

## CHAPTER - IV

### THE BOREDOM

The basic requirement of literary judgement is, according to Eliot, the dual consciousness of what man is and what he ought to be. But there are few people who are honest or sincere enough to know either. They hardly realize that unless they know what they are, they cannot discern what they ought to be. These two forms of self-consciousness are inter-dependent and must go together. Such an attitude is prevalent throughout Eliot's works. The prime concern in his early poems is to depict what modern men really feel - a sense of intense boredom arising out of the psychological and moral problems. The later poems simply supplement them with visions of man's shortcomings and possible ways of salvation. In this way Eliot's poetry offers an integral vision of man's spiritual decay and regeneration. The poet himself characterizes it as the power to "be able to see beneath both beauty and ugliness; to see the boredom, and the horror and the glory"<sup>1</sup>.

Only Helen Gardner among the critics has the acute consciousness to recognize in the above statement "the summary of development of Mr. Eliot's vision of the world"<sup>2</sup>. She describes the development upto The Waste Land as the movement from boredom

---

1. T.S. Eliot, The Use of Poetry and The Use of Criticism, op. cit., p. 106.

2. The Art of T.S. Eliot, op. cit., p. 79.

to terror, alternating with horror. But she is slightly confused when she remarks that "terror and horror are present from the beginning", and that in Poems (1920) she mainly finds boredom. The element of horror or terror [a term used by Gardner] does not properly enter into the early poems. The extreme type of boredom or disgust that flits across these poems may have been mistaken as an element of horror. The stage of poetic development where ideas of boredom, are swallowed up by horror, is just possible when man's shortcomings are realized and a religious vision is imminent. But the poems that are included in Prufrock and Other Observations (1917), Poems (1920) and The Waste Land (1922) deal with social "ennui" and moral discomfort. There are, of course, some suggestions towards the end of The Waste Land, following which modern men may overcome this miserable condition.

According to Eliot, the loss of interest in life is the immediate cause of boredom that has overcast the mind of most urban people. The city dwellers lead a sophisticated life very much complicated by their moral and psychological problems. A "cheery automatism" has rendered modern men dull and morbid morals, once sanctioned by religion, have now become a matter of simple habits. Hence moral uncertainty dominates society. It is, however, inseparably bound up with the psychological problem. Modern men are mostly anemic, they have not sufficient blood in them to do either good or evil. "So far as we are human", says Eliot, "what we do must be either evil or good; so far as we do evil or good,

we are human; and it is better, in a paradoxical way, to do evil than to do nothing; at least, we exist"<sup>3</sup>. Eliot even considers that a sense of evil also implies a sense of good. Insofar as they are men, they can be either glorified in their capacity for damnation or, in their alternate capacity for salvation. Human beings are left free in their will either to submit themselves to a process of purgation or allow themselves to suffer damnation. Since modern men have reduced themselves into rigid patterns and formulae, since they are almost automatic in their actions, they are indifferent and powerless to deal with diverse situations of life. Even the sexual act - an act of immense social importance, which had always been a source of awe and reverence to primitive people, has now mostly become mechanical and a commonplace thing. Whereas on the one hand a man is haunted by burning passion, he has to forego its honest urge, on the other, to keep up mechanical faces and maintain the exterior polish. Naturally the present generation suffers from repression and inhibition, resulting in perversity. Hence, according to Eliot, the possibility of damnation through action is better than inanition or vacuity, which men very often project in their senses. Eliot has highly commended Baudelaire for he attempted to express the idea of damnation; for he thinks that "the possibility of damnation is so immense a relief in a world of electoral reform, plebiscites, sex reform and dress reform, that damnation itself is an immediate form of salvation - of salvation from the ennui of modern life, because it at last gives

---

3. T.S. Eliot, Selected Essays, op. cit., p. 429.

some significance to living"<sup>4</sup>. Baudelaire perceives that in an age of progressive degradation the most important thing was the moral sense of good and evil — a sense of sin and redemption. Though Fleurs Du Mal just represents the sense of "ennui" and damnation in contemporary society, it also presages a sense of blasphemy. It is this sense of blasphemy that Eliot so much recommends for the artificial society today. Blasphemy, according to Eliot, is just an affirmation of belief in a slightly different way. "Genuine blasphemy", he says, "genuine in spirit and not purely verbal, is the product of partial belief, and is as impossible to the complete atheist as to the perfect Christian. It is in a way of affirming belief"<sup>5</sup>. Prufrock and Other Observations, Poems and The Waste Land develop the idea of boredom, for these poems present the moral problem of man's inadequate idea of good and evil and the most complicated psychological problem of the conflict of oppressive passion and mechanical restraints of the society.

Eliot wrote that "the contemplation of the horror or sordid or disgusting, by an artist, is the necessary and negative aspect of the impulse towards the pursuit of beauty ... The negative is the more importunate"<sup>6</sup>. And he, as an artist, used to record the private habits of mind, the fears and the solitary impulses that led him to a religious position. Although this position became a serious

---

4. Ibid., p. 427.

5. Ibid., p. 421.

6. T.S. Eliot, The Sacred Wood, op. cit., p. 169.

alternative only in about 1914, many of the earlier poems record an underground phase of religious searching, a slow incubation and maturing of motives. "Towards any profound conviction" says Eliot, "one is borne gradually perhaps insensibly over a long period of time, by what Newman called "powerful and concurrent reasons"<sup>7</sup>. He was gradually formulating a choice all through his juvenilia. He then set up the notion of an Absolute or Pure Idea or Soul over against ordinary experience. His strategy, was to make it explicit that women, time and society were the Absolute's enemies. All this finds expression in the following poems.

(1) Poems Written In Early Youth.

During his student life, Eliot wrote a few poems that reflect the religious bent of the poet's mind. In "conversation Galante" he indicts the woman as the "eternal enemy of the Absolute"<sup>8</sup>. The Harvard Advocate poem "Spleen" records the distraction and rejection produced by the "procession ... of Sunday faces", by the social routines of the day and the sordid aspects of an urban alley<sup>9</sup>. The poem comes to an end with a personification of "Life" as a balding and graying man, fastidiously attired and mannered, waiting with self-conscious correctness as a social caller upon the "Absolute". In another confessional poem "The First Debate between Body and Soul", Eliot calls on the Absolute to rescue him

---

7. B.XC Talk (1932)

8. CPP., p. 33.

9. Leonard Unger, T.S. Eliot Moments and Matters (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1966), p. 11.

from demeaning physical senses. And he gets his reward six months later, by his experience of silence in the Boston street.

Although Eliot's 1910 poems are mostly rejections of family and Boston life, this year marked the beginning of a religious ferment and a rebellion against the world's dull conspiracy to tie him to its life customs. He has presented two experiences that bear the religious thought of the poet. In his "Easter : Sensations of April" (April 1910), the smell of some geraniums on a third floor sill calls up a long forgotten scene of a little black girl across the alley with a red geranium in her hands which she has brought from the Church. When he imagines her obedient prayers, he thinks that she was very sure of God. For a long period Eliot's caution and self-distrust have kept him at a stage of religious intimation rather than of surrender and conviction. This latent interest remains balanced against the distractions of his immediate surroundings. Although he could not find the truth he sought, his personal sense of special destiny slowly hardened and ultimately found expression in the "saint" poems. In his first blasphemous poem, he contrasts the enlightened view of the universe, a scientific ordered structure of atoms and geometric laws, with his own comic fantasy of an Absolute with arbitrary powers sitting in the middle of a geometric net as a syphilitic spider does.

In "2nd Debate between the Body and Soul" and "the Little Passion" one finds Eliot's mind edging beyond "silence" and "The First Debate" shows him towards a religious, even Christian point of view. In the fragment, "He said : this crucifixion was

dramatic ..."<sup>10</sup>, the poet thinks for a short time an imitation of Christ. He has then recourse to his own miserable alternatives that are, on the one hand, the Parisian Garret, the seedy life of the would-be artist up six dingy flights of stairs and the office chair, an equally untempting inheritance from his father, a businessman. The poet has taken God briefly as an alternative to an unwanted relationship in Entretien dans Un Parc. He imagines himself walking with a woman in the alley, filled with nervous discomfort in the face of her composure. All of a sudden he imagines how his dusty soul might expand to meet God.

Eliot's poem "I am the Resurre..." states the unknowability of the divine force that determines man's destiny but which cannot be judged in human terms. The implicit question is how one may have a relation to the unknown. The poet's answer in "The Burnt Dancer" and the two "saint" poems are significant for an extraordinary show of wilful physical self-abuse.

In "The Burnt Dancer", the poet who hears children crying behind walls finds a black moth that dances round a yellow ring of flame. Perhaps the moth symbolizes himself hovering on the edge of a bright ring of illumination and its dance brings him to a marvellous fate beyond most human understanding. He sees the moth when it willingly singes its wings on the flame as if he watches the expiation of a martyr. The exceptional patience of the moth's

---

10. Cited by Gordon Lyndall in Eliot's Early Years (London: Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 42.

passion enlivens him, its superhuman endurance of pain. However, he finds the end forbidding for the moth, now broken, loses its passion and wants only the fatal end of its ordeal. It invites comparison with "Saint Narcissus" in the case that there is a savage joy in pain.

Eliot's poem, "The Love Song of Saint Sebastian" presents his debates between body and soul carried beyond possibility of resolution. This poem is a ritualized attack on the flesh for the body of the lover is whipped in the first stanza, while the body of the beloved is strangled in the second stanza. This violent and deliberately abhorrent annihilation of physical beauty is inspired only superficially by a sense of sin, more by an avidity for sensation. The story of saint Sebastian has tenuous resemblance with the real Saint, a Roman martyr in the time of Diocletian who, as it is said, was sentenced to be shot by archers. Though the arrows pierced his flesh, he did not die but was rescued by a woman and nursed in her longings. In Eliot's poem, the martyrdom is not only self-inflicted, but is an exhibitionistic effort to invite a woman's attention. He expects her to see him in a hair shirt and to observe when he flogs himself for an hour till his blood spatters all over the lamp he carries. Only then does she accept him, hideous and dying, as her neophyte. Then one finds a swift Jekyll - Hyde transformed from abject saint to instinctual man when the world dissolves in heat or ice. Being liberated from social constraints, the lover goes to strangle the beautiful lady with sinister fondness. The instinctual side of



Sebastian is significant for the formation of Eliot's later characters like the brute Sweeney, playful with his razor in the brothel, and Harry, Lord Monchensey, with his murderous heart.

"The Death of Saint Narcissus", the last visionary poem, is based on W.E. Hulme's "conversion" that Eliot might have read at Pound's direction just after his arrival in England. In this poem, Narcissus sets out to win immediate experience of divinity by retiring from the world, like the desert fathers of the fourth century. It can be a logical answer to the Prufrockian world of ridiculous conformity. Eliot explained an ascetic's motives more plausibly in 1937 in The Family Reunion, where Harry wants to subdue his sickeningly murderous heart in "the heart of the sun and the icy vigil". Though Harry wills his wife's death and his atonement is real, Narcissus has nothing particular for atonement and his solitariness is self-serving. He wants to win the glow of fervour through abuse of his body. However, whatever glow he achieves quickly subsides, leaving him exhausted and without grace.

Thus Eliot wrote a considerable number of poems in his student life. But he did not make any serious religious commitment during the composition of these poems. There is, according to Eliot's student notes, a warning from Evelyn Underhill that the vision through the senses is imperfect, capricious, often a delusion. One must wait purely spiritual communication. Eliot refused to make more of feverish excitement and abasements than a kind of stunt. The wry, derisive note, entirely absent in "The Burnt Dancer", undercuts the posturing of Saint Narcissus six months

later. The heroes of the spirit in Eliot's works "genuinely experience the attractions of asceticism, and they know dazzling glimpses of divine reality, but these possess no decisive life-transforming power"<sup>11</sup>.

(ii) Prufrock and other Observations (1917)

In these poems the boredom and squalor of life with occasional flashes of horror stir the readers of their complacency. Although these poems cannot stand by themselves as poems of faith, an overwhelming sense of emptiness and frustration that urge the mind to be conscious of the spiritual realities, the only refuge from sham ways of life, is after all a religious ardour. F.O. Matthiessen has rightly described them as marking "the direction in which the poet's experience is leading him, that he has ascended step by step from the pit of his Inferno. They voice the desire of belief, the understanding of its importance to the human spirit, the impalpable movements of the poet's mind from doubt towards acceptance, his gradual comprehension of what, encountering in Baudelaire, he has called the greatest, the most difficult of the Christian virtues, the virtues of humility"<sup>12</sup>.

"The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" is the most typical and best known example of Eliot's early poetry. It has been the leading poem of the volume of Prufrock and other Observations for the simple reason that it brings into focus the underlying

---

11. Ibid., p. 63.

12. F.O. Matthiessen, The Achievement of T.S. Eliot, op. cit., pp. 99-100.

ideas which the poet intends to convey in the other poems composed during this time. The poet has projected through this poem the neurosis of Prufrock's soul which symbolizes the spiritual decay of modern civilization. He, as no other poet has ever done, uncompromisingly presented the picture of a civilization without spiritual values. Although Eliot himself has not committed to these values by this time, his concern for the same has already begun.

The epigraph to this poem, derived from Dante's Inferno (XXVII, 61-66), is very significant and throws a good deal of light on the theme of the poem and the nature of the protagonist as well. This epigraph translated reads thus : "If I thought that my reply would be to some one who would ever return to earth, this flame would remain without further movement but as no one has ever returned alive from this gulf, if what I hear is true I can answer you with no fear of infamy"<sup>13</sup>. The speaker is in hell, and gives his reason for speaking freely without fear of scandal his belief that nobody who listens to him could possibly return from hell to the living world and report his words. Dante and all genuine Catholics believe that hell is simply the state of the self-condemned soul fixed for ever in the evil which it has obstinately chosen. The other point to be kept in mind is the fact that the journey to God is journey into reality; to behold God is to realize that hell is the antithesis of Reality; it is the deliberately willed condition.

---

13. A. Dante, The Divine Comedy. Inferno, XXVII, pp. 61-66.

Prufrock resembles Guido in many respects : he lives in a world of self-willed delusion. The offence of Guido is an intellectual one and so is Prufrock's. He has refused to make use of the powers of his intellect to work out his salvation. Both are afraid to communicate their infernal experience. However, Prufrock differs from Guido in at least one respect. Unlike Guido, he has never contributed to the evil of the world through active participation. One must guess that he is not an active sinner but he fails to act.

The first section of the poem forms an invitation to set out on an adventure into the less frequent quarters of the city:

Let us go, through certain half-deserted streets,  
 The muttering retreats  
 Of restless nights in one-night cheap hotels  
 And sawdust restaurants with oyster-shells<sup>14</sup>.

Just like the identity between Prufrock and the evening, there is also an identity between him and "restless nights in one-night cheap hotels". The image of "one-night cheap hotels" not only stands for urban sordidness but also symbolizes the restlessness and aimlessness of vagrant human Prufrock's own soul. These saloon visitors, are, in fact, mere pleasant seeking creatures that live on the animal plane of existence.

The dilemma of Prufrock reflects the general human predicament of the present world. People are seen as "crowds" not as

---

14. DP., p. 13.

individuals. Leonard Unger observes that this early poem records the distraction and dejection produced by the "procession ... Of Sunday faces", by the social routines of the day and the sordid aspects of an urban alley<sup>15</sup>. In this way the poet brings out the disintegration of human and spiritual values in the modern world. In fact, the first half of this poem shows a critical situation where the temporal is devoid of the eternal:

For I have known them all already, known them all  
Have known the evenings, mornings, afternoons,  
I have measured out my life with coffee spoons<sup>16</sup>.

Prufrock's anguish is presented against the background of meaningless social routine. He appears more concerned with "Coffee spoons than with things that are of vital importance to him. He presents himself as one whose life has been meaningless and trivial. To him nothing has occurred and he is in a state of illusion. The poem reveals the only reality of "the impression of an eternal afternoon tea which Prufrock and his acquaintances are unable to escape ... nor do they wish to"<sup>17</sup>.

Then Prufrock pauses to look out of his windows at the yellow fog which is stealing through the houses like a big cat, nosing at the window panes, licking the corners of the evening, pausing over the standing water in the gutters, receiving a shower of soot on its back from the chimneys, slipping and making a sudden leap

---

15. T.S. Eliot : Moments and Patterns, op. cit., p. 11.

16. CPP., p. 14.

17. Ralf J. Miller, Jr. The Climate of Faith in Modern Literature (New York : The Seabury Press, 1964), pp. 153-54.

and finally curling about the house to sink in slumber in "the sort October night". Here one may notice another image of Prufrock's consciousness, foggy, sneaking and inclined to sleep rather than to be up and doing. He shows his mental state which is one of inertia:

There will be time, there will be time  
To prepare a face to meet the faces that you meet<sup>18</sup>.

As he begins his musings again, he shows an inclination to postpone his "question" to a more proper time, for there is an appropriate time for, every action. The lines in this context are a parody of a well-known passage in the Bible:

To everything there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven: A time to be born and a time to die; a time to plant, a time to pluck up that which is planted; A time to kill, a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up; A time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance; A time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones together; a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing; A time to get, and a time to loose; a time to keep, and a time to cast away; A time to rend, and a time to sew; a time to keep silence and a time to speak; A time to love, and a time to hate; a time of war, and a time of peace<sup>19</sup>.

When one examines Prufrock's lines in contrast to the above passage, one realizes the monotony, triviality and the fruitless mental efforts which make up the sum total of his hollow existence.

---

18. Id., p. 14.

19. Ecclesiastes, 3, 1-9.

One may again consider Prufrock as a self-romanticizing character who is conscious of something vital lacking in his life. Since he is unable to reach out to the demands of beliefs, he earnestly desires death or oblivion : "I should have been a pair of ragged claws/Scuttling across the floors of silent seas"<sup>20</sup>. To realize the existence of evil in oneself is a perverse recognition of the reality of good. As Eliot states in his essay, "Baudelaire", "so far as we are human, what we do must be either evil or good; so far as we do evil or good, we are human; and it is better, in a paradoxical way, to do evil than to do nothing ; at least, we exist"<sup>21</sup>. Prufrock seems to have pursued neither evil nor good: "Had he done that he would have at least lived; the moral struggle would have been a possibility"<sup>22</sup>. But, as he is in limbo, he is unable to pursue either good or evil owing to the passivity of his will. This kind of existence probably fascinates Eliot, since men have come across it with marked regularity in his poem : spiritual sloth or indifference, the condition of a society from which all evidence of the spiritual has vanished.

The reverie of Prufrock then centres upon the risen Lazarus and the martyred John the Baptist, both of whom represent a new testimony to the power of Christ. He says:

---

20. CPP., p. 15.

21. T. S. Eliot, Selected Essays, op. cit., p. 429.

22. M. M. Bhalla, T. S. Eliot : Congress for Cultural Freedom (Bombay: Manaktalas, 1965), p. 24.

But though I have wept and fasted, and prayed,  
 though I have seen my head (grown slightly bald)  
 brought in upon a platter,  
 I am no prophet - and here's no great matter<sup>23</sup>.

While one draws a comparison with the Biblical figures, Lazarus and John the Baptist, one immediately finds that Prufrock is most timid due to the consciousness of his own inferiority. He confesses his inadequacy and admits that he is, after all, no tragic hero or prophet. His daily life has been summed in a "hundred indecisions, and hundred visions and revisions". And even then he is a prophet in some way for he is exposing through self analysis the spiritual hollowness, the alienation and the anxiety of all who are spiritually dead. Prufrock's love song "will never be uttered outside the inferno of his own mind, and the 'you and I' of his soliloquy are the impulses within him 'to murder and create' or to be or not to be', concluding neither in suicide nor in the release of chosen action, but in the death - in - life of the abdication of the will"<sup>24</sup>. To sing is to achieve a definition and Prufrock's fate is to fall short of definition to bring momentous news only to threshold.

One must be curious to know what Prufrock intends to ask for in his overwhelming question. Prufrock needs to ask not only a

---

23. CPP., p. 15.

24. Elizabeth Drew, T.S. Eliot : The Design of His Poetry,  
op. cit., p. 28.



lover's question but also a spiritual one. Though he wants certainty, permanence and lasting in this world of decay and uncertainty, he is too afraid to go in search of the source, the foundation head where he may drink to his satiety. His infirmity of his will is not only the result of his moral deficiency but also a consequence of his subjectivism. His thoughts are vacillating between the past and the future instead of concentrating on the present.

Finally, Prufrock is awakened from his reverie by human voices and brought back to reality; the consciousness of lover and prophet dies away:

We have lingered in the chamber of the sea  
 By sea-girls wreathed with seaweed red and brown  
 Till human voices wake us, and we drown<sup>25</sup>.

Eliot is concerned with the metaphysical idea of life and death in this poem as well as in some of his major poems. Prufrock is afraid of dying, not realizing that one is born into life through suffering and death. No resurrection is possible without undergoing the pain of suffering; in fact, "to die into the true life one must die away from the saloon"<sup>26</sup>. The irony of his existence is sharpened at the climax of the poem when Prufrock drowns for he is awakened by human voices. In this connection, an eminent critic observes: "Like legendary sailors lulled asleep by mermaids or sirens and

---

25. CPP., p. 17.

26. B. Rajan, The Overwhelming Question T.S. Eliot : The Man and His Works, ed. Allen Tate (London, Chatto & Windus, 1961), p. 369.

then dragged down to parish in the sea, Prufrock has awakened to late"<sup>27</sup>. As submarine existence is not the answer, Prufrock does not undergo true death by drowning. He thinks too much; self-analysis leads to self-deprecation and fear. Charles Berryman has rightly stated : "The poem projects much of Eliot's adolescent dissatisfaction with a contemporary world that would neither allay his shy and painful self-consciousness nor respect his spiritual unrest"<sup>28</sup>.

Eliot's concern for morality in sex relationship is manifest in "Portrait of a Lady". In this poem, the lady is, in fact, the female counterpart of Prufrock — a pitiable soul hankering after the touch of friendship and love which she never gets. The ennui of life has sapped her vitality, the indifferent and callous attitude of her lover has thwarted her dreams.

The poem is essentially the portrait of a youth who faces an emotional crisis, following his somewhat unusual relationship with the lady who has a "buried past". The poet slyly hints at an act the young man has committed much to his distress, and of which he is afraid to make "cowardly amends". One can guess that it is this act which has exposed him to a moral discomfiture. The year-long relationship which slowly unfolds before the readers'

---

27. Grover Smith : T.S. Eliot's Poetry and Plays : A Study in sources and Meaning (1950; rpt. Chicago : The University of Chicago, 1956), p. 20.

28. From Wilderness to Waste Land: The Trial of the Puritan God in the American Imagination (London: Kennikat Press, National University Publications, 1979), p. 162.

eyes, clearly suggests the emotional catastrophe the young man is approaching. Though the lady is conscious of her hold on the young man and significantly tries to remind him of what other people say about their relationship, he simply tries to look at the whole thing sportively and wants to play it out.

However, the realization comes hard upon him. He wants to keep up appearances, but his self-possession is gone. In the presence of the lady he feels:

... Like one who smiles, and turning shall remark  
 Suddenly, his expression in a glass  
 My self-possession gutters, we are really in  
 the dark<sup>29</sup>.

On the eve of his departure from the lady he grows restive on the sad prospect of his emotional defeat:

And I must borrow every changing shape  
 To find expression ... dance, dance  
 Like a dancing bear,  
 Cry like a parrot, chatter like an ape<sup>30</sup>.

But he is afraid to face the reality squarely and in the face. He wants to forget it in the haze of tobacco trance. Such an attempt at self evasion is what Eliot deprecates. He thinks that sex relation is inseparably bound up with the moral problem. People must attach sufficient dignity to the whole thing. It is

---

29. CPP., p. 21.

30. Idem.

the lack of manliness which has aggravated the atmosphere of moral uncertainty. According to Eliot, man must do either evil or good, but he cannot escape from it. This moral sense of good and evil has distinguished man from other animals. The poet is alarmed to see the modern man who tries to forget the inevitable by imposing upon themselves the superficialities of life.

"Preludes" may be considered as one of the most effective of Eliot's poems and makes a significant contribution to his development from "Prufrock" to The Waste Land<sup>31</sup>. It may also serve as an introduction to Eliot's conception of modern life, characterized by a sense of decay and frustration. The routine bound life in the city along with its mechanical absorption in superficial details results in monotony.

One finds that a sense of waste is gradually growing in the minds of the people. These people seem to be much pre-occupied with sordid ideas that may be characterized as a definite mark of devitalization. Life in the metropolis are found to be dull and cheerless. The "burn-out ends of smoky days", the "grimy scraps" and "withered leaves about your feet" symbolize a sense of waste and frustration that is slowly swallowing up society. The different kinds of images, such as showers beating on the broken blinds and chimney pots, the muddy feet pressing to early coffee stands, and in thousand furnished rooms "hands raising dingy shades" are pregnant with the underlying idea of boredom. Modern men, Eliot thinks,

---

31. H.M. Williams, T.S. Eliot - The Waste Land and Other Poems (Calcutta : Firma K. L. Mukhopadhyay, 1965), p. 44.

are very much overcome with the mental fatigue and irritation. The notion of "some infinitely gentle", "infinitely suffering thing" characteristically reflects the poet's idea of the plight of the city dwellers. Here the poet has pointed out the drawbacks of mechanical and lifeless society, whose refinement and culture are purely superficial.

In "Rhapsody on a Windy Night" Eliot shows the moral problems and complications that arise out of the mechanical indulgence in lust and perversions. His aim is to destroy the illusion of gentility and complacency in modern life. A sense of fatal degradation seems to haunt the city dweller in his subconscious mind, where memory in its toils is caught unaware.

The poet thinks that prostitution cannot be separated from the economic distress of women and their soulless and artificial life. He further thinks that absence of moral strength and lack of human understanding have brought degeneration and automatic absorption in corruption. This corruption and animality has been suggested through the picture of a cat:

... which flattens itself in the gutter,  
Slip out its tongue  
And devours a morsel of rancid butter<sup>32</sup>.

The poet has skilfully presented the helpless condition of modern man through the image of the old crab with barnacles"

---

32. CPP., p. 25.

gripping the stick. The artificial smiles and charms of the prostitute has betrayed a sense of pathos. In an atmosphere of filth and corruption the woman has been depicted as a lonely and helpless creature to be pitied rather than to be taken advantage of. A sarcastic note on the deceptive complacency of modern life finds expression in the last few lines of the poem:

Mount.

The bed is open; the tooth-brush hangs on the wall,  
Put your shoes at the door, sleep, prepare for life  
The last twist of the knife<sup>33</sup>.

"Morning at the Window," "The Boston Evening Transcript", "Aunt Helen" and "Cousin Nancy" present different pictures of corruption and meaninglessness of modern life. "Mr. Apollinax", of course, seems to represent the poet's idea of an unconventional man who combines in him the contrary elements of emotion and intellect — animality and culture.

"La Figlia Che Piange" develops the idea of frustration that follows the separation of defeated lovers. The poet here suggests that sexual passion has an overwhelming sway on the modern youth even though he understands the futility of the whole thing. The tragedy of the modern young man is the tragedy of emotional failure.

Thus the poems of Prufrock and Other Observations have successfully explored the subconscious mind of the modern man.

---

33. Ibid., p. 26.

These poems reveal the overgrowing sense of distress and weariness which lie hidden under the garb of false complacency. The poet deals with the sordidness, the stupidity, and the ugliness of modern urban life without surrendering to its values which he treats with the irony of a keenly critical mind. Through these poems, the poet conveys a vivid impression of the presence of the great modern city, which is conceived as a kind of hell, the misery of which is listless and undramatic.

(iii) Poems (1920)

Eliot's Poems (1920) marks a considerable advance upon the poems of Prufrock and Other Observations. His scope has widened, and it embraces the lower strata of the modern civilized society on the one hand, and the whole of the post-war European civilization on the other. The reader finds the satiric vein of the early poems alive till this time, but the acute feeling of the extreme fear of the perversion of human relationships overawes him. Religious institutions have become sterile; priesthood is corrupt; money has assumed the role of a great force in life to reckon with; sincere emotions and feelings have no value, love as the ethics of man-woman-relationship has been displaced by vulgar, naked sensuality, the science of the devilish sex. Man has become a victim of nightmarish isolation and lost the power of intuiting truth. But his intellectual probing does not help him much to make empirical investigation. It is not possible to have any communication on any level among the homo-sapiens. And the poems of this volume comment upon the emotional stalemate and spiritual inanition which has been

caused by man's separation from the basic foundations of his faith.

"The Hippopotamus" deals with an entertaining satire on the Church, ironically called the True Church. Its epigraph is taken from St. Paul's Epistle to Collossians, two groups of Christians in the 1st century A.D., who were "Wavering between Christianity and Judaism. The Epistle is to remind them of their Christian duties, and beliefs"<sup>34</sup>.

The hippopotamus reflects the animal plane of existence of man who is engaged in the mundane activities of life. Man is subject to the shocks of failure and reverses in his life but the Church stands firm on a rock for it comes from St. Peter whom Christ described as a solid rock. The poet ironically says that the common man may fail to gain his material ends in the world, but the Church gets its share of money, without any exertion, from the tithe paid by the rich and the poor as well.

The hippopotamus cannot reach the fruits on the branches, i.e., luxuries beyond humble income, but the Church can easily obtain exotics from all the corners of the earth. The hippopotamus is excited by sexual appetite only in fit so seasons, but the Church celebrates its spiritual union with God every week. The hippopotamus has its season of work and rest well defined, but the Church can sleep and feed at the same time. The line "God works in a

---

34. B. C. Southam, A Student's Guide to the Selected Poems of T.S. Eliot (London: Faber and Faber, 1985), p. 69.



mysterious way" echoes the opening of Cowper's poem "Light Shinning out of Darkness". But in this poem the operations of God have produced only darkness, gross materialism that has quenched the sparks of godliness.

The common man, however, can easily soar up from the earth to the height of the heaven and enter as a blessed soul the company of angels before the throne of God, singing the "praise of God". The blood of the Saviour, Christ, "the Lamb", shall wash the sins of man and he will be admitted to the company of saints to string his harp for music in praise of God's glory. So the sinful soul of man will be washed snow white in the sacrificial blood of the Saviour and enjoy the love of all saintly virgins in heaven, but "the True Church remains below/wrapt in the old miasmal mist".<sup>35</sup>

"Whispers of Immortality reminds one of Wordsworth's "Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood". Here the poet attempts to make it clear that whispers of immortality are audible to persons that are capable of uniting sense and thought and perceiving the presence of death in and behind life. He states that the Metaphysical poets and Jacobean playwrights had a peculiar quality — "the sensuous apprehension of thought:" that enabled them to unite life and death and beyond death to glimpse an immortal state of being. But as senses and thoughts have become separated, man's metaphysical speculations are only rotations round dry abstractions.

---

35. CPP., p. 50.

Obsessed with death, Webster saw the skeleton behind the beautiful body, clothed in flesh and skins. The sexual act itself was equated with death, it was the process of dying. He could see

... the skull beneath the skin;  
 And breastless creatures under ground  
 Leaned backward with a lipless grin<sup>36</sup>.

He however, perceived the birth of a new life out of the dead bodies, the eye balls became daffodil bulbs growing out of the sockets. Like Hamlet in the Churchyard, Webster could rebuild all the lust and luxuries associated with them. Another poet who could blend lust and mysticism was Donne. Sexual experience led to the intimation of the skeleton and the contemplation of skeleton gave him an insight into the mystery of that natural urge of man which sexual union could not gratify, for "the thirst that from the soul doth rise, doth need a drink divine".

But the modern world is much possessed by Griskin a Russian woman of great sexual attraction. Her sensuous charm has no kinship with abstract entities, like essence, quiddity and immortality. Although her lovers hover this fleshly loveliness, they do not cling to it. They are not warmed and animated by its sensuous effluence. The poet has referred to Dante's power of blending the lower and the higher love, the conceptions of woman as the object of lust and also the source of spiritual exaltation and progress.

---

36. Ibid., p. 52.

In a way, it was also the Platonic conception of love, where the effluence of physical beauty warmed up the soul, made it winged and capable of soaring upward. But, as sense and thought are separated today, man's metaphysical meditations are warmed only through his perpetual motions among the dry bones of abstractions. Thus the poem becomes a statement about sex as means of attaining the intellectual knowledge of death — a means only possible, however, to such a lusty age as the Jacobean.

"Mr. Eliot's Sunday Morning Service" is a satire upon the formalism of the Church and the corruption of the rank of the ministers of the Lord. Like "The Hippopotamus", it ridicules the Christian community mercilessly. The Churchmen do not discharge their duties for spiritual purpose and the presbyters have become "sapient sutlers", trading in religion. As the epigraph suggests they are "caterpillars" who abuse their high office by exploiting the laity in the name of religion and filling their own coffers. The poet presents these customers of the Lord in the first stanza "Drift acrosss the windowpanes", on the look-out for their "customers" who may wait for their religious blessings.

There are many theological controversialists that have equally harmed Christianity. St. John says : "In the beginning was the word, and the word was with God, and the word was God"<sup>37</sup>. He further says that "the word was made flesh and dwelt among us" in

---

37. St. John, 1.1.

the form of Jesus Christ<sup>38</sup>. Origen, the most notable among the early Christian theological scholars, greatly fertilized this concept and minimized the importance of Christ. He held the view that "in relation to God this Logos or Son was a copy of the original and as such inferior"<sup>39</sup>.

However, Christ's baptism that has been painted on the wall of the Church, reminds the poet of the greatness of the Saviour. Through the baptismal waters "the unoffending feet" of Christ are shining and above them are the images of God and of the Holy Ghost. But the wall on which this Biblical episode is painted looks desolate for it is cracked and discoloured at many places. It shows how the presbyters neglect the church and busied themselves in planning to extort money from their devotees. These salesman of religion are now in the open avenues where penitent young men are waiting for them, with "piaculative pence"<sup>40</sup> to offer to the presbyters. Now their souls are burning with the fire of divine sense which the Church authority does not care.

The poet then invites the reader's attention to the part of the theological controversialists. Like the bees, they pick up

---

38. Idem.

39. Cited by George Willimson, A Reader's Guide to T.S. Eliot. A Poem by Poem Analysis (London: Thames and Hudson, 1955), p. 93.

40. CPP .. p. 54.

some pollengrains from the stamen of the Bible and mix with them the dirt of the hairy wings of their own imagination. After this they preach these mixed ideas in the minds of the innocent persons of blind faith in them. In this way pure minds get controversial ideas pertaining to the established tenets of religion. The theological controversialists misuse their noble duties of intermediaries between the religious truth and its seekers. The misuse of the authoritative version of religious principles causes the birth of Sweeneys, animal-men who are prone to sensual pleasures, neglecting spiritual values. It finds a symbolical expression in the lines. "Sweeney shifts from ham to ham/Stirring the water in his bath"<sup>41</sup>. It becomes a very fine parody of Christ's baptism and a dramatization of presbyters antics. The great polymaths, the "masters of the subtle schools", of theology, are busy in raising controversial issues in religion. Thus churchmen and theologians ironically become the greatest enemies of religion today.

"Sweeney among the Nightingales" is a poem in which Eliot consciously attempts to create a sense of foreboding — Sweeney is threatened by death. As nobody murders Sweeney in this poem, the scene which is laid in South America, the foreboding is unrelieved save by the final imagery. However, the poem depicts a slice of city life, which is observed as a foil to the mythological background, a remote epoch when culture derived its vitality from ritual and religion, piety and faith. In this poem Eliot has contrasted

---

41. Ibid., p. 55.

the spiritually heroic past with the gross materialism, the decayed and vulgar present, the actual dreary ugliness of contemporary existence. It is a satire upon the sordid, mean, and ignoble contemporary world. The poet has described a modern cafe or dive with all its details, but the seven figures that move on the scene are mere shadow, having no vitality of their own. Sweeney is the most typical character of this sordid world. He is more adapted to his world than Prufrock or Gerontion, which may be one reason why the poet associates him with animals:

Apeneck Sweeney spreads his knees  
 letting his arms hang down to laugh,  
 The zebra stripes along his jaw  
 Swelling to maculate giraffe<sup>42</sup>.

He "is the type of the modern lout, the grotesquely ugly and crassly unspiritual being produced by Western urban civilization"<sup>43</sup>.

In "Sweeney Erect", the erotic significance is even more overt. The epigraph, taken from The Maid's Tragedy, sets the scene like that of Waste Land, the "wilderness cracked and brown" of the "Sunday Morning Service". Aspatia, the speaker in the play, has

---

42. Ibid., p. 56.

43. V. de S. Pinto, Crisis in English Poetry 1880-1940 (London: Arrow Books Ltd., 1963), p. 150.

been deserted by her lover and bids her women to weave her story into a tapestry depicting Ariadne's desertion. Aspatia, Ariadne, the nameless epileptic on the bed, become figures with the deserted ladies in "La Figlia Che Piange" and "Portrait of a Lady", Sweeney a coarsely comic version of the two lovers in these poems. In "Sweeney among the Nightingales" Sweeney has played Agamemnon, but here, "in as much as the deserted woman is an Ariadne, he plays the role of a Theseus another Greek hero whose fate was seemingly unlike any fate appropriate to the farcical and fleshly Sweeney"<sup>44</sup>. Theseus killed the Minotaur with the help of Ariadne, defeated the Amazons and went to hell to rescue Proserpine. He was imprisoned by Pluto, and was rescued at last by Hercules. However, the farcical contrast between Theseus and Sweeney still links them. In this poem, Sweeney has been presented as a potential hero who lives in two worlds, capable of heaven and hell". While the conflict between the relative claims of the ascetic and the sensual life has been to the disadvantages of the ascetic, the balance begins the swing the other way in "Sweeney Erect"<sup>45</sup>.

---

44. David Ward, T.S. Eliot : Between two worlds (London: Thames & Hudson, 1955), p. 37.

45. Idem.

"A Cooking Egg" presents Pipit who plays the role of the deserted woman, the sensitive soul. She, and Honour, Capital and Society - all that is required on earth, are contrasted with the delights of Heaven. Although these are ironically presented, one must be sure of the choice which the lover has made in leaving her. The promise made by Heaven depends upon the choice which Piccarda de Donati has made in one of the most beautiful descriptions of submission to the love of God : "And His will is our peace; it is that sea towards which everything moves, that which it creates and which nature makes"<sup>46</sup>.

Until Piccarda de Donati enters, the ironies cut both ways. Since that time the promise of Heaven is gently parodied and Pipit regrets tenderly. However, in the last few lines of the poem, the rage against the sadness, the corruption and the horror of the world are a complete desertion of the city of earth for the city of God. The lover is approaching a quest which leads him to the rejection of Honour, wealth and Friendship, of will, desire and sensuous delight, of the sensitive self of Pipit, to enquire after the peace of submission to "la sua volontate"<sup>47</sup>.

"Burbank with a Baedeker : Bleistein with a Cigar" begins with a new dimension of the perversion of man woman relationship. Here the threads are woven around four characters — Burbank, Bleistein, Sir Ferdinand Klein and Princess Volupine who enact their drama of failure and success in Venice.

---

46. Paradiso, III, 25-30.

47. David Ward, op. cit., pp. 38-39.



The city of Venice, as evoked in the composite epigraph is a chaotic one of the world, a compound of emotions that ranges from the jealous rage of Othello, "goats and monkeys!" to the sombre words, "nothing endures except the divine, the rest is smoke". Burbank meets Princess Volupine in Venice and falls for the delights offered by the worldly princess. This "falls" is a kind of death:

Defunctive music uncer sea  
 Passed seaward with the passing bell  
 Slowly : the God Hercules  
 Had left him, that had loved him well<sup>48</sup>.

The "fall" that recalls the Christian use, is a loss of god like strength, the strength of a Hercules to harrow the other world and return in triumph with its secrets. The death drowns poor Burbank in the same sea as Prufrock, the corrosive destroying sea of the Phædo. The indirect reference to Antony, that other hero held back from conquest of the world by "voluptas", "Tis the god Hercules, whom Antony lov'd/Now leaves him"<sup>49</sup> prompts the association between the princess and Cleopatra, "Her shuttered barge/  
 Burned on the water all the day"<sup>50</sup>. However, the world continues to revolve in the wheel of change and decay, around the turning axle tree.

But, as Burbank is incapable of extinguishing the fire of the Princess's passions, she preys on another man, Bleistein, a creature of flesh. Perhaps her lust is not satisfied by Bleistein

---

48. CPP., p. 40.

49. William Shakespeare, Antony and Cleopatra, IV, iii, line 16.

50. T.S. Eliot, loc. cit.

for when she happens to meet another man who has made his fortune in fur trade, she extends her voluptuous hand towards him, leaving Bleistein, too.

Like Prufrock and Tiresias, Burbank is observing all this enacted before him. As he is still under the illusion of his dreamy ideals in which his faith is strong, he thinks about the nobility and purity of human emotions and sentiments enshrined in the cultural tradition of Venice symbolized by the winged lion, the emblem of the Venetian Republic. He then meditates on the disappearance of Venetian cultural traditions with the passage of time since the Renaissance and on the need of the Noachian Laws. "The Seven Commandments of the Sons of Noah" includes prohibition of idolatry, murder, blasphemy, incest, theft, the eating of flesh taken from the limb of an animal and the establishment of courts of law. Thus he who is a man of intellect and emotion as well, feels the need of faith in the elemental values of life around him.

"Gerontion", which means "an old man", is a very important poem in the Eliot canon. It sums up the essence of all the poems of the volume : money-orientation of values, spiritual sterility, death of intuition and the birth of empirical search for knowledge, all symptomatic of the post-Renaissance commercial civilization "with religious communion or human sense of community, a nightmare world of isolation and instability, of restless nervous and intellectual activity, emotional stagnation and spiritual drought"<sup>5</sup>

---

51. Elizabeth Drew, op. cit., p. 39.

In the opening lines Gerontion introduces himself as an old man in a dry month, waiting for rain. He reminds the reader of the impotent Fisher King and his arid and barren land in the myth at the back of The Waste Land. "Dry Season" refers to the condition of spiritual barrenness, and the "rain" for which he has been waiting is the grace of God which will purge his mind and restore him to the state of spiritual health, purity and vigour. He confesses that as a representative of a commercial civilization he has not followed the heroic ideals and fought for noble values in the thick of risks to his life and trials of the body. He is devoid of any faith of his own for, as Elizabeth Drew observes, he has never "throughout his life fought for any values he believes in. His inert helpless old age is the result of a passive comfort-seeking indolence"<sup>52</sup>.

The other accompaniments of his environment are equally sordid. The owner of his house is a Jew who symbolizes the commercialization of human relationships in the modern world. His "decayed house" refers to the spiritual decay of western civilization and the "goat", a symbol of potency, has grown sickly and coughs at night, clearly symbolizes the speaker's own sexual decay. Around the house are lying rock, moss, iron and excreta, signifying squalor and rottenness. The female cook, who provides food and physical comfort at least, is herself afflicted with cold and peevishly scrapes the gutter or the dying fire before her.

---

52. Ibid., p. 40.

He is a "dull head among windy spaces". However, he knows what modern people lack. They are devoid of spiritual values which can be had intuitively, not empirically. He explains the condition of modern men with reference to the unbelieving pharisees in the Bible. "Master", the Pharisees said, "we would see a sign from thee" to which Christ replied that "An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after sign"<sup>53</sup>. They could not understand the meaning of the Logos turned into flesh in the form of Christ for the darkness of their ignorance, greed and lust. The spirit of Christ knocks at the door every year in Spring: "In the juvescence of the year/Came Christ the tiger"<sup>54</sup>. But modern people, absorbed in sensual life, do not appreciate him.

Critics have observed that this entire description is a symbol of the Renaissance in Europe which was the youthful splendour of the human mind and imagination. The trend set by the Renaissance paved the way for the eventful loss of faith and the spiritual sterility of the modern society, of which Gerontion is at once the victim and the "Inquisitor". Christianity has become Churchianity and the old ceremony of Eucharist in which bread and wine were taken by the faithful as the body and blood of Christ has been forgotten. This ceremony which was sincerely believed to be a symbol of man's absolute dependence on God, the living fountain of his strength has now become a sort of cocktail party. Modern people, in search of substitute religions, are free to talk of

---

53. St. Matthew, 12 : 38-39.

54. CPP., p. 37.

scandal or of sex in subdued breath. The typical figures clearly indicate this religious show. Mr. Silvero, a symbol of material prosperity, caresses Limoges enamels, without any sense of the human element in art; Hakagawa, similarly bows before the paintings of Titian; Madame de Tornquist practices seances, and finally, Fraulein von Kulp repudiates it, turning away from the door. Gerontion comments that such practices and curiosities are simply vain attempts of human minds to probe into the heart of the mystery without the help of God's grace and true religious faith. According to David Ward, "They are the impossibly isolated elements of experience each caught taking part in separate rituals, but at the same time a common eucharistic ritual, attending upon the alchemy of an incredible miracle"<sup>55</sup>. Thus they are barren and sterile, the futile motions of mental shuttles weaving the wind.

The phrase "After such knowledge what forgiveness?" connects the foregoing and following meditations on the futility of knowledge which is gained faith in God. Such type of knowledge breeds pride, the most deadly of human sins, sure to call down divine retribution. Opposed to this is wisdom born of faith in God, the badge of which is humility, which saves man. Gerontion, however, looks back to the past history and examines the futility of all human efforts to deduce certain principles from a rational point of view. He says that history is a labyrinth with many intricate and confusing cross - currents, issues and problems. History is a woman full of wiles. She gives her knowledge:

---

55. Op. cit., p. 62

... when our attention is distracted  
 And what she gives, gives with such supple confusions  
 That the giving famishes the craving<sup>56</sup>.

Here Eliot means to say that the knowledge acquired from history is very doubtful for it does not help in man's quest for spiritual salvation. It is crooked and inopportune because it deprives him of communion with the world. The enthusiastic lovers of the rationalistic and objective method of history are guilty of rejecting faith and Christianity. Those who still have some faith, have it in memory only "reconsidered passion"; for them the revelation of religion is only an experience at second hand. The rejection of faith and Christianity has given rise to a revenge in the form of a sense of guilt and the origin of all sins. It has been responsible for the mess and confusion that man has become involved into such an extent that no escape is possible.

This reminds Gerontion of Adam's tasting the fruit of knowledge and God's anger upon him and his subsequent fall. He immediately shows his faith in the Blakean prediction that Christ, as a tiger, "Springs in the new year. Us he devours"<sup>57</sup>. He confesses that he has not been able to arrive at any conclusion about spiritual condition and he lies in "a rented house". He tells that he has not made a "show" of his inner vacuity without any purpose and he would like to express his feelings honestly to others. He then continues:

---

56. Ibid., p. 38.

57. Idem.

I that was near your heart was removed therefrom  
 To lose beauty in terror, terror in inquisition<sup>58</sup>.

This confession of Gerontion traces the history of the progressive decline of religious sentiment in Europe. First, men were genuinely attracted to God out of love for beauty. Then this love changed into terror born of the possibility of Divine retribution leading to damnation as found in Marlowe's Dr. Faustus as he was about to die. But in the third stage men became so rational as to argue away this fear and separate themselves from God.

Gerontion says that he has lost his sexual passion as his society has lost the spiritual passion. It is useless to keep passion without a definite object for that passion, sexual craving or religious instinct not attached to a definite object. Such rootless passion is bound to become corrupt and decadent. He has sexually become impotent, a man of decayed body and senses, unfit for actual contact with her. So any healthy communion with God is beyond the capacity of his rotten society.

He, therefore, expresses the uselessness of his analyses of religion and love. He accuses himself of merely seeking a last bit of titillation by indulging in these religious "deliberations". It may be compared to an effort to restore the lost appetite by exciting the taste buds with "pungent sauces". Or, it is like projecting mirrors from different angles on the wilderness of life.

---

58. Idem.

Then,

What will the spider do,  
Suspend its operations, will the weevil  
Delay?<sup>59</sup>

Gerontion here points out that the agents of death and decay, symbolized by the spider and the weevil will not be halted by anything he can say or do. He knows the ultimate end of all, the fate of those who fight against adversity and of those who surrender to inimical forces. He, however, emphasizes the necessity of gathering the broken fibres of courage, strength and hope "to make the most of what remains"<sup>60</sup>.

In the concluding two lines Gerontion addresses modern people as "Tenants of the house" and tells them that these were his thoughts, "thoughts of a dry brain in a dry season" -- an image of drought and sterility. These tenants are, of course, devoid of any spiritual support, and, therefore, leading an insecure existence. The poem fittingly steps forward to the atmosphere of The Waste Land. An eminent modern critic has also stated that the poem "is an important stage in Eliot's development, leading towards The Waste Land, in which he wished to include it"<sup>61</sup>.

---

59. Ibid., pp. 38-39.

60. Philip R. Headings, T.S. Eliot (New Haven, Connecticut : College and University Press Publishers, 1964), p. 49.

61. Stephen Spender, Eliot (London: Fontana : New York: Viking, 1975), p. 63.



## (iv) The Waste Land

The Waste Land, published in 1922, is Eliot's magnum opus. Its title and plan, as the poet states in his notes to this poem, have been suggested by Miss Jessie L. Weston's book on the Grail legend, From Ritual to Romance. It is a long poem of about Four hundred and forty lines in five parts entitled (I) The Burial of the Dead, (II) A Game of Chess, (III) The Fire Sermon, (IV) Death by water and (V) What the Thunder Said.

A large number of critics have commented on the theme of The Waste Land since its publication. Critics like F.R. Leavis, F.O. Matthiessen and Cleanth Brooks are of the opinion that the poem is a highly condensed epic of the modern age. A.G. George says : "It is an epic on man and on human civilization, not any particular civilization, but on the sum total of human achievements since the dawn of history to the modern times"<sup>62</sup>. The poem according to an Indian Critic, presents "the journey of the living dead across the Waste Land which is another name for the contemporary human situation, a journey we all have to undertake"<sup>63</sup>. It largely deals with the spiritual Waste Land of modern society, a Waste Land which the mystics and religious thinkers have ascribed to the isolation of man from God, which means the death of the soul, the collapse of moral and spiritual values and the reduction of the

---

62. T.S. Eliot : His Mind and Art (Bombay : Asia Publishing House, 1962), p. 118.

63. Sisir Kumar Ghosh, "The Waste Land Revisited", Span, July, 1981.

human life to the bare naturalistic and animal plane — "birth, copulation and death". But one finds some glimpses of Light or Message for release from this Waste Land. B.C. Southam has rightly stated ; "The theme of the poem is the salvation of the Waste, not as a certainty but as a possibility ; of emotional, spiritual and intellectual vitality to be regained"<sup>64</sup>. Some eminent critics — Helen Gardner, Geoffrey Bullough, K.R. Srivasa Iyengar and C.D. Narasimhaiah have also expressed this same view. In the words of Iyengar : "In Eliot's The Waste Land there is the rumble of distant thunder and the hint of rain and renewal and redemption at the end, so that one is left with the hope that the parched lands of the Fisher King and the sahara's of the human soul and heart will soon be quickened into new life by the downpour from Above"<sup>65</sup>.

So The Waste Land is a religious poem, even a Christian poem though in 1926 I.A. Richards stated that it was a poetry "severed from all beliefs"<sup>66</sup>. In fact, the poem has in retrospect been considered more Christian than it originally appeared to be. It adumbrates a Christian orthodoxy that becomes clarified in Four Quarters. The treatment of sex and Nature makes it essentially Christian. It is not severed from all beliefs. Here the poet attempts to propose a Christian interpretation of life and prove the need for regeneration. Cleanth Brooks says: "The Christian material is

---

64. Op. cit., p. 81.

65. The Adventure of Criticism (Bombay: Asia Publishing House, 1962), p. 621.

66. Science and Poetry, p. 64.

at the centre, but the poet never deals with it directly. The theme of resurrection is made on the surface in terms of the fertility rites<sup>67</sup>. Even the traditional myth of the Fisher King is given a Christian interpretation. The sacrificed King is Christ, as God incarnate, and the barren land which has to be reclaimed to fertility is the human heart full of selfishness and lust, choked with the tares of sin. Christian material at the basis of this, is that human nature is liable to the temptations of flesh and this weakness leads to suffering and death and the possibility of redemption.

In a review of James Joyce's Ulysses, Eliot wrote:

In using the myth, in manipulating a continuous parallel between contemporaneity and antiquity, Mr. Joyce is pursuing a method which others must pursue after him ... It is simply a way of controlling, of ordering, of giving a shape and a significance to the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history<sup>68</sup>.

This "mythical method" is necessary for the understanding of The Waste Land. C.L. Narasimhaiah observes: "The myth controls the design of the whole poem; indeed, the poem is the re-enactment of the myth in terms of the present, which should answer to his requirement of "action"<sup>69</sup>. Having adopted the technique of

---

67. Modern Poetry and the Tradition, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1966), p. 171.

68. A review of James Joyce's Ulysses, The Dial, Nov. 1923.

69. "The waste Land Vindicated", Span, July, 1981.

compression and telescoping and with a poetic shorthand, the poet links the predicament of modern humanity with that in other ages of human history, turning the contemporary malaise into an eternal problem of man. So the past and the present merge together and antiquity is brought into the embrace of contemporaneity so that the poem of about four hundred and forty lines acquires a dimension of an epic not only of modern disillusionment, but actually of the crisis and disillusionment in the cultural history of the entire human race.

Eliot has frankly stated that he is indebted to Miss Weston's From Ritual to Romance and Frazer's The Golden Bough.<sup>70</sup> Both the authors have emphasized a common pattern recurrent in the series of old myths and subsequently adopted in the mystery cults and by Christianity itself. This pattern may be described as the theme of death and rebirth, of the loss of life and its subsequent renewal. In the old nature myths winter represents the death of the year and spring the return of life. This rhythm in nature was enacted in the "agon" or the conflict between the old priest and his young successor which ended with the death of the old and the triumph of the new. This took place in "the bloody wood". This process gave rise to fertility rituals which centred round the loss of the land's fertility in the season of drought, betokening death, and its return with rains, the harbinger of the re-birth of the dead land. For example, in Egypt vegetation ritual was

---

70. CPD., p. 76.

performed in many ways. The effigy of the vegetation god was stuck with grains all over its body and then buried underground. But in a few days the grains sprouted and green blades broke into the light of the day. The dead god was reborn. There were also rituals concerning the hanged god, the drowned god and the god whose limbs were detached and scattered at first, but later collected together and assembled like parts of a machine to signify the restoration of the god to life. The pattern appears in Christianity as the Crucifixion and the Resurrection of Christ, the Saviour.

Besides this central motif in these myths, there is a repeated emphasis upon the most intimate connection between sex and religion, the sanctity of sex forming the base, as it were, of the health and vitality of spiritual life and its violation serving as a manifestation of the decay of the religious instinct. On the physical plane, sex was sanctified in marriage, in the lawful and regulated union of man and woman for procreation, so necessary for the preservation and multiplication of the human race. However, the sexual union had to be sublimated in the higher union between the soul of man and his Creator. The Cup and the Lance in the Grail are justly sexual symbols and so are the emblems on the Tarot packs used in Egypt and other countries in the performance of the fertility rituals.

In The Waste Land the "objective correlative" is formed by the mediaeval myth of the Fisher King, which is connected with

the well-known legend. The Grail was, initially, the dish or plate used by Christ in the Last Supper, in which the blood of the Saviour was held up on the eve of his Crucifixion by one of his devotees. It was soon discovered that the vessel had acquired medicinal and miraculous properties and steps were at once taken to build temples for organizing the worship of the holy vessel. But a time came when this holy relic of Christianity disappeared mysteriously and the search for the Grail eventually became an allegory for man's quest for truth or spiritual realization. It was the general faith that the lost Grail sometimes appeared in the sky as a floating saucer of great beauty and splendour, but it could be seen only by a Knight of virginal purity. Miss Weston has treated the legend critically and historically, and concluded that the Grail was originally connected with the fertility myth as is witnessed by its sexual symbols. But it suffered a sea change when it was associated with the founder of Christianity.

In this way the legend of the Fisher King becomes a fit analogue for a tale of modern humanity and his waste land a physical counterpart of the spiritual sterility in the contemporary world. For this rain and drought become the primary symbols of spiritual fertility and sterility. In order to give a universal and timeless dimension to the modern waste land the poet has subsumed, under the principal of the Fisher King, three other legends with classical, Biblical and Indian associations. The classical legend of King Oedipus of Thebes, the story of a man who killed his father and married his own mother, enters the poem through Tiresias the blind

prophet who revealed the sin of Oedipus. The story of Oedipus also is a story of sin (death) and atonement, bringing about spiritual regeneration and re-birth. Incidentally the poem glances at the Biblical waste land, a land without water, a desert scattered with bones, awaiting the life-giving breath of God. Lastly, there is an explicit reference to the spiritual waste land in Ancient India. "Ganga was sunken low" and Prajapati, speaking to the suppliants, man, demon and God, in thunder prescribed Datta (to give), Dayadhavam (to sympathize) and Dameyata (to control) as the threefold path of deliverance from the present impasse. Thus the poet has interwined many mythical aspects to form a complex traditional background to explain the nature and measure the depth of the spiritual waste land" which is contemporary history".

The introduction of Tiresias in the poem is significant for the universality of the problems raised in the poem has been possible for him. His comprehensive vision transcends the barriers of time and place. Eliot says:

Tiresias, although a mere spectator and not indeed a 'character', is yet the most important personage in the poem, uniting all the rest. Just as the one-eyed merchant, seller of currants, melts into the Phoenician sailor, and the latter is not wholly distinct from Ferdinand Prince of Naples, so all the women are one woman, and the two sexes meet in Tiresias. What Tiresias sees, in fact, is the substance of the poem<sup>71</sup>.

---

71. Ibid., p. 78.

Though he is unable to act or react for his old age, impotence and blindness, his physical blindness is compensated by his power of prophecy. In Sophocles's Oedipus The King the Chorus says : "... what the Lord Tiresias sees, is most often/what the Lord Appollo sees"<sup>72</sup>. He is considered as "... the godly prophet in whom alone of mankind truth is native"<sup>73</sup>. He does not have eyes but in his mind he has clear picture of the plague with which Thebes is afflicted. The addressing words of Tiresias to Oedipus sound a note of warning to all the waste-landers of all ages:

You have your eyes but see not where  
You are in sin, nor where you live, nor whom you  
live with<sup>74</sup>.

All other figures in The Waste Land are actively engaged in aimless wandering and lustful gratification of the senses, but he is only a passive spectator. For modern people he works as a lens of photo camera through whom the ignobility of the life of the waste landers is perceived. He is symbolically the "historical sense" of the poet, looking back to the ancient Egypt, Upanishadic India and modern Europe. Thus he is searching for religious ground to bring a meaning in modern life.

Now, before entering the poem to find out the religious ideas, it is worthwhile to say a few words on the epigraph of this

---

72. David Greene and Richmond Lattimore eds. Greek Tragedies, Vol. I (Chicago : The University of Chicago Press, 1960, thirteenth Impression, 1970), p. 121.

73. Ibid., p. 122.

74. Ibid., p. 128.



poem. Its epigraph comes from the Satyricon, a satire by the Roman poet, Petronius, of the 1st century A.D. The poem narrates the story of the Sibyl of Cumae. In Greek mythology, sibyls were women of prophetic power, that of Cumae being the most famous of them. She was the beloved of Apollo who granted her the gift of immortality, but without eternal youth. As a result of it, she grew old and withered with the passing of time and longed for death. Translated into English, the epigraph means : "Once I saw with my own eyes the Sibyl at Cumae hanging in a cage, and when boys said to her, "Sibyl, what do you want?" She answered, "I want to die". This motto of the poem contains the sum and essence of its primary theme, because it reflects, on the surface, the death-wish of modern humanity, its willingness to exist merely on the animal plane, "birth, copulation and death" in total disregard of the spiritual life, but it also points ambivalently to the duty of man to die physically in order to be able to live spiritually, to deprive himself gradually of all worldliness so that he may in time advance from the realm of death to the luminous life of the soul. Thus it is apparent that the poem moves between the physical life, which is the death of the spirit, and physical death (the negation of the senses) which is a necessary stage in the re-birth of the soul, the regeneration of man when he gets above the torture of the desire unfulfilled and the greater torment of the desire fulfilled, "the sad of satiety" of love and life.

## I. The Burial of the Dead

The title of the first section of The Waste Land glances at the burial service for the dead performed in the Christian Church and the burial of the dead fertility gods described by Frazer and others. Death, in both cases, is believed to be followed by re-birth or resurrection. So the first section places the pivotal points of the poem — death, life-in-death and re-birth of the soul.

The section begins with the famous lines:

April is the crullest month, breeding  
Lilacs out of the dead land .....<sup>75</sup>

These lines represent the meditation of Tiresias, the Protagonist, who is reflecting upon the life in the modern waste land. In the month of April, the life giving showers have fertilized the dead womb of the earth and stirred the <sup>inert</sup> roots into activity, so that nature has resumed the lapsed process of birth and growth and the beautiful lilac flowers have begun to appear on the surface. This is the return of life, the mixing of memory and desire, connecting the past with the present and thus restoring the rhythm of life in nature which has been broken by the dead winter. But this process of re-birth out of death is extremely painful and beyond the endurance of the timid and light hearted denizens of the waste land. These people were more comfortable in the winter season, when the

---

75. CPP., p. 61.

snow covering the earth, made them forgetful of past and future. Here it is obvious that "the winter which kept us warm" stands for life on the animal plane, a life in which man is satisfied only with creature comforts, lives only in the present — "take the cash in hand and wave the rest" — and totally forgets the spiritual and moral values, duties and responsibilities. They "dislike to be roused from their death-in-life"<sup>76</sup>.

The contrast between Eliot's cruellest April and Chaucer's "April with sweet showers" in the opening line of "The Prologue" is significant. April was sweet to Chaucer for it filled dead nature with the spirit and energy of a new life and, at the same time, spurred the spiritual impulse of men and women who started on their pilgrimage to the shrine of the martyred saint of Canterbury, bubbling with joy and enthusiasm. But today the advent of April, with its call for the return of new life, is content to lie, fearful of any awakening of new life. This humanity has naturally forgotten the spiritual meaning of spring and winter.

The German princess, Marie, who introduces herself in her mother tongue, "I am not Russian at all; I come from Lithuania; I am a real German", is an appropriate symbol of rootless internationalism, the worst enemy of sound culture and morality. In Eliot's opinion, the real life, spiritual and moral, can be developed only in a well organized community, with its roots deep into the soil:

---

76. Cleanth Brooks, Modern Poetry and the Tradition, op. cit., p. 139.

"There is no life that is not in community/And no community not lived in praise of God"<sup>77</sup>. Since the German princess has no communal and religious ties, she considers summer showers and sunshines in terms solely of her physical comfort and discomfort. She is surprised by summer with a sudden shower of rain and takes shelter to avoid drenching. She has no sense of the spiritual significance of rain and water — the fertilizing, purifying and transforming property of water as reflected in ritual immersion, baptism and drowning etc. Her memory and desire also are physical and mundane - the memory of her childhood with her cousin, the Archduke, who sustained her failing courage while riding a sledge and the desire to go to the South for freely amorous sports and surrender to romance.

Then Tiresias surveys the wide panorama of spiritual chaos, futility and fragmentation. In a tone of bewilderment, he asks if it is possible for anything to take root and grow spiritually in a soil which has become so inhospitable to any thought of spirituality. It is "stony rubbish", a society not only spiritually barren, but utterly disorganized, uprooted and littered with the wrecks of the old ideals and values. The puzzled prophet, "Son of man" gets the answer from a superior voice to the effect that so far as spiritual rebirth and growth in this decaying society is concerned it is difficult even to make any hopeful guess. He can be only certain of

---

77. CPP., p. 152.

A heap of broken images, where the sun beats,  
 And the dead tree gives no shelter the cricket  
   no relief,  
 And the dry stone no sound of water ...<sup>78</sup>

This physical landscape, with stony rocks breaking under the scorching sun, the dead tree denuded of its shady foliage and stony soil in the deadening grip of drought, without even the "sound of water" symbolizes the stark spiritual barrenness without the least trace of the quickening of the soul. The "heap of broken images" lying around are the debris of shattered values, creeds and conventions which once served as the guiding principles of human life and accounted for the integrity of the individual and the solidarity of the community of which he was a living part, "a shady tree" fruitful in himself and beneficial to others. In this connection, the poet refers to the Biblical words:

... When they shall be afraid of that which is high, and fears shall be in the way, and the almond tree shall flourish, and the grasshopper shall be a burden, and desire shall fail ; because man goeth to his long home, and the mourners go about the streets<sup>79</sup>.

The Key-word in this passage is "fear" which throws an interesting light on the following lines where the prophet is invited to come under the shadow of the "red rock" where he will be shown "fear in handful of dust", that is in the soulless humanity which has denied

---

78. T.S. Eliot, loc. cit.

79. Ecclesiastes XII, V

its God. The word "red" combined with "rock" envisions the image of angry God sitting in judgement, as it were, over the sinful humanity in the modern waste land, filling it with panic and fear. The shadow under the "red rock" is fixed and changeless; it is the shade of eternity. This shadow is clearly contrasted with the changing shadow of the mortal individuals, the shadow of mortality which accompanies him throughout his life. This shadow of mortality falls behind him in youth (morning) as life opens out in front, but advances to meet him in front in his old age (evening). Critics like C.D. Narasimhaiah have referred to the idea contained in these Biblical words "And a man shall be as <sup>a</sup>hiding place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest; as rivers of water in a dry place, as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land"<sup>80</sup> and observed "Obsessed with his own shadow [which may be self-centred practice], man has hardly the time for the other, the only shadow which can save him, the Holy Ghost"<sup>81</sup>.

Then follow two "ghosts" of love scenes in contrast, one depicting the intensity of emotion and feeling and an undying faith in love even in the face of death, and the other reflecting total breakdown of emotional communications. Tristan, who was fatally wounded, lay on a bank of flowers, longing for death, and waited for his beloved; and when he had the last glimpse of his beloved, he opened his wound and breathed his last. This kind of happy death is not possible for the modern people. Instead they cling to life

---

80. Isaiah, XXXII, II.

81. The Literary Criterion, Vol. XXV, 1990, No. 1.

even though there is nothing to cherish as a noble dream or ideal visions and naturally they must fear death. Another "shot" exposes the hollowness of man-woman relationship without emotional warmth. A young girl who has had an experience of being love with a man tells him that when they returned from the hyacinth garden a year before, her heart was filled with a terror of her existence, instead of cherishing the sweetness of the moments spent with him. The words of the sailor who told Tristan that in the empty sea there was no sign of the ship carrying Isolde have become the fate of "the hyacith girl" : the desolate empty wide sea is the vast void that is her life. Thus these two contrasted episodes of love have the same effect -- a momentary joy followed by regret, pain and fear.

The readers are then taken to the heart of the modern waste land where spiritual degradation is symbolized by Madame Sosostris and Tarot pack of cards. The Tarot pack of 78 cards was anciently associated with the fertility ritual in Egypt, for the diviners and weather prophets used to forecast the rising and falling of the waters of the Nile, the life stream of that dry land, with the help of this pack. But now the pack has become an instrument in the hands of Madame Sosostris, the fraudulent fortune teller. She, "the wisest woman in Europe" in the ironical sense of the term, foretells the future of the self-seeking waste-landers. But she cannot recognize. "The Hanged Man", the symbol of spiritual regeneration, as the resurrected Christ was not recognized by the travellers journeying to Emmaus<sup>82</sup>. The "Hanged Man" is at once the sacrificial fertility

---

82. St. Luke, XXIV, 13-16.

god of Frazer and Christ Crucified, who is not to be found in the sordidly secular world of Madame Sosostris.

The section then focuses on the "Unreal City" of London which "is cut off from both natural and spiritual sources of life" and "no longer has anything of its old sense of community"<sup>83</sup>. The mantle of "brown fog" deepens its unreality and produces an atmosphere, dim and hazy, like that in Dante's Limbo. In this "unreal city" a slow moving crowd is found passing like a flood over the London Bridge. It is the crowd of clerks and business functionaries who are the slaves of routine and keep themselves confined to the narrow circle of their business-life. They take no risks, make no moral and intellectual excursions, follow straight in the line of their nose and are law-abiding. They are men of an over-prudent, negative way of life or, more precisely, death - in-life and are rightly comparable to the multitude of doomed souls in Hell and Limbo, who made Dante exclaim : "I had not thought death had undone so many". The wretched creatures who are abased and downcast and are repenting their sin in short, swift sighs are those "who were never baptized" and those who were never alive; "who lived without praise or blame and are wanted neither by Hell nor by Heaven". The London crowd is the modern version of these souls, still encased in flesh and blood, but without the least trace of the living man in them. Tiresias is shocked at the spiritless creatures as Dante felt in Inferno where he saw a

---

83. Elizabeth Drew, op. cit., p. 58.



big crowd of poor spirits who, while alive in the mortal world, never knew either good or evil nor cared for anything except themselves. Their business hour begins at nine, but the hand of the Church-clock always pointing to the ninth hour reminds the time of Christ's Passion. So the implication is two-fold: first, the crowd has forgotten the Saviour and his Sacrifice, and secondly, the hour of business is also the hour of the Saviour's agony and death. In the modern age commerce, the worship of Mammon, and business, the worship of dead routine, amount ultimately to the denial of God.

Tiresias then stops Stetson, a person, in the crowd for conversation and inquiry as is done by Dante in the crowded Inferno. Cleanth Brooks has said that "Eliot in having the protagonist address the friend in a London street as one who was with him in the Punic War rather than as one who was with him in the World War is making the point that all the wars are one war; all experience, one experience"<sup>84</sup>. The protagonist reminds Stetson that the latter buried his "corpse", i.e. decaying lustful self with the hope that a new, purer soul would spring, asks him whether he has observed signs of regeneration or not. Tiresias doubts Stetson's spiritual regeneration for he fears that indifference towards the spiritual meaning of life would have destroyed the sprouting seeds of faith. Moreover, he warns Stetson to;

... keep the Dog far hence, that's friend to men,  
Or with his nails he'll dig it up again<sup>85</sup>.

---

84. T.S. Eliot : A Study of His Writings by Several Hands ed. by B. Rajan (London: Dennis Dobson, 1947), pp. 13-14.

85. CPP., p. 63.

According to D.E.S. Maxwell, the Dog symbolizes "spiritual awareness or conscience"<sup>86</sup> which will like to rouse man to a sense of his spiritual failure. But such awakening is disliked by Stetson and other waste landers, for spiritual regeneration requires effort and positive action. The last line of the poem "you ! hypocrite lecteur ! - mon semblable, - mon frere !" is the warning of the protagonist to Stetson. This warning is applicable to all residents of the modern waste land. It is only the hypocrites who will think that they do not belong to the waste land. Modern people are also hypocritical in the sense that they are indifferent to the spiritual values though they talk of moral values. The spiritual rebirth requires a lot of effort and positive action which the modern men are in capable of doing. Thus they are all the ghostly denizens of the nightmarish waste land.

## II. A Game of Chess

The second section, "A game of Chess" depicts the failure of the central situation in fertility myths - namely, the relation between man and woman in love and marriage. Its title symbolically suggests the many sided collapse of this fundamental relationship in the waste land with terrible result apt to flow from the total unawareness of the deeper spiritual meaning of sex. The most obvious

---

86. The Poetry of T.S. Eliot (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1961), p. 39.

association of the Game is with the game of chess in Middleton's play Women Beware Women, where a game of chess is used as a device for distracting the attention of a simple old woman, while her daughter-in-law is being seduced by a lustful Duke<sup>87</sup>.

The poet has presented two contrasted scenes of high life and low life where sexual relationship has collapsed. In both scenes the tragedy of woman comes from the misdirection of value-orientation, not from richness or poverty. To quote Frederick J. Hoffman, because "religious incentive is lacking, belief fails of a divine purpose, love has no real opportunity for issuing either in a meaningful sexual relationship or in life itself. The full terror of this situation is presented in terms of a dramatic analogy of faith and love - given a concrete, social, human meaning"<sup>88</sup>.

The opening lines of this section visualize the drawing-room of "Belladonna, the Lady of the Rocks, The lady of situations" of the first section. The poet here points out the weariness of the lady, caused by her husband's cold and indifferent attitude towards her. She is not destroying anybody but herself bit by bit while waiting for a few moments of love. It is true that she has been reduced to a "lady of situations", to a creature lost in "aimless routine affairs" for her sad tragic life. The entire setting of the richly decorated drawing-room tells her story.

---

87. Op. cit., II, ii.

88. The Twenties : American Writing in the Post war Decade (New York; Books, 1962), p. 336.

In the very opening line, "the chair she sat in" reminds one of Cleopatra in her barge proceeding to meet Antony : "The chair she sat in like burnished throne/burnished on the water"<sup>89</sup>. Antony and Cleopatra were almost immortalized by their love — "eternity was in our lips and eyes" and even death was transfigured by their passion. But in the modern waste land Belladonna and her lover are far from this sort of love. They find pleasure only in the mechanical love-making. Hence her only inmates are the art objects decorating her room, in which the beauty of nature has been captured in lifeless stills. The glass holding up the standards is wrought with "fruited vines", from which golden cupids peeped out. They were glittering with the glare of the chandelier, re-inforcing the effect of light reflected on the table. Heaps of rich jewels glittered there brilliantly and sent their own sparkle up to meet the light. There were then open vials of ivory and glass full of perfume, cosmetics and unguents which diffused their strong scent in the air and over powered the sense "with too much sweet". The current of air passing through the window stirred the scent and pushed it up like a cloud of vapour to feed and flatten the candle flames. The scenes displayed in her room pertain to such mythical tales as comment upon her own tragic plight. The scene on the panelled ceiling reflects the banquet given by Dido in honour of Aeneas, her lover, who betrayed her. Another scene above the mantel reminds the story of the rape of Philomela and her change into the

---

89. CPP., p. 64.

nightingale of "golden voice". The poet's interpretation of this underlines the transforming effect of suffering willingly accepted as a fruitful spiritual discipline. Philomela converted her suffering and shame into the purgatorial fire, her tainted human body died and out of it the nightingale of pure and entrancing song sprang into life. The song filled the spiritual desert in antiquity and its peculiar notes "Jug, Jug" are still heard, proclaiming, as it were, the significance of the old myth. But they are falling upon the dirty ears of the degraded worldlings who take no heed and follow the beaten path of their sordid joys and mean recreations. Other such scenes from the past legend and mythology were also carved upon the wall. But they carry no spiritual significance for the waste landers. They are mere useless relics of the dead past.

When Belladonna's husband comes to her lonely chamber, she tells him that she is feeling nervous debility and requests him to stay with her. Out of perplexity, she cries:

Speak to me. Why do you never speak, speak.

What are you thinking of? What thinking?

What?

I never know what you are thinking. Think<sup>90</sup>.

The silent interlocutor opens his lips only to say:

I think we are in rats' alley

where the dead men lost their bones<sup>91</sup>.

---

90. *Ibid.*, p. 65.

91. *Idem.*

The Bible contains the image of a valley full of dead bones to picture a land of sinful humanity, men with dead souls. But here the valley has narrowed down to the rat's alley, indicating not only the spiritual dead, but also meaningless monotony of a narrow life, devoted to the titillations of jaded nerves. A fine image of death-in-life finds expression in Belladonna's cry:

You know nothing? Do you see nothing? Do you remember  
Nothing?<sup>92</sup>

Again the man remarks:

I remember  
Those are pearls that were his eyes<sup>93</sup>.

But these lines with their emphasis on the transforming power of water and the process of re-birth out of the very heart of death carry no spiritual significance for him; they do not tell the tale of transformation into something higher and nobler through death. Under the pressure from the lady's nervous tongue, "Are you alive or not? Is there nothing in your head?"<sup>94</sup>, he gives out a sudden but constrained ejaculation like a spurt of soda-water from the bottle:

0000 that Shakespearean Rag —  
It's so elegant  
So intelligent<sup>95</sup>.

---

92. T.S. Eliot, loc. cit.

93. Idem.

94. Idem.

95. Idem.

Thus the noble fragment of poetry with its deep spiritual meaning has become only a bit of "rag rhyme" sound without sense in it.

The lady then comes to the heart of their problem:

What shall I do now? what shall I do?

...                    ...                    ...

... what shall we do tomorrow?

what shall we ever do?<sup>96</sup>

This is a deeply moving picture of the empty, aimless life of the rich, who are not led by the whip-hand of necessity to work. Life has become a burden and the desperate woman wishes to fling all conventions or decorum to the four winds and rush out into the street, half-dressed and with her hair down. The monotonous routine is summed up in the following lines:

The hot water at ten.  
 And if it rains, a closed car at four.  
 And we shall play a game of chess,  
 Pressing lidless eyes and waiting for a knock  
 upon the door<sup>97</sup>.

The game of chess is a fit symbol of the dull life of ceaseless but futile celebrations when the eyes are vigilantly fixed upon the mechanical moves and counter-moves and the mind waits for a knock upon the door, that is, for something which may relieve the lifeless monotony. But this weary waiting has no hope. In this connection,

---

96. Idem.

97. Idem.

Cleanth Brooks writes that "the theme of life which is death is stated specifically in the conversation between the man and the woman"<sup>98</sup>.

The reader is led to a pub where the stalemate of married life is presented through a conversation among a set of women representing lower stratum of society. The speaker is a treacherous friend of a poor married woman, Lil by name, talking about her collapsed marriage relationship. Lil has lost her youth prematurely under the strain of child-bearing and the pills she had to take for dissolving the last conception has rendered her "antique" and almost toothless. But her husband, just returned from war service, wants to see her smart and attractive to keep him away from going to other women for the enjoyment of a "a good time". It is a picture of the perversion of the very aim of marriage. Marriage means children and in children the mother is reborn but the young wife dies. The qualities of motherhood are different from those of an attractive young wife and a husband should have the wisdom to realize the fact. In the absence of such a wisdom and self-restraint marriage will be a burden and curse upon the poor woman.

Then there is a knocking at the gate - "Hurry up Please Its Time". But the knock is not heeded for the problem of life defies all attempts at solution within limits of time. The problem is long though time is fleeting. The closing line of the section echoes

---

98. Op. cit., p. 149.



the words of Ophelia a poor, innocent but spineless girl who fell an easy victim to the cruelty of her lover. Despite all apparent contrasts in external conditions, the fate of helpless Lil receives an added significance and poignancy through Ophelia.

### III. The Fire Sermon

The third section of The Waste Land presents the picture of a dreary autumn scene on the Thames side and glances at the contamination of the river water by the commercial and sexual mud of the modern age. It is "a world of automatic lust"<sup>99</sup> where men and women are burning in the fire of passions. But Elizabeth Drew comments that "it is not the fire of lust at all which is illustrated, but merely the complete indifference towards chastity"<sup>100</sup>.

The wanton disregard of the purity of a river which is the life-line of England symbolizes the poisoning of the moral and sexual life of the people at its very response. In Spencer the significant details are the purity of the river's water, the beauty of the banks bedecked with flowers, with young ladies in immaculate attire picking flowers to make garlands against "the marriage day which is not long". But it is quite different now. In summer the river is visited by young girls along with their lovers who leave behind them

---

99. Hugh Kenner, The Invisible Poet : T.S. Eliot (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1966), p. 141.

100. Op. cit., p. 64.

... empty bottles, sandwich papers,  
 silk - handkerchiefs, cardboard boxes, cigarette ends  
 Or other testimony of summer nights<sup>101</sup>.

But, as it is winter, these lovers are not found here. They did not leave their addresses for they thought that they would be in trouble if any of the girls conceived. Such sex relations find expressions in the words of an eminent critic : "Love is not love if it cannot be identified with addresses, with the circumstances of home, the responsibilities of a human continuity; it is only an 'incident', something quickly indulged in and forgotten, a source of boredom"<sup>102</sup>.

The protagonist is filled with grief and despair, after surveying the scene on the Thames side and recalling the process of the contaminations of the river. He glances back to the past history and visualizes two familiar incidents — the captive Jews weeping "by the rivers of Babylon" for their motherland, and Bonnivard in Byron's "Prisoner of Chillon" pining in captivity below the bed of Lake Lemane for light and freedom. Other memories and sensations crowd into his mind as he sits, like a member of the modern community in the Waste Land, fishing in the dull canal behind the gas-house, swept by the cold wind which brings to his ear the noise, the chatter and "the chuckle spread from ear to ear". Since he is the spokesman of humanity, one who has foresuffered all, one whose memories go to the remote past, the scene also reminds him of the

---

101. CPP., p. 67.

102. Frederick J. Hoffman, op. cit., p. 337.

brother of The Fisher King, fishing for the regeneration of his brother and of Ferdinand, mourning the death of his father, the King:

Musing upon the king my brother's wreck  
 And on the king my father's death before him<sup>103</sup>.

Water and fishing were symbols of transformation and regeneration in the past, but now they have lost their spiritual significance. The surroundings of the river are dirty, slimy rats creep by, naked dead bodies float on the river, bones are scattered all over, and are rattled as the rats move about. Such is the spiritual degeneracy in the modern waste land.

Then the "sound of horns and motors" reminds him of the story of a daring mortal, Actaeon, the Greek hunter, chancing to cast his eye upon the naked beauty of bathing Diana, goddess of chastity and at once suffering the penalty for his accidental stupidity which was, his sudden change into a stag, chased and devoured by his own hounds. This old picture of terrible chastity and holy bathing clashes sharply with degraded modern counterparts. Here the sound is the horn of the car which is to bring Mrs. Sweeney, a vulgar lump of the modern industrial society, frankly given to carnal pleasures to Mrs. Porter, modern Diana, short of all vestiges of chastity who along with her daughter washes her feet in soda-water to catch more flies in her lustful web. It is a travesty at once of the bathing of Diana in her sacred pool, and the ritual

---

103. T.S. Eliot, loc. cit.

washing of the body or feet in religious rites, a process preparatory to and symptomatic of the inner purification. This picture of the vulgarization of something which was once holy and spiritual is supported by two more references that follow.

The French quotation, which means "O those children's voices, singing in the choir" presents the quest of Grail from the modern, vulgar point of view. Here the hero, Parsifal, comes within the hearing of the sweet voices of children singing in the Grail temple, but their sound does not bring joy and holy calm to him as it did to his prototype in antiquity. On the contrary, it thrills his homosexual instinct and he is of a mind to debauch the innocents. This is followed by the sound of the nightingale with its characteristic significance to the dirty ears of modern vulgarians, "so rudely forc'd/Teru"<sup>104</sup>. It is not the "inviolable" beauty of the song born out of suffering which the modern ear can find here, but simply and solely the idea of rape which the story seems to convey as an eternal sanction for man's brutality to helpless women and also to young boys. Thus there is complete vulgarization of spiritual values.

Eliot's pre-occupation with the vulgarization of spiritual values is further found in the reference to Mr. Engenides, the Smyrna merchant, the one-eyed merchant of the Tarot Pack. Miss Weston has pointed out that the Syrian merchants were the main carriers of the fertility cult to Europe, that commerce and religion

---

104. Ibid., p. 68.

were like their two eyes and they set up their temple and their counting-house side by side. But now the eye of religion is blasted and they carry only articles of merchandise and the worse freight of homosexuality. Thus Mr. Engenides, the Symrna merchant unshaven, comes to the "unreal city", wrapped in the brown winter fog, with his pockets "full of currants" and the Bill of Lading, "carriage and insurance free" to London. He invites the protagonist in slangy French to lunch at the Cannon Street hotel to be followed by a weekened holiday at the Metropole. What this insidious invitation means is clear from the knowledge that both the hotels were notorious for associations and homosexual debauch, especially during the years following the end of the first world war. Thus he represents a sex-relationship which is essentially sterile.

This picture of sexual perversion is followed by an account of the equally sordid situation -- the mating of the typist girl, with her "young man carbuncular". The female typist is a human machine, tied to the pitiless drudgery of the desk. She has been working all the day like a "human engine", but at the end of the daily routine near the evening she raises her eyes and back, from the machine over which she has been leaning, and thinks with relief of her release and returns to her room. Her dull heart begins to throb with human warmth and she sits waiting for the moment of closure. The typist then reaches home at tea time and the picture of her so-called home serves to underline her loneliness and her poverty. After her tea she sits in a frame of mind which betokens an expected visit from the lover.

Then the "expected guest" comes to her. He is a person of a low status, a house agent's clerk, on whose face the look of "assurance" or sturdy self-confidence is quite unnatural. The young man, however, is shrewd enough to guess that the time is quite favourable for him to have his way with the girl. She has already taken her meal and is feeling bored and tired, and a relaxation will not be abhorrent to her. So he

Endeavours to engage her in caresses  
 which still are unproved, if undesired.  
 Flushed and decided, he assaults at once;  
 Exploring hands encounter no defence  
 His vanity requires no response,  
 And makes a welcome of indifference<sup>105</sup>.

As the thing is done, the "bold" young man at once departs without wasting a word about it with the typist, who receives only a parting, "patronising Kiss" from him.

Tiresias comments that on the strength of his experience as man and woman, among the poor and the low in the city of Thebes he has no difficulty in understanding the psychology of the partners in this chance mating. There is no feeling involved in such sexual encounters among the poor and hard-pressed people. They are dehumanized by the burden of their daily life and for them sex itself is a mechanical and dull experience. So she gets up and begins to walk about in her room; her hand automatically rises to her head for

---

105. Idem.

smoothing the hair and then she puts a record on the gramophone for her usual recreation.

The line "when lovely woman stoops to folly" is an allusion to the pathetic song sung by poor Olivia, the seduced girl of virtue in The Vicar of Wakefield. It presents a contrast between sex, which was bound up with morality, when loss of chastity was worse than death for the female victim, and sex in the modern waste land, amounting merely to mechanical animal coupling. The mechanical nature of this business is emphasized by such words as "automatic hand" and "record on a gramophone". There is no shadow of regret for what the typist has lost.

Like Ferdinand under the spell of the song of Ariel, the protagonist moves along the strand, up Queen Victoria Street, towards the lower reaches of the Thames where the sailors live a communal life in the real sense of the term. The workers in the nearby fish market are relaxing in a cheap hotel, enjoying the pleasant tune of a madoline amid the clatter of their spoons and the clatter of their merry tongues. This communal gathering is close to the old Church, Magnum Martyr, the interior decoration of which is highly praised by Eliot. This is a glimpse of the vanishing communal life which still survives among the poor and unsophisticated people in the lower reaches of the river Thames. However, this area of the poor is also not free from the sexual perversion and sin as is brought out by the songs of the three Thames' daughters, living on the bank of the river.

The poet refers to Wagner's opera Die Gotterdammerung<sup>106</sup>, which suggests a contrast between the Rhine daughters lamenting the theft of the river's gold and anticipating its return and the Thames daughters cursing their lot. While the former regretted the loss of material wealth which could be recovered, the latter are regretting the loss of something irrecoverable. Since the first Thames was bored with her life in Highbury, she sought temporary relief in Richmond and Kew where she surrendered herself to a debauch. The memory of her sexual performance has lacerated her heart so much that she cannot but use vulgar language to describe the scene of her ruin. "By Richmond I raised my knees supine on the floor of a narrow canoe"<sup>107</sup>. The man who seduced the second Thames' daughter at Moorgate seems to be a man of conscience. The girl says that he wept after seducing her and promised "a new start", which she "made no comment". Of course, she had then nothing to preserve by showing her resentment against any move of the man. The third Thames daughter was violated on Margate sands. She compares her life to a dirty hand of which the past and the present are like the broken finger nails. Her past was a cypher and so is her present and the sum total of her life is a zero. Nothing can suggest the squalor and the abject insignificance of a ruined girl's life so powerfully as the apparently trivial and unpoetical image.

---

106. Ibid., p. 78.

107. Ibid., p. 70.



The section comes to an end with a promise of redemption from the sin of the flesh through repentance. Men have committed sins in the past, but they became saints through repentance. St. Augustine is an example. He refers to his youthful temptations : "... to Carthage then I came, /where a Cauldron of unholy loves sang all about mine ears"<sup>108</sup>. Here Buddha's views on human passions are juxtaposed with Augustine's, Buddha visualizes the world as a universal flame in which everything is burning:

All things, O priests, are on fire ;  
 ... The eye, O priests, is on fire ;  
 forms are on fire ; eye consciousness is on  
 fire ; impressions received by the eye are on  
 fire ; and whatever sensation, pleasant, unpleasant,  
 or indifferent, or originates in dependence on  
 impression received by the eye, that is also on  
 fire<sup>109</sup>.

And the fire is lust, hatred, infatuation. Buddha recommended withdrawal from everything in man's nature, that is fire, as a gateway to Nirvana.

The line, "O Lord Thou pluckest me out", is a part of the following sentence : "I entangle my steps with those outward beauties, but Thou pluckest me out, O Lord, Thou pluckest me out"<sup>110</sup>. St. Augustine had been far away from God for many years. But when

---

108. Confessions, III, 1.

109. The Teaching of the Compassionate Buddha, edited with Introduction and Notes by E.A. Burtt (New York : The New American Library, Inc., 1965), pp. 96-97.

he repented for his sins, he felt God had plucked him out of the fire of unholy passions. Eliot has said : "The collocation of these two representatives of eastern and western asceticism, as the culmination of this part of the poem, is not an accident"<sup>111</sup>. The remedy suggested by these two representatives of the wisdom of East and West, is continence or self-control, a spiritual discipline which chastens the senses and tames their craving. According to an eminent critic, the "word 'burning' which concludes this section ... runs the fires of male desire into the thought of a woman destroyed"<sup>112</sup>. Thus the section bears the note of redemption from the sin of flesh through repentance.

#### IV. Death by water.

In this section the focuss of attention shifts from consuming fire to the element of water, which was once an embodiment of spiritual purification and rebirth. There are two associations behind the description of death by drowning. The first association is the song of Ariel to Prince Ferdinand in The Tempest, "Full fathom five thy father lies", which describes the drowned body as "suffering a sea-change into something rich and strange". The second association refers to a ritual in ancient Egypt in which, according to Miss Weston, an effigy of the head of the fertility god was cast into the

---

110. St. Augustine, op. cit., X, 36.

111. CPP., p. 79.

112. Anthony Easthope, "The Waste Land" as a dramatic Monologue" in T.S. Eliot, Critical Assessment, Vol. II ed. by Graham Clarke (London: Christopher Helm, 1990), p. 349.

sea at Alexandria, to signify his death. The head was pursued as it was caught by the current and carried towards Bybles, where it was redeemed from water and worshipped as the god reborn. The ritual is represented in the baptismal ceremony of the Christian Church where the scattering of holy water on the body of an initiate becomes the symbol of his redemption from sin and death.

Thus water is the traditional symbol of purification, and regeneration. But this water, too, has become as destructive as fire in this modern waste land. Instead of creating a new life through the transformation of the old one, it simply swallows up a man, young, handsome and physically strong:

Phlebas the Phoenician, a fortnight dead,  
 Forgot the cry of gulls, and the deep sea swell  
 And the profit and loss<sup>113</sup>.

The drowned Phoenician sailor described here is his own cousin to the one-eyed Smyrna merchant in the third section, a type of vulgar trader thinking only of his profit and loss and the cry of sea-gulls, i.e. sensuous pleasures and recreations. In his life, there was simply a circular movement round profit, loss and pleasures. And when his bones are caught after his death by the current, they simply repeat the same circular process in a direction reverse to the rhythm of his life. Life is a round of birth, growth maturity, age and death, and after death the opposite process starts — age, youth and childhood, and ultimately total oblivion into the whirlpool of water.

---

113. Ibid., p. 71.

The warning to "Gentle or Jew" clearly reminds one of the words of St. Paul, "... We have before proved both Jews and Gentiles, that they are all under Sin"<sup>114</sup>. It brings the idea home to all that the case of this merchant has a lesson for all persons, irrespective of race and religion, who have to steer their ships and watch the wind in course of their voyage on the ocean. It implies that all men are voyagers on the sea of life where they have to pass through the temptations of wealth and of the senses. It also implies that if they suffer themselves to be overcome by these temptations, their life will be only a whirling wheel followed by the vortex of death. This is the wheel of worldly existence which becomes a key symbol in Eliot's later poetry and is contrasted with "the still point":

... not in movement  
 But abstention from movement, while the world moves  
 In appetency, on its metalled ways  
 Of time past and time future<sup>115</sup>.

As a devoted scholar of philosophy, Eliot was acquainted with a basic conception in Indian philosophy that the sense-ridden soul is tied to the cycle of birth, death and re-birth through endless ages till it is disciplined and enlightened by subducing the strong pull of the senses, which paves the way for its final release. Discussing the passage Helen Gardner speaks of "its suggestion of an

---

114. Romans, 3:9

115. CPP., p. 174.

ineffable peace, a passage backward through a dream, to a dreamless sleep in which the stain of living is washed away"<sup>116</sup>.

#### V. What the Thunder Said

The final section of The Waste Land is the most complex and philosophical. Here the element is air, just as in the first and second it is earth, in the third fire, in the fourth water. The title of this section glances at the message, which was proclaimed in the voice of thunder for the deliverance of society from the grip of spiritual sterility. The first part of the section is taken up by three themes. The mythical journey of the knight through the thirsty land of the Fisher King to the Chapel Perilous; the Biblical journey of the wavering disciples of dead Christ to Emmaus that ended in the revelation of the mystery of Resurrection and the aimless journey of the uprooted modern humanity through the regions of the fertility cult in Eastern Europe which is at the verge of total collapse, the once homogeneous society breaking to fragments. According to Raymond Tschumi, the "three themes are but illustrations of one single theme : the falling down of the temporal world and the promise of a revivification through the spirit"<sup>117</sup>.

---

116. The Art of T.S. Eliot, op. cit., p. 95.

117. Thought in Twentieth Century English Poetry (London: Kegan Paul, 1951), p. 140.

In the opening lines, there is an account of Christ's arrest by the crowd headed by his betrayer, Judas : "Judas, then, having received a band of men and officers from the chief priests and pharisees, cometh thither with lanterns and torches and weapons"<sup>118</sup>. "Torchlight red" here conveys the sense of terror and violence. "Frosty silence in the gardens" refers to death-like silence that prevailed in the garden of Gethsemane after Christ had been taken away by the noisy crowd. "Gardens" implies that the story of Christ's death typifies the stories of all the hanged, drowned and buried fertility gods as stated in Frazer's The Golden Bough. Then "agony in stony places" indicates the suffering of Christ in the prison at the hands of the hostile officers and functionaries. Again "shouting and crying" in the following line refers to the noisy demonstration staged by the populace before the prison and the palace of Pilate, the Roman Governor against the proposed release of Christ. And the phrase, "reverberations of thunder" brings the story to its final phase, namely, the hour of his agony and passion which was reflected in the convulsion and distemper of nature at the moment. Thus the account has moved steadily from point to point to the eve of Crucifixion.

but the account suddenly takes a surprising turn with the following:

---

118. St. John, XVIII, 111.

He who was living is now dead  
 We who were living are now dying  
 With a little patience<sup>119</sup>.

It means that the Crucifixion of Christ was really a new life and new birth for him. Christ the man died and Christ, the god, Saviour and fountain head of a new religion, Christianity, was re-born. Christ was not killed by his enemies, but has now been killed by the modern followers of his creed, who have forsaken him not for other gods, but for no god. The death of god, who is the fountain of living strength for man, has resulted in the process of the spiritual death of modern humanity, which, however, is so totally devoid of any spiritual sense that it does not feel even a fraction of that agony which even the son of God experienced in the fatal hour. Thus modern people are dying with a little patience and going the way of death not with a "bang", but with a "whimper".

The second verse paragraph depicts the mythical journey of Perceival and his fellow questers to the Chapel perilous in the Fisher King's drought-ridden dominion prior to the advent of the long-awaited showers to the thirsty land. The hardships of the journey along with the marchers are presented in a special order. The brave band is always conscious of rock and sand without a trace of water to allay its thirst which has parched the throats of men, as if, with fever heat. In the rocks the wide gaps that look like the mouth of old men show the rotten remnants of their teeth, and tawny patches of dry grass with the wind whistling menacingly through

---

119. CPP., p. 72.

the hard and dry stalks. The searchers are fed up with the sterile songs of insects and yearn for the sound of water. Sometimes the voices of ghostly figures, "red sullen faces" strike terror, but more clearly mock at the whole undertaking as a vain pursuit of a mirage. Thus the necessity of water is felt.

This journey is symbolical and points to the unbearable purgatory through which the soul must pass to complete its spiritual quest. The journey is uphill and the Chapel Stands at the peak of the mountain, which is as it should be because Truth always sits on the top of the crag. F.R. Leavis has rightly pointed out that the cry "water, water" and the frantic but futile search which is implicit in the cry clearly acquire a religious significance<sup>120</sup>. The poet has frequently emphasized that the most important requisite for spiritual regeneration is the awareness of one's meaningless existence merely on the animal plane and intense longing for release which is best symbolized by the fierce want for that "water" which alone slake the thirst of the soul. The urgency of this intense longing finds expression in the following lines:

But sound of water over a rock  
 Where the hermit thrush sings in the pine trees  
 Drip drop drip drop drop drop drop  
 But there is no water<sup>121</sup>.

---

120. "T.S. Eliot" in T.S. Eliot: Critical Assessment ed. by Graham Clarke, op. cit., p. 170.

121. CPP., p. 73.



Then the crucial experience in the process of spiritual discipline has been hinted at in the following:

There is not even solitude in the mountains  
 But red sullen faces sneer and snarl  
 From doors of mudcracked houses<sup>122</sup>.

It is found in the life of Buddha and Christ that when the soul begins to rise above the senses and the ordinary desires and attachments to life, it is assailed by a strong temptation.

Now the above journey melts into the Biblical journey to Emmaus with the opening line, "who is the third who walks always beside you?" And this journey also symbolizes the progress of the soul from a state of doubt and uncertainty to one of full faith. When Christ was Crucified, some of his own disciples were doubtful about the resurrection. But one of the two disciples who were journeying to a place known as Emmaus feels the presence of a third figure walking beside his companion, with the body wrapped "in a brown mantle" and head covered with a hood. But as he turns to see if it is really there or what sort of person it may represent, man or woman, it becomes invisible. Although the poet has connected this illusion with an Antarctic expedition, it should be pointed out that the figure of resurrected Christ appears at first as a mocking vision:

Gliding wrapt in a brown mantle, hooded  
 I do not know whether a man or a woman  
 — But who is that on the other side of you?<sup>123</sup>

---

122. Ibid., p. 72.

123. T.S. Eliot, loc. cit.

Christ appears in person before them only in the final stage and sets their wavering at rest.

The poet then introduces the third journey — the march of uprooted humanity in the modern waste land wandering aimlessly amid the wrecks and splitting explosions of the Christian society, especially in Eastern Europe. Here it should be pointed out that the epithet "hooded" applied to the figure of Christ in the previous passage has been used to refer to the uprooted "hordes" or humanity also. This connection is significant when one remembers that Christ always identified himself with the poor, homeless humanity and lamented the fact that while birds and foxes have shelter the son of man has no where to rest his head in. It is really Christ, rambling like an outcast, without shelter and definite goal. It is the picture of spiritual decay of Eastern Europe. This impression is confined by the description of "the city over the mountains" which "cracks, reforms and dissolves in the air", tinged with the twilight of a civilization threatened with total collapse. This city of falling towers stands for all capitals of Europe and centres of faith and fertility in the past. This picture of disintegration is based upon an account of the upheaval caused by the Russian Revolution in the German book Blick ins Chaos by Hermann Hesse:

Already half of Europe, already at least half of Eastern Europe, on the way to Chaos, drives drunkenly in spiritual frenzy along the edge of the abyss, sings drunkenly, as though singing hymns. The offended bourgeois laughs at the songs; the saint and the seer hear them with tears<sup>124</sup>.

---

124. Ibid., p. 80.

The entire tragedy has been symbolized by an insane woman fiddling her subdued music on her own stretched hair - black but symptomatic of decay - as it were a musical instrument. The mad song chimes in with the physical surroundings -- blackened worlds on which "bats with baby faces are crawling downward down". The Church itself has felt the effect of the universal decay and its main function has become topsy-turvy. Its bells are still ringing as a token of the service which used to be performed there. But Christianity has declined into what Ruskin has called "Churchianity". People still go to the Church and sing the conventional hymns, but they are the voices of godless men living in an "empty cistern" and "dry wells". Here one may refer to the Biblical words:

... my people have committed two evils; they have forsaken me (saith the Lord) the fountain of the living waters, and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water<sup>125</sup>.

It implies that modern people have rejected its God, the fountain of its strength and tranquility and have decided to follow the mirage of luxury and sensual pleasures.

The broken Church in the modern waste land now melts into the dilapidated Chapel in the mythical waste land which the Knights have now reached. They have been able to make their truce with the dead, the "sneering voices" have been silenced and the dead bones have lost their power to disturb them. As the night of trials is

---

125. Purgatorio, XXVI, 148.

over, the moon is shining and the grass is now singing in a different tune. Above all, the clarion note of the cock, "Co Co rico" is heard suddenly in the silent atmosphere, chasing the evil spirits and heralding the morn and the advent of rain — showers preceded by flashes of lightning and a welcome gust of damp wind. Thus the re-birth of the dead land and rejuvenation of the maimed King have become almost certain; there is a strong possibility of the rehabilitation of the old chapel and restoration of the suspended religious life. Critics like B.C. Southam<sup>126</sup> have associated the crowing of the cock with the betrayal of Christ by Peter. But this kind of association is baseless for here it is primarily concerned with a point in the progress of the spirit where reconciliation with God is expected rather than his betrayal.

The successful quest is likened with a similar scene of spiritual crisis and the remedy suggested for overcoming it by the hoary wisdom of India. There came a period of spiritual crisis, a spell of draught in the land of the Hindus, when the waters of the holy Ganges had touched the lowest level. As the river Ganges is the blood stream of Hindu culture, the sinking of its water is naturally symptomatic of cultural and spiritual decline. The weather was hot and dry and the forest with drooping shoulders, as if in readiness to sustain the force of the beating rains expected to come soon in view of the mustering of dark clouds over the Himalayas, the home of snow, in the north.

---

126. Op. cit., p. 107.

The poet here refers to an episode<sup>127</sup>, which describes how in a period of doubt and confusion, men, gods and demons approached Prajapati, the creator and sustainer of the Universe, for guidance. In answer to their prayer the divine teacher uttered in thunder only one Sanskrit word thrice — Da, Da, Da which each group interpreted in its own peculiar way. For men it signified Datta - give, for demons, Dayadhvam - sympathize, for gods, Damayat - control. Since man himself is the single centre of all the three properties — human, angelic and demonic, the terms may be taken together to form the three-fold path of deliverance from the darkness and sterility of the spiritual life. The poet then proceeds to explain the meaning of the three categorical imperatives in relation to the predicament of humanity in the modern waste land.

According to the protagonist the meaning of Datta i.e. "to give" in relation to humanity does not mean giving alms to the poor for their relief. It means giving oneself away, a positive commitment to a way of life in moment of great emotional conviction — "blood shaking my heart". In the life of man there come moments when hesitation, prudence and dilatory weighing of pros and cons of the steps contemplated are quite out of place. Man has to surrender to the dictates of his throbbing and clamouring heart and take a plunge into the dark. This is the positive commitment to a way of life dictated by the wisdom of a full-blooded heart which no later prudence can reject. This "giving" to the insistent

---

127. The Brihadaranyaka Upanishad, 5, I.

demand of the great occasions has constituted the real life of humanity; it has been the inspiration behind all revolutions, all adventures of body and mind. However, those who martyr themselves for some noble cause are not often remembered in obituaries, or in epitaphs covered with spider's webs, or in the wills of the rich and the great. Such martyrs are now rare, for they are not honoured in the modern waste land. Such martyrs may not get earthly name and fame, wealth and prosperity, but it is only such dedication that can cause spiritual rebirth. Such dedication is a spiritual satisfaction in itself, and a great achievement.

Dayadhvam, i.e., "to sympathize" is an emotional going out of one's own ego into the mind of somebody else. It also means an emotional bond of union between two persons or between the individual and the group. But the humanity of today has become ego-centric and "modern millions" live alone. The remark of Count Ugolino<sup>128</sup> is an adequate summary of the modern humanity. He tells Dante that he was thrust into the tower and the door was locked and communication with the external world completely was cut off. So in the modern waste land each man is confined to his own ego-cell and is impervious to the impressions outside. The talk of the need of breaking this narrow cell and of the remedies conducive to the wider outlook, shows that modern people are self-centred and ego-centric. Eliot has referred to a remark of Bradley to support this point of view:

---

128. Inferno, XXXIII, 46.

My external sensations are no less private to myself than are my thoughts or my feelings. In either case, my experience falls within my own circle, a circle closed on the outside; and, with all its elements alike, every sphere is opaque to the others which surround it ... In brief, regarded as an existence which appears in a soul, the whole world for each is peculiar and private to that soul<sup>129</sup>.

The self-imprisoned humanity gets out of the walls of its ego only in the silence of the night, under the drowsy numbness which overpowers the conscious ego and makes the passage smooth for the upward swing of the unconscious feelings, the conventional Christian feelings, "ethereal rumours, forgotten by man's waking consciousness. For a moment his callous heart is ready to admit the sentiments of love and sympathy, so that the condition of broken Coriolanus" is revived.

Damayata, i.e., "to control" indicates the necessity of regulating one's life in such a manner that the natural spirit of adventure and buoyancy is not destroyed. For example, in dance, movement and discipline go together. The poet compares this control to the movement of a boat under an expert captain. The boat of life must sail without fear of wind but with the guidance of an expert controlling hand. The heart should also respond willingly to the body in controlling the mechanism within the individual. In other words, there is the need for inner discipline or the voice of conscience to control the feelings and actions of the individual

---

129. CPP., p. 80.

So there can be no rule or uniform mechanism of an individual self-regulation. Each person must discover the means of his own inner discipline so that society may not disintegrate.

The concluding lines of this section really contain the core of the poem, the point of convergence of the scattered meditations of the protagonist. These lines strike a personal note, the protagonist becoming the mouth piece of the poet himself, who is fishing or searching for spiritual fertility turning his back upon the "arid plain" or the spiritually barren society. Since the social structure is breaking down, the sensitive individual will have to take the initiative for the reconstruction of his own spiritual life. For this he selects three fragments from the broken culture of the West for personal reconstruction which correspond to the three key words of the Upanishad, mentioned above, as the triple way of social deliverance. The first refers to the words of Aeneas Daniel who is suffering in purgatory but is glad to think that the flames will purify his soul<sup>130</sup>. This means willing acceptance of suffering for self-reforms. The second fragment is taken from <sup>131</sup> "Pervigilium Veneris", the Eve of Venus, which celebrates the return of spring, a season of new life and freedom when the birds are pouring their songs with "full-throated ease". The poet alone is tongue-tied, but yearns for a like release. The nightingale sings her cruel memories forgotten and the poet longs for the dawn of spring in him, and becoming swallow-like to have a voice. For the

---

130. Purgatorio, XXVI, 148.

131. CPP., p. 80.



poet, the nightingale and swallow symbolize beauty, purity and freedom born of suffering willingly undergone. The second fragment, therefore, emphasizes the hope of the sufferer, which will lead him to beauty and freedom. This suffering-purification - release and joy is the way up of the mystic John of the Cross. The third fragment is taken from a sonnet<sup>132</sup>, where the poet bereft of everything, like the Prince of Aquitaine at the ruined tower, has no stay and is yet hopeful about his life. It means the negative aspect of the spiritual discipline which requires utter destitution of the soul of all attachment for worldly things which is a pre-requisite for the soul's progress towards a new life. The poet intends to re-build the world with these three important remedies.

To some people, the poet's idea of a spiritual reconstruction will sound as the shouting of mad man. Hieronymo found strength in his madness which made him oblivious of his grief. Similarly, this spiritual madness constitute the one resource of the poet to reconstruct his own inner life which combined with "Datta, Dayadhavam, Damayata" - the formula for social reconstruction, will make the benediction of Heaven descend on the suffering humanity like the freshing drops of gentle rain, "Shantih, Shantih, Shantih — the peace which passeth understanding". Commenting on these words, Elizabeth Drew says that feeling peace in the concluding is impossible for,

---

132. Idem.

It is a formal ending only.

The atmosphere is coloured far more strongly by the image of destruction ... and by the sense of attempting to shore up the ruins by repeating words of comfort and strengthening of the spirit which may help him. But they are in foreign tongues, not translated into his own inner experience and so become a part of himself<sup>133</sup>.

But it is not so for one finds the dawn of peace in these lines. She is perhaps mistaken for the poet has suggested three remedies after presenting the atmosphere with "the image of destruction". Moreover, the poet's interpretation comes from the words of Paul to the early Christians. "And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus"<sup>134</sup>. Thus the poem ends with a note of hope. Georges Cattaul has rightly observed that the "poem of despair ends on a note of expectation; this 'season in hell' opens out on to the hope of salvation"<sup>135</sup>.

---

133. Op. cit., p. 71.

134. Philippians, IV, 7.

135. T.S. Eliot, translated by Claire PACE and Jean Stewart, (London: The Merlin Press, 1966), p. 53.