

## CHAPTER - V

### THE HORROR

The Waste Land has been concerned 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 human life to the bare naturalistic and animal plane "birth, copulation and death". The central point which has been discovered to be the heart of this spiritual plague is the collapse of the healthy sexual life, which has always formed the basis of the religious life in a community. Sexual union to be fruitful must be based upon the moral sense, the sense of good and evil. Bereft of this sense, sex amounts to a mere coupling of animals and leads to a lot of perversions and abnormalities.

To get out of this impasse, symbolized here by the game of chess, the three-fold path of deliverance, "Give, sympathize, control", discovered by the wisdom of India in the hoary past, is still valid. But in a society of decay and disintegration of traditional values and social solidarity, the process of reconstruction must be initiated by enlightened individuals.

The poems that follow The Waste Land depict the process of re-birth, not social but personal, and the culmination of this new trend is marked by the Four Quartets, at once the summit of Eliot's Christian and mystical outlook, and of the religious and reflective poetry produced in the modern age of materialism and confusion.

The hint of this new note is implicit in the last verse paragraph of The Waste Land and becomes clearer in "The Hollow Men" where the setting is reminiscent of the former poem, yet the sense of self-realization is strong. Religion has been the nucleus of Eliot's poetry and his poetic pilgrimage starts with a gloomy vision of the rough world and closes with a happy realization. His treatment of religion which is negative is over with The Waste Land and takes a turn and becomes affirmative in the poems beginning from "The Hollow Men". In the light of this new note, "The Hollow Men", Sweeney Agonistes, the Ariel Poems and the Ash-Wednesday are explained in this chapter.

#### (1) The Hollow Men

"The Hollow Men" is a meditation on the subject of human nature in this world, and the relationship of this world to another, the world of death and eternity. It was first published in its present form in 1925. George Williamson suggests that its title is a combination of William Morris' poem "The Hollow Land" and Kipling's "The Broken Men"<sup>1</sup>. It may also be possible that the title was suggested by the following passage:

There are no tricks in plain and simple faith;  
 But Hollow men, like horses hot at land,  
 Make gallant show and promise of their mettle;  
 But when they should endure the bloody spur,  
 They fall their crests, and like deceitful jades,  
 Sink in the trial<sup>2</sup>.

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1. George William, op. cit., 184.

2. W. Shakespeare, Julius Caesar Act. IV, Scene II, 1122-27.

T.S. Eliot has provided two epigraphs to "The Hollow Men". "Mistah Kurtz - he dead" and "A penny for the Old Guy". The first epigraph "Mistah Kurtz - he dead" comes from Conrad's novel The Heart of Darkness. The words are spoken by the servant, Marlow, who reports the death of Mistah Kurtz, the white man, who had tyrannized over the poor natives. Mistah Kurtz is the agent of a trading company in the remote interior of Africa. He takes to drinking, and becomes more savage and blood-thirsty than even the natives themselves. He met death knowingly, with direct eyes; he is one of the "lost violent souls" referred to in line sixteen of the first section of the poem, and in this respect he is different from the hollow men who are incapable of action and decision. In Eliot's philosophy, it is better to do evil than to do nothing at all, it is better to be dead than to be deadened like the hollow men in the poem.

The second epigraph "A Penny for the Old Guy", draws the readers' attention to the notorious "Gun Powder Plot" of the extreme catholics under James I. Their plan was to blow up the parliament and thus to capture power by killing the King and his ministers. The King, however, got wind of the plot, and Guy Fawkes was arrested in the cellars of the House of Lords where he stood guard over tons of gun-powder. Thus he, too, was one of the "lost violent souls" of line sixteen of the poem.

The plot failed, and Guy Fawkes was hanged, drawn and quartered, and his body burnt to ashes. Ever since, every year on

the 5th of November, his effigy stuffed with straw is burned to the accompaniment of fireworks. The money for this popular celebration is collected by boys who go from door to door soliciting money. "A penny for the Old Guy". Guy Fawkes was not a hollow man. He was "a lost, violent soul", but he has affinities with Eliot's hollow men in as much as his effigy stuffed with straw figures in the popular celebration.

The opening lines depict the condition of the effigies which lean together with their straw-filled-heads and produce dry whispers as the wind blows over them. But their condition is miserable because they symbolize the condition of men spiritually empty and desiccated men lying in the valley of bones, in the Bible or, in "the rat's alley/where dead men lost their bones"<sup>4</sup>. Their description as "Shape without form, shade without colour,/paralysed force, gesture without motion"<sup>5</sup>, places them in the category of the negative souls in Dante, who lived in the world without praise or blame and were rejected both by Hell and Heaven. This is Marlow's vision of greyness without form.

These hollow men are in death's "dream Kingdom" and clearly remember the stronger and more positive souls who had the courage to see truth steadily and to affirm it, and had deservedly crossed to "death's other Kingdom", a higher spiritual state leading to final redemption. These positive souls remember them as even incapable of positive evil, the action, to which the living Guy

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4. CPP., p. 65

5. Ibid., p. 83

Pawkes and Kurtz of the Heart or Darkness had committed themselves. Here Eliot's remark deserves mention, "So far 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>6</sup>. These men are simply hollow, tied to a tepid, negative existence.

In Part II the poet introduces the image of the "eyes" that are important in both Dante and the Heart of Darkness. In Dante the "eyes" refer to those of Beatrice which he is afraid to face because of his carnal sin and breach of faith to her. In Heart of Darkness, they refer to the "stare" of Kurtz or the glance of his fiancée, "guileless, profound, confident, and trustful" before which Marlow quails. But in "death's dream kingdom", the world of lower vision to which the Hollow Men are confined the redeeming eyes can appear only in dreams, as Beatrice used to appear to Dante. They, however, can be glimpsed in waking hours only symbolically as "sunlight on a broken column" or a tree swinging in the air and resounding with the rustless of the wind. It is a momentary vision of the light in darkness, which appears to be more remote and impressive than a dim star on the distant horizon. It is a faint vision of the Earthly Paradise in Dante full of music and birds where the star, dimly visible to the hollow men, symbolizes God or Mary. These men cannot face too much reality.

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Selected Essays, op. cit., p. 429.

They want to avoid that vision by putting on "deliberate disguises", by turning into the scare-Crows erected in the fields and swinging to and fro, without stay or substance, as the wind blows and veers. They are afraid of the final encounter with the heavenly eyes as was the case with Dante, between Purgatory and Paradise, where he was to meet Beatrice face to face. This transitory stage is "the twilight Kingdom".

Part III presents an implied contrast between "death's dream Kingdom", that is the phantasmagoric life on this earth and the existence one enters upon, in the Kingdom of death. The phrase "other Kingdom" implies that death has its kingdom on this earth also and its subjects are the hollow men who clutch at illusions only. They are the denizens of the Waste land, a barren and rocky place where stone images are raised and supplicated with the hands of men who are spiritually dead. To them,

This is the dead land  
This is cactus land<sup>7</sup>.

The worship here is of the World and the Flesh and the Devil. They have forsaken God, the fountain of their strength, and the light which guides them is "twinkle of a fading star", not the splendour of the sun. The hollow men wonder if "death's other kingdom", the higher world beyond the river of death, is also like their own barren and desolate land. The readers' sympathy for the hollow men is evoked, for they feel a genuine desire to worship God, their Maker, but their desire is thwarted, because in their barren

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7. CPP., p. 84

land there are only stone idols, lifeless and unrewarding. They would like to pray, but the impulse is frozen. Theirs is merely a futile yearning; they are incapable of any effort or purposeful activity.

In Part IV, the hollow men become more despairing and pessimistic as they give an account of the land they inhabit. It is as dead and hollow as the men themselves. In this world there are no "eyes", eyes full of direction and purpose, as the eyes of those who have crossed over to death's other kingdom, or as the sharp eyes of Beatrice who led Dante towards Paradiso. It is a hollow valley in which life is a pointless drifting without any goal or purpose. It is a valley of lost kingdom out of the scheme of divine providence, as useless and worthless as a broken jaw. Northrop Frye takes the lost kingdoms to represent the past: "The great cultural achievements of the past remain in the present to represent another world"<sup>8</sup>, but this cultural heritage of the past is out of the reach of the hollow men, who have lost all sense of its value and significance.

These hollow men are represented as assembled on the banks of a river, the river Lete of the underworld, and like Dante's "nothing men" waiting for Charon, the ferryman to take them across the river to death's other kingdom. As they cannot see clearly, they grope in the dark, and avoid talking to each other. This is the measure of their despair, frustration, spiritual deadness. Their

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8. Northrop Frye, T.S. Eliot (London: Oliver and Boyd, 1963), p. 57.

only hope is that just as sharp and piercing eyes of Beatrice appeared to Dante and guided him to Paradise where he saw God's love as a vast many pettalled rose, so also eyes, the eyes of Virgin Mary, i.e., "the perpetual star" would appear to them, and guide them from their dark "twilight kingdom" towards the bright and beautiful Paradise, death's other kingdom. One may find a clear ambiguity here in the placing of only, a word for whose placing there are no adequate rules. This phrase means both that the rose is only the hope, and nothing more, of empty men, and that it is the hope of empty men only, not of those who know and act better, and it implies as well that it is the only hope of empty men. Thus it operates both ways, pessimistic and optimistic; this ambiguity is certainly deliberate.

Part V brings the readers down from the hope of the empty men to the reality of their existence. It is a sort of incantatory conclusion, a kind of ritual to conclude the lament of the hollow men. The hollow men going round the prickly pear sing a parody of the children's nursery song : "Here we go round the mulberry bush". This nursery song is itself a parody of a spring song: "Here we go gathering nuts in May". But in the world of the hollow men there is no spring and so instead of "mulberry" and "nuts" they get merely prickly pear, the products of a desolate land. The ritual going round the prickly pear is also suggestive of their aimless and futile existence, as well as of the fact that their world is a world of make-belief, like the world of children, having no contact with reality.

The three stanzas that follow describe three types of frustrations, each leading to the other and melting into it till the last gathers in itself the full force of the preceding two. Between one stanza and the other occurs a fragment from the Lord's Prayer : "For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory". The fragments are apparently quotations. The stanzas have two clear references which should be explained for their interpretation. The first reference is to the conflict in the mind of Brutus meditating upon the problem of his association with the conspiracy to murder Julius Caesar:

Between the acting of a dreadful thing  
And the first motion, all the interim is  
Like a phantasma, or a hideous dream:  
The genius and the mortal instruments  
Are then in council; and the state of man,  
Like to a little kingdom, suffers then  
The nature of an insurrection<sup>9</sup>.

The second reference recalls the best known poem by Ernst Dowson, where "There falls thy shadow" is used as a refrain. The "shadow" is the symbol of weak will in man, which is the property of his flesh - "the spirit willeth but the flesh is weak". The spirit of man yearns for the kingdom of God to descend to the earth, but because of the frailty of flesh his good resolutions remain airy and he is not able to make up his mind as if he were to live long and could afford to defer decision and action. For this

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9. Shakespeare, Julius Caesar, Act II, Scene I, ll 63-69.

feeble resolution his idea is not realized and his impulse to act does not actualize itself in action; his mind conceives an idea which he is unable to render creatively; emotion agitates him but his imagination does not respond to it. The failure of the creative imagination was the tragedy of Coleridge, and its possibility haunted the mind of Eliot also. This frustration pervades the whole life of man, from sexual to spiritual. He has the sexual desire which he cannot gratify in satisfactory intercourse. Though he has the manliness, he cannot make his existence worth something. He talks of essences and spiritual abstractions or the Platonic ideas which he cannot incarnate in concrete realities. The result is that he resolves to utter the Lord's Prayer but finds, like Macbeth and Claudius, that the words have stuck in his throat.

The poem closes with another parody of the nursery song:

This is the way the world ends . . .  
 This is the way the world ends  
 This is the way the world ends  
 Not with a bang but a whimper<sup>10</sup>.

His allusions at the Gunpowder plot and the desire of Guy Fawkes to end the world of royalty in a noisy explosion. But his straw effigies, symbolizing the "hollow men" are likely to perish in fire with the mournful cry of a helpless child. The word "whimper" occurs in Kipling's "Danny Deever", where the soul of Danny, a British soldier executed, passes from the earth "whimpering". But

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10. CPD., p. 86

it also reminds the readers of the new birth of Dante who leaves behind the fallen world and stands before Beatrice like a child before a stern mother. It is not clear whether the fire consuming the effigies will be purgatorial, leading to a new birth. Thus the poem closes at an ambiguous stage, leaving the hollow men on the "red step" in Dante, which represents remorse and contrition born of the realization of one's sin. However, the despair in the poem is not sterile, and "the hope only" of the hollow men is not baseless, "ultimately", says D. S. S. Maxwell, "it is the slight signs of faith in the body of the poem that bear fruit"<sup>11</sup>.

#### (ii) Sweeney Agonistes

It has been described as "Fragments of an Aristophanic Melodrama". Here Sweeney Agonistes is a combination of the natural man and the Messiah of spiritual vision. Like Milton's Samson Agonistes, he is conscious of his duties towards himself as well as towards other degenerate souls. He must kill the animal in him and see that others also do so and redeem their souls through purification.

The theme of purification is hinted at in the epigraph which alludes to both Aescylus and St. John of the Cross. This is done to prepare the readers to make an imaginative spiritual pilgrimage along with the characters in the play. Sweeney feels within him a desire to purge his soul of evils; St. John of the Cross prescribes the divestment of the love of "the created beings" as a prerequisite

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11. The Poetry of E. E. Eliot (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1961) p. 141.

to "the divine union". It was 1936 when Eliot explained, without directly referring to St. John of the Cross, the connotation of the term "the created beings" used by the mystic saint, in the context of the modern age and emphasized the need of avoiding social philosophies such as humanitarianism: "But unless this humanity is considered always in relation to God, we may expect to find an excessive love of created beings, in other words, humanitarianism, leading to a genuine oppression of human beings in what is conceived by other human beings to be their interest"<sup>12</sup>. Thus, if people are to seek the spiritual way, they shall have to rid themselves of such philosophies.

Sweeney Agonistes depicts the sordid industrialized, urban world with a background of "cavernous waste shore". This world is peopled by creatures unsure of their relations, cautious women and shabby men, living in seedy flats. They belong to the category of people without possessing "any criteria for discriminating between good and evil" and "the number of half-alive, hungry for any form of spiritual experience, or what offers itself as spiritual experience, with a law, good or bad"<sup>13</sup>. Their minds are not guided by any central metaphysical authority. Their concept of the world is composed of "broken fragments of various systems". They are like the natural inhabitants of The Waste Land, the victims of modern malaise,

12. T.S. Eliot, Essays Ancient and Modern (London: Faber and Faber Co., 1932), p. 119.

13. T.S. Eliot, After Strange Gods: A Pilgrimage in Modern Times, p. cit., p. 61.

boredom, futility and squalor, because of their inability to be damned or saved. This atmosphere of this world is best suggested in the lines:

Your dreamt you waked up at Seven O'clock and it's  
foggy and it's damp and it's dawn and it's dark.

And you wait for a knock and the turning of a lock  
for you know the hangman's waiting for you.

And perhaps you're alive  
And perhaps you're dead<sup>14</sup>.

This foggy background of spiritual squalor combined with the dark, damp and uncertain imagery of sordid life of a great metropolis is not a mere romantic decor. This is what life is in modern times in essence. Eliot presents it, not merely to stress its ugliness but to show the readers the substratum of life, the stratum beneath "the boredom, horror and glory".

Sweeney Agonistes presents the world of sex and crime. It is an experiment in modern morality play, an attempt to revive the drama of "a late murder", the kind one finds the Arden of Feversham of the Jacobean age since gossip and sensation are necessary to humanity as oxygen, the themes of sex and crime are bound to have a popular appeal. These spicy things, well within the region of drama in Elizabethan and Jacobean times, are usurped by the popular press in modern times. Moreover, in the twenties, the English devoured crime-fiction for breakfast and supper. Thus Eliot himself was taking

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14. CPP., p. 126.

interest in detective fiction. As the Editor of The Criterion, he allowed himself the luxury of reviewing thrillers. His experimental Sweeney Agonistes shows his capacity to exploit the artistic possibilities of popular stuff for a serious purpose. Murder in the Cathedral is a deceptive catchy title, which appeals to the readers' sense of crime. The Family Reunion is the drama of a man suffering from an imaginary and expitiating it. Eliot writes, "fine art is the refinement, not the antithesis, of popular art"<sup>15</sup>.

Sweeney Agonistes, in the words of an eminent critic, is "the dream of the man who has committed the crime every man wants to commit once in his life"<sup>16</sup>. The first section of Sweeney Agonistes presents two fallen women, Doris and Dusty, trying to read their luck through a pack of cards - the same game of Madam Sosostria in The Waste Land. Just when they are about to finish their fortune reading, by a happy coincidence, a whistle outside the window announces the arrival of customers. The whole shady affair is brilliantly suggested by Eliot -

Doris : Is that Sam

Dusty : Of course it's Sam !

Doris : Of course, the Knave of Hearts is Sam !

Dusty : (Cleaning out of the window); Hello Sam !

Wauchope : Hello dear

How manys up there?

Dusty : Nobody's up here

How many's down there?

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15. Dial, 1923

16. Herbert Howarth, Notes on Some Figures Behind  
T.S. Eliot, op. cit., p. 312.

Wauchope : Four of us here.

Wait till I put the car round the corner

We'll be right up

Dusty : All right, come up

Dusty (to Doris) Cards are queer<sup>17</sup>.

In the next section, Sweeney arrives and gives tempting descriptions of crocodile island and spicy narrations of sex-murders.

The profound truth of the human predicament is hidden beneath this deceptive surface of a shady affair. Man is a part of a great scheme of things. He is a part of the Absolute which is more than a combination of parts. Man is man, not because he exists physically, but because he is conscious of the metaphysical. To whatever depths of degradation man may fall, however hard he may try to ignore that awareness, he cannot escape his metaphysical identity. He cannot suppress his intimate impulses and forget the Absolute of which he is a part, which gives meaning and significance to his existence. In this incident, where two fallen women try to read their fortune, what looks like a mere superstitious and superficial indulgence of vulgar humanity betrays their inner concern to know the destiny guiding human affairs. Eliot could show the profound significance of such apparently futile and trivial aspects of life because, he believed that any life "if accurately and profoundly penetrated, is interesting and always strange"<sup>18</sup>.

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17. CPP., p. 118.

18. T.S. Eliot, The Sacred Wood : Essays on Poetry and Criticism, op. cit., p. 31.

Man's incapacity to ignore or escape the metaphysical reality is implied in Sweeney's most blatant denial of his awareness of it. Sweeney, the embodiment of rebellious flesh, seeking genital gratification, may boast of downright animalism:

Birth, and copulation, and ceath.  
That's all the facts when you come to brass tacks:  
Birth, and copulation, and death<sup>19</sup>.

But his very exclusive emphasis on the physical betrays his inner vulnerability. Since he cannot ignore the engulfing boredom proceeding from his want of a guiding ethical force, he wishes to escape into an Utopia of his invention, a savage island free from the noisy paraphernalia of modern civilization:

There's no telephones  
There's no gramophones  
There's no motor cars  
No two-seaters, no six-seaters,  
No Citroen, no Rolls-Royce,  
Nothing to eat but the fruit as it grows<sup>20</sup>.

Sweeney's attempts to nullify his gnawing inner vacuum by sensual indulgence and deliberate gloating over the brutal sadism of sex-murders land him only in a more disturbing dilemma of life and death. He speaks with an implied generalization about the hidden brutal impulses of human beings, of a friend who did a girl in:

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19. CPP., p. 122.

20. Ibid., p. 121.

I knew a man once did a girl in  
 Any man has to, needs to, wants to  
 Once in a lifetime, do a girl in  
 Well he kept her there in a bath  
 With a gallown of lysol in a bath<sup>21</sup>.

This friend of Sweeney cheats all, society as well as law,  
 but succumbs to the flagging of his own invisible self. As it is  
 indicated in the final lines of the chorus, no one can escape from  
 the painful dictates of his inner conscience which shows a man's  
 real self to him:

When you're alone in the middle of the night and  
     you wake in a sweat and hell of a fright  
 When you're alone in the middle of the bed and  
     you wake like someone hit you in the head  
 You've had a cream of a nightmare dream and  
     you've got the hoo-ha's coming to you.  
 Hoo hoo hoo<sup>22</sup>.

(iii) Ariel Poems

The Ariel Poems shows a curious change. These poems bear  
 the note of inert resignation. The movements are tired and nerve-  
 less; they suggest the failure of rhythm. An eminent critic observes:  
 "If the extreme agony of consciousness has passed, so has the

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21. Ibid., p. 124.

22. Ibid., pp. 125-26.

extraordinary vitality that went with it"<sup>23</sup>. Out the change has another aspect. These poems reveal a significant pre-occupation; they have a direction, and they all point the same way". "Journey of the Magi" and "A Song for Simeon" deal dramatically with their religious theme, the promise of salvation. The liturgical note characteristic of Ash Wednesday appears at the end of "Animala", the third of the Ariel Poems. "Marina", which though falls out of the "Ariel" group for its tone, is a "triumphant realization of joy in a human relationship"<sup>24</sup>. A discussion of all the Ariel Poems except "The Cultivation of Christmas Trees" follows

(a) Journey of the Magi

The term "Magi" according to the Bible, refers to the three wise men of the East who came to honour the new-born Christ. It also indicates the generic title of the priestly class of magicians in Ancient Persia. This poem incorporates some of the key sentences of the native sermon preached before King James I by Lancelot Andrewes on Christmas Day, 1622. For example, one may take the description of the conditions under which the journey is undertaken: "A cold-coming they had of it at this time of the year, just the worst time of the year to take a journey and specially a long journey in, the ways deep, the weather sharp, the days short, the Sun farthest off, in solstito brumali, 'the very dead of winter'<sup>25</sup>.

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23. F.R. Leavis, New Bearings in English Poetry, (Penguin Book in association with Chatto and Windus, 1984) pp. 115-116.

24. G. Smith, T.S. Eliot's Poetry and Plays, op. cit., p. 130.

25. Cited by T.S. Eliot in Selected Essays, op. cit., p. 350.

Here one of the Magi is giving an account of the difficulties faced by the travellers and the memories of home and its pleasures for comforts which haunted their minds during their arduous journey through unknown tracks. However, the entire account is symbolical; "journey" itself is a quest symbol, signifying the passage of mind from one state to another, from the death of the old and the unattended birth of the new. The description in the beginning is realistic and has the air of a factual report and the tone is conversational and neutral; the details are vivid and precise:

A cold coming we had of it,  
 Just the worst time of the year  
 For a journey, and such a long journey:  
 The ways deep and the weather sharp,  
 The very dead of winter<sup>26</sup>.

Besides these difficulties, there was an obstacle arising from fatigue and injury incidental to the journey, the wounded camels and their reluctance to proceed further. The nostalgic recollection of sensuous pleasures at home - the summer palaces on slope and "the silken girls bringing sherbet" made the camel-drivers rebellious and hostile. The difficulty was further increased by unfriendly cities and towns, and, "dirty villages charging high prices". However, they were impelled by the inner urge to continue their journey, "all night, sleeping in snatches". But their enthusiasm was sometimes crossed by a doubt, experienced by all the spiritual questers, that the journey itself might be a hoax and a wild-goose chase, signifying a foolish pursuit of something

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26. CPP., p. 103.

illusory. This is the demon of doubt, a part and parcel of faith itself.

However, the following stanza marks the end of difficulty and despair, and the emergence of hope and brighter prospect, though the images clearly suggest the sinister shadows of death mixed with the happy birth they were going to witness. They survived the long journey in the night and at dawn they were in a "temperate valley" where everything was pleasant. It is the dawn of spiritual exhilaration; the different aspects of nature signify the new images of life; the "running stream" symbolizes the rhythmic flow of life; the "water-mill beating the darkness" suggests the doubt being driven away; the galloping away of "the white horse" in the meadow symbolizes upward movement of the spirit.

The three trees refer to Calvary where Christ was crucified and three crosses were raised, one for Christ and two for the "malefactors"<sup>27</sup> who were crucified with him. The "white horse" appears in Revelation, where Christ the conqueror rides on a "white horse"<sup>28</sup>. The "tavern with vine-leaves over the lintel" clearly symbolizes Communion, and "six hands... dicing for pieces of silver" alludes to the betrayal of Christ by Judas, for thirty pieces of silver<sup>29</sup> and the soldiers dicing for his robes at the Crucifixion. *The author* refers to these images in a well-known passage: "Why, for all of us,

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27. St. Luke, 23: 32-33.

28. Revelation, 6:2

29. Matthew, 26 : 14-15.

out of all that we have heard, seen, felt, in a life time, do certain images recur, charged with emotion, rather others? Six ruffians seen through an open window playing cards at night at a small French railway junction where there was a water-mill<sup>30</sup>.

The prosaic account of the end of their journey was satisfactory in the sense that they at last reached their destination. It perhaps glances at these words:

The word, and not be able to speak a word? How evil  
agreeth this ! This He put up. How born, how entertained?  
In a stately palace, cradle of ivory, robes of estate?  
No; but a stable for His Palace, a manger for his cradle,  
poor clouts for His array<sup>31</sup>.

Here the important thing to be remembered is not so much the eventful journey, finished amid circumstances prohibitive and painful, as the psychological impact which the Birth they had gone all the way to witness. The speaker is puzzled to think of the peculiar state of mind in which the new Birth had plunged him, because this Birth was quite different from the ordinary births they had witnessed in the world, births which were quite obviously distinct from deaths. But this Birth simultaneously set in motion a painful process of death, as it were, the pang of which left them restless and they have not yet recovered from its effect. Of course, the description points to the uneasy state of mind when the soul

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30. T. S. Eliot The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism,  
op. cit., p. 148.

31. Cited by T. S. Eliot in Selected Essays, op. cit., p. 350.

has discarded its habitual dispensation, but has not yet settled in the higher state. As the speaker says,

We returned to our places, these kingdoms,  
But no longer at ease here, in the old dispensation,  
With an allien people clutching their gods<sup>32</sup>.

Here one may recall Arnold's famous characterization of his own state as a wanderer "between two worlds, one dead/The other powerless to be born"<sup>33</sup>. It is the description of incomplete conversion, when the mind is more keenly aware of the death of the old self than of its re-birth, in a higher state. They have returned home to their kingdoms and to the old familiar way of life and worship, but they are not more at home "in the old dispensation". They have undergone a spiritual transformation and their own people with their old familiar gods and modes of worship now wear the aspect of a strangers and aliens to them. So the speaker yearns for a second process of death which may set him completely free from the old ties and restore him fully to the new ways of life, **thought** and worship which have been opened to men by the Birth of Christ.

(b) A Song for Simeon

This poem is built on the relationship between Biblical narrative<sup>34</sup> and personal experience. According to the Biblical story,<sup>a</sup> Simeon was resident of Jerusalem. To him appeared the spirit of God who said that he would not die before he had seen Jesus Christ. Simeon was then guided by God to go into the temple where the child

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32. CPP., p. 104.

33. Cp. cit., p. 163.

34. St. Luke ii, 25-35

Jesus was taken by his parents according to the custom. As he took the child in his arms he felt that his destiny had fulfilled itself and he could then die in peace : "Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word. For mine eyes have seen thy salvation, which thou hast prepared before the face of all people"<sup>35</sup>.

This old Jew also relates to Mary all the suffering which awaited her child as he would march ahead on the road of life : "Behold this child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel; and for a sign which shall be spoken against; (yea, a sword shall pierce through thy own soul also) that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed"<sup>36</sup>.

Thus the old Simeon is convinced of the birth of a new dispensation which he himself is too old to partake of. He is a man rooted in old dispensation, but he is anticipating, with joy, the dawn of a new one. Though the emotional pattern of the poem is apparently identical with that of the "Journey of the Magi", the two poems differ. "The voice that speaks in the poem is very different from that of the narrator in 'Journey of the Magi'. The vigorous, graphic descriptions, the moments of excited intensity and the lapses into weary bafflement, all alike carried in the tones of direct speech, are gone. In their place is a more musical rhythm, direct, biblical echoes, chant-like cadences and irregular rhyme and assonance"<sup>37</sup>. To both the Magi and Simeon, the new birth remains

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35. Ibid., 29-31.

36. Ibid., 34-35.

37. Elizabeth Drew, T. S. Eliot : The Design of His Poetry, op. cit., p. 98.

pure loss as far as their own lives are concerned. With the Magi it is accompanied by no social change whatever ; with Simeon it brings the vision of the pain, death and destruction which is to be the immediate conclusion of the birth of the new value.

The poem depicts the prayer of an old man who, like Tiresias, is suspended between two worlds, those of birth and dying. The nature imagery in the opening lines presents the symbolic background of the poem. The Roman hyacinths blooming in bowls symbolize the possibility of Simeon's resurrection and the winter sun creeping by the snowhills signifies the hope of renewal. His life is light like a feather, free from the allurements of the material world; he is aware of his body being composed of dust particles, and the memories of his past experiences are fresh in his mind. He is, therefore, waiting for the "spiritual chill" that may do away with his passions and show "the ultimate vision". At this juncture of his spiritual journey he recapitulates his righteous deeds and "just and devout" past life :

I have walked many years in this city,  
 Kept faith and fast, provided for the poor,  
 Have given and taken honour and ease.  
 There went never any rejected from my door<sup>38</sup>.

But the thought of the future of his offspring troubles his mind:

who shall remember my house, where shall live my  
 children's children  
 when the time of sorrow is come?<sup>39</sup>

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38. CPP., p. 105.

39. Idem.

He fears that they will go astray from the path of righteousness in the moments of adversity:

They will take to the goat's path, and the fox's home,  
Fleeing from the foreign faces and the foreign swords<sup>40</sup>.

Then comes the moment of his visualizing the process of spiritual renewal. The whole story of Christ's trial and Crucifixion and lamentation by the women becomes alive in his mind. He wishes to overcome the loss of "ease" felt by him before undergoing the ordeal of spiritual resurrection. At this paradoxical moment of the birth of the new ensuing the death of the old, he wishes to be consoled "by the new-born Jesus", "the still unspeaking and unspoken Word". He broods over the fate of men of belief whose eternal symbol is Christ. On the one hand they are praised for their beliefs and services to humanity, and on the other hand, they are divided by the non-believers; they suffer a lot and have to sacrifice themselves eventually.

The birth season of Christ is the death season of Old Simeon, the death of his body under the weight of eighty winters, and death also of his old self which Christ's birth has brought about. Although he is not destined to count himself among the followers of the "Son of Man", he prays to the Babe, "the word within the word, yet not able to speak a word", for that consolation which Christ promised to Israelites, his chosen people. The consolation promised was their final settlement as a peaceful community after years of painful

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40. Idem.

wanderings. The old man is at the end of his earthly career and can have only a prophetic vision of the Saints of Christ in days to come who, in every generation, shall praise Lord and follow the way of the Cross, the way of suffering and derision in the world outside, but of glory and exaltation in the inner world of the spirit. He shall not share the spiritual ascents of saints in mystic meditation when the soul climbs slowly up the series of steps leading to the final communion, nor the inward glory and vision of the blessed life in Heaven which accompany the saints as they undergo all the tortures of martyrdom with exultation. But he craves for that "peace" of Christ which passeth comprehension.

The last stanza moves to a "dying close", the stillness of the exhausted soul content with a far-off vision of salvation. "And a sword shall pierce thy heart" refers to Simeon's prophecy to the Virgin, who shall witness the suffering and Crucifixion of Christ, with her heart broken in twain, as it were, by the dart of sorrow. The old man has been a symbol, a representative of men in all ages who are "old" in the Pauline sense, that is, men who are unregenerate, whose souls' **earthly** taint has not been washed clean by the blood of the Saviour, even those for whom Christ was born in vain and whose life is only a process of dying. However, Simeon can visualize the weariness of lives not redeemed by the Saviour, lives which sink into the abyss of death without any hope for "tomorrow":

I am tired with my own life and the lives of those after me,  
I am dying in my own death and the deaths of those after me<sup>41</sup>.

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41. Ibid., p. 106

But Simeon, at least, can depart in peace as he has **seen** the Saviour with his own eyes and is quite certain of the salvation which He will purchase with His own blood:

Let thy servant depart,  
Having seen thy salvation<sup>42</sup>.

(c) Animula

"Animula" means the little soul and recalls the poem by the Roman Emperor, Hadrian of the second century A.D. In his poem Hadrian addresses his soul, as the "Little soul-fleeting away and charming". The generalization about the human soul pure in childhood, but capable of gathering round itself the taint of worldliness as it advances along the miry road of its earthly career, is apt to recall similar account of Wordsworth's "Intimations" ode and Vaughan's "The Retreat".

The opening line which Eliot has derived from Dante's Purgatory, XVI, carries the central theme of the poem. Marco Lombardo's spirit explains to Dante the roles of God and human free will as regards to the operation of the soul. He does not accept the idea that everything that takes place in this World is the manifestation of the desire of God. If it had been so, the free will enjoyed by man would have been destroyed and man would not have joy for

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42. Idem.

good and mourning for evil. God sets man's impulses in motion; He gives him an insight to discriminate between good and evil. But, despite his possession of the free will, man is dependent on a greater power because the free will by its nature seeks good and God being supreme good, man's free will is subject to God. In other words, God determines the course of his actions. Nevertheless, this does not imply the restriction of liberty, but this ensures the fulfilment of his will. Again, if the world goes astray, its cause lies in man's soul. Marco Lombardo then tells Dante how the soul that emanates from God evolves spontaneously in the beginning and goes astray for want of ethical discipline and moral guidance:

From his hands who fondly love her ere she is in being,  
 there issues, after the fashion of a little child that  
 sports, now weeping, now laughing, the simple, tender soul,  
 who knoweth naught save that, sprung from a joyous maker,  
 willingly she turneth to that which delights her. First  
 she tastes the flavour of a trifling good; there she is  
 beguiled and runeth after it, if guide or curb turn not  
 her love aside, wherefore, 'twas needful to put law as a  
 curb, needful to have a ruler who might discern at least  
 the tower of the true city<sup>43</sup>.

In his poem, Eliot has depicted the soul as a child. "Moving between legs of tables and of chairs"<sup>44</sup>. This soul is subject to the shifting sense impressions of the external world, "To light, dark, dry or damp, chilly or warm"<sup>45</sup>, eagerly grasping at kisses and toys,

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43. A Dante, Purgatorio, XVI, 85-88.

44. CPP., p. 107.

45. Idem.

rising and falling, presuming to be bold but quick to take alarms. The world around this child is replete with beauty and wonder. IF finds pleasure in the colourful Christmas tree, the wind, sea and sunlight and the sunlit patterns on the floor, the running stags wrought on a silver tray. The child makes no distinction between fancies and actualities and mingles the ways of the fairies with the common conversation of servants.

As the soul grows older, it faces the perplexing problem of distinguishing between the appearances and the realities. Here Eliot refers to the terminology of his favourite philosopher, F.H. Bradley who has defined reality as an awareness of the gap between the "real" and the "ideal", which makes the imperatives; that is moral duties and obligations. This awareness sets in motion a conflict in the soul between desire and control, between the choice of one thing and denial of another. The growing soul finds living in reality painful and seeks relief and anodyne in its dreams, or in the pursuit of abstract knowledge symbolized by Encyclopaedia Britannica, a pursuit which dries up all the springs of its heart and shrivels its senses.

So the passage of years transforms the soul into something timorous, selfish, misshapen and distorted, looking before and after and paralyzed by the opposite pulls of moving ahead or re-tracing its steps to a backward position. As all its sensitiveness is gone, it fears and distrusts the warm reality and goodness offered by life, and the pleasures his senses are yearning to grasp. In this moral struggle the spontaneous soul shrinks into a ghost wandering in the shadow, emanating from its own depth, a hollow sham, with its impulses and actions reduced to a tangled knot of

confusion. This is a state of utter passivity which shows that the process of life is actually a process of death, death of body and of the soul, or of the soul in a living body, which has become the grave where it lies buried like a corpse. Viaticum is the last sacrament of communion given to the dying. The poet opines that the death or corruption of the soul can be prevented only by the grace of God.

The poem ends with a call for prayer:

Pray for Guiterriez, avid of speed and power,  
 For Boudin, blown to pieces,  
 For this one who made a great fortune,  
 And that one who went his own way<sup>46</sup>.

The names that hint at the several ways of dying to which human birth may lead are imaginary and typify the corruption of the soul through absorption in the various concerns of the world. Eliot himself refers to Guiterriez, Boudin as two men representing different types of career, the successful person of the machine age and some one who was killed in the last war. Though Floret is described as an imaginary character, Eliot suggests that the name might bring to some minds "certain folklore and memories". He may refer to Actaeon, the Greek hunter who was torn to pieces by his own hounds as he was transformed into a stag for daring to see the naked body of Diana, bathing. Again he may mean the legends about Adonis and Attis, the fertility gods, who were supposed to have been killed by wild boarhounds. Between yew and yew, i.e., between death and immortality or in a state of suspension between worldliness

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46. Ibid., p. 108.

and spiritual dedication. Eliot has probably symbolized in the person of Floret the frailty of flesh which cannot endure "to much reality" and keeps the soul, suspended between "afore and after".

The phrase of the conventional Christian prayer, "at the hour of our death" has been changed to "at the hour of our birth" in the last line of the poem. This indicates the fact that man's birth, that is, the descent of the soul from the hands of God into the mesnes of the earth, is actually the first moment of his death and what one may call life in the world is really a funeral march to the dusty grave. For the soul the world itself is a vast grave and the more it advances into its depth the greater becomes the distance between itself and its Creator. As the darkness of the worldly prison-house begins to close round the soul, its vision of the heavenly light grows dimmer till the final extinction and oblivion of it. The soul lost in its love for the creatures is apt to alienate itself from the Creator.

Thus "Animula" becomes a step farther from The Waste Land than either "The Hollow Men" or the "Journey of the Magi". It is definitely a pointer to Eliot's most philosophical and religious work Four Quartets.

#### (d) Marina

"Marina" the fourth of the Ariel Poems, is the most touching personal poem of T.S. Eliot. This poem was composed in September 1930 and leads the poet to faith in the Anglican Church. The context designated in the title is that of Pericles' reunion

with his lost daughter Marina in Shakespeare's Pericles. Marina in Shakespeare is the daughter of the Phoenician sailor who has lost her. Marina is restored at last to her father in Act V, Scene I. It is one of the best recognition scenes in the whole of Shakespeare. In this scene of great beauty Pericles is overcome with joy and hears music unheard by others present. He believes it to be the music of the spheres, the music made by the spheres of the medieval universe as they turn, celebrating the glory of God. The whole experience has been one of complete restoration of faith in divine order. To Pericles, finding her alive whom he had thought dead, Marina seems the incarnation of a vision.

Eliot's poem is about his own search for religious experience, and about a moment of discovery, when the lost innocence seems to be found again. The story of Pericles and Marina is used as a means of describing Eliot's own experience of illumination. The child, as Miss Elizabeth Drew has pointed out, is not the Christian Saviour, but a symbol of regeneration, a miraculous rebirth out of death, so miraculous indeed, that it has all the haziness and freshness of a dream and fills the heart of the beholder with ecstasy<sup>47</sup>. Thus Marina is, in terms of Jungian psychology, "the dream symbol of something newly born, and the scene is a recognition, a discovery of this magical creative regeneration, begotten in some mysterious way by the speaker himself"<sup>48</sup>.

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47. Cp. cit., p. 102.

48. Idem.

But Eliot has taken the epigraph of the poem from Seneca :  
 "What is this place, what country, what region of the world?"<sup>49</sup>  
 This is the exclamation of Hercules in the play, as he regains sanity  
 from his fit of madness in which he has killed his wife and children.  
 Eliot wrote in 1930 that he had made use of these two dramatic  
 references to effect a "criss cross". Their contrast is clear.  
Pericles is concerned with truth and revelation as miraculously  
 wonderful experiences. But the hero in Hercules Furens has been  
 driven mad as a punishment for his pride. He emerges from insanity  
 to a discovery of horror<sup>50</sup>.

The common point between the two contrasted situations is  
 the peculiar state of mind characterizing the protagonists. They are  
 both in the border land between dream and reality, the reality being  
 so incredible as to wear the aspect of a strange dream. Crover Smith  
 has perceptively summed up the purport of the poem:

The poem is a monologue, spoken precisely at the  
 instant of recognition. Pericles is not sure whether  
 he has crossed the boundaries of dream into reality.  
 His experience belongs to a kind of halfway world, the  
 atmosphere of which pervades his words. As in a dream,  
 he is standing on the deck of a vessel approaching land,  
 from whose granite shores are borne the scent of pine and  
 the song of the woodthrush — images rising out of some

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49. Hercules Furens, line 1138.

50. B.C. Southam, op. cit., p. 146.

buried recollection and made vivid as he becomes conscious of his daughter's presence. The images objectify the emotion stirring in him. They obliterate the memory of other images - those of men associated with the sins of envy, pride, sloth, and concupiscence, and with the state of death consequent upon habitual sin<sup>51</sup>.

Such men are classified and defined in the brief passage which begins with "those" and repeats "Death" at the end of each line. These classes of people represent the aspects of the worldliness which closes round the soul and renders it numb and inert. Those who sharpen the tooth of the dog are men who are enslaved by passions and violent desires destructive of all that is noble and spiritual in man, "the image of God". Eliot has employed the symbol of "Dog" which is to dig up the corpse and prevent re-birth. Those who go about singing like a bird of bright plumes are the vain creatures flaunting the glitter of their wealth, and material pomp to men below them. Those who sit in the sty of contentment are people who, like beasts, are satisfied with the creature-comforts, food, sleep and sexual gratification and have no trace of spiritual yearning or divine discontent. The essence of their animal - contentment is concentrated in the lines:

Winter kept us warm, covering  
 Earth in forgetful snow, feeding  
 A little life with dried tubers<sup>52</sup>.

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51. The Poetry and Plays of T. S. Eliot,  
 op. cit., pp. 131-132.

52. CPP., p. 61.

Those who suffer the ecstasy of animals are the sensualists prizing the pleasures of the senses and wasting no thought for the bliss of soul. This gross worldliness fettering the spirit of the speaker has been dissolved by the grace symbolized in the child which has set the wind of liberation blowing to waft away the vestiges of the old self in the old place. In the final movement Eliot uses "the hermit thrush singing among the pines" as a symbol of spiritual regeneration.

Here the miraculous child, the grace incarnate, that has now occupied the place yielded by the faded images of the familiar world is itself a puzzle hard to define, at once familiar and intimate, as well as strange and remote from the known world. In Shakespeare's Pericles, it is the speech of creatures who are more than human, seen in a light more than that of day. The same "haziness" of a dream clings round the image of daughter as she stands before the entranced gaze of her father. In terms of Jungian psychology, as Elizabeth Drew has pointed out, she is the anima figure distinct from the "Lady" in Ash-Wednesday: "In both she is 'opalescent' a semi-visionary companion, yet holding within her being the meaning of the total experience. But again, here she has lost the formal element of a poetic and religious tradition. She is not semi-divine 'sister', 'mother', veiled, remote, worshipful, she is 'daughter', both child and woman, created of the speaker, springing from himself, a part of himself, though strange, unfamiliar, and recreated of his spirit"<sup>53</sup>. It is at once near yet remote, temporal, yet

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53. Elizabeth Drew, op. cit., pp. 103-104.

timeless, "a phantom of delight" yet a prize and a possession, symbol of a new life, which is but a transfiguration of the old. It brings with it a wave of joy and sense of release akin to that generated by some childhood memory, "whispers and small laughter between leaves and hurrying feet" which recurs in Four Quartets. "It returns in that dream world where all the streams of images from the conscious and the unconscious, the past and the present, meet and flow and reform into new patterns"<sup>54</sup>.

With the baffling logic of a dream there follows the description of the ship which he has made. This ship has been beaten and battered by wind and weather into something at once familiar and unknown. Although the ship is ill-built and battered out of shape, it has served him well and brought him triumphantly to Marina who represents a new life. It has been the means of his passage from the old life to a new one. As the new vista opens before him and old self dissolves into the thin air, the old ship must also break and sink into the depth of the sea.

So the old self as the old ship, a self which has not deliberately committed to any discipline or regulated by any fixed goal, is now resigned to the child, with face and form, but as yet without the power of speech, like the divine Babe in the manger, "Word within the word, yet not able to speak a word". The silent

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54. Ibid., p. 105.

child is the symbol of life destined to survive in a world of time beyond the term of life granted to the speaker who is prepared to sacrifice his own life:

... let me

Resign my life for this life, my speech for that unspoken,  
The awakened, lips parted, the hope, the new ships<sup>55</sup>.

Through this total surrender of the old, decayed self to the child, the life of the old man will be renewed. A new ship will emerge out of the old and rotten one and will sail towards new shores, following the note of the wood-thrush through the fog.

Thus it is found that the poem ends with a note of radiant affirmation and ecstasy; the voyager has found a new ship, discovered the right direction and can fare forward to an assured port.

#### (iv) Ash-Wednesday

Eliot was interested in the composition of poetry with the religious theme throughout his poetic career. But after his poetic confirmation in the Church in England in 1927 he showed greater interest in the religious aspect of poetry. So he chose religious, even Christian themes, and the mythical background was provided by Christian tradition and theology. This kind of religious mind finds its best expression in the poems like Ash-Wednesday. It is a major poem in six parts, which appeared as separate poems from 1927-1930, and in its present form as a single poem in 1930.

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55. CPP., p. 110.

Ash-Wednesday indicates a definite turning point in Eliot's life and work as well. As one may observe in his letter to Paul Elmer More on Shrove Tuesday, the day of confession before Ash-Wednesday, he was faced with a void "in the middle of all human happiness and all human relations"<sup>56</sup>, and he found the turn to Christianity the only way to fill it. This attitude also led the poet to turn away from the sensual pleasures to the purgatorial fires of asceticism and penance which are the means of purification for the soul that starts its journey to be united with God.

"The title Ash-Wednesday associates the poem with a day of commination and humility, and the poem itself suggests the Mass at many points"<sup>57</sup>. In the ritual for Ash-Wednesday the priest dips his fingers in ashes and marks the sign of the cross on the forehead saying: "Remember, man, that thou art dust, and unto dust thou shall return". So man needs to turn from the world to God. This provides the basic turning theme of the poem and implies the complementary theme.

It is observed that Eliot's poetry from Prufrock onwards is marked by a sense of continuity. To maintain this sequence he has taken the theme of purification and he states in his essay on "The 'Fensees' of Rascal" in support of this:

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56. John D. Margolis, T.S. Eliot's Intellectual Development 1922-1934 (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1972), p. 142.

57. G. Williamson, A. Reader's Guide to T.S. Eliot (London: Thames and Hudson, 1965), p. 168.

The Christian thinker - and I mean the man who is trying consciously and conscientiously to explain to himself the sequence which culminates in faith, rather than the public apologist - proceeds by rejection and elimination. He finds the world to be so and so; he finds its character inexplicable by any non-religious theory : among religions he finds Christianity and Catholic Christianity, to account most satisfactorily for the world and especially for the moral world within; and thus, by what Newman calls 'powerful and concurrent' reasons, he finds himself inexorably committed to the dogma of the Incarnation"<sup>58</sup>.

This faith in the Word made flesh which gives validity and significance to this life of penance and asceticism; and the poem is a clear revelation of the poet's decision to undergo the pain of purgatorial suffering rather than the depiction "of human weakness and an escapist's despair"<sup>59</sup>. Ash-wednesday is, in the Christian calendar, the first day of Lent, a period of forty days' penance and fasting to commemorate the forty days Christ spent fasting in the wilderness, where he was tempted by Satan but with no result. It is a period when the Christian repents for his past sins, and turns away from the world to God. And the six poems of Ash-Wednesday, taken together, circle around the same theme, namely that of penance and purification of sin through fasting, prayer and penance. By the end of the sequence the poem moves, as Joseph Chiary says, "to an assertion of faith found and held with anxiety, and an urge to rise

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58. . Selected Essays, op. cit., p. 408.

59. Edmund Wilson, Axel's Cattle : A Study in the Imaginative Literature of 1870-1930 (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1950), p. 126.

to a higher sphere of being, through the shedding of desires, ambitions and pressures and demand of senses"<sup>60</sup>. Yet, because this struggle is expressed in poetry, "that which appears to be only personal and intimate becomes also universal, and applies to all men"<sup>61</sup>.

Ash-Wednesday is based on that sort of mundane love that finally leads the poet to find the divine love. The observations of an eminent critic deserves mention here : "The essential impulse of the poem is a need to renounce human love which is a torment; to idealise the beloved; and to achieve a transcendent harmony and wholeness 'in his will'. This involves the whole of the poet's life and being, through the medium of the particular relationship which has failed in its promise of complete fulfilment"<sup>62</sup>.

The speaker in the poem tries to convert his anguish into something which is enduring and pious. Here the poet has followed Dante's "brave attempts to fabricate something permanent and holy out of his personal animal feelings - as in the Vita Nuova"<sup>63</sup>. But the urgency of his personal problems fails Eliot to separate "the mind which creates" from "the man who suffers". One must find here

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60. T. S. Eliot : Poet and Dramatist (London: Vision Press, 1972), p. 75.

61. Philip A. Martin, Mastery and Mercy: A study of two religious poems (London: Oxford University Press, 1957), p. 84.

62. A. D. Moody, Thomas Stearns Eliot Poet (London: Cambridge University Press, 1979), p. 140.

63. T. S. Eliot, Selected Essays, op. cit., p. 137.

that the protagonist is eager to be purified like gold in the furnace or like the souls in Dante's purgatory voluntarily surrenders to suffering. While he talks about the difference between the suffering of Hell and that of Purgatory, he comments, "In hell, the torment issues from the very nature of the damned themselves, expresses their essence; they writhe in the torment of their own perpetually perverted nature. In purgatory the torment of flame is deliberately and consciously accepted by the penitent"<sup>64</sup>. And when he speaks of repentance he writes: "Let us mourn in a private chamber, learning the way of penitence,/And then let us learn the joyful communion of saints"<sup>65</sup>.

## I

The speaker of Ash-Wednesday is found in the purgatorial atmosphere. The poem begins with a quotation from the Italian poet Guido Cavalcanti. He was banished for causing civil disturbance in the city to Saranza from where he thought that he could never return to his beloved whom he left in Florence. When he was languishing in this place of exile, he wrote some of the most poignant love poems presenting the lover on the brink of despair. These poems also betray a sense of sorrow mingle with love: "Because I do not hope

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64. Ibid., p. 255.

65. CPP., p. 164.

to turn again, Ballatelta to Tuscany"<sup>66</sup>. The first poem of Ash-Wednesday revolves around the same theme of the poets' inability to turn back:

Because I do not hope to turn again  
 Because I do not hope  
 Because I do not hope to turn<sup>67</sup>.

Here it must be pointed out that Cavalcanti who is in exile and separated from his lady, pledges his love to her for ever, but the speaker of Ash-Wednesday has made desperate attempt to turn away from his lady in order to turn to God<sup>68</sup>.

The central image of turning, pervasive through the whole poem and emphasized in the first section, is taken from Lancelot Andrewes' account of repentance as a kind of turning and returning to Him from whom men have turned away through sin and rejection. Andrewes refers to his own sermon and says: "And much after a circle is this text; begins with the word 'turn'; and returns about to the same word again"<sup>69</sup>. The poet has made his decision that he cannot go back to the past. Just as Cavalcanti finds it impossible to return home, Eliot also realizes the changelessness of his decision

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66. Philip Martin, op. cit., p. 97.

67. CPP., p. 89.

68. A.D. Moody, op. cit., p. 137.

69. Lancelot Andrewes, Sermons of the Nativity and of Repentance and Fasting (Oxford : John Henry Parker, 1941), p. 358.



However, the poem does not end here : if it had been so, it would have been an example of self-centred sorrow, and the scene would have been one of cheerlessness and despair. The poem continues:

Yet in these thoughts myself almost despising,  
 Haply I think on thee, — and then my estate,  
 Like to the lark at break of day arising  
 From sullen earth, sings hymns at heaven's gate<sup>74</sup>.

So the thought of the loved one gives meaning and worth to a life which would otherwise be one of despair and sorrow. The sorrow is one which blends with hope and love; so that right from the beginning of the poem, the reader is made to believe that contrition which is the most important element in true repentance is "a sorrow which is not self-centred but upward looking"<sup>75</sup>. While giving himself to this experience of sorrow and repentance, the poet tries to insure himself against the thought of regret at the passing away of youth and all that goes with it. He states:

Why should the aged eagle stretch its wings?  
 Why should I mourn  
 The vanished power of the usual reign?<sup>76</sup>

The phrase "the aged eagle" refers to the old Mediaeval fable which says that the old eagle flies upto the sun and is scorched and then plunges into a well to renew its youthful energy. Hence "the aged

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74. Idem.

75. Philip M. Martin, op. cit., p. 99.

76. T.S. Eliot, loc. cit.

eagle", like the Phoenix becomes the symbol of spiritual re-birth or resurrection. But here "the aged eagle" would not strive even for his spiritual regeneration. This is a reference to the "non-faire" attitude of all those who follow the mystical path; who are detached not only from the sensual but even the spiritual leaning on pure faith alone.

A well-known passage from St. John of the Cross tells of rejuvenation : "God makes (the soul) to die to all that is not naturally God so that once it is stripped and denuded of its former skin, He may begin to clothe it anew. And thus, its youth is renewed like the eagle's and it is clothed with the new man"<sup>77</sup>. Now as his will is not only set against the sins of the past, but is directed positively towards God, the poet presents himself before God in supplication; his hope and love begin to take a new meaning. He prays:

. . .  
 And I pray that I may forget  
 these matters that with myself I too much discuss  
 Too much explain<sup>78</sup>.

The common dangers that every penitent has to face is remorse and scrupulous recrimination - the danger of explaining within himself his past and his possible future. What has been done is

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77. St. John of the Cross, The Complete Works ed. & trans. E. Allison Peers (1935; rpt. London: Burns and Oates, 1964), p. 478.

78. CPP, p. 89.

finished and over, and the protagonist strengthens his will:

For what is done, not to be done again  
 May the judgement not be too heavy upon us<sup>79</sup>.

And a measure of peace and relief has been achieved and a desire for mystical union. Hence the prayer:

Teach us to care and not to care  
 Teach us to sit still<sup>80</sup>.

As the commitment to the new found faith is final and irrevocable, he prays to God to give him strength to sit still and contemplate things spiritual, in complete freedom from the profane and mundane. The poet has now merged into the community and the concluding prayer is for "us", "the sinners now and at the hour of our death". Here it should be pointed out that the words from the "Ave Maria" blend the lady of the poet with Mary, the Mother of the Church, who is the mediatrix before the throne of God.

## II

The second section of Ash-Wednesday has been originally given the title "salutation" referring to Dante's encounter with his Lady, and refers to the second step on the spiritual plain. Whereas the first section of the poem depicts the renunciation of the world by the devotee, the second section presents the renunciation of his own flesh - his body which is an embodiment of sin

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79. Ibid., 90.

80. Ibid.

and a hurdle for spiritual progress. The destruction and dissolution of the body is necessary for the new birth as mentioned in the old fertility rituals.

There are numerous allusions to the Bible and Dante in this part of Ash Wednesday. Dante's sole aim in setting out on his pilgrimage through hell, purgatory and heaven is to seek his beloved Beatrice. When he finds her "Going in white and blue in Mary's colour" at last, she is transformed and glorified, becoming the intercessor of the pilgrim soul before the throne of God. "Belladonna, the lady of the Rocks" of The Waste Land emerges now as this glorious reconciling figure through which the poet reaches his beatific vision.

Robert Lencourt holds the view that Eliot at the time of his conversion, accompanied Lord Halifax everyday to Rickleton church and surrendered himself to Halifax's devotion to the Virgin . . . other, recognizing her central place in the communion of saints<sup>81</sup>. Again, in a letter to Sr. Mary James Power, dated December 6, 1932, Eliot states of his adherence to the Catholic movement of the Church of England as represented by Viscount Halifax and the English Church Union. Thus he "believed in the creeds, the invocation of the Blessed Virgin and the Saints, the sacrament of penance, etc."<sup>82</sup>

81. T. S. Eliot : A Memoir (New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1971), p. 104.

82. Sr. Mary James Power, Poets at Prayer (New York and London: Sheed and Ward, 1938), p. 126.

The second poem of Ash-Wednesday presents a scene under "a juniper tree" and "in the cool of the day" in the desert. Elijah, one of the greatest prophets of the Old Testament period, after defeating the priests of Baal in that faith-filled act where the glory of the true God was magnificiently revealed, became a despairing man as Jezebel, the supporter of the priests of Baal, decided to kill him. For this he "went on a day's journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a juniper tree; and he requested for himself that he might die; --- And as he lay and slept under a juniper tree, behold, then an angel touched him, and said unto him, Arise and eat"<sup>83</sup>. The "three white leopards" who devour the human remains under the tree in the desert remind the readers of the beasts that met Dante at the commencement of his journey in the "dark forest". The beasts in Dante's canto inspired fear and awe whereas the three leopards under the juniper tree are agents of purification symbolized by their "white" colours; they are beneficent features associated with "the cool of the day". In The Dark Night of the Soul St. John of the Cross locates physical strength in the legs, emotion in the heart, sensuality in the liver, and sense perception in the skull. So the living man has been thoroughly consumed by leopards and is ready now to embark on a new life.

Again, "The Juniper Tree" which is one of Jacob Grimm's tales, is the story of a husband and wife, who, having no children, managed to obtain a son through supernatural aid. As the woman died

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83. The First Book of Kings, 19 : 4-5.

at child-birth the husband married a woman who had daughter of her own. The woman killed the little boy out of jealousy and made pudding of the boy's flesh. Marlinchen, the sister, collected the bones and buried them under a juniper tree. Then there were mist and flames and a bird appeared which caused the death of the step-mother and became a boy again. The lady by her goodness corresponds to the sister Marlinchen. Besides, *the critic* comments that the eating of the boy's flesh parallels the Communion and the boy's return to life reminds one of the Christian resurrection<sup>84</sup>. Eliot has made use of many different devices to convince the readers that life comes through death:

And I who am here dissembled  
 Proffer my deeds to oblivion, and my love  
 To the posterity of the desert and the fruit of the  
 gourd<sup>85</sup>.

These lines refer to another Biblical passage where Jonah, the prophet, <sup>was</sup> consumed by a longing for extinction. When Jonah was afflicted by the sun's heat because the gourd under which he sat had withered, "he fainted, and wished in himself to die, and said, It is better for me to die than to live"<sup>86</sup>. The poem presents the idea of death and death is welcome as complete extinction of all that is mundane:

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84. Leonard Unger, T.S. Eliot : Moments and Patterns, op. cit., p. 51.

85. CPG., p. 91.

86. The Book of Jonah, 4:8

End of the endless  
 Journey to no end  
 Conclusion of all that  
 Is inconclusible<sup>87</sup>.

The outcome has not much in common with that of the same theme in "The Hollow Men" or "Journey the Magi", or "A Song for Simeon". The desire for death and annihilation, "I should be glad of another death" and "I am tired with my own life and the lives of those after me" become a deliberately longed-for desire:

As I am forgotten  
 And would be forgotten, so I would forget  
 Thus devoted, concentrated in purpose<sup>88</sup>.

Although the poet is troubled by doubt, frustration and helplessness right from the beginning, he is conscious of a new pattern of life which enables him to forget the past so that he might have a goal towards which he strives along, "devoted and concentrated". Then the litany of praises to the Lady of silences begin, "Lady of silences/Calm and distressed ---"<sup>89</sup> taking the form of a prayer. It combines memories, of "the Litany of our Lady" with Dante's hymn to the Virgin Mary in the last canto of the Paradiso. She is the paradoxical combination of "both Virgin and Mother, uniting perfect innocence and supreme experience, at once Mater Gloriosa and Mater Dolorosa"<sup>90</sup>, the only woman who was worthy to

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87. CPP., p. 92.

88. Ibid., p. 91.

89. Idem.

90. Helen Gardner, The Art of T.S. Eliot, op. cit., p. 117.

enclose the Maker of the world in her tiny womb and in the process, "torn and most whole". She is the mystical Rose of the Garden "where all loves end", the symbol of renewed life, and restoration and wholeness which shall be when men possess God and are united with Him.

It is found that there is a personal symbolism with prophetic vision throughout the poem. The thirty seventh chapter of Ezekiel, tells of the prophet beholding in a vision a valley full of bones "and lo they were dry". After the Lord passes His verdict of punishment upon the people of Israel who had deviated from righteousness, He promises them redemption and reanimation. The prophet finds a vision of renewed vitality : "The hand of the Lord was upon me, and carried me out in the spirit of the Lord, and set me down in the midst of the valley which was full of bones --- ye shall live"<sup>91</sup>. This chapter of Ezekiel goes on with a prophesy of the unity and blessings which God will bestow on his people. And it comes to an end with instructions for the dividing of the land and negotiation of inheritance : "This is the land ye shall divide by lot unto the tribes of Isreal for inheritance, and these are their portions, Saith the Lord God"<sup>92</sup>.

### III

When the third section of Ash-Wednesday was separately published as an independent poem, it was given the title "Som de

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91. The Book of Ezekiel, 37 : 1-5.

92. Ibid., p. 48 : 29.

L'Escalina" [Summit of the stairway], a phrase taken from the Purgatorio, (XXVI). The image of the stair is also a reference to St. John's The Dark Night in which the ladder of living faith is used to illustrate and describe the purgative contemplation. The soul is continually ascending and descending, experiencing exaltation and humiliation "until it has acquired perfect habits; and this ascending and descending will cease, since the soul will have attained to God and become united with Him, which comes to pass at the summit of the ladder; for the ladder rests and leans upon Him"<sup>93</sup>.

Here the speaker has come to his decision; the past is past. But he is moved by temptations, to relax the will and to "turn again" especially at the three levels, the psychological, the moral and the spiritual. Helen Gardner observes that the poem deals with "the temptations of self-absorption, self-disgust and self-indulgence" which must be prevented at the very outset, otherwise they will debilitate the will and prompt the soul to return to its former ways<sup>94</sup>.

The poem may be considered as one of purgation and purification. The image of the stairway, apart from that mentioned in St. John of the Cross, also refers to that of the three steps at St. Peter's Gate which Dante faced at his entrance of purgatory. Higher

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93. St. John of the Cross, The Dark Night of the Soul, quoted in Leonard Unger, Moments and Patterns, op. cit., p. 56.

94. Op. cit., p. 119.

up on the mount of purgatory itself, Dante saw in his vision a particular place that consisted seven circles where souls were being purged of their strain of the deadly sins. A truly apologetic person, it is believed, desires to be purified of his sins that he may be wholly restored to his original state of innocence; that the souls in purgatory suffers.

In the circle where the strain of lust was being purged from penitent sinners, Dante met the soul of the provencal poet Arnaut Daniel, who said : "I am Arnaut, and I weep and singing go ..." Like the other souls in Dante's vision, he is glad to suffer that he may be ultimately united with God. The poet also is ready to accept the trouble of "Struggling with the devil of the stairs who wears/The deceitful face of hope and of despair"<sup>95</sup>.

Here it may be stated that the words "The deceitful face of hope and of despair" suggest "the demon of doubt" of which Eliot wrote in his essay on Pascal as "inseparable from the spirit of belief" for he said, "For every man who thinks and lives by thought must have his own scepticism, that which stops at the question; that which ends in denial, or that which leads to faith and which is somehow integrated into the faith which transcends it"<sup>96</sup>. However, at this point, it refers to the devil who tempts men to become egocentric, to relax their resolution with the suggestion that sin is a necessary evil and in the world there are worse people than

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95. CPP., p. 93.

96. Selected Essays, op. cit., p. 411.

themselves. Thus, when the will is weakened and the spirit begins to vacillate, the three enemies of man who is striving for perfection, namely, the natural world, the flesh and the devil begin to assert themselves. They go on overcoming him by their attractiveness more powerful than before and the will begin to waver once again. When the allurements are properly prevented, and the goal of amendment and penance is firmly established, the picture withers, the attraction diminishes and the penitent discovers "strength beyond hope and despair/Climbing the third stair"<sup>97</sup>.

It appears that the poem exemplifies the spiritual history which depicts a sense of progress towards the desired goal. The protagonist has won considerable victory in his struggle against the sensual and now is in a position "to care and not to care", has got "strength beyond hope and despair". The words of Leonard Unger deserve mention in this context" : The part of man that is vexed by the fables of hope and despair is being purged"<sup>98</sup>. So he has been in a position to utter:

Lord, I am not worthy  
 Lord, I am not worthy/but speak the word only<sup>99</sup>.

In this way this section of Ash-Wednesday comes to an end with the words of the Roman Centurion requesting Christ to cure his ailing servant : "Lord, I am not worthy that thou shouldst come under my roof : but speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed"<sup>100</sup>. When the Holy Eucharist is celebrated, the priest,

97. Chr., p. 93.

98. op. cit., p. 57.

99. Chr., p. 93.

100. Matthew, 8:8.

just before he consumes the body and blood of Christ repeats thrice together with the participants, "Lord, I am not worthy that Thou shouldst come under my roof. But speak the word only and my soul shall be healed". So, the healing of the sinful soul, the restoration of the penitent, is accompanied by the powerful and the liberating words of God alive within those who trust Him, and whose entire being is set upon Him. With fervour and humility, the poet has now the grace to continue his quest "climbing the third stair".

#### IV

The title "The Eternal Mediatix" of the fourth poem is the line which provides its central image: "Vestita de color de fiamma," from Vita Nuova section III and Purgatorio (XXX). Eliot quotes the latter passage and comments, "how skilfully Dante expresses the recrudescence of an ancient passion in a new emotion, in a new situation, which comprehends, enlarges, and gives a meaning to it"<sup>101</sup>. By that he has meant that the first love is now understood in its final cause, that is, as "attraction towards God". The action of the fourth poem takes place on the borders of Paradise after the purgatorial flame has been crossed.

The divine lady who walked between the violet and the violet in "ignorance and in knowledge of eternal colour" resembles the lady

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101. Selected Essays, op. cit., p. 262.

of Dante's "divine pageant" of the Paradiso. When one reads Dante's poem, one finds a dazzling light that resolves into a mystical procession heralded by seven candlesticks, "the seven spirits of God". After this four and twenty elders and four beats - the latter symbols of the four Gospels escort the triumphal carriage of the church drawn by a two natural gryphon. Behind them all, in the midst of angels scattering flowers, is a veiled lady dressed in the colours of faith, hope and charity "who moved among the others as they walked.../white light folded, sheathed about her, folded"<sup>102</sup>. This pageant is, as it is stated in the essay "Dante", "the kind of pageantry which we find here and in the Paradiso will be tedious to those, if there may be any, who are unmoved by the splendour of the Revelation of St. John. It belongs to the world of what I call high dream, and the world seems capable only of the low dream"<sup>103</sup>.

The passage that follows reminds once of the lady who is at once a real woman and a celestial form, something at once familiar and distant :

The silent sister veiled in white and blue  
 Between the yews, behind the garden god,  
 Whose flute is breathless, bent her head and signed  
 but spoke no word<sup>104</sup>.

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102. CFP., p. 94.

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

104. T.S. Eliot, loc. cit.

The lady here is among the trees, all is calm and still, even the flute is breathless. But the powerful presence of the Lady pervades the entire atmosphere. It resembles "Animula" in which the yew tree is the symbol of immortality. In English country funerals, the mourners carry yew branches as a symbol of everlasting life. But eternal life and spiritual rebirth can be obtained only through time. It is time that restores. The purgatorial suffering leads to the beatific vision. In the words of Nancy K. Gish, "Through suffering in time, the soul attains perfection which is timeless"<sup>105</sup>. Thus there comes the request:

Redeem

The time redeem

The unread vision in the higher dream

While jewelled unicorns draw by the gilded  
hearse<sup>106</sup>.

Here "redeem the time" means to sanctify, to make meaningful one's temporal existence. St. Paul speaks of "redeeming the time" in his letter to the Ephesians, "Walk as wise, redeeming the time because the days are evil". Only when the poet has yielded himself to a care ordered by God rather than by man is it possible for him "to redeem the time", and in doing so "to redeem the unread vision in the higher dream", the dream that is "the token of word unheard,

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105. Time in the Poetry of T. S. Eliot: A Study in Structure and Theme (London: Macmillan, 1981), p. 81.

106. CPP., p. 94.

unspoken". The pageant of the gilded hearse drawn by the jewelled unicorns is a reference to the past splendour of the Church which has now become nothing more than a gilded corpse. It will not be irrelevant to point out that Eliot's religious poetry is an attempt to revitalize the old Christian tradition as found in his prose writings.

V

The fifth section of Ash-Wednesday is a hortatory meditation on the theme of incarnation, opposing the Word against the world and word. The poem takes up the reality of the incarnation, the initiating and outgoing love of God. It refers to the prologue of St. John's Gospel "In the beginning was the word". But he is much ignored or rejected by the world which was created by him and for him; the world exists in His own right, absolutely so for He is the only existence; all other existence is derived from Him. "In Him was life. He was in the world, and the world was made by Him"<sup>107</sup>. Yet,

still is the unspoken word, the word unheard,  
The word without a word, the word within  
The world and for the world<sup>108</sup>.

Here the poet implies the Nativit y sermon of Bishop Lancelot Andrewes, "Indeed every word here is a wicker: To an infant, verbum

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107. St. John, 1:4-10

108. CPP., p. 96.

inians, the Word without a word; the eternall Word not able to speak a word"109. The Word became a human being for the sake of the world. He is the principle and centre of the world's life. But the world is apt to deny the Word. In this way the reality of the Word world is apt to deny the Word. In this way the reality of the Word face flesh, "the still point of the turning world"; the meditation moves to the human response to His Incarnation. The world does not respond when the Word incarnates itself in their lives. When the poet has a tragic realization of this, the poet thinks of himself in relation to the Word: "Against Thee only have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight"110. In a moment of enlightenment the poet realizes the ailment of the present day world; preference of darkness though light has come; it is the rejection of God's gift of redemption.

## VI

The Sixth section is the concluding one of Ash-Wednesday, but it does not necessarily mould a conclusion as purgation is never finished in this life. The soul, surrounded by the taint of human existence, finds plenty of scope for penance and sorrow. The words "Gilead me father"111 are significant. These words are used by the penitent just before revealing his sins to the priest. The sacrament of penance is not only a means for the purification of one's sins

109. Lancelot Andrewes, "Sermon 12 of the Nativity : Christmas 161 Sermons, ed. G. . . Story (Oxford Clarendon Press, 1967), p. 85.

110. Psalm, 51 : 4.

111. CFP., p. 98.



sister, mother  
 And spirit of the river, spirit of the sea,  
 Suffer me not to be separated  
 And let my cry come unto Thee<sup>114</sup>.

The prayer with which the poem ends is a glad prayer: "Suffer me not to be separated". It is only fitting that he has recourse to the supplication of the Lady, the Virgin Mother, for her intercession is suppliant omnipotence.

One may find that The Waste Land looks forward to such a poet as Ash Wednesday, especially prominent are the lines:

I sat upon the shore  
 Fishing, with the arid plain behind me  
 Shall I at least set my lands in order?<sup>115</sup>

What the setting one's land in order would mean is that the poet has determined to practise inner control and discipline. An eminent critic writes: "the protagonist resolved to claim his tradition or rehabilitate it"<sup>116</sup>. However, it is evident in the later poem that the protagonist has gone far beyond the claiming of his tradition; he is striving to rise to a higher sphere of being; he has dedicated and effectively entered upon the way of perfection through penance and prayer "which means dying into new life"<sup>117</sup>. So the six poems of Ash-Wednesday, taken together, present a covert's progress from

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114. Ibid., p. 99.

115. Ibid., p. 74.

116. B. Rajan ed. T.S. Eliot : Study of His Writings by Several Hands (London: Dennis Dobson, 1971), p. 30.

117. A.L. Moody, T.S. Eliot, op. cit., p. 153.

hopelessness to regeneration; his new found faith has helped him grapple with the anxieties and tensions of life.

Ash Wednesday has the heart of twilight, purgatorial atmosphere, where existence is made valid by the presence of the incarnate Word who alone can strengthen and sustain the poet in his journey towards mystical union. Now the poet has come a long way from the "rocky" desert of The Waste Land, the rugged and sandy landscape of "The Hollow Men"; the humility of Ash-Wednesday will lead him into the rose-garden of the Four Quartets.