pursued in the study of God and religious faith must not be formulated and discussed only parochially, within the community of believers. Theological investigation can be profitably carried out from both a 'detached' stance and a 'committed' one; and the serious student will demand to know how the data is evaluated from each stance. Most especially, the committed Christian, because he is necessarily a missionary, will sense the importance of imaginative and sympathetic understanding of the agnostic's view of religious faith and Christian revelation.

There is no chaining the gospel, said Paul. And the first Christians would enforce this moral. Taking their mission to Gentiles as well as Jews, they translated the gospel message into terms that made it accessible to the Hellenistic world and enriched our understanding of the Christian mysteries. Likewise, Thomas broadened the base of medieval philosophy through his acquaintance with Greek and Islamic thought, and he contributed considerably to Christian theology. Just as we would not want to choose between the Jewish-oriented gospel according to Matthew and the Gentile-oriented redaction of Luke, or to suppress either Anselm or Thomas, so we will do well to allow scope for theological investigation to run its course within both 'detached' circles and 'committed' ones and to foster a maximum of interchange between the two. The risk involved is altogether appropriate for an essentially missionary faith.

The Sentimental Clown: The Idea of the Self in T. S. Eliot

by Stan Smith

One recurring premise in much criticism of T. S. Eliot's poetry is the dissoluteness of his *dramatis personae*. I say 'dissoluteness', because there is usually assumed to be some correlation between the imputed psychological state and a moral dereliction. Thus, Bernard Bergonzi's recent study,[1] speaking of the 'deluded' or 'corrupt' narrator of *Portrait of a Lady*, argues that 'his consciousness is at all times on the verge of dissolution'. His drawing-room conversation is said to be disrupted by the 'grotesque musical sounds going on inside his head. . . . He makes an effort literally to compose himself but his impressions remain as fragmentary and disjunctive as the items in a

[1]*T. S. Eliot*, Bernard Bergonzi, Macmillan (1972). I shall be reviewing this book in a later issue of *New Blackfriars*.

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daily paper.' Yet the lines Bergonzi cites to substantiate this suggest the opposite. In face of a multitude of other lives assembled, but also abstracted, reduced, made safe for him by the newspaper, the narrator maintains a casual equanimity, only mildly stirred by the sense of a problematic otherness:

> I take my hat: how can I make a cowardly amends
> For what she has said to me?
> You will see me any morning in the park
> Reading the comics and the sporting page.
> Particularly I remark
> An English countess goes upon the stage.
> A Greek was murdered at a Polish dance,
> Another bank defaulter has confessed.
> I keep my countenance,
> I remain self-possessed
> Except when a street piano, mechanical and tired
> Reiterates some worn out common song
> With the smell of hyacinths across the garden
> Recalling things that other people have desired.
> Are these ideas right or wrong?

The abrupt shift to an exterior view is demeaning but finally evasive, distracting attention from that compromising sense of obligation raised by the initial rhetorical question. The raffishly assumed pose offers an easy composure, as he deftly switches back to a series of notations of vulnerable otherness—lapsed dignity, confused social identity, desperate self-betrayal—which, in an obscure osmosis, seems to link assassination with wilful self-exposure. The hoarded ego of the curt main clauses is unlikely to commit this loss of nerve, only self-indulgently accessible to the stale nostalgia which trails away into the inconsequence of other people's desires. 'Recalling things that other people have desired' may mean 'I am not the first', or 'I am not as other men'.

The linking of emotion with a tawdry mechanical music is a precursor of that moment when squalid ordinariness is immortalized in *The Waste Land*. The fastidious anti-hero of *Portrait* may not stoop to folly, but he shares with the 'lovely woman' a disdainful imperviousness to the relationship in which he is ambiguously involved. The 'fornication' of the epigraph (in *The Jew of Malta* itself the deflection of a graver accusation) is primarily spiritual: a cynical, exploitative toying which preserves personal detachment. He is surely not reduced to the 'subhuman absurdity' Bergonzi detects in the third section of the poem, admitting only to 'a slight sensation of being ill at ease', and only in imagination climbing the stairs on hands and knees. Self-possession gutters, but with a purely inward flicker. He loses his cool momentarily, suspecting that his manipulative guises have been penetrated and in turn manipulated. The sense of a shared ignorance ('*we* are really in the dark') is almost a kind

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of relief. All the humiliations suffered in the poem are self-inflicted. Indignantly realizing that to continue the relationship involves a compromising histrionics, he opts to extricate himself from it, immediately by a change of scene, in the long term by a severing of relations which is bodied forth in a wishful symbolic assassination:

> 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—
>
> Well! and what if she should die some afternoon, . . .
> Should die and leave me 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 . . .
> Would she not have the advantage after all?
> This music is successful with a 'dying fall'
> Now that we talk of dying—
> And should I have the right to smile?

This is not a 'dissolving' ego, but an over-rigid one, scrupulously dissembling its insecurity by a pathological manoeuvring capable of interpreting even death as a tactical device for trapping him into emotional commitment. A calculating moral evasiveness converts self-doubtings into the 'dying fall' of a subdued technical concern with the 'sense of an ending'. The smile, like a Cheshire cat's, loiters in the air left empty by the poem's sudden disappearance. The rhythm of extrication, which preserves the ego intact by the abrupt reminder that this is after all an 'aesthetic' experience, is the pattern of all Eliot's poetry.

The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock is clearly a test-case for such a proposition. Hugh Kenner has argued[1] that Prufrock, far from being an identified and consistent person, is no more than a 'zone of consciousness'. The issue is worth taking up since it engages with the now-receding but still powerful critical orthodoxy which has bedevilled the reading of these poems for many years. In this theory, all poems are pseudo-statements, the 'emotional equivalent of thought', 'objective correlatives' of a precise, 'aesthetic experience' not referable back to any experience not of art, exempted from responsibility. At the time Eliot advanced these propositions, they represented a necessary revolt against a personalized, expressive theory of poetry. But they have ossified into a doctrine of 'aesthetic monads', of poems as self-sufficient, impersonal artefacts, which has become the apologia for a technological literary criticism with a purely professional rationale and teleology. Kenner insists a little too much, perhaps, on the autonomy of J. Alfred Prufrock, obscuring

[1]Hugh Kenner, *The Invisible Poet: T. S. Eliot,* W. H. Allen, 1960.

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his affinity, as a familiar social stereotype, with the 'T. Stearns Eliot' who contributed articles on Bradley and Leibniz to the Chicago journal, *The Monist*:

> J. Alfred Prufrock is a name plus a Voice. He isn't a character cut out of the rest of the universe and equipped with a history and a little necessary context, like the speaker of a Browning monologue. We have no information about him whatever; even his age is ambiguous (the poet once referred casually to Prufrock in a lecture as a *young man*). Nor is he an Everyman. . . . Everyman's mind doesn't teem with allusions to Hesiod, Hamlet, Lazarus, Falstaff, entomology, eschatology, John the Baptist, mermaids. What 'Prufrock' is, is the name of a possible zone of consciousness where these materials can maintain a vague congruity; no more than that; certainly not a person. You are not, in allowing their intermodulations to echo in your mind, deepening your apprehension of an imagined character, such as Hamlet, or discerning his boundaries; Prufrock is strangely boundless.

Kenner's rhetoric is persuasive, but it says less than it proposes, as he perhaps recognized in a series of rather shifty attempts to counter the argument that Tennyson's Arthur is equally 'a name plus a Voice'. It is, I would suggest, a mystifying proposition, drawing uncritically on Eliot's own theory of the poet as an impersonal catalyst of feelings, phrases and images, in the attempt to conscript Prufrock to a literary-psychological orthodoxy. Prufrock's age is surely no great matter; he is in that indeterminate region of after-dinner sleep which seems to have been Eliot's perennial locale from the early expulsion from the rose-garden for precocity, until the self-description in *Four Quartets* of being 'in the middle way'. Kenner cites the indelible lines—

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

as the 'non-sequitur of an ageing Bostonian'. It is worth looking at the point at which these lines occur:

> No! I am not Prince Hamlet, nor was meant to be;
> Am an attendant lord, one that will do
> To swell a progress, start a scene or two,
> Advise the prince; no doubt an easy tool,
> Deferential, glad to be of use,
> Politic, cautious, and meticulous;
> Full of high sentence, but a bit obtuse;
> At times, indeed, almost ridiculous—
> Almost, at times, the Fool.
>
> I grow old. . . .

Prufrock adopts deliberately that protean changeableness forced on the speaker of *Portrait*, fluctuating through a series of identities—

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now trustworthy, now not—which seem to include Horatio, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, Polonius, in a descent of the chain of being towards a suspect absurdity further and further removed from Hamlet. The Fool seems the natural conclusion of this descent. But Shakespeare's fools are cleverer than their patrons: like Eliot they have read their Bradley and studied Logical Positivism under Bertrand Russell. The Fool in *Hamlet* is also the Gravedigger who lives to bury most of his superiors. He has the last laugh. Hamlet comes closer to the Fool than to any other of the characters, when he assumes an 'antic disposition' to evade suspicion while he probes the flaws of a cynical and manipulative court. ('Why then Ile fit you. Hieronymo's mad againe' alludes to a similar dissembling to beguile the time).

The relation of identity and socially given role in 'No! I am not Prince Hamlet, nor was meant to be', is complicated: it cannot be taken as a simple, unambiguous denial. But the vulnerably balding Prufrock is not going to be caught in Romantic posturing, with his Bradleyan flannels round his Achilles' heels. The disclaimer sublimates a sense of election, revealed already in the identification (immediately retracted) with John the Baptist and Lazarus, 'come from the dead, / Come back to tell you all'. This sense of election, as frequently in Eliot, combines the idea of some exclusive insight with a vulnerable visibility and fallenness. The elliptical switch to a ludicrous exterior view thus draws attention away from a confession which seems dangerously near to giving the game away. Prufrock's bounds are indeterminate only because an adroit, self-regulating intelligence prevents us from seeing them. The accomplishment of the sleight of hand is mooted equivocally in the epigraph from Dante, which at once affirms the honesty of, and dissociates itself from, any biographical conclusions we might draw from a poem whose self-parodying title is not so much an impersonalizing as a disowning gesture.

Prufrock is more abrupt in its elisions than *Portrait*, not because the consciousness is more disintegrated, but because it is less assured, more immediately evasive in response to a world it can no longer simply turn its back on. Prufrock is more vulnerable than the antihero of *Portrait* because he is a supplicant, seeking entrée to a world he may despise but cannot so readily dismiss. Prufrock lacks 'a history and a little necessary context' because he is a déraciné expatriate, still looking for a place in the world. The crucial fact I take to be Eliot's removal to Europe: though *Prufrock* was started at Harvard it was continued in Paris and completed in Munich. It would be a mistake to assimilate the literary salons of Europe to the drawing-rooms of Boston tea-parties. The apposite Henry James novel is *The Europeans*.

Several critics have noted Eliot's debt to Dostoevsky, whom he read in Paris while *Prufrock* was in composition. But if the figure

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behind Prufrock is in part Dostoevsky's 'underground man', forced to frequent a world he despises, where fastidiousness is mistaken for dullness, abstention for failure, and undue attention is paid to the superficies of physical appearance, there are also other analogues. Verkovensky, the posturing middle-aged littérateur of *The Possessed*, whose mutually exploitative relationship with his patroness-paramour is cuttingly dismissed by his son—'She was the capitalist and you were her sentimental clown'—like Prufrock chooses to dance attendance upon a world where there is much chatter about the 'Sistine Madonna', and a great discrepancy between ambition and competence. Prufrock, I suggest, oscillates selfconsciously between these two self-images, the archetypes of Bohemian and bourgeois bad faith, avoiding both definitions by a sideways-scuttling deprecatory irony which never permits him to be fixed upon a pin. The 'pair of ragged claws' recalls Hamlet's evasive banter with Polonius (Act II, sc. ii). 'Though this be madness, yet there is method in't.'

Eliot's well-known preference for Groucho Marx over Chaplin is worth pursuing. Chaplin poses with all the dandified but down-at-heel nonchalance of the Laforguian flâneur. But he lacks that protective paranoia which would alert him to his own potential absurdity and thus extricate him from the designs and sniggers of a hostile world. He acts in shy, self-absorbed ignorance of the causes and effects of his actions, in a blissfully spontaneous balancing act perpetually one degree from catastrophe. His only concession to a public world is an occasional quizzical shrug or scratch of the head. Groucho Marx is superlatively self-conscious, skilfully playing himself for laughs, a mountebank who transcends his seedy fa llenness through a cunning chameleon irony that reveals his contempt for the gulls, shysters and thieves he happens to have fallen among. The facility with which he plays the system expresses a kind of intellectual disdain for the banality of evil, though his schemings never transcend but merely ratify that system. But he attains gratuitously to a kind of grace, a 'sentimental clown' betrayed into maudlin chivalry by some classy tinsel Marina.

It is not difficult to conflate this poised insouciance with the 'polemical irony' and 'his obvious zest in using it' which Eliot attributed to Bradley, in speaking of his 'habit of discomfiting an opponent with a sudden profession of ignorance, of inability to understand, or an incapacity for abstruse thought'. The observation throws a droll light on Eliot's elusive disowning of his own previous judgments and *bons mots* (which academic commentators have cited with trusting approval and relief), as mere conveniences, transcended in a new synthesis never finally revealed because as soon as revealed superseded. It also adds an ironic twist to the disarming candour with which Eliot prefaced *The Sacred Wood*. The reader who agrees with Eliot in resenting 'a stiffness and an assumption of pontifical solemnity which may be tiresome to some' may find the reassuring

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solidarity undercut by a suspicion that he's been relegated to that mass of the unrefined who might be better advised to look elsewhere, unlikely to be one of those 'honnêtes gens' able to appreciate the cursory distinction of Dante from Shakespeare with which the preface flamboyantly concludes.

Eliot's doctoral dissertation on Bradley provides a philosophic rationale for this tactical irony, arguing that 'To realize that a point of view is a point of view is already to have transcended it'. Such a purely spectatorial transcendence is the counter-encirclement strategy deployed by Prufrock, to contain a potentially mocking world:

> I have known the eyes already, known them all
> The eyes that fix you in a formulated phrase.

An acknowledged terror before an otherness as vast as the universe ('I have seen the moment of my greatness flicker/ And I have seen the eternal Footman hold my coat and snicker') is sobered by a self-deprecating gesture ('here's no great matter') which is really the cover for a dismissal of others in a discriminating moral abstention ('And would it have been worth it after all?'). The eternal Footman is not so much God, or death, as the whole alien external world which includes them and which is at once sordidly inferior, unworthy of serious attention, and yet prevents one everywhere, with a sly supercilious leer.

The fear of visibility, as tainting and corrosive, haunts Eliot's work, and accounts for that 'obsessive' recurrence of the imagery of eyes which many critics have noted. Eliot gives the image a suspiciously clinical inflection in the arch simile of an early essay on Bradley:

> On the one hand, my experience is, in principle, essentially public. My emotions may be better understood by others than by myself; as my oculist knows my eyes. And, on the other hand, everything, the whole world, is private to myself. Internal and external are thus not adjectives applied to different contents within the same world; they are different points of view.

The rigid antitheses, typical of Eliot's style, demarcate that gap in being where Prufrock and the anti-hero of *Portrait* squirm in perpetual fear of being caught out, seen through. There is no way of resolving these discrepant perspectives. The self walks in lonely solipsistic anguish, knowing, 'on the one hand', with Edward in *The Cocktail Party*,

> Hell is oneself,
> Hell is alone, the other figures in it
> Merely projections,

and, 'on the other hand', permanent exposure in a world of reproach-

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ful, judging, retributive others, symbolically embodied in the persecuting but ultimately just Furies of *The Family Reunion*:

> How can you sit in this blaze of light for all the world to look at?
> If you knew how you looked, when I saw you through the window.
> Do you like to be stared at by eyes through a window?

A moment of infantile prurience at catching others unawares shifts to the bracketting recognition (every man his own oculist) of complicity in a common visibility.

Richard Wollheim has demonstrated the extreme polarization which consciousness undergoes in Eliot's Bradleyan epistemology.[1] As the monadic 'receptacle' (*Tradition and the Individual Talent*) within which objects and quasi-objectified feelings 'come to consciousness', mind is at once everything and nothing, the absolute circumference of events, and yet a mere hollow interior emptied of any content specific to itself. Eliot's note on Tiresias, in *The Waste Land*, is, on this assessment, one of the few important keys to the poem: 'What Tiresias *sees*, in fact, is the substance of the poem'. The passage Eliot quotes from Ovid's *Metamorphoses* modulates at once into the tale of Echo and Narcissus (whom Tiresias warned cryptically against 'self-knowledge').

The 'two sexes meet in Tiresias' because he combines the fatal self-absorption of one with the equally fatal absorption in others of the other: Narcissus drowns in the pool of his own admired reflection ('Death by Water'); Echo evaporates to the mere echoic repetition of another's speech, in her passively dependent yearning ('the death of air'). Like Gerontion, Tiresias wanders in a 'wilderness of mirrors' whose multiplying variety only give him back infinite distortions of his own misinterpreted image. And the mirrors are all in his own head. It is in combining a distracting self-awareness with a disabling wariness of others that Tiresias achieves the epicene, sterile marriage of those two knowledges delineated in the earlier poems:

> I feel like one who smiles and turning shall remark
> Suddenly, his expression in a glass. . . .
>
> I have known them all already, known them all. . . .
> I know the voices dying with a dying fall. . . .
> So how should I presume?

Tiresias' knowledge is at the expense of action. Foresuffering all, Prufrock-Tiresias is exempted in advance from 'the awful daring of a moment's surrender/ Which an age of prudence can never retract'. For, as Eliot noted in an essay, to grasp 'the indestructible barriers between one human being and another' is to realize 'the awful separation between potential passion and any actualization in life'. After such knowledge, desire fails. Even at his most earnest, Eliot

[1] *Eliot and F. H. Bradley: An Account*, in *Eliot in Perspective*, ed. Graham Martin, Macmillan, 1970.

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maintained an almost gleeful conviction of the gulf between his political-theological prescriptions and 'any actualization in life'. 'Abstention from movement' is both the precondition and the consequence of insight:

Between the idea
And the reality
Between the motion
And the act
Falls the Shadow.

All Men are Intellectuals: A Disagreement between Friends

by Adrian Edwards, C.S.Sp.

My friend, Father Marcel Boivin, W.F., sent me a copy of his article 'A Positive Approach to Taboo' and asked for my comments. I wrote a somewhat sharp reply, which he received with his usual good nature, standing his ground, however, on the essential point of there being an essential difference between the scientific mentality and the taboo mentality. For me, this theory is, if not a taboo, at least a myth which is perhaps open to critical analysis; however, I feel I ought to sketch out my own way of seeing human thought in action. As Fr Boivin knows, I am neither a psychologist nor a philosopher nor a theologian, but a priest capable of, at any rate, preaching to peasants, children and seminarists, traditionally the three most taboo-ridden categories of mankind; I am also a social anthropologist, a profession whose initiates aspire to explain taboos scientifically, a claim which, if taboos and science are really of such utterly different orders, should mark us as sacred monsters of the quality of the pangolin of the Lele.[1]

To understand human thought one needs to reflect on language. Dolphins, honey-bees and apes all transmit information to each other;[2] human language abstracts and generalizes, and can refer to what is absent, or past, or purely imaginary. It can therefore transmit far more than is transmitted through animal communication systems, and, for this purpose, language is structured by grammar and syntax. One can speak a language correctly without being able to explain the rules of grammar, but whenever a language is analysed

[1]See Mary Douglas *Purity and Danger* Pelican Books, 1970, p. 202-5.
[2]For contemporary linguistics see Noel Minnis *Linguistics at Large*, Gollancz, 1971, particularly the essay 'Language and Animal Signals', by Claire and W. M. S. Russell.

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