in the way all the monologues are personal; taken together they create a scene in the narrator's mind, which he reflects on and reacts to (producing an emotional response). In the middle four stanzas the point of view suddenly shifts. The narrator presumably remains the same, but suddenly the whole tone changes to that which marks most of the quatrain poems. The quatrain form, as we have seen, can support this
kind of change, but the monologue cannot, without better psychological preparation. There is too large a leap from the witty and objective, "I shall not want Pipit in Heaven," to the much more deeply felt, "But where is the penny world I bought" (or even more, "Where are the eagles and the trumpets"). The form prevents enough development of a psychologically real dramatic figure (a personality) as narrator to make this kind of mental and emotional leap plausible (although a narrator like Prufrock can, because he is a personality). The problem with "A Cooking Egg," then, is that although its two points of view are probably rationally compatible, and even suggest a sense of unrealized hopes in their juxtaposition, the juxtaposition itself lacks both psychological and poetic verity. The problem, in a sense, is the obverse of that which we see in "Morning at the Window." In that poem there are images which depend upon a strongly individualized narrator who, unfortunately, is absent. In "A Cooking Egg" the narrator is present, but it is difficult to believe in his imagery; in addition this is the only poem in which Eliot tried to use a prescribed and regular form for the monologue. The highly formal poem, in effect, proved to be too objective for the kind of personal treatment Eliot wanted to employ, and after experimenting with it, he returned to the monologue that used a free verse.

One additional point cannot be ignored. I mentioned early that dramatic poetry avoids many of the most obvious problems regarding the intrusion of the poet's own voice into the poem, since the narrator's voice does not allow such an intrusion. In the quatrain poems--and
significantly, in the French poems which are their contemporaries—this is hardly the case. Consequently there are several cases in which Eliot seems to speak in his own voice. One thinks immediately of "Mr. Eliot's Sunday Morning Service" or "Mélange Adultere de Tout" which seem to be observations made specifically by Eliot upon himself. There is also perhaps the introduction of the Eliotic voice in a line such as, "Donne, I suppose, was such another" in "Whispers of Immortality," and there is the veiled naming of his own age and situation in the epigraph to "A Cooking Egg." Individually these are small signs, veiled by foreign language, irony and quotation. Yet together they are important for they begin to point to the quite specifically personal narrators in Ash Wednesday and Four Quartets. Although small, this is surely a sign that Eliot is moving from the position stated in " Tradition and the Individual Talent" that "Poetry is an extinction of personality," to the comment made some 20 years later regarding the introductory poem to Yeats's Responsibilities:

...the naming of his age in the poem is significant. More than half a lifetime to arrive at this freedom of speech. It is a triumph. (On Poetry and Poets, p. 300)

These veiled, but public, references to himself represent a tentative attempt at personal expression, and is part of a gradual development of the freedom to be personal in his poetry without being "confessional." Again in the essay on Yeats Eliot says that the mature poet is one who "out of intense and personal experience, is able to express a general
truth; retaining all the particularity of his experience, to make of it a general symbol." *(On Poetry and Poets*, p. 299). These poems represent an initial step in that direction. "Gerontion" is another.

Eliot returned to the monologue in "Gerontion," but the formalism and the impersonality of character he learned from the quatrain separates "Gerontion" from the earlier monologues. In "Gerontion" the centre of interest returns to the consciousness of the individual narrator, but there is a relative shift in emphasis away from the process of the consciousness in reverie toward the objects of perception. Gerontion, although still a "personality" is not so exclusively concerned with his own personality as is, say, Prufrock. This may have something to do with the age of the narrator, for as an old man his condition is more static than is Prufrock's. As a result, he is more concerned with his past, both personal and racial, than any of the earlier narrators are.

In Gerontion's reverie there is an overwhelming sense that everything is settled, final. Unlike Prufrock, to whom there is always the sense of impending action, or at least the possibility of action, Gerontion begins his monologue with a review of his past which suggests irrevocable loss of his "moment of greatness":

I was neither at the hot gates
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.

We catch Prufrock as if in the process of his experience (though only imagined), experiencing, in fact, largely in the present tense. Prufrock
is presently missing his experience; the poem begins with the injunction: "Let us go." Gerontion, on the other hand, begins by reflecting on the already missed experience. His house is a "decayed" house, Prufrock's is decaying. Thus, in "Gerontion" there is a sense of the irrevocable pastness of the past, even though this past still lingers in his memory. It cannot be recovered, only remembered. The pattern of the past determines the pattern of the present, for Gerontion, and thus he sees his past as binding. For him history is servitude, not freedom.

It is in part because of the static nature of Gerontion's conception of himself that history, both personal and racial, is an important outside forces for him. His own past is to him a final, objective thing. It is defined in terms of what he did not do and what he has lost; it is in these terms that his own history is so final. The possibility of regaining, or even redeeming, the past is hardly considered, and is consequently rejected out of hand. Likewise the "cunning passages and contrived corridors" of history, and the loss of power to meet sensually with God or man (or woman), represent merely an extension of this sense of finality. History in "Gerontion" is a fact; it is a fact both because it is irredeemable to Gerontion, and because it so thoroughly defines him. It has become to Gerontion a symbol of his personality; he thinks he is what he has done (or failed to do). All he can do is think about it; thus the loss of all sensual reactions and abilities. Because he has tried to bury his personality with his past, he has become a "dull head among windy spaces;" his thoughts (and the emphasis upon "thought" is
prominent in the poem) are "thoughts of a dry brain in a dry season." Unlike Prufrock, who never rejects the possibility of both thought and sensation, Gerontion has lost his passion. He says of himself:

I have lost my sight, smell, hearing, taste and touch:

and later

These with a thousand small deliberations
Protract the profit of their chilled delirium
Excite the membrane, when the sense has cooled.

There is also a suggestion that Gerontion's dryness is not only personal; he is a dull head among "windy spaces" and a dry brain in a "dry season," which implicates also the age. In this respect the poem is "about" a general dissociation of sensibility, a separation of thought and emotion.

Because Gerontion is no longer in the midst of his life, he cannot as easily rationalize all of his failings away as the early narrators try to do. Since the memory of his past is all that remains for him, and he cannot look to a promising future, he looks on his past as concrete and real; he takes his life and history more seriously than many of the early narrators. Instead of "I have known them all already" Gerontion thinks about his past with real moral seriousness:

I that was near your heart was removed therefrom
To lose beauty in terror, terror in inquisition.

In short, Gerontion is more ready to think in terms of external facts, and the chief of these facts are the past and religion. Gerontion sees what the others hadn't, that to come to terms with oneself, one also has to come to terms with men and God, and to do that, one has to acknowledge
and take seriously their independent existence. Man's past and his religious feeling are seen as "facts" in "Gerontion" in the same way as they are in "Burbank" and "Mr. Eliot's Sunday Morning Service."

However, this knowledge is gained at great cost, the loss of sensual capacity. Like the persona of *Ash Wednesday* Gerontion begins his monologue rejecting his own sensuality, and by the middle of the poem he is limited to merely intellectual responses. In one central passage the injunction to "think" occurs five times in 18 lines. In this sense Gerontion might be said to be "depersonalized" but if so it is false and unsatisfactory impersonality, arising from his own abstraction of himself. It comes from a division between the sensual self and the mental self that is implicit in the rejection of the lost sensual powers. Thus, it is rather a fragmentation of the personality than an objectification, or universalization of it. As the poem progresses, Gerontion moves from sensual to purely mental poses. The first 28 lines depict (in sensual terms) the loss of a sensual capacity that was actually never used, but is nevertheless rejected.

> I was neither at the hot gates  
> Nor fought in the warm rain . . .

Even the present condition of Gerontion is represented in sensual terms:

> 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.

And he sits listening to the goat (lust?) coughing in a field, while an old woman sneezes about her work in the kitchen.
There is a sense here, however, of the narrator's disgust at this sensually apprehended surrounding. The sensual terms he used to describe the setting are connotatively pejorative: the landlord was "spawned," and he "squats" on the sill; both he and his house are "blistered" and "patched and peeled." This disgust is made explicit as Gerontion's attention shifts from the house to the tenants who are seeking in their perverted ways a "sign." Sensuality to Gerontion has become so corrupt that even the religious images are sensual and uninviting:

In the juvescence of the year
Came Christ the tiger

In depraved May, dogwood and chestnut, flowering judas,
To be eaten, to be divided, to be drunk.

All this as the tenants of the house continue to pervert the sensual apprehension of things; "communion" is taken,

by Mr Silvero
With caressing hands, at Limoges
Who walked all night in the next room;
By Hakagawa, bowing among the Titians;
By Madame de Tornquist, in the dark room
Shifting candles; Fraulein von Kulp
Who turned in the hall, one hand on the door.

However, Gerontion's disgust with the sensual is clearly tempered by his regret at having lost the capability himself, and several times he interrupts a sensually phrased description to lament his own dryness. He first describes himself as,

an old man,
A dull head among windy spaces.
He is only head, having rejected passion, sensual capacity. And so he is only disgusted by it, seeing it only in its perverted state. All that surrounds him is perverted sensuality; he calls it "windy spaces," that surrounds his "dull head" and as the poem progresses the wind itself becomes more active, seems to act more directly upon Gerontion:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Vacant shuttles} \\
\text{Weave the wind. I have no ghosts,} \\
\text{An old man in a draughty house} \\
\text{Under a windy knob.}^{8}
\end{align*}
\]

Gerontion is a dry head that translates what passion he sees about him into winds and draughts, having rejected not only the perversions of the tenants but the fighting at the hot gates and the coming of "Christ the tiger."

Hence, the next part of the poem begins with Gerontion's attempt to translate all of his experience into pure knowledge. He turns to history as it can be perceived conceptually:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{After such knowledge, what forgiveness? Think now} \\
\text{History has many cunning passages, contrived corridors} \\
\text{And issues, . . . [italics mine]}
\end{align*}
\]

But history cannot be made to speak only conceptually to the dry brain, and in spite of the emphasis upon knowledge and the repeated reminder to "think now," Gerontion continually slips back into history's sensual lessons and confusions. History becomes as a woman, to be apprehended wholly or not at all:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{She gives when our attention is distracted} \\
\text{And what she gives, gives with such supple confusions} \\
\text{That the giving famishes the craving.}
\end{align*}
\]
In spite of his "thinking" Gerontion describes history's lessons sensually: she gives with "supple confusions" that "famish" the "craving." In the following lines Gerontion translates this "lesson" from history into terms of his own experience. History, he says,

Gives too late
What's not believed in, or is still believed,
In memory only, reconsidered passion. Gives too soon
Into weak hands, what's thought can be dispensed with
Till the refusal propagates a fear. [italics mine]

The definition of memory as "reconsidered passion" is a clear indication that Gerontion tries to translate the sensual into the conceptual. And, as well, the reference to the former rejection of the sensual apprehension in "what's thought can be dispensed with" contains a suggestion that Gerontion's condition is not entirely due to his age, but is inherent in his temperament, a suggestion that reinforces the opening lines of the poem.

After the history passage Gerontion attempts to re-establish his mental control over the process:

Think
Neither fear not courage saves us. Unnatural vices
Are fathered by our heroism. Virtues
Are forced upon us by our impudent crimes.

This is the most explicit rejection on the part of the narrator of the virtues and vices, all of which are sensual, he sees surrounding himself. History cannot speak to Gerontion except in terms of his own experience, and his experience leads him back upon himself, forcing him once more to reject his sensual potential and consequently the sensual in his past. There is a suggestion throughout the passage on history that somehow
history should provide a standard by which to define the self; "she" does not give the answers, but only because these are too little or given too late. Gerontion cannot interpret her lesson: it is not history, but Gerontion himself who is at fault. Thus, the central conflict is not solely the personal conflict between elements of the self, but is also the conflict between the insufficient self and the absolute standard that is unknowable by the insufficient self. But because Gerontion cannot know this absolute he turns away from it, rejects it also and turns back to his own experience and observation:

These tears are shaken from the wrath-bearing tree.

And of course tears are what the dry brain seeks to escape.

In desperation Gerontion is driven back upon Christ:

The tiger springs in the new year. Us he devours.

However, the tiger here is not as explicitly Christ as it was earlier. Without a doubt Christ is suggested, but there is also the suggestion that the tiger means more; that it represents something more general. This expansion is accounted for partly by the following lines, dealing explicitly with Gerontion's imminent death:

Think at last
We have not reached conclusion, when I
Stiffen in a rented house

The tiger is Christ, but it is also all experience of which the brain is afraid, and which the brain tries to conceptualize. And after the springing of the tiger, and the devouring, Gerontion lapses into his accustomed response:
Think at last
We have not reached conclusion . . .

The "we" suggests not so much a duality of personality as it did in Prufrock as a sort of editorial "we," an intellectual depersonalization, that prefigures the final lines of the poem:

Tenants of the house,
Thoughts of a dry brain in a dry season.

Before he concludes, Gerontion does make a final effort at intellectual honesty, but it is so couched in Gerontion's habitual terms of escape, that it suggests something else:

Think at last
I have not made this show purposelessly
And it is not by any concitation
Of the backward devils.

In the literal sense Gerontion here dissociates himself from the kind of purposeless and perverse sensuality he has earlier described, and he continues in a way that would confirm this suggestion:

I would meet you upon this honestly.

But the terms in which this occurs suggests only a kind of rhetoric, different from what I have called Prufrock's typically "sensual rhetoric," but still a rhetoric that suggests that, like Prufrock, Gerontion "sees himself" in a dramatic light. And further, it suggests that there is a kind of subterranean knowledge of where this "show" should take him, what pose he is acquiring. Prufrock's goal is escape in the commerce of men's affairs. Gerontion's is his "honesty." But his "honesty" is a kind of escape as well, for it rejects the emotional, sensual response. In fact the next stanza provides a suggestion that the narrator will
meet "you" (presumably Christ, but possibly a person for whom all passion is spent) "honestly," but on his own terms: conceptually, not wholly or totally.

I would meet you upon this honestly.  
I that was near your heart was removed therefrom  
To lose beauty in terror, terror in inquisition.  
I have lost my passion: why should I need to keep it  
Since what is kept must be adulterated?  
I have lost my sight, smell, hearing, taste and touch:  
How should I use them for your closer contact?

The six lines of reservation deprives the affirmation in the first line of much of its force. This does not suggest that Gerontion's terror and inquisition go for nothing, that he has made the show without purpose. There is real terror in Gerontion's predicament, and the tone of the poem is generally sympathetic. But there is nothing especially admirable in his inability to react wholly, and Eliot makes it clear that it is Gerontion's personal failure that results in the inability to achieve "closer contact" with either "history" or Christ. These remain inviolable external standards; and it is in these that this poem differs chiefly from "Prufrock" and the other early monologues. The nature of Gerontion's failure is that Gerontion is still a "personality" in spite of the attempts he makes to abstract himself. His rejection of his sensual part is not real impersonality on any vital and valid level. And hence he is forced back upon his partial self as the poem concludes. Specifically he is faced with the contemplation of the loss of sensual capacity with which the poem begins:
These with a thousand small deliberations
Protract the profit of their chilled delirium,
Excite the membrane when the sense has cooled,
With pungent sauces, multiply variety
In a wilderness of mirrors.

Finally the inevitable result of the "small deliberations" is the contemplation of death. But even here he cannot escape the sensual apprehension. The ironic suggestion is that the spider should suspend its operations, that the sensual world around him should be whirled off "beyond the circuit of the shuddering Bear/ In fractured atoms." Sensually this would seem the appropriate response, but of course, the mind knows it is not. Even death is made cerebral and consequently empty--of no consequence. Gerontion has been driven by the winds into his sleepy corner.

Gerontion is one of Eliot's Hollow Men; his hollowness comes from his efforts to abstract himself with the consequent rejection of emotional or sensual experience. From this rejection arises his inability to come to terms with experience and by extension with things outside of himself, particularly his tradition, historical and religious. As a result Gerontion finds that,

Between the conception
And the creation
Between the emotion
And the response
Falls the shadow,

the shadow of conceptualizing all things. Gerontion is not truly "impersonal;" rather he is a fragmented personality. As we see in Ash Wednesday (which parallels this theme from "Gerontion") the truly
impersonal response is one which comes only after a "unification" of the whole human being. Only then does the individual come to terms with the larger forces that surround him. Gerontion's brand of impersonality is therefore a dead end; it is a false attempt that ends in false conclusions which are not conclusions at all, but rather the willlessness of "an old man driven by the Trades/ To a sleepy corner."

"Gerontion" for this reason occupies an interesting position in Eliot's developing treatment of the personality. In one sense he is a failure because his experience is discontinuous; the conceptual and the physical are separate. Unlike the narrator of *Ash Wednesday* (who is also an old man troubled by the loss of sensual power), Gerontion rejects only the part of himself that he feels most keenly lost. The narrator of *Ash Wednesday* rejects also his "thinking." He renounces the "blessed face" and the "voice;" he also goes on to

> pray that I may forget
> These matters that with myself I too much discuss
> Too much explain.

The predicament is generally the same, but in *Ash Wednesday* the persona turns away from both the sensual and the intellectual; and although negative this is the beginning of a kind of reunification of the two parts.

Thus, it would seem that "Gerontion" represents an important development. Gerontion's failure as a character comes clearly from within himself, and there is consequently some suggestion (although it is slight and our recognition of it is undoubtedly helped by our
knowledge of later poems) of a possible means of salvation. The terms themselves are introduced in "Gerontion," and in the quatrain poems; these poems represent an important turning that is to lead to the use of myth in The Waste Land and later to the non-human historical and religious absolutes that inform Ash Wednesday and the Four Quartets. There exists in these poems the embryo of the attitude that, when developed, will help to account for the shift from the assertion in "Tradition and the Individual Talent" that,

the more perfect the artist, the more completely separate in him will be the man who suffers and the mind which creates;

and the later account of the same relationship:

The [mature] impersonality is that of the poet who, out of intense and personal experience, is able to express a general truth. ¹¹

The later statement involves no division within the man; but it depends upon a separation between personal experience and absolute values; it also accounts for the use of personal history in the Quartets.
CHAPTER 3  FOOTNOTES

1 The Invisible Poet, p. 30. Although Kenner makes the point with reference to "Preludes" it is clearly appropriate on a wider scale.

2 While it is difficult to make many meaningful generalizations about a group of poems as varied as the seven quatrain poems published in Poems of 1920, it is useful to talk about what Eliot seems to have been trying to do with the form itself, and it is for this purpose and with the limitations implied by it that I am grouping them for a common analysis.

3 Most of these earlier poems were omitted (by Eliot) from his Selected Poems; all of the quatrain poems were included.

4 Milton, of course, describes Adam as "Godlike erect."

5 It is interesting to note that T. E. Hulme singled out Ruskin as one romantic who was aware of the central distinction between the finite and the infinite, but who lacked the "metaphysical background which would enable him to state definitely what he meant!" (Speculations, p. 139). Hulme also mentions evolution and decline in a way which is relevant to Eliot's poem:

   This view [i.e. of original sin] was a little shaken at the time of Darwin. You remember his particular hypothesis, that new species came into existence by the cumulative effect of small variations--this seems to admit the possibility of future progress. But at the present day the contrary hypothesis makes headway in the shape of De Vrie's mutation theory, that each new species comes into existence, not gradually by the accumulation of small steps, but suddenly in a jump, a kind of sport, and that once in existence it remains absolutely fixed. (Speculations, pp. 116-117)

6 Origen held that since the son was a copy of the father he was necessarily imperfect--a Platonic doctrine suitably humanistic in its implications.

7 The relationship between age and stasis is a theme that is strong in Eliot's poetry, and in "A Song for Simeon" and Ash Wednesday it is finally and painfully purged.
This development also looks ahead to the final lines in which not only Gerontion, but all the tenants have become "vacant shuttles" that weave in the wind:

De Bailhache, frescA, Mrs. Cammel, whirled
Beyond the circuit of the shuddering Bear
In fractured atoms. Gull against the wind, in the windy straights

And an old man driven by the Trades
To a sleepy corner.

See Eliot's comment in "Tradition and the Individual Talent":
Shakespeare acquired more essential history from Plutarch
than most men could from the whole British Museum.
Essential history is what Gerontion lacks.

Many of these themes of sterility come up again in the later poems, of course, and the development in the ways Eliot treats different themes at different periods in his life is one of the surest ways we have to trace his own attitudes and consequently to judge how his changing attitudes affect his poetry.

On Poetry and Poets, p. 299.
AND EACH CONFIRMS A PRISON:
IMPERSONALITY AS ANONYMITY.

Eliot's dramatic sense controls the poetry before *The Waste Land*; with it Eliot explores dramatic situations and individual attitudes and responses with the kind of irony he describes in "'Rhetoric' and Poetic Drama." Even the lyric poems, as Robert Langbaum points out, are dramatic in depicting moods and dramatic situations. After "Gerontion," however, Eliot stopped using the traditional form of the dramatic monologue (except of course for two Ariel poems and *Coriolan*), but the monologue's dramatic voice continues to lie behind all the major poetry. Beginning with *The Waste Land* Eliot manipulates and alters the dramatic monologue in a way that expands its possibilities while retaining the essential dramatic quality that informs it. The result is to achieve a poetry that at once includes the personal world and yet points to a more absolute and universal one.

In *The Waste Land* this effect is achieved through the narrator, who provides a constant and definite voice but who fades into the background, becoming like the anonymous voice that Kenner describes in his analysis of "Prufrock." Consequently, there is a shift in emphasis from the personality of the narrator toward the objects he sees.
Because the narrator is a passive observer, he directs our attention to objects existing outside his own mind. The method of the poem does not depend as heavily upon the mind which remembers as upon the facts remembered. In this sense the narrator of *The Waste Land* is less "personal" than any of the earlier narrators, and this of course makes the poem itself less personal—less concerned with a personality. However, while this is clearly the case, it would be wrong to suggest that either the poem or its narrator is wholly or absolutely impersonal. The narrator is not only a constant and definable voice; he also possesses a consciousness, a point of view which not only colours the entire tone of the poem, but also undergoes an important change in the progression of the poem.

Analysis of this might well begin with one of the hints Eliot has given concerning the nature of the narrator and the characters of the poem. In what is perhaps the most often quoted "note" to *The Waste Land* Eliot remarks:

Tiresias, although a mere spectator and not indeed a "character," is yet the most important personage in the poem, uniting all the rest. Just as the one-eyed merchant, seller of currants, melts into the Phoenician Sailor, and the latter is not wholly distinct from Ferdinand Prince of Naples, so all the women are one woman, and the two sexes meet in Tiresias. What Tiresias sees, in fact, is the substance of the poem. *(Collected Poems, p. 82)*

There are two important points to be made in regard to this note, points which have important bearing upon the poem. First is the statement that "What Tiresias sees, in fact, is the substance of the poem."
In the poem itself, when Tiresias first appears by name, he is introduced in similar terms, as the perceiver of the action:

I Tiresias, though blind, throbbing between two lives,
Old man with wrinkled female breasts, can see . . . .

What Tiresias sees in this episode is what we see, just as in any monologue what the narrator sees is essentially what we see. Thus, in *The Waste Land* what the narrator sees becomes our point of view. The suggestion in this note, then, would seem to be that Tiresias is the narrator not just of this segment, but of the entire poem, and this suggestion seems wholly just within the context of the poem itself.

The narrator of the poem is obviously the central persona (or "personage") who provides the links between the many fragments and characters, and who is capable of "seeing" all of the events and characters with a prophetic, timeless point of view, thus uniting them into a whole vision, and introducing a point of view that is at once objective and participatory.

But whether the narrator is seen as Tiresias, or as some nameless, more anonymous persona, his function remains the same. That is, whether the narrator is named or not, his role in the poem is distinctly different from that of the other "characters:" he is not one of them. This is the second point made in the note. Eliot is careful to make the distinction between Tiresias as a "personage" (not a "character") and the rest of the "characters" who are united (and seen) by Tiresias. This is central to the technique of *The Waste Land*, and separates it
from the earlier monologues. The narrator is not such an active participant in the poem; his reverie does not concern himself--his own consciousness--as exclusively as do the reveries of the narrators from "Prufrock" to "Gerontion." This narrator looks outward toward the events and dramatic responses of the characters. He does not act as the characters act, and consequently is able to maintain an ironic point of view toward the characters that is more distant and universalized than is possible to the active narrator-participant.

Yet the poem's irony depends upon Tiresias's participation in the poem although it is a different kind of participation from the other characters. Cleanth Brooks, in his essay on The Waste Land, describes the particular kind of irony pervading the poem. He observes:

The basic method used in The Waste Land may be described as the application of the principle of complexity. The poet works in terms of surface parallelisms which in reality make ironical contrasts, and in terms of surface contrasts which in reality constitute parallelisms.

Brooks sees the "protagonist" in a dual role shifting between "speculation" and "memory." It is upon this dual role of the narrator that I wish to lay special emphasis. Taking a cue from Brooks's description of the narrator's "reverie in which speculation on life glides off into memory of an actual conversation . . . and back into speculation again," and from Eliot's explanation that Tiresias sees the substance of the poem, and is, in fact, the "most important personage in the poem," we can conclude that Tiresias's narrative technique includes two separate and distinct points of view. First is objective reportage of what characters
say and think. This is sometimes done simply and directly, as in lines 5-18 of "The Burial of the Dead;"

and sometimes more indirectly and ambiguously as in the second stanza of "The Fire Sermon":

A rat crept softly through the vegetation
Dragging its slimy belly on the bank
While I was fishing in the dull canal . . . .

Here one is uncertain if this is the narrator speaking directly or reporting the consciousness of one of the characters. But this uncertainty itself is part of the function of the narrator, for in the development of the poem his description of other characters merges at times into the second point of view, which is the narrator's response to and judgments of the action he describes. The narrator functions, in other words, as a "seer" in both senses of that term: he sees the action and he prophesies upon it. It is in the central episode of the typist and the clerk that this merging of roles is made most explicit.

Tiresias reports first:

I, Tiresias, though blind, throbbing between two lives,
Old man with wrinkled female breasts, can see . . . [italics mine]

and later:

I Tiresias, old man with wrinkled dugs
*Perceived* the scene, and *foretold* the rest--
*I too* awaited the expected guest. [italics mine]

and finally:

(And I Tiresias have *foresuffered* all
Enacted on this same divan or bed;
I who have sat by Thebes below the wall
And walked among the lowest of the dead.) [italics mine]
These passages suggest an extremely complex role for the narrator. On the surface, his task is to describe the events and the characters' responses, and then to judge these, but he also "foresuffers," and this implies participation. The opening two stanzas of the poem illustrate this process. The first stanza "reports" a series of fragments of conversation which represent the limbo in which the characters live, followed by the prophetic response in the second stanza:

What are the roots that clutch, what branches grow
Out of this stony rubbish? Son of man,
You cannot say, or guess, for you know only
A heap of broken images, . . .

The distinction between the two points of view here appears clearly: there is reportage and there is the judgment; and they are made separately. Yet even as a reporter, Tiresias somehow becomes involved in the action of the poem, for he not only sees, he "foresuffers."

This is because all of the action takes place within the consciousness of the narrator, and the development of the poem--especially the development of irony in the poem--depends upon the shifting relationship between the narrator's reportage and his judgment, between his experience and his attempts to give that experience order and meaning.

It is this dual role, in fact, that is central to the blending of the personal confession of the earlier monologues with the relative objectivity of the quatrain poems. The quatrain poems, it has been pointed out, consist of series of incontrovertible facts set side by side; the "meaning" arises from the order in which these facts are placed. There is, it is assumed, a mind that orders these facts and therefore
which possesses the point of view, but it is not present as a specified narrator-character. It is totally impersonal in this sense. In *The Waste Land*, too, we find facts placed side by side, only here we know where to find the consciousness that orders the facts and even to whom the experience occurs. The result is that the poem retains most of the sense of impersonality or objectivity found in the quatrain poems, but in addition contains that sense of the personal, the immediate, which Eliot increasingly regarded as important to great poetry.

It will be helpful to introduce an analogy to explain this concept. In this case the analogy comes from a late topical poem, "A Note on War Poetry" (1942), which treats explicitly the relation between the individual experience and "universal" poetry. I will quote the poem in its entirety.

Not the expression of collective emotion
Imperfectly reflected in the daily papers.
Where is the point at which the merely individual
Explosion breaks

In the path of an action merely typical
To create the universal, originate a symbol
Out of the impact? This is a meeting
On which we attend

Of forces beyond control by experiment--
Of Nature and the Spirit. Mostly the individual
Experience is too large, or too small. Our emotions
Are only "incidents"

In the effort to keep day and night together.
It seems just possible that a poem might happen
To a very young man: but a poem is not poetry--
That is a life.
War is not a life: it is a situation,
One which may neither be ignored or accepted,
A problem to be met with ambush and stratagem,
Enveloped or scattered.

The enduring is not a substitute for the transient,
Neither one for the other. But the abstract conception
Of private experience at its greatest intensity
Becoming universal, which we call "poetry",
May be affirmed in verse.

This is a poem about what constitutes poetry; its theme is similar to
the central proposition enunciated in the essay on "Yeats:"
poetry is
the result of "private experience at its greatest intensity" becoming
poetry. The analogy I wish to propose is that something like this
process actually takes place in The Waste Land itself, not only to
Eliot's personal experience, but also to the experience of the poem's
narrator/persona.

"A Note on War Poetry" addresses itself to the question contained
in lines 3-7:

Where is the point at which the merely individual
Explosion breaks

In the path of an action merely typical
To create the universal, originate a symbol
Out of the impact?

The phrasing of this question suggests three types of experience: the
"merely individual," the "merely typical!"
(which is "the expression of
collective emotion"), and the "universal," which we call 'poetry.'"
That is, "poetry" is neither "merely individual" nor (more importantly)
"merely typical;" it is the "explosion" that occurs when the individual
and the typical, or "collective," become one. The creation of the
"universal," includes and transcends the others.

The application of this to *The Waste Land* depends upon Eliot's proposition that there is a difference between the typical action or collective emotion and the universal, "general symbol" which constitutes poetry. The fragments of action and conversation, the situations and events of *The Waste Land* are in this sense merely typical or collective emotions and events. It is the consciousness of the narrator that not only brings these together to demonstrate their typicality but also, because it is a private and in a sense personal experience as well, brings to the poem an individual response that makes it "universal."

Tiresias, as narrator, not only reports (and poetry is not merely the "expression of collective emotion"), he "foresuffers," he shares the action. In addition, there exist throughout the poem numerous responses by Tiresias which contribute significantly to the sense of his personal involvement. The double point of view, then, is a meeting of the typical, which exists in what Tiresias sees, and the individual, which exists in what Tiresias feels (or "foresuffers"). The narrator in *The Waste Land* is as surely involved in the action of the poem as are the "characters," although he does not act himself, literally. Indeed, in a significant portion of the poem it is Tiresias rather than the characters who feels the action with any intensity.

Tiresias's role as narrator is twofold: to relate the communal experience, and to "universalize" that experience through his personal experience in it. The personal experience of the individual characters
is, as Eliot remarks in "A Note on War Poetry", either "too large, or too small:" too large in the sense that the "typical" experience is abstract (rather than general) and too small in that individually none of the characters can represent what the poem as a whole represents. Tiresias transcends these limitations largely because of his mythical tradition. He can at once "see" everything and feel everything, and still maintain a sense of objectivity that comes from his being physically outside of the action. It is important to recognize this dual capability, the capability to remain outside of the action in one sense while entering into it in another. For the central development of the poem involves this fact. Eliot makes it very clear in the first movement of the poem that the narrator possesses this double vision, and then shows the line between the two points of view beginning to become indistinct as the narrator's personal involvement in the poem begins to assert itself. The whole movement of the poem is, in fact, one that depends upon the narrator's increasing involvement in the action (although generally only on a mental level) and his consequent loss of ability to separate in his consciousness the two points of view with which he begins. It is significant that as the poem progresses two important changes take place in the nature of the narrator's reportage. First is a general shift in pronoun in those segments in which the narrator "speculates," or makes his judgments, a shift from the second to the first person: from "you cannot say" to "what have we given?" Second is a sense of decreasing certainty about the voice of the speaker. In "The Burial of
the Dead" the identity of the voice is always clear, we always know if
the narrator is speaking in his own, or another's voice. As the poem
progresses this distinction becomes less certain, the narrator as reporter
becomes less distinct from narrator as judge, and the action is increasingly
described in a manner that includes the narrator with the rest of the
characters. In short, the narrator begins the poem with his roles as
objective observer and judge clearly delimited, but during the course of
the poem he is drawn into the action. And finally he becomes as one of
the lost "characters."

The close analysis of the poem, then, for purposes of this
investigation must be centred upon the narrator. The poem opens, I
have suggested, with a relatively clear distinction made between the
two points of view of the narrator. Both points of view are rendered
in largely objective terms; that is, the narrator not only is objective
when he is reporting the fragments of conversation but he remains
detached from the action when making his comments and judgments upon it.
He remains largely above the action in this first part of the poem.
Both the fragments of the conversation and the narrator's responses are
represented as external facts, or images.

The first two stanzas clearly introduce us to the narrative
method of the poem. Each begins with a statement of judgment by the
narrator after which the narration melts into fragments of conversation.
In the opening stanza the first four lines announce, in the narrator's
voice, the theme of sterility and death-in-life:
April is the cruellest month, breeding
Lilacs out of the dead land, mixing
Memory and desire, stirring
Dull roots with spring rain.

This is clearly the narrator stating factually the conditions he observes about him, just as lines 8-18 are clearly fragments of conversation spoken by the "characters," overheard, as it were, and reported by the narrator:

Summer surprised us, coming over the Starnbergersee
With a shower of rain; we stopped in the colonnade,
And went on in the sunlight, into the Hofgarten,
And drank coffee, and talked for an hour . . . .

These "images" brought together and played against one another form the content of this section of the poem, building up a kind of typical representation of the condition of the characters of *The Waste Land* by a process of juxtaposition of judgment and example.

But it is never quite this simple, since even here it is occasionally difficult to separate these two points of view. For example, the first four lines of the opening stanza are clearly spoken in the narrator's own voice, and lines 8-18 in the voices of various actors, or characters. But the three lines which connect these two segments are indistinct, possessing characteristics of both the narrator's and the characters' voices:

Winter kept us warm, covering
Earth with forgetful snow, feeding
A little life with dried tubers.

To begin with, the lineation, the continuing device of ending lines with the participle which syntactically belongs with the following lines,
suggests a close continuity. In addition, the sense that the speaker understands the condition of which he speaks is almost without exception present only when the narrator is speaking in his own voice. All this suggests that this is the narrator speaking in his own voice, directly. Yet there is a sense in which these lines seem to be rather a part of the following fragments than an extension of the narrator's own statement. The presence of the first person pronoun--"Winter kept us warm"--especially, with its apparent parallel with "Summer surprised us," is typical of the bits of conversation, not of the narrator's voice.

This uncertainty is resolved by the narrator himself, who is at once observer and participant. The two roles are brought together by the fact that the action takes place within his consciousness; he "foreknows" and "foresuffers" the action. The various characters are "united," Eliot says, in the figure of Tiresias because they exist in his consciousness, in a way that is not altogether different from the women in Prufrock's memory. The transition, then, from the narrator speaking in his own voice to the narrator speaking in the voices of the various characters is made by that process of association which marks all of the monologues; hence the two poses assumed by the narrator tend to blend in his own consciousness.

This is also true of the second stanza, which begins again with an even more apparent judgment than does the first stanza. Here is emphasized the distance between the first person of the narrator and the second person of the characters (and perhaps of the reader) to whom he addresses himself.
Thus he begins his address to the characters:

What are the roots that clutch, what branches grow  
Out of this stony rubbish? Son of man,  
You cannot say, or guess, for you know only  
A heap of broken images.

And presently introduces explicitly his own voice with,

And I will show you something different from either  
Your shadow at morning striding behind you  
Or your shadow at evening rising to meet you; [italics mine];

thus making a clear distinction between himself and his audience. But again the distinction fades when at the conclusion of this stanza there is another fragment of conversation between the hyacinth girl and her lover. The girl's voice is clearly set off, but the man's response is not. On the surface this response would appear to be made by one of the "characters," but closer inspection indicates that the narrator's own voice also is audible; again there is the sense that the reply is tempered by the narrator's knowledge of the symptoms of sterility:

I was neither  
Living nor dead, and I knew nothing,  
Looking into the heart of light, the silence.

The progression present in these two first sections is important for two reasons. First it establishes the distinction between the narrator's private, personal voice--the voice of the prophet--and his public voice--the voice of the reporter; and second because it prefigures the movement of the poem as a whole by permitting these two poses to merge. And how they merge is itself important. The distinction between the two roles--in fact between the narrator and the characters--is most distinct when the narrator is able to dwell upon observation and judgment
of the ills which surround him, and particularly to dwell upon these in general and abstract terms. Thus, the narrator is most distinct and separated when he is acting the role of Ezekiel:

Son of man,
You cannot say, or guess, for you know only
A heap of broken images,

or

(Come in under the shadow of this red rock),
And I will show you . . .

But when the particular and specific action arises, the narrator, (whether through sympathy or fear is not immediately clear at this point) becomes less distinct as a separate voice; he is drawn into the action. This pattern is important to recognize in these early stanzas for it plays an increasingly important part in the development of the poem, and gives to the poem a sense of individual experience. Thus, these early stanzas are important not only because they introduce the theme and central symbols of the poem, but perhaps even more because they establish this dual function of the narrator, of the voice of the poem, and because they foreshadow the eventual breaking down of the distinction between the two voices and the resulting confusion with which the poem concludes.

This confusion is made explicit in the final two stanzas of "The Burial of the Dead." The first of these is devoted entirely to a representation of "Madame Sosostris, famous clairvoyante," a character who is well-suited to represent the spiritual sterility of The Waste Land. She is another of Eliot's "sign-seekers." It has been suggested that Madame Sosostris's subject in this episode is the narrator himself, the protagonist. Whether it is or not is perhaps a moot point; certainly
Cleanth Brooks argues convincingly that the fortune told is that of the "protagonist." But it is also, abstracted, the fortune of any character of *The Waste Land*. More significantly this episode is reported simply and objectively, with a sense of irony that is not present in the stanzas surrounding it. This indicates that the point of view in this stanza is that of the narrator as the objective reporter. The pose implies a kind of aloofness consistent with that implicit in the opening of the poem. The narrator here stands apart and views the folly, the ignorance and the sterility of those whom he observes.

This stanza of "reportage" is followed by a stanza that begins with a lament for the fallen, "Unreal City," with the narrator shifting into his role as commentator. The judgment is explicit; the characters are living a death. And the allusion to Dante--

I had not thought death had undone so many.
Sighs, short and infrequent, were exhaled,—
places the narrator squarely in a tradition of moral judgment, describing this modern limbo. However, during the course of this commentary the narrator is quite unwittingly drawn into the action, in a way similar to that which we have seen in the earlier monologues. That it is the narrator rather than one of the other characters who accosts Stetson is attested to both by the lack of transition from the preceding lines and by the suggestion of timelessness in the line,

You who were with me in the ships at Mylae!

This, of course, is appropriate only to Tiresias.
There are two aspects of the speech to Stetson which require some emphasis. In the first place, this is the first time in the poem that the narrator explicitly enters the poem as an actor. One may speculate about the extent to which he is involved in earlier episodes—for example, whether he is in fact the client of Madame Sosostris—, but here there is no question. The narrator, in the course of his condemnatory description of the "Unreal City", comes across Stetson, an old acquaintance; and this unexpected meeting destroys for a moment the pose which the narrator has established, a pose which is marked by its detachment from the action and by its superior position. As a result the narrator is thrown into a state of confusion, which comes from the sudden evaporation of the distance that has separated him from the other characters.

In addition, this confrontation represents the first time in the poem that the narrator's attention has been forced to shift from his description and judgment of the conditions of sterility and death that surround him to the search for some sort of redemption from this condition. Again, one may speculate about various ironic suggestions concerning redemption in earlier stanzas, and again, the Madame Sosostris episode comes to mind; her prophecies do contain a sort of ironic hint, which she certainly does not intend, of redemption. But primarily—explicitly—her fortune telling is essentially another example of the sterility and perversion in The Waste Land. But there is no mistaking the intent of the corpse buried in the garden, at least in the general sense. It clearly
has to do with an attempted salvation. The parallels with the numerous myths about the risen saviour are enough to confirm this, and the familiar cycle of death and rebirth—"unless a seed fall and die ..."—gives further evidence.

Whether the narrator's confusion arises from his suddenly being drawn into the action, or from the sudden introduction of the theme of redemption, or whether there is some relationship between these two, is not made clear at this point. But this episode does prepare us for the repeated occurrence of this reaction in the narrator. As the poem develops these two reactions occur simultaneously, as the theme of redemption is introduced the narrator becomes involved in the action, and as a result his tone becomes increasingly hysterical. Thus, the movement of "The Burial of the Dead" prefigures in miniature the movement of The Waste Land in total. The narrator begins as observer and judge, reporter and prophet. As long as he continues to describe and judge the condition of The Waste Land there appears to be no difficulty in his maintaining these two separate roles. Consequently he observes—

Under the brown fog of a winter dawn,
A crowd flowed over London Bridge, --
and he makes his judgment--

so many,
I had not thought death had undone so many.

However, he finds himself unwittingly drawn into the action, becoming something of an active participant. And this coincides with the sudden shift from the analysis of the condition to the investigation of a means
of salvation. The consistency with which this happens in the poem suggests that there may be a causal relationship between the introduction of the means to salvation and the involvement and consequent confusion within the voice of the narrator himself. Thus, in this stanza, the narrator meets Stetson, an old acquaintance, who by chance has performed a ritual suggesting salvation, and the narrator is immediately thrown into a sense of confusion; his speech becomes garbled, even nonsensical, its tone one of panic and fear and desperation. Then, in a sudden turn, he collects his wits in a defensive pose, resuming his judgmental pose:

"You! hypocrite lecture!"

The pattern of development is similar to that which informs the early monologues; it most clearly resembles the central stanza of "Prufrock" in which Prufrock is unwittingly drawn into his own moral consciousness.

"The Burial of the Dead" concludes with the narrator's attempt to recover his impersonality and objectivity. "A Game of Chess" continues this development. This section of the poem is largely one of reportage and description, containing two "typical" examples of the dryness of The Waste Land, one from the upper and one from the lower classes. Thus is established a pattern that controls the overall development of the poem. For just as within each section the narrator's pose shifts from observer to participant, so within the poem as a whole we find the same kind of movement. In section I we observe the narrator being drawn increasingly into the action until he loses control of it. In the second section he
maintains, with great effort, an objective pose. In the third section he is again drawn into the action, and this is followed by the short, fourth section which again is comparatively objective. Finally, in the last section his attempt to remain outside of the action is fully dashed as he concludes with a series of "fragments" of his own that parallel the fragments of the "characters" in the opening stanza of "The Burial of the Dead." In addition, we find that in the second and fourth--the more objective--stanzas, the narrator's attention is chiefly placed upon analysis of his world's ills. And in the first, third, and fifth sections his attention shifts to the theme of redemption, whether it be the buried corpse, the "Confessions" of Augustine and the burning of the "Fire Sermon" or the three commands of the thunder.

"A Game of Chess," of course, opens with the parody of Enobarbus's description of Cleopatra. (Enobarbus is also the detached observer who fears becoming involved in an action which he regards as ruinous.) The first 38 lines are purely descriptive (unless one wishes to argue that the comment upon the rape of Philomel--"And still she cried, and still the world pursues"--is an intrusion by the narrator's own voice). And even after these 38 lines (which end with the lady's command: "'I never know what you are thinking. Think.'"), the response is not explicitly made by the narrator. This response, in fact, is reminiscent of the anonymous response to the hyacinth girl in the first section. In both a woman speaks to a male companion, and her speech is set off with quotation marks. And in both the reply is made ostensibly by the man
addressed. However, because these replies are not so set off, the question of his identity arises. Perhaps it is the person of the narrator who replies in both cases, and the similarity of reply provides evidence for this supposition. In section one the response is:

I could not
Speak, and my eyes failed, I was neither
Living nor Dead, and I knew nothing,
Looking into the heart of light, the silence.

This, I have suggested, implicates the narrator through the knowledge of sterility it expresses. So with the responses to the lady in the second section. First:

I think we are in rat's alley
Where dead men lost their bones.

And then, in response to the question, "What shall we ever do?"

The hot water at ten.
And if it rains, a closed car at four.
And we shall play a game of chess,
Pressing lidless eyes and waiting for a knock upon the door.

Here is a similar kind of cynicism, and the cynical mood is like that of the narrator in his role as critic. But more telling is the imagery, which recalls much of the imagery of the first section: the association of the drowned man--"Those are pearls that were his eyes"--and Shakespeare, the rats, the hollow wind, the death's head figure--"Pressing lidless eyes"--all of these are images that continually appear in the consciousness of the narrator throughout the poem, and they suggest that it is the narrator who responds to the lady.8

After the final response to the lady's questioning the narrator drops this episode and begins another, again apparently content merely to
describe the event. This results in the monologue relating the sexual sterility of Lil and Albert. But the monologue is interrupted by an external voice in a number of places, chiefly with the refrain:

HURRY UP PLEASE ITS TIME.

This is ostensibly spoken by the landlord, impatient to close his pub. However, the obvious appropriateness of the line to the central theme of sterility and redemption, along with the manner in which the narrator's role has been developed to this point in the poem, suggests that once again the consciousness of the narrator intrudes into the action of the poem. There are two implications conveyed by this refrain. First is the suggestion that it is time for repentance and redemption. But also there is the suggestion that since the ordeal of complete collapse is imminent, this ordeal should be concluded as quickly as possible. The first of these seems consistent with the role of the narrator as seer; the second with the role of the narrator as participant. And the two come together in the final line of this section:

Good night, ladies, good night, sweet ladies, good night, good night.

These "good nights" are clearly distinguished from the "goodnights" of the tipsy woman speaker, and can belong only to the voice of the narrator. There is a complex irony present in this closing line; playing the popular song against Ophelia's mad speech, the woman's "goodnight" against the narrator's, the inappropriate adjective, "sweet": all of these contribute toward establishing a tone of judgment, of moral
superiority, yet at the same time, of weary despair. And the progression in this section from Enobarbus to Ophelia parallels, if on a more subtle level, the progression from an objective sanity to personal confusion.

"The Fire Sermon" returns to the method of juxtaposing description and judgment that typifies "The Burial of the Dead." But the inclusion of the fragments and images from the preceding sections renders it more complex. Consequently the associative process in the consciousness of the narrator appears more clearly. In the opening lines, for example, the narrator begins with a description of the scene:

The river's tent is broken; the last fingers of leaf Clutch and sink into the wet bank. The wind Crosses the brown land, unheard. The nymphs are departed.

The leaves which "clutch" the bank recall lines 19-20:

What are the roots that clutch, what branches grow Out of this stony rubbish?

The wind that "Crosses the brown land, unheard," suggests:

"What is the wind doing?"
Nothing again nothing.

The narrator is presumably observing the scene and describing it, but incorporated into this description are the images that he holds in his mind from his experiences of previous episodes in the poem, and, of course, by this time he has accumulated a complex structure of images to draw upon. Since Eliot tells us that "what Tiresias sees, in fact, is the substance of the poem," then the final set of images that constitutes the poem are those images that have pressed themselves upon
his consciousness. In this light two brief passages, one near the beginning of the poem and one at the end, assume added importance. The first is 11. 20-22:

Son of man,
You cannot say, or guess, for you know only
A heap of broken images.

I have suggested that the word "images" refers specifically to those images that occur in the opening stanza, but could be extended to mean all of the images which constitute the poem. The implication is that within the poem only the narrator sees the relationship between the broken images, thus the meaning in them. But at the end of the poem the narrator again refers to these "broken images," but a different term is used to describe them, a term that alters our attitude toward the experience not only of the characters in *The Waste Land*, but of the narrator himself as he says:

These fragments I have shored against my ruins.

Actually there are two important departures from the description of the images at the beginning of the poem. Besides the shift from the term "broken images" to the term "fragments," which suggests a further breakdown, there is the shift from the "you" in the first section to "I" in the last. The first passage, in which the narrator addresses the inhabitants of *The Waste Land* (perhaps also the reader), clearly distinguishes him from these who know only the broken images, a distinction that carries with it the implication that the narrator does, in fact, know more than broken images. And this passage is followed by the invitation
to "Come in under the shadow of this red rock," where there is a shadow rather than merely broken images; the "shadow at morning striding behind you" and the "Shadow at evening rising to meet you" appear to be an alternative knowledge which is to be seen in opposition to the broken images, and of which the narrator implies he is in possession. In the final passage, however, it is the narrator himself who is in possession not merely of broken images, but of fragments which he "shores against his ruins."

This final passage recalls the section of "The Fire Sermon" which deals with the river, for in the final stanza of the poem the narrator begins:

I sat upon the shore
Fishing, with the arid plain behind me,

and "The Fire Sermon" begins also upon a "shore." Consequently we may look for other parallels. It is, in fact, in "The Fire Sermon" that the real deterioration of the narrator's objectivity is manifested. Near the end of the first stanza of "The Fire Sermon" the narrator, through a kind of association of historical fact, recalls Spenser's, "Sweet Thames, run softly, for I speak not loud or long" (which in itself could be suggested by "HURRY UP PLEASE ITS TIME"), which in turn suggests the lines from Marvell's "Coy Mistress" (which in this case are altered by the persistent image of the wind):

But at my back in a cold blast I hear . . .

And the cold blast (the wind) reminds him of the relationship of the wind with the rattle of bones which he made in Section II, ll. 115-120:
"The rattle of the bones, and chuckle spread from ear to ear." The rattle of the bones, in turn, suggests to him the rat, from "rats alley," and from this arises the memory of the drowned Phoenician Sailor, which is recalled again in 11. 115-120 of Section II. Finally the process of association brings him back to Marvell, who is altered this time by the sounds of the horns and motors which will begin the progression of sterile and lustful sexual activities which constitute the remainder of "The Fire Sermon."

After the brief description of the shady Mr. Eugenides (another merchant) we are introduced to the typist and her "young man." This passage is central because it introduces Tiresias by name and also because, with some help from the notes, it gives us our clearest understanding of the way the narrator is able both to observe and to experience all action. Tiresias intrudes three times while describing this brief tryst. The first time he announces that he experiences both male and female responses (he "throbs" between two lives) and also that he sees the action. The second time he reiterates his bisexual capacity for experience and announces that he can foretell what will happen. Here we get Tiresias as observer (seeing) and as prophet (foretelling). But in the third intrusion these distinctions once more break down; Tiresias announces that he also suffers the action, which indicates that he becomes a part of it. This fact, stated here quite straightforwardly (and the note to this passage confirms that "what Tiresias sees, in fact, is the substance of the poem"), is quite
central to the development of the poem. Tiresias not only sees what is going on about him, he suffers it, and this causes him to react very often in a personal and immediate way. When he is forced to react personally (as in his meeting with Stetson, etc.) he loses all feeling of objectivity. Thus there is always a feeling of intense suffering even when the characters are not capable of suffering. In this episode, for example, neither the young man, who "requires no response," nor the woman, who allows one half-formed thought to pass, are capable of evoking the passionate response we feel here. The suffering, in this episode, as in others throughout the poem, is primarily the suffering of the narrator, Tiresias. It is in Tiresias's consciousness that the association resulting from the young lady's gramophone record brings him back to the recurrent passage from *The Tempest* with:

"This music crept by me upon the waters"

and then in his own experience,

And along the Strand, up Queen Victoria Street.

In his response to the typist and her lover, the narrator avoids the present limbo, turning rather to the memories of music more pleasant than the typist's gramophone produces:

O City city, I can sometimes hear
Beside a public bar in Lower Thames Street,
The pleasant whining of a mandoline
And a clatter and a chatter from within
Where fishermen lounge at noon: where the walls
Of Magnus Martyr hold
Inexplicable splendour of Ionian white and gold.

Magnus Martyr with its visual image of Renaissance glories is contrasted with Saint Mary Woolnoth which keeps the hours "With a dead sound on the
final stroke of nine"; and the fishmen's chatter and pleasant music contrasts with the crowd flowing over London Bridge, half dead, with eyes fixed before their feet. This image of Lower Thames Street produces the memory of a richer experience, if not the experience itself, which contrasts with the meaningless sexual experience of the typist, and, of course, also brings Tiresias back to the river, and to the song of the Thames daughters. This song is, in effect, a chorus for "The Fire Sermon," serving a purpose something like that of the chorus in the drama. First, it sums up the action of "The Fire Sermon:" the first part of the song recapitulates the modern river; the sweating oil and tar helps to explain why there are no longer even the empty bottles and cardboard boxes on the shores; the river has been so fouled that it is unattractive even for the modern nymphs and their friends, the loitering heirs of City directors. The second part refers us back to the images of the Renaissance (Spenser, Magnus Martyr, etc.) And the final part parallels Elizabeth's journey down the river, this time bringing the journey explicitly back to the river of the Waste Land and connecting it with the typist and the river nymphs who have departed with their friends.

The contrasts implicit in the three songs, particularly that between the song of Elizabeth and that of the modern nymph, serve to emphasize the conflict within the consciousness of Tiresias which is the crucial aspect of the typist episode—the conflict that arises from meaningless experience set against the notion of meaning that lies somewhere beyond. The absence of meaning in "The Fire Sermon" is represented in sexual terms, and the action
without meaning then becomes the action of lust (contrasted to the action of love). Lust is only one of the major elements of sterility in the poem; the fear of death, the fear of faith and of daring are really the larger themes to which sexual activity, as well as such things as the charlatan fortune-telling of Madame Sosostris, the fine toilette of the lady of situations or the pub talk of the other woman, are secondary. Lust is a particularly apt representation, however, for it allows "The Fire Sermon" to culminate in the paradox that concludes the section. Eliot has pointed out that the "collocation of these two representatives of eastern and western asceticism [i.e., Buddha and Augustine], as the culmination of this part of the poem, is not an accident," and obviously the ascetic nature of both the Confessions and Buddha's "Fire Sermon" is necessary to redeem the sterile lust of this part of Eliot's poem.

Thus, after the songs of the Thames Daughters, the narrator's association shifts to the opening of Augustine's third chapter, "To Carthage then I came, where a cauldron of unholy loves sang all about mine ears." (One might be reminded by this of the closing lines of book II: "I wandered, O my God, too much astray from thee in my stay, in these days of my youth, and I became to my self a waste land"), and to the fire sermon—"Burning . . . etc." The association of burning as the burning of lust is apparent, but also present is the suggestion that must come from the repeated references to Dante's purgatory of the "fire that refines." For following the burning in the consciousness of Tiresias
is the additional reference to Augustine, "O Lord Thou pluckest me out," and then an echo of that line, but significantly omitting the words "me out:" "O Lord Thou pluckest," which suggests torture of plucking without the salvation of lifting out. Then finally comes the single word, "burning," which has neither a capital letter to begin it nor a stop to end it. Consequently there is the same sort of irony here that Brooks demonstrates in the Madame Sosostris passage. That is, the paradox that might lead to salvation is one that involves the immersion in the fire. One might look ahead for a moment to section IV of "Little Gidding" for a parallel expression (the chief difference being that in "Little Gidding" the paradox is made complete in full consciousness of what it signifies, while in "The Fire Sermon" it remains merely a series of fragments, suggesting a solution perhaps, but not with the full consciousness, or at least not with the will, to realize what it means). In "Little Gidding" we find the lines:

The Dove descending breaks the air
With flame of incandescent terror
Of which the tongues declare
The one discharge from sin and error.
The only hope, or else despair
   Lies in the choice of pyre or pyre--
   To be redeemed from fire by fire.

Who then devised the torment? Love.
Love is the unfamiliar Name
Behind the hands that wove
The intolerable shirt of flame
Which human power cannot remove.
   We only live, only suspire
   Consumed by either fire or fire.

There is a sense of awareness present in these lines from "Little Gidding" that is absent from Tiresias's lines.
Tiresias has stated the terms of redemption (just as Madame Sosostris did in part I) but has stated them in a manner which does not lead to salvation. The close of "The Fire Sermon" thus prefigures the conclusion of the poem in which Tiresias is again made explicitly aware of the terms of redemption but is capable only of "setting his lands in order" and of shoring his fragments against his ruin. The impulse in his consciousness is to be plucked out of the burning without enduring the redemptive burning of purgation, the kind of annihilation of the self that is so important a theme in Ash Wednesday and Four Quartets. In this respect, "The Fire Sermon" plays a crucial part in the development of the whole poem that is similar to the stanza in Prufrock ending "And in short I was afraid" or the passage in which Gerontion reckons his lost relationship with Christ the Tiger. It is, in short, the kind of confrontation which most of Eliot's personae begin and then back away from in fear. (One might recollect Tiresias' early prophecy "I will show you fear in a handful of dust.") What Tiresias suffers is the recognition of the necessity of purgation, of commitment. But Tiresias allows himself to be involved only to the extent of a sort of vicarious foresuffering, and cannot enter the action wholly enough to be purged of it. And by extension, the other characters, who are less able and less alive than Tiresias, do not commit themselves to the "awful daring of a moment's surrender."

In section IV, "Death by Water," the narrator recalls the Phoenician sailor again, perhaps prompted by the trailing off of his reverie at the end of III to the single word, "burning." This would follow the theme
that has emerged at the end of III, the theme of purgation by immersion.
The other side of the paradox of purgation from fire by fire is, in fact, the concept of redemption from water by water. But as in the fire, purgation is merely annihilation if it is not accompanied by a will for redemption. Consequently the reflection of Phlebas the Phoenician's death is as inconclusive as is the meditation on the two prophets, Buddha and Augustine; and the narrator, after recalling Phlebas, can only turn to the audience and attempt a prophecy of his own:

Gentile or Jew
O you who turn the wheel and look to windward,
Consider Phlebas, who was once handsome and tall as you.

It should be noted how much less authority (and, in fact, meaning) there is in this prophetic outburst than in the earlier ones, for example:

Son of man,
You cannot say, or guess, for you know only
A heap of broken images, . . .

One other aspect of this brief section bears mentioning. In this passage occurs the last use of the second person pronoun to separate the narrator from the audience or from the other characters of the poem. This signifies the final attempt of the narrator to raise himself to an objective position, to extricate himself, as it were, from the suffering that is a part of his experience in "The Fire Sermon." One is tempted to say that this is the narrator's own effort to "pluck himself out" of degenerative participation in The Waste Land; and perhaps the very brevity of the section suggests the futility of this attempt.

For in "What the Thunder Said" the reverie of the narrator (and
reverie is exactly what it is) deteriorates into a confused mixture of recollection of previous images and episodes mixed with a fragmented formula for redemption. The outstanding feature of the first half or more of this section is an apparent random mixture of images from the first four sections. The torchlight red on sweaty faces, the frosty silence in the garden, the dry rock and dead mountain all recall the river scenes, the images of winter and of gardens and the sterile rocks of the first three sections. The "hooded hordes swarming/ Over endless plains, stumbling in cracked earth/ Ringed by the flat horizon only" recalls Madame Sosostris', "I see crowds of people, walking round in a ring;" the "City over the mountains . . . Jerusalem, Athens, Alexandria/ Vienna, London" is an echo, and expansion of the "Unreal City;" and the woman who "drew her long hair out tight/ And fiddled whisper music on those strings" is reminiscent of the Lady of Section II who "under the firelight under the brush, her hair/ Spread out in fiery points/ Glowed into words, then would be savagely still."

There are, however, two qualities which distinguish the images here from their earlier appearances. The first is their unreal, almost surrealistic quality. The "Dead mountain mouth of carious teeth that cannot spit;" the "Hooded hordes swarming/ Over endless plains," the "bats with baby faces in the violet light" (perhaps a reference to the typist, who comes to her flat in the violet light) are in fact images of events that are distorted, perhaps by the terror they evoke. They are images which should point to the perilous journey, the reappearance
of a crucified God, the message of salvation in the commands of the thunder. But they do not, because the narrator only sees in them a kind of mortal fascination which only makes them more unreal and terrifying and makes the wish for water seem a hollow yearning. The main feeling here is one of disintegration, not salvation, and when the narrator finally arrives at the chapel in the mountains there is the cock's crow, which reminds us of Peter's denial of Christ. There is even a question, I think, of whether the rain arrives at all, for immediately following the lines "Then a damp gust/ Bringing rain" is a description of an arid landscape which "waited for rain" and received only thunder, and in the final stanza the plain is still "arid."

In addition, there is a shift in emphasis in this section from the earlier ones. However much the narrator found himself drawn into the action, into the suffering in sections I-IV, he maintained at least the formal distinction between himself and the other characters, between "I" and "you." Wherever the pronoun "I" appears in these sections it is either the narrator or it is clearly set off, as in the songs of the Thames' daughters. As late in the poem as "Death by Water" this distinction is made, with the narrator addressing his audience as "you who turn the wheel and look to windward," clearly implying the "I"ness of himself. But from the beginning of "What the Thunder Said" one is struck by the fact that the distinction between "You" and "I" is nearly gone, is replaced by the less definite distinction between "We" and "I." The narrator has finally become, or perhaps has admitted to becoming, one of the participants in the poem. In the first stanza
we find:

He who was living is now dead
We who were living are now dying. (my italics)

And in the following stanza, again:

If there were water we should stop and drink
Amongst the rock one cannot stop or think. (my italics)

In the brief passage recollecting the Journey to Emmaus there is the "I" which is not set off, suggesting that the actor is in fact the narrator. And the responses to the first two commands of the thunder are in the first person. The only use of the second person is in the response to the third command, a conditional situation which in the context would not seem to refer to the actual condition of either Tiresias or the auditor, but to a figure who might have found redemption:

The boat responded
Gaily, to the hand expert with sail and oar
The sea was calm, your heart would have responded
Gaily, when invited, beating obedient
To controlling hands. [Italics mine]

The reference here, it seems to me, is to Christ's calming of the seas, and the implication is that in a living religious context the heart would have responded. But "He who was living is now dead," and there is consequently no response. In the final stanza, of course, the first person pronoun is resumed, but in a passage that is permeated with personal despair.

In addition to the general shift away from the distinction between "you" and "I" roles, there is a specific shift from the plural to the singular as this section progresses. It will have been noted that in
the listing of the occurrences of the pronoun in the above paragraph, the general movement was from the inclusive "we" to the exclusive, and consequently personal, "I." In the earlier portions of "What the Thunder Said" Tiresias tends to think in terms of the collective consciousness: "we are now dying," "We should stop and drink." Even as late as the response to the first command of the thunder it is "we" whom Tiresias speaks of:

```
what have we given?
My friend, blood shaking my heart
The awful daring of a moment's surrender
Which an age of prudence can never retract
By this, and this only, we have existed
Which is not to be found in our obituaries
Or in memories draped by the beneficent spider
Or under seal broken by the lean solicitor
In our empty rooms.
```

This passage illustrates clearly the kind of combination of personal and collective consciousness which marks Tiresias's role here. Literally, Tiresias is addressing his audience, telling us that we must all (including the speaker) dare to live fully and dangerously: "By this, and this only, we have existed." (The theme is again the recurrent image of immersion in the destructive element.) However, the line, "My friend, blood shaking my heart," is an interjection which not only emphasizes the importance of the statement, but also illustrates the profound emotional response it evokes from the narrator. This kind of emotional response helps to create a sense of emotional energy in the poem, and it perhaps helps to universalize the poetic response, but it also points to the final spiritual ambiguity of the narrator who cannot
save mankind because he cannot quite save himself. He has the "keys,"

    I have heard the key
    Turn in the door and turn once only
    We think of the key, each in his prison
    Thinking of the key, each confirms a prison;

but the keys do not lead to salvation. They only confirm the individual prison of each man. Thus, the response to the third command--to practice control, or self-restraint--is a conditional response which suggests only what might have been if the key had been turned, if the surrender had been made. The first command is, in fact, the condition upon which the other two are based in the development of the poem, and as the recognition of this occurs in the consciousness of Tiresias, the narrator-protagonist, the shift from a collective inquisition to an intensely personal one occurs. Tiresias muses, "I have heard the key turn once only;" speculates that "we think of the key, each [the narrator included, of course, in the collective pronoun] in his prison/

    Thinking of the key, each confirms his prison." Consequently as the mental association progresses (without punctuation) from the supposition of control to the actuality of the present condition, Tiresias ignores the collective and thinks only of his personal condition:

    I sat upon the shore
    Fishing, with the arid plain behind me
    Shall I at least set my lands in order?

    These fragments I have shored against my ruins
    Why then Ile fit you. Hieronymo's mad againe.

It is especially significant in this context that the quotation from Kyd is taken from the end of the play, just after Hieronymo has taken
his revenge and just before he cuts out his tongue to prevent his being questioned.

This last stanza completes the transition from the collective experience to the deeply personal one, but personal in terms of "A Note on War Poetry":

Of private experience at its greatest intensity
Becoming universal, which we call "poetry."

The phrase "personal experience . . . becoming universal" has a particular significance in the development of this poem, particularly in the development of the figure of Tiresias, who serves at once as the narrator, or persona, and the central personage in the poem. In the early sections, as we have seen, Tiresias serves primarily as an objective narrator, relating the experience of the various characters who inhabit the waste land, and responding chiefly in a mental manner to these characters. This kind of reportage might be called (to use Eliot's phrase) "expression of collective emotion," given poetic form by the directing consciousness of the narrator. But somewhere during the course of the poem—it is impossible to put one's finger on the exact spot, although one can point to important episodes, such as the typist home for tea time—the "merely individual/ Explosion breaks/ In the path of an action merely typical/ To create the universal, originate a symbol." And the nature of this "explosion" rests within the role that Tiresias plays in the poem. That is, as the narrator becomes involved in the action, and consequently as the response becomes emotional as well as mental, and
as he sees the action more and more in terms of his own experience, the symbol is created. Just as Prufrock or Gerontion cannot fully comprehend their individual experiences, so is Tiresias incapable of comprehending his. Thus the resigned, "These fragments I have shored against my ruins," transcends the experience of the central character, although it comes through the experience of that character. In short, it is the experience of Tiresias that gives *The Waste Land* its meaning and its poetic form, for the fragments (as opposed to images) that conclude the poem constitute its poetic form and meaning. Tiresias' early role as an "organizer" of the experience of the other characters becomes a role of trying (and failing) to sort out his own involvement in the action of the poem. And just as Tiresias is a remarkably fitting figure to sort out the experience of the other characters, being timeless, and including all men and all women, so is he a fitting figure to represent the final quandary of *The Waste Land*. First because of his assumed moral superiority he is a figure admirably suited to represent that sort of solipsistic pride which in all of Eliot's work prevents redemption. His being at once in the action and somehow apart from it suits him to the role. In addition, he is a figure who can conceive of the terms of salvation without being able to participate in it or to accept the terms. He is, in short, a figure not unlike either Prufrock or Gerontion, or many of Eliot's protagonists in his incapacity to give "the awful daring of a moment's surrender." But he is superior to these other protagonists in his knowledge and range of experience and mythical associations. Thus, it seems to me, the greater achievement of *The Waste Land* over the earlier poems rests largely, even primarily, on
the success with which Eliot was able to employ his narrator, the figure of Tiresias, in the poem.

However, the achievement of the poem still takes place within the general framework of the earlier poetry; that is, the poem depends upon the use of a narrator who serves as a mask for the poet. In this sense, Tiresias is not different in kind from the figures who narrate the earlier poems. Though far more complex than any earlier poems, *The Waste Land* operates essentially upon the principle of the dramatic monologue. The role of Tiresias in this poem parallels the role of Prufrock and Gerontion in their poems. It is the experience of Tiresias that forms the substance of the poem and it is when the experience of Tiresias becomes most intensely personal that the poem reaches its climaxes and consequently becomes most universal. However, two important differences here from the earlier poems should be noted. The first is the inclusion of a wide range of minor characters within the action of the poem. These serve, first, to incorporate a wider and consequently more representative range of experience, and second, to give a wider panorama of situations and events to which the narrator can respond and which in fact colour his responses. The women of "Prufrock" and Gerontion's fellow tenants are here expanded into a set of secondary characters who become at times as important as the narrator himself. That is, within many of the separate episodes Tiresias is not apparently primary; his importance as the primary personage of the poem becomes apparent only in the development of the poem as a whole.
A second departure from the earlier poems is the ambiguity or lack of precise delineation of the narrator. In "Prufrock," "Portrait," "Gerontion" and others, the narrator is a self that can be defined, if not in the same way as most of Browning's personalities, at least as people with relatively clearly defined limitations and traits of character. Tiresias is not so, partly because of his mythical associations and partly because of his particular type of role within the poem itself. Eliot has chosen to use that group of characteristics associated with the Tiresias myth that emphasize the capability to experience the roles of others, and as a natural result has de-emphasized any strong characteristics of a strong personality that were available. As a consequence, although the personal suffering of Tiresias forms the main impact of the poem, as a "personality" Tiresias is practically non-existent. Tiresias comes perhaps as close as a persona can to being one who has personal experiences that have no quality of personality in them at all. He is, in effect, a voice without a personality who nevertheless is subject to personal experiences, personal suffering, and personal despair. To this extent, The Waste Land marks one kind of success in Eliot's search for an impersonal method in poetry; that success is in creation of a persona with no definable limits, who possesses a consciousness that comprehends all personalities, yet is distinct from all personalities. Tiresias, in the end, seems to exhaust this line of development, and in general the movement after The Waste Land is one back to the use of a persona who, if not much more clearly defined, has a more limited, more personal, more clearly individual character. In Ash Wednesday and the Four Quartets
the persona is much more like Eliot himself than in any of the other poems.

This dual role of the narrator has a further application, one that represents a development from the earlier monologues. As an observer who is never quite fully detached from the action of the other characters, yet never wholly in that action, Tiresias represents a kind of relationship between the individual consciousness and other consciousnesses. Tiresias, however, is not just another consciousness; his mythical, wide-ranging background makes of him a rather more generalized character than all the rest. He is representative in the sense that he brings together all human consciousness. He is, in other words, a representative of the human level of consciousness, perhaps not really typical, but nevertheless representative of this plane of human association.

On the other hand, in his role as the objective judge or prophet he represents the association of human consciousness with the plane of absolute moral and spiritual values. His dual role puts him in the position in which he is, or might be, capable of connecting the human and the absolute, or eternal. The similarity between this position and the initial, central assumption in T. E. Hulme's "Humanism and the Religious Attitude,"\(^{16}\) whether it is accidental or intentional, is striking. Hulme's thesis is that the central fault of Western Humanism is the failure to distinguish clearly between the organic human plane and the absolute moral plane. Tiresias, as an active participant in the action (whether he is called "character" or "personage"), fails for approximately the same reason.
That is, in every crucial situation he fails to make this distinction because he allows his personality, his own individual responses, to intrude. When he does separate the two planes—as for example in the first two stanzas of the poem—he does so at the expense of one of them. In other words, the narrator consistently aligns himself with either human activities or moral absolutes, but he is in the end incapable of bringing the two together. This is his central failure as an actor in the poem, a failure that is in many important ways similar to that of the earlier narrators, and that is redeemed in the later poems. The central difference between The Waste Land and the Four Quartets is that the latter poems either point the way towards or achieve the "intersection of time and eternity" (i.e. the human and absolute worlds). As we shall see, a central reason for the difference lies in the personae of the poems, particularly in their abilities to distinguish between that in the human consciousness which is universal and that which is merely personal. Tiresias's central weakness as a character is that he must be either entirely personal or entirely impersonal; he cannot connect the individual with the eternal; thus he finally lacks the will for salvation.

This is not to say that The Waste Land fails as a poem. It does not any more than "Prufrock" fails because of the failure of its narrator's personality. Out of Tiresias's personal experience Eliot succeeds in creating something larger than merely the personal experience. We recognize the gap between knowledge of and achievement of salvation and from this gap arises the ironic conflict that informs the poem. This
conflict rests within the narrator himself, between his allegiance to spiritual and moral values on one hand, and on the other his overwhelming humanness which prevents him from finally attaching himself to other than purely human activity.

As a narrator Tiresias stands at a point midway between the particularized actor-narrators of the earlier monologues and the less personalized, although equally individual, "I" of the final great poems. He is a figure who experiences the action by proxy, unlike either the earlier or the later narrators. Like the earlier narrators he is a figure who is clearly distinct from the poet. Like the "I" of *Ash Wednesday* and the *Four Quartets* he is detached sufficiently to understand, at least partially, the situation in which he finds himself. But this understanding is more limited than that of the narrators in the later poems, for it includes only his external world, not himself.

Thus, in the figure of Tiresias lie two possibilities for further development. On one hand he points to the narrators of *Ash Wednesday* and *Four Quartets*, who have the ability to create absolutes out of personal experience. The development from Tiresias to the "I" of *Ash Wednesday* is not really great. Both narrators participate in some way in the action of the poem, and both have the ability to stand apart from the action and weigh it. The chief difference is that the "I" of *Ash Wednesday* judges his own action and motives in relation to, and by the standards of, an absolute set of values. Tiresias, on the other hand, judges the characters about him, condemning their sterility and absence of faith, not
his own. As a result, the narrator of *Ash Wednesday* succeeds in dissocia
ting himself and his values from his own personal emotions; Tiresias fails, fails because he lacks the kind of humility to say,

Teach us to care and not to care.

Tiresias, in fact, is distinguished by his pride. From the beginning:

\begin{quote}
Son of man,
You cannot say, or guess, for you know only
A heap of broken images,
\end{quote}

to

\begin{quote}
Dry bones can harm no one.\textsuperscript{17}
\end{quote}

Tiresias continually assumes the pose that enables him to say, in effect, of the other characters "There, but for my superior knowledge, go I."\textsuperscript{18}

The final irony, of course, is that his knowledge does not save him; his pride does not prevent his becoming one of the damned; consequently the final stanza shows him also to be one who is only in possession of "A heap of broken images:" his "fragments." And the irony is heightened because his fragments include the "keys" to redemption--"Datta. Dayadhvam. Damyata."

The second possible development from Tiresias is the complete extinction of individuality--not transcendence, as is found in the later poems, but extinction. Prufrock is a character in his poem, the central character. Tiresias, if we may continue to use Eliot's description, is a personage, not a character. Continuing this development would result in a narrator who is not even a personage, who has no individual existence of his own whatever. This is in a sense what does happen in *The Hollow*
Men. For if *The Waste Land* is a poem with a persona who is indistinct as an individual personality, *The Hollow Men* goes even further. It is a poem almost without a persona, almost, in fact, without any voice. Tiresias at least is an individual capable of points of view; he is capable of assuming the personalities of those he sees, but this ability does not cause the extinction of his own individuality. But one can hardly speak of a persona in *The Hollow Men*: it is for the most part a chorus speaking, and the "I" sections are not distinguishable from the "we" sections, unless it is in the strong wish not to be an individual:

Let me be no nearer
In death's dream kingdom
Let me also wear
Such deliberate disguises.

Escape, in fact, is central to the speaker of this poem. The emphasis throughout the poem is upon the elimination of his individual presence. The first section begins with an assertion, although negative in intent, of an identity; but this assertion is couched in the collective plural:

We are the hollow men
We are the stuffed men
Leaning together

They possess a single collective "Headpiece filled with straw." In the second stanza the pronoun shifts to the singular, but the speaker merely asks not to be an individual:

Let me be no nearer
In death's dream kingdom
Let me also wear
Such deliberate disguises
Rat's coat, crowskin, crossed staves
In a field
Behaving as the wind behaves
No nearer

After this any explicit reference to the self occurs only rarely and always in the plural. In the third and fourth sections highly depersonalized synecdoche replaces the personal pronoun.¹⁹

Here the stone images
Are raised, here they receive
The supplication of a dead man's hand

and

Lips that would kiss
Form prayers to broken stone.

Yet as the apparent effort to withdraw is made, there is a sense in which the suffering consciousness becomes more real. The final refrain--

For Thine is
Life is
For thine is the--

represents the kind of hysteria present in such passages from The Waste Land as the meeting with Stetson or the final stanza of the poem. Thus, like The Waste Land this poem represents the effect of the extinction (opposed to the transcendence) of individuality and personality. The persona who is afraid of his individuality and personality is also incapable of forming any moral or spiritual absolutes, and therefore is separated from life itself. This fact is central to Eliot's poetry, particularly from this point onward.

The chief difficulty, then, in speaking of the persona of The
*Hollow Men* is to identify the persona. The question occurs, "Are any of the speakers distinguishable in any way from the others?" The theme, tone, and the liturgical basis of the poem all suggest that there is nothing by which the speakers are to be distinguished. They possess the anonymity of a collection of voices in liturgical response. In fact, the liturgical tone of the poem compensates in a way for the lack of a definable persona; the liturgy replaces the persona. The prosody of *The Hollow Men* is, of course, a parody on the liturgy of the Church. The short, formal lines of grave intent suggest the ritual of the Church service from the *Book of Common Prayer*. And this is enforced by the numerous references and allusions to the rituals of the Church. In addition there are a number of references to pagan rituals which also have had, at one time, a real significance to men.

Obviously, the initial effect of this liturgical method is to satirize the hollow men who have the liturgy without the meaning, whose ritual is therefore empty and offers no solace. But in addition the use of ritual in *The Hollow Men* represents an important step in the development from the complex and indecisive function of ritual in *The Waste Land* to the more straightforward and personal use of it in *Ash Wednesday*. Although the ritual in *The Hollow Men* is used satirically, it is, for the first time in Eliot's poetry, explicitly religious. That is to say, even in *The Waste Land* the ritual, which is mostly anthropological in origin, is used to express the desires, the history, and the failure of men and man. In *The Hollow Men* the ritual depends for its success upon
our recognition of it as formal, traditional liturgy of the Church. That the hollow men themselves are unable, because unwilling, to find meaning in their ritual does not reflect upon the ritual itself: only on the men. The meaning of the poem depends upon the reader's recognition of the fact that the ritual is not diminished by the hollow men's misuse of it; rather the hollow men are shown to be as they are through their use of it. There are similarities, of course, with the earlier poetry; the pagan fertility ritual implicit in the song:

Here we go round the prickly pear . . .

is similar in a way to the pagan myths in The Waste Land. But there is a definite and significant shift in emphasis from The Waste Land to The Hollow Men, a shift that points clearly toward the acceptance of Christian ritual in Ash Wednesday.

The liturgical, religious, use of ritual in The Hollow Men might be said to replace the narrator as the controlling, unifying device of the poem. The hollow men are incapable of individual voices; thus their expression emerges through a formalized style that acts as a substitute for individual ability. But unlike Ash Wednesday the ritual in The Hollow Men is a refuge; not an attempt to reach out to something beyond the human but rather merely to escape the human. Again the impersonality of the characters arises from their cowardice and hollowness. There is no "character" in The Hollow Men; there is no single "voice;" consequently their method of narration is the only direct contact we have with them. That is to say, the method of narration is the narration itself; we have
nothing else but a hollow parody on meaningful ritual.

The absence of a specific narrator is not, of course, particularly unusual in poetry. It is, however, unusual in the dramatic monologue and of course, *The Hollow Men* is a monologue. It is a monologue in which the theme is the absence of an individual voice. As a result the narrator lacks a voice of his own. This is perhaps the epitome of impersonality in the monologue—the monologue without a narrator. All trace of the individual persona is gone. Yet the situation into which the hollow men are placed requires an individual response. "Those who have crossed [death? faith?] with direct eyes" stand in contrast to the hollow men, for they represent, if anything, a sense of individual bravery. In contrast the hollow men are afraid, and this fear brings them together, "Leaning together." The major judgment made upon the hollow men, in fact, is made in terms of the failure of individuality. The poem is filled with the wish not to be alone, not to assert a personality and an individuality. The chief failure of the characters is the failure to assert their personalities. Instead they lean together with their collective headpiece filled with straw.

It is in respect to this theme that perhaps the most thorough and convincing definition of personality, as Eliot regards it from this point onward, can be made. Personality, in popular usage, generally has something to do with those characteristics of the self in which one differs from other selves—individuality. The characters of *The Hollow Men* have no marks of individuality. Yet their impersonality is totally
one of failure. There is another kind of "personality" which Eliot increasingly used and which he obliquely defined in his essay on Yeats in the passage I have already quoted a number of times. Instead of going to that essay again it might be more helpful to return to Hulme for a minute, to a definition which seems entirely consistent with what Eliot had in mind. In explaining the essential difference between the medieval religious mind and the modern humanistic mind, Hulme stresses the loss, in Humanism, of the doctrine of original sin: that is, the belief that man's nature is forever limited and flawed. The failure to believe in original sin, says Hulme, results in the exaggerated faith in human personality. He goes on to formulate two errors which follow this shift in thought.

(1) The error in human things; the confusion blurs the clear outlines of human relations by introducing into them the Perfection that properly belongs to the non-human. It thus creates the bastard conception of Personality. In literature it leads to romanticism.

(2) The confusion created in the absolute values of religion and ethics is even greater. It distorts the real nature of ethical values by deriving them out of essentially subjective things, like human desires and feelings; and all attempts to "explain" religion, on a humanist basis, whether it be Christianity, or an alien religion like Buddhism, must always be futile. As a minor example of this, take the question of immortality. It seems paradoxical at first sight, that the Middle Ages, which lacked entirely the conception of personality, had a real belief in immortality; while thought since the Renaissance, which has been dominated by the belief in personality, has not had the same conviction. You might have expected that it would be the people who thought they really had something worth preserving who would have thought they were immortal, but the contrary is the case. Moreover, those thinkers since the Renaissance who have believed in immortality and who have attempted to give explanations of
it, have, in my opinion, gone wrong, because they have dealt with it in terms of the category of individuality. The problem can only be profitably dealt with by being entirely re-stated. This is just one instance of the way in which thought about these things, in terms of categories appropriate only to human and vital things, distorts them. (Speculations, pp. 48, 49)

And later, when amplifying upon this, Hulme takes an example of the difference between Byzantine and Renaissance art.

Renaissance art we may call a "vital" art in that it depends on pleasure in the reproduction of human and natural forms. Byzantine art is the exact contrary of this. There is nothing vital in it; the emotion you get from it is not a pleasure in the reproduction of natural or human life. The disgust with the trivial and accidental characteristics of living shapes, the searching after an austerity, a perfection and rigidity which vital things can never have, lead here to the use of forms which can almost be called geometrical. Man is subordinate to certain absolute values: there is no delight in the human form, leading to its natural reproduction; it is always distorted to fit into the more abstract forms which convey an intense religious emotion. (p. 53)

The import of Hulme's comments is that there is an essential difference between personality as character and personality in the more popular sense, as individual differences. When Hulme uses the term in these passages he refers to the popular notion of personality, to the belief, in fact, that accidental differences of "personality" between men is important. This is a different thing from a specific individual's personality, in the sense of his own feelings and emotions. For Hulme nowhere denies the necessity of the individual's coming to terms with the absolute in a personal, individual sense. What he does deny is that the way to come to the absolute is by attributing to it characteristics of
the individual's own personality. In other words, individuality is inescapable, but it must be subordinate to the absolute.

This conception of personality is consistent with that which informs *The Hollow Men*. To paraphrase an earlier statement by Eliot, they are impersonal where they should be individual, and personal where they should be impersonal. Their impersonality--and the impersonality inherent in the method of narration of the poem--is really a fear to be alone, a self. But the emphasis upon the individual characteristics of man in general, upon the abstraction of "personality" as Hulme uses the term, prevents them from becoming individual selves. There is no centre in the hollow men--or, for that matter, in the poem itself (excepting the ritual)--to hold things together. There is nothing with which to meet the absolute (which is "more distant ... than a fading star"), with which to cross into "death's other Kingdom."

It is significant in this respect that as a link between *The Waste Land* and *Ash Wednesday*, *The Hollow Men* possesses fragments of elements which are central to both, but lacks the respective unifying forces that hold the other poems together. Like the earlier monologues, there is a satirical view of people without faith, without spiritual absolutes. But there is no "character" in the poem who serves as a point of view. And like the later poems, there is a positive and religious use of ritual, suggesting a formal approach to the absolutes of theistic and religious values, but again there is no sense of individuality from which the absolute can be approached. *The Hollow Men* is Eliot's only
substantial poem lacking a specific persona, a consciousness through which the external can be viewed, a personal point of view. This is, I think, a real flaw in the poem, making of it a "minor" poem. It possesses the usual Eliotic sense of proper sound and development; it lacks only the point of view which is present in the poems that precede and follow it. It is, however, for this reason, enlightening, for it illustrates the importance that the individual point of view continues to have in Eliot's poetry. For time and eternity to intersect, both time (the human) and eternity must be present. If, as in *The Hollow Men*, the human disappears (i.e. the specifically individual human consciousness) the eternal also disappears. The eternal is absolute in Eliot's thought, but it is not "abstract" in the sense of being vague. It is as specific as is the individual self. And it requires a specific self through which to be apprehended. In those of Eliot's poems in which the persona lacks individuality and specificity, the success of the poem is limited. *The Hollow Men*, although undoubtedly a good, competent poem, suffers from the fault of the earliest short lyrics: it presents a mood, a state of consciousness, with no consciousness present. In the poems that follow *The Hollow Men*, Eliot returns to the use of a specific, identifiable persona to give the poems direction and unity.
CHAPTER 4 FOOTNOTES


2 The Invisible Poet, p. 35. Prufrock, Kenner says, is "a name plus a voice . . . Prufrock is strangely boundless; one doesn't affirm at a given point with certainty, 'Here is where his knowledge would have stopped,' or 'These are subtleties to which he would not have aspired.'" Even allowing for a certain amount of exaggeration to make a necessary point about Eliot's poetic technique, this description is surely more appropriate for The Waste Land than it is for "Prufrock." One wonders if Eliot had struck out in a different direction after the early monologues if they would still be characterized in terms like Kenner uses; how much of our description of "Prufrock" is dictated by our knowledge of the later poems?

3 One of Pound's marginal comments in the recently published manuscript of The Waste Land would seem to confirm this. Beside a passage in which the narrator says something quite vaguely, Pound admonished, "Make up yr mind/ you Tiresias/ if you know/ know damn well/ or else you don't."

4 A number of critics have been more cautious, referring to the narrator of the poem as the "protagonist" or the "persona." (I know of no serious argument against the assumption that there is a central voice throughout the poem, the only question is the extent to which that voice can be identified, either as a dramatic character or as a mask for the poet. It seems to me that identification of the narrator is both entirely consistent with the poem itself and very helpful in bringing a clearer understanding to our reading of the poem, in the mythical association which Tiresias brings with him.


6 Although the biographical information remains incomplete, it is clear enough that The Waste Land was inspired by Eliot's own personal, marital, economic, etc., problems in combination with his observation of 'the present decay of eastern Europe' (and perhaps western Europe as well). What I am speaking of is in addition to this; that within the poem itself the narrator himself undergoes this process by which individual, or typical, experience becomes universal.

7 Modern Poetry and the Tradition, pp. 142-143.
Such a response, of course, could be simply imagined by the narrator, just as Prufrock imagines his lady's responses.

Eliot tells us in a note that this church is about to be demolished.

Eliot tells us that in this part "they speak in turn." That the three individual statements seem to form one history is not only a further indication of the sameness of all the characters, but also another link between the inhabitants of the waste land and the hollow men who "lean together."

One is reminded of Conrad (whom Eliot often used) and Stein's injunction to immerse oneself in the destructive elements (a similar use of the water image), in Lord Jim.

This is the same combination present in "The Fire Sermon," the chief difference being that in "What the Thunder Said" the narrative voice is even more confused and personal.

This distinction between "we" and "I" (that is between first person singular and plural rather than between first and second person) brings "What the Thunder Said" closer to The Hollow Men than to any of the other monologues in its point of view.

The most common interpretation is that the "persona" becomes the quester in this section. (E.g. See Brooks, Modern Poetry and the Tradition, pp. 160-163.)

Eliot's thesis on Bradley is insistent in a number of passages upon the necessity of a well-developed personality, or character, in the achievement of meaningful human relationships.

In Speculations, ed. Herbert Read (London, 1924), pp. 3-71, Eliot's favourable review of the book in the Criterion shows that he knew and liked the essay.

Cf., the "dry bones" in Ash Wednesday, II. Tiresias's boast is an example of his failure to understand the spiritual implications of many of the symbols which occupy his reverie.

19 This is an echo of what Prufrock does with his women. They also are only voices, arms, skirts, etc.

20 It is significant to compare this use of liturgy with the use of the Mass and of prayer in *Ash Wednesday*. The liturgy of *The Hollow Men* is modelled after one of the most impersonal parts of worship, the unison response; the mass and the ritual of prayer, while equally formal, are far more personal in the sense that they involve the individual more or less directly in some sort of contact with the divine.

21 See my note #16 above. There can be no doubt that Eliot knew and admired (more important, agreed with) Hulme's work by this time.
CHAPTER 5

"AND AFTER THIS OUR EXILE":
LOOKING TO DEATH FOR WHAT LIFE CANNOT GIVE.

In the five or six years following the publication of *The Hollow Men* Eliot experimented with a variety of poetic voices. He began with the dramatic fragment, *Sweeney Agonistes*, which was published in the *Criterion* in 1926. In a way the transition to drama was natural after *The Hollow Men*; the normal technique of the drama is direct presentation of the characters with no narrator whatever, which would seem to be the next natural step after the collective personae of *The Hollow Men*. However, *Sweeney Agonistes* appears to have presented Eliot with problems which he found, at this point, insurmountable, and he finally published it along with *Coriolan*, as an "unfinished poem."¹

With "Sweeney" out of the way, Eliot continued to experiment with different voices. From 1927 to 1930 he wrote four *Ariel* poems and *Ash Wednesday*. Except for "Animula" (the least successful of the four) the *Ariel* poems are monologues in which the narrators are historical or semi-historical figures. In this respect they are the most "traditional" monologues Eliot ever wrote. Thematically, the progression from "Journey of the Magi" (1927), through "A Song for Simeon" (1928) to "Marina" (1930) is interesting for the development of a kind of reconciliation and
discovery that recalls Shakespeare's final plays. As in *Pericles*, *Winter's Tale* or *The Tempest*, the pervading image of reconciliation becomes the uniting of generations. The image is implicit in "Journey of the Magi" and "A Song for Simeon"--the old men finding rebirth in a child--and it is completed in "Marina." In each case the narrator learns (or tries to learn) a resignation which comes from two discoveries: first, that the individual has a temporary but proper place within the continuing tradition of his race, and second, that birth and death are connected in various mysterious ways. Thus, one general characteristic shared by the Magus, Simeon and Pericles, which sets them apart from earlier narrators, is their humility. This is different from the cowardice of the hollow men, for it does not necessarily reject the individual's importance; it merely is a view which recognizes and strives to accept the individual's limitations in the face of more permanent facts and traditions. Allan Tate put this succinctly, saying that the central mood of the poems to *The Hollow Men* is ironic, while in *Ash Wednesday* and the *Ariel* poems the mood is humble. He goes on to illustrate that in say, *The Waste Land*, the poet's mood [toward his narrator's] is "But for the grace of God, . . . there go I," while in the later poems the poet is more sympathetic toward the narrators. Denis Harding described this shift when he said that in the poetry before *Ash Wednesday* the dominant note is protest, the characters are "sufferers" rather than "failures," and the poet "invite[s] you to step across a dividing line and join him in guaranteed rightness. . . . Throughout the earlier poems there are traces of what, if it were cruder and
without irony and impersonality, would be felt at once as self-pity or futile protest." In the later poetry, Harding says, the poet "never invites you to believe that everything undesirable in you is due to outside influences that can be blamed for tampering with your original rightness," but instead merely "suggests at the most that you and he should both try, in familiar and difficult ways, not to live so badly." One might add that the dramatic characters as well as poet and reader are subject to this attitude. Thus, the lessening of the irony brings the poet's attitude closer to that of his narrators in these monologues; and, as Harding concludes, "the clearer and more direct realization of this kind of experience . . . makes the later poems at the same time more personal and more mature."

The poems published in 1927 begin this transformation. The Magus is Eliot's first dramatic character to recognize with anything approaching full understanding the personal implications of the paradox of death and rebirth:

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.

But the Magus's understanding of this paradox (which is similar to the poet's understanding of it) arises from his recognition that he does not really understand it; he only recognizes and accepts it as a condition of his new existence. He is neither angry nor self-righteous about his discovery, and it is this kind of submission, or humility, that distinguishes him from the earlier narrators. And it is accompanied by
a new sense of separation from the old self:

We returned to our places, these Kingdoms,
But no longer at ease here, in the old dispensation,
With an alien people clutching their gods.

This is, however, only a tentative beginning; and the Magus's conclusion is really another kind of escape even if put in different and more positive terms from the earlier poems. There is a definite development from

These fragments I have shored against my ruins

to

I should be glad of another death.

The latter contains a good deal more resignation and even purpose, but it still suggests a strong wish to escape the strain of being human. However, the Magus' gloom is tempered by the recognition of a certain kind of continuity between the different--human and spiritual--births and deaths, and this points the way towards Eliot's final reconciliation with the human condition and the individual personality.

"A Song for Simeon," like "Journey of the Magi," is a "traditional" monologue; what is new in this poem is not narrative technique or posture, but rather a difference in the situation, and consequently the attitudes, of the narrator. The Magus finds himself wrenched out of his old tradition--the old dispensation--and placed into an alien tradition. Hence he is alienated from both, at home neither in the new nor in the old ways. The result is a profound disenchantment with life and a desire to escape into "another death." Simeon, on the other hand, is
placed firmly within a long and powerful tradition; his sense of continuity is prevalent throughout the poem:

I have walked many years in this city,  
Kept faith and fast, provided for the poor,  
Have given and taken honour and ease.  

Let the Infant, the still unspeaking and unspoken Word,  
Grant Israel's consolation.  

According to thy word.  
They shall praise Thee and suffer in every generation.

It is this emphasis on his tradition that permits Simeon to conclude more hopefully than does the Magus, even though there is still a sense of doom. Simeon asks,

Who shall remember my house, where shall live my children's children  
When the time of sorrow is come?  
They will take the goat's path, and the foxes' home,  
Fleeing from the foreign faces and the foreign swords.

But from this dismal prophecy of destruction Simeon progresses to resolution and reconciliation. First, he prays for his God's peace "before the time of cords and scourges and lamentation." His prayer is not merely personal; it is for the nation. "Grant us thy peace," he says twice before he finally prays for himself.

Of course it is the Messiah who is to be the means by which God's peace is granted--the saviour of the nation. But he is also the saviour of men, and Simeon's prayer moves from the communal to the personal. This begins with his recognition of the limitations of his understanding of this event, the birth of the Messiah:
Not for me the martyrdom, the ecstasy of thought and prayer,
Not for me the ultimate vision.
Grant me thy peace.

And after this recognition that this Messiah, too, must suffer he
concludes with a tone of resignation:

I am tired with my own life and the lives of those after me,
I am dying in my own death and the deaths of those after me.

But because of his attachment to the tradition—which includes the
future as well as the past—and because he has had his own vision, this
resignation is a positive one that transcends the human weariness of the
Magus. Compare, "I should be glad of another death," with Simeon's:

Let thy servant depart
Having seen thy salvation.

In the figure of Simeon there is a reconciliation between the
personal and the sense of community that is new to Eliot's poetry. It
comes from Simeon's own view of himself as a part of his people.

Throughout the poem Simeon sees his own fate as the fate of his nation—
his "house" and descendents, and conversely he sees the fate of his
people as his own fate. This attachment enables him to conceive of
himself in terms that are at once personal and impersonal, as an individual
that is also part of something larger than the merely individual.

Consequently he possesses a sense of place and relationships. In
addition, he possesses the ability to recognize the value of his own
vision, even if it is not the "ultimate vision." In this, "A Song for
Simeon" anticipates the Four Quartets in which one of the central themes
is that of the "reflected" vision, the "hints and guesses" which
approximate in human terms the divine vision. In the final stanza of "A Song for Simeon" the narrator first comes to terms with the limited nature of his own understanding and from this arises a resignation that permits him to recognize the full value of the vision and understanding of which he is capable.

This recognition seems to permit the extension of the general theme of rediscovery into the personal and purely human realm. Consequently, the central theme of "Marina" (1930) is the rediscovery of human joy. This is apparent in the ironic contrast between the epigraph--Hercules' lament upon discovering he has murdered his own children--and Pericles' discovery of his lost daughter. The implication in this contrast is one of the familiar paradox of death and rebirth--to live you must die, and to have you must first renounce. But here there is an additional element to this paradox: to have you must not expect, for the object desired comes only as a gift, by chance, as it were; never through conscious effort. Pericles renounces all that is naturalistic and human:

Those who sharpen the tooth of the dog, meaning Death
Those who glitter with the glory of the hummingbird, meaning Death
Those who sit in the sty of contentment, meaning Death
Those who suffer the ecstasy of the animals, meaning Death

Are become unsubstantial, reduced by a wind,
A breath of pine, and the woodsong fog
By this grace dissolved in place.
Yet the joy he discovers is not non-human. Its object is plainly human, his daughter. However, it is also spiritual. Marina is, in fact, described in terms that suggest the incarnation. Almost like God become man, she is "this grace dissolved in place." These terms with which Pericles greets his daughter are both human and spiritual, (reminiscent of Simeon's prayer):

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 unspoken,
The awakened, lips parted, the hope, the new ships.

The joy discovered by Pericles, in short, is human, but it partakes of the spiritual since it reflects something of the eternal absolute joy of the spiritual realm. It is a spiritual grace "dissolved" in the physical world, and it looks forward to the image of eternity "intersected" by time in the *Four Quartets*.

The shift that this represents is one in which the relationship between personality and personal experience is altered, and with the new concepts of this relationship, there are also new attitudes toward the use of personal experiences (and personality, for that matter) in the poetry itself. To explain these ideas it is necessary to look at some of the comments Eliot made in his critical writings. In "Tradition and the Individual Talent" Eliot had said that, "It is not in his personal emotions, the emotions provoked by particular events in his life, that the poet is in any way remarkable or interesting. His particular emotions may be simple, or crude, or flat," and yet he will produce poetry with very complex emotions. Undoubtedly Eliot's intention here is to attack the romantic
notion that a poet is an important personage; the first sentence in this passage might have been written at any time of Eliot's life. But the assertion that the poet's own "emotions may be simple, or crude, or flat" with no effect upon his poetry is a radical position which Eliot did not hold long. For in the later essays the emphasis is directed rather toward the necessity of personal experiences of some quality and significance in the poet's own life. Of course Eliot never returned to the Romantic notion that individual idiosyncrasies in a poet are necessary or admirable; indeed *After Strange Gods* (1934) is Eliot's strongest argument ever for the necessity of controlling the poet's idiosyncrasies. But in the major essays of 1928 to 1935--*Dante* (1929), *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism* (1933) and *After Strange Gods*--there is a new sense that personal experience and the personality are of central importance in a life as in a poem, if there is a recognition of the inherent limitations and the utter humanness of any personal experience, feeling or emotion. The quality of the poet's experiences, then, has something to do with the quality of his poems. The first explicit statement about this relationship comes from the section on the *Vita Nuova* in the essay on *Dante* (1929):

Now Dante, I believe, had experiences which seemed to him of some importance; not of importance because they had happened to him and because he, Dante Alighieri, was an important person who kept press-cutting bureaux busy; but important in themselves; and therefore they seemed to him to have some philosophical and impersonal value.

Of course, it is plain that the experiences are important for the value they have in a "philosophic and impersonal" sense, but the emphasis itself
upon the importance of the personal experience is significant. One can hardly imagine a "simple, or crude, or flat" emotion having Dante's kind of complex philosophical value.

It is in *After Strange Gods* that Eliot's new position in this respect is most clearly stated. Eliot begins the book with this paragraph:

Some years ago I wrote an essay entitled *Tradition and the Individual Talent*. During the course of subsequent years I have discovered, or had brought to my attention, some unsatisfactory phrasing and at least one more than doubtful analogy. But I do not repudiate what I wrote in that essay more fully than I should expect to do after such a lapse of time. The problem, naturally, does not seem to me simple as it seemed then, nor could I treat it now as a purely literary one. What I propose to attempt in these three lectures is to outline the matter as I now conceive it.

Eliot then proceeds in the first lecture to propose new terms to explain the relationship between the tradition and the individual talent, between the "conscious" and the "unconscious" functions of the poet, between the personal experience and the poetry. Orthodoxy and heterodoxy (heresy) he says, are roughly equivalent to classicism and romanticism, but they are more complex and universal. Tradition, he says, is the *instinctual* vitalization of the present by the past; it is "habit, breeding, environment," which come more or less automatically merely by living in one's own age. Orthodoxy, on the other hand, is the "conscious intellectual upholding of absolute values;" it is the criticism of the tradition, the conscious interpretation of it. Thus, the earlier term, "tradition," is divided into two parts, one instinctive
"emotional;" and the other conscious, rational.

Then in the remaining two lectures Eliot elaborates upon the implications in this division, dwelling with particular emphasis upon orthodoxy. The lack of orthodoxy, he says in the second lecture, leads to extreme individualism in the author's beliefs and to literary expression that is unconnected to a tradition. In the third lecture he traces the results of this individualism using the novel as his example:

Contemporary eminent novelists . . . have been more concerned than their predecessors--consciously or not--to impose upon their readers their own personal view of life, and . . . this is merely a part of the whole movement of several centuries towards the aggrandisement and exploitation of personality. I do not suggest that "personality" is an illicit intruder; I imagine that the admirers of Jane Austen are all fascinated by something that may be called her personality. But personality, with Jane Austen, with Dickens and with Thackeray, was more nearly in its proper place. The standards by which they criticised their world, if not very lofty ones, were at least not of their own making . . . . These novelists were still observers: however superficial--in contrast, for instance, to Flaubert--we find their observations to be. They are orthodox enough according to the light of their day: the first suspicion of heresy creeps in with . . . George Eliot. George Eliot seems to me to be of the same tribe as all the serious and eccentric moralists we have had since: we must respect her for being a serious moralist, but deplore her individualistic morals.

What I have been leading up to is the following assertion: that when morals cease to be a matter of tradition and orthodoxy--that is, of the habits of the community formulated, corrected, and elevated by the continuous thought and direction of the Church--and when each man is to elaborate his own, then personality becomes a thing of alarming importance. (pp. 53-54)

Eliot is not rejecting out of hand the personality; instead he is merely arguing that it must be put "in its proper place." That is, a writer
should not eliminate his personality, but should see to it that his personality is "orthodox"--i.e. subjected to external controls. It is only when the personality is set up as the standard of moral values that it becomes "a thing of alarming importance." The implication in literature is quite clear: even assuming that the author is able to eliminate his own personality from his work, any emphasis upon personality as an important thing in itself is contrary to "orthodoxy," resulting in an unhealthy emphasis on personal interpretation of morals. In literature as in everything else, personality and moral value must not be confused; moral value is external to the individual; it is absolute and the individual is finite:

Where there is no external test of the validity of a writer's work, we fail to distinguish between the truth of his view of life and the personality which makes it plausible; so that in our reading, we may be simply yielding ourselves up to one seductive personality after another. The first requisite usually held up by the promoters of personality is that a man should "be himself;" and this "sincerity" is considered more important than that the self in question should, socially and spiritually, be a good or a bad one. This view of personality is merely an assumption on the part of the modern world, and is no more tenable than several other views which have been held at various times and in various places. The personality thus expressed, the personality which fascinates us in the work of philosophy or art, tends naturally to be the unregenerate personality, partly self-deceived, and partly irresponsible, and because of its freedom, terribly limited by prejudice and self-conceit, capable of much good or of great mischief according to the natural goodness or impurity of the man. (After Strange Gods, pp. 62-63)

Apart from the theological implications involved, the phrasing of these statements suggest the nature and extent of Eliot's distrust of personality.
Sincere self-expression is the expression of "the unregenerate personality," "capable of much good or of great mischief" (usually the latter). By contrast those earlier authors whose concern was not self-expression were content to act as "observers:" hence the "standards by which they criticised their world, if not very lofty ones, were at least not of their own making." This position is not as simplistic as the position stated in "Tradition and the Individual Talent," for here it is not as necessary that the author's personality be eliminated, but that the celebration of personality itself must be curtailed. In the early poems the poet is ostensibly absent from the poems, but the poems revolve around the personalities of the narrators and characters. Prufrock's failures are failures of personality, but even the standards by which these failures are measured are largely personal standards, self-contained and self-centred. In the *Ariel* poems, on the other hand, external, traditional standards are brought to bear upon themselves by the characters; as a result the characters recognize something of their relation to an absolute world. And personality ceases to be a thing of "alarming importance," although it is not made extinct. In fact, in a poem such as "Marina" while the personality of the narrator diminishes in importance, the personal experience becomes more central, and the resolution is worked out in terms of human experience, the specific experience of the narrator.

Except for the *Four Quartets*, *Ash Wednesday* is Eliot's most ambitious attempt to achieve this balance between the personal and the
external. In the first place, this is the first of Eliot's major works in which the persona is not clearly distinguished from the poet. Although one does not say with certainty that the narrator is Eliot himself, there are many indications in the poems that the narrator is closely associated with the poet, although many of these indications are still veiled and indirect. However it does not take much imagination to catch the significance of the reference to Cavalcanti, the exiled poet, in the first line, or to Shakespeare's sonnet in the line, "Desiring this man's gift and that man's scope." In other words, although we must continue to speak of the "I" in *Ash Wednesday* as a persona rather than as the poet himself, we no longer have to take the persona as a consciously-used mask to hide the poet.

In addition, the poems represent a thematic blending of personal experience and formal, external control. This can be seen, first, in Eliot's use of the two central referents in the poems: Dante's *Divine Comedy* and the Rite of the Mass. In both of these there is a unification of personal vision or personal experience and formal ritualistic ordering of experience. Dante's is surely a personal work, recounting an intensely personal vision, but recounting it in a formal manner that objectifies and universalizes it. (In much the same way the Rite of the Mass, by combining its formal and public liturgy with the Christian symbols of personal salvation, objectifies and thus "depersonalizes" the union of the individual soul with God. The ritual of prayer, which also plays a large part in *Ash Wednesday*, is also personal in this sense.)
But in all these the personal experience is separated from mere idiosyncrasy by the rigidly structured formal ritual in which it takes place.

However, to stress only the personal and individual in *Ash Wednesday* quite obviously would be to misinterpret the intention of the work, for equal emphasis is attached to the public ritual, the external, non-personal. This equal emphasis comes about because the two elements are united in a variety of ways throughout the six poems, thus concluding a struggle that dominated the poetry to this point. We recall that Prufrock confuses the public and the private by conceiving of the external primarily as an extension of himself. Gerontion rejects the aridity of the public, communal world of Mr. Silvero and the others, but he also sees the external world as an extension of his own "draughty corner." Tiresias makes the attempt to unite both worlds but ends in confusion, and it is uncertain at the end if he reflects the waste land, or if it exists within him: if he is observer or participant, judge or judged. And finally the Hollow Men reject their personal existence, preferring to exist only in their hollow public ritual.

In *Ash Wednesday* the balance is achieved by rejecting the old categories; the division is no longer between public and private, but between secular (the human) and spiritual (the absolute). The progression of the persona through these six poems is not from the personal to the public, nor from the public to the personal; it is rather from the secular towards the beatific. Thus, it encompasses both the personal and the public worlds by structuring the personal experience into a formal
public ritual, which, through its formalism reflects the world of
eternal moral and spiritual values.

It is significant that the union of these elements takes place in
a poem which contains no tortured search into the historical past, into
the loss of some viable order and code; it is entirely in the present
or (much the same thing) the immediate personal past of the persona.
The past, of course, does exist implicitly, but it has its existence
as a part of—not opposed to—the present. Thus, in Ash Wednesday
Eliot finally began to achieve the task he set for himself in "Tradition
and the Individual Talent." It is, however, not such a simple proposi­
tion as that, for there is a different view as to how the individual occupies
his place in the tradition. In Dante (1929) Eliot explained how Dante's
personal experiences were altered by the tradition. He notes the
similarities between the Vita Nuova and the Shepherd of Hermas, and says:

Gourmont would say that Dante borrowed; but that is
imputing our own mind to the thirteenth century. I
merely suggest that possibly Dante, in his place and
time, was following something more essential than
merely a "literary" tradition . . .

We cannot, as a matter of fact, understand the
Vita Nuova without some saturation in the poetry of
Dante's Italian contemporaries, or even in the poetry
of Dante's Provencal predecessors. Literary parallels
are most important, but we must be on guard not to take
them in a purely literary and literal way. Dante wrote
more or less, at first, like other poets, not simply
because he had read their works, but because his modes
of feeling and thought were much like theirs.

(Selected Essays, pp. 233-235)

What Eliot, of course, is getting at here is that Dante was--had to be--
so immersed in his own age that his thinking would automatically be the
thinking of that age. However, it is not until 1935, five years following the publication of *Ash Wednesday*, that Eliot finally stated the full implication of this concept. In an essay entitled "Literature and the Modern World," Eliot undertook to show the balance and relationship between one's (particularly the poet's) sense of individuality and one's sense of "membership" in the human race:

... the artist cannot devote himself truly to any cause unless by that devotion he is also most truly being, and becoming, himself. The artist may, as Remy de Gourmont profoundly says, "in writing himself, write his age;" but I think that we should add that he may sometimes in writing his age, write himself: which will come to the same thing. But it is from himself that he must start.

Eliot goes on to suggest that the two poles are equally dangerous and false:

Whereas a man like D. H. Lawrence is in danger of manipulating his philosophy to fit his private needs and to justify his private weaknesses, the adherent of an objective creed is in danger of denying, or distorting himself to fit his beliefs; and the opposite insincerity becomes possible.

Both the individual's development and the purity of the creed are in danger of being polluted; the sanest position is that which balances the self and the creed against one another. Eliot illustrates this by comparing the social criticism of Dante and of Shelley:

Shelley's excitement is in his head, and therefore emits rather shrill and inapplicable head noises; whereas Dante's is involved with all his own sufferings--definite grievances and definite humiliations at the hands of particular people, of all of which he is conscious: self-interested grudges and deprivations, earthly if you like, but primarily
real, and that is the first thing. Only the greatest, the Hebrew Prophets, seem to be utterly caught up and possessed by God as mouthpieces; in ordinary human poets the human personal loss, the private grievance and bitterness and loneliness, must be present. Even when the poet is aware of nothing, interested in nothing, beyond his personal feelings, these may have, by their intensity, a representative value, so that we envisage him, like Villon, not as wrapped up in his private griefs, but relieving them, holding nothing back, in a passionate cry to God—and there is, in the end, no one else to cry to. But in the greatest poets these private passions are completed in a passionate belief in objective moral values, in a striving towards justice and the life of the spirit among men.

The central thesis in this essay, then, is that, first, the individual is a unique self, a personality, and second that he is also a member:

A man is both an individual and a member. Instead of "individual" I shall use the word "person." His personality is unique and not to be violated; but he is equally created to be a member of society . . . A man is not himself unless he is a member; and he cannot be a member, unless he is also something alone. Man's membership and his solitude must be taken together.

It is within the Church rather than within any political system or ideology, Eliot goes on to say, that the balance between man's individuality and his membership is not merely recognized, but maintained. The reason for this is that political systems are only human and therefore they cannot cope with the humanity of the individual. "What liberal democracy really recognizes is a sum, not of persons, but of individuals: that is to say, not the variety and uniqueness of persons, but the purely material individuation of the old-fashioned or Democritean atom." And totalitarian systems such as fascism or communism merely dehumanize the person. It is only by introducing another set of terms--
non- or super-human--that the divergent parts of human existence can be brought together.

The same balance, of course, ought to exist in the artist; and this is where Eliot's discussion of devotion to a cause arises. The balance is one between the author's individual personality and his devotion to a philosophy or creed. Contemporary poetry, Eliot says, is superior to that of the late nineteenth century because of its "social earnestness." It associates itself with causes, hence with the social world; the poets are both individuals and members. But, Eliot concludes, this is not sufficient, for mere social righteousness is always in "danger of neglecting the permanent for the transitory, the personal for the social."

Hence in this essay Eliot makes his most explicit detailed account of the relationship between the three elements which inform *Ash Wednesday*: the personal, the sense of human community, and the spiritual "objective" truth. In "Literature and the Modern World" Eliot concludes, "What is important is that the creation of poetry depends upon the maintenance of the person, of the person in relation to other individuals, to God, and to society." And the maintenance of the person means that the poetry is "primarily real, and that is the first thing."

This essay comes some five years after the publication of *Ash Wednesday*; and *Ash Wednesday* does not fulfill entirely all of the conditions proposed in the essay. Indeed, "Literature and the Modern World" is contemporary with the publication of "Burnt Norton" (and Eliot
reprinted it in 1940 as the next of the *Quartets* was being issued) and the *Quartets* fulfil its conditions more fully than does *Ash Wednesday*. However, I introduce it here because it provides a gloss on *Ash Wednesday*, particularly because it expands upon the two central movements within *Ash Wednesday*: the development of a significant relationship between the personal, the social and the spiritual; and the progression in point of view from the human to the divine. *Ash Wednesday* and the *Four Quartets* share this kind of movement. The central difference between them is that in *Ash Wednesday* Eliot is still reluctant to use the explicitly personal experience that is found in the *Quartets*.

In addition there is an emphasis in the essays of this period, as well as in the poetry, upon the quality of the personal experience. In "Tradition and the Individual Talent" Eliot has said that what mattered in poetry, was the intensity with which the experience—the emotion of feeling—was got into the poetry: the poet's own emotions might be crude, or flat without harm to the poem. Intensity, particularly the poetic intensity continues, of course, to be important, but here it is no longer sufficient. To it has been added the importance of the personal quality of the experience. It is in this, more than in anything else, that the position of "Tradition and the Individual Talent" is modified; personal emotion and feeling (as well as thought) are redeemed. This emphasis upon the quality of experience is, in fact, the central motif in *Ash Wednesday*. That is, the first poem begins with a renunciation of the ordinary kind of human experience, made manifest in the sense of loss that always accompanies human experience. The sequence then
progresses through a number of attempts to make experience meaningful, by moving from a renunciation of human experience toward an affirmation of the spiritual. However, a complete unification of the human and the spiritual worlds has to wait until the *Four Quartets*, for even at the end of *Ash Wednesday* there is a sense of loss that is negative, passive:

```
Teach us to care and not to care
Teach us to sit still
Even among these rocks
Our peace in His will.
```

Eliot often criticised the humanistic point of view by attacking its expectations: it hopes for too much on this earth. *Ash Wednesday* is a poem that in another sense suffers from the same sort of weakness. If this life cannot bring the satisfaction of the divine, then it must be rejected in favour of the divine. The final lines of the poem exhibit this attitude:

```
Sister, mother
And spirit of the river, spirit of the sea
Suffer me not to be separated

And let my cry come unto Thee.
```

This prayer is made from renunciation, from a sense of loss, a sense that if the human world cannot approximate the divine then the world must be renounced, and what resignation we find at the end of *Ash Wednesday* is chiefly one in which the persona accepts the fact that he must live in this unsatisfactory world for some time longer, and he reconciles himself to it, praying all the while that he may not lose contact with the spiritual world which is his only hope. This is in contrast with the conclusion of "Little Gidding", in which the dominant motif is the
"return," the return to home, "to where we started," knowing the place for the first time. In *Ash Wednesday* human life is only useful in preparing for some other life; in the *Quartets* it is also joyful, reflecting another life.

This characteristic resignation in *Ash Wednesday* is manifested in the two central movements of the poem I mentioned above: the progression of the point of view from the human to the divine, and the relationship between the personal, the social and the spiritual. The first can be seen within each of the poems as a progression in the allusions from "ordinary human poets" to "the greatest, the Hebrew Prophets, [who are] utterly caught up and possessed by God as mouthpieces." And the second is seen in the development of the persona's attitude toward the figure of the lady as the sequence progresses.

Each of the six poems in this sequence opens in a voice that is either explicitly that of the persona or that is borrowed from some other poet. And in each the conclusion alludes to the voice of the prophets. In the final poems these allusions to the prophetic voice become more numerous. The implication of this is that the persona is making an attempt to rise above (or perhaps reject) the ordinary human and attain the state in which he is as "a mouthpiece of God." Hence the tension which pervades *Ash Wednesday*. Although the use of the allusions to the prophets is more mature and more effective than it is in *The Waste Land*, it still operates on a simple dualistic level, allowing for either worldly acceptance or divine acceptance. A comparison of the use made of the
prophetic voice in *The Waste Land* and *Ash Wednesday* will illustrate both the development and the shortcomings of the latter poem. Tiresias, it has been observed, only assumes the prophetic role to avoid his own involvement in the action of the poem. In the first section of the poem he assumes the guise of Ezekiel:

> What are the roots that clutch, what branches grow
> Out of this stony rubbish. Son of man,
> You cannot say, or guess, for you know only
> A heap of broken images . . .

This is prophecy of condemnation; it allows Tiresias to separate himself from the rest of the characters--from his membership. It is an example of that pride of which Eliot has continually accused modern man, for it implies that the speaker is immune from this judgment. Again in "The Fire Sermon" Tiresias concludes in his prophetic voice: "O Lord Thou pluckest me out." But as I suggested in the discussion of this passage, this again is a kind of escape from humanity, a conscious attempt by the narrator to separate himself from the human predicament.

In *Ash Wednesday*, on the other hand, the tone of most of the prophetic allusions is more humble, without the implication that separates the narrator from humanity. This is noticeable in the pronoun, which in *Ash Wednesday* is plural and does not distinguish between the speaker and others:

> Teach us to care and not to care;
> This is the land which ye
> Shall divide by lot;
> We have our inheritance

or the divine reproach from God to a people:

> O my people, what have I done unto thee?
This shift in emphasis indicates a sense of community that is not present in the Tiresias figure of *The Waste Land*, that sense of "membership" of which Eliot speaks in "Literature and the Modern World." In the end it does succeed in being personal:

And let my cry come unto Thee,
but only after the membership has been firmly established. This plea is diametrically opposite the cry of Tiresias:

"O Lord thou pluckest me out,''
both in its serenity, and in its feeling of that humility which comes from the recognition of the common bond of limitation that unites all men, and is to be reiterated in *Four Quartets*:

Our only health is the disease
If we obey the dying nurse
Whose constant care is not to please
But to remind of our, and Adam's curse,
And that, to be restored, our sickness must grow worse.

The persona is not a judge, but a fellow sufferer. The suffering is, of course, subject to analysis, but this analysis is undertaken in a spirit of humility, not judgment.9

Thus the persona does not see himself as a "personality" in the same way that Prufrock or Gerontion or even Tiresias does. He strives to regard himself, and to create of himself, to use E. E. Duncan Jones's phrase, "not so much a personality as a will" striving after God.10 But this description too must be modified, for *Ash Wednesday* is not a poem of doctrine or of theology as much as one that rehearses the feeling of repentance and spiritual struggle. It is, most importantly,
a poem of spiritual progression in which a person moves, a progression from rejection and loss towards resignation and acceptance. This movement is made clear by the development from "Because I do not hope to turn again" to "Although I do not hope to turn again."

That Ash Wednesday is intensely personal in this sense is made clear in the first poem, in which the persona is concerned chiefly with matters of the self:

Because I do not hope to turn again
Desiring this man's gift and that man's scope
I no longer strive to strive towards such things
(Why should the aged eagle stretch its wings?)
Why should I mourn
The vanished power of the usual reign?

It soon becomes clear, however, that the persona does mourn the vanished power, for he continually returns to that loss. The next stanza begins with the catalogue of things lost:

Because I do not hope to know again
The infirm glory of the positive hour
Because I do not think
Because I know I shall not know
The one veritable transitory power
Because I cannot drink
There, where trees flower, and springs flow, for there is nothing again

Consequently the persona makes only a gesture, rejecting only those things which are already lost:

Because I know that time is always time
And place is always and only place
And what is actual is actual only for one time
And only for one place
I rejoice that things are as they are and
I renounce the blessed face
And renounce the voice
The sense of loss is even stronger than the resignation, for the persona keeps returning to this loss, which, in fact, indicates that he is still primarily concerned with his own feelings. Even though he prays,

that I may forget
These matters that with myself I too much discuss
Too much explain

he always returns to himself:

Because I do not hope to turn again
Let these words answer
For what is done, not to be done again.

The point from which *Ash Wednesday* begins, in other words, is particularly personal, occasioned by the loss of personal capabilities. A number of critics have suggested that the first poem is an attempt to assert the will, and by that assertion to subdue an exaggerated concern for the self. Nevertheless, the resulting conflict between the sense of self-importance and the knowledge of the weakness of the self, gives to the poem a feeling of self-centeredness. The reader is forced to recognize with the persona that these matters of self are, in fact, too much discussed and too much explained. And the persona, by himself, is incapable of dismissing his sense of self-importance by an unaided act of the will:

Because these wings are no longer wings to fly
But merely fans to beat the air
The air which is now thoroughly small and dry
Smaller and dryer than the will
Teach us to care and not to care
Teach us to sit still.

He must turn outside of himself, in this poem by means of an ambiguous prayer ending with:

Pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death
Pray for us now and at the hour of our death.
Duncan Jones suggests that the shift here from the first person to the third person pronoun is an indication of the persona's recognition of the place of the Church as a remedy for his isolation. However, assuming this to be true, it must be noted that the recognition is a vague one: and might be more accurately put by saying that here is a recognition of human limitations and of the necessity for turning somewhere outside of the self. It is at the beginning of the second poem that the turning receives concrete personification in the figure of the Lady (who is, or becomes, a viable symbol of the "renounced face and voice" of the first poem). The introduction of the Lady at this point is of crucial importance, for it comes immediately after the concluding supplication of the first poem, and is, in fact, the introduction of a "personage" who will serve to contrast with the persona and provide a specific symbol for the turning away from the self.

The Lady demands comparison with the third person characters of the earlier poems. In poems from "Prufrock" to The Hollow Men the characters who come into contact with the personae serve primarily two functions. They normally represent either a goal for the persona (such as the women in "Prufrock" or "those who have crossed with direct eyes" in The Hollow Men) or a personification of that which must be rejected by the persona (as the fellow tenants to Gerontion or any number of the characters in The Waste Land. And sometimes they serve both functions at once, as perhaps the Lady of "Portrait."

In any case the lesser characters in these poems serve as foils
against which the central characters are placed in order to help define the narrator's character. The women in "Prufrock," for example, serve mainly to demonstrate his fear; they are the objects he wants to possess, and his inability to attain them indicates his weakness of personality. They are extensions of himself as well as representatives of the order outside of himself. Consequently, they are, as he is, personal, mainly because he sees them as personalities to be reckoned with. The view of the persona toward the other characters, then, heightens rather than diminishes his own self-importance. The characters are not important in themselves, or even for what they represent in the way of an external standard; they are important mainly in the reactions and attitudes they invoke in the central character.

This use of secondary characters reaches its culmination in *The Waste Land*, where the narrator begins, apparently, by viewing them from an objective and critical point of view; but as the poem progresses, we learn that the real interest they hold for him is that their suffering is also his suffering, his "foresuffering." As this relationship between the narrator and the other characters becomes apparent it also becomes clear that the presence of the other characters breeds a kind of panic in the narrator. This general tendency is present in most of the poetry written before 1925, and even in "Journey of the Magi" confrontation arouses in the central character some sort of confusion or regret or fear. An probable reason for this is Eliot's distrust of human relationships, particularly the relationship of love. But more important is the source
of this failure of relationships, which comes from the manner in which
the central character views those with whom he is in contact. It is, in
fact, more a failure of the individual than it is a failure of "relationship" in the abstract. Relationships are weak in Eliot's poetry because
men and women are weak; and the weakness stems from a too personal view
of the potentials of the relationship.

In *Ash Wednesday* there is a fundamental departure from this type
of relationship. The persona does not view the Lady as a personality,
and consequently as "approachable." She is, in fact, impersonal in a
way that balances the personality of the persona. His rejection of her
face and voice in the first poem (she becomes the "silent sister" and the
"veiled sister"), is an indication of a radical change from the earlier
poems where the narrators were more apt to describe their ladies only by
their voices and faces. The Lady's impersonality is different from the
depersonalized automatons of the preceding poems. The typist, for
example, from Part III of *The Waste Land* is a patent failure as a
personality; she is equated with the automatic music of the gramophone.
This automatic and depersonalized figure who allows only one "half
formed thought" to enter her mind is an enlightening contrast to the
Lady who "withdraws to contemplation" and consequently has the power to
become an intermediary between the persona and the Deity. Her's is an
impersonality that progresses from personal to impersonal, showing the
way for the narrator. She is more than a "character," she becomes a
symbol in the sense that Dante's Beatrice also becomes a symbol.
Another fundamental change, one that is simultaneous with this and depends upon it, is that the Lady, the "other character" assumes an importance in the poem that is both unlike and greater than the relative unimportance of the earlier figures. The role of the Lady in this poem is, in fact, of equal importance to that of the persona. Structurally, every second poem is devoted to the Lady, the alternate ones being devoted primarily to the persona. The first poem, as we have seen, is one in which the self-examination of the persona receives primary emphasis. The second poem begins with the Lady, and is addressed primarily to her:

Lady, three white leopards sat under a juniper tree,

and the tone of the poem becomes much more calm and assured than the previous one, and this because of the influence of the Lady:

Because of the goodness of this Lady
And because of her loveliness, and because
She honours the Virgin in meditation,
We shine with brightness.

And even the song that the bones sing "to the wind" is addressed to the Lady:

Lady of silences
Calm and distressed
Torn and most whole
Rose of memory
Rose of forgetfulness
Exhausted and life giving
Worried reposeful
The single Rose
Is now the Garden
Where all loves end . . .

It is because the Lady is distant and unattainable (or at least so it
would seem at this point) that she brings peace to the persona, and
that she enables the conclusion:

Under a juniper-tree the bones sang, scattered and shining
We are glad to be scattered, we did little good to each other,
Under a tree in the cool of the day, with the blessing of sand,
Forgetting themselves and each other, united
In the quiet of the desert. This is the land which ye
Shall divide by lot. And neither division nor unity
Matters......

This sharp contrast in tone between the first two poems serves
two functions. First, it defines the radically different points of
view of the two personages; the self-interest of the first poem is
clearly distinguished from the forgetfulness of the second. Also,
it helps to establish a sense of separation which in the succeeding
poems is to be diminished, for the two subsequent "pairs" of poems,
while continuing to maintain the two points of view, move closer
together in tone and feeling.

In the third poem is traced the progression of the persona in
terms of the turnings of the stair, and in terms again of the self.
The omission of the Lady from this poem suggests the private nature of
the spiritual struggle through sensuality and despair; from the "devil
of the stairs who wears/ The deceitful face of hope and of despair,"
to the vision of the "pasture scene," which brings the "Distraction"
of "brown hair over the mouth blown." The final realization of
this personal struggle, however, is the recognition of the inability
of the self to continue alone:

Distraction, music of the flute, stops and steps of the
mind over the third stair,
Fading, fading; strength beyond hope and despair
Climbing the third stair.
Lord, I am not worthy
Lord, I am not worthy
but speak the word only,

The recognition of the persona's unworthiness (i.e. limitations) in this poem, just like the recognition of his unworthiness at the end of the first poem, sets the scene for the reintroduction of the Lady in the fourth poem:

Who walked between the violet and the violet
Who walked between
The various ranks of varied green
Going in white and blue, in Mary's colour.

The Lady in this poem is a more ambiguous figure than she was in II, but her ambiguity is used rather to suggest her ambiguous role than to conceal her identity. It suggests that the Lady is, to borrow a phrase from Philip Wheelwright, "a little remote from casual apprehension." But her ambiguous nature has an additional function, for this poem bears the same relationship to the third poem that the second had to the first. In the first two poems there is, as we have seen, a statement of the relationship between the persona and the Lady. That is, the first poem presents a picture of the tortured self-analysis of the persona, while the second gives us a picture of the calming effect that the Lady provides, as well as indicating the impersonal nature of the Lady's contemplation and loveliness. Both poems are relatively static, presenting states of being of the two central figures of *Ash Wednesday*. By contrast both the third and the fourth poems are fluid, indicating a progression in the respective central personages. The third poem concerns the struggle of the persona up the stairs, and the fourth the
progression of the Lady from the "voice and face" which were rejected in the first poem, to the Beatrice-like figure which she eventually becomes. The Lady begins by walking between the violet and the violet, and between the ranks of varied green, going in white (the colour she wore in the second poem) and in blue (Mary's colour as well as the colour of Larkspur.) She begins by "talking of trivial things," but as the poem progresses she becomes silent and foregoes the trivial talk; and as this progression occurs she gains the power to redeem the time, and perhaps by suggestion, to redeem the persona.

This development is made clear in the opening lines; she begins:

Going in white and blue, in Mary's colour,
Talking of trivial things
In ignorance and in knowledge of eternal dolour.

The white of her own purity and loveliness, but a purity and loveliness that is marked by ignorance of eternal dolour, begins to merge with the blue of Mary, perhaps implying knowledge. The next lines indicate her movement away from the trivial: her separation from "the others:"

Who moved among the others as they walked,
Who then made strong the fountains and made fresh the springs
Made cool the dry rock and made firm the sand
In blue of larkspur, blue of Mary's colour,
Sovegna vos. [Italics mine]

As she becomes silent and meditative, with the trivial talk being replaced by the simple gestures of the bent head and the sign, two reactions occur. The garden god (who perhaps is the broad-backed flautist of the third poem) becomes silent, and the birds and the fountain begin to sing:
The silent sister veiled in white and blue
Between the yews, behind the garden god,
Whose flute is breathless, bent her head and signed
but spoke no word

But the fountain sprang up and the bird sang down
and the new message is one of redemption:

Redeem the time, redeem the dream
The token of the word unheard, unspoken
[italics mine]^{14}

The redemption, nevertheless, is couched still in terms of the "thousand whispers of the Yew," Eliot's symbol for death; and of "exile," a motif which is taken up in the fifth poem. However, the Lady's role has become specific; she is a token, a symbol of the spiritual world.

The development of the position of the Lady in the fourth poem from one who talks of trivial things to one who goes silent in meditation is important not only because the Lady herself is an important personage in the poem, but also because of the relationship she bears to the persona. It will be noted that the objects which create the setting for this poem—the garden, the god, the fountain, etc.—react to the Lady in a way which indicates a state of increasing spirituality. The sensual god is silenced, but the fountain springs up and the bird sings down his message of time and dream. But at the same time this development tends to separate, in an empirical sense, the Lady from the persona. This separation is a subtle one and depends upon the fifth poem for its full realization.

It comes about primarily through the repetition of the motifs of redemption; the Lady is responsible for the redemption of time and the
dream (or vision) as well as of the persona's poetic capability.

However, in the light of the opening lines of the fifth poem the Lady's powers for redemption seem only temporary:

If the lost word is lost, if the spent word is spent
If the unheard, unspoken
Word is unspoken, unheard;

This seems to suggest that the Lady prepares the way for, but does not consummate, the persona's redemption, because the growing impersonality of the Lady is somehow not finally compatible with the personality, or the consciousness, of the persona. The Lady's example is only that: an example, and it remains for the persona to endeavor, through continued self-effort, to attain a state of blessedness. This is expressed through terms of silence, the paradox of the unspoken, unheard word. The Lady becomes silent (after talking of trivial things), and the persona is not even certain if she will pray for him. Thus, while the Lady clearly acts as a guide for finding spiritual solace, there is an element of terror in her silence, since it could mean that she has become so distant from the persona that she is unattainable.

The result of the depersonalization of the Lady in this poem is that she becomes a symbol rather than a character to the persona. It is for this reason that the balance established in the first four poems between the persona and the Lady changes in the fifth and sixth poems, where there is no longer the explicit alternation of focus between "the Lady" and the "I." By the end of the fourth poem the relationship is developed and established, and the Lady continues to be, in the last two
poems the veiled and silent sister who may pray for purely human sinners:

Will the veiled sister between the slender
Yew trees pray for those who offend her
And are terrified and cannot surrender
And affirm before the world and deny between the rocks
In the last desert between the last blue rocks
The desert in the garden the garden in the desert
Of drouth, spitting from the mouth the withered appleseed.

There is doubt here: syntactically, the question is whether the Lady
will pray; but the punctuation is not interrogative, and consequently
there is also the suggestion that this is a supplication as well as a
question, asking the Lady for her prayers. And its tone contrasts with
the prayer at the end of the sixth poem. This comes after two stanzas of
tortured intellectual speculation, reminiscent of the first poem, which
also treats the paradox of the silent word in time and space:

Where shall the word be found, where will the word
Resound? Not here, there is not enough silence

The right time and the right place are not here
No place of grace for those who avoid the face
No time to rejoice for those who walk among noise and
deny the voice.

The images here recall specifically the rejection in the first poem and
also the Lady's renunciation in the fourth.

The final two poems, then, include the alternate moods that are
established in the first four poems. In both, the persona begins with
self-inspection, and concludes with a prayer to the Lady, or to an image
of the Lady, an image which suggests (although it does not bring) peace.
In the fifth poem the persona speculates about where the voice, the word,
can be achieved; in the sixth he ruminates on the "visions" he has seen
in the course of the poem, the secular vision of the garden:

From the wide window towards the granite shore
The white sails still fly seaward, seaward flying
Unbroken wings . . . .

and the spiritual vision of the Lady:

The place of solitude where three dreams cross
Between blue rocks
(i.e. between dying and birth)

And in each poem the conclusion is a plea, ambiguous in the fifth and
direct in the sixth, for the Lady to pray:

Blessed sister, holy mother, spirit of the fountain,
spirit of the garden,
Suffer us not to mock ourselves with falsehood
Teach us to care and not to care
Teach us to sit still
Even among these rocks
Sister, mother
And spirit of the sea,
Suffer me not to be separated

And let my cry come unto Thee.

This final prayer is important in several respects. It is, firstly, a
statement of "decision:" the persona begins the poem with "Although I do
not hope to turn again," suggesting a different kind of resignation from that
in the first poem. It is in fact a resignation rather than a rejection,
and the difference between those two terms indicate the speaker's progress
through the poem. Rejection is at once more definite and more tentative
than resignation, for it embodies a tension arising from the forced
rejection. Resignation is more calm, more peaceful, and it implies at
least a partial acceptance of the things of this world (including one's
own personality). Secondly there is a sudden shift from the third person
of "Teach us to sit still" to the first person of "Suffer me not to be separated." Thus, the persona reasserts himself as an individual among men. In the second poem separation was accepted because it enabled the persona to reject his worldly aspirations:

We are glad to be scattered, we did little good to each other Under a tree in the cool of the day, with the blessing of sand, Forgetting themselves and each other, united In the quiet of the desert.

But although this may be a necessary part of the whole process, it is nevertheless an escape for it ignores the "responsibility and strain of being human," as Eliot says in "Literature and the Modern World:"

For we must remember that it is a great strain for the erect animal to persist in being erect, a physical and still more a moral strain. With or without mechanical aids or movement and noise, most people spend a good deal of their time avoiding the human responsibility; and we only remain human because of the continual vicarious sacrifices of a few dedicated lives.

This would seem to have especial significance for Ash Wednesday; for after all, this is a poem about the preparation for, rather than the accomplishment of salvation, about purgation rather than salvation, and the preparation for prayer demands not extinction of the personality but the subjection of the personality to something absolute. Yet even this description is misleading, for the will toward the absolute is not really separate from the personality--in this poem or in any of Eliot's work. Both are parts of "being human" and "in ordinary human poets the human personal loss, the private grievance and bitterness and loneliness, must be present." ('Literature and the Modern World')
Thus, the concluding prayer fixes the relationship between the Lady and the persona; and it is a relationship chiefly of separation. The Lady has moved into the spiritual plane, including in herself all of the spiritual figures of the poem:

Blessed sister, holy mother, spirit of the fountain, spirit of the garden;

while the persona has stayed firmly in the human world, "the time of tension between dying and birth."

This is extremely important in Eliot's developing thought. *Ash Wednesday* is a poem of purgation of the human desire to be more than human, or resignation to the fact, not that we grow old (Gerontion is resigned to that), but that we are incapable, even with age, of direct apprehension of the spiritual world. The only way we can conceive of the spiritual world is in human terms (because we have no other terms to use), but when we think of the spiritual world as a human world we tend either to humanize the spiritual world or to think of the human world as spiritual. (This is essentially Hulme's argument in his "Romanticism & Classicism."

The development of the relationship between the persona and the Lady is an attempt to reconcile these two worlds without falling into either of these pitfalls. To do this Eliot employs a Beatrice-like figure who is first seen in human terms and then transformed in the course of the poem into a spiritual figure, until at the end it is difficult to tell if the plea, "And let my cry come unto Thee," is directed to the Lady or to God. The Lady's role in the poem is, therefore, a complex one. She must be human enough to be credible, and at the same time she must function as a
symbol of the spiritual world, or as Eliot said in his essay on Dante, as a "serious and practical means of making the spiritual visible" *(Selected Essays, p. 227).*

However, Eliot is not quite as successful as Dante in his use of the spiritual, beatific lady, primarily because the Lady becomes too remote. Dante's method does not quite work in the twentieth century and in the *Four Quartets* Eliot turns to other methods by which to "make the spiritual visible." In this way the Lady anticipates the central recurrent motif of the *Four Quartets*: the "reflection" of the absolute to our limited human perception.

But if the Lady becomes a symbol of the divine, the persona remains fully human. He does not lose his personality, his individuality or his humanity. The Lady loses these things, but she is not, at the end, a "real" person; she is a symbol like the Beatrice of the *Paradiso*. The persona learns a lesson in what Eliot called "The practical sense of realities . . ., which is antiromantic: not to expect more from *life* than it can give or more from *human* beings than they can give; to look to *death* for what *life* cannot give" *(Selected Essays, p. 235).* This leads not to a negation of the self, but rather to an acceptance of the personal limitations, some of which are racial and some personal. But the resignation to one's limitations is not an end in itself for Eliot; it is merely one important step in finding a place in which the human and the spiritual may meet. For this meeting must take place on a level that is within the capabilities of the *human* being, and it is for this
reason that Eliot praises Dante most highly for his ability to make the spiritual visible—to create images that made possible the perception, on human terms, of the invisible: "One can feel only awe at the power of the master who could thus at every moment realize the inapprehensible in visual images" (*Selected Essays*, p. 228). *Ash Wednesday* prepares for this "realization" by clearing away the final illusions about human and personal capabilities; after this the *Four Quartets* can construct something upon which to rejoice, a positive location of the point at which the merely human can apprehend the absolute.

*Ash Wednesday*, then, is not a poem of unification, but rather of the preparation for unification. It concludes with the plea, "Let me not be separated." "Marina" (1930) takes up from this point; it is the first of Eliot's poems in which the major theme is reunification (and its referent is *Pericles*, the first of Shakespeare's "Tragicomedies" in which unification, not just of lovers, but of generations, is dominant) "Marina" is central in Eliot's work for it completes a number of images from the poetry that precedes it, and anticipates imagery from the *Quartets*. For example, the image of the boat in "Marina" culminates in an image of promise, "the hope, the new ships," which appears after he has "resigned" his life for hers. In *The Waste Land* Tiresias's response to the final command of the thunder also is made in boat imagery, but it is conditional, a rejection rather than a resignation, and it leads to isolation and fragmentation:
Damyata: The boat responded
Gaily, to the hand expert with sail and oar
The sea was calm, your heart would have responded
Gaily, when invited, being obedient.
To controlling hands.

One might also point out images such as "more distant than the stars and nearer to the eye," and the song of the bird also recall and complete earlier images. The images all have some spiritual implication in the earlier poetry but they are generally negative. That is they represent unsuccessful attempts to apprehend the spiritual; in "Marina" they are successful, but essentially on a human level. The unity which has been sought out in that vague area of human perfection has been completed in an ordinary human way: not the unification of spirit and man, but rather simply of man and daughter. But, of course, it is not "simply" since this human, physical reunion, suggests something more--recapitulates, perhaps, a more spiritual union. This is the direction in which Eliot's poetry moves, until in the Four Quartets this function of the human--to reflect the divine, and to catch reflections of the spiritual--is made explicit.

But as always, Eliot's affirmations are made tentatively, inquiringly, and with a great deal of careful definition. Thus, to limit and define the central theme of resignation in Ash Wednesday and the Ariel poems, Coriolan (1931-1932) returns to resignation in humanistic, materialistic terms. Coriolanus, Eliot said on a number of occasions, is a figure of pride (a sin dominant in the twentieth century). And the two poems of which Coriolan consists explore the appearance and the reality of
human pride, of pinning one's hopes on life and on human beings.

The first of these poems "Triumphant March" (1931) concerns human appearances. The action is seen from the sidelines; Coriolanus is presented from the third person point of view. As a consequence he is just one--chief perhaps, but still one--of the long list of items in the parade. His appearance is impersonal from an external point of view, but as we learn in "Difficulties of a Statesman" this appearance is false. This is another of Eliot's explorations into situations which are entirely different from what they look like. The eyes of the statesman seem to possess the calm which is from peace; in fact the calm comes from an effort to hide uncertainty. And the conclusion of Coriolan:

O mother
What shall I cry?
We demand a committee, a representative committee, a committee of investigation
RESIGN RESIGN RESIGN,

is a parody of the resolution in "Marina:"

let me
Resign my life for this life, my speech for that unspoken,
The awakened, lips parted, the hope, the new ships.

The contrast, which is really a contrast of entire modes of perception and attitudes towards this earthly life, is part of Eliot's peculiar dialectic, opposing points of view which look alike but are different; it is not used to find a synthetic truth in the classical sense, but to show the falsity of one of those points of view. Even if Coriolanus appears to have the poet's sympathy much more than do any of the earlier subjects of Eliot's irony, yet these two poems are clearly in opposition to the Ariel poems.
The pride and shallow limits of perception in Coriolan do not modify the humility of "A Song for Simeon" or "Marina," but rather accentuate the virtue of the humility in these poems, and the resultant spiritual "depth and height."
1 It is interesting to speculate—and it can only be speculation—upon the reasons for this "false start" into the drama. It was nearly ten years before Eliot took to drama again. Perhaps one reason for his inability to carry out Sweeney Agonistes is that he needed to find his own poetic voice before he could handle with sufficient ease a number of "impersonal" dramatic characters at one time.


4 Eliot's own later comment about The Waste Land, reported in his wife's introduction to the facsimile manuscript, is interesting even if a bit tongue in cheek:

Various critics have done me the honour to interpret the poem in terms of the contemporary world, have considered it, indeed, as an important bit of social criticism. To me it was only the relief of a personal and wholly insignificant grouse against life; it is just a piece of rhythmical grumbling.

5 It is interesting to compare Simeon's use of "house" with Gerontion's. In fact, there are a number of parallels between these two poems which point out how much "at home" Simeon feels in the world.

6 Note again the extremely close similarity to Hulme, particularly the central theses in both "Humanism and the Religious Attitude" and "Romanticism and Classicism."

7 This, of course, is the same shifting of categories that exists in the prose between "Tradition and the Individual Talent" and After Strange Gods.

9 But it is important to remember the distinction made by Harding that unlike the earlier poems there is no sense here that the suffering is either unjust or caused by forces (particularly social forces) outside of the person's own control or responsibility.

10 "Ash Wednesday," in B. Rajan (ed.) T. S. Eliot: A Study of His Works by Several Hands. (London: Denis Dobson, 1947), p.37. This definition of the persona, however, is subject to an opposite extreme; substitution of the term "will" for the term "personality" suggests that all personal attributes have disappeared. This, of course, is not the case; it is not, in the context of Eliot's whole work, a compliment to call his personae merely "wills." I use Jones' description chiefly because it points to a failure of personality in Ash Wednesday that is redeemed in Four Quartets.

11 Cf. the opening lines of "Gerontion:

Here I am, an old man in a dry month,
Being read to by a boy, waiting for rain.
I was neither at the hot gates
Nor fought in the warm rain
Nor knee deep in the salt marsh, heaving a cutlass,
Bitten by flies, fought.

Even in the first poem of Ash Wednesday the attitude toward lost and missed experience is more resigned than it is in "Gerontion."

12 "In keeping with this impersonality [of Ash Wednesday's persona], at its peaks and climaxes the poetry passes into the anonymous language of the Church!"—"Ash Wednesday," in B. Rajan, (ed.) T. S. Eliot: A Study of His Work by Several Hands, p. 37.


14 There is an important similarity here with the vision in the rose garden in "Burnt Norton." In both cases the vision is a reflection or "token" of the spiritual world, an intersection of time and eternity, and in both cases it is a bird (a traditional symbol for divine messengers) that interprets the vision.

15 However, the fifth poem is still the self-interested interrogation of the first and third, while the sixth, at least in its conclusion, returns to a resigned prayer to the Lady.
George Williamson in his *A Reader's Guide to T. S. Eliot* (New York: Noonday Press, 1953), p. 183, assigns to these three dreams the Lady, the Virgin and Christ. This seems to me to be quite arbitrary and probably unfounded.

There is a similar change of pronoun in "A Song for Simeon," from "Grant us thy peace" (which is repeated twice) to "Grant me thy peace."
CHAPTER 6
YOU ARE THE MUSIC WHILE THE MUSIC LASTS
LIFE OF THE SPIRIT AMONG MEN

Ash Wednesday and the Ariel poems (particularly "Marina")
taken together seem almost, though not quite, to have concluded
Eliot's search for a poetic voice which could express the full range
of human experiences without falling into either romantic excesses
or religious "heresies." It would seem that the Four Quartets
concluded this search to Eliot's satisfaction since he left them
as his final major poetic work. Initially, the differences between
the personae of Ash Wednesday and of the Four Quartets seem small,
but in several ways are as important and significant as are the
differences between the narrators of The Hollow Men and Ash Wednesday.
Of course, neither Ash Wednesday nor Four Quartets use a dramatic
character as narrator. The personae of these poems speak with
voices which are not as easily distinguishable as are those of any of
the dramatic narrators. However, even a superficial look at the large
body of commentary on Eliot's work will show that critics seem to have
found it much more difficult to talk about the persona of the Four Quartets
than about the persona of Ash Wednesday, in the same way that they have
been more reluctant to talk confidently of the persona of Ash Wednesday.
than of any of the earlier poems. This clearly suggests one kind of increasing impersonality—in the sense that the narrators or personae of the last two major poems are themselves lesser "personalities" than are the earlier narrators. As a result of the disappearance of the definable, concrete dramatic persona, the voice in the *Four Quartets* becomes more personally Eliot's own. That is, in a poem such as "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" it is quite simple to say that the narrator is not Eliot because it is Prufrock, and Prufrock is a character whom Eliot invented and therefore controls. He may represent or be subject to some of the things Eliot himself feels or he may only represent things which Eliot has observed that those around him feel. Or he may represent both of these in varying combinations (which is probably the case). Obviously, as Eliot's concerns change over the years so do the concerns of his narrators; but this is not to say that the personae share Eliot's personality, only his concerns.

It is also relatively simple in "Prufrock" to separate the study of the personality of the persona from the study of personality itself. Thus, we can speak about Prufrock himself as a personality with desires, weaknesses, etc., and we can speak quite separately about the theme of personal perception or of personal involvement in human or social activities and relationships, all of which involve (in the poem) the personality of
the central character, but none of which are identical with Ms personality. To put it another way, we may say that Eliot manipulates the weak and limited personality of Prufrock, a created dramatic figure, in such a way that as readers we can join with Eliot, the poet, in analyzing how an individual might respond to certain feelings in certain situations.

As the personae become less specifically invented characters, however, it becomes increasingly difficult either to say that the narrator is separate from the poet (or more correctly, in exactly what ways the narrator is separate from the poet) or to say how the theme of personal involvement can be distinguished from the personae's personalities. In *Ash Wednesday*, for example, most of the specific things we can say about the persona also apply to Eliot himself. Now, this is not to say that Eliot and the persona are one and the same, but merely to say that they are difficult to distinguish: both are aging; both are religious, and both are concerned to find a religious consolation for the "vanished power of the usual reign." However, there are some clues in *Ash Wednesday* that suggest that the persona is in fact a dramatic character. First is the presence of another dramatic character in the figure of the Lady. In all of Eliot's poems in which more than one character appears there is no question but that all of the characters are actually dramatic personae. In addition, the frequent allusions to the Old Testament prophets beyond those contained in the Mass itself evoke earlier personae such as Gerontion or the narrator of *The Waste Land*. And finally the whole
pattern of imagery which contains what Kenner called the "purely literary effects" of the earliest monologues again point to the presence of a dramatic character who sees himself in a dramatic light in something like the same way that Prufrock does. Besides the Lady there are a number of symbolic objects (such as the garden god) which need to be understood in the context of a dramatic character who thinks in those terms. These are symbols which are not natural objects, but literary ones, and they are essentially different from the symbols of the *Four Quartets* for this reason.

Unlike *Ash Wednesday*, the *Four Quartets* do not contain most of these "clues" about how the narrator sees himself. If it is difficult to isolate the persona in *Ash Wednesday*, it is nearly impossible to do so in the *Quartets*. Although there is as definite a progression of thought and feeling in these poems as there is in any of Eliot's sequences (especially *The Waste Land* and *Ash Wednesday*), and although there is as strong a sense of the need for and the striving after a personal salvation, yet it is difficult to talk of the *Four Quartets* as containing a "character" in any real sense who undergoes this progression. In *The Waste Land* one can describe the narrator who begins as an observer and commentator upon the society around him and gradually becomes involved (and lost) in that society. In *Ash Wednesday* one can analyze the spiritual progress of the persona who begins to rid himself of personal encumbrances as he tries to achieve a state of spiritual preparedness. But in the *Four Quartets* one most often talks of the *themes* of redemption.
or spiritual preparation, or of the visions, or the images, or the patterns, not of the persona. Eliot's critics, in fact, have generally avoided speaking of the persona of the *Quartets*. Even Hugh Kenner, who is very interested in finding Eliot's "masks," admits that one characteristic of the technique of the *Quartets* is that there is no persona in the poem: "words seem to be writing themselves." One wonders if a good deal of this apparent confusion about Eliot's persona in the *Quartets* arises because critics are looking for a persona who is essentially like the personae of all the earlier poetry, not realizing that there is an altogether different kind of voice (or persona) operating here.

It is difficult to speak of the persona, perhaps, because in one sense there is no persona—no dramatic character—in the *Four Quartets*. In this sense, it seems quite possible to speak of the voice of the *Quartets* as Eliot's own.

One of the most significant indications of this change in the persona can be found in the versification of the poems. When the *Four Quartets* first appeared many critics and reviewers were puzzled by the mixture of tightly formed lyrical passages and what seemed to them as loose, unstructured passages. The sections that came most under attack were those such as the following from "East Coker":

That was a way of putting it—not very satisfactory:
A periphrastic study in a worn-out poetical fashion,
Leaving one still with the intolerable wrestle
With words and meanings. The poetry does not matter.
It was not (to start again) what one had expected.

This and most of the similar passages in the *Quartets* seem to speak of matters which directly concern Eliot the poet or
Eliot the spiritual pilgrim in search of truth, and thus they convey a sense of uncertainty and reticence.

This mixture of tones, however, is used by Eliot to create a tension similar to that which exists between the narrator and the dramatic figure of the Lady in *Ash Wednesday*. In that poem the spiritual trials and achievements of the narrator are measured by his relationship with and attitude towards the Lady. One result of this is the creation of a dialogue in the poem, a dialogue that operates in a rather complicated way. On one level, it appears that the narrator speaks and the Lady replies. But, of course, she does not reply; instead, the narrator first speaks personally, in his own voice, and then he answers himself, speaking in a voice he feels is appropriate to the Lady. When using his own voice, he speaks of his doubts, fears and aspirations. When he addresses the Lady, he speaks impersonally in terms of relative certainty. Thus, he manages to will himself into a state of spiritual resignation by speaking more and more in the voice that addresses the Lady.

In the *Four Quartets*, on the other hand, there is no external dramatic character such as one finds in the earlier poetry. But there is nevertheless a similar juxtaposition of poetic voices in the poem that works in the same way to direct his narrator toward a spiritual resolution. There are, on the one hand, the generally long-lined, loose-limbed passages which also are usually personal and often sound like the tentative, uncertain musing of a man who is spiritually unresolved.
On the other hand, there are sections containing some of the most formally contrived verse passages that Eliot ever wrote, reminiscent of the quatrain poems from the twenties; and these sections normally assert a more certain voice. Within the *Quartets* the more loosely structured passages tend to call into question the certainties advanced by the more tightly constructed ones. For example, the passage quoted above--"That was a way of putting it..."--seems to question the truth of the lyric, "What is the late November doing"; and the parallel interrogatory passage at the end of "East Coker" similarly questions another tightly constructed (and rhymed) lyric, "The wounded surgeon plies the steel." Further, these contrasting kinds of verse structure represent not only different attitudes and moods, but more importantly, different states of certainty and self-esteem in the narrator.

As the *Quartets* progress, however, the pattern begins gradually to alter, just as does the relationship between the narrator and the Lady in *Ash Wednesday*. Thus, the lyrics, which are more formal and impersonal in "Burnt Norton" and "East Coker," begin at the end of "The Dry Salvages" and throughout "Little Gidding" to represent the more personal feelings of the narrator, as he begins to will himself into a state of spiritual acceptance and resolution.

"Burnt Norton" displays most clearly the distinction between the different kinds of mood the persona suffers, and in addition:it is the most impersonal of the four *Quartets* in the sense that *Ash Wednesday* is
impersonal. In fact, it stands halfway between *Ash Wednesday* and the remaining three quartets both in time and in development of its persona. The poem begins and ends with the persona trying to find a meaning in ordinary, non-visionary time. That is, there are really two kinds of time in his mind: the moment of the visionary experience (such as the moment in the rose garden) which he feels is meaningful and valuable, and the "waste sad time/ Stretching before and after" the moments of vision, which seems to him to be hollow and "ridiculous." The moment of the vision presents no problem to the narrator (except perhaps the problem of how to extend it). But the second, ordinary kind of time does, and most of the poem (most of the four poems, in fact) concerns itself a good deal with the search for connections or relationships between the vision and ordinary existence that will permit the spiritual value of the vision to be carried over into one's ordinary life.

But in "Burnt Norton" this attempt ends without success, and the narrator concludes the summary of his vision with the judgment:

Ridiculous the waste sad time
Ststretching before and after.

This is not very different from the conclusions of many of Eliot's poems between 1927 and 1935. Compare it with, "I should be glad of another death," or "Let thy servant depart,/ Having seen thy salvation," or "And after this our exile." Thus, the narrator of "Burnt Norton" would appear to resemble the kind of persona found in these other poems: a dramatic character who meditates upon the relationship between his mundane
and his spiritual lives.

There is, however, an important way in which "Burnt Norton" does represent a significant change from the 1927-1930 poems. This has to do with Eliot's use of his own personal experiences in the poem. Before "Burnt Norton" all personal experience was hidden in one of two main ways. On the one hand it could be transformed into the experience of a dramatic narrator, as Conrad Aiken tells us Eliot's visits to a Cambridge matron were transformed into "Portrait of a Lady," or as Eliot himself tells us happened in "Journey of the Magi." Or, on the other hand, it could be generalized beyond any specific recognition, usually by means of fitting the experience into some sort of external pattern or ritual, like the liturgy of *The Hollow Men* or *Ash Wednesday*. But in "Burnt Norton" Eliot used for the first time his own personal experiences--that is, experiences which are individual and specific, such as the visit to the formal garden at Burnt Norton and the vision there--without clearly subjecting them to one of these depersonalizing techniques. This is not, of course, to say that he is parading his own private experience in "Burnt Norton," only that this private and personal experience is introduced into the poetry without the intervention of an elaborate system of masks. While not delighting in the revelation of his private experience, Eliot seems to be less cautious about using it straightforwardly than ever before.

But it is not in his use of the visit to the rose garden or even the kind of hesitant and apparently personal speculation about the visit
that "Burnt Norton" is chiefly notable in this regard, for even if these are less impersonal uses of poetry than we find elsewhere, they are still things which might belong to anyone. The most striking characteristic of this poem is the speculation on the writing of poetry that begins the fifth section:

Words strain
Crack and sometimes break, under the burden,
Under the tension, slip, slide, perish,
Decay with imprecision, will not stay in place
Will not stay still.

That this meditation upon the difficulty of using words slips into a meditation upon the word as "logos" or incarnation does not mute the personal significance of this passage. If anything, it emphasizes it, to connect so closely the motif of incarnation (which after all, is part of the theme of reflected spiritual truth) and the poet's own craft, for it connects the art and the artist with the major themes of the poem.

Although there are important differences in the use of personal experience between "Burnt Norton" and the poems written before 1935, it is important to remember the similarities in the personae that I also noted. For the differences between "Burnt Norton" and the other three Quartets are as great—in some instances greater—than are the differences between *Ash Wednesday* and "Burnt Norton." For example, compare the meditation on poetry I have just quoted with the corresponding one from *East Coker*:

So here I am, in the middle way, having had twenty years—
Twenty years largely wasted, the years of *l'entre deux guerres*—
Trying to learn to use words, and every attempt
Is a wholly new start, and a different kind of failure
Because one has only learnt to get the better of words
For the thing one no longer has to say, or the way in which
One is no longer disposed to say it . . .

This passage deals not just with poetry, but with Eliot's own writing of poetry.

In the same year that Eliot published this, he delivered a
lecture on Yeats in which he spends a good deal of time explaining why
Yeats's later poetry is better than his earlier poetry. The chief
reason Eliot gives is that Yeats continued to grow in artistic "character":
that is, he was never content merely to repeat the same things he had
done before. And to do this, Eliot says, Yeats had to grow as a person
as well, and he had to translate his personal growth into his poetry.

He then makes two statements that have especially significant application
to a passage such as the one I have just quoted from "East Coker."

First, he speaks of two kinds of impersonality. The first is the
 impersonality "which is natural to the mere skilled craftsman," and which
results in the occasional fine poem. 6 The other is the impersonality
"which is more and more achieved by the maturing artist," and which is
"that of the poet who, out of intense and personal experience, is able
to express a general truth." He then goes on to make two qualifications
to this which are especially important in explaining not only Yeats's
development, but also his own, in the light of the passage from "East
Coker." First, he says that in translating particular and private
experience into general truth, the mature artist will also retain "all
the particularity of his experience," and then he goes on to illustrate
this principle in Yeats's poetry. The earliest poems, he says, are beautiful,
but only craftsman's work, because one does not feel present in them the particularity which must provide the material for the general truth. By the time of the volume of 1904 there is a development visible in a very lovely poem, 'the Folly of Being Comforted', and in 'Adam's Curse'; something is coming through, and in beginning to speak as a particular man he is beginning to speak for man. This is clearer still in the poem 'Peace', in the 1910 volume. But it is not fully evinced until the volume of 1914, in the violent and terrible epistle dedicatory of *Responsibilities*, with the great lines

Pardon that for a barren passion's sake,
Although I have come close on forty-nine. . . .

And the naming of his age in the poem is significant. More than half a lifetime to arrive at this freedom of speech. It is a triumph.7

Eliot was nearly the same age mentioned in Yeats's poem when he wrote this, and it had been slightly more than twenty years since he had published *Prufrock and Other Observations*. (It is reported that he had once liked to say that "Prufrock" was his swan-song) In this light, these lines from "East Coker" assume a special significance:

So here I am, in the middle way, having had twenty years—
Twenty years largely wasted, the years of *l'entre deux guerres*—

Twenty years and more to arrive at this freedom of speech, and although the specific time—between two wars—is still slightly masked behind the foreign language, there is no mistaking the application. We have here for the first time in his adult life Eliot writing a poem in which it seems obvious that he is speaking of his own experience in his own voice. "It is a triumph."
And it also gives an important clue to Eliot's use of personal experience in the final three quartets. Burnt Norton was a place Eliot happened to visit, and while there, he apparently had an experience that he felt was worth turning into poetry. Gradually during the next five years it must have occurred to him that "Burnt Norton" might become the first of a series of poems using a similar pattern and similar motifs, images and themes to work out a more positive resolution for the problems introduced in "Burnt Norton." This in itself is not remarkable, or even particularly significant. What is important is that in carrying out this conception he transformed the patterns of "Burnt Norton" into a kind of personal history. East Coker, of course, has ancestral connections; The Dry Salvages is a place associated with his life in the United States. And throughout these two poems Eliot explores quite openly his own personal and family past.

Because of their new and explicit use of personal experience, these poems raise a general point regarding the relationship between the persona and the poet in any poem. There is a very thorough and generally convincing study of this topic in George Wright's book, *The Poet in the Poem: The Personae of Eliot, Yeats, and Pound*. Wright's treatment of the subject is rather intricate and involved, so a brief summary of the relevant concepts will have to be sufficient.

Wright begins with the quite reasonable assumption that all poems, as artificial objects, speak with the voice of a persona who is not the poet. Since every poem is more limited and controlled in its point of view than any person is, the point of view of the poet is always larger and less focussed than that of the persona of any poem--even a
long one. The persona is always limited both by poetic conventions and fashions and by the poet's own interests and purposes in writing the poem. Further, the poet is always present, Wright says, somewhere behind the persona, controlling him, and by means of a number of techniques ranging from irony to explicit judgment, directing the reader's attitudes toward the persona and thus the poem. Thus the poet and the reader meet somewhere along a sort of a sliding scale between the persona and the poet himself, depending upon how the poet has dissociated himself from his persona.  

Now if we grant all of this, and especially note that Wright wisely avoids trying to fix that point behind the persona where one could find the poet, we might formulate for the sake of simplicity something like the following to translate Wright's generalization into a specific comment on Eliot's use of personal experience. At one end of the scale we might put the monologue, in which Eliot says to us, in effect, "look, this is my character: I have invented him as a dramatic figure to represent some idea I wish to speak about. Please do not confuse him with me." On the other end of the scale is the poem such as "East Coker," in which Eliot says, among other things, "I feel this way about my efforts to write poetry during the last twenty or so years. I will talk to you about that because I think it is important, but remember it is only myself in the role of poet I am talking about." For another point that Wright makes is that even when we think we can find the poet in his work it is not really the poet as a man, but rather a pose that
the poet invents for us:

The poet not only contrives a speaker for his poems; he also contrives for himself a personality that the reader can abstract from the poem. Some aspects of the writer are omitted, others are added, so that the idea of the poet which comes to us from the poem is often a representation not of what the poet is but of what he thinks he is or would like to be or cannot help being. (p. 28)

One might add in Eliot's case, since one gets the impression that Eliot was more than fully aware of these complexities, that his pose might also be partly a representation of what Eliot thinks we need to think he is.

In the context of this formulation, it is easy to see Eliot's work sliding from one end of the scale to the other, ranging from the relative impersonality of the monologues to the relatively straightforward expression of personal experience in "East Coker." Of course the persona of "East Coker" speaks with the voice which Eliot wants to project, but it is a voice which deals with such experience of his own as Eliot selects to reveal to us. In this regard, it is interesting to note a different use of allusions in "East Coker." Eliot's typical method of borrowing from a wide variety of sources is so obvious and so well documented that it hardly needs further illustration. But the kind of borrowing for which Eliot is so famous actually decreases in importance, and in the Quartets it is not nearly as obvious as it is in many of the longer works before the Quartets. And in "East Coker" the one most obvious allusion to another writer--the borrowing from Thomas Elyot--has
clear personal overtones. But in the *Four Quartets* an unexpected kind of borrowing appears replacing the old use of allusion; Eliot begins alluding to himself. A number of commentators—Helen Gardner and Hugh Kenner, for example—have listed in some detail the parallels between earlier and later poems, but what I am talking about is something a bit different. In those sections of the final three quartets in which Eliot speaks of his own writing, and also on a number of occasions where he says things such as, "You say I am repeating/ Something I have said before," there are hints that he is speaking of his whole work, not merely of earlier passages in this poem. Again things like the specific reference to the twenty years largely wasted serve as most obvious examples of this, but there are others which could also point to the same thing. For instance, when he says in "The Dry Salvages":

I have said before
That the past experience revived in the meaning
Is not the experience of one life only
But of many generations,

he is clearly alluding to a passage in the same poem which precedes this by only three or four lines, also possibly to a passage from "East Coker":

And not the lifetime of one man only
But of old stones that cannot be deciphered;

and perhaps even to poems before the *Quartets*, poems such as "A Song for Simeon," *The Waste Land*, "Gerontion," or "Burbank with a Baedeker. . .," all of which make specific reference to this same theme, the search for personal meaning through one's connection with history.

In addition to this one finds spread out through the *Quartets*
various lines and passages which recall lines and passages from his earlier work. For instance, this passage from "East Coker" is reminiscent of the "corridors of history" passage from "Gerontion."

We are only undeceived
Of that which, deceiving, could no longer harm.

(The entire segment from which this comes has a number of similarities with "Gerontion."") Or there are several passages in the Quartets which echo Ash Wednesday's phrase, "Redeem/ The time," beginning early in "Burnt Norton!" ("All time is unredeemable"). Also, "Men and bits of paper, whirled by the cold wind," suggests "Gerontion:" "Vacant shuttles/ Weave the wind," and "De Bailhache, Fresca, Mrs. Cammel, whirled/ Beyond the circuit of the shuddering Bear/ In fractured atoms," which in turn suggests "East Coker!": "Comets weep and Leonids fly/ Hunt the heavens and the plains/ Whirled in a vortex that shall bring . . . ," which itself recalls The Waste Land and "The sound of horns and motors which shall bring/ Sweeney to Mrs. Porter in the spring." Finally, there is perhaps an ironic echo of the opening of The Waste Land in the first line of "Little Gidding."

What I am suggesting in tracing this allusion to his own work and the autobiographical reference found in the Four Quartets is that the extent of relatively explicit personal intrusion into the Quartets is substantial. In order to explain this further, I will return to George Wright's discussion for one more point. Wright sees an important shift in the role of the persona between the Renaissance and the Romantic period.
In Renaissance poetry, "The poet is a singer. Whatever else he is remains irrelevant" (p. 31). With the Romantics, the typical persona ceased to be a singer and became instead "the poet." Thus, in the typically Romantic poem "the persona goes through an experience recounting it as he proceeds" (p. 44). In its extreme form, this intrusion into the poem by the poet-as-man resulted in that quality which Eliot deplored so eloquently in essays from "Tradition and the Individual Talent" to "Dante": the poet begins to regard his own experience as important because it happened to him and he is a poet--a public figure. "The poet assures us," in Wright's phrase, "that the events and people already have a value that the poem merely reports" (p. 46).

The manner in which Eliot uses his own experience in "East Coker" and "The Dry Salvages" suggests that he had reached a compromise with the Romantics on this point when he wrote these poems. (That he mentions Milton with grave respect in "Little Gidding"--and confirms his changed opinion toward Milton in a 1947 essay--is also significant, since both Eliot and George Wright point to Milton as the originator of this particular romantic heresy.) In order to explain the nature of this compromise, let us turn for a moment to Eliot's comments on Dante's most explicitly autobiographical work, the *Vita Nuova*:

Now Dante, I believe, had experiences which seemed to him of some importance; not of importance because they had happened to him and because he, Dante Alighieri, was an important person who kept the press-cutting bureaux busy; but important in themselves; and therefore they seemed to him to have some philosophic and impersonal value. *(Selected Essays, p. 233)*
Eliot was always cautious about being regarded as an important person, and consequently he avoided talking about himself in his poetry. But gradually in the example of Dante (and others—one is again reminded of his comments on Yeats's personal references) he found that explicitly personal experience could be fruitfully used in the writing of poetry, although it seems to have taken him a long time discovering how. *Ash Wednesday* represents one attempt, and a partial success. "Burnt Norton" is another, and relatively even more successful. And finally the two middle quartets make full and explicit use of personal history, almost as if to show it could be done—to purge the need to do so before returning to the relative impersonality of "Little Gidding."

A brief analysis of the progression through these different stages from *Ash Wednesday* to "Little Gidding" will illustrate Eliot's developing ability to make straightforward use of his own experience in his poems. I have mentioned that *Ash Wednesday* makes use of experiences which are so universal, general and unspecific that they could be anyone's experience. And its style further objectifies this poem. That is, because Eliot borrowed so much of his organizational and symbolic technique for this poem from the Mass and from Dante's *Divine Comedy*, anything which might have seemed to be specifically personal is objectified beyond recognition. As in *The Waste Land* and *The Hollow Men*, the myth and the formal religious liturgy in *Ash Wednesday* impose an order and a symbolic structure that is entirely external to the experience of the poet, and thus there results a kind of formal impersonality that separates the persona's experience from that of the poet himself.
Nevertheless, *Ash Wednesday* clearly is more "personal" than is a poem such as *The Waste Land*, not only because of a more personal kind of imagery, but because the Mass itself is a more personal kind of ordering structure to Eliot in 1930 than any number of anthropological studies were in 1920. The Mass is spiritual and personal, the anthropology rather more intellectual and impersonal. Likewise, the personae of the two poems can be similarly compared; the ageless, mythical seer who narrates *The Waste Land* has far fewer personal similarities with the poet than does the aging penitent who narrates *Ash Wednesday*. The persona and the symbolic and structural bases of *Ash Wednesday*, then, are much closer to the poet's own experience than are those of *The Waste Land*.

Likewise, "Burnt Norton" is even more personal than is *Ash Wednesday*. First, and most important, is the fact that there are no externally imposed structural patterns like those of the Mass. Instead, Eliot borrows his structure from his own earlier work; as Helen Gardner pointed out, he uses the pattern of *The Waste Land*. Second is the use of experiences which are clearly his own, such as the visit to the formal garden at Burnt Norton and the vision experienced there, along with the relatively personal speculations and introspections regarding the vision. In addition, the meditation upon his art, even if put formally and impersonally in "Burnt Norton," is a step from *Ash Wednesday* where whatever references there may be to the persona's poetic calling are hidden in obscure allusions to Shakespeare's sonnets.

There is another difference between *Ash Wednesday* and "Burnt
Norton" which has to do with the way in which the personae judge the value and quality of their moral and spiritual lives. In *Ash Wednesday* Eliot measures the persona's spiritual and moral behaviour against the objective standards suggested by the structure and dogma contained in the Mass and the *Divine Comedy*. The Lady, in becoming a spiritual figure, not only provides a possible intermediary to the spiritual world, but she also shows the persona how far he is from a state of beatification himself. (It is highly interesting, in fact, to note that in *Ash Wednesday* Eliot dwells upon those parts of the Mass which emphasize man's sinfulness and God's perfection [that is, the distance between man and God] rather than those parts which refer to salvation or Christ.) On the other hand, "Burnt Norton" lacks such formal external standards as are present in *Ash Wednesday*. That is, in "Burnt Norton" there are no explicitly theological or dogmatic images, such as the Lady in *Ash Wednesday*, which might act as moral absolutes against which to make value judgments; and even when value judgments are made or implied, they are done in primarily human, rather than religious, terms. For example, the vision in the rose garden is essentially a sensuous vision, and the language reinforces the sensuality. It is as if Eliot, having come to terms with and absorbed the doctrines of the Church (and of course there is no departure from the doctrines of the Church in "Burnt Norton," only from the theological images and terminology), he once again turned to human experience, only now with enough assurance both to make confident moral judgments of his own and to use his own
However, "Burnt Norton" is not nearly as personal—in the sense that it treats directly the poet's explicit personal experience—as are the next two quartets. The best example of this is probably those corresponding sections in which Eliot's craft is treated. From "Burnt Norton:"

Words strain,
Crack and sometimes break, under the burden,
Under the tension, slip, slide, perish,
Decay with imprecision, will not stay in place,
Will not stay still.

And from "East Coker:"

So here I am, in the middle way, having had twenty years—
Twenty years largely wasted, the years of l'entre deux guerres—
Trying to learn to use words, and every attempt
Is a wholly new start, and a different kind of failure.

The passage from "East Coker" is more personal in every sense. Likewise, the place names also show the same progression, from a place with which Eliot had no real personal association to a place from which his own ancestors set off to America. And even the literary allusions one finds in "East Coker" emphasize the personal references, instead of hiding them as in the earlier poems. For instance, the allusion to Dante implicit in the opening line from section V, "So here I am, in the middle way,
is an allusion that clearly is applicable to Eliot's own condition at the time of writing, and it is used in the same autobiographical manner in which Dante himself used it. Likewise, the motto from Mary, Queen of Scots, "In my beginning is my end," opening a poem which bears the name of an ancestral home, can only be read as a personal reference, especially
when shortly thereafter Eliot quotes a famous ancestor.

The references to personal and family history are equally strong in "The Dry Salvages," and the tone of the poem is equally, if not increasingly, personal: for example, "I have said before," or, "I sometimes wonder if that is what Krishna meant." That these passages, along with "I do not know much about gods," etc., drew the wholesale condemnation of a number of early reviewers who otherwise liked Eliot's work, illustrates what a departure they really were to people used to his impersonal methods. Eliot saying things directly in something like his own voice could only be taken as Eliot being coy with his readers. But of course Eliot is not being coy with us; he is speaking with us as directly as any poet's persona will allow him to speak, and by means of this direct speaking he is giving us a clue to the thematic development of the Four Quartets, a development that on one level becomes more personal, and on another translates that personal experience into impersonal, or philosophic experience.

That is, in the first three quartets the actual experiences out of which the poetry is made become more specifically personal. "Burnt Norton" concerns a chance visit to a place where a vision occurs. The place itself possesses no personal value, but the experience does, and in an effort to find the meaning of that vision, Eliot goes to East Coker, a place with historical personal association, to search for an answer in historical terms, and "East Coker" is centrally about time. And, significantly, to work out a meaning for time, Eliot begins with
his own past, and works from the personal back to the philosophical: from "So here I am," to "old stones that cannot be deciphered." But there is always the return to self in the *quartets*, so "East Coker" ends, as it begins, with the motto, significantly altered: "In my end is my beginning." After this, Eliot goes to the Dry Salvages, a place with even more personal implications, embracing as it does the poet's own youth, the "nursery bedroom." And here he continues in the effort to work out the meaning of "the vision" (the vision having become by this time not merely the moment in the rose garden, but any vision:

    the moment in and out of time,
    The distraction fit, lost in a shaft of sunlight,
    The wild thyme unseen, or the winter lightning
    Or the waterfall, or music heard so deeply
    That it is not heard at all.)

And the two major motifs—time's relation to eternity and place's relation to infinity—continue to dominate the search, although there is probably a shift in emphasis from time in "Burnt Norton" to place in "The Dry Salvages." Thus, "The Dry Salvages" begins with the specifically personal place, the childhood and later the boyhood settings. And the voyage becomes important, carrying us from the "nursery bedroom" through all recorded history and beyond, "towards the primitive terror" and back again to the "significant soil" which is "Not too far from the yew-tree."

However, as this reference to the poet's own experience becomes stronger, there is a parallel movement to show that it has "some philosophic and impersonal value," not because they are his experiences, but because "home is where we start from:" one must begin with what one has,
in poetry as in life. Thus, as the personal experience becomes more obviously personal, there is an increased emphasis upon the central motif of "hints and guesses." From the beginning of "Burnt Norton," of course, there is the theme of the "reflected" vision. The vision in the rose garden is quite literally a reflection from a particular angle of sunlight:

And the pool was filled with water out of sunlight,

The surface glittered out of heart of light,
And they were behind us, reflected in the pool.
Then a cloud passed, and the pool was empty.

For that matter, so is the central "vision" in "Little Gidding:"

The brief sun flames the ice, on pond and ditches,
In windless cold that is the heart's heat,
Reflecting in a watery mirror
A glare that is blindness in the early afternoon.

And the reflection, beyond its literal explanation, is clearly the reflection of the spiritual world in the temporal one, of eternity in time, of the absolute world in the individual. But it is not until the personal nature of these visions (as well as the personal nature of Eliot's persona in the poems) has been made amply clear that the meaning of this theme of reflections is given explicit explanation. First there is only the bird telling the persona to leave, for "human-kind/ Cannot bear very much reality," and the persona concludes that all time before and after the vision is ridiculous, sad and wasted. Then in "East Coker" there is the search through history which yields a perspective on human time:
Not the intense moment
Isolated, with no before and after,
But a lifetime burning in every moment
And not the lifetime of one man only
But of old stones that cannot be deciphered.
There is a time for the evening under starlight,
A time for evening under lamplight

. . . . . . . . . . . .
Here and there does not matter
We must be still and still moving
Into another intensity.

But it is "The Dry Salvages" which provides the largest number
and the most explicit of these hints and guesses about the spiritual
meaning in the visions. First:

We had the experience but missed the meaning
And approach to the meaning restores the experience
In a different form, beyond any meaning
We can assign to happiness.

This goes a long way not only to redeeming the "waste sad time/ Stretching before and after." And all this leads up to the final thirty-five or so lines of "The Dry Salvages:"

But to apprehend
The point of intersection of the timeless
With time, is an occupation for the saint--

. . . . . . . . . .
For most of us, there is only the unattended
Moment, the moment in and out of time,
The distraction fit, . . .

. . . or music heard so deeply
That it is not heard at all, but you are the music
While the music lasts. These are only hints and guesses,
Hints followed by guesses; . . .
The hint half guessed, the gift half understood, is Incarnation.
Here the impossible union
Of spheres of existence is actual,
Here the past and future
Are conquered, and reconciled. [italics mine]

And finally, the reconciliation provided by the divine hints and our human guesses is a reconciliation to "The life of significant soil."
It is not, however, only in their themes that the first three *Quartets* become progressively more personal to Eliot. In technique, too, he pares away the masks, the tricks of camouflage, and increasingly says directly and openly what he has to say. Nowhere is this better illustrated than in the second section of each of these three poems. The pattern for this section is the same in all three poems. First comes a relatively short lyric, introducing the theme. It is tightly controlled, *taut*, and spare in its use of language, tending generally toward Eliot's traditional lyric style. Following this lyric is a more loosely constructed meditation on the lyric's theme. This last half tends to begin more loosely than it ends; specifically, it begins as a disjointed and often relatively confused rehearsal of the theme which had been dealt with compactly, but a bit obscurely, in the opening lyrical section, and then it begins to tighten as the narrator sorts out the ideas in his own mind. The second section of "Burnt Norton" is the clearest example of this development.

This section of "Burnt Norton" opens with the lyrical poem beginning:

Garlic and sapphires in the mud
Clot the bedded axle-tree.

The lyric then develops its theme by juxtaposing contrasting images. Although the poem asserts in several places the unity of these images those assertions are not really convincing, since they depend too much upon paradox. The garlic and the sapphires together in the mud
may well be "reconciled among the stars", but they nevertheless "clot the bedded axle-tree." And although "We move above the moving tree/
In light upon the figured leaf," we still "hear upon the sodden floor/
Below, the boarhound and the boar/ Pursue their pattern-as before,"
although they are somehow (through astrology, perhaps?) "reconciled
among the stars." The poem is not really very conclusive; it can be
taken both as a serious attempt to reconcile apparently unreconcilable
images, or as an ironic and perhaps cynical comment upon false, or too
easy, reconciliations. And in the development of "Burnt Norton" itself,
its effect is more likely to confuse than to elucidate the relationships between the mundane and the eternal.

Consequently, the next passage opens with a series of
fragments which do not seem to be related and which, significantly,
are far more personal, far less formally controlled, than the opening lyric:

At the still point of the turning world. Neither flesh
nor fleshless;
Neither from nor towards; at the still point, there
the dance is,
But neither arrest nor movement. And do not call
it fixity . . .

The tone here suggests the apparently difficult task of fitting ideas
together and is represented by a series of sentence fragments. It
muses rather than goes forward, and where it seems to make progress,
as in "there the dance is" (the first subject predicate construction in
this passage), it is immediately modified by another fragment:
"But neither arrest nor movement," which seems to bring us and the
narrator back to the beginning.
After a few lines of this kind of loose meditation upon a theme, the persona begins to deal with the topic in terms of his own experience:

Except for the point, the still point,
There would be no dance, and there is only the dance.
I can only say, there we have been: but I cannot say where.

After this the rest of the section attempts to bring together personal experience and impersonal formulation, resulting in an uneasy mixture of deduction and induction: trying at once to fit the experience to the idea, and to formulate the idea in the context of the experience. As a result, because he "cannot say, how long, for that is to place it in time," he must conclude with a paradox:

To be conscious is not to be in time
But only in time can the moment in the rose-garden,
The moment in the arbour where the rain beat,
The moment in the draughty church at smokefall,
Be remembered; involved with past and future.
Only through time time is conquered.

The fifth section of "Burnt Norton" reintroduces and further develops this theme in even more personal terms, as Eliot writes of the craft of poetry. He begins the section with the familiar paradox:

Words move, music moves
Only in time; but that which is only living
Can only die.

Words which are living are imperfect and unsatisfactory; they suffer from the same kind of failure to achieve the absolute patterns as does the rest of human experience:
Words strain,
Crack and sometimes break, under the burden,
Under the tension, slip, slide, perish,
Decay with imprecision, will not stay in place,
Will not stay still. Shrieking voices
Scolding, mocking, or merely chattering,
Always assail them.

Like anything else, poetry can only be written in time, the very time
which finally prevents poetry from being made permanent. And finally,
as if this were not enough, even the Godhead himself, when made flesh,
suffered the same kind of "shrieking voices";

The Word in the desert
Is most attacked by voices of temptation,
The crying shadow in the funeral dance,
The loud lament of the disconsolate chimera.

If even Christ, the Word made flesh, suffers from the ravages of time,
then the last lines of "Burnt Norton" are the only apparent conclusion:

Ridiculous the waste sad time
Stretching before and after.

If the final section from "Burnt Norton" hints that something
is wrong with the pattern of words (and poetry is a pattern of words)
itsel, the second section of "East Coker" makes explicit what is
the matter. This section, of course, follows in the same pattern as
does the corresponding section of "Burnt Norton": a short lyric follow-
ed by a longer, more loosely organized and more personal meditation
upon the themes and images introduced in the first part. These images
are more limited and perhaps more personal than those of "Burnt Norton",
but they bear a definite resemblance. They are still concerned with the place of time in the eternal scheme of things; the images still develop from relatively local to relatively cosmic, but here the problem concerns quite specifically growing old. The lyric begins by asking why November is troubled with the urges that are supposed to be associated with spring. The seasons are out of order. "Late roses" are filled with "early snow," and on a more cosmic level, "Scorpion fights against the Sun," so that in the end the world is to be tormented with ice and fire. Actually, this lyric is much clearer, if not better, than the corresponding lyric of "Burnt Norton," but the reaction to it in the meditative section is even more extreme. The narrator--who by this time bears quite obvious analogical similarities to Eliot himself--begins with a disclaimer:

That was a way of putting it--not very satisfactory:  
A paraphrastic study in a worn-out poetical fashion,  
Leaving one still with the intolerable wrestle  
With words and meanings. The poetry does not matter.

But almost as if he does not trust us to get his point, he reemphasizes that he is going to have to tell us again what he was trying to say in the lyric:

It was not (to start again) what one had expected.  
What was the value of the long looked forward to,  
Long hoped for calm, the autumnal serenity  
And the wisdom of age?

The bracketed phrase "(to start again)" seems absolutely unnecessary--in fact it is probably more confusing than helpful, for it seems to
suggest that he is beginning again the passage that begins with "That was a way of putting it," rather than, as is actually the case, the lyric, "What is the late November doing." If he had left out, "To start again," we would know without question that he was resaying what he said in the lyric. Apparently, the only reason to include this slightly confusing phrase is to emphasize the fact that he does not feel that the poetic form had done its job. And when it fails he substitutes a poetic form that is so much more personal, that so exposes the poet, that readers for a long time had great difficulty deciding what he was up to. It seems very unlike the Eliot of "Tradition and the Individual Talent" or of The Waste Land to be saying in effect, "This formal poetic form did not suffice for what I wanted to tell you because it was too impersonal; therefore I am going to have to speak more directly and more personally with you for a time." This message is continually reinforced throughout the remainder of the second section as well as in the third and fifth sections of "East Coker." In the third section we find this passage:

You say I am repeating
Something I have said before. I shall say it again.
Shall I say it again?

Why, in fact, does Eliot add this apparently unnecessary question? Perhaps for the same reason he adds the unnecessary bracketed phrase in section II: it emphasizes not only the fact that the poet is forced to repeat what he has said to make it clear, but also it creates a sense of conversational interaction with the audience. Here, more than anywhere
in his poetry, Eliot throws off his poetic masks, reduces the distance between himself and his audience, and enters into a spirit of direct contact. The only alternative interpretation would involve an irony of a kind that does not fit the seriousness and the frankness of this passage in which the phrase occurs. (The phrase introduces a process that is clearly meant to be, at least in outline, autobiographical, in the middle of a poem that is remarkably--for Eliot--autobiographical).

Even more obviously, the fifth section of "East Coker" develops the personal implications of the realization that the formal masks of impersonal poetry do not say what Eliot finds it necessary to say:

So here I am, in the middle way, having had twenty years--
Twenty years largely wasted, the years of l'entre deux guerres--
Trying to learn to use words, and every attempt
Is a wholly new start, and a different kind of failure
Because one has only learnt to get the better of words
For the thing one no longer has to say, or the way in which
One is no longer disposed to say it. And so each venture
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. And what there is to conquer
By strength and submission, has already been discovered
Once or twice, or several times, by men whom one cannot hope
To emulate--but there is no competition--
There is only the fight to recover what has been lost
And found and lost again and again: and now, under conditions
That seem unpropitious. But perhaps neither gain nor loss.
For us, there is only the trying. The rest is not our business.

The "shabby equipment" of poetry does not allow for complete or accurate statement of one's "undisciplined squads of emotion." Thus one has to say again what has already been said, but said incompletely. It is important that the poem in which this statement is made most explicitly is also the poem that is one of his most personal--one that
not only deals with family history, and indeed with personal biography, but that also introduces its theme in a personal phraseology ("In my beginning is my end") that can imply both personal implications inherent in his ancestral origins and additionally the spiritual intersection of time and eternity which was intended by Mary Stuart: an intention that clearly invokes personal salvation.

"The Dry Salvages" as a whole is in many ways the most personal of the *Four Quartets*. Its opening lines puzzled the critics. He was accused by reviewers of being coy with the readers, of having a joke at the reader's expense, and even of having lost his poetic gift. On the other hand he was praised for having achieved a breakthrough in poetics (although even most favorable reviews were not quite certain about the nature of the breakthrough). But however it was received, the opening lines surprised Eliot's audience with their obvious personal history and their chatty tone:

I do not know much about gods; but I think that the river
Is a strong brown god--sullen, untamed and intractable... .

His rhythm was present in the nursery bedroom,
In the rank ailanthus of the April dooryard,
In the smell of grapes on the autumn table,
And the evening circles in the winter gaslight.

Likewise, the opening lines of the third section of the poem are more personal than the corresponding part of the first two *Quartets*:

I sometimes wonder if that is what Krishna meant--
Among other things--or one way of putting the same thing.

(Compare this with the opening of the third section of "East Coker":
"O dark dark dark. They all go into the dark.")
However, in spite of this tone in sections I and II, the second and fifth sections of "The Dry Salvages," which correspond to the personal parts of the first two Quartets, are less personal. The fifth section contains neither any singular personal pronoun nor any direct reference to the writing of poetry. And in the second section, there is only one passing reference to his own writing:

I have said before
That the past experience revived in the meaning
Is not the experience of one life only......

and he goes on to amplify the idea. For the first time in the Quartets he does not protest about how unsuccessful he had been at saying things before.

Nevertheless, even with these differences noted, the second and fifth sections of "The Dry Salvages" do at least follow the pattern set up in the first two Quartets. The second section opens with a sestina, perhaps the most formal and complicated verse form found in the Four Quartets. This lyric is followed by a more loosely constructed passage that develops or rephrases the theme of the lyric, and includes the one reference mentioned above to the poet's having said something before. Like the second sections of "Burnt Norton" and "East Coker," it gradually becomes tighter and more controlled as it develops, and concludes calmly, though still speaking from boyhood experience:

Time the destroyer is time the preserver,
Like the river with its cargo of dead negroes, cows and chicken coops,
The bitter apple and the bite in the apple.
And the ragged rock in the restless waters,
Waves wash over it, fogs conceal it;
On a halcyon day it is merely a monument,
In navigable weather it is always a seaman
To lay a course by: but in the sombre season
Or the sudden fury, is what it always was.

Likewise, although the fifth section of "The Dry Salvages"
does not make direct reference to the craft of poetry, it does dwell
on questions concerning the content and purpose of poetry in ways that
remind us of some of Eliot's prose criticism. Compare, for instance,
the following passage from Eliot's essay, "Literature and the Modern
World," with section V of "The Dry Salvages":

From "Literature and the Modern World":

Only the greatest, the Hebrew Prophets, seem to be utterly
captured up and possessed by God as mouthpieces; in ordinary
human poets the human personal loss, the private grievance
and bitterness and loneliness, must be present. Even when
the poet is aware of nothing, interested in nothing, beyond
his personal feelings, these may have, by their intensity,
a representative value, so that we envisage him, like
Villon, not as wrapped up in his private griefs, but
relieving them, holding nothing back, in a passionate cry
to God--and there is, in the end, no one else to cry to.
But in the greatest poets these private passions are
completed in a passionate belief in objective moral values,
in a striving towards justice and the life of the spirit
among men.12

And From "The Dry Salvages":

Men's curiosity searches past and future
And clings to that dimension. But to apprehend
the point of intersection of the timeless
With time, is an occupation for the saint--
No occupation either, but something given
And taken, in a lifetime's death in love,
Ardour and selflessness and self-surrender.
For most of us there is only the unattended
Moment, the moment in and out of time,....
The similarity in concerns is obvious, but the passage from "Literature and the Modern World" illustrates clearly that the concern with the apprehension of the point of intersection of the timeless with the time is the concern of the poet as poet. The change of emphasis in "The Dry Salvages" is from poetry as craft to poetry as inspiration, or "Incarnation." ("The hint half guessed, the gift half understood, is Incarnation.") This shift not only develops the dual meaning of "the word" but also prepares the way for the corresponding passage of "Little Gidding" where the craft and the vision are united as "The complete consort dancing together."

Thus, in "The Dry Salvages" the patterns that are established in the first two Quartets begin to turn around. In "Burnt Norton" and "East Coker" the most personal parts, the parts that appear to contain the most personal and even "confessional" passages, are generally found in the second and fifth sections. In "The Dry Salvages" sections one and three become more personal and sections two and five a little less so. The general effect of this is that "The Dry Salvages" is the most personal poem in the quartets, and perhaps the most personal that Eliot ever wrote. In theme it is based primarily upon his own life's experience, beginning with his childhood on the Missouri and youth in New England. In tone it is conversational, reaching a level of informality that is highly unlike Eliot. "The Dry Salvages", in short, completes the process begun in "Burnt Norton", the process of throwing off masks, of shedding the superficial layers of personality that prevent the reconciliation of the
timeless and the time. The final lines of "Burnt Norton" suggest that if there is a resolution, it is not presently available. The pattern of salvation is movement, but so is the pattern of desire. And only in the moment of vision can the two be clearly distinguished; consequently human time becomes a "waste". However, this conclusion is untenable because it essentially rejects ordinary human experience. "East Coker" then attempts to find the place of human experience by looking to human history, and "The Dry Salvages", tries to do the same thing by looking into one's own history. But while "East Coker" and "The Dry Salvages" attempt to justify the ordinary human time, they do not quite manage to reconcile it with the spiritual. "The Dry Salvages" seem to me an intellectually complex poem; its intellectual difficulty contrasts with the more straightforward "Little Gidding." Likewise it is the most immediately personal of the Quartets, which contrasts with the cooler impersonality of "Little Gidding."

"The Dry Salvages," then, is personal in a way that Eliot is usually not personal: it makes extensive and obvious use of his own personal history. Because of this it is an important landmark in his poetry, one that is a culmination of a great deal of preparation, beginning with Ash Wednesday, but seen most clearly in "Burnt Norton" and "East Coker." It could only come, for example, after such a "confession" that his poetry is a "Periphrastic study in a worn out poetical fashion," and that the last twenty years were "largely wasted" in trying to "get the better of words/ For the thing one no longer has to say." In "The Dry Salvages" Eliot could finally
talk about his own life, about his childhood and youth, and do so in an argumentative and personal tone that he had not used before in his poetry (although it appears in the prose: "I do not know much about gods; but. . ." reminds one of "Mr. Russell is a great mathematician; but. . ."). Eliot seemed to find it easier to talk about himself as poet than as an individual human, perhaps because as a poet he was always a bit of a public man. Thus he talks confidentially to us in "East Coker" about himself as poet before he speaks of himself in "The Dry Salvages" in more personal terms. The most personal "confession" about the writer comes in "East Coker" and the personal history comes in "The Dry Salvages." By the same token, the "word" theme is developed quite early in the Quartets.

"The Dry Salvages," then, changes the pattern of the relationships between the various sections of the poems; "Little Gidding" goes on to change the relationships within sections and therefore within the poem as a whole. Once again section two illustrates most clearly. In the first three Quartets, of course, section two begins with a tightly constructed, generally traditional lyric poem, followed by a loosely constructed personal meditation that develops the theme introduced in the lyric in the context of the poet's own experience. But in section two of "Little Gidding," the opening lyric is followed by another rigidly structured passage, using a variation of Dante's Terza Rima. Yet this highly formal construction carries an equally highly personal confession. The familiar compound ghost that the poet meets after the air raid is ambiguous only in the sense that we
cannot know just who it represents. That it is from Eliot's own past, however, is clear. If it is a master, a combination of masters, if it is an old self or selves, or even if it represents his old personae (it bears a good deal of resemblance to Tiresias from *The Waste Land*, for example) or if it is none or all of these does not really matter. What is important is that it speaks of the poet as a man--of Eliot himself, and in theme it attempts to reconcile the poet with his whole past, however unchangeable or "irredeemable" ("Last season's fruit is eaten" and "last year's words belong to last year's language"). Though the ills of the past still weigh heavily, they can be "restored by that refining fire" which dominates the rest of "Little Gidding."

There are two changes here from the second section of the first three *Quartets*. The first is the new formality of the last half of the section, and the second is the new hope that is offered. This last obviously personal passage in the *Quartets* is thus a blending of the personal with the formal, a blending that enables the poet finally to achieve that which he had praised in Dante years before, the impersonal and philosophic use of his own personal experience.

The two differences blend together and prepare the way for the following sections of "Little Gidding". In the first three *Quartets*, the second sections consist of an impersonal passage, written in a highly controlled and generally traditional manner (a worn-out poetical fashion, Eliot calls it), followed by a personal meditation in a more loosely constructed form. This construction implies that the controlled form is suitable for the impersonal
presentation, but that anything more personal requires a looser poetic structure. By using an old poetical fashion in this section of "Little Gidding" to relate a particularly long and, indeed, "confessional" passage, Eliot calls this assumption into question. And since the poetic style he chooses is very much like Dante's *Terza Rima*, he reminds us once again of the objective and impersonal uses to which Eliot himself has told us that Dante put his own personal experiences.

Immediately after this alteration of an unmistakable pattern, Eliot begins the third section with this explanation of patterns:

There are three conditions which often look alike
Yet differ completely, flourish in the same hedgerow:
Attachment to self and to things and to persons, detachment
From self and from things and from persons; and, growing
between them, indifference...

After dismissing the third, indifference, he spends some time telling us that the patterns between attachment and detachment are essentially the same and that one leads quite naturally into the other. This is, of course, the basis upon which the final resolution of the *Four Quartets* rests. All of the images of reflection, of juxtapositions of patterns, of echoes from history, hints and guesses, and finally of the mystical vision itself, lead to this final moment in which the reflection of eternity (which takes place in time) becomes eternity itself. And the practical terms within which this unification takes form is very personal: "The intersection of the timeless moment/ Is England and nowhere." And later, "love of a country/ Begins as attachment to our own field of action/ And comes to find that action of little importance/ Though never indifferent." Thus, just as the reflection of
eternity apprehended in time becomes eternity, so the individual personality, with its own loves and hates, its own "field of action," becomes impersonal and immortal. This immortality is achieved in the fifth section of "Little Gidding," beginning with the poetry itself:

And every phrase
And sentence that is right (where every word is at home,
Taking its place to support the others,
The word neither diffident nor ostentatious,
An easy commerce of the old and the new,
The common word exact without vulgarity,
The formal word precise but not pedantic,
The complete consort dancing together)
Every phrase and every sentence is an end and a beginning,
Every poem an epitaph.

The final line of "Little Gidding," "And the fire and the rose are one," recalls the question that precedes the first vision of "Burnt Norton," But to what purpose/ Disturbing the dust on a bowl of rose-leaves." The dust must be disturbed just as the spring roots must be stirred in The Waste Land. Mankind must be awakened physically in all of Eliot's poetry in order to be awakened spiritually. The physical awakening, although not an end in itself, is highly important. One might argue, in fact, that Prufrock's problem is that he is more awake spiritually than he is physically. That the physical awakening is finally transcended does not lessen its importance; there is a profound difference between staying and returning:

We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time.
The conclusion of "Little Gidding" also recalls the conclusion of "Burnt Norton," and in this comparison the nature of Eliot's final resolution is made even more strikingly. From "Burnt Norton" the conclusion is cynical and desperate:

Quick now, here, now, always--
Ridiculous the waste sad time
Stretcing before and after,

But in "Little Gidding":

Quick now, here, now, always--
A condition of complete simplicity
(Costing not less than everything)
And all shall be well and
All manner of thing shall be well
When the tongues of flame are in-folded
Into the crowned knot of fire
And the fire and the rose are one.

In addition to illustrating that the journey through the Quartets has been a single-purposed one, these echoes from earlier Quartets in "Little Gidding" emphasize that the serenity of the final resolution is set in the same essentially human and personal context that exists throughout the entire Four Quartets. The tone is far less openly personal in "Little Gidding," but that fact does not reduce either the personal implications or the importance of the poet's own voice in the poem. Again and again in "Little Gidding" Eliot explains the process whereby the individual can remain individual and yet be transcendent. For example:

This is the use of memory:
For liberation--not less of love but expanding
Of love beyond desire, and so liberation
From the future as well as the past...
See, now they vanish,
The faces and places, with the self which, as it could,
loved them,
To become renewed, transfigured, in another pattern.

Thus, when the most personal passages in "Little Gidding" are put in the most formal verse patterns (where in the first three Quartets they would have been put in the loosest) Eliot "transfigures" the personal experience quite conspicuously. Everything else in "Little Gidding" follows this pattern of transfiguration.

It is rather in tone than in theme that "Little Gidding" advances the Quartets. Eliot repeats the major themes, but he alters the tone and the voice, hence the persona, of "Little Gidding." Thus, personal passages are put in formal verse, and the sections that retain the looser structures of the first three Quartets, deal almost exclusively with generally impersonal matters. The personal tone of the two middle poems creates a mood of struggle, of uncertainty, of doubt and argument. The mood of "Little Gidding" is a calm one, its dominant note is confidence:

All shall be well, and
All manner of thing shall be well
By the purification of the motive
In the ground of our beseeching.

This is not a cheap victory, of course, for it implies the other theme of the return home after the arduous journey to self-knowledge. And the terms in which Eliot states this theme of self-knowledge are personal, referring back and evoking images from the two middle poems:
And any action
   Is a step to the block, to the fire, down the sea's throat
Or to an illegible stone: and that is where we start.

In "Little Gidding," then, Eliot returns to a kind of impersonal distant poetry that is in some ways reminiscent of the earlier poetry, but especially of *Ash Wednesday* and "Burnt Norton." But there is an important difference, a difference which shows the results of the personal investigation in "East Coker" and "The Dry Salvages." The impersonality of "Little Gidding" is not an impersonality of escape; it is one of transformation. In an analogical sense, what happens to the persona in "Little Gidding" is something like what happens to the lady in *Ash Wednesday*. In fact, the image with which "Little Gidding" concludes is an image reminiscent of the image Dante used in describing the sanctified Beatrice of *Paradiso*, the "crowned knot of fire," only for Eliot it does not apply to a beatific figure, but rather to the resolution that occurs in the persona himself.

In a sense, then, the theme and the method of "Little Gidding" are truly united in a manner that is much more complete and successful than in the earlier poems. For the persona talks about the relationship of place and time to infinity and eternity as he himself is "transformed" into another pattern, a pattern in which the personality is comfortably at home with itself in an easy commerce with the absolute world of spiritual values. People thus become both real and important in this poem; there is no scorn or sense of threat: and they become important because there is a new sense of the importance
of "the self which, as it could, loved them." One is reminded of the passage quoted above from the essay "Literature and the Modern World":

in ordinary human poets the human personal loss, the private grievance and bitterness and loneliness must be present. . .But in the greatest poets these private visions are completed in a passionate belief in objective moral values, in a striving towards justice and the life of the spirit among men.

One can only assume that "Little Gidding" is Eliot's last major poem because he felt that it achieved something like this state. Passionate belief in objective moral values had existed side by side with the private bitterness and loneliness in Eliot's poetry almost from the beginning, but they did not "complete" each other; they fought and in many cases cancelled each other. "Little Gidding" (and thus, the Four Quartets) finally achieve the life of the spirit among men, and this is a personal triumph for Eliot of the greatest magnitude.

This resolution to "Little Gidding" brings together two aspects of Eliot's personae which I have treated separately in this thesis: First, the relationship between Eliot himself and his personae, and second, Eliot's treatment of personality as a poetic theme. This resolution is the culmination of a process of the will which begins in "Prufrock." In "Prufrock," "Gerontion," The Waste Land and The Hollow Men the personae display conspicuous absence of will, an absence that is heightened by setting the personae against heroic mythological or legendary figures.
Prufrock compares himself with John the Baptist and Hamlet. Gerontion confesses that he has not fought "knee deep in the soft marsh," thereby contrasting himself with those who have. The narrator of *The Waste Land* is juxtaposed with a number of religious and secular heroes. And the hollow men recall wistfully "Those who have crossed/ With direct eyes, to death's other kingdom." These early personae all lack the will to see the idea through to the reality, because unlike the legendary heroes with which they are contrasted they possess the wrong kind of self-importance. The personalities of all these characters are built from self-pity, those of the heroes from self-worth. Prufrock and John the Baptist both regard themselves as important personally, but Prufrock lacks the further vision that John clearly possessed.

In *Ash Wednesday*, the persona begins to discover the will to resign himself to the things which trouble the earlier personae. Like Gerontion, he cannot recapture the past, but unlike Gerontion, he can resign himself meaningfully to his present condition. Thus he gains a spiritual victory that is beyond the reach of the earlier personae. In "Burnt Norton" Eliot tries something more ambitious; he tries to use the will not merely to reconcile the self to its losses, but rather to discover for the self a positive set of human values, to find in the normal world and in normal life an intensity equivalent to the intensity of spiritual vision. He is unsuccessful in the end, and has to resign himself to the recognition that normal time is only "wasted sad time," but in even having tried he has created a more ambitious and heroic persona and thus has developed a context in which the bringing together of spiritual intensity and worldly life (time and eternity) can be finally achieved.
This progression in the use of the will is a part of a larger process of change in Eliot's poetry: the recognition of the importance of the human personality in spiritual life. Between Prufrock and the narrator of the *Four Quartets* there is a complete transformation of personality. But such a transformation would not itself be possible without a corresponding transformation in the relationship between poet and persona. In a recent article entitled "Prufrock and After: the Theme of Change," Elisabeth Schneider touches upon this development in her treatment of a process in Eliot's poetry she calls "subjective change."

Miss Schneider suggests that: the major poems trace the struggle of transforming "wish into will, will into belief and then dedication." And although she judiciously refrains from basing her argument on autobiographical elements in Eliot's poetry, she stresses continually that the concern about the possibility of subjective change which absorbs Eliot's major personae, was shared by Eliot himself. For example, she suggests that Prufrock is speaking for Eliot when he asks about his own chances for changing. She explains the relationship between poet and persona this way:

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. 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."
"Prufrock was Eliot," Miss Schneider concludes, "though Eliot was much more than Prufrock." Put another way, Eliot undoubtedly recognized something of Prufrock in his own character, but he clearly also saw more clearly than does Prufrock the nature of his essential weakness of character; thus the social satire which delighted Eliot's contemporaries.

Taken by itself, however, the cause of Prufrock's failure can arise from any number of causes. Prufrock can be seen as a weak character of the type that a corrupt or decadent urban society produces or as a character who represents a humanity that is genetically incapable of significant action. However, Eliot clearly dissociated himself from those who interpreted his early work in these cynical directions; what they saw, he later said, was their disillusion at being disillusioned. However, one would not know this merely from reading "Prufrock." The point is that Eliot himself doesn't lay down any specific ways in which he is different from or superior to Prufrock. One can, as does Elisabeth Schneider, point to different kinds or 'levels' of symbolism which serve to suggest differences in awareness between Prufrock and Eliot. Or one can, as I did in the chapter on that poem, show that Eliot leads Prufrock into the kind of moral dilemmas which can later, if one travels in Eliot's direction, lead to a conviction of religious realities. Or one can, as Hugh Kenner does, emphasize those aspects of Prufrock's character which are least specific, and conclude that Prufrock is not a real character.
at all, but merely a 'literary effect,' by which Eliot can criticize his world. In any case, whichever approach one chooses, one is hard pressed to describe exactly in which ways or in fact to what extent Eliot feels himself superior to Prufrock. Clearly, Eliot as writer is clearly to be set above Prufrock as character. However, the moral superiority Eliot asserts is, in fact, a particularly vague one; one that has best been characterized as "there but for the grace of God, go I." If the poem asserts one specific theme with any certainty, it is that meaningful change in one's own life is particularly difficult. But of course, even Prufrock knows that.

Thus, Eliot's separation from his dramatic persona in this earliest major poem (the same is essentially true for "Gerontion") is that Eliot is capable of pitying and of satirizing Prufrock, and to pity and to satirize both suggest a superiority which is asserted but not proved. This is not to suggest that the poem is a contest between the poet and the dramatic character, but when Prufrock is compared with the narrator of "Burnt Norton" a number of interesting and important points emerge.

First of all, there is at least one very important similarity between the two poems. Both narrators attempt and fail to achieve some sort of personal transformation: Prufrock in his ability to form meaningful sexual relationships and the narrator of "Burnt Norton" to sustain the spiritual intensity of a mystical vision. Nevertheless, the narrator of "Burnt Norton" is clearly greater in his failure than Prufrock is in his. The reasons for this greater
stature illustrate the primary ways in which Eliot's attitude toward the human personality and toward his own poetic personae has changed.

The first and most obvious reason for the later persona's greatness is that he tries a greater change, and tries it more seriously. Consequently both the poet and the reader have to take the character more seriously. His failure to change is not from want of sincere effort, nor is it quite as final as is Prufrock's. "Burnt Norton," therefore, is a much more profound record of human weakness than is "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock."

Secondly, Eliot's attitude toward his persona is quite completely changed in "Burnt Norton." In Prufrock, Eliot either scorns or pities his dramatic character in such a way that he as poet (and we as readers) are assured a moral superiority over the fictional character. We can say that, yes, we know people like that (and aren't we glad we are not among their number). In "Burnt Norton," as in all his later poems, Eliot makes it much more difficult to assume that kind of easy automatic superiority. The difference in Eliot's attitude toward his personae in these two poems, then, is not dependent upon the difference between the personae's success and failure as is often assumed. The difference is that in "Burnt Norton" Eliot as poet appears to be showing his readers what in his social and moral criticism he often tells us: It is difficult to gain even small victories in living; let us be glad when they are won and disappointed when they are not. Eliot invites us to mock Prufrock for presuming that he is capable of changing his own personality. In
"Burnt Norton," on the other hand, we are painstakingly prevented by Eliot from mocking the narrator for his inability either to sustain his vision or to change enough to make that vision meaningful in his non-visionary, mundane life.

Finally, "Burnt Norton" marks a turning point in Eliot's own working out of this whole question of the individual's capacity to save himself (which is really another way of saying the individual's capacity to effect subjective change in himself).

*Ash Wednesday*, of course, had shown a character who was able to effect some change, however modest, in himself, but that change takes place with the help of the Lady. Thus, the unspectacular nature of the persona's development (more a reconciliation than a change), coupled with the fact that his reconciliation is not totally self-accomplished, modifies the significance of the persona's final resolution. This does not take away from the difficulties the persona encounters in coming to his final position, nor does it belittle the spiritual theme that Eliot presents. It does, however, illustrate once more the depth of Eliot's conviction that an individual cannot by himself make spectacular changes in his own personality. (Miss Schneider sees Eliot's later poetry as an apology for not believing as wholeheartedly in his own Christian devotion as he claimed in his prose writings. It might be fairer to Eliot to phrase it differently and say that this poetry illustrates the difficulty of believing wholeheartedly these convictions.)
In light of this, "Burnt Norton" assumes a particularly important position in Eliot's canon, for in "Burnt Norton," Eliot for the first time dares to let a narrator who is not clearly separated from him not only try, but fail in his attempt, to find a spiritual meaning for his life without such outside guidance as the lady of Ash Wednesday offers. The narrator in this poem, and later in the rest of the Quartets, concerns himself with trying to find a way to make the spiritual vision give a meaning to the rest of his life. That he fails in "Burnt Norton" is really a mark of success in Eliot's poetry, for the act of presenting that kind of failure without the use of a complicated mask to hide himself is for Eliot, the poet, and the man, a personal triumph. In many ways, of course, it seems that the 1935 Collected Poems is a far less hopeful book than the 1962 version, which contains the final three Quartets, but "Burnt Norton" is not a totally unsuitable poem with which to conclude a major segment of Eliot's work, for it suggests that finally the poet is able to deal straightforwardly with the sense of personal failure. And while Eliot finally (but not for five years after "Burnt Norton") was able to complete the final step in working through the remaining Quartets, that final step turns out to be not any greater than the one that leads to "Burnt Norton" and certainly depends upon the willingness, first shown in "Burnt Norton," to admit that although one cannot will oneself into the kind of spiritual state one wishes, having to rely on some sort of divine grace, the will is nevertheless necessary. And for the will to be effective, the individual must be
willing to expose his own spiritual anguish to the scrutiny of others, not because one is himself important, but because in any man that spiritual struggle is important. Miss Schneider observes that "Prufrock could not have become a poet of stature"; neither could he ever achieve the final resolution Eliot achieves in "Little Gidding." If Prufrock cannot be saved because he is only a part of Eliot, then Eliot cannot be saved wearing Prufrock's (or anybody's) mask. This, then, is the final triumph of the *Four Quartets*: the straightforward acceptance and use of one's own personality in the poetry, not because one is an important public figure, and particularly not because one is seeking either sympathy or praise, but because (like the public confession in the Mass) one must finally assume responsibility for one's own life. Eliot was undoubtedly thinking of himself as well when he said of Yeats' poetry written in middle age:

Most men either cling to the experiences of youth, so that their writing becomes an insincere mimicry of their earlier work, or they leave their passion behind, and write only from the head, with a hollow and wasted virtuosity. There is another and even worse temptation: that of becoming dignified, of becoming public figures with only a public existence - coat racks hung with decorations and distinctions, doing, saying and even thinking and feeling only what they believe the public expects of them.15

It is this danger of being a dignified public man that Eliot seems to have felt his own greatest threat - the danger of becoming the elder statesman (and that is only another mask). Eliot saw that the greatest temptation was neither insincere emotion nor sterile rationality, but rather the temptation to assume another
role, to wear another mask. And at the time he was writing this he was also engaged in writing the final three poems of the *Four Quartets*, a work which deserves as surely as any of Yeats' work, to be described in Eliot's own words:

There are two forms of impersonality: that which is natural to the mere skilful craftsman, and that which is more and more achieved by the maturing artist. The first is that of what I have called the 'anthology piece', of a lyric by Lovelace or Suckling, or of Campion, a finer poet than either. The second impersonality, is that of the poet who, out of intense and personal experience, is able to express a general truth; retaining all the particularity of his experience, to make of it a general symbol. And the strange thing is that Yeats, having been a great craftsman in the first kind, became a great poet in the second. It is not that he became a different man, for, as I have hinted, one feels sure that the intense experience of youth had been lived through--and indeed, without his early experience he could never have attained anything of the wisdom which appears in his later writing. But he had to wait for a later maturity to find expression of early experience; and this makes him, I think, a unique and especially interesting poet.16

Although in not quite the same way, Eliot too had to wait until the *Four Quartets* to find the capacity to trust his own voice in his poetry and finally to achieve that faith in human personality which made possible such directness.
1 It is not unusual, for instance, to find a student who carefully avoids confusing Eliot with his other narrators, but speaks of the persona of these two poems as "Eliot."

2 A notable exception is George Wright in *The Poet in the Poem: The Personae of Eliot, Yeats, and Pound* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1960). However, Wright does not distinguish even between the personae of *The Waste Land* and the *Four Quartets*. The only distinction he feels it necessary to make for his purposes is between the 'earlier and the later personae' and he fixes 1920 as the line of division between the two periods.

3 *The Invisible Poet*, p. 250.

4 Of course, one must qualify this kind of statement with the rider that technically every poem uses a persona, no matter how personal or autobiographical it is; I will take up this question again later in the chapter.

5 That "Burnt Norton" was published as the terminal poem of the *Collected Poems: 1909-1935* suggests that it might easily be treated separately as well as with the rest of the *Quartets*. Most of the evidence available would seem to suggest that when he published it, Eliot did not yet intend to write the companion poems.

6 One is reminded of "A Note on War Poetry":

   It seems just possible that a poem might happen
   To a very young man: but a poem is not poetry--
   That is a life.

7 *On Poetry and Poets*, p. 299.

8 "In the middle way" is a pun with a number of implications, of course, but most of the most obvious ones are clearly personal: middle age, the middle part of a career, even the middle of the poem.

9 I am using chiefly the first 60 pages which are devoted to a general historical and technical discussion of the topic. The chapter on Eliot in Wright's book does not pursue the topic in the same direction as I do here.
FOOTNOTES  CHAPTER 6 (continued)

10 For this last part I am, of course, borrowing the concepts and the analogy from Wayne C. Booth's *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1961).


12 *American Prefaces*, 1:2 (Nov., 1935), 19-22. It is interesting to note that this essay was first published in the year "Burnt Norton" was first published, and then republished in 1940 as "East Coker" appeared and when Eliot must have been planning the whole of *Four Quartets*.

13 Elisabeth Schneider, "Prufrock and After: The Theme of Change," *PMLA*, (October, 1972), 1103-1105.

14 As noted in Ch. 5, Alan Tate uses this phrase to explain the transformation; see "On Ash Wednesday," in Tate's *Collected Essays* (Denver: Alan Swallow, 1959).


Selected Bibliography

This bibliography is divided into two main sections: works by Eliot and works about Eliot. The first section is further divided into poetry and prose, and the works are listed chronologically as they appeared in print. Individual articles have been listed only when they have not been reprinted in one of the standard collections.

In the Second section, no attempt has been made to distinguish between works which are central to the thesis and those which are only peripheral. Instead all those works consulted which have any bearing, however small, upon topics dealt with in the thesis have been included.

I Eliot's Poems and Prose

A) Poems


(Reprinted with notes from The Criterion 1, i [Oct., 1922]: 50-64, and The Dial 73, v [Nov., 1922]: 473-85)


Journey of the Magi. London: Faber, 1927. (Ariel Poems no. 8.)

A Song for Simeon. London: Faber, 1928. (Ariel Poems no. 16.)
Marina. London: Faber, 1930. (Ariel Poems no. 29.)

Triumphal March. London: Faber, 1930. (Ariel Poems no. 35.)


East Coker. London: Faber, 1940.


The Dry Salvages. London: Faber, 1941.


B) Prose

For Lancelot Andrewes: Essays on Style and Order. London: Faber, 1928.
Dante. London: Faber, 1929.


II Secondary Sources


Austin, Allen. "T.S. Eliot's Objective Correlative."

Univ. of Kansas City Review 26 (1960): 133-140.


Explicator 14 (1956): item 27.

Barnes, W.J. "T.S. Eliot's 'Marina': Image and Symbol."

Univ. of Kansas City Review 29 (1963): 297-305.

Basler, Rox P. "Psychological Patterns in 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock','" Twentieth Century


South Atlantic Quarterly 56 (1957): 79-90.


Blackmur, R.P. "In the Hope of Straightening Things Out."


Bradford, C., "Footnotes to East Coker: a Reading."
Sewanee Review 52 (1944): 169-175.

Catholic World 190 (1959): 151-156.


Chaning-Pearce, M. "Little Gidding." *Nineteenth Century* 133 (1943): 74-78.


Gallup, Donal. "The 'Lost' Manuscripts of T.S. Eliot."

Gallup, Donald. *T.S. Eliot, a Bibliography, Including Contributions to Periodicals and Foreign Translations.*


(Byron Foundation Lecture, 1965.) Nottingham: Univ. of Nottingham, 1966.


Hirsch, David H. "T.S. Eliot and the Vexation of Time."


   Barnes and Noble; London.


*Explicator* 17 (1959): item 42.


Pritchard, William H. "I. Reading The Waste Land Today."


Romer, Karen T. "T.S. Eliot and the Language of Liturgy."


San Juan, E., Jr. "Form and Meaning in 'Gerontion'."


Schauzer, Ernest. "'Mr. Eliot's Sunday Morning Service'."

Schneider, Elisabeth. "Prufrock and After: The Theme of Change."

Schoeck, R.J., "T.S. Eliot, Mary Queen of Scots and Guillaume de Machaut."

Schwartz, Delmore. "T.S. Eliot's Voice and His Voices [Parts I & II]."


Warren, Austin. "Continuity in T.S. Eliot's Criticism."


West, Ray B., Jr. "Personal History and the Four Quartets."
New Mexico Quarterly 23 (1953): 269-282.


Williams, Philip. "The Resurrection Lyric of Four Quartets."

Williams, Charles. "A Dialogue on Mr. Eliot's Poem."


