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I argue in this paper that "La Figlia che Piange" is T. S. Eliot's first masterpiece to truly reflect his ambition to be a poet of stature and that it is the earliest poem forecasting his poetic signatures that remain throughout the rest of his *oeuvre*. I also assert that this poem demonstrates Eliot's classic essay, "Tradition and the Individual Talent" in verse. "La Figlia che Piange" can therefore be described as an "ars poetica." Eliot uses the material of a failed union between lovers and their subsequent parting as a way in to his chosen poetic predecessors' material (that of Virgil and Dante), while simultaneously drawing upon individual poetic elements of modern influencers such as Jules Laforgue.

HIDDEN IN PLAIN SIGHT: VIRGILIAN, DANTEAN, AND LAFORGUIAN
ALLUSIONS IN T. S. ELIOT'S "LA FIGLA CHE PIANGE"

by

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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

“La Figlia che Piange” is nearly a centenarian. She, as a poem, is still mysterious. Known for her beauty for her almost one-hundred-year existence, “La Figlia che Piange” continues to haunt Eliot’s readers with a singular music, music that dips into the well of tradition while uniquely carrying fresh water of modernity into the experience and space of the poem.

“La Figlia che Piange” is the picture of a man torturing himself by mentally rehearsing what he wants and needs to forget. Eliot’s speaker begins the poem in a garden scene; he is telling the woman in the memory where to stand, “there, stand on the highest pavement of the stair,” what to touch, “lean on the garden urn,” how to react, “Clasp your flowers, then fling them to the ground, then turn” and which emotions to display, “clasp the flowers with a pained surprise,” with your “eyes looking resentful.” He is, as many critics have noted over the years, like a film director directing his leading lady in the middle of a film scene of a tumultuous lover’s parting scene (Smith 27).

Why does he torment himself by painstakingly mulling such concrete mental images when he obviously desperately wants to forget this woman, this scene, and “move on”? He does because he must; he has no choice and, wrestles with the interior torment because he cannot master it. Eliot’s speaker demonstrates the age-old dilemma, that of the familiar, universal, experience of passionate love on one or both sides that- goes

wrong, is wrong (by societal standards), contradicts reason, or simply falls apart, but not without causing immense emotional collateral damage in its wake. A modern Aeneas, Eliot's speaker is caught between fate and will. Unlike Virgil's Aeneas of a classical age, Eliot's speaker lacks a deity (however fickle or even cruel), an oracle, or an organized societal system to give him guidance, deliverance, or inner resolution.

Eliot presents an intentionally ambiguous scenario in "La Figlia che Piange." He keeps the poem devoid of direct narrative. While reminiscent of Browning's dramatic monologue, such as in "My Last Duchess" (Browning 101), Eliot more effectively describes an emotionally tumultuous, truly believable scene between the speaker and his beloved without revealing "why" the relationship haunts him. Eliot presents a modern dilemma with this technique. We, as readers, are given no names, no actual dialogue, and very few counters to designate the time, place, and personae of the poem. The linguistic elements parallel the ambiguity in setting, characters, and circumstance between the speaker and his love. Puzzling pronoun shifts, startling grammatical moves (such as shifts in verb tense as well as unusually emphasized adverbs), and varying line lengths enhance a modernistic ambivalence, a centrifugal force kept by the poem's intense beauty and music from shattering into structural chaos.

In contrast to the few specific concrete counters, the poem exudes, rather, a plethora of "hints and guesses" (T. Eliot, *CPP* 136). Eliot's clear nods to Virgil and Dante begin with the epigraph. Although the Virgilian epigraph, "O quam te memorem virgo..." or "Maiden, by what name shall I know you?" (*Aen.* I. 463) was added to this 1917 printing, it is central to the understanding of the poem because it parallels the many

Virgilian nuances within the poem, as well as those to Virgil's self-designated heir, Dante. I argue that the Virgilian and Dantean allusions in "La Figlia che Piange" are essential in that they indicate intertextual derivations inherent in not only this early poem but in Eliot's entire *oeuvre* from "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" to *East Coker*. I will offer a reading demonstrating Eliot's ingenuous integration of Laforgue's poetic impetus. Implicated within the text, as well, is Eliot's 1919 formula for poetic greatness as expressed in his classic essay, "Tradition and the Individual Talent." I will explore Eliot's blending of these disparate elements to simultaneously anchor his verse in the *Spiritus Mundi* of the past while at the same time modernizing his work and succeeding in this quest to "make it new" (Pound, title).

Eliot demonstrates the modern's twentieth-century perplexities in "La Figlia che Piange." In a world that was on the brink of declaring war on itself, had declared war on its religious traditions, social conventions, and romantic idealisms of the previous century, Eliot's speaker displays the inner conflict and disintegration of a mind grappling with a familiar conflict in an unfamiliar modern world. Eliot draws on Virgilian and Dantean echoes while skillfully using modified Laforguian techniques to create a voice entirely his own and destined for greatness, a greatness that he instinctively knew was his.

I argue that "La Figlia che Piange" is the first of T. S. Eliot's masterpieces to truly reflect his ambition to be a poet of stature and that it is the earliest poem forecasting his poetic signatures that remain throughout the rest of his *oeuvre*. I also assert that this poem demonstrates Eliot's classic essay, "Tradition and the Individual Talent" in artistic

form. “La Figlia che Piange” can therefore be described as an “ars poetica.” Eliot uses the material of a failed union between lovers and their subsequent parting as a way in to his chosen poetic predecessors’ material (that of Virgil and Dante), while simultaneously drawing upon individual poetic elements of modern influencers such as Jules Laforgue.

La Figlia che Piange

O quam te memorem virgo...

Stand on the highest pavement of the stair—
Lean on a garden urn—
Weave, weave the sunlight in your hair—
Clasp your flowers to you with a pained surprise—
Fling them to the ground and turn
With a fugitive resentment in your eyes:
But weave, weave the sunlight in your hair.

So I would have had him leave,
So I would have had her stand and grieve,
So he would have left
As the soul leaves the body torn and bruised,
As the mind deserts the body it has used.
I should find
Some way incomparably light and deft,
Some way we both should understand,
Simple and faithless as a smile and a shake of the hand.

She turned away, but with the autumn weather
Compelled my imagination many days,
Many days and many hours:
Her hair over her arms and her arms full of flowers.
And I wonder how they should have been together!
I should have lost a gesture and a pose.
Sometimes these cogitations still amaze
The troubled midnight and the noon’s repose. (Eliot, *CPP* 20)

CHAPTER II
CRITICAL APPRAISAL

Early Reviews

“La Figlia che Piange” was first published in the September 1916 issue of Harriet Monroe’s literary journal *Poetry* (Monroe 292). T. S. Eliot was a relative unknown at the time, as we know by his letter to Monroe regarding the proofs sent to him before the September issue went to press, thanking her for her kind letter and pointing out that his name had been misspelled in the proofs. “The proof is all right except that I am T. S., not T. R. There is only one ‘T.R.’ I hope!” (Eliot, *Letters* 153). Next published in Eliot’s 1917 seminal volume *Prufrock and Other Observations*, the poem began to draw important critical attention. Marianne Moore complained that Eliot’s decision to put “La Figlia che Piange” in the terminal position of his first volume was a mistake, saying he should have put this beautiful poem first for the “gentle reader who likes his literature...sweetened” and advocating “La Figlia che Piange” as title poem rather than “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock” so as to create a “fangless” version (Moore 36-7). The poet himself must have recognized the general approbation “La Figlia che Piange” was receiving early on in comparison with the less accessible “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock.” In a 1920 letter to publisher Sir Algernon Methuen, Eliot indicated the terminal poem of his 1917 volume as being the most likely candidate for an anthology piece adding, “Many people seem to like it who do not like the other things”

(Eliot, *Letters Rev.ed.* 517-18). The poem's very "sweetness" and apparent accessibility brought it earlier approval than its fellow Eliotic masterpieces, simultaneously serving to deflect critical attention from itself by the very same qualities. It is time to turn again to the depths of the poem, to reexamine the Virgilian and Dantean nuances within it and what they signify.

Eliot's earliest critic was Conrad Aiken, his literary friend from Harvard days. In 1914, Aiken hand-carried typescripts of "La Figlia che Piange" and "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" to England, seeking a publisher for Eliot's poems (Brooker xiv). He was unable to sell either, but succeeded in being the first to show them to Ezra Pound in London. Pound and Aiken were Eliot's earliest reviewers. While Pound's part in Eliot's life and work was singularly essential, Aiken was the more astute as to the nature of subjectivity in Eliot's work. He immediately recognized that Eliot's poetry mapped an interior terrain.

As Jewel Brooker distinguishes between the two in her recent book on Eliot's contemporary reviewers, "Aiken's Eliot is Modern (Anglo-American, personal, subjective, psychological, Expressionistic) whereas Pound's Eliot is Modernist (European, impersonal, objective, realistic, Post-Impressionistic, Cubistic, avant-garde)." As she continues, "both perspectives are valuable, so much so that entire schools of commentary have formed themselves around this basic polarity" (Brooker xv).

Aiken was, therefore, the first to recognize in Eliot's poems the significant subterranean quality informed by his autobiography. Eliot's emerging sense of call to poetry as vocation and avocation is a significant element in that autobiography. The

textual evidence linking “La Figlia che Piange” so strongly to Dante and Virgil through allusions, structure, and imagery is a proclamation of Eliot’s intention and destiny. The epigraph added to the 1917 printing addressing Venus only underlines textual nuances declaring Eliot’s propensities as a poet and as a man. As A. David Moody would later observe, we should not underestimate Eliot’s “self-consciousness, his subtlety and his ambition” nor undervalue the reality that poets of Yeats’ and Eliot’s statures “have always shown themselves at every stage [to be] aware of the Life they were writing” (Moody, *Eliot: Poet* 9).

The initial reaction by early reviewers and critics, like Marianne Moore, to “La Figlia che Piange” seems to form a consensus, a unilateral inclination to find the beauty, loveliness, and accessibility in the poem as opposed to the disturbing fragmentation of “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock,” and unsettling cloying tone of “Portrait of a Lady,” (also from the *Prufrock and Other Observations* volume) or the earliest Eliot poems such as “Nocturne” (Eliot, *Poems Written* 23). While critics noted nuances of Browning in these early poems and others of the nineteenth-century English school of poetry, they were quick to find the different pulse beating in Eliot’s *Prufrock and Other Observations*, calling it new, individual; even repulsive to their Victorian trained poetic ears. Eliot’s early poetry reflects his disdain for the comfortable moneyed world of the late 1800’s. He recognized in it a “veneer over emptiness” (Chinitz 377). Eliot’s art exposed the cultured class of his time as one who “neither understood themselves nor their emotions and who came to stand as unworthy figures of authority” (Chinitz 377). Readers and reviewers expected poetry to be understandable and written in the familiar

traditional forms. The great Romantic poets had prepared their taste for beautifully written lines in standard forms.

Arthur Waugh, quintessential representative of comfort and respectability in early twentieth-century literary critics, famously derided Eliot and his poetry. He called Eliot an “anarchist;” a “literary Cubist” and warned that Eliot and Pound’s other poets were subversive, seeking to destroy the English literary tradition. Pound, who delighted in refuting Mr. Waugh, wrote a counter-review on “La Figlia che Piange.” After first reproducing the entire poem in full, Pound retorted, “and since when have helots taken to reading Dante?” (Brooker 15). Pound, in this early review, recognized and emphasized Dante’s importance to the poem. He admitted Browning’s place in early Eliot poetry but was careful to distinguish Eliot’s style as being distinctively different from Browning. “Eliot has made an advance on Browning,” Pound unequivocally purported: “he has made his *dramatis personae* contemporary and convincing” (Brooker 15).

Waugh was not the only one disturbed by Eliot’s *Prufrock and Other Observations*. Many reviewers panned it. “His ‘poems’ will hardly be read by many with enjoyment,” wrote one. “His ‘notion of poetry’ verges on the catalogue and lacks articulation was the verdict of this same reviewer in a *Times Literary Supplement* article on 21 June 1917 (Brooker 6). A *Literary World* reviewer (5 July 1917) complained “Mr. Eliot is one of those clever young men who find it amusing to pull the leg of a sober reviewer. We can imagine his saying to his friends: ‘See me have a lark out of the old fogies who don’t know a poem from a pea-shooter. I’ll just put down the first thing that comes into my head, and call it ‘The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock’” (Brooker 6). He

tried to soften the blow later in the article by saying “We do not wish to appear patronizing, but we are certain that Mr. Eliot could do finer work on traditional lines” (Brooker 6).

Even sympathetic reviewers confessed being puzzled and disturbed by Eliot’s early poetry. Marianne Moore admitted she couldn’t help feeling that even a “hardened reviewer” would “curse the poet in his mind” for poems like “Portrait of a Lady” that “wrenches a piece of life at the roots” (Moore 36-7). May Sinclair labeled Eliot’s poetry “dangerous” (Sinclair 8-14). She took issue with the company he kept and the publications, like the notorious *Blast*, which he chose to grace with his poetry. Sinclair commented on the fight between Ezra Pound and Arthur Waugh as being an inevitable battle between the staid and comfortable Establishment (meaning Waugh) and the Avant-Garde (meaning Pound). After incisive comments regarding the artistic climate of 1917 and Prufrock’s startling impact on it, she attended to the poems.

Sinclair and Moore both immediately recognized “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock” as a masterpiece. Sinclair equated Prufrock and “Portrait of a Lady” with Browning’s *Romances* and *Men and Women* in degree and kind. She interestingly differentiated “La Figlia che Piange” from the rest, singling it out as “a unique masterpiece...[that] without such technique and such attention the finest imagination is futile, and that if Mr. Eliot had written nothing but [‘La Figlia che Piange’] he would rank as a poet by right of its perfection” (Sinclair 8-14).

Then comes the “but.” “But Mr. Eliot is dangerous. Mr. Eliot is associated with an unpopular movement and with unpopular people” (Sinclair 8-14). Sinclair goes on to

label Eliot's a disturbing genius. She objected to his poetic decisions to force his readers to smell streets and stare at ugliness. She offered us a rather succinct description of traditional art and modern art in this little review of "La Figlia che Piange." Her sensibilities were alarmed by Eliot's art primarily because his poetry was uncomfortable to read. That seems to sum up her main concern: Eliot's poetry was not traditional and therefore not comfortable and therefore, not Poetry. She went so far as to say that "Mr. Eliot is not in any tradition at all...his resemblances to Browning are superficial. Sinclair's highly trained poetic antennae knew at once that Eliot's "La Figlia che Piange" was both "perfect" in technique and presented a "new beauty" and a "new magic" (Sinclair 12). She lauded him while at the same time telling traditional poetry lovers, those possessing a "comfortable and respectable mind [who] love poetry and therefore conventional beauty," to beware (Sinclair 11).

In 1919's *Little Review*, William Carlos Williams offered his insights into "La Figlia che Piange." He, like Moore and Sinclair before him, dwelt not on the similarities in the poem to traditional poetry (such as the poetry of Browning, Tennyson, or Swinburne) but rather on the differences. Williams found the poem's unconventional and nontraditional qualities most worthy of note. His article was a response to Edgar Jepson's gushing review of Eliot's Prufrock poems, "La Figlia che Piange" in particular, as an example of a "very fine flower of the finest spirit of the U.S." Jepson exuberantly praises Eliot using the unqualified adjectives "lovely, beautiful, exquisite, and delicate" (Brooker 15).

Williams Carlos Williams took exception to Jepson's view. He conceded "La Figlia's" refinement. He also saw in La Figlia a brutality displayed by the poem's structure. His examination of the line "Simple and faithless as a smile and shake of the hand" prompted him to regard this line as "perfection beyond cavil." He continued, "Yet, in the last stanza, this paradigm...is warped out of alignment, obscured in meaning even to the point of an absolute unintelligibility by the inevitable straining after a rhyme!-the very cleverness with which this straining is covered being a sinister token in itself. 'And I wonder how they should have been together!'" (Brooker 15). Williams concluded his analysis of "La Figlia che Piange" with a prognosis. If Eliot's (and thereby also Pound's) poetry is the new epitome of art, "then it is *tant pis* for the rest of us" (Brooker 16). Williams called Eliot a "subtle conformist" while at the same time remarked a paradigm that is "out of alignment." These comments precluded and echoed Eliot's own thoughts about conforming to tradition while forging new ground in poetry in his monumental essay, "Tradition and the Individual Talent," published later that year. It is significant that Williams zeroes in on "La Figlia che Piange" as an example of Eliot's vision, an art drawing deeply from the well of past masters while simultaneously dramatizing an avant-garde newness.

I find it interesting that early reviewers like Aiken, Pound, Sinclair, Moore, and Williams took pains to delineate how "La Figlia che Piange" repeatedly diverges from tradition. While admitting its beauty, they qualified their admiration of this beauty by noticing its strangeness. Browning (as seen by these early reviewers) provided, merely and primarily, a point of reference and contrast for poems like "La Figlia che Piange."

Eliot's mastery of technique was promoted as being similar and equal to Browning's, but the stark and important contrast between the two is duly noted. What these fellow poets saw immediately was in Eliot's a distinctively interior poetry in contrast to Browning's, whose dramatic monologues are recognizably external in derivation. As May Sinclair saliently put it, Eliot allows us in his poetry to see naked "live thoughts...in a live brain" (Sinclair 8-14).

The next decade brought recognition for Eliot's talent as a poet. By 1936, critics were no longer castigating Eliot and his poetry as being "anarchist" and "subversive." Now he was being called a "classic" within his own lifetime. These post-*Waste Land* critics of the twenties and thirties proclaimed his place in poetry while still acknowledging the difficulty, even obscurity, of his poetry, harsh words indeed, to be said to be a classic "without being very well understood or much needed" (Brooker 365). In "The Modern Poet," an article published by the *Calendar of Modern Letters* in December 1925, Edgell Rickword deemed "La Figlia che Piange" as the "most easily appreciated of Eliot's poems" (Brooker 129). In similar vein, Peter Munro Jack designated "the *lovely*" [Italics mine] "La Figlia che Piange" as a poem destined for the anthology (Brooker 365).

I bring this criticism to the fore as it relates to "La Figlia che Piange's" acknowledged place in poetic history and an unfortunate lack of attention focused on it, partly due to its misleading beauty. Book-ended between the towering "The Love Song and J. Alfred Prufrock" and *The Waste Land*, "La Figlia che Piange" by virtue of its comparatively less explosive elements of disturbing imagery, language, and thematic

material and apparently greater congruence with recognizably nineteenth-century forms like Browning's, has caused it to become, for the most part, unduly overlooked by a century of critics. Its beauty perhaps has been its undoing, ironically, from a critical standpoint.

Later Criticism

Not too long after this, critics of caliber such as F. O. Matthiessen, Grover Smith, Ronald Bush, and F. R. Leavis chose to focus their attention on the task of examining and interpreting the existing Eliot *oeuvre*. Matthiessen famously illuminated Eliot's thematic focus on interiority, "what lies behind action and beneath appearance" (Matthiessen 70). Matthiessen found in "La Figlia che Piange" an ability like that of Henry James (as in "The Aspern Papers"), to present an entire world and character with one well-chosen image. He pointed to a Jamesian moment where a young man hands his cousin the evening paper as being Dantean in effect; James had an ability to, like Dante, to "create clear, visual images...[to] set something down," relating this moment in James to Eliot's "girl standing at the top of a stairway 'with a fugitive resentment in her eyes'" (Matthiessen 57; Eliot, *SE* 204).

As to Browning's influence on Eliot's poems and his imitation of Browning therein, Matthiessen firmly asserted a problem in equating Eliot's technique with Browning's dramatic monologue as "Eliot did not ordinarily 'identify a character with himself'—he was expressing the problem of being without a character" (Matthiessen 210). Whereas (in his view) Pound's various personae "are used to relish the exhilaration

of appropriating identities,”- Eliot’s voices were used to express “not a self, but the struggle to find a self, or do without a self” (Matthiessen 210). Agreeing with the earliest critics of “La Figlia che Piange,” Matthiessen highlighted the divergence from nineteenth-century poets like Browning and reminded his readers of the deep debt to Dante Eliot continually acknowledged in his many essays on his predecessor. Matthiessen also noted Eliot’s recurring preoccupation with Virgil, Aeneas, the Eumenides, and the “Dido episode” throughout his imaginative works as being topoi Eliot returned to repeatedly in an earnest exploration of destiny, piety, and moral responsibility (Matthiessen 205).

Grover Smith complicated the debate about “La Figlia che Piange” by purporting that, rather than being about a personal experience, it is an ekphrastic poem written about an object of art never seen by Eliot. This allusory nuance stated emphatically in Smith’s standard critical work, *T. S. Eliot’s Poetry and Plays: A Study in Sources and Meanings* (1955) became an important way into the poem for future critics. Smith’s assertion derived from a radio broadcast in 1948 given by John Hayward. As Helen Gardner stated in *The Art of T. S. Eliot* published in 1949, the intense and suppressed emotion evident in “La Figlia che Piange” caused readers to suppose this to be about a “real girl with whom the poet had been in love—a mistake possible originating in the poem’s Latin epigraph...the poem in fact is one of speculation and regret, about a statue which Mr. Eliot had looked for in a museum in Italy but had failed to find” (107). Norwegian critic, Kristian Smidt, corroborated this claim in his 1949- *Poetry and Belief in the Work of T. S.*

Eliot, also taking the position that the definitive source material for the poem was this same allusive stele in Italy (Smidt 68).

Grover Smith further diverged from the critical consensus by emphasizing the Laforgian influences in the poem, explaining the shifts in voice as dramatizing the doubling of the poet's personality, as in Laforgue's technique of *dedoublement*. Smith saw the "La Figlia" character as a crucial foreshadowing to the Hyacinth girl of *The Waste Land*. He reminded readers that this "much-praised poem must have meant a good deal to Eliot, in view of his having assigned it the terminal position in his first collected volume" (Smith 28). While he asserted the early Prufrockian poems to "present the clash between the fleshly and the spiritual, the autinomies of sex and love" with "La Figlia che Piange" being "among the best of the shorter pieces," "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" claimed the lion's share of Smith's critical analysis in this important early book on Eliot's work. His insight about the influence of Laforgue's doubling technique and his claim about the unseen stele in Italy as the occasion for the poem are his main contributions to the critical discussion of "La Figlia."

Smith highlighted the mythology found in *The Waste Land* and, while acknowledging strong Dantean allusions in the earlier poetry, saw *The Waste Land* as a firm divide between Eliot's early poetry connected to Laforgue's influence and Eliot's later poetry. I suggest "La Figlia che Piange" is attuned to the mature poetry based on the Dantean allusions and has strong textual similarities to Eliot's most fervent poetic expressions of the weighty questions regarding fate, human love, and *pietas* as informed by both a spiritual motivation as well as a sexual motivation. Smith wrote that- not until

The Waste Land has a “new hero fully emerged, still frustrated but cast in a more traditionally romantic mold” (Smith 7). I argue that “La Figlia che Piange” has already presented that persona, perhaps just more covertly.

Later critics, such as Ronald Bush, give more attention to the other aspects of “La Figlia che Piange.” Perhaps sufficient ink had been spent on the towering masterpieces (Prufrock and *The Waste Land*) and time had come to pay some further attention to this important and beautiful, but relatively ignored, poem. Bush reiterated the suggestion that a stele of a weeping libation-bearer etched into stone and housed in an Italian museum was the inspiration for Eliot’s poem thus regarding it as an ekphrastic poem (Bush 27).

Bush concentrated on the violence of “La Figlia” rather than its beauty, as did F. R. Leavis in his 1988 essay, “T. S. Eliot and the Poetry of the Future” (Leavis 481-97). He saw in Eliot’s early poems an expressed personal emotional intensity, *images trouvaillées* that displayed insights into “the poet’s inner world of nightmare” (Bush 41). In his influential work on Eliot, New Critic Leavis pointed out the distinct differences between Eliot’s early poetry and Browning’s dramatic monologues. In discussing the emotional quality and language suggesting interiority (Leavis called this “surgical detachment of rhetorical control”) demonstrated in poems such as “La Figlia che Piange” Leavis remarked, “that one takes it so much to heart, for it is painfully dramatic, demonstrates how superior this mode of early Eliot is to Browning’s dramatic monologues, both as poetry and psychology” (Leavis 493). Rather than focus on the beauty of “La Figlia che Piange,” an aesthetic quality he likened to the Pre-Raphaelites, Leavis called it instead a

calculated piece of experimental cruelty. “And I wonder how they should have been together / I should have lost a gesture and a pose” is the icy detachment of an artist manipulating behavior according to some aesthetical demand—and if, as one feels, the poem is no mere hypothesis, but bears some relation to Eliot’s life— Olympianly callous. (Leavis 493)

Is it not possible that Eliot, like Aeneas to whom he links this poem so overtly, both in the text and epigraph, is wrestling with his sense of fate as a poet? His sense of destiny as an artist? Like his predecessors Virgil and Dante, Eliot is aware that his vocation represents a calling, for Eliot, a risky divergence from the path of a conventional and parentally sanctioned life in Puritan New England pursuing the certain security of a tenured professorship in Philosophy. I assert that this is not only a possibility but is Eliot’s impetus for the poem and provides the key to understanding it.

Poet and critic Denis Donoghue, in *Words Alone: The Poet T. S. Eliot* (2002), expresses his belief that this is Eliot’s most beautiful as well as most Virgilian poem (58). He launches into a listing of major Eliot analysts, demonstrating the dearth of attention given to this poem over the years without explaining why. He simply feels that the beauty of the poem and the fact that it is Eliot’s makes it worthy of his attention. Donoghue finds the connection to Virgil’s Dido crucial to understanding the poem, but feels that Eliot derives the emotion in the poem from literature rather than personal experience. Although admitting the supreme subliminal anguish depicted in words as similar to moments in *The Waste Land*, citing for example the lines in “La Figlia che Piange” paralleling torment in both body and soul, “As the soul leaves the body torn and bruised / As the mind leaves the body it has used,” (Eliot, *CPP* 20), Donoghue suggests Eliot’s compositional motivation to be primarily an artistic one, “to write a Pure Poem for

once” (Donoghue 72). Donoghue’s depiction of “La Figlia” as being a Virgilian poem echoes Gareth Reeves’s work and view on Eliot. As Reeves delineates, “La Figlia che Piange,” “‘converses’ with the *Aeneid*, questioning, even as it draws on the Dido and Aeneas story” (Reeves 11). Reeves finds “La Figlia” to signify Eliot’s “lasting preoccupation with the story of Dido and Aeneas” (Reeves 11).

Some writers emphasize the possible biographical sources for the poem from Eliot’s own life. Establishing the composition date is crucial to an argument that Emily Hale, a woman romantically involved with Eliot, is the probable source for the woman in “La Figlia che Piange,” (as well as the Hyacinth girl, and the figure in the Rose-Garden of *Four Quartets*). (Gordon 81). Given my essay’s argument that Eliot in this early poem declares his poetic promise and inheritance from Virgil and Dante, intentionally using carefully interpolated modernist sources to craft a twentieth-century voice, an approximate date for composition should be adequate. It is certain that Eliot wrote “La Figlia che Piange” at Harvard, sometime between his year in Paris in 1910 and his return to Europe in 1914 (Moody 32). Christopher Ricks gives 1911 as the composition date for “La Figlia che Piange” (*IMH* xl). Eliot met Emily Hale in 1912 (Gordon 81).

Most recently, Derek Roper’s 2002 essay, published by Oxford, entitled “La Figlia che Piange” Picture without a Frame,” proposes the poem to be “hardly about love at all,” (222) but rather derived from a possible encounter between Eliot and an unnamed source of visual art, perhaps one of the paintings (Whistler, Sargent, or Tissot) hanging in a British art museum as seen by Eliot at some unspecified time (Roper 224). He suggests this would make “La Figlia che Piange” a Picture Poem, along the lines of Walter Pater’s

prose writing on the “Mona Lisa,” a form of “impressionistic criticism.”(Roper 226). This assertion necessarily ignores the inherent textual allusions to Virgil and Dante (as well as Laforgue) in concert with Eliot’s many comments about poetic heritage lacing his prose writings. It also suggests this poem to be an anomaly, as Eliot published no overtly ekphrastic poems as part of his known corpus. The idea is new, but even he admits the evidence to be scant: “There is no painter’s name, no frame, and the viewer is not necessarily located in a museum or gallery” (Roper 231). I suggest the fact that Eliot names no artist or artwork signified in “La Figlia che Piange” to augment my argument that Eliot is, rather, drawing on Virgilian paradigms. As John Hollander points out, the rhetorical figure of ekphrasis exists throughout Virgil’s *Aeneid*. He describes Virgil’s use of ekphrasis as “Notional Ekphrasis,” that is, a work of art that is “palpably felt” by Virgil’s reader but is, in fact, a representational artifact generated solely and entirely by the author’s imagination (Heffernan 7). Six of these word depictions (notational ekphrasis) of visual artworks are scattered throughout the *Aeneid*, from the first book to the last, starting, significantly in light of “La Figlia,” with the murals that decorate Dido’s temple for Juno that recount the Trojan War. Virgil’s reader experiences the drama within the drama as Aeneas stands before Dido’s murals in Book I, reacting with empathy as he responds to the scenes which he surveys of Troy’s last days (Anderson 28). This art describing art serves also to impute a parallel compassion to Dido, whose workmen created this mural so moving to Aeneas (Heffernan 6, 25). The act of creating a “notional ekphrasis” in writing “La Figlia che Piange” contains within Eliot’s choice, one more structural thread to Virgil and his Aeneas. Eliot by this poetic thread ties his “La Figlia”

to the *Aeneid*'s pictures that "weep for us and our mortality": "sunt lacrimae rerum et mentem mortalia tanguant" (*Aen.* I.460; Heffernan 25).

In *A Companion to T. S. Eliot*, published by Blackwell in 2009, Frances Dickey draws upon Roper's essay, to corroborate her view that Eliot's epigraphs, (since they were often added later) have been possibly overstated (Chinitz 128). Dickey surmises Eliot's epigraphs alluding to classical texts like Virgil's *Aeneid* to be a result of his canonical educational background in nineteenth-century texts. Her feeling is that Eliot's early poem's derivations issue from more recent sources to Eliot, Laforgue and Symons in particular. She implies the classical texts to be window-dressing for poems like "La Figlia che Piange." I suggest, rather, the allusions to Dante, Virgil, and Laforgue in "La Figlia che Piange" as essential derivations that demonstrate "Tradition and the Individual Talent" in the poetic flesh, and signal Eliot's declaration of chosen poetic lineage, as we shall explore in the next sections of the essay.

CHAPTER III
POETIC LINEAGE

Dante

In his youth Eliot taught himself Italian in order to read Dante. From 1911 on he habitually carried a dual language edition of the *Commedia* in his pocket (Eliot, *Letters* 338, n.). In a letter from the poet written to his friend Lady Ottoline Morrell in March 1920, Eliot said that his latest article on Dante prompted him to feel “completely inferior in his presence—there seems really nothing to do but point to him and be silent” (Eliot, *Letters* 374-5). Eliot’s three essays on Dante all remark on his debt to the great Italian poet, even so far as to call Dante “a model for all poets” who wrote poetry of the “greatest altitude and greatest depth” in the history of poetry (Eliot, *SP* 228). As Dante transcended Virgil by establishing a poetic Christendom in the *Commedia*, so Eliot wanted to transcend Dante by traversing the divide between the more traditional world of the nineteenth century and the nihilistic modern and fragmented world of the twentieth.

Associations with Dante (and Virgil) begin with the title to the poem. “La Figlia che Piange” is an Italian phrase, created by and original with Eliot and meaning in English, “the daughter who cries.” In this way Eliot combines allusion with Dante (using his famously vernacular Italian), both Virgil and Dante (including “tears”), and his own soon-to-be recognized individual talent. Many critics mistranslate this title as “Young Girl Weeping” (Smith 27; Chinitz 128). I imagine this translation is derived from John

Quinn's broadcast denoting Eliot's source for the poem (a stele in northern Italy). This is the English title Quinn gave to "La Figlia che Piange" (Gardner 107). This is unfortunate, as the Italian word "figlia," is more accurately translated into English as "daughter." "Daughter" carries a more profound and complex Eliotic meaning than "woman" or "girl" as it resonates importantly with others of Eliot's works. For example, "Oh my daughter" is the stated address of the speaker to the subject of "Marina," with accompanying images of an unnamed lost daughter central to the poem (Eliot, *CPP* 72). The central image of lamented children open *Four Quartets* with the beginning of *Burnt Norton* and its "leaves full of children" (Eliot, *CPP* 118).

The reference to "tears" in the title, "the daughter who weeps," alludes to a crucial image in Dante's *Purgatorio* as well as to Virgil's Aeneas. Eliot emphasized "Tears" in his poem's title. "Tears" are central to Dante's *Commedia* as they express Dante's compassion, humanity, and progression from *Inferno* to *Paradiso*. "Tears" are central in Virgil's *Aeneid*. "Tears" are found throughout *Purgatorio* where the penitent suffer, visually depicting their aspiration to have their desires purged and cleansed (witness the tears, for instance, in the graphic examples of the Lustful, the Envious, and the Avaricious as portrayed in *Purgatorio* XIII, XX, and XXVI. Another scene relevant to "La Figlia"'s anguish and tears as derived from love and trespass is that of *Inferno* V in which the moved speaker Dante tells the suffering Francesca, "your afflictions move me to tears." It is also here in this Dantean location of Limbo that Dido dwells, and suffers, permanently (*Inf.* V. 85).

Tears are mentioned continually in Virgil's *Aeneid*, providing a humanizing element to the poem. In the two scenes paralleled in "La Figlia che Piange," the two emotionally charged dialogues between Aeneas and Dido, "tears" are a central motif. Dido's tears fall on deaf ears in Book IV. Heaven and a sense of duty have blocked Aeneas's "gentle, human ears...he takes the full force of love and suffering deep in his great heart. His will stands unmoved. The falling tears [Dido's] are futile" (*Aen.* IV. 550-565). Aeneas weeps before Dido in Book VI, their second farewell, in Hades. This time it is Aeneas who weeps and Dido who is unmoved. He approaches her weeping and "tries to soothe the burning, fierce-eyed Shade." She turns away from him as if made of stone; Aeneas is said to be "stunned by her unkindly fate, [he] still follows [her] at a distance with tears and pity for her as she goes" (*Aen.* VI. 600-28). Eliot brings both scenes into the poem by mentioning the woman's tears in the title and dramatizing the second farewell scene in Hades within the text. The tears of Virgil's Aeneas and Dido will be discussed more in detail in the next section of the essay more specifically devoted to Virgilian allusions in "La Figlia che Piange."

Eliot's garden settings are associated with a sense of trespass and tangled love, a place where desires are uneasy and complicated and the tension between fate and will press his speakers unbearably. "La Figlia che Piange" is Eliot's first major poem set in this tortured setting. Eliot's gardens inevitably accompany most vividly stroked elegiac relationships, such as the speaker's Hyacinth garden of *The Waste Land* and the Rose-Garden of *Burnt Norton*. In the garden of *The Waste Land*, Eliot's speaker laments, "—
Yet, when we came back, late, from the Hyacinth garden, / Your arms full and your hair

wet, I could not / Speak, and my eyes failed, I was neither / Living nor dead” (Eliot, *CPP* 38). The rose garden of *Burnt Norton* is Eliot’s emblem of poignant, irrevocable loss. *Burnt Norton* stands as a poetic treatise on “what might have been” (Eliot, *CPP* 117). Both of these compelling later Eliotic scenarios evoke a tone of loss, regret, and a Beatrice never found or found-- but now irrevocably lost. “La Figlia che Piange” is the first to present this Eliotic melancholic trill that aches of lost love, authentic love, and ethereal beauty.

Other Eliot poems are associated with “garden” and a sense of trespass. In “Portrait of a Lady” the sexually tormented and introspective speaker is tortured by the “smell of hyacinths across the garden / Recalling other things that other people have desired. / Are these things right or wrong?” (Eliot, *CPP* 10). “Hysteria” presents an eerie tone in a quotidian moment as the frantic speaker listens to the “elderly waiter with trembling hand” directing him and his hysterical lady to this sexually charged place for Eliot--“If the lady and the gentleman wish to take their tea in the garden...”(Eliot, *CPP* 19). Sweeney, a notably sexually unsettled and unsettling character in Eliot’s poems speaks of his “garden-wall... [where] the bees with hairy bellies pass between / the staminate and pistilate” (Eliot, *CPP* 34). In “Ash-Wednesday,” the woman is silent and in a garden. In a sense she has become the garden, as Eliot writes, “The single Rose / is now the Garden / Where all loves end / and a plea to terminate torment” (Eliot, *CPP* 62). Significantly, Eliot chooses to end his entire *oeuvre* in the garden image. He purges this place of trespass with flame in his famous and final line of *Four Quartets*--“the fire and the rose are one” (Eliot, *CPP* 145).

Let us narrow the focus from gardens to the significance of “flowers” as a correlative between Dante’s *Commedia* and Eliot’s “La Figlia che Piange.” Flowers surround Beatrice at the moment Dante first meets her in the *Commedia*, signifying human love and the earthly paradise she represents for him. Dante’s first vision of Beatrice is as she greets him at the threshold of *Paradiso* “Within a cloud of flowers that were cast and then fell back, outside and in the chariot, a woman should appear herself to me...I felt the mighty power of old love” (*Purg.* XXX.28-39), Prior to this scene, Matelda prepares Dante to meet Beatrice and proceed to *Paradiso*. Flowers are Matelda’s primary associated image. Dante’s pilgrim expresses astonishment at the sight of Matelda in *Purgatorio* XXVIII, an astonishment that vanquishes all other thought, “I saw a solitary woman moving, singing, and gathering up flower on flower—the flowers that colored all of her pathway” (34-42). Matelda is a mysterious Dantean figure of prelapsarian vitality and eroticism; she represents a sanctified but earthly love. Upon meeting she gives Dante a gift: she “lifts her eyes to him, evoking to him—Venus in love with Adonis by Cupid’s bidding. Therefore, Dante desires her in a physical sense; just as Venus desired Adonis” (Lansing 600) Dante remarks, “I do not think a light so bright had shone beneath the lids of Venus when her son pierced her in extraordinary fashion” (*Purg.* XXVIII. 52-55). Dante continues associating Matelda with flowers, this time, adding that hers are numinous flowers. “Erect, along the farther bank, she smiled, her hands entwining varicolored flowers, which that high land, needing no seed, engenders” (*Purg.* XXVIII. 52-55). Matelda stands “weaving her garland of flowers on the River Lethe” near *Purgatorio*’s other important river, the River Eunoe. The river Lethe is the

“river of forgetfulness in classical literature, and the first of the two streams from which Dante must drink in the Earthly Paradise” (Lansing 561).

Matelda represents love that is simultaneously innocent and erotic. The figure of Matelda is essential because she makes Dante ready for Paradise. She brings him to the river Eunoe “whose waters renew him and prepare him for ascent to the stars,” for ascent to divine Paradise (Lansing 332). Matelda’s presence in Dante-Pilgrim’s life

affirms for him the original good of creation and perfection of the Garden; it is through Matelda’s bidding that Dante finally achieves an inner life that mirrors the harmonious aspects of the Earthly Paradise. (Lansing 600)

We can surmise from this that the central trope in “La Figlia che Piange,” that of “flowers,” as Eliot emphasizes the emotionally forceful image through repeated lines regarding the remembered woman and her “arms full of flowers,” an emblem of erotic love. In Dante’s work the flowers accompany prelapsarian innocent love, but an erotic love nonetheless. In Dante’s world, redeemed eroticism is possible, if one follows the rules.

In stark contrast, Eliot’s female figure holding flowers in her arms-- reflects only discomfort, dissonance, even severe distress in both (presumably) her life and (certainly) the inner life of the speaker. His speaker’s state of mind is anything but harmonious; his thoughts mirror a forlorn sense of loss, anguished introspection, and disunity. The Eliotic woman, holding flowers in her arms, cannot guide him to Earthly Paradise, much less, a divine Paradise. As a modern poet Eliot had to go beyond the Dantean model, displaying that inner disharmony that characterizes a modern path of interior angst and turmoil

rather than any possible Dantean harmony promised by a guided, unified, medieval path of order and religious authority. Dante's itinerary forms a long and continually guided pilgrimage traversing the wood of *Inferno* to the heights of *Paradiso*, a parallel to his speaker's inner and moral life journeying from bondage to freedom.

As Eliot's "La Figlia che Piange" evokes Matelda's prelapsarian flowers ("her hair over her arms and her arms full of flowers"), so *Burnt Norton* evokes Dante's Empyrean Rose but with a twist. The continuity between this early poem and nearly last is, in this way, undeniable and progressive. Unlike Dante, making his protected pilgrimage from hell to heaven, Eliot's speakers are left to wander through the cacophony of a bewildering modern world, necessarily making their modern soul's journey alone. There is no unified thought or human guide to take Eliot's speaker from Alpha to Omega. This applies specifically to the question of eros and the erotic subtext of Eliot's poems in contrast to Dante's clear path from Eros to God described in his journey from *Inferno* to *Paradiso*. There is no clear path from Eros to God in Eliot's poetry; there is perhaps no path at all. The speaker of "La Figlia che Piange" sings a song to his lady of flowers amidst the troubled solitude in a succession of tortured midnights, compelled with the recurring question "And I wonder how they should have been together!" (Eliot, *CPP* 20). Flowers give him no comfort as they do to Dante's pilgrim. Eliot's speaker is, on the other hand, haunted by the woman's flowers and a sense of the exacerbated solipsism and disharmony associated with them. He has no guide (as did his predecessor Dante)-to navigate a spiritual morass of anguished introspection, nor Rivers Lethe and Eunoe for his soul's relief. His soul is rather, left in a death-like state, like a body's that is "torn and

bruised” or the mind deserted “by the body it has used” (Eliot, *CPP* 20) He is left in a lonely noon and “troubled midnight” his interior psyche battered and assaulted by ultimate questions. The tension in Eliot’s poem is relentless from the first line to the last. There is no relief within the poem and no resolution in sight.

Compare and contrast Eliot’s scene with the words that Dante attributes to Mary at the end of the *Commedia*, “the feminine protagonist of affect...the living daughter of Memory and Affection” (Mandelbaum. *Par.* xvii): “the name of that fair flower which I always / invoke, at morning and at evening (*Par.* XXIII. 88-89), the fair flower is “Mary, the Rosa Mystica, the Mary of the Rosary and the Rose in which the Word of God became flesh” (Mandelbaum. *Par.* XXIII. 73-74).

The Empyrean Rose, a central image in *Paradiso*, is associated with Mary, but also essential to Beatrice, another of Dante’s spiritual guides. This celestial Rose consists of the saints who have become one magnificent flower upon which “the angels are a multitude of bees, dipping in and out of it as they move incessantly between God and the happy human souls” (*Par.* XXX. 94; XXXI. 7). Dante’s Celestial Rose, the tenth and final sphere of the Empyrean, is God’s domain, where the redeemed saints become themselves the petals of the Empyrean Rose and “contemplate eternally the mystery of his being” (Lansing 183). It is on this rose that these saints exist in eternal harmony with the Universe—within, without, and with Him with whom they have to do. Here then, at the conclusion of Dante’s poetic vision, is a harmonious love between Creator, creatures, and creation.

At the conclusion of Eliot's imaginative vision- in *Four Quartets*- his speaker in *Little Gidding* finally reaches a type of inner harmony, but only after relinquishing human love. Whereas Dante designates human love to be "the most effective route to God" (Lansing 93), by *Little Gidding* Eliot calls love a "torment" (Eliot, *CPP* 144).

Love is the unfamiliar Name / Behind the hands that wove / The intolerable shirt
of flame / Which human power cannot remove. / We only live, only suspire /
Consumed by either fire or fire. (Eliot, *CPP* 144)

This inner harmony comes at the cost of "not less than everything" (Eliot, *CPP* 145). Renunciation of human love, as exemplified by Julian of Norwich's words, inserted by Eliot as is in the coda of *Little Gidding* points the way to inner harmony: "And all shall be well and / All manner of thing shall be well" (Eliot, *CPP* 145). Even the Empyrean Rose must be subsumed by fire in Eliot's internal quest of "this Love and the voice of this Calling" as the "the tongues of flame are in-folded / Into the crowned know of fire / And the fire and the rose are one". (Eliot, *CPP* 145). We see the beginning of this debate in "La Figlia che Piange."

Dante's speaker is guided by Virgil, aided by Matelda in Earthly Paradise, led by Beatrice and then as Beatrice leaves him to return to her heavenly throne-replaced by St. Bernard as guide. Dante's speaker is never alone in his journey. Eliot's speaker, in contrast, is continually and inevitably alone in his. The last line of Dante's *Commedia* "l'amor move il sole e l'altre stele ("the Love that moves the sun and the other stars") derives from Dante's understanding of a divine Love (Christ and God represented by "sun") that wills and orders the universe "like a wheel / In even motion, by Love

impelled” (*Par.* XXXIII). Eliot’s early and lasting immersion in Dante provided Eliot a poetic touchstone and progenitor to draw from for his own work as we see from his use of, and divergence from, central Dantean tropes like Matelda’s flowers and the Emyrean rose.

Another Dantean trope evoked and subsequently transformed by Eliot in “La Figlia che Piange” is that of “stairs.” Eliot’s speaker wishes the woman in the poem to “Stand on the highest pavement of the stair” (Eliot, *CPP* 20). “Stairs” and “terraces” are pivotal images in Dante’s second book of *The Commedia*. Dante’s pilgrim in *Purgatorio* ascends the seven terraces on Mount Purgatory, after his harrowing descent through *Inferno*- the pilgrim enters Dante’s *Purgatorio* through a gate at the top of a three-step stairway. On each of the seven terraces, a specific sin is punished and purified. Each sin is removed as the sinner submits to the cleansing process of Purgatory. The seven terraces punish, in order, pride, envy, wrath, sloth, avarice, gluttony, and lust. The seventh, or highest terrace (or stair), is for the Lustful. In Eliot’s later “Ash-Wednesday,” stairs are also an important visual metaphor, as they are in “La Figlia che Piange.”

Eliot’s use of modified Dantean “stairs” dominates the imagery of Part III of Eliot’s 1930 post-conversion poem, “Ash-Wednesday,” as the speaker “struggles with the devil of the stairs (Eliot, *CPP* 63). The poet interestingly interpolates mellifluously romantic images like “lilacs” and “sweet, blown, brown hair,” with cloying Pan-like figures and “fetid air;” signifying extreme sexual tension and distress on the part of the speaker. As in “La Figlia che Piange,” sweet images are juxtaposed with surging emotional tension as hawthorn blossoms and lilacs contrast sharply with devils under

Purgatorial stairs, suggesting inner turmoil in the presence of what would normally be positive images of romance in a poem. “Sweet, blown, brown hair,” in Eliot’s poems, begin in “La Figlia che Piange” to be associated inherently with twisting on Purgatorial stairs. Eliot’s metaphors in “Ash-Wednesday,” those of an “old man’s mouth driveling, beyond repair” and an “aged shark” join forces to interject abject despair and revulsion into the speaker’s inner world; his “steps of the mind” (Eliot, *CPP* 63). The man is old; the shark’s power is spent-strange images to juxtapose with the robust romantic “fig’s fruit” and “sweet, brown hair” in the poem’s subsequent lines (Eliot, *CPP* 63). “Lord, I am not worthy / Lord, I am not worthy / but speak the word only” (Eliot, *CPP* 63), the concluding lines of “Ash-Wednesday,” are the speaker’s desperate cry from where he stands on the third stair (Eliot, *CPP* 67).

Eliot’s repeated impactful line in “La Figlia”-“Weave, weave the sunlight in your hair”-derives from both Dante and Virgil. The placement and music in the line prompts the reader to linger over the line. This emphasis underlines the significance of both “weave” and “sunlight” as key metaphors. I discuss “weave” in the section on Virgilian allusions; I concentrate here on the significance in the trope “sunlight” in this section on Dante and Eliot.

“Sunlight” woven through the woman’s hair creates an unforgettable image in “La Figlia che Piange” carrying a strong emotional currency in the poem. A central trope in *Paradiso*, Dante uses light as a symbol for “what is dictated by nature, what God is, or is like” (Lewis 71). C.S.Lewis gives us Dante’s complex simile of *Paradiso* 46-54. As Beatrice gazes at the sun, Dante gazes at Beatrice and in turn “imitates her and also gazes

at the sun. The second beam is in its turn compared to a pilgrim desirous at return. Dante and Beatrice are [in this sense] literaliter to the sun (and allegorice to God)” (Lewis 73). The visual energy of the poem centers on this vision of sunlight in hair, conflating the impossibilities implicit in this command to “weave, weave the sunlight in your hair” (Eliot, *CPP* 20).

Both speaker and female figure are confronted with the impossible in his command to “weave sunlight in your hair.” As she is given an impossible directive from the speaker (as she cannot possibly direct or control the sun’s rays), he is attempting the impossible--to absolve himself from the memory of her image. “La Figlia che Piange” offers no hope of future resolve within the space of the poem. In the vehicle of this phrase, “But weave, weave the sunlight in your hair,” Eliot presents the tenor of yearning, guilt, introspection, failed union, struggle with fate, and desire for return and reunion--collocated in this musically beautiful and haunting repeated line which is weighty in resonance while remaining Spartan in structure.

Virgil’s Aeneas, the speaker’s literary parallel implied within the text, is also a man struggling with fate, but within a Virgilian world of sense and order. In Eliot’s view, Aeneas is the “prototype of a Christian hero. For he is, humbly, a man with a mission and the mission is everything” (Eliot, *OPP* 144). Aeneas is a figure epitomizing *fatum*, *labor*, and *pietas*. He is one who yields obeisance to the authority of divinity and destiny at the cost of personal volition and human passion. The pathos in his relationship with Dido is of central importance to Virgil’s narrative in the *Aeneid* and is a recurring leitmotif for Eliot, in poetry and prose alike. The Virgilian scene that shows Dido

spurning Aeneas in Hades, in particular, is reiterated and reemphasized by Eliot. That moment is woven into the text of “La Figlia che Piange” and I will delineate significant elements thereof in the next section focusing more specifically on the Virgilian allusions in the poem. What concerned Eliot primarily is that essence of Virgil which gives him a solitary place as nexus between the pre-Christian and the Christian world. For Eliot, as for Dante, Virgil “looks both ways; he makes a liaison between the old world and the new” (Eliot, *OPP* 138).

Virgil

In the first lines of “La Figlia che Piange,” T. S. Eliot declares his poetic lineage and instinctive affinity with both Virgil and Dante.

Weave, weave the sunlight in your hair—
Clasp your flowers to you with a pained surprise—
Fling them to the ground and turn
With a fugitive resentment in your eyes:
But weave, weave the sunlight in your hair. (Eliot, *CPP* 20)

Eliot calls immense attention to the word “weave” in the first stanza of “La Figlia che Piange” by employing the poetic technique, *rime riche* (Preminger and Brogan 1070). His continued repetition (four times no less) not only draws attention to the word “weave” but creates an incantational music in the lines in which the word is embedded. The metaphor is afforded additional mystery and allusory power by the impossibility implied in the speaker’s command to the woman to “weave the sunlight in your hair.” (Eliot, *CPP* 20).

“Weave” has a long and exalted literary association, one rich in numinous nuance. Classical scholars delineate “weave” as being likely the most ancient of metaphors. The word “Text” itself is derived from the Latin “to weave”-“texere” (Simpson 223). “Weave,” “loom,” and “spin” are linked words and consistently associated with Fate in several legends and in more than one tradition (Howatson and Chilvers 224). In Greek Mythology, Ariadne, wife of Dionysus in Crete, possessed the spun thread that conquered the Labyrinth (Howatson and Chilvers 54). Penelope wove a design each day as she waited for her Odysseus, unraveling it each night to stay her suitors until his return (Howatson and Chilvers 405). In the *Iliad*, Iris, “the god’s herald,” addresses Helen as she was “weaving a folding mantle / On a great loom and designing into the blood-red fabric / The trials that the Trojans and Greeks had suffered / For her beauty under Ares’ murderous hands” (*Iliad*. III. 123-130). Athena, the “weaver goddess” turned Arachne into a spider rather than be bested by her, a mere mortal, in the artistry of spinning and weaving (Howatson and Chilvers 49). Circe and Calypso were “weaving enchantresses.” Calypso is encountered in her palace, “lifting / her breathtaking voice as she glided back and forth / before her loom, her golden shuttle weaving...” (*Od*. V. 68-70). The goddess, Circe, the “nymph with lovely braids” is heard “lifting her spellbinding voice” while she weaves on her “immortal loom...a shimmering glory only goddesses can weave” (*Od*. X. 240-45).

Philomela uses her loom to become her voice after her tongue has been brutally struck out by Tereus (her sister’s husband). Poignantly, she must “weave” her tragic tale in cloth as a means for it to be “heard.” Philomela is transmuted into a nightingale,

according to Latin legend, which holds strong associations with poetry and poets throughout the years (Howatson and Chilvers 418). Philomela's story is one Eliot will return to in his 1922 monumental *The Waste Land*. Directly referred to in the poem's eerie second section, "A Game of Chess," Eliot's allusions move from the "laquearia" of the *Aeneid* (Reeves 28) and Milton's "sylvan scene," to "The change of Philomel, by the barbarous king / So rudely forced: yet there the nightingale / Filled all the desert with inviolable voice / And still she cried, and still the world pursues, / "Jug Jug" to dirty ears" (Eliot, *CPP* 40). Again, in parallel to "La Figlia che Piange"'s emphasis on "hair," especially in association with "weave" and poetic voice, Eliot's lines in *The Waste Land* immediately following this direct allusion to Philomela are these: "her hair / Spread out in fiery points / Glowed into words, then would be savagely still" (Eliot, *CPP* 40). As in "Figlia che Piange" the hair is central. It is the hair that "glows into words" and then is said to be "savagely still" (Eliot, *CPP* 40).

"Weave" not only anchors "La Figlia che Piange" by multivalent threads of metaphor to a plethora of mythological associations with fate and destiny (as well as an emblem of a poet's voice) but evokes Virgil's *Aeneid* in particular and most pointedly. Fate versus personal choice drives Virgil's story thematically. External forces dictate Aeneas's action to leave Troy and found Rome. Virgil makes it clear that this action runs "counter to Aeneas' personal desires, his attachment to his native land makes him a reluctant, unhappy leader who regrets every foot that separates him further from Troy" (Anderson 12). If Aeneas had had his own way, he would have died in battle defending his beloved Troy as he expresses in Book I, "three or four times blessed [those] whose

fate it was to die before the faces of their fathers under the lofty walls of Troy!”(*Aen.* I. 94-6). A second best scenario would have found him rebuilding Troy. Aeneas continually looks back to Troy, throughout the narrative of the early books of the *Aeneid*, rather than forward to Italy. “What compelled him to go into ‘exile’ and make that exile permanent was fate” (Anderson 12) as seen in the opening lines of the epic: “I sing of arms and of a man / His fate had made him fugitive”(*Aen.* I. i-ii). Eliot’s speaker, on the other hand, continually looks to a bewildering past, with no future to look to “And I wonder how they should have been together!” (Eliot, *CPP* 20)

Aeneas, like Homer’s Odysseus before him, is a wanderer. Aeneas is a “profundus”-by “fate a fugitive” (*Aen.* I.i-ii). Unlike Odysseus, however, Virgil’s hero demonstrates passivity and *obeisance*. He follows decrees designed for him to establish an empire; at key points in the text his fate countermands his personal will. Out of Troy’s rubble, Aeneas journeys by sea to found Rome as designated by the gods. His relationship with Dido, orchestrated by the gods and then dissolved by the same gods, conflates the modern readers’ questions regarding implications raised in the *Aeneid*: human obedience to divine authority or personal desire, civic duty versus individual happiness. Dido, is said by Virgil to be “ignorant of destiny” (*Aen.* I.422). She is unsuspecting in her compassion for the Trojan fleet and heedless of the personal danger inherent in her merciful action towards Aeneas’s company. Aeneas, on the other hand, continually struggles with his knowledge of his fate and its divergence from his desires. His character must continually and intentionally suffer subsequent forfeiture of personal happiness. There is something in this suffering that profoundly resonated with Eliot. He

was captivated by the literary and exquisite depiction of Dido's Snub of Aeneas in Hades. I believe "La Figlia che Piange" dramatizes Eliot's personal realization of the tormenting tension between personal desire and duty. The poem presents for the first time but certainly not the last, Eliot's own *agon*.

Even as early as 1910 it is clear, Eliot knew his was not a conventional destiny. I believe he felt his greatness. I suggest this poem to be the first serious envoy to weave, like Philomela's fabric, Eliot's artistic heritage and promise- in print. Eliot admired the *pietas* of the world of Virgil. He found that *ethos* to ring more true than the haphazard moral world of the Greeks. Eliot could relate to the agony, moral integrity, and inner torment of an Aeneas. He, also, was an aristocratic prince of sorts, bred to distinction in a Puritan world of stringent moral values. Eliot, as an astute observer of his life and times was, like Virgil, painfully aware of possible tensions resulting in the conflict between a man's fate and a man's will. Eliot's speaker in "La Figlia" agonizes over what "should" have happened and what "could" have happened in this fated relationship and subsequent maddening memory and tells himself "I should find" some way to resolve this impasse. "Should's," "Could's," and self-direction are textual indications that Eliot's speaker senses an obligation he cannot fulfill towards this woman in the poem. He desires her, he cannot forget her, but he has left her and wishes to find a socially acceptable resolution to their situation that "both should understand" but implies at the same time the absolute impossibility of such a sane and moderated outcome (8-16).

Aeneas is known for his humanity, emotions, and an adherence to "doing what's right" even when duty directly opposes his personal desires causing him intense inner

turmoil. In his famous 1919 essay, “Tradition and the Individual Talent” Eliot discusses the place of emotional intensity and art in the “man who suffers and the mind which creates.” Eliot quietly confesses his own *agon* in this essay, a struggle similar to Virgil’s Aeneas: “Poetry is not a turning loose of emotion, but an escape from emotion; it is not the expression of personality, but an escape from personality. But, of course, only those who have personality and emotion know what it means to want to escape from these things” (Eliot, *SP* 10).

Virgil tells his reader that Aeneas “does as he was told”—he victoriously fulfills his destiny, but at a cost (*Aen.* I. 420-5). He leaves his beloved Troy. He reluctantly, but without question, abandons his beloved Dido. Virgil’s depiction of the concepts of *pietas*, *fatum*, and passivity as demonstrated in the characters of Aeneas and Dido (and the significance thereof) haunted Eliot’s imaginative life, as is evident from his continual referral to these key scenes in the *Aeneid*. “La Figlia che Piange” and its Virgilian allusions give us an important portal into Eliot’s mind as they demonstrate his foundational thoughts regarding fate and will.

Fate’s is not an easy mantle to bear for either Virgil’s Aeneas or Eliot’s speaker of “La Figlia che Piange.” Aeneas’s inner contest of will against destiny is at the crux of *pietas*. It is because of this quality in Aeneas, in Eliot’s mind, that the “future of the Western World depends...he is given a fate that is for him a “burden and responsibility rather than a reason for self-glorification” (Eliot, *OPP* 144). He does not appropriate the founding of Rome as his personal vision enacted by his individual force of action and strength of will. In his prose, Eliot expressed his belief that when individuals seize their

own destiny, when they take upon themselves the authority as the sole and only “active source of what they do, their pride is punished by disaster” (Eliot, *OPP* 144). Aeneas’s dutiful vision is the more proper vision in Eliot’s view. In submitting to the will of fate and the divine, Virgil has Aeneas offer himself as an instrument for a destiny beyond himself. Eliot makes of this an important distinction. Aeneas acting in opposition to his individual desires demonstrates *pietas* and (to Eliot) represents a form of demonstrated humility that is importantly prescient of essential superior Christian virtue. As Eliot will write later in *East Coker* of *Four Quartets*: “The only wisdom we can hope to acquire / Is the wisdom of humility: humility is endless” (Eliot, *CPP* 126). It is clear that Eliot was wrestling with these concepts as early as “La Figlia che Piange” in depicting Dido’s betrayal and Aeneas’s helplessness to alter fate, even for his love for her.

Eliot describes his early, lasting, and significant affinity with Virgil in his 1951 essay, “Virgil and the Christian World” (Eliot, *OPP* 135-48). In his account, Virgil made his mark on Eliot long before Eliot became a poet. Eliot’s nod to Dante as master and predecessor was consistent and constant throughout his career and has been emphasized more often by critics, especially recently. Eliot’s debt to both poets is crucial, elemental to understanding his work, and present in this poem. Additionally, their work interconnects in an important way as regards to what we read in “La Figlia” and its pertinence on Eliot’s thoughts on tradition and individual talent. It is important to notice the Virgilian references in Eliot’s early poems (like “La Figlia che Piange”) and not only recognize them as appearing in the later post-conversion poetry, as some critics have done (Reeves 28).

In his essay, Eliot analyzed his reason for instinctively preferring Virgil to Homer. Although he found the Greek language to be more interesting than Latin, Eliot realized early on that he valued “the *world* of Virgil” over the “*world* of Homer—because it was a more civilized world of dignity, reason and order” (Eliot, *OPP* 139). Homer’s world was populated with Greek gods who were, in Eliot’s words, “irresponsible, as much a prey to their passions, as devoid of public spirit and the sense of fair play, as the heroes.” Eliot found this “shocking...their sense of humor extended only to the crudest form of horseplay,” calling Achilles “a ruffian” (Eliot, *OPP* 139). Homer’s Greek world, one of chaotic individualism informed the *Iliad*. Eliot found Virgil’s work more palatable, as it was informed by the *labor*, *pietas*, and *fatum* of Rome, as refined and explained by Virgil’s sensibility and artistry (Eliot, *OPP* 140).

As Eliot explains it, a fate like that of Aeneas (which so strongly runs across the grain of personal choice) is “a very heavy cross to bear” (Eliot, *OPP* 145). Aeneas is the penultimate passive hero. He prefigures Christian virtue and *pietas*, a sharp contrast to Homer’s heroes. Put even more strongly, “As an Odyssean individualist he is completely destroyed by his responsibility” (Anderson 16). This conflict of the soul more than interested Eliot, it portrayed him as a man and an artist.

As Eliot sees it,

Aeneas is pious towards the gods, and in no way does his piety appear more clearly than when the gods afflict him. He had a good deal to put up with from Juno; and even his mother Venus, as the benevolent instrument of his destiny put him into one very awkward position. There is in Aeneas a virtue—an essential ingredient in his piety—which is an analogue and foreshadow of Christian humility. (Eliot, *OPP* 143)

Aeneas has a destiny beyond himself to fill, despite the certain personal cost of forfeited desire.

Eliot's verb tense choices in "La Figlia" provide a roadmap to the reader as the speaker works through his interior conundrum at the same time demonstrating Eliot's tethering of the poem to the traditions of poetry past and a new poetic voice for the twentieth century. He begins in the first stanza with a consistent use of the imperative voice. This commanding verb tense mirrors the Aeneas's Empire. The imperative verbs signal destiny's demands to drastic action in this opening stanza of "La Figlia che Piange." The speaker commands the woman to stand, lean, clasp, fling, weave, and finally, turn away. Eliot reflects the speaker's futile attempts to grasp his own destiny and change an unwanted outcome with a lost beloved. His is a forlorn passivity. He has not the compensation of a future virile outcome like Aeneas.

We see Eliot's speaker's frustration demonstrated in the conditional passive tense of the verbs in the second stanza beginning with "So I would have had him leave" (8). Eliot's verbs push the reader to a state of uncertainty as the speaker confronts the reader with an onrush of unresolved jumble of what he "could have" and "should have" done and an emphasized line "I should find." Virgil's Aeneas found Rome. The gods make good on their fate for Aeneas. They provide him a regal wife to propagate a proper lineage for the Empire of Rome. Eliot's speaker, in contrast, finds nothing but is left, rather, ruminating over a bungled parting, wondering in the troubled midnights about the woman's "hair over her arms and her arms full of flowers" and "how they should have been together!" (Eliot, *CPP* 20). Eliot heightens the second stanza's sense of vertigo by

introducing a dizzying speaker shift at the same time. Eliot shifts from the solid first person speaker of the beginning stanza to a murky third person speaker in the second stanza without explaining why. In these techniques Eliot simultaneously uses Virgil's work as both a touchstone and a springboard within the poem's text.

Eliot repeatedly returns to the trope Fate versus personal choice throughout his corpus. In Eliot's later verse-drama "The Family Reunion," for example, The Eumenides, or Fates, are uniquely actual characters in the play (like a Greek chorus) and perform an important role in the plot. They pursue Harry, the main character, by hounding him with their presence and exacerbating guilty memories plaguing him regarding his wife's mysterious death and his ambiguous responsibility for it. In the 1939 production Eliot's Eumenides were spookily portrayed in KKK-like costumes, the director posted them at the theatre exits, effectively blocking the doors to the audience to present a palpable sense of being blocked by Fate (Brooker 409).

The epigraph, as mentioned, did not appear in the first printing of the poem but was added later in the 1917 version published in *Prufrock and Other Observations*. The epigraph quotes Aeneas's words in Book 1 of the *Aeneid*, "O quam te memorem virgo..." as he encounters his mother, Venus, disguised as a Carthagian huntress. In this scene, Venus rehearses Aeneas's fate to found Rome and gives him a personal history of the unhappy Dido. In a quick stroke, this epigraph represents the distillation of Aeneas's dilemma: fate vs. will. I argue that the added epigraph is like a sign pointing to a destination, the sign serves to affirm the direction to the city that exists, sign or no sign; it

is merely a help to the traveler, and in this case of the epigraph, the reader. I propose the epigraph to effectively corroborate what we find intrinsically within the text.

Virgil presents two emotionally electric confrontations between the two lovers, Aeneas and Dido. In the first, in Book IV Aeneas has a terrifying vision from Jove that warns him to leave Dido's shores and immediately pursue his given task of founding Rome. Virgil here gives his reader insight into Aeneas's true feelings. He is said by Virgil to be "overwhelmed" (*Aen.* IV. 346) as Dido "means the world to him" (*Aen.* IV. 360). "He longs to talk to her, soothe her sorrow / because of his great love." Aeneas is caught between his own passion for Dido and his commitment to duty and obedience to the gods. Virgil skillfully presents Aeneas's interior struggle. Aeneas makes a certain decision to follow duty but not without personal emotional cost, as Virgil makes clear (*Aen.* IV. 540).

Virgil's strong description regarding Aeneas's dilemma struck Eliot full-force, causing Eliot to return to this character's conflict in verse and in prose. Aeneas wrestling with fate versus will is "stunned, his thoughts racing, here, there probing his option. He is torn in two, until at his wit's end" (*Aen.* IV. 352-5). Eliot uses similar language to describe his speaker's personal anguish in "La Figlia che Piange" in stanza two: "As the soul leaves the body torn and bruised, / As the mind deserts the body it has used" (Eliot, *CPP* 20).

Eliot parallels here Aeneas' initial thought in what to do about Dido. Aeneas decides that the simplest solution to his (in his mind) unavoidable commitment to duty is to leave her without a word of farewell. She gets wind of his departure, however, "for

who can deceive a lover?" (*Aen.* IV. 369) She subsequently forces him to confront her. In Virgil's farewell scene between the lovers in Book IV, he says that Dido's eyes are "silent," Her voice is not. Aeneas pleads with her to understand his action, "My own eyes have seen the god...my ears have drunk his words. No longer set yourself and me afire. Stop your quarrel. It is not my own free will that leads to Italy" (*Aen.* IV.490). Dido is completely unconvinced by this reasoning. She starts her diatribe by calling his lineage into question "no goddess was your mother, false Aeneas" (IV. 365), then unleashes a passionate and eloquent statement of her lover's claim, his betrayal of her trust, and his destruction of her honor and life (*Aen.* IV. 497). In her mind he has left her nothing but suicide. But nothing she can say sways him. They are at a complete impasse. Her eyes are silent, her words aflame. Virgil puts particular emphasis on the expression in Dido's eyes in scenes of confrontation between the soon-to-be-parted lovers. This is important in light of "La Figlia" as Eliot evokes both farewell scenes between Aeneas and Dido. Eliot's speaker refers to the silent woman's eyes as holding a "fugitive resentment." Eliot chooses the woman to be silent in the poem, in the moment of the telling and in the recollected memory of the speaker. Her eyes express resentment. Virgil's living Dido has silent eyes but flaming voice. His Dido in Hades is silent, but harbors anger in her eyes. Eliot, in his poetic craft, deftly calls on both farewell scenes between Aeneas and Dido, signifying the drama between will and fate and its implications, with these poetic choices.

The second confrontation between the two lovers is found in the sixth book of the *Aeneid*. In Virgil's epic, Aeneas, like Odysseus before him and Dante after him, journeys to the Underworld. Soon upon arrival in Hades, Aeneas sees the dim shape of Dido, "her

wound still fresh.” He weeps and expresses his love and tenderness for her; then repeats his personal wish was to stay with her, “I was unwilling to leave your shores” (*Aen.* IV. 606). This time Dido’s eyes are not silent. She is a “burning, fierce-eyed Shade” who turns away from Aeneas, unwilling to either listen to him, accept his reasoning, or his gods’s authority. Virgil draws a stunning picture of a scorned woman. Dido turns away from Aeneas for the second and last time; her face unmoved-Virgil describes her in detail as having been made of stone. Aeneas weeps again, “stunned by her unkindly fate” then resolutely moves on to his ships. He is under orders and acts accordingly although moved by Dido’s pleas and plight.

The “fugitive eyes,” silence of the woman, and her irrevocable turn from the speaker skillfully evoke these two scenes between the two legendary lovers of the *Aeneid*. Dido’s eyes are silent while alive, but her voice speaks eloquently and passionately as she confronts Aeneas with his betrayal of their love and subsequent unswerving resolve to leave her to found an empire, in Book IV. In this first scene between Aeneas and Dido, it is Aeneas who is as immobile as flint in his resolve to comply with fate and Jupiter’s decree. In the second confrontation between them, this time in Hades after Dido’s suicide, Dido’s face becomes “immobile, as if it had been carved out of flint of Marpesian rock” (Eliot, *OPP* 145). In the scene in Hades in Book VI, her voice is silent but her eyes speak. Her turn from Aeneas as he pleads with her to understand his action towards her while living, “speaks” even more powerfully and eloquently now that they meet in the afterlife.

In 1944, thirty years after writing “La Figlia che Piange,” Eliot claimed that this emotionally charged scene was “not only one of the most poignant, but one of the most civilized passages in poetry” (Eliot, *OPP* 63). He emphasizes the point that Aeneas, in the scene in Hades, projects an inability to forgive himself in spite of the fact that he knows that he has taken the only action possible as one who must obey divine commands. Eliot’s interpretation of Aeneas’s feeling, that he must “feel a bit of a worm” in this scene in which Dido snubs him in Hades gives us an insightful view into Eliot’s mind on the moral dilemmas that often face us regarding fate and desire (Eliot, *OPP* 63-4).

Eliot’s interpretation of Aeneas and his projection of conscience continued to plague him well into the 1950’s as Eliot’s essay on Virgil illuminates (Eliot, *OPP* 145). To Eliot, Aeneas is the “original Displaced Person... The *pietas* is in this way explicable only in terms of *fatum*. This is a word which constantly recurs in the *Aeneid*; a word charged with meaning, and perhaps more meaning than Virgil himself knew” (Eliot, *OPP* 144). Significant to Eliot is the dilemma presented by Virgil in these two scenes of confrontation and important to our discussion is Eliot’s interpretation of Aeneas’s position as it informs his poetry. It is significant that Eliot describes Aeneas as “having felt decidedly a worm” (Eliot, *OPP* 145) even while defending Aeneas’ action as ethically superior. For Eliot, it was not “either, or” but “and, therefore.” Aeneas was caught in an inalterable moral situation in which his personal passion had to be sacrificed. Eliot’s speaker demonstrates a similar angst in which a desired woman must be figuratively abandoned. Even though Eliot’s speaker is unsuccessful in his quest to put this failed relationship in the past, his agony mirrors Aeneas’s. Eliot’s speaker gains no

compensation from the action of farewell. While Aeneas enjoys a resolved satisfaction in his own moral virtue by way of his obeisance to the gods, Eliot's twentieth-century speaker is left holding the proverbial empty bag. His desire is unfulfilled, his memories haunt him, and he is completely alone. No one speaks to him- not the woman, not the gods, not a friend. He cannot even speak clearly to himself. His thoughts are fragmented and dissonant as witnessed linguistically in Eliot's use of a variety of personal pronouns and address in the speaker voice as Eliot shifts from first person to third person and then back to first person.

Eliot cleverly resists, (in writing "La Figlia che Piange"), a straightforward imitation of Virgil's scene in the *Aeneid* by carefully inserting a modern Laforguian tone and voice within the arras of classical Virgilian and Dantean allusions. While dramatizing a speaker with a dilemma like that of Aeneas and evoking Dante's poetic *Purgatorio*, he masterfully interjects a necessarily modern attitude. By juxtaposing the modern cosmopolitan sounding word "pavement," for example, and the garden's Purgatorial stair, Eliot interpolates modernity within the Dantean image, "pavement" embedding an association of artificiality and urbanity. By telling the woman to stand on the highest pavement of the stair, he is suggesting a desire to move this maddeningly distracting moment of relational failure to a transcendent place of beatitude. It appears a desperate attempt by the speaker to be the agent of his memories rather than the passive recipient of their torment. In this way perhaps he, like Dante before him, can command his memories, transcending them, and make of her a Beatrice. But Eliot's speaker, a modern Aeneas, is left without hope of resolution or source of solace by the poem's end.

Eliot says of Virgil: “he was denied the vision of the man who could say: ‘ Within its depth I saw ingathered, bound by love in one volume, the scattered leaves of all the universe’” (Eliot, *OPP* 143). As Dante’s Christianity and artistry demanded Virgil to be transcended in the *Commedia*, Eliot knew he must transcend Dante artistically to portray a modern world of perplexity, ambivalence, and “love crying” (Childs 133).

Laforgue

Eliot draws on Laforguan poetic lines and flair to infuse the poem with an attitude of unresolved modern disillusionment regarding life and love. The poem ends in “troubled midnight” and “noon’s repose.” The very word “repose” is suspect at the conclusion of the poem as it follows the speaker’s bewilderment that he cannot lose the “gesture” and “pose” that haunt him. It is an ironical noontime repose that hints at “acedia” rather than rest. The poem takes place in an artificially constructed setting. The garden of the first stanza exists (perhaps only) in the speaker’s mind. The second and third stanzas take place apparently completely internally. We, as readers, are given no external markers to identify the setting throughout much of the poem. Eliot’s abstract language such as, “As the soul leaves the body torn and bruised, / As the mind deserts the body it has used” reminds us that we have been brought into the landscape of the mind. It is difficult to know, thanks to Eliot’s poetic techniques, whether the first stanza reflects a true memory or an imagined wished-for scenario as an alternative to a real memory. Eliot does convince us, however, that the woman is real, the speaker is real, and the inner torment of being “torn in two” are quintessentially real.

The distinction between the internal and the external fascinated Eliot consistently. As J. Alfred Prufrock hesitates on the cusp of conventionality with his question, “Do I dare / Disturb the universe? (Eliot, *CPP* 4,5) so does the speaker of “La Figlia che Piange” hesitate continually throughout the poem as to what course of action (if any) he should take as dramatized in his repeated “So I would,” “So I would,” “So he would,” “As,” “As,” and “Some way,” “Some way” in the middle of the poem. The speaker’s quandary is representative of the uncertainty of the age. The speaker is unsure of himself; he is even unsure of his own memories. He is still “cogitating” at the end of the poem in amazement at the immense power these interior reveries have on him and he has absolutely no idea what to do about them. He does not or cannot seek a divine or oracle (as Aeneas seeks out a seer) to deliver him from his internal dilemma. The only divine authority mentioned, the Venus alluded to in the postscript epigraph, is fittingly-- in disguise, reiterating the speaker’s isolation.

The beloved woman of the poem is no longer of value to him as a source of comfort or personal happiness (if she ever was). She still dominates his subterranean existence but, for reasons we are not given, is no longer available to him. She has “turned away (Eliot, *CPP* 20). But with the “autumn weather” thoughts of her recur relentlessly. The move to end the poem in present tense dramatizes the speaker’s situation. He is caught in a twisting internal emotional purgation complete with doubts and regrets (“I should find”) without any hope of determination in sight.

Eliot employs several important Symbolist techniques such as the use of *vers libre*, dramatic speaker shifts, and *nouveau* diction. Laforgue’s influence is seen in the

spectacularly uneven line lengths. Eliot composed the first stanza in a moderated *terza rima* but the second stanza dances with a rhythm inherited from a syncopated freedom encouraged by avant-garde French Symbolists. Two long lines and then a short; two long lines and then a short-creates a modern music not allowed by the traditional structures of the standard iambic pentameter of the English Romantics like Wordsworth or Tennyson. It displays, instead, the Symbolist's "conversational expression of an emotive idea" (Chinitz 255).

Eliot went to Paris in 1910. During that year abroad he studied French Literature with writer Alain-Fournier, deepening in his knowledge of and interest in, the French Symbolist poets and attending lectures by the philosopher, Henri Bergson. At the age of 20, before his year in Paris, Eliot had discovered the decadent and innovative poetry of Laforgue and Baudelaire on his own-from Arthur Symon's book *The Symbolist Movement in Literature*. Jules Laforgue's poetry, in particular, resonated with Eliot, as Laforgue's own tendency was (like Eliot's) romantic in tendency but cynical in manner (Smith 5). Laforgue uniquely "shaded his poems with a subtle pathos, brightened them with a tinsel novelty all the more bizarre because of their slang. Splitting or 'doubling' himself into "languid sufferer and satiric commentator" was a technique used by Eliot, according to Grover Smith, to "veil personal agonies with impersonal ironies" (5). Laforgue and Mallarme before him had "broken with conventions of French poetry and established *vers libre* as the most appropriate form for modern poetry" (Chinitz 30).

In "Reflections on *vers libre*," (1917) Eliot explored the age-old polemic between what is old and what is new in art. He is rather hard on Free Verse in this essay, blaming

the revolutionary new poetic form as the source of unwonted rejoicing on the part of his contemporaries for being complete freedom from poetic structure. Eliot warned of the trajectory of thinking that a complete freedom from structure in poetry (as early proponents of *vers libre* seemed to think it suggested) meant automatic advances in innovation and modern poetry of caliber. In addressing the continual polemic between traditional art and innovative art and how it relates to the introduction of *vers libre*, he asserted that “*Vers libre* has not even the excuse of a polemic; it is a battle-cry of freedom and there is no freedom in art” (Eliot, *SP* 32). In his opinion, a genuine verse-form would have a positive definition. And he could “define it only in negatives: (1) absence of pattern, (2) absence of rhyme, (3) absence of metre... There is no escape from metre there is only mastery” (32). Finally Eliot concludes the essay with the pronouncement, “we can only conclude that the division between Conservative Verse and *vers libre* does not exist, for there is only good verse, bad verse, and chaos” (Eliot, *SP* 36).

Eliot interestingly cautioned against wholesale use of the new *vers libre* while skillfully employing its techniques in his early poetry like “La Figlia.” In this apparent dichotomy he demonstrates his greatness, in fitting his poetry into the continuum of poetic tradition while creating a fresh poetic voice for a new century. I suggest that while Eliot saw the danger in a complete removal of structure from poetry, he also recognized the necessity of interpolating the new form with the traditions of Parnassus. By writing and publishing his own poetry in what we would term *vers libre*, he is recognizing the unalterable change in the weather vane of poetry toward a strikingly new and necessarily

less conventional pattern in contemporary poetry. “The poet must be very conscious of the main current,” are Eliot’s words in “Tradition and the Individual Talent,” for what only conforms to what has gone before cannot be an artist’s goal, for “what is not new is not art” (Eliot, *SP* 39). Eliot’s statements regarding *vers libre* may give the appearance of contradiction but I think that he demonstrates in his verse the mastery of the old infused with the new in poetics. Eliot drew upon classical forms, rhyme schemes, images, and meters while writing fresh poetry with a new twist, as informed by the innovative philosophical concepts, cosmopolitan themes, and opened up diction, learned from Laforgue and other innovators.

Several of Eliot’s poems written before “La Figlia che Piange” share a similar thematic ground, including elements such as tension, guilt, and inner torment from a sense of loss and failure between lovers. Notable among these are the notebook poems: “Embarquement pour Cythere,” “Suite Clownesque,” and especially, “Entretien dans un parc” (Eliot, *IMH* 27, 32-6, 48). Eliot evidently regarded these poems as exercise poems; he never allowed them published during his lifetime. A conclusion can be drawn from this that although Eliot drew upon Laforgue’s wit, urbanity, and avant-garde irreverence and poetic structure (as seen in the entire Prufrock volume) his decision to leave the notebook poems perennially unpublished reveals Eliot’s view of Laforgue as an “elder poet brother” (Eliot, *TCC* 126) he needed to outgrow and eclipse. Dante and Virgil were the poets Eliot looked to as his true predecessors. They were, in his mind, his proper progenitor oaks of poetic greatness. His careful inclusion of their imagery, *gravitas*, *topoi*, and allusions within his poetry as in “La Figlia che Piange” was an intentional

move to fuse traditional with ground-breaking newness to create the next great voice on the poetic continuum.

The striking contrast in tone between the unpublished earlier poem and the subject of our study is important to note. Eliot's experimentation with Laforgue's language is clearly evident in "Entretien dans un parc" in the first lines surrounded by brackets

[Was it a morning or an afternoon
That has such things to answer for!] (Eliot, *IMH* 48)

The setting is (ostensibly) in a park as per the title, the subject matter a tete-a-tete between lovers. The surprise of interjected urbanity and desolation bring the reader up short as we suddenly find ourselves not in a park but rather: "-Up a blind alley, stopped with broken walls / Papered with posters, chalked with childish scrawls!"(Eliot, *IMH* 48). The slang in lines such as, "But if we could have given ourselves the slip" (Eliot, *IMH* 49) overwhelms any chance for as the overly ironic tone. The speaker's words are somewhat adolescent in tone as he fusses in irritation at a romantic situation that reminds him of soup cooking over a campfire: "Round and round, as in a bubbling pot / That will not cool / Simmering upon the fire, piping hot / Upon the fire of ridicule" (Eliot, *IMH* 48). Within only a few months of writing, "Entretien dans un parc," Eliot would again use these same leitmotifs, that of ridicule and heat in perplexing romantic situations, but with a more successful seriousness ("Portrait of a Lady" and "La Figlia che Piange" respectively). (Eliot, *CPP* 8, 20). He had learned to moderate the Symbolist technique, tempering it with classical motifs and allusions to steady the weight of the poem, as we

see a lighter touch of irony in “La Figlia che Piange” encountered in words like “fling” and “cogitations” (Eliot, *CPP* 20).

As in “La Figlia che Piange,” the speaker in this poem and his amour are at odds with one another. Unlike “La Figlia che Piange,” the diction in Eliot’s earlier and unpublished “Entretien dans un parc” is so strongly overly drawn that it creates a near-caricature of a romantic scene, a result of a heavy-handed over-application of the Symbolists’ ironic palette. The speaker shifts at the end of the poem from his musings on romantic frustration to a plea for divine deliverance. “We are helpless,” he cries in a desperate hope that God will intervene, as he says in the next line, “Some day, if God-” (Eliot, *IMH* 49). We recognize in this a hope realized for characters in traditional literature, (such as the classical Aeneas or the Christian Dante). Eliot’s Laforguian-like speaker reconsiders by the very last line of the poem that this source of deliverance is to be of no use to him as he expresses, “But then, what opening out of dusty souls!” (Eliot, *IMH* 49).

It is striking and informative to recognize the similarities in setting, theme, and underlying internal wrestling paralleled in the two poems. “Entretien dans un parc” states an agony about fate: “I wonder if it is too late or soon / For the resolution that our lives demand” (Eliot, *CPP* 48). The speaker tells us about his frustrations:

And yet while we have not spoken a word / It becomes at last a bit ridiculous /
And irritating. All the scene’s absurd! / She and myself and what has come to us /
And what we feel, or not; / And my exasperation . (Eliot, *IMH* 48)

Eliot grapples here, via his speaker, with the tumultuous cosmic questions regarding fate, will, and perplexing emotional situations. By adopting Laforgue's devil-may-care attitude, he frees his voice to scamper up and down the registers of hitherto forbidden lexical flippancy and thematic irreverence. "Entretien dans un parc" serves then as a warm-up for the more mature, elegiac, stately "La Figlia che Piange" and his later poems which explore parallel perplexities but are crafted with a more masterfully understated emotional power.

Laforgue provided an important modernistic counterpoint, bearing witness in verse to the paradigmatic shift to modern poetry. Laforgue was the first to write in the daring *vers libre*, a poetic form with ostensibly no form, at least, no recognizable form to the traditional ear. His rhythm and meter instead, in the words of Remy de Gourmont, follow an "inner law" according to an "emotive idea" (Rees xxxv). Laforgue's experimentation with irregular meter, unpredictable line lengths, and erratic rhymes, in league with his cosmopolitan settings and slangy off-handed language—was a call to arms in poetry, subsequently proving to revolutionize verse. His "L'Hiver qui vient" is deemed the first "genuine and successful free verse poem of any length in the French language" (Rees 328). "The Onset of Winter," serves as the opening poem in Laforgue's final volume, *Derniers Vers*, published posthumously in 1886-7. In it, he attacks classical and religious traditions in an ironic outpouring of slangy diction in wildly avant-garde free verse:

"Sentimental blockade! Levantine packet-boats!...All Saint's Day, Christmas and New Year, Oh, in the drizzle" (Rees 217) in a poem lamenting our "last Sunday" as

“being ruined, mildewed and drizzled” (Rees 218). “The spider’s webs give way beneath the drops of water, and that’s the end of them” (Rees 218). Juxtaposed with this monumental listing of mildewed traditions—both classical and religious in nature—is the following line: “Tallyho, tallyho, and view halloo! (Rees 218). This line is a good example of Laforgue’s over-the-top flippant ironical humor of a poetic “elder brother” that Eliot would admire, imitate, and then proceed to surpass.

Thematic tropes of wrack and ruin join in a tumble of irreverent sentiment; a thin veneer covers the speaker’s emotional anguish. The unity is psychological- the effect, lingering, as Laforgue unravels his lines revealing the edges of disconnected dreams. Nothing is sacred in Laforgue’s poetic world. He issues gut-honest challenges to the authoritative texts and mores of the past. Hard truths are told. The speaker calls a spade a spade as he sees it. His humor (such as in “Tallyho, tallyho and view halloo!”) is an intentionally unsuccessful attempt to completely mask the flamboyant *flaneur*’s inner despair.

In Laforgue, readers identify a monumental shift away from traditional French values and revered landmarks towards a fragmented modern world of openly meaningless marriages, darkened cathedrals, and empty holy days. “It’s not my sort of thing, despotic Venuses offering on a golden background the Lotus of Evil, and their hair done in Titus fashion! Not my sort of thing,” Laforgue’s speaker declares in “The Life They Make Me Lead,” (Rees 180) with his ironic tone of bravado that masks an all-too palpable poignancy of spirit. Laforgue’s poems are replete with an “I” speaker, a disheartened Ego who says of himself that he is spiritually as well as physically “nothing but a colony of

cells created by fluke” (Rees 180). These words surely cannot have the impact in our latter-day age of settled in-Darwinism and Postmodernist pervasive thought as they must have had to Laforgue’s contemporaries of 1887 or to Eliot’s ears in 1908 when he first encountered them.

Laforgue’s Lord Pierrot as a mask or persona of an apparent moon worshipper, serves to mock Paris’s emblematic Notre Dame in “L’Imitation de Notre Dame la Lune.” This series of poems parallels and inverts Thomas a Kempis’s seminal *Imitation of Christ*, a book Laforgue with which Laforgue was intimately acquainted (Rees xxix). The “moon” and “venus” are metaphors frequently used by Laforgue in his ambivalent and anguished search for authenticity in life and love.

Eliot’s line in “La Figlia...”-“Simple and faithless as a smile and shake of the hand” (Eliot, *CPP* 20) is, in this way, an amalgam. We recognize a rendition of a nearly identical line in Laforgue’s poem “The Life They Make Me Lead” (Rees 194). In this poem, also about fate and romance, Laforgue’s speaker laments, “It hurts me too much that Love is exchanged the way it is these days. / Simple and faithless as a ‘hello,’ / from those who are never straight to those whose Fate comes with arms akimbo” (Rees 194). The similarity is striking while the difference significant between the two poems and two poets. Eliot brings Laforguian irony and modernistic disillusionment about love into “La Figlia che Piange” by using much of Laforgue’s line, but deftly transfuses the line with Dantean shading by interchanging “smile” for “hello” and removing the Laforguian slangy “akimbo” (Rees 194), instead inserting the Virgilian nuanced “some way we both

should understand” (Eliot, *CPP* 20). Eliot’s diction drastically changes the import of this central line.

Eliot’s mood in “La Figlia che Piange” is noticeably more serious throughout. The tone contains touches of irony but they are slight in contrast to Laforgue’s broad strokes of bold-faced irony, as exemplified in the end word “akimbo” (Rees 194). “Smile” evokes Dante’s Beatrice. It also evokes Francesca and Guinevere (*Inf.* V). “Smile” introduces a complexity to the image, as a smile is not the same as saying, “hello.” A smile is not a favor conferred on everyone in every social situation. It is not as ubiquitous and faithless as saying “hello.” It can imply romantic promise, or danger, as opposed to Laforgue’s “simple bonjour.”(Rees 194). Eliot’s line in “La Figlia” demonstrates the melding of techniques of modernity with classical allusions and spiritual thought in what would become an Eliotic poetic signature.

CHAPTER IV
TRADITION AND THE INDIVIDUAL TALENT

Eliot demonstrates his commitment to remove some of the mosaic tiles from Laforgue's unalloyed irony and replace them with concrete metaphorical weightier nuances from past masters. From Dante and Virgil he draws metaphorical force with central tropes: "stair," "smile," "light," "turn," and "weave." From Laforgue he brings a vivid newness into the poem in choosing words like "fling," "cogitation," and "amaze."

Another elemental Laforguian technique demonstrated in "La Figlia che Piange" is that of *dedoublement*. The intensity of the puzzling pronoun shifts still mystify scholars as the speaker moves from a commanding implied "I" in the first stanza, to a third person "he" and "she" in the second, returning to "I" in "I should find" and ending the poem with mixed address—"I wonder how they should have been together!" (Eliot, *CPP* 20).

In Laforgue's work, *dedoublement* affords an intentional "double presence" in which the poet is at once actor and observer. We see this most keenly in his Hamlet portrayal in *Moralites Legendaires* in which Laforgue's Hamlet "mourns, rants, weeps, at the same time as he contemptuously views himself doing so" (Rees xxi). The dialectic between the Real and the Apparent is performed by these structural syntactic and grammatical poetic strokes as a result of Eliot's profound and lasting intellectual

exploration in the correspondence between the external world we live in and the interior world of the soul.

A “double anxiety” results from the dual nature of the speaking voice, as the speaker is split into a dual personality by virtue of Eliot’s subtle shift in pronouns. The revolutionary power of the speaker shifts, displayed even more pointedly in his 1922 masterpiece, *The Waste Land*, is more muted in “La Figlia che Piange,” but nonetheless present and structurally significant in the earlier poem. What we as readers encounter here is “the agonized speculation of a man asking ultimate questions and being unable—or afraid—to answer” (Bush 66). This anxiety deepens as the poem progresses. The understated emotional force of the text expands as the poem moves through the second stanza and into the final stanza, as the speaker continues to struggle unsuccessfully with, and unravels in, his interior state of mind. As in *The Waste Land*, the speaker’s impetus is to determine whether the “silence” or the “heart of life” is meaningless or not (Bush 67). Can a Beatrice even exist for him in the twentieth century? Eliot’s speakers consistently agonize over the perplexing dilemma of a failed union, a dilemma that recurs throughout his *oeuvre*, from “La Figlia che Piange,” to the monumental *The Waste Land*, finally culminating in *Burnt Norton*’s rose-garden. Eliot’s garden settings consistently emblemize a state of solipsism and interior perplexity.

Also important to note, Eliot’s speaker in “La Figlia che Piange” diverges sharply from the more tinny tone in “J. Alfred Prufrock,” striking a mature chord of authenticity and a departure from the diffidence displayed by the “Prufrock” speaker. We have a hard time believing that “Prufrock”’s women, for example, are even real, at least to him.

Nearly phantom-like, they are wisps of women as he has observed them coming and going through drawing rooms and social events in his detached social life. Smith also pointed out the de-humanizing effect in “Prufrock”’s description of bodily members such as feet, hands, eyes, and fingers. “La Figlia”’s woman’s eyes “with a fugitive resentment” in them and “her hair over her arms and her arms full of flowers” give us, I think, the picture of a living breathing woman; these are the arms and hair of a Beatrice figure rather than “Prufrock”’s disturbing dismembered women’s “arms that lay along a table” (Eliot, *CPP* 5).

The woman in “Portrait of a Lady” (Eliot, *CPP* 8) is somewhat more believable, but just barely. Eliot’s insertion of purposely melodramatic images, statements by the lady, and a complete unresponsiveness to her on the part of the speaker, eliminates her from the long list of serious love objects memorialized in poems over the centuries. Eliot’s use of irony in the poem makes of her nearly a caricature: she is certainly not in the elevated company of a poet’s Beatrice, Juliet, Francesca, or Dido. Drawn on a woman known in their Harvard days, Eliot’s friend, Conrad Aiken, described her as a “precieuse ridicule.” In Eliot scholar Grover Smith’s words she is, “at once pitiful and odd; her young man inept and supercilious” (Smith 9).

Eliot poetically demonstrates his acute awareness that social conventions could no longer reliably provide or orchestrate a blueprint for relationships. He set his poems in socially disastrous drawing rooms and gardens, imagery informed by his insights into the important cultural changes happening in the early 1900’s. He recognized the making way of a bygone Victorian era for a newly arrived fragmented twentieth century. The

teacups, porcelain, and “skirts that trail along the floor” (Eliot, *CPP* 6) represent useless social conventions that only heighten the sense of Eliot’s speaker’s isolation in “J. Alfred Prufrock.” “La Figlia”’s flowers carry associations of remembered and continued emotional trauma. Eliot does not include them to represent solace, direction, or resolution for his speaker’s impasse with the woman and accelerated sense of isolation.

Eliot’s strong tenor of solipsism in each of these poems connects them thematically to a current reverberating throughout his corpus. The nineteenth-century drawing room rules have not done their work in this relationship (a simple smile and a noncommittal handshake that leads to a committed relationship in a dance both partners can understand). Relational courtship protocols of the previous century are no longer in play in this new century. The drawing room is a setting for many of Eliot’s early poems; the tension evident in “Prufrock”’s speaker as he attempts to negotiate the world of women with a sense of no-man’s land. “La Figlia che Piange” experimentally employs the garden as setting for Eliot’s equally insecure speaker who also tries to come to grips with his palpable psychological distress using drawing room techniques for romance (a “way we both can understand”) with no hope of success.

Prufrock is unsure of any ability to have meaningful contact with women; he laments that even the mermaids will not sing to him (Eliot, *CPP* 7). Eliot’s “Portrait” speaker is enthralled with the strangeness of the woman he visits but cannot wait to escape her presence, sighing a masculine sigh of relief when he finally can emerge into the safety of the public square and his evening bocks with the gents (Eliot, *CPP* 9). He keeps returning to her presence even though he finds it unnerving and unsettling (Eliot,

CPP 9). Eliot demonstrates a new maturity in his poetry in “La Figlia,” by depicting an authentic (albeit troubled) relationship with a real woman. Eliot’s decision to portray the epic struggle in which free will contradicts irresistible fate as demonstrated by “La Figlia”’s verb choices, diction, and allusions, marks an important paradigm shift for Eliot as a poet.

Eliot introduces his “heart of light” figure, so prominently featured in *The Waste Land* and in *Burnt Norton*, for the first time in “La Figlia che Piange.” Even as she appears, disappears, and returns throughout his *oeuvre*, she appears prominently in the first stanza, is repressed by the speaker in the second stanza, only to forcefully reappear in his mind and memory in the final stanza.

She turned away, but with the autumn weather
Compelled my imagination many days,
Many days and many hours... (Eliot, CPP 20)

As our poem returns to Dantean and Virgilian allusions, depicting the woman who has turned away, but before doing so has infused the unfortunate, conflicted Eliotic speaker with her painfully compelling “hair over her arms and her arms full of flowers”- so I return in this essay to the profound affinity Eliot felt for Dante. In 1950 Eliot said of Dante as compared with Laforgue:

The kind of debt I owe to Dante is the kind which goes on accumulating, the kind which is not the debt of one period or another of one’s life. Of some poets I can say I learned a great deal from them at a particular stage...to teach me the poetic possibilities of my own idiom. [Dante is one of the great masters] like distant ancestors who have been almost deified; whereas the smaller poet, who has directed one’s first steps, is more like an admired elder brother. (Eliot, TCC 126)

Eliot had a sense of poetic descendancy from, and affinity for, Dante that was like Dante's for Virgil. It is no coincidence that Eliot returns to the Virgilian allusions in the last stanza of "La Figlia" for, like Dante who must leave Virgil in *Purgatorio*, Eliot must go beyond Dante into a twentieth century and its unmapped modern terrain of existentialism, disintegration of traditional values, and solipsistic urbanity.

As indicated by the title of his 1919 essay, "Tradition and the Individual Talent," Eliot took a brave stand on behalf of tradition's role in art. Tradition was under attack in 1919, as it so often is from generation to generation, but with the beginning of the twentieth century came an especially intense preponderance of scholars, writers, religious minds, and political activists assailing the gates of traditional ways and thought. The Great War of World War I had recently thoroughly and irrevocably shaken the world; the remaining European monarchies had toppled or were on the verge of going the way of the French royalty; Darwin, Freud, and Nietzsche were among the many influential names forever changing future trends of thought and culture. Emerging thinkers like Henri Bergson and his fellow philosophers were radically challenging traditional Western philosophy. The French Symbolists were among those experimenting with dramatically unconventional poetic prosody. Igor Stravinsky shocked the world with his drastic departure from traditional ballet with his seminal *Le Sacre de Printemps*, performed by the Ballet Russes in Paris in 1913. Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring* changed dance forever. In the world of painting and sculpture, during this decade, we can point to Pablo Picasso as supreme among others who would drastically change the visual arts, continuing the revolution started by the Impressionists at the end of the previous century.

Championing tradition's cause was an odd intellectual drum to beat in 1919. Yet the young Eliot promoted the idea that tradition must not be dismissed or denied but acknowledged and accommodated as the source for invention. In his words from "Tradition and the Individual Talent":

No poet, no artist of any art, has his complete meaning alone. His significance, his appreciation is the appreciation of his relation to the dead poets and artists. You cannot value him alone; you must set him, for contrast and comparison among the dead. (Eliot, *SP* 38)

Eliot also reminds his readers that no matter how innovative an individual artist's creation might be, "he will be aware also that he must inevitably be judged by the standards of the past" (Eliot, *SP* 39) and that the new work of art must be new in order to be authentic art, but that it is judged to be valuable by

its fitting in...that the existing order [of art] is complete before the new work arrives; for order to persist after the supervention of novelty, the whole existing order must be, if ever so slightly, altered; and so the relations, proportions, values of each work of art toward the whole are readjusted; and this is conformity between the old and the new...the past [is] altered by the present as much as the present is directed by the past. (Eliot, *SP* 39)

Eliot's contemporary critics and fellow poets immediately recognized "La Figlia che Piange" as a masterpiece of uniqueness and beauty. We now recognize, as it nears its one-hundredth anniversary, Eliot's declaration within it, that he knew himself to be a poet of promise with a poetic descendancy from his revered Dante and Dante's Virgil. We have the advantage of Eliot's entire *oeuvre* to now see that patterns first displayed in "La Figlia," such as the "heart of light" figure, herald his future caliber and stature as a

poet, thinker, and man of influence. His influence continues to reverberate. Eliot shares a potential for greatness time has tested for Dante and Virgil. As Dante intuitively chose Virgil as poetic guide and subsequently necessarily transcended him to write for a medieval age, so Eliot chose Dante and his Virgil to be his poetic guides and forefathers of genius and, with the help of older poetic “brother” Laforgue, necessarily transcended Dante to become the great poetic modern voice.

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