The students of Harvard University publish a literary magazine, the “Harvard Advocate.” The first poems of Eliot appeared there during his “undergraduate” years, from 1907 to 1910. They are verses of the sadness of youth, precious and melancholy, entirely under the spell of late-Victorian poetry. They deal with the withering of the world in autumn; the palace of Circe, in which one experiences death; aftereffects of Swinburne, Rossetti and Dowson.

But that obtains only for the first two years, 1907 and 1908. Then a sonnet suddenly appears with the title “Nocturne,” in which Romeo is apostrophized as “grand serieux” who is given a veritable gift of his Juliet’s death, thereby avoiding the banal danger of having to keep their intensive love affair going for weeks and years to wear it out. Because these verses aren’t in any of Eliot’s books and are therefore unknown I quote them here:

> Romeo, *grand serieux*, to importune
> Guitar and hat in hand, beside the gate
> With Juliet, in the usual debate
> Of love, beneath a bored but courteous moon;
> The conversation failing, strikes some tune
> Banal, and out of pity for their fate
> Behind the wall I have some servant wait,
> Stab, and the lady sinks into a swoon.
>
> Blood looks effective on the moonlit ground —
> The hero smiles; in my best mode oblique
> Rolls toward the moon a frenzied eye profound,
> (No need of “Love forever?” – “Love next week?”)
> While female readers all in tears are drowned: —
> “The perfect climax all true lovers seek!”

The speaker of these saucy, witty apercus is of course Shakespeare himself, who appears bored by the eternally shining moon of the lovers and makes fun of the tears of his stirred women readers and acknowledges Romeo in the last line, for whom Juliet’s death is “the perfect climax all true lovers seek.” Something has clearly happened here that has made for a clever unmasking of romantic attitudes by the elegiac late-comer at twenty years of age. We also know what it was, because one of

the following poems of the student Eliot is a free translation of Jules Laforgue, in which a marionette, a cynical actress, reproaches the world for its old-fashioned ardent desires in a saucy voice:

> "Your damned thin moonlight, worse than gas —
> Now in New York."

Hence Eliot discovered Laforgue in this year and made his themes and diction his own. According to some accounts, the first poem Eliot inserted into his canon of work, namely "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," was already written in the year 1911, but it was first published in 1915, for even the intrepid patrons of new poetry needed a long time before they could bring themselves to print a poem with such an aggressive portrait as the one with which the poem begins, and which today is among the most famous Eliot-quotes. However, in order to understand the boldness of this portrait, with which Eliot makes his entry into modern poetry, some stock must be taken of the poetic possibilities around 1915. The young poets in all lands felt called to renew the worn out lyrical clichés and the cozy situational moods, which had emerged from congealed late-romantic poetics and which now, in corpulent collections of poetry in home libraries, had given contented readers a comfortable feeling that the 19th century hadn't really come to an end. In Germany this anti-bourgeois renewal is called Expressionism. It has proved to be a noble dead end. On the other hand, Eliot's wholly different path to the same goal has become modern and remained viable. German Expressionism brought doom, which made connecting its poetic language to what was happening generally in Europe difficult, if not almost impossible.

Take the years 1915-1919. Appearing in Germany: J.R. Becher's "Verbrüderung" and "An Europa" (1916), Benn's "Fleisch" (1917), Däubler's "Hymnen an Italien" (1916), Ivan Goll's "Dithyramben," Ehrenstein's "Der Mensch schreit" (1916), Hasenclever's "Tod und Auferstehung" (1917) and Werfel's . "Gesänge aus den drei Reichen" (1917). The titles themselves betray an intoxicated, hymnically voiced, philanthropically philosophical, world-happy, rejoicing and indicting state of mood and mind. Old themes are taken up again in elevated style: one speaks to God in challenging and quarreling ways, lovers entertain no doubts about their feelings and cry out enraptured into each other's ears, humans shall be brothers, compassion counts as the most natural virtue in the world, "a great glory of inner fervor" (Schickele) takes hold of all phenomena. Where wholly new themes appear, say in the modern metropolis, they are experienced in visionary ways and robbed of their real proportions. As long as these instincts, emotions, and sentiments became sources for enriching the stock of words, many possible variations of new ways to use verse strategies presented themselves; unheard of

images, overlapping lines and compaction. The moment vision breaks off, only fashion remains. *It* was certainly persuable then, but is quite impossible nowadays, and has become unbearable as well; because fashion permitted Baldur von Schirach and the winner of the Stalin Prize, Johannes R. Becher, a way of writing poetry for which there's no means of scaffolding in contemporary European poetry.

In England, at the same time, the three really modern English poets come forward as wholly new voices: old Thomas Hardy, who turned completely into a lyric poet after leaving behind his great body of novels; Yeats in his middle period, who was breaking through his Irish-mythical and lyrically lush beginnings; and the young Eliot. These three poets struck a tone which has been able to define English poetic diction to this day. W. H. Auden paid homage to Yeats, Ezra Pound declared for Hardy and Philip Larkin, whom one counts among the most important living English poets today, and who writes with the voice of the old Hardy.

The book titles of these three poets have been called eloquent over time. In 1917, Hardy publishes his book "Moments of Vision and Miscellaneous Verses"; T.S. Eliot appears the same year with "Prufrock and Other Observations" and William Butler Yeats, two years later, with "The Wild Swans at Coole." As if issuing from dread, which one would like to ascribe to his softly voiced visions of humanity, exactingly framed both ideologically and philosophically , Hardy delimits his vision at the same time by what is current; just brief glimpses and insights seem allowed, and the addition of "miscellaneous poems" takes away completely any ecstatic momentum from the visionary. One could translate the Hardy book title as "Occasional Visions and Miscellaneous Verses." Yeats delimits his lyrical survey of life straight away through the wholly concrete reference to the park at Coole, the Irish property of his patroness Lady Gregory, and T.S. Eliot finally goes a giant step farther and selects an anti-poetic title, intentionally warding off all large words of pomp: to English ears a comically sounding name aligned with the sober pointer that distancing analyses, "observations," are at play. Not a single line from the occasionally splendid poems of German Expressionists was able to sneak into the language of the nation as an altogether recognizable quotation. Contrastingly, Eliot has furnished the most well-known quotations of our time. Alone his very first poem contains at least three winged lines, which everyone in England or America knows, even those of minimal reading habits. Besides the image at the beginning, every undergraduate knows how to say, fraught with meaning:

> "I have measured out my life with coffee spoons" and
> "I grow old… I grow old…
> I shall wear the bottoms of my trousers rolled."

In addition, Eliot has created so many personas who have become figures in English — perhaps not as famous as Don Juan or Faust, but surely as well-known as Becky Sharp or Leopold Bloom, namely Prufrock, Sweeney, Madame Sosostris and the tomcat Macavity. While in Germany poets were getting dithyrambic, poets in English was starting to discover a new manner of speaking. And many subjects which were indispensable to the nineteenth century are devalued, exposed and in the end entirely robbed of their phony vivacity through parodistic analysis. Thomas Hardy must be seen as their father. In his poems' observations, seemingly so unpretentious, musical, and melancholy, Hardy understood how to be passionately personal without delivering obtrusive autobiography in the mix. He listened with a subtle ear and assembled his completely traditional verses strophically in expert rhythms and descending cadences, whereby a penetrating, often broken rhythm arose, as if he were going about saying these poems encircling death, memory and doubts about God softly to himself. An entirely new quietude arose in the poem, compared to which Swinburne suddenly appeared as a bacchic reveler, in whose wondrous pomp individual words devalued one another through their trance-like, successive cascades and their volume. But Hardy was up to something else as well, which could have made this conservative old man into a likely model for Eliot and Auden: he took the themes and situations, with which the 19th century had comforted itself poetically – conversations with God, between lovers, observing pretty girls or nature — and stripped them of their sentimental sweetness. Human self-deception is laid bare by the slightest phrase vis-à-vis these tender feelings. It's "the little ironies of life" Hardy mediates about. He sees them everywhere.

The young Eliot raises Hardy's tendencies to an extreme. He takes the design of free rhythms from La Faforgue. The length and cadence of the different verses are now determined solely by the tone of voice, a "subtle conversational tone," which, according to Pound, Eliot had learned from Laforgue. But this is not just simply Eliot's own tone of voice now, but the conversational tone of his contemporaries. The societal conversational tone of the salon veils what in public has a wholly different meaning. Here language becomes a means of masking. The lyrical "I" would be an all too oppressive partner. This "I," declaring itself, would have to assert its suffering and joys and thereby couldn't escape pathos, if it takes itself seriously – and all poets must take themselves seriously. The "I" could only do that if it gave off comical or humorous tones, in a kind of cabaret-art. To avoid both these possibilities, Laforgue had already put many of his poems in the mouth of a person who's not to be identified as the poet. He took sight of a persona, a mask through which his own voice could then emanate noticeably and strangely. The poet, then, can speak without forcing his obtrusive emotional world on us. He doesn't preach and burden his own tender feelings with serious import. He wins distance and looks at his creation with irony. In this regard Eliot makes a move of the highest

significance: he wins for this tone of voice access to the zone of high-flown poetry, by freeing it from all whimsical jocosity and simple-minded earthiness in his pointedly amusing poems. But Eliot also found models in his own tradition for doing so, above all in John Donne and Andrew Marvell, the *metaphysical* poets of the 17th century, whose newly awakened fame Eliot, along with others, decisively helped to establish. These poets, as Eliot noted in his essay dedicated to them, had understood how to transmute "ideas into sensation, an observation into a state of mind." They continued apace, uniting levity and gravity, thereby intensifying gravity so it could appear as wit. All these subtle definitions of Eliot are at bottom spoken pro domo, because they precisely describe what he himself did in his very first poem. Prufrock is one of those clueless modern everyday humans on whom Eliot now practices his devaluation of an inherited stock of sentiments in the crassest way. With the following lines he alerts the new poetics:

> "Let us go then, you and I,
> When the evening is spread out against the sky,"
> seemingly very full of feeling, dreamy, softly wistful, almost like a folksong, lyrically soothing. Indeed, isn't it as if he quite consciously connects with Yeats's famous and unforgettable early poem? This poem from the year 1893 begins with the line:
> "I will arise and go now, and go to Innisfree."

In Eliot's, two lovers appear to be going off into an evening landscape. But the first two lines of Prufrock's love song were just a trap, because in the third Eliot strikes that blow from which English poetry hasn't recovered till this day, and hasn't wanted to recover:

> "Let us go then, you and I,
> When the evening is spread out against the sky
> Like a patient etherized upon a table."

The idyllic evening sky shining over the two lovers has suddenly become a patient lying on an operating table narcotized by ether. It reveals itself as the modern metropolis-sky, whose light, half hidden beneath the fogs of industry, is as if lifeless. Only now do we notice the word "out" in the second line, which breaks through the expected poetic rhythm in favor of the rhythm of speech: *When the evening is spread against the sky* would have been early Yeats, but *When the evening is spread out against the sky* strangely enough effects no relaxation, rather an intensification of the tone. The

narcotically drugged patient has been sentenced to total immobility. It marks Prufrock's broken will. He's a man who is just becoming barren, in the midst of an unromantic age, for whom it would actually be time to pose genuine life-questions and answer them fearlessly. Up to this point he's always evaded them. The "you and I" soon proves to be something altogether different as well from what it seemed to be. It's not a lover who cheerfully and dreamily urges his beloved to wander along with him, but Prufrock is both "you and I", the one tricking himself and the one disillusioned, both of whom, singularly entangled, now hold an inner monologue. Earlier, the monologue, even in Browning's case, was the only means by which the speaker could express his innermost truth. In Prufrock's monologue, however, someone's speaking who wants to undervalue his innermost truth; only the poet hidden behind him speaks the unveiled truth. Prufrock exposes himself to the reader, even as he himself doesn't realize it:

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

This then is what has become of the lightly-sung love song: an elderly gentleman walks listlessly and uneasily past brothels through the noiseless, deserted streets wet with fog to a rendezvous he dreads. His despair grows: "I have measured out my life with coffee spoons." Eliot is now transmuting ideas into a spiritual bearing and transforms an observation into sensations by veiling the grand and virtually arch-pathetic content of the poem, so that Prufrock confuses the primary question he should be asking of life — who is he really – with the question of what to do at the given moment during a lover's tryst. How can I bring up the question, for God's sake, without exposing myself, he thinks during the walk, and only the reader knows what the real question is. Prufrock believes his paralyzing

anxiety comes from his no longer understanding how to appear the charming daredevil. He doesn't know his situation calls for an act of cool heroism. Even in his self-recognition at the end he remains sad, apprehensive, passive and disconsolate.

Linguistically, Eliot proceeds by elucidating Prufrock's complete moral cowardice, his confusing large and small matters, by means of comic rhymes:

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

> Equally exposing are the following lines in which Prufrock, with a final attempt at self-deception, compares himself to John the Baptist. The incongruence alone is comical, without being waggish. It would almost sound arch-poetic and pathetic if it read:

> But though I have wept and fasted, wept and prayed,
> Though I have seen my head brought in on a platter,
> I am no prophet.

> But Eliot attaches the ironic voice of the "I" to the voice of the "you", and in reality the lines read like this:

> "But though I have wept and fasted, wept and prayed,
> Though I have seen my head (grown slightly bald)
> brought in on a platter.
> I am no prophet – and here's no great matter."

Likewise, at the end. Eliot borrows a famous line from John Donne and with its help shoves Prufrock farther into irrelevance. In Donne we read: "Teach me to hear Mermaids singing," with which Donne plainly wanted to present the impossible. But poor Prufrock mumbles to himself:
"I have heard the mermaids singing, each to each."

No, not to him have the Sirens been singing, just one to another. It seems to be a long way within a short poem to get from the patient on the operating table to the Sirens, from the hospital to the coral

reef. These water-creatures certainly belong to the eternal stock of poetry, to the fabulous. But they have now become strange and dismissive. They remain, unpalpable, the messengers of a mythical world, in which however Prufrock may not take part. These mermaids no longer accompany an evocative boat trip past the "Schreckenstein" in order to let auspicious shivers ripple down the backs of modern citizens of metropolises no longer familiar with elemental creatures. They've withdrawn into the mists, the inaccessible realm, where they sing to one another. Eliot's radical devaluation isn't ever directed at the archetypes themselves, just solely at those who devalue these archetypes. One has sometimes misunderstood that and has therefore thought of the young Eliot as an attacker of images, which he never was.

This incongruity, obtaining between Prufrock and the mermaids, also separates Sweeney from the nightingales. The nightingales, these pitiable birds, almost had had to sob themselves half to death in the 18th and 19th centuries in trysts turning ever sillier. Now they've become tired and hoarse, called to serve humans begging for comfort. How can one save them for the renovated poem? One can only abstract and dematerialize them, in order to harden the poetic prototype again, which had grown all too soft. Again there are fundamentally two paths to this goal. German Expressionism tried to do so via the force of overloud hymnody. In one of the most successful poems of that time Theodor Däubler has "Millionen Nachtigallen schlagen" (3):

> "Millions of nightingales flapping.
> Spring's flashing.
> Myriads of eyelashes quivering, aglow.
> The green happiness of spring night binges
> Begins its own chesty be-splendoring. (1)

A million nightingales are unimaginable. They become abstract. They don't lull one any longer with sweetly melancholic trilling, but let one almost go deaf instead. Däubler is not concerned with accuracy, but instead with the breaking of forms and contours to pieces, with bursting into the flames, where things totally melt down. Eliot however goes the opposite way, of renewal and dematerialization, in his poem at about the same time, "Sweeney among the Nightingales." Instead of a deafening orchestra, a terrifying stillness sets in, the stillness of all early Eliot poems. With Prufrock one passed through streets almost without people. The metropolis is not being torn to pieces by cries, it only offers "muttering retreats." An ominous whispering rules everywhere, a sudden, growing silence. The conversation with the old woman in *Portrait of a Lady* is crammed with "unspoken

things", while soft music resounds. The nightly wanderer in "Rhapsody on a Windy Night" is haunted by "whispering lunar incantations," and the street lamps stammer, flickering away, mumbling to themselves. The old woman waits in silence for a sign of renewal, the word in the word, which however language is powerless to supply, "unable to speak a word"; the *verbum infans*, the Christ child, which, without being able to speak, is the word. One only drinks the wine amid whispers. Similarly, these days immortality whispers scarcely understandable promises into our ear in the poem "Whispers of Immortality." And the heart of the light is silence, as *The Waste Land* puts it. Indeed, a terrible deadening of sound will signify the end of the world:

> "This is the way the world ends
> Not with a bang but a whimper."

No glowing outcry of expressionistic longing, this whimper has instead become the most famous quote of the 20th century.

The stillness in "Sweeney among the Nightingales" is similarly ominous. Sweeney alone with his gorilla neck, the zebra stripes on his mandibles und his spotted, giraffe-like neck is "the silent man in mocha brown." Orion and the dog star Sirius are covered over, a frightening stillness rules over the retreating seas, "hushed the shrunken seas." Sweeney has happened upon a notorious café somewhere along the Rio de la Plata. At first, he looks for an easy conquest, but is killed by the rabble who quietly talk themselves into it; an antiheroic, dirty affair. At the end of the poem we hear the nightingales singing. Once before, the last stanza tells us, they've sung like that. That was when they killed Agamemnon, who cried out. His death-cry in erudite Greek forms the motto for the poem: "Woe is me, I have been struck to death."

The distance between Agamemnon's fate and the robbery-slaying of Sweeney in the South American low dive is immense, and the nightingales no longer sing for Sweeney, just for themselves, "each to each," just like the mermaids. No easy, sweet mood music accompanies this vulgar adventure. The love scene in a magical, exotic locale is defaced, the *Liebestod* falls under the rubric of misadventures and crimes. The nightingale alone has remained intact. It prevails, but no longer gives itself up to the world grown godless.

Like all genuine poets, Eliot has only very few themes as well connecting his poems, of such

outwardly different natures. He doesn't seize interesting subjects in order to versify them. Interesting things are the quickest to grow obsolete. But Eliot's *Waste Land* from the year 1922, which extends the thematic techniques just outlined, has not been squeezed back into the avant-garde of the day before yesterday. It has fashioned a style und built up a poetic consciousness. Many lines from the *Waste Land* have also become winged words. Take for example the very first line: "April is the cruellest month." In this cruel April a whole generation found itself in one stroke cast out into something disastrous, devoid of spring. This beginning must have sounded at once familiar and highly provocative to every English ear, both traditional and an audacious challenge to tradition, which of course is the theme of all poetry. For before Eliot every English speaker knew two famous poems that began with April. They were a dear, self-evident, unconsidered national treasure. Chaucer's "Canterbury Tales," familiar to everyone from school and university, begin with April:

> "Whan that Aprille with his shoures sote
> The droghte of Marche hath perced to the rote"
>
> When that April with its sweet showers
> Has pierced the drought of March to the root (2)

And Robert Browning's "Home Thoughts, from Abroad," one of the most famous of anthologized English poems, which begins with the lines:

> "Oh, to be in England
> Now that April's there."

But now Eliot takes this April and destroys the protected possession, just as he had rendered the mermaids and the nightingales useless for a lyricism already in retreat. No more precious, refreshing renewals, through which a clearly green England is awakened more and more to easy greenness. The land has become desolate and April, generous with life, the cruelest of all months, because it wants to force the dead to be dead no longer. Nothing is harder and weirder than renewal. That's the content of the five poems of this cyclical work. "I will show you fear in a handful of dust": these words grown famous Eliot speaks in the persona of a prophetic voice.

But no prophet appears hence in this land that has become a dusty desert. HIS office and HIS dignity

have turned into something small-minded and incidental. Instead of Ezekiel it's now Madam Sosostris, the famous London clairvoyant, who sets about unmasking the deeply-hidden sense of life with the help of a cunning game's cards, "A wicked pack of cards." She's got a cold and not at her best. While Madam Sosostris sees the true archetypes, because she makes use of the old symbolic tarot cards, she no longer understands them and therefore warns her client of the danger of drowning. His card is the one of the drowned Phoenician Sailor. "Beware of a death by water," she counsels him; while water, however, in April-renewal, would be the only deliverance that promises a new life. Here, as in the earlier poems, the archetypes have remained true, if one only understood them and could establish a relationship to them. But the names of the great, mysterious fertility deities, the dying and resurrected figures, are dealt with like small change, Hyakinthos as Hyacinth; the Phoenician Sailor, the sad fisher-king of the Grail-legend, the Hanged Man in the tarot cards are used to tell fortunes. Water flows under the bridge in London, but over it flow the many dead, who evade the rain. The *Waste Land* is no social-critical poem in the manner of Bert Brecht. No class, no societal system is indicted; instead, a human condition is. And entirely unlike Brecht, say, Eliot doesn't exclude himself. He avoids the pathos of the Public Prosecutor by including himself, because the first section of the cycle ends with the words: "You! Hypocrite lecteur! – mon semblade, — mon frère!"

That's a quote, the last line of Baudelaire's "Preface" to his "Fleurs du Mal." The whole poem is a montage of partly parodistically recast known quotations, word-for-word citations from the Bible, Wagner's "Tristan" in German, Dante, Baudelaire, Shakespeare, Milton, Hermann Hesse, Spenser, Andrew Marvell, the Unpanishaden in Sanskrit and many, many other sources. At first glance that's a colossal practical joke, as if Eliot were playing a refined Poet-quartet with the reader. A poet, who makes poetry with a scissors; and by doing so often delivers a cut that reduces the poetic magic of the original to comic banality. In Andrew Marvell's most well-known poem, "To His Coy Mistress," the most well-known citation reads:

> "But at my back I always hear
> Time's winged chariot hurrying near." (3)

This becomes in the *Waste Land* in spoken rhythmics:

> "But at my back from time to time I hear
> The sound of horns and motors, which shall bring

Sweeney to Mrs. Porter in the spring."

Marvell, beset by infinity, "always" heard the wing-beat of uncompromising time. These days one hears "from time to time" something or other, and of course car motors and horns. While Marvell, in deep dismay, would like to delay transitoriness, the modern eavesdropper understands with boring certainty that Mr. Sweeney will succeed in reaching Mrs. Porter in spite of the troublesome traffic. But what does that mean? Doesn't that resemble the schoolboy pranks, which Schiller's "Glocke" or the "Bürgschaft" comically parody? Surely Eliot has something of the long-lasting Anglo-Saxon immaturity that resounds from the leather armchair of a men's club in idle, dry, anti-pathetically witty nonsense verses. But in essence this passage is no such Marvell-parody. The lines of the "Glocke" already sound so comical to us in their naïve pathos that they bring about the parody itself, while Marvell's lines aren't comical at all and hence can't be devalued by Eliot's demolition. Marvell remains, as do all other cited archetypes, intact. How untouched Marvell himself remains by the devaluation is made clear by a hidden allusion that is planted in the main theme of Eliot's "Ash Wednesday." In his poem "The Garden" Marvell experienced a mystical reunion with the "creature." Now Eliot also has the same experience in a garden — "he dream-crossed twilight between birth and dying." Eliot's entire montage-technique does not in the first instance arise from a need for risqué remarks, a poetic thrill-effect, rather it is entirely thematic, a necessary part of the content. Because only intimations of immortality are open to us, no great unifying images lie scattered about anymore in the wasteland, only just "a heap of broken images." We've forfeited the great continuities; what has been deeply hidden from us only flushes up in little, broken, mostly disfigured fragments. That, I believe, is the meaning of Eliot's montage-technique. It's not the scissors that's produced them, rather the disturbed faculty of memory. The stuck-together snippets correspond to piecemeal consciousness that resists surrendering to the buried God.

And just as the great images have crumbled away, so too frames of mind can no longer assert themselves. One pursues the other, chasing new thrills in an ongoing hunt in the wasteland . And so the constant break in style is thematically conditioned. Out of Shakespeare there's jazz in ragtime rhythms; jazz awakens a hunger for life; and hunger for life turns into dread. But the pathos of dread can't last long; it flies off immediately and becomes sheer boredom of the everyday, all within minutes, all within a few minutes, within a few lines in the poem:

"O O O O that Shakespeherian Rag –
It's so elegant

So intelligent
'What shall I do now? What shall I do?
I shall rush out as I am, and walk the street
With my hair down, so. What shall we do tomorrow?
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.

Eliot has poetized the atomization of the soul. He works from resignation, from suppressed hope; he waits and collects what's been broken into pieces, behind which stands, immense, wonderful and untouchable, what was once whole. Only someone who fails to appreciate that can be astonished at the seeming transformation, which Eliot's work has gone through. How can it be, one asks oneself often, that the middle and late Eliot could emerge from this witty, irreverent, revolutionary ultra-modernist as the arch-conservative Anglican, Royalist and Tory? It seems to me that the difference between the early and late Eliot rests solely in his poetic technique. What is spoken later seriously had at the beginning just been wittily veiled. The Eliot of Prufrock, of Sweeney, of the *Waste Land* was also a poeta doctus, a traditionalist and no destroyer. And when Eliot strove in his last plays to loosen blank verse so much that it was hardly distinguishable from everyday spoken colloquial conversations, wherein the serious content was cleverly concealed, he was also technically extending his earlier experiments. That Prufrock is not serenaded by the mermaids, that Sweeney can't call upon the nightingales and that no ear can hear the winged chariot of the time, the fault of this modern deafness for eternal music did not lie in the archetypes. They had from the very beginning the same immense traditional authority, which Eliot, grown old, extolled in an immutably soft voice.

This translation is an homage paid to the memory of Werner Vordtriede by the American poet Stuart Friebert who was his student at the University of Wisconsin (1953-7).

Notes

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permission to publish.

1. Freely translated by SF.
2. Vordtriede translates Chaucer here into modern German, and in turn I translate Vordtriede for the reader of English.
3. Vordtriede translates Marvell here, which I have chosen to leave out.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Werner Vordtriede

Werner Vordtriede, was a writer, translator, editor and scholar born in Germany in 1915. After the Nazis came to power, to avoid racial persecution, he emigrated to Switzerland and later to the United States, where he earned his PhD and taught French and German Literature with various universities, including Princeton and Wisconsin. In 1946 he received American citizenship and in 1957 became a Guggenheim Fellow. In 1960 he returned to Germany and taught literary studies at München University, which conferred him the Emeritus Professor title in 1976. He passed away in 1985. His publications include literary criticism (*Novalis und die französischen Symbolisten*, 1963), poetry (*Gedichte*, 1964), a diary of his exile in the USA (*Das verlassene Haus. Tagebuch aus dem amerikanischen Exil 1938-1947*, 1975) and novels, the best known being *Innenseiter* (1981), and *Ulrichs Ulrich oder Vorbereitungen zum Untergang* (1982).