

THE ASCENDANCY OF T. S. ELIOT,
1925-1950

FOR twenty-five years T. S. Eliot exercised an authority in the literary world not possessed by any writer before him for more than a century. By the end of the 1920s his poetry was an inescapable influence on younger poets, and his criticism shaped their work even more pervasively, if only because they read the authors he praised. Twenty years later *The Waste Land* was still widely regarded as the most radical and brilliant development of Modernist poetry. One must have lived through the 1940s and 1950s to grasp how frequently and respectfully Eliot's literary judgments were cited. By this time few poets were imitating him, for his elliptical style had severe disadvantages. Eliot felt this himself, and in the *Four Quartets* he partly reverted to a personal, meditative voice traditional in poetry. Moreover, except during and after the Second World War, his conservative, Christian ideology was unattractive to many intellectuals in England and the United States. Even without these grounds for rejection, the poets who came after Eliot would have been compelled to resist him in order to establish an identity of their own. Thus the future development of poetry did not proceed from Eliot, but both from and against him, and in both respects he was central.

"I do not know for certain how much of my own mind he

invented," William Empson wrote, "let alone how much of it is a reaction against him or indeed a consequence of misreading him." "To our generation," recalled Stephen Spender, "Eliot was the poet of poets." "Are there any better poems of their kind in English," Archibald MacLeish wistfully asked himself in 1925, having just read "Three Poems" in *Criterion* magazine (of which two became portions of "The Hollow Men"). In a letter to John Peale Bishop at this time MacLeish said that "after Eliot" it was impossible to write anything except "more Eliot," of which MacLeish felt personally incapable. When Allen Tate first read Eliot in 1922, he reported the "shock" in a letter to Hart Crane. Crane replied: "I have been facing him for *four* years . . . You see it is such a fearful temptation to imitate him that at times I have been distracted." But Crane hoped he had discovered a way "through [Eliot] toward a *different* goal." William Carlos Williams believed that with the publication of *The Waste Land* "the bottom had dropped out of everything" he cared about in poetry. Eliot's poem, Williams felt, was "the great catastrophe to our letters . . . I was defeated." The yearbook of Delmore Schwartz's high school remarked that "T. S. Eliot is God, and Delmore Schwartz is his prophet," so much had Schwartz extolled Eliot. In later years Schwartz sensed that he was living under a literary dictatorship, and he both submitted and rebelled. Eliot was equally an obsession for Karl Shapiro, who violently attacked him as a simulacrum. Stanley Kunitz later explained that "for more than three decades" before the Second World War "you could scarcely pick up a poem by a young writer without overhearing [Eliot] somewhere in the background . . . In the twenties and thirties one had to follow Eliot in order to win a reputation or an audience."

During the 1950s and 1960s it was frequently said that Eliot's ascendancy had deflected English and American poetry from its natural path. This view of literary history is represented by Philip Larkin's 1973 *Oxford Book of Twentieth-Century English Verse*, which emphasizes continuities between poetry before the First and after the Second World War. Eliot's poetry has always seemed alien—Franco-American—to many English readers. In the United States William Carlos Williams and his followers deplored Eliot's prestige on similar grounds. He had disseminated, they said, a formalism, a cosmopolitanism, and an academicism

from which American poetry recovered only in the 1950s and 1960s, when it reattached itself to poets and traditions it had deserted in the 1920s. As Robert Lowell put it to Williams in a 1952 letter, Eliot's "personality and opinions" were "not at all what anyone in America or England [had] really wanted . . . I think the field was open, and that" Williams and his fellow poets had enjoyed "the more direct road." Eliot had dominated, Lowell bluntly told Williams, because of his superior "artistry and sincerity."

Eliot was not a better poet than Yeats or Frost, and the course of poetry after the Second World War showed that he was not inevitably a stronger influence than Pound, Williams, or Wallace Stevens. We may ask, therefore, why it was Eliot, so much more than these other poets, who loomed in the path of his immediate successors. During the first period of Pound's strong influence on modern poetry, roughly from 1912 to 1925, Pound and Eliot were a front, and Eliot's impact was augmented by this alliance. Their critical statements spread the demand that poetry should "modernize" its style, and their own poetry exemplified what was meant. Yeats, Hardy, and Frost did not seem comparably "modern" in the period when this adjective acquired a special cachet. Recognition of Wallace Stevens and William Carlos Williams was delayed by Eliot's ascendancy, and Pound's influence waned after 1921, when Pound left London. Living in Paris and, after 1924, in Italy, Pound could no longer be a personal force. Meanwhile in London Eliot founded and edited *Criterion* magazine and became an editor at the publishing firm of Faber and Faber. Most younger poets in England and the United States were published by Eliot or hoped to be.

Eliot's literary criticism enormously enhanced his prestige. The transformation of taste he effected is a commonplace of modern literature. I. A. Richards, William Empson, F. R. Leavis, Allen Tate, and others who also played important roles were themselves influenced by Eliot. "It is as much as one's life is worth nowadays, among young people," Edmund Wilson wrote in 1931, "to say an approving word for Shelley or a dubious one about Donne." When in 1923 Archibald MacLeish quit the law for literature, he thought he should prepare himself for his new vocation by a course of reading. Even at this early date his program reflected the critical perceptions of Eliot and Pound: he

intended to learn "Italian with a view to reading Dante," to go through "pre-Chaucerian stuff," to "follow the trend from Anglo-Saxon and Provençal," and to study Laforgue in French, *The Golden Bough*, and "that line." Malcolm Cowley was also intimidated into learning Italian in order to read Dante, and as late as 1952 I knew numerous graduate students who began studying Italian under the same influences. Eliot was among the writers who led Hart Crane and Allen Tate to French *symbolisme*. Owing partly to Eliot, Dylan Thomas and William Empson were infatuated with "Metaphysical" conceits at the end of the 1920s, and so were numerous other English and American poets in the 1930s, while books and articles on the Metaphysical poetry of the seventeenth century poured from the universities.

The authority of Eliot never permeated the literary world completely, however, and it arrived at different times for different readers. With poets younger than Eliot it was at its height from 1922, when *The Waste Land* was published, into the 1930s. But with critics, editors, academic students of literature, and general readers the story is more complicated. Few persons older than Eliot were able to appreciate his poetry. The record is full of experienced readers—H. L. Mencken, Harriet Monroe, Van Wyck Brooks, Louis Untermeyer, Amy Lowell, Harold Monroe, W. B. Yeats—who never understood why Eliot's poetry was so much admired, though some of them paid lip service. We may illustrate the generational situation by comparing the reactions of John Crowe Ransom with those of Allen Tate. When Tate began to praise Eliot, Ransom, who was eleven years older than Tate, had never read Eliot, and he did not much like Eliot's poetry when he did read it. Yet we do not suppose that Ransom was a less receptive or intelligent reader than Tate.

Most academic critics lagged a quarter-century behind. The first important book on Eliot by a university professor was by F. O. Matthiessen and came out in 1935. In 1949 UNESCO asked a group of American professors of English to name the twenty best American books. Their list included Robinson and Frost but not Eliot. Perhaps Eliot was viewed as English, but "The Best Books of Our Time," a list compiled from publications of library associations and other "expert" sources, affirmed in 1948 that the best poets were, in order of rank, Frost, Auden, and Sandburg, with Eliot in fourteenth place. In the same year

New Colophon: A Book Collector's Quarterly asked its readers to name living American writers most likely to be regarded as classics in A.D. 2000. The poets on this list were Frost, Sandburg, Eliot, and Millay, in third, fifth, seventh, and tenth place respectively. Ten years later, in 1958, a poll of graduate students in English at Columbia University placed Eliot first among living poets. With general readers and the professoriat, in other words, Eliot's reputation reached its height only after the Second World War, just when it was rapidly eroding among poets.

In later chapters I will have occasion to dwell on the relations between Eliot and this or that particular poet or group, but I here sketch the continuing dialectic of emulation and resistance as a whole. In following the order of chapters to come, this sketch also provides an overview of the course of modern poetry from the 1920s to the present. Needless to say, a great many older poets, such as Hardy, Frost, and Yeats, were active during this period, and Yeats rivaled Eliot in reputation. These poets, whose careers were described in the first volume of this history, are central in modern poetry, but owed nothing to Eliot, having formed their styles before he wrote. Our story concerns the successive generations of poets who emerged after the high Modernist revolution of 1917–22, and we begin with four Americans—E. E. Cummings, Archibald MacLeish, Robinson Jeffers, and Hart Crane—who first made their reputations in the 1920s. They illustrate different types of poetry that seemed "modern" at that time. Of these four only MacLeish and Crane were much influenced by Eliot, for Cummings and Jeffers, like Robert Graves in England, derived from earlier moments in the modern development. We shall see that in the 1920s and 1930s Eliot challenged the Whitmanian tradition—he is the great antagonist to Whitman in American poetry, even though his *Four Quartets* is full of Whitman—and that Crane conceived his epic *The Bridge* as a reply to *The Waste Land*. He hoped to carry Eliot's methods into a celebration, altogether in the spirit of Whitman, of American experience, and finally into mystical ecstasy.

Coming next to an international style, we observe what I call "the poetry of critical intelligence," a type of poetry that was created primarily by William Empson, John Crowe Ransom, and Allen Tate. So far as it descended from Eliot, this style was

shaped more by his criticism than by his poetry. In other words, Empson and Tate followed Eliot more closely as critics than as poets, and their poetry reflected their critical ideals and tastes. Gradually their criticism, together with that of I. A. Richards, Richard Blackmur, Yvor Winters, Robert Penn Warren, and Cleanth Brooks, was perceived as forming a school, and in the United States this so-called New Criticism penetrated the university teaching of literature. Young poets began to write for the kind of "close reading" or "explication" they had been taught in the classroom. This was during the 1940s and 1950s, when symbolism, "organic" interconnection of images, formal meters and stanzas, and packed "wit" characterized an academic style in the United States. This style was adopted by, among many others, John Berryman, Robert Lowell, Richard Wilbur, and Adrienne Rich at the start of their careers. Thus there were two generations of New Critical poets, the older one that created the style in the 1920s and the younger one that received it in the classroom during the 1940s. The second generation, which eventually rebelled against this style, is the subject of a later chapter, "Breaking through the New Criticism."

In the 1930s intellectual life was preoccupied by political events—economic collapse, Fascism in Italy and Germany, the Italian invasion of Ethiopia, the Spanish Civil War, rearmament, and the growing threat of a second World War. The important new poets who emerged in the 1930s were English rather than American, for most poets of the same generation in the United States did not begin to publish until the 1940s. The thirties poets of England expressed the emotions evoked in them by the historical crises, and these emotions were widely shared. Moreover, many poets desired to engage their art directly in the historical crises by forwarding a political cause, and so they wrote to warn, to denounce, or to rally supporters. Such intentions presupposed a loosening of style, and one might have expected that their poetry would reach a large audience. The same type of reader who had responded to the Georgian poets and to Wilfred Owen and Siegfried Sassoon during the First World War, but had not been able to appreciate Eliot, Pound, and Yeats, might have been addressed by the gifted new generation of W. H. Auden, Stephen Spender, Louis MacNeice, and Cecil Day-Lewis.

Yet, on the whole, this did not happen, and the main reason

lies in the continuing grip of the difficult Modernist style on the young poets. This is the more remarkable because Modernism meant chiefly Eliot—his literary criticism and *The Waste Land*—and yet the social attitudes implied in *The Waste Land* were offensive to most poets in the 1930s. After 1934, when he published *After Strange Gods*, Eliot was suspected of Fascist sympathies. Nevertheless, the young poets could not surrender what Eliot had taught them about writing, for it represented to them the highest standards of contemporary poetic art. We should also keep in mind that even in relation to the public crises the poets' emotions were likely to be complex and ambivalent. If, for example, they hoped for a Communist revolution, they also dreaded it, for it would destroy the middle-class way of life to which they were fondly attached—the thatched, rural, private cottage, for example, in which Cecil Day-Lewis was living while he distributed Communist pamphlets. Modernist complexity and obscurity were necessary for a poet as self-divided and unclear about his position as Auden. Thus these poets could not readily adopt Modernist style, and neither could they reject it. They found themselves in a dilemma, one that has been prototypical for poets since.

Eliot's poetry overturned poetic conventions of the Romantic tradition, and his criticism attacked them. His anti-Romantic polemic was continued by most of the more important critics of the following generation—William Empson, F. R. Leavis, and the New Critics in the United States—and at least a third of the new poets subscribed to it in theory. Auden viewed Romanticism as leading to Fascism. Yet Romantic aspects and derivations have since been highlighted in both Eliot and Auden, not to mention other great Modernist poets such as Yeats, Williams, and Stevens. And though most poets after Eliot would have become irritable at any suggestion that they themselves were not modern, their hearts still melted when they read Romantic lyrics. They hungered for the melody and cadence, imagery of nature, strong personal emotion, idealism, and mysticism of poetry in the Romantic tradition. Cummings, MacLeish, Crane, Spender, Day-Lewis, Thomas, and Roethke, among many others, were modern poets of Romantic sensibility. Thus in practice the Modernist movement in poetry was much less anti-Romantic than is usually supposed. Despite conflicting cross-currents, the domi-

nant impulse of poets in the twenty years after *The Waste Land* was not to carry the Modernist development further, but to modify it by combining it with the poetic traditions of the nineteenth century.

The English Romantic revival, which I describe in Chapter 8, expressed a definite restlessness with Eliot's hegemony. Dylan Thomas, the greatest of the neo-Romantic poets, combined *symboliste* technique with Metaphysical wit, but he also challenged the ethos of Eliot through biblical tones of prophecy and an imagery of quasi-mystical oneness with nature. The "True Confessions" of George Barker were the apotheosis of the un-Eliotic personal and unbuttoned. The Second World War fostered feelings of solidarity among classes and of continuity with the national past. In this atmosphere high Modernist style had little appeal, and neither the poets who described war experience nor those who expressed the religious emotions evoked by the war were much influenced by it. The chief exception is Eliot himself, whose "Little Gidding" is the great English poem of the war years.

In the United States, meanwhile, the poets who emerged in the 1930s, such as Stanley Kunitz, Richard Eberhart, Delmore Schwartz, and Karl Shapiro, felt themselves inhibited by the authority of Eliot, since it militated against the strong, direct emotional expression that was natural for them. Generally they opposed Eliot's influence as much as they dared, though, as I have mentioned, Schwartz was ambivalent. Theodore Roethke imitated Eliot at times, but in his finest poems he shared the Romantic ethos of Dylan Thomas.

After the Modernist revolution of 1912-22, the second major transition in the history of modern poetry was the revolt against Modernism, which took place between roughly 1954 and 1964. In England this second revolution was the work of Philip Larkin and other poets of the so-called Movement; they returned for inspiration to Hardy, the Georgian poets of the 1910s and 1920s, and the Augustan poets of the eighteenth century. English poets now wrote almost as though Eliot had never existed. In the United States the break with Modernism was less drastic but more explosive, as can be seen in Allen Ginsberg's *Howl* (1955), Robert Lowell's *Life Studies* (1959), and the many new disciples of William Carlos Williams at this time. The Beat movement,

itself merely the visible tip of a much larger, deeper change in American culture and lifestyle, contributed to the dispelling of Modernism. So also did the protest in the 1960s against the war in Vietnam. But the history of Postmodernism in poetry, the subject of Part Three of this book, begins in the United States with the academic triumph of Modernism, that is, with the establishment of the New Criticism, and therefore of the authority of Eliot, as an orthodoxy within university English departments. At this point, when *The Waste Land* was routinely "explicated" to freshmen, a poet could be truly "modern" and "avant-garde" only by rejecting the New Criticism and Eliot. The style of poetry that had been fostered by the New Criticism now seemed lifeless and remote from reality, and young poets looked about for new ways of writing. The most visible sources of a poetic renewal were the great poets of Eliot's own generation—Pound, Williams, and Stevens—whom Eliot had more or less eclipsed. By 1950 they were authors of vastly impressive oeuvres, and they had recently published new work of major importance—Pound's *Pisan Cantos* (1948), Williams' *Paterson I* (1946), and Stevens' *Transport to Summer* (1947) and *Auroras of Autumn* (1950). Yet, except for Pound, these poets had never been adequately recognized, and Pound had been neglected after 1930. All were available, so to speak, to be discovered, championed, identified with, and learned from.

The first factor, then, in the reaction against Eliot and the New Criticism in the 1950s was the resurgence of Pound, Williams, and Stevens, which is described in Part Two of this book. The term "resurgence" refers both to their own splendid creativity after the Second World War and to their rising reputations and influence on younger poets at this time. But a poet could hardly draw inspiration from both Stevens, on the one hand, and Pound and Williams, on the other, for their styles were widely different, and hence the admirers of one generally lacked interest in the other, a situation still reflected in critical writing. The new admiration for Pound and Williams also focused attention on minor followers of theirs in earlier generations, and Basil Bunting and Louis Zukofsky found a small readership for the first time. This appreciation led Bunting, who had stopped writing poetry, to resume it, and at the age of sixty-six he produced his masterpiece, *Briggflatts* (1966). Meanwhile, David Jones,

though not personally associated with Pound or influenced by him, also found new readers at this time, since the resurgence of Pound created a warmer acceptance for Jones's methods of allusive, fragmentary montage in *Anathemata* (1955) and other poems.

Since from the 1960s to the present Eliot has not been an important influence on poets, there is no reason to dwell here on the final chapters of this book. In them I shall be telling how American poets greatly modified or abandoned the New Critical style. I shall discuss the disciples of William Carlos Williams, the theories of open form propagated by Charles Olson, Robert Duncan, and others, the Beat ethos of Allen Ginsberg, and the Confessional poetry of Lowell and Berryman. Over the last twenty years poetry in Great Britain has been generally more conservative than in the United States. The chief figures are Thom Gunn, Ted Hughes, and Geoffrey Hill; and with them I discuss the contemporary poetry of Ireland, especially as this is represented in the achievement of Seamus Heaney. I look at the American poetry of black and women's experience, and in the poetry of Robert Bly, James Wright, W. S. Merwin, Gary Snyder, and others, I explore the emotional rejection of civilization evoked by materialistic glut, ecological pollution, extermination of animal species, and terror of nuclear war, together with the compensatory idealization of the primitive. After a discussion of A. R. Ammons, I conclude with substantial essays on the finest living American poets, John Ashbery and James Merrill.

ELIOT'S LATER CAREER

TS. ELIOT (1888–1965) came of a genteel, middle-class family. As a child he lived in St. Louis and spent summers on the coast north of Boston. On a trip to Europe in 1910–11, after graduating from Harvard College, he completed his first important poems, "Portrait of a Lady" and "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock." In London in 1914 he showed these to Ezra Pound, who arranged for "Prufrock" to be published. In 1915 Eliot married Vivien Haigh-Wood, an Englishwoman, and abandoned the academic career he had been intending. For a while he earned his living by teaching school, and then he found a job in a London bank. His marriage proved unhappy, but despite the emotional turmoil it produced, he continued his literary career, composing "Gerontion" and the famous poems in quatrains. After 1917 he was also writing the book reviews that were eventually to make him influential as a critic, and his first collection of critical essays, *The Sacred Wood*, was published in 1920. In 1921, his health temporarily broken, he went to a sanatorium in Switzerland, and there he completed *The Waste Land* (1922). A year later he founded *Criterion* magazine, an influential journal of literature and criticism, which he edited henceforth. I described Eliot's life to this point at length in the first

volume of this history, paying particular attention to *The Waste Land* and its revolutionary methods of poetic expression.

In 1927 Eliot was baptized and confirmed as a member of the Anglican Church. The demon of doubt, with which he had wrestled since college, had not left him. Virtually all his poetry from this time forth presents the struggle for belief and faith in one who has already made a religious commitment. But intellectual and psychological needs—for tradition, order, belief, hope that his suffering had a purpose, for God as an object of his devotion, and for absolution—were overriding. To his mind, moreover, Christianity was less implausible than any other doctrine. Once he had joined the Church, he was punctilious in attendance and duties. His later poetry is saturated with the rhythm and diction of the Anglican liturgy, which he heard daily.

Eliot's conversion shocked many of his readers. The skepticism of *The Waste Land* had contributed to the impression of its modernity and hence to its prestige. Eliot's poem had displayed the modern mind saturated with history, possessing incongruous elements from different cultures in the past but no unified culture of its own. The poem had expressed the fascination of the modern intellectual with myths that had once embodied religious truth for a culture. It had dramatized the weakened will to live in the modern world, and had suggested to many readers that if the myths could again be believed, our culture and will would be restored to wholeness and vitality. Thus in *The Waste Land* Eliot had given concrete expression to ideas familiar in Nietzsche and several other diagnosticians of the wounded modern spirit. That a bearer of this wound should actually join the Church could not be wholly unexpected, but it was viewed by some as another symptom of the illness.

Rereading *The Waste Land* after Eliot's conversion, one could find foretokenings of it. If the poem showed, as I. A. Richards said, that poetry could be written in the absence of all positive belief, it also testified to the woe of this state of mind. And Eliot had been moving toward conversion slowly over a period of time. He had never since his college years doubted the truth of Original Sin, the Christian doctrine that man's nature is fallen. Like many of the Aesthetes at the end of the nineteenth century, he felt, even during the years when he was not a Christian, that

liberal optimism was shallow by comparison with the pessimistic insight of Christianity into the vanity of human life and the corruption of the heart. In 1919 Eliot was attentively reading sermons of John Donne and Lancelot Andrewes. He loved the churches of London, and would sometimes retreat into them for moments of peace. Though in his personal life and his poetry he had rebelled against tradition, a part of him had always believed in tradition and in the need for institutions that embody it. He was convinced that responsible thinking must lead to commitment. His relations with his wife, to which I shall come in a moment, left him with a sense of guilt and a disillusion with the possibilities of human love. By 1926 he was taking Anglican instruction and attending morning services, and on a trip to Rome he astonished his Unitarian relatives by kneeling before Michelangelo's *Pietà*.

Vivien Eliot was sensitive and vivacious, and she had unusual literary intelligence, appreciated Eliot's writing, and supported him in it. But she had a long history of nervous illnesses, and after her marriage these were exacerbated. While Eliot was working fifteen hours a day, Vivien had little to do. Their troubles were compounded by sexual failures. Vivien's symptoms were variable—headaches, stomach upsets, prostration, sleeplessness—and were made worse by the "cures," such as virtual starvation, to which the medical practice of the time condemned her. For long periods she required constant attendance. The Eliots' life together was dominated by the rhythm of collapse and partial recovery, the despair with flickers of hope, of chronic invalidism. Eliot felt responsible, helpless, and guilty, and the strain of caring for his wife undermined his own health. Vivien felt guilty for being a burden and for interfering with his work. To both their relationship could seem utterly empty. By 1925 they were spending much time apart, yet Vivien was showing signs of extreme dependence. Her mental states were increasingly alarming. Eliot tried to withdraw emotionally, wondered whether his presence might be harmful to her, and considered a separation. She sensed that he was withdrawing, and her resentment and fear vented themselves in hostility. At last he decided that he must leave her, and in 1933, while in the United States, he wrote his solicitors to prepare a deed of separation, enclosing a letter to be given to her. He did not see her

again, for when he returned to England his home address was kept from her, and she was denied access to him at his office. In 1938 Vivien was committed to a mental institution, where she died in 1947.

Throughout these years of enormous unhappiness Eliot had been making his literary career. Through Bertrand Russell, who had taught him at Harvard, he met Lady Ottoline Morrell, a celebrated literary hostess, and through her he was introduced to other writers such as Aldous Huxley and Katherine Mansfield. Pound made him acquainted with Wyndham Lewis, and in 1918 he got to know Virginia Woolf and Edith and Osbert Sitwell. Personal contacts called the attention of these writers to his poetry. When Pound arranged to have *Prufrock and Other Observations*, Eliot's first collection of poems, published in 1917, reviewers ignored or dismissed the book, but the poems were already being discussed in drawing rooms that mattered. In the same year Eliot became assistant editor of *Egoist* magazine, where he began his career as a book reviewer. *Poems* (1919), which Leonard and Virginia Woolf published from the Hogarth Press, included Eliot's poems in quatrains, such as "Sweeney Among the Nightingales." Eliot started to contribute literary essays to Middleton Murry's *Athenaeum* and then to the *Times Literary Supplement*, for which he composed "Tradition and the Individual Talent" and other famous pieces. By 1920 his poems were beginning to find an enthusiastic audience among young literary academics, such as I. A. Richards, and in the same year the critical essays in *The Sacred Wood* augmented his reputation with this audience. *The Waste Land* came in 1922, and with *Criterion* he was editor of his own magazine. In 1925 Eliot joined the publishing firm of Faber and Gwyer (later Faber and Faber). "The Hollow Men" appeared in *Poems 1909-1925*, and *Ash Wednesday* was published in 1930. Meanwhile Eliot continued to turn out critical prose. He was invited to give the Clark Lectures at Cambridge in 1926 and the Norton Lectures at Harvard in 1932-33. These invitations show that his name would now attract an audience.

During the 1920s he stressed more forcibly than ever the virtues of the "classical" attitude. Like other modern thinkers of similar tendency, such as Irving Babbitt, Paul Elmer More, T. E. Hulme, and Charles Maurras (who all influenced him), Eliot ad-

vocated "classicism" in hostility to the modern world, which he viewed as Romantic, and his formulations were often harsh and intransigent. Emotion is naturally disordered and must be disciplined. External authority is necessary. Order is a principal ideal, and is to be achieved through intellectual awareness and control. Doubtless Eliot's "classicism" was, in part, a response to the emotional chaos of his own life. His baptism in 1927 and his naturalization as a British citizen were formal commitments expressing his resolve to put his life in order.

Eliot's literary tastes and ideals changed somewhat during the 1920s. Donne continued to fascinate him, but in the Clark lectures of 1926 he pronounced Donne to be personal, emotional, immature, and Romantic. Laforgue, with whom he had identified fifteen years before, he now criticized for lacking a coherent philosophy. Because of this, he argued, Laforgue's emotion had little significance. He contrasted both Laforgue and Donne in this respect with Dante, whose *Vita Nuova* placed erotic feelings within a total order of thought. Eliot's ideals of poetic impersonality and objectivity now somewhat shifted their meaning. In his 1919 essay "Hamlet and His Problems" he had asserted that a poet can express emotion only through an "objective correlative," but he had assumed that by this method the writer would express personal emotion. By 1926, however, the ideal of impersonality might mean that the writer does not express his personal emotion at all; more exactly, he should express an emotion derived from and appropriate to whatever he contemplates. Thus Eliot praised Lancelot Andrewes because his emotion "is not personal, it is wholly evoked by the object of contemplation, to which it is adequate." Had he been able to emulate Andrewes, his poetry would have been a meditative discipline ordering the personal, emotional self.

Yet Eliot's poetic style did not become "classical," not, at least, if by that term we mean what Eliot did—"ordonnance," impersonality, continuous syntax, prose word order, and intellectual concentration and precision. Moreover, while rereading Dante, he also studied Mallarmé and Valéry, and he translated St.-John Perse's *Anabase* into English. These *symboliste* authors were also impersonal and intellectually deliberate, but they were scarcely "classical," if only because they liberated words from denotation and activated remote suggestions. The fusion of "classical" or

Augustan with *symboliste* verse that Eliot would achieve in the *Four Quartets* was preparing itself.

During the 1920s Eliot began to interpret his own life in a different way. Christianity teaches that the world moves on one plane and the spirit on another, and that the same event may have totally opposed meanings in these different realms. Thus Eliot's personal descent into humiliation and guilt might also be an ascent toward God. "The way up and the way down are one and the same," to quote the words of Heraclitus that Eliot later used as an epigraph to "Burnt Norton." As an epigraph to *Sweeney Agonistes*, the experimental drama he began in 1923, Eliot quoted St. John of the Cross: "Hence the soul cannot be possessed of the divine union, until it has divested itself of the love of created things"; and Eliot came to see such divestment as the purpose behind his marriage. He viewed himself as one of those exceptional persons, like Harry in *The Family Reunion* or Celia in *The Cocktail Party*, whose lives follow a spiritual pattern of which others are not aware. He accepted isolation and emotional aridity as the worldly side of a spiritual vocation.

"THE HOLLOW MEN" AND ASH WEDNESDAY

To its first readers "The Hollow Men" (1925) seemed to continue from *The Waste Land*. There is a similar imagery of a desert, and some images are almost identical. For example, "rats' feet over broken glass / In our dry cellar" at the start of "The Hollow Men" echos "a little low dry garret" with rats' feet in lines 194–5 of *The Waste Land*. The two poems employ similar methods of allusion and juxtaposition—in "The Hollow Men" the allusion, for example, in the epigraph to Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. At the end of "The Hollow Men" a fragment of the Lord's Prayer ("For Thine is the Kingdom") is interwoven with a sigh of weariness ("Life is very long"); in technique this juxtaposition recalls lines 308–11 of *The Waste Land*. Above all, "The Hollow Men" resembles *The Waste Land* in mood. The opening and closing parts, especially, might almost fit into the earlier poem. Like *The Waste Land*, "The Hollow Men" begins with a chorus—

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

—expressing a collective death in life; it ends like *The Waste Land* with a mocking representation of the world going to smash. Hence in 1925 it was reasonable to see in "The Hollow Men" a further expression of the despair of *The Waste Land*—for *The Waste Land* was then understood to express only despair.

Yet after Eliot's conversion and the publication of *Ash Wednesday* a few years later, "The Hollow Men" could be read in a different way, as beginning a new development that *Ash Wednesday* extended. For amid the gestures and symbols that recalled *The Waste Land*, there is in "The Hollow Men" a much more explicit religiousness. The possibility of salvation is present, though the speakers either cannot or will not receive it, and this possibility is expressed in Christian symbols mediated through Dante: the "multifoliate rose" of part IV—"The hope only / Of empty men"—and the "eyes" the speaker dares not meet. The latter presumably belong to a composite figure including the Virgin Mary and Dante's Beatrice. "The Hollow Men" ends in a state of mind mingling disbelieving mockery, sorrow, weariness, and prayer, and cannot be simplified into affirmation, but as compared with *The Waste Land*, it registers a step of Eliot's mind toward conversion.

In style "The Hollow Men" differs strikingly from *The Waste Land* because, like every major poem of Eliot's henceforth, it lacks fragments of dramatic scenes and passages of extended narration. Such concrete vignettes as the conversation of Marie in *The Waste Land*, the session with the fortuneteller Madame Sosostriis, and the description of the lovemaking of the typist and the real estate clerk are totally absent. This side of Eliot's genius went partly into making plays, but to a large extent it died. "The Hollow Men" still juxtaposed various styles, as *The Waste Land* had, but they were styles of abstraction. The stylistic virtue of

Between the idea
And the reality
Between the motion
And the act

lies in the precise philosophical terminology, in the "ordonnance" of the statement, and in the intellectual clarity to which these contribute, as well as in the chantlike rhythm.

The style of parts II–IV of "The Hollow Men" might also be characterized as abstract, but it is the abstraction of *symbolisme*:

Eyes I dare not meet in dreams
 In death's dream kingdom
 These do not appear:
 There, the eyes are
 Sunlight on a broken column
 There, is a tree swinging
 And voices are
 In the wind's singing
 More distant and more solemn
 Than a fading star.

These lines can readily be interpreted. They express a state of consciousness in which presences (eyes, voices) that might possibly be salvific are not wholly withdrawn, but are distant, only reflected, and fading. Nevertheless, we are meant to be uncertain as to just where the eyes "do not appear," what and where "death's dream kingdom" may be, and what exactly the tree, voices, and star may symbolize. The images are precise—"Sunlight on a broken column"—but their meanings and emotional resonances are complicated and not fully determinable. The effect is of haunting vagueness with rich music.

"The Hollow Men" was created only gradually as a sequence, and part III originally belonged to an earlier sequence entitled "Doris's Dream Songs," while parts II and IV were composed for still another sequence, "Three Poems." Part I was first published as a separate lyric. Doris was a character in *Sweeney Agonistes*, and Eliot told Lady Ottoline Morrell that the poem arose as a by-product of the play. The simple diction and the repetitions of "The Hollow Men" ("This is the dead land / This is cactus land") reflect his stylistic effort in the play, and so do the strong rhythms of some passages.

The first major poem Eliot published after he joined the Church, *Ash Wednesday* (1930) enacts the stress of the mind in the process of conversion. The image of turning dominates the first and final sections of the poem. Considered as the work of a recent convert, the poem strikingly lacks joyous belief. In fact, some passages are almost shockingly anguished, as Eliot speaks of those "who chose thee and oppose thee," who "affirm before the world and deny between the rocks." "Between" is the spiritual locus of the speaker throughout: he is between faith and doubt; between the order of nature and the order of grace; be-

tween the objects of desire of a natural creature, which are now lost, and those of religious faith, which are not yet wholly possessed. The speaker is in a "brief transit where the dreams cross" or intersect, "The dreamcrossed twilight between birth and dying" or between dying and birth. Like the characters in *The Waste Land* and "The Hollow Men," the protagonist is in a desert and can only wait. "Teach us to sit still," he says, "Even among these rocks"; but as these quotations show, the waiting in the desert has a different quality in *Ash Wednesday*, for it is filled with prayer, or with broken attempts at prayer.

Like "The Hollow Men," *Ash Wednesday* lacks the concrete, dramatic vignettes of *The Waste Land*, but in other respects it shows Eliot widening his stylistic resources. Some of his experiments were not to be repeated: the brilliant repetition of lines with variation of their terminal points—

Because I do not hope to turn again
 Because I do not hope
 Because I do not hope to turn

—at the start of the poem; the allegorical imagery and the litany of part II; and the mannered repetitions and internal rhymes of part V. Other experiments had a future. Admirers of the impersonal concision of Eliot's earlier property must have been amazed to encounter these lines:

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.

For such writing is personal and ample, almost verbose. There would be similar passages in *Four Quartets*. If we contrast with this passage the lovely "reprise of Prufrock," as Ronald Bush describes it, from Part III of *Ash Wednesday*—"Blown hair is sweet, brown hair over the mouth blown, / Lilac and brown hair"—we see at once how much Eliot's style had changed. In other passages there is the emotional directness he had earlier deplored in the poetry of the nineteenth century:

And the lost heart stiffens and rejoices
 In the lost lilac and the lost sea voices

And the weak spirit quickens to rebel
 For the bent golden-rod and the lost sea smell
 Quickens to recover
 The cry of quail and the whirling plover.

In comparable passages in *Four Quartets*, Eliot uses this style for its own sake, but here it is thematic. It expresses an insurgent emotion of which he disapproves and against which he is struggling.

Eliot's reading of Dante shapes the poem, and two concepts are fundamental. In his depiction of Beatrice, Eliot believed, "Dante expresses the recrudescence of an ancient [erotic] passion in a new emotion, in a new situation, which comprehends, enlarges, and gives a meaning to it." If the general conception is familiar in Christian Platonism—erotic love can lead to religious love of God and find therein its meaning—Eliot's point of emphasis was not typical, for he stressed that the religious emotion not only contains but also revives the erotic one. Eliot's poetry never represented erotic attraction as happy. It was distasteful, or frustrated, or rejected through some failure of courage, or lost in the past, or was a temptation to be renounced. But when erotic feeling became a transfigured element in a religious experience or symbol, Eliot could rejoice in it without reserve, as he does in passages of *Ash Wednesday*:

Here are the years that walk between, bearing
 Away the fiddles and the flutes, restoring
 One who moves in the time between sleep and waking, wearing

White light folded, sheathed about her, folded.

Thus Dante's attitude to Beatrice unlocked a part of Eliot's sensibility.

In part II of *Ash Wednesday* the protagonist has been eaten by three white leopards, and exists only as dry bones. But the bones, "shining with brightness," are glad to be dead and scattered in the desert. Not because they are weary of life, like the characters of *The Waste Land*, but because they accept their condition as purgative. Eliot had been deeply impressed by a passage in Dante in which the souls in Purgatory crowd toward Dante "so far as they could, but ever watchful not to come so far that they should *not be in the fire*." In his essay on Dante Eliot

remarked, with the wonder of sudden insight, that "the souls in purgatory suffer because they *wish to suffer*." This conception modifies the tone of feeling throughout *Ash Wednesday*. Darkness and anguish are present in the poem, but their quality is changed from *The Waste Land*, for the speaker knows that they may have a religious meaning, and they are shot through with waiting, hope, and prayer.

Eliot completed and published *Ash Wednesday* in 1930. In the academic year 1932–33 he was in the United States, lecturing at Harvard University and at the University of Virginia. These lectures were published as *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism* (1933) and *After Strange Gods* (1934). While in the United States he took, as I mentioned earlier, the decisive step of formally separating from his wife. He renewed affections with his family and with Emily Hale, an American he had known before he met Vivien.

His poetry of the early thirties experimented in various directions. "Marina" (1930) is the most elusive poem Eliot ever wrote. It reflects his fascination at this time with Shakespeare's late plays, *Cymbeline*, *Pericles*, *The Winter's Tale*, and *The Tempest*, and conveys a nexus of emotions—fatigue, fear associated with old age, a feeling of shipwreck, discovery, wonder, and love. He started a new suite of poems, *Coriolan*, which he intended to be a political satire. But the poems soon began to reflect ambivalent personal emotions and the suite was never completed. In the United States he wrote poems evoking landscape in "Virginia" and "Cape Ann," and these poems slightly anticipated methods and emotions in the *Four Quartets*.

Returning to Great Britain, Eliot lived in drab accommodations in the presbytery of St. Stephen's in London, where he was to remain until the start of the second World War. Though Geoffrey Faber, Herbert Read, Frank Morley, and others were close friends, he was lonely. Eliot was one of those persons who take refuge from a bleak personal life in work, but of the work that filled his days, relatively little was composing poetry. He spent long hours on his editorial duties, and he accepted a great many chores—lectures, essays, poetry readings, committees, conferences—on behalf of worthy causes.

In the 1930s and thereafter Eliot's main effort as a writer went

into poetic drama. Since dramas are not the subject of this history, I shall not discuss Eliot's. In general they wasted his creative energy, and as he moved from the unfinished *Sweeney Agonistes* (1932) to *Murder in the Cathedral* (1935), *The Family Reunion* (1939), *The Cocktail Party* (1950), *The Confidential Clerk* (1954), and *The Elder Statesman* (1958), each was less interesting than its predecessors. The time Eliot spent on these dramas counts among the notorious losses to English literature, like the twenty years Milton devoted to pamphleteering.

Eliot's political attitude throughout the 1930s was hand-wringing. He disliked all contemporary political systems and philosophies, including British democracy, and was rightly sure that no system of which he could approve would be established. When the Second World War began, however, he put such criticisms aside and felt a renewed identification with his adopted country. He became an air-raid warden, a job that required him to sit up two nights a week, and he increased his other activities.

FOUR QUARTETS

To my mind the *Four Quartets* is the greatest long poem yet written in English in the twentieth century. It is uneven. Some bits fail lamentably, and many passages seem to me set pieces, fine but contrived. But other passages are magnificent, and, what is more important, Eliot's formal procedures compensate for local inadequacies of imagination and phrasing. The context of the whole poem impends in every part, charging the language with resonance. Moreover, through long passages the poem combines concentrated meaning with direct emotional force and accessibility. Some of its rhythms are deeply moving, especially the legato of the final paragraph of "Burnt Norton" and the similar rhythms in "Little Gidding" III and V. The symbolism of the poem is inexhaustible, and so are its paradoxes: "In my end is my beginning"; "the way up is the way down"; "We die with the dying"; "the end of all our exploring / Will be to arrive where we started." Other passages impress by their austere truths wrung from the aridity of Eliot's daily life and the exacerbations of his conscience: the concluding lines of "Burnt Norton," the whole speech of the ghost in "Little Gidding" II, and the aphor-

ism that concludes the second movement of "East Coker"—"The only wisdom we can hope to acquire / Is the wisdom of humility." At its best the *Four Quartets* is more honest, more intelligent, more concerned with the essential in human experience, or more of all these in combination, than any other modern English or American poem.

"Burnt Norton," the first quartet in the sequence, had been created as an independent poem in the mid-1930s. It had developed out of passages rejected from *Murder in the Cathedral*. The three later quartets—"East Coker," "The Dry Salvages," and "Little Gidding"—were written between 1940 and 1942. It was only in 1940, while working on "East Coker," that Eliot had the idea of making a suite of four poems.

In poetic form the *Four Quartets* withdraws from the high Modernism of the 1920s, as can be seen from a quick comparison of the *Four Quartets* with *The Waste Land*. *The Waste Land* is impersonal presentation; the *Four Quartets* is personal speech. In it we overhear the poet exploring and reflecting upon personal memories—memories of the rose garden at the manor house of Burnt Norton, which Eliot had visited with Emily Hale in September 1935; of a 1937 trip to the village of East Coker, whence his ancestor Andrew Eliot had emigrated to America; and of his childhood in St. Louis and the sea and coast near Gloucester, Massachusetts, where he had spent his summers as a boy. *The Waste Land* is discontinuous and concrete, juxtaposing fragments of actions and scenes. In passages the *Four Quartets* is continuous and discursive; in other words, it employs the language of meditation and generalization. *The Waste Land* is laced with literary allusions and uses a variety of contrasting, historical styles; both these features are much softened in the *Four Quartets*. *The Waste Land* interprets modern life within the perspective of ancient myth, and it also parallels or contrasts the present with the historical past. The mythical dimension is less prominent in the *Four Quartets*, and history is conceived in a different way, as a past saturated with values, as a tradition to which the present is or can be linked. And finally, *The Waste Land* exhibits the character and quality of life in the contemporary, urban world. Social critique is largely absent from the *Four Quartets*, which is a poem of Romantic metaphysical exploration. It presents the lonely mind of the poet attempting to read ultimate mysteries.

Of these developments, unquestionably the most important was Eliot's return in the *Four Quartets* to the language of reflection and generalization, to the conceptual language in which most people think. At the start of his career Eliot had tried to shed his predilection for reflective verse, but now he returned to it as a mode deeply congenial to him. Instances of such language could already be found, as we noted, in "The Hollow Men," *Ash Wednesday*, and other poems of the same period. Eliot's success with such language in the *Four Quartets* followed long experiment, particularly in his plays. The same development had been taking place generally in modern poetry; in Chapter 6 of this history I discuss at some length the new poetry of discourse of the 1930s and its motivations. But the chief motivation, influencing Eliot as much as other poets, was simply that discursive thinking and generalization are as natural for a poet as for anyone else. To exclude them from poetry imposes an artificial limitation.

Yet if the *Four Quartets* returns to English poetic tradition, we cannot say precisely which tradition. Several passages in the poem, especially some of the briefer lyrics, recall verse of the seventeenth century. Some lines are partly modeled on prose. In *Ash Wednesday* V Eliot had experimented with the puns and repetitions of the seventeenth-century sermon, and he does this again, though in a different way, in "East Coker" III. Most readers associate Eliot's discursive passages with the Augustan mode. And since each of the quartets begins with a description or evocation of a place—the rose garden at Burnt Norton; the village of East Coker; the Mississippi River and the coast of Cape Ann; and the landscape along the way to the chapel at Little Gidding—the *Four Quartets* has a general affinity with the so-called descriptive-meditative poetry of the eighteenth century. In such poems, of which Gray's "Elegy in a Country Churchyard" is the most famous example, the poet renders the place where he is or the landscape before him, and then goes on to express thoughts the scene suggests to him.

The *Four Quartets* is a traditional type of poem in less definable ways, also: ways that have to do with the uses to which poetry is put or with notions of the "poetic." *The Waste Land* was sometimes read as satire, but the *Four Quartets* is undeviatingly serious. In fact, its tone is generally elegiac. Poems in the nineteenth cen-

tury were, in contrast to novels, expected to soar above worldly dust. As the *Four Quartets* contemplates such large issues as art, death, time and eternity, it escapes from ordinary, humdrum reality. Moreover, its major symbols—the rose, fire, light, dark, the wheel, the sea, the river, the garden—are, as imagery, not emotionally disagreeable. In such respects the *Four Quartets* was in keeping with the Romantic conventions of the nineteenth century.

On the other hand, the *Four Quartets* is also the culmination of twentieth-century symbolism. The title proposes that the poem resembles music. Specific lines and passages activate the semantic suggestions and emotional overtones of words while precluding determinate meaning. Eliot impedes denotation by verbal contradiction, vagueness, ambiguous or incomplete grammar, failure of logical sequence, and paradox. In "Burnt Norton," for example, the opening episode in the rose garden is a memory of something that never happened—

Footfalls echo in the memory
Down the passage which we did not take
Towards the door we never opened
Into the rose-garden

—and most of what follows in this episode is similarly self-contradictory and indefinite. Later in the poem there are, to mention only a few illustrations, the vaguenesses of "Garlic and sapphires in the mud / Clot the bedded axle-tree," where the first line is adapted from one by Mallarmé; the paradoxes of "at the still point, there the dance is, / But neither arrest nor movement"; and the finely ominous mysteriousness of "Time and the bell have buried the day."

In *The Waste Land* Eliot had used recurrent images and actions as leitmotifs—for example, the desert, rain or water, and death by drowning. As the same images were repeated in different contexts, they associated these contexts, and thus tended to integrate the poem as a whole. At the same time, with each repetition the image acquired new connotations, until it became a densely suggestive nexus or symbol. To what degree Eliot had consciously intended these effects as he created *The Waste Land* is uncertain, but in writing the *Four Quartets* he was fully aware of their possibilities, and the *Four Quartets* is leitmotifical, so to

speak, to an unparalleled degree. As leitmotifs Eliot uses not only images and symbols—darkness, traveling, dancing, roses, fire—but also conceptual terms, such as “end,” “beginning,” “motion,” “stillness,” “word,” and “pattern.” By incremental, leitmotif repetition of such terms he gives intensity even to the abstract diction of the poem. Moreover, the poem returns in separate passages throughout to the same intellectual themes and existential concerns: to ways of conceiving time; to concepts of patterns; to the question of the relation of intense moments to the “waste sad time / Stretching before and after”; to experiences of psychological depression and religious darkness; and to fears of old age and death. Such themes should not be called leitmotifs, but the way they recur is analogous. The effective formal principles of the *Four Quartets*, making it a long poem rather than an assemblage of short ones, are cross-reference, increment, and reprise.

The word “end,” to take an obvious example, occurs first in the tenth line of “Burnt Norton,” where it means “termination” and “result”:

What might have been and what has been
Point to one end.

Exactly the same words are repeated thirty-five lines later as the conclusion to the first part of “Burnt Norton.” But now the statement has a changed emotional meaning. Coming after a brief, visionary experience of “reality,” the lines represent a return to the realm of time, and thus carry an added emotional burden of regret. The word “end” recurs again in “Burnt Norton” V. Here the subject is art as form, but art is itself an analogy to reality as pattern, and Eliot illustrates his points by meditating on a Chinese jar. As one follows the pattern around the sides of the jar, each moment is both an end and a beginning.

Or say that the end precedes the beginning,
And the end and the beginning were always there
Before the beginning and after the end.
And all is always now.

And in the final paragraph of “Burnt Norton” we read that

Desire itself is movement
Not in itself desirable;

Love is itself unmoving,
Only the cause and end of movement.

In this context “end” clearly means not only “termination” but also “goal” or “final cause.” With this meaning in mind, we may recall, as we read “And the end and the beginning were always there,” the words of Revelation 12:6, “I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end,” and we realize that in the first occurrence of the word, near the start of the poem, this sense of “end” was already active:

What might have been and what has been
Point to one end, which is always present.

For a larger example of the kinds of echoing and cross-reference that integrate the *Four Quartets* we may briefly consider the concept of pattern as the poem explores it. The rose garden at the start of “Burnt Norton” is a formal one in which paths are laid out. As the protagonist moves through the garden, he follows, Eliot writes, a “formal pattern.” “Burnt Norton” II introduces the idea, fundamental to the *Four Quartets*, of cyclic pattern, which is seen as governing existence from the circulation of the blood to that of the stars. When observed from a sufficient distance, strife—the boarhound pursuing the boar—is revealed as pattern. In these contexts the pattern is pervasive, unchanging, and always controlling though not always known. In “Burnt Norton” V Eliot meditates that “Only by the form, the pattern” can works of art “reach / The stillness”; the latter term is an evocative image for ultimate reality beyond the phenomenal. It refers to what earlier in the poem Eliot called “the still point of the turning world.” In this context, then, Eliot is suggesting that pattern in the phenomenal, temporal world links to or impels toward the spiritual and eternal. But, significantly, in this same fifth section he conveys for the first time that the pattern is not automatically controlling, that things—in this instance, “words”—may fall out of the pattern: “Words strain, / Crack and sometimes break, under the burden”; and he links the “words” of a formal utterance, a poem or prayer, with Christ, the Logos or Word, assailed by temptations in the desert. In this passage the concept of a pattern is associated with moral and spiritual striving; one imposes pattern on oneself or one accepts it by will and faith.

Ideas of pattern are central to three of the five sections of "Burnt Norton" and continue to be developed in later quartets. The concept articulates Eliot's will to conform his being to a prior, external order, to express love as self-discipline, self-abnegation, and penitential acceptance of suffering. The pattern is not God, needless to say, but is created by God and is the way to Him. In the most powerful passage in the poem, the great second movement in "Little Gidding" II, the speaker contrasts mere onward, linear progression with patterned motion:

From wrong to wrong the exasperated spirit
Proceeds, unless restored by that refining fire
Where you must move in measure, like a dancer.

And the concept of pattern is connected with Eliot's desire not to desire, with the "detachment" that in "Little Gidding" III he describes as a virtue (but which I suspect was his spiritual sin). For if one sees people and their lives as elements of a pattern, the sense of the pattern mitigates "Attachment"—to use Eliot's word—"to self and to things and to persons." "See, now they vanish," he writes,

The faces and places, with the self which, as it could, loved them,
To become renewed, transfigured, in another pattern.

Most of all, the idea of a pattern is related to Eliot's search for meaning in experience; to see a pattern, as opposed to incoherence or even to mere sequence, is to feel assured that meaning is present.

The major subject of the *Four Quartets* is life in time in relation to the eternal. Eliot dwells on different conceptions of time as a linear sequence of continual change, as cyclic, and as an infinite plane, like the ocean, on which one is adrift, and he ponders these conceptions in relation to the brief years of one's own life and the longer span of history. Unless time has meaning in relation to eternity, it is, in Eliot's experience, waste and empty. In rare moments, however, the eternal is incarnate within the realm of time. Within our personal lives, such moments are elusive. They are charged with a quality and significance we feel but cannot understand. The episode in the rose garden, at the start of "Burnt Norton," renders one such moment, and the rest of

the *Four Quartets* might be described as a meditation on it, as an effort to recover it "in a different form" by approaching its meaning. But in the lives of others in the past such moments can be more clearly read. Here Eliot is thinking of the incarnation of the divine in Christ as the ultimate prototype, but he also has in mind other instances of suffering, self-sacrifice, and love. Finally, at the conclusion of the *Four Quartets* in "Little Gidding," the Church itself, which is temporal and historical and also supernatural and eternal, is also seen as a point where the timeless and time intersect and are reconciled.

After "Little Gidding" Eliot composed no more important poetry. His routine of life consisted of morning Mass, breakfast, writing, and, in the afternoon, work at Faber and Faber. Lunch was usually a social occasion and so was tea, but he often dined alone with a tray on his knees. In the evenings he would work or read. As the years passed he spent less time at Faber and Faber, chiefly because of dwindling health and energy. He made frequent visits to the United States and also lectured elsewhere. Illness and exhaustion compelled him to take many holidays. His closest personal attachments were with his family and old friends. Between 1946 and 1956 he shared an apartment with John Hayward, a literary scholar and critic. Since Hayward could not live alone—he suffered from muscular dystrophy and was confined to a wheelchair—Eliot was probably motivated by feelings of charity and duty, but also he was lonely and welcomed the companionship. Meanwhile, as I said, his fame flourished as never before in this postwar period. He received the Nobel Prize in 1954, and was treated by the media as a celebrity. When he lectured at the University of Minnesota in Minneapolis in 1956, 14,000 people attended, and the lecture was delivered in a stadium. Vivien Eliot having died in 1947, Eliot married for a second time in 1956. His wife, Valerie Fletcher, had been his secretary since 1949. Thanks to their marriage, his last years were his happiest since childhood. But he had been recurrently and increasingly ill over the last ten years with bronchitis and emphysema (he was a heavy smoker), and he also suffered bouts of tachycardia. Marriage altered his state of mind, but his physical decline continued, and he died in January 1965. By his wish, his body was cremated and his ashes interred in the church at East Coker.