

**THE UMFRALISATION  
OF  
ALFRED PRUFROCK J**

How could you believe me when I  
said I'd be a lawyer  
when you know I've been a liar  
all my life?

*Mark Thomas\**

- Canto I:**           **The Love Song of Alfred Prufrock J**
- Canto II:**           **New Companions:**  
Including — *A Sonnet on the Immanence of Things*  
*Possessory (by Diogenes)*
- Canto III:**          **On the Sale of Goods:**  
*The cruelty of Christmastide*
- Canto IV:**          **a l'agent timide:**  
*by His/Her Coye Agent*
- Canto V:**           **Epilogue**  
*The umfralisation of Prufrock J*

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CANTO I  
**The Love Song of Alfred Prufrock J<sup>1</sup>**  
*Sed non è vero, è molto ben trovato*<sup>2</sup>

●

Let us go, then, me'n'youse,<sup>3</sup>  
 Now the 'net's a source that would-be writers can peruse — abuse —  
 with no concern for copyright or shame.  
 Let us wade again though forests<sup>4</sup> of despair,  
 of duties legal (?) moral (?) or of care.  
 Post-modern thought informs us, 'It's a game'<sup>5</sup>  
 and [thankfully] relieves us of all blame.

In the court, the lawyers come and go  
 dreaming of *restitutio*

The stately legal fog of London [*House of Lords*]  
 obfuscates,  
 curls the synaptic tendrils like toes in a cold bed,  
 obscures the shadows in a shabby lane:<sup>6</sup>  
 the legal fog  
 which gathers up the gaslight-thought,

punctilious and impartially dispensed to GbmH,  
 to PLC or just for T A Pits.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Few people it seems realise that, following the personal crisis which Mr Prufrock underwent around 1917, he studied law and eventually ascended the Bench — a judge noted to be 'politic, cautious, and meticulous/Full of high sentence, but a bit obtuse', *qv* Eliot, 'The Love Song of J Alfred Prufrock', 1917. This document provides some limited insight into the subsequent legal career and death of Mr Prufrock.

<sup>2</sup> Sixteenth century Italian proverb — attributed to Giardorno Bruno (1585) *cf* 'egli è stato un bel trovato'.

<sup>3</sup> It is a peculiar grammatical failure of the English language that it refuses to accommodate plurality of second persons, unlike the Romance languages generally or the protolanguage, Strine, in which I have observed the clear distinction between 'you' in the singular and 'youse' in the plural. Confirmation of this usage can be seen in J Fenech, *The Philosophical Musings of a Maricksville Pugilist* ('I love youse all', p 123), and the *Revised Australian Hymn Book* (No 176: 'Youse holy angels brite').  
 Arden *cf et in Arcadia ego*.

<sup>5</sup> I had rather thought, in my youth, that *la vie* was a game — rather like polo, but without horses, mallets, goalposts or ball: *qv* — Wittgenstein: 'the language game'.

<sup>6</sup> I had in mind the rather quaint (but shabby) lane that ran between the coffee house in Picadilly and the Numismatists' Building. The latter — not designed by Wren, after all, but by an unknown Scottish draftsman — has since been demolished, and replaced by an all-night laundrette. *Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose*.

The law's perverse. [The law gives me the shits.]

In a counsel's brief there is room  
for decisions, indecisions, which  
appellate courts reverse.

In sacred Uxbridge, holy Bow Street,  
at the turning of this unremarkable century,  
sandstone and marble gave way to stale concrète: yesterday's voice  
to

the shrill perceptions of untutored newness,  
couched in indifference to language.

At the turning of the year,  
the dry roll from then to then  
in a single, unpropitious now,  
a confusion of experience and meaning:  
I should plant my irresolute steps<sup>8</sup>  
between experience and meaning.

In the court, the lawyers come and go  
talking of *tabula in naufragio*

After each case is put —  
the furious debate, the pleading's ardour and the acid interchange —  
the lost, intangible responses fade limply through a closing door,  
the deferent nods —

[*touche, riposte, mon frere, mon learned ami* — a small acerbic curtsey  
'neath the beak's unsympathetic gaze]  
{or is His Lordship peering through an alcoholic haze?}

... after each side is done,  
the Damoclean verdict crawls  
slowly  
out of desp'rate, shirt-sleeved argument,  
slouching through the raw chthonian ooze:  
the plaintiff tells me, *now*, 'It's all a ruse'!

<sup>7</sup> TA Pits is the politically corrected offspring of the archetypal couple — presumably they met and mated waiting for the Clapham omnibus — acronymically, the celebrated man in the street (TC Mits), and the celebrated woman in the street (TC Wits). The parents were named by Lillian and Hugh Lieber, of Long Island University, and as sociological phenomena their biographies appear in *The Education of TC Mits* (1944) and *Mits, Wits and Logic* (1960).

<sup>8</sup> cf Lucretius, *de rerum natura*, Book III: 'In your well-marked footprints now I plant my resolute steps.'

'I dun it so's the missus c'n be free  
of doctor's bills, 'n' mortgages, 'n' me.'

The law's perverse. [Commercial law's far worse.]

HURRY UP, PLEASE. THE JURY'S DONE.

In the hall, the lawyers to and fro'  
assess the case's metric *quid pro quo*.

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*Mais non — ma jeunesse est finie.*

\_\_\_\_\_ — Gerard de Nerval

To Chambers, then, I came,<sup>9</sup> hearing applications  
supplication  
sufferance and prayer  
— *nobis quoque* ... please. M'Lord, now lettest thou ... please!

MAY'T PLEASE THE COURT; PRAY SILENCE — here in this dusty garden of the  
law,

the rose, the henbane, deadly nightshade, nettlefold and hemlock,  
stinkwort, mugwort, belladonna, catchweed,  
algaed pool and toxic bloom  
— rusty *secateurs*.

Strike the gravel, my friend: AGAIN I say — strike it  
AGAIN. 'Order!'

'I claim title, here, unchained,'  
— accessory to this unkempt garden; its rake ... its spade;  
commingled with its weeds, its earth, 'ts inchöate blood:

Commixed.  
Inseparable.  
Confused.'

Blesséd Warden,  
learnéd *Docteur*,  
*ma grande juriste*,

<sup>9</sup> cf Eliot, *The Waste Land*, l 307 footnote thereto: *vid* St Augustine's *Confessions*.

grant *jus spatiandi et manendi*<sup>10</sup> here, in this garden — *gremio legis* —  
all the days of my life.

## X

*mea culpa levis in concreto*<sup>11</sup>

*Entschuldigen Sie bitte* — (bitter) ...

I grow old,

I grow old — the catastrophic legal mermaid's gone and sold my birthright,<sup>12</sup>  
peace of mind:

exported *c.i.f.*?, or *f.o.b.*? — it matters not;  
my chances of regaining it are shot.

[O my affliction: how cheape I'am growne — *un avocaillon*]<sup>13</sup>

For all that,

For all that, I am

For all that, I am a

fortunate old man: a clipped white beard and muddy boweles  
necessitate short sittings<sup>14</sup>

but do not interfere with the hearing of evidence  
or the proper concentration. The *res gestæ* is not beyond me.

I can pronounce

(what was it, I forget)

*do, dico, addico*? — as necessary and apposite.

With thoughts thus riveted,<sup>15</sup> I wander to the just end:

through digests, cases, unreported judgements and the rest — and come  
to some conclusion — all in jest —

by IRAC, lurking in its long-forgotten lair —  
while ill-begotten students comb their law reports and hair.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>10</sup> The right to stray and remain: use of garden in an easement: *Re Davies, Powell v Maddison* [1956] Ch. 131.

<sup>11</sup> L = 'my fault was to wear Levis into the concrete'.

<sup>12</sup> Pursuant to the *Sale of Goods Act*? Given the nature of the goods, could s 17(1) of the Act apply? Or perhaps, by what authority? An act beyond ostensible authority?

<sup>13</sup> *qv* Donne, 'The lamentations of Jeremy, for the most part according to Tremelius', Chap I 144.

<sup>14</sup> *vid* Virgil, *Eclogue I* — the characterisation conflates observations of both Melibæus and Tityrus, with Donne's boweles thrown in for good measure.

<sup>15</sup> Dante, *Purgatorio* Canto V line 10: '*Perché l'animo tuo tanto s'impiglia,*' | *disse 'l maestro, 'che l'andare allenti?|che ti fa ciò che quivi si pispiglia?'*

<sup>16</sup> The terminal underline is abstracted from Blackstone's *Commentaries*, where it is used extensively to terminate certain refined passages of text: eg *Comm* 1, 53 *et seq*: *cf* *Purgatorio*, *MCMCVII*, Wednesday, 6 March.

**Canto II**  
**The Dinner Guests**  
*New Companions*

What is life?

*ENTSCHULDIGEN SIE BITTE.* I would rather dine with traders  
 than with prophets.

Tiresias and Cassandra were tiresome dinner guests, spitting vitriol,  
 hawking unconvincing visions and divisions,  
 their clothing all awry.

Diogenes performed a sonnet  
 decrying materialism — no one cared.

Elijah farted once for each of fourteen lines;  
 — the whore of Delphi belched and scratched.<sup>17</sup>

[Like lawyers, the doomsayers cannot agree.]

**Diogenes' Sonnet:**

*On the immanence of things possessory*

Rights without duty? Shape without form? I'll not  
 Disturb the rich pageant, tapestry, borne from Rome.  
 Found? Acquired? Abandoned? Somehow got  
 From preternatural, elemental foam.  
 The intertextual, co-dependent fabric of possession,  
 Informed by common-law and Latin wit,  
 Demands we search for corpses, animation<sup>18</sup> —  
 And even more before it's ownership.

Nine-tenths of law? 'Tis but a sprat  
 Not reaching up to sweet totality.  
 A mere percentage (partial)? Bugger that —  
 In *ego sum*, the *sum* a sigma be.  
 The quintessential 'I', it seems, cannot  
 O'erwhelm the quatressential 'what I got'.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>17</sup> cf Petronius: *cenae meretrix Babyloni* | *sapor pudendam eradavat eructevitque* — Satyricon: Dinner with Trimalchio.

<sup>18</sup> *corpus possessio et animus possidendi* - Diogenes is an idiot, and not surprisingly, his Latin is poor.

<sup>19</sup> *ὀκῦων* — Diogenes, it must be noted, was rather possessive of his barrel: *qv* Diogenes (*Oxford Classical Dictionary*, London, OUP, 1972 corrected reprint, p 348).

Sparse applause: — politic; and we returned to the main course,  
 the imported red, and much discussion of the forex trends;  
 how Chris had beat the system; how best the law might serve  
     as if the law were nothing  
     but the claws of the corporate animal.<sup>20</sup>

These are my new companions, for whom the spheroid music  
 echoes only in the cashflow and account;  
 for whom (with some exception) Ethic was in vain.

    These are the children of  
     Nozick and Baal.

Here is the mimic of generosity;  
 here, civility's fool.  
 Here, the painted mask of genteel agreement  
 and smiling fraud.

GOOD?           I know not good; though 'profitable' stirs me  
 like hyacinth and lilac  
                   [rape and plunder]  
 like lilac and hyacinth should.

Prophets alone may hear celestial tunes:  
     A faded *entrépreneur* called — stole the spoons.

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<sup>20</sup> *qv* Canto III and Canto V *infra*.

CANTO III  
On the SALE of GOODS

*April is the cruellest month ...*

*The Waste Land*

This is the heart of commerce — trading all the day,  
slipping the cashflow overnight  
to electronic usury.

FITNESSE FOR PURPOSE?  
MARRY, I'LL SHEW YOU! FITNESS?

This is the heart of law. Custom as history, the merchant's tale as fact.  
In the market, the habit of the trader is the law.

The slick talker, the white-shoed spruiker,  
*nouveau riche*,  
sits idly by the pool,  
sips chardonnay and gorges quiche,  
her assets toiling in the cyber-sun  
in paperless circumnavigation of the *nouveau monde*.

*'Dahhling, the forex's good.'*

This is the heart of law. Facilitation and avarice:  
Protection.  
In the market, the word of the trader is the law.

The back-room manipulator — the electronic puppeteer —  
*enfant terrible*

hunches to the screen's raster,  
his thoughts projecting (33.6)<sup>21</sup>  
in bar-code synch and fiscal tricks;

Here we go round      the tele-mall  
                                 the tele-mall  
                                 the tele-mall  
Here we go round      the tele-mall  
                                 at four o'clock in the morning.

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<sup>21</sup> The baud rate of some (now obsolete) modems is 33.6K bits per second.



Not April, Tom, but late December  
[the cricket's no relief, remember]:—<sup>22</sup>  
for all the cruelty of spring,  
it's Christmastide of which we must be wary;  
of all the retailers, all so mercenary —  
consumer dollars perching on the angel's corporate wing.

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<sup>22</sup> *qv* "The Waste Land": I. The Burial of the Dead, l23 — Stop: England 255 for 2 at tea on the second day, Boycott opening and 17 not out. No bloody relief at all.

CANTO IV  
A L'AGENT TIMIDE  
(By His/Her Coye Agent)

**The Argument** That while we may in Truth contract on the bafis of our moft precious Worde and Bond, the Agreement arifing therefrom is worth not the Paper it if yprinted on. Therefore Good Reader heede the Leffon herein containd that ye may not fuffer as I fuffer through the foul Admixture of Busineffe with Pleafure & amicable Accord.

**H**ad we, with more than mere intention, acted so an agency's contracted —

Had we but wrote our notions down  
With some identifying scrawls to crown  
This incorporeal thing, relationship,  
We'd be but subject to a merry quip.  
But since it weren't reduced to writing,  
In court we'll stand, induced to fighting  
Out the points of fact and law, encumbered  
By the fees of barristers — in scores — unnumbered!

A simple thing, the terms on which I could  
Oblige you! On my act, you should  
Be bound as if, in fact, 'twere you  
Who'd signed the papers, put the glue  
Of contract on't.

But folly, woe, alas, alack  
The dogs of law have bitten back  
And upped us, escalatingly  
From minor discord through to World War III.

What was my fault? I did my best  
To see your interests progressed —  
'Twas just a serendipity  
That so much profit fell to me.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>23</sup> As fiduciary, the mere fall of the profit to the agent (in excess of any agreed remuneration for services) is *prima facie* an indication of a breach of interest and duty: *Phipps v Boardman* [1967] 2 AC 46.

What's that you say? ... you never gave me leave  
 To purchase in your name? I do believe  
 You did so! Why, just August last  
 You took receipt of goods that I had cast  
 With indications of your ownership.  
 What diff'rence now? What loss? What plot  
 Should cause you to reject this lot  
 And search for fiscal retribution  
 In the holy name of restitution?

Let us abandon all this gutter law  
 And find our own way from Receiver's maw,  
 Since always at our backs we hear  
 The time-cost lawyers' charge; and fear  
 Of dread insolvency — by honour's breach,  
 for one or both, who once did honour each —  
 Should cause us to consider ADR  
 Whilst yet we can — before it's gone too far.  
 Now, let us, therefore, while we may,  
 Contain our costs. You, shall we say,  
 Abort y'authority's breach action  
 And search for other forms of satisfaction.  
 I, for my part, will make it up to you  
 In fashion fair, as agent's ought to do.  
 I'll make all damage good, I vow,  
 Without the threat of bailiff, court or blow.

Or else — to trial! — That statue (free of lust) is  
 Searching high and low for law and justice,  
 And 'neath its blind oxymoronic gaze  
 We'd struggle through the doldrumatic maze  
 Till you or I (more likely we)  
 Should be reduced to poverty  
 And then, a judge enthroned should try  
 Thy much relied-on full indemnity.

The court's a dark and inauspicious site  
 In which to seek for justice' precious light:  
 An unlitigious way to sort it out  
 Would benefit us both, no doubt.

And yet, I cannot make my fair proposal — short  
 of guns at dawn, I'll see you, sir, in court.

CANTO V  
Epilogue  
*The umfralisation<sup>24</sup> of Prufrock J*

‘That is not it at all,  
That is not what I meant at all.’

*Prufrock*

Now there is silence.  
Not consent, but immaterial silence.<sup>25</sup>  
In the end, there is nothing but silence. By whatever road,  
lane, [secret] path<sup>26</sup> or course we come to judgment,  
finally the silence supervenes.

I can tell you nothing.  
Nothing.  
I do not know  
the purpose of the moon —  
I cannot measure the efficiency of the rainbow.

I have searched the indexes and digests  
of a thousand learned tomes  
and could not find a shadow of the rainbow or the moon.

[KANN EIN SCHATTEN EINEM SCHATTEN ABGEBEN?] <sup>27</sup>

But the customs of traders?  
That is another matter.

In amongst the idle chatter  
I have heard the corporate whispers of evasion, the hushed  
suggestion of haven and monopoly, of  
millions turning on a wink, a nod

<sup>24</sup> The verb ‘to umfralise’ appears in its native Janglish in a set of instructions accompanying after-market caravan-towing mirrors, where the purchaser/installer was adjured to ‘take the long end of the bar and umfralise it’. No amount of contemplation has yet revealed [i] just how you tell which end of a bar is the long end, or [ii] even if you could tell which end was which, what the umfralisation of the long end of a bar involves or accomplishes. In short, it is the perfect postmodern verb.

<sup>25</sup> *contra: Bessala v Stern* (1887) 2 C.P.D. 265 — *qui tacet consentire videtur*.

<sup>26</sup> See *Inferno* Canto X, St 1: ‘*Ora sen va per un secreto calle, tra'l muro de la terra e li martiri, lo mio maestro, e io dopo le spalle.*’

<sup>27</sup> Gr: *Can a shadow cast a shadow?* Whose is the German voice which appears beside Prufrock’s in his last moments? Later: *In this book, we find your acts. Your sins. How say you? Guilty or no?*

— the eternal acquisitive chuckle —  
and I, in my cool deliberation ...  
I have been silent in the face of greed.

I should have stayed with absent Michelangelo.  
The fraudulent discussions, the shallow chat  
about the Virgin's nose struck off in pious anger,  
have little in the way of repercussions.  
This garden is no more pleasant than its predecessors,  
Eden and Gethsemane.  
Its denizens  
— despite the deference and *bonhomie* —  
have chardonnay and murder,  
unkinder kinds of fraud,  
chilled, glistening on their lips.

What could I bring  
to soften the savagery of trade?  
*Homo commercialis* is a vile creature,  
subtler than any beast, with sharper claws.  
Glaucous-eyed  
it nuzzles the hand of judgement, cajoles, implores.

[IN DIESEM BUCH FINDEN WIR DEINE TÄTEN?  
DEINE SÜNDEN.  
WIE SAGST DU? SCHULDIG ODER NE?]

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*Odious and hard is the law  
And painful to little squirrels.*<sup>28</sup>

*Robert Clidro (C 16th)*

At the tattered edge of this black robe,  
now frayed, translucent and a lustrous grey,  
the fingers of supplicants unpick the threads and hem  
stitched  
patiently from common law —  
unweave the coarse stuff or finer silk  
ravelled up by erudition,  
held up in analytic lamplight now to ridicule.

[*Tout passe*]

<sup>28</sup> *Marchan Wood* — 'a poem on behalf of the squirrels who went to London to file and make an affidavit on the bill for the cutting down of Marchan Wood, near Rhuthyn' *qv* Gwyn Williams, *Welsh Poems, Sixth Century to 1600*, Faber, 1973, pp 87ff.

[I remember, *par exemple*,  
 how the woodland plaintiffs —  
 simple of request, in simple justice framed —  
 were sent packing off to upland Wales  
 to watch the forest till the edge of time:  
     the law  
 could bring them no good.]

[*Tout casse*]

As always, I was powerless to intervene<sup>29</sup>  
 in processes beyond the jurisdiction: —  
     the circuit of the moon;  
         the burning of rainbows;  
             the unspeakable algebra of the poor.

[*Tout lasse*]

Give me darkness in armfuls.<sup>30</sup> Give me lilies.

In the unwinding silence now  
 — in the dark —  
 the voices of the dark,  
 the dark incalculable voices  
 quietly thunder my passing in shy unflattering epitaph.

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<sup>29</sup> cf Virgil, *Eclogue* iii.108 — *non nostrum inter vos tantas componere lites*  
<sup>30</sup> *manibus date lila plenis* — Virgil, *Aeniad* vi: 882.