

T.S. ELIOT

The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock

The Waste Land

Unit-II

T.S. Eliot

SECTION I: CRITICISM ON ELIOT

1. The Age of T.S. Eliot

The 20th century is such a complex and problematic age that it cannot be represented by a single voice or character. We can hardly call it the Age of Science, for even physics is today on the verge of metaphysics, nor will it suffice to designate it as the Age of Anxiety, for that really tells nothing. Neither it is humanistic, nor classical, nor scientific, nor romantic, nor one of the compromise. We cannot simply sum up the age by a single charming epithet, as in case with the previous eras, e.g. the Age of Chaucer, the Age of Milton, the Age of Dryden, the Age of Pope, the Age of Wordsworth, and so on and so forth. The 20th century is a peculiar mass that entraps us with tempting baits heartlessly; it is a baffling mass of currents and cross-currents. The moment we set out to discover it, it becomes a mirage. Instead of unfolding itself to us, it rather engulfs us. It seems that the 20th century has brought all the distinct threads trailing through centuries together and tied them in a knot. It would be a miracle indeed if someone were born to voice the concern of the age in all its manifestations. But the miracle has already happened in the form of T.S. Eliot !

Surrounded by a hostile world, Eliot's many-sided genius became impatient to formulate new devices of speech and rhythm in English poetry. When he began writing verses, the Georgian poetry was in progress. By and by the poets had forgotten their avowed aims and had begun doing the same as the romantic Decadents, against whom they had risen in revolt erstwhile.

To understand the greatness of T.S. Eliot, it is worthwhile to throw light on the Georgian school of poetry, since it is school against which he stood firmly and contributed something concrete to the growth of English poetry.

The Georgian school of poets published five volume of *Georgian Poetry* between 1912 and 1922 from the Poetry Bookshop of Harold Monro. In these volumes appeared the poems of R. Brooke, E. Blunden, W.H. Davies, Walter de la Mare, L.A. Bercrombie, Gordon Bottomley, John Drinkwater, J.E. Flecker, John Freeman, W.W. Gibson, Ralph Hodgson, Edward Shanks, Sir John Squire, Alfred Noyes, G.K. Chesterton, Masfield and Hilaire Belloc. These poets had their recognisable features, but they were alike in the rejection of the Decadent ideals of art and literature. They cultivated such qualities as reality, simplicity, love of natural beauty, and adherence to the main traditions of English poetry in form and technique. With the passage of time, they turned away from real life and, like the Romantics, sought shelter in "old, unhappy, far-off things" and in "battles long ago".¹ And hence their revolt against the decadents proved to be no more than a re-statement of 'what had already been said perfectly'. They wrote for the popular taste, and their "exoteric" poetry tended to be "flat and thin, or shallow and shadowless. an evasion like the phrase, 'Not at Home'."² This is the reason that led the Sitwells, Roy Campbell and others to attack their poetic practice.

T.E. Hulme (1883-1917) led the reaction against the Georgian poetry. Through his impressive lectures and five short poems, Hulme stressed that poetry should solely confine itself to the world perceived by the senses, and to the presentation of its themes in a succession of concise, clearly visualized, concrete images, accurate in detail and precise in significance. He also stressed the employment of *vers libre* with its unlimited freedom of expression and its rhythms approaching those of everyday speech. Hilda Doolittle and Ezra Pound offered their unstinted support to Hulme, and they combinedly launched an attack on the Georgian poetry and brought into being the literary movement, known as Imagism. In 1914 appeared *The Egoist* and *Des Imagistes*. The

Imagist poets went on with their job with a missionary zeal, and succeeded in producing the three collections of poems under the title *Some Imagist Poets* (1915-1917) and the final *Imagist Anthology* (1930). Although the Imagist movement grew weak by the desertion of its certain members and by the obsession of its practitioners to follow the sequence of very exact and concise images. But the movement was in full swing after the first Great War, and exerted profound influence upon Eliot and Richard Aldington. Eliot could never shake off its impact and it ensured to him the use of concrete images.

When Eliot came from the New England to Europe, the condition of English poetry was not very bright; American poetry was defunct; and French poetry began to draw inspiration from Symbolism, which influenced writers like Arthur Symonds and W.B. Yeats in its wake.

Two eminent poets of Eliot's time were Yeats and Ezra Pound. But whereas the early Yeats was devoted whole-heartedly to 'the stuff of dreams' and to the Irish questions, and Pound to his idiosyncracies about art and politics, Eliot alone showed in poetry the "complex intensities of concern about soul and body"³. In case with the first two poets, in many other respects great and powerful as they were, "the moral, religious and anthropological preoccupations"⁴ are absent. Yeats could be a realist and an over-all metaphysical seer only towards the close of his career. Moreover, the best utterance of Yeats philosophy is *A Vision* (1925 and 1937), which is in itself an obscure work of prose, not of poetry. But Eliot's best religious and philosophical work, as far as I can think, is *Four Quartets*, a unique flower of the poet's genius: "The complete consort dancing together."⁵ And Pound stands nowhere in the context, since his "main concern has always been art: he is, in the most serious sense of the word, an aesthete."⁶ Despite Eliot's proclaimed gratefulness to Pound, who was his "technical adviser"⁷ and to whom he dedicated *The Waste Land*, "the influence of Mr. Pound that can be observed from outside is secondary to Mr. Eliot's."⁸ Thus it can be safely asserted that Eliot is the truest poet of his time, only next to none.

Being conscious of the 'failings' of the Georgians, Eliot set about to introduce "new ways of thought, new modes of approach, new patterns of expression, new rhythms and new cadences".⁹ And Eliot succeeded wonderfully in his job as a poet for that simple reason that he had the humility to admit the great ineluctable value of tradition. That indeed is the indelible mark of true genius. The true genius does not invent or discover so much as he creates or transmutes the borrowed material. In Shakespeare's hands the material drawn from other sources 'suffered a sea-change.'

Eliot wanted to evolve and practise certain standards; he was a traditionalist through and through. He longed to imbibe in his works the best of the European tradition, of which the British was a part. "Although a poet of the English language, Eliot is, first and foremost, an European poet."¹⁰ And it is this 'Europeanism, the awareness of belonging to a tradition broader than that of his language that distinguishes him from many of his English-language contemporaries. He went to Christianity to satisfy the longing for European tradition and culture, since Christianity was "the most effective measure against the corruption of totalitarianism" and could "save the modern man from being completely atomized and going adrift".¹¹

Correlated to this traditionalism is Eliot's concept of art. His most remarkable contribution to modern literature is the 'impersonal theory of poetry' *Tradition and the Individual Talent* is a very good essay in which Eliot says that the poem and the poet are two separate things. He elucidates the matter by examining "the relation of the poem to the past" and then "the relation of the poem to its author".¹² He thinks that the past is never dead; it lives in the present. The poet should draw his model and ideas from the past to shape the future. He takes much from the stored wisdom of the ancients and gives comparatively less to the tradition. And in this usual barter system, he has to annihilate himself greatly, or to undergo the process of 'a continual self-sacrifice, a continual extinction of personality.' Personality, therefore, finds no room in his theory of poetry. In this respect he is very different from the romantic conception of art, and his declaration in 1928 that he was "classicist in literature, Anglo-Catholic in religion, royalist in politics"¹³ is fully vindicated. Thus we see that Eliot was not only an innovator in poetry but also in criticism. His multipronged genius heralded the dawn of a new era in the field of English poetic drama too. As Eliot thought, certain emotions and feelings visit us only in

moments of inaction, the moments frequently symbolized in Eliot's work by a scene in a rose-garden or apple orchard. These can only be expressed in the language of poetry. But at the same time the contact with the ordinary, everyday world must be organically related to each other. They should look as 'integral products of an act of imagination.'

And Eliot, beyond doubt, was "an integral poet",¹⁴ who had been searching for a form of poetry as well as for a form of life. He could make the search easy by means of symbols and images, which synthesised his disparate experiences, and which came up to fill in the gap created by the absence of connections and transitions. But if "he omits the grammatical signs of connection and order, he preserves the psychological or poetic signs."¹⁵ Eliot's employment of 'broken images', his abrupt transitions from one thought to another, his wit-flashes, his over-implication, his allusiveness, his elliptical style that are so evident in his works are all indicative of his permanent concern to convey 'the genuine whole of tangled feelings'.

Some critics have charged Eliot of being obscure and elliptical in his poetry, particularly so in *The Waste Land* and *Four Quartets*. Though the charge may not be rejected totally, the age itself we are living in is such. Eliot did not believe in producing work haphazardly; he worked with diligence and artistry. In his reaction against the preceding poetry, he chose the way of esotericism. And in one of his memorable essays¹⁶ he has tried to clarify his stand in the matter:

"We can only say that it appears likely that poets in our civilisation, as it exists at present, must be difficult. Our civilisation comprehends great variety and complexity, and this variety and complexity, playing upon a refined sensibility, must produce various and complex results. The poet must become more and more comprehensive, more allusive, more indirect, in order to force, to dislocate if necessary, language into his meaning."

Eliot was fully convinced of "the uselessness of wide appeal to an audience incapable of full appreciation."¹⁷ He was also fully convinced of the demands of our civilisation being infinitely much more complex than in any previous era. As art is the reflection of the spirit of the age, it requires the resurrection of the lost and the development of new artistic devices. Esotericism, as opposed to exotericism of the Georgian poetry, was at once "a discipline for the easier desires of the artist and of the audience" and "a necessary result of the conditions in which the poet's sensibility had to operate."¹⁸ The esoteric poet aims at "cultivating all the possibilities of words as a medium"¹⁹, and "when the speech of one sense is insufficient to convey (the) entire meaning, (using) the language of another".²⁰ Esotericism therefore, as cultivated by Eliot, was a call of the 20th century to create new devices essential to the expression of entirely new conditions.

Paul Elmer More labeled Eliot as a 'lyric prophet of chaos'. When he attributed this epithet to him, he simply meant that Eliot had dealt with 'the confusion of life' in his poetry. In 1922, a new star became lord of the ascendant. Eliot's *The Waste Land* was hailed by the literary world as a landmark in English poetry comparable to the *Lyrical Ballads*. The poem was written under the shadow of postwar horror and despair. *The Waste Land*, in method as well as in mood, is a continuation of *Gerontion*; it is in genre the same as *The Hollow Men* which is the next to follow it. This poem has surpassed even Laforgue in technique and symbolic expression. Eliot has now "developed a new technique, at once laconic, quick, and precise, for representing the transmutations of thought, the interplay of perception and reflection."²¹

Most of the 'modernist' trends of poetry – the new psychology, anthropology, symbolism, and metaphysics – meet in the work of T.S. Eliot and contribute most to its surprising success. The years 1919-1929 were "a confused" and "a barren decade"²² but not for Eliot. The poet is loved and liked today so much due to his flourishing at a time when there was felt a vacuum in English poetry. Critics like Yvor Winters should have done well to themselves and to the literary world at large by greeting the 'ascendant' star instead of labeling him as one who 'surrenders his form to his subject', and thereby becomes chaotic. Who can say that Eliot is chaotic, simply because he 'holds a mirror to Nature' as a true social reporter and reformer? Who can deny the fact that he has done considerable service to English poetry by bringing it back to life? Perhaps Mr. Hugh Kenner has dispensed justice to him by ascribing him the quality to be "the invisible poet in an age of systematic

literary scrutiny”²³ Mr. William Empson is also quite judicious in his evaluation of Eliot as ‘ a very penetrating influence, perhaps not unlike an east wind’.

For good poetry Mr. Pound has laid down that it should ensure the blending of three aspects together: (1) Melopoeia, (2) Imagism, and finally (3) Lagopoeia. Some of these three is found in all good poetry, as in Eliot’s too. Such poetry “must resolve the distinctive characteristics of its own time – which are temporary – into universality.”²⁴ For Eliot, the past or tradition is the best form of universality. But this past or tradition does not imply the insular outlook of ‘Europeanism’. It transcends the limitations of space and time. Eliot is a ‘universal’ poet of the first rank. He is not ‘the great minor poet of 20th century’ as David Daiches characterised him in his Delhi Seminar address. One must bear in mind that Eliot’s universality is a progression of the concept of ‘Europeanism’ and not a retrogression. It highlights his readiness to accept ‘the best that is known and thought’ in the world. Octavio paz has expressed this idea in the following memorable manner:

“Eliot is universal in the sense in which all great poetry, from the funeral chants of the pygmies to the Hai-ku of the Japanese, is the common heritage of all men; and he is universal also because of his influence in world literature of our time, comparable to that of Klee in painting or that of Sxtravinsky in music: an influence which differs from others because it is a critical influence.”²⁵

As a true ‘universal’ poet, Eliot included, at least, six foreign languages in *The Waste Land alone*. He would be remembered as a scholar who was sincerely devoted to the betterment of English poetry by plumbing new depths and exploring new horizons. In the words of Pinto: ‘He has given it (English Poetry) a new intellectual dignity, new forms arising out of a sincerity and a new spiritual depth. Like Dryden after the Restoration and Wordsworth at the end of the eighteenth century he has also given it a new policy’. And this is a very balanced judgement of Eliot indeed.

1. Wordsworth, ‘The Solitary Reaper’. *Fifteen poets*
2. Edith Sitwell, *Aspects of Modern Poetry*, p.73.
3. F.R. Leavis, *New Bearings In English Poetry*, P. 140
4. *Ibid.*, p.140
5. ‘Little Gidding’, *Four Quatets. Complete Poems*, p.
6. F.R. Leavis, *New Bearings In English Poetry*, p.140.
7. G.S. Fraser, *Ezra Pound*, p.1.
8. F.R. Leavis, *New Bearings In English Poetry*, p.134.
9. *The P.G.E.A. Magazine* , Allahabad University , Allahabad (1964-65),p.20.
10. Octavio Paz, ‘Inaugural Address’, *Papers and Proceedings of a Seminar* (1965), p.2
11. *Papers and Proceedings of a Seminar*, p. 97.
12. ‘Tradition and the Individual Talent’, *The Sacred Wood* p. 51.
13. See the Preface to *For Lancelot Andrewes*, p.7
14. K.Smidt, *Poetry and Belief in the Work of T.S. Eliot* , p. 114.
15. George Williamson, *A Reader’s Guide to T.S. Eliot*, p.14.
16. ‘The Metaphysical Poets’ in *Selected Essays*, p.289.
17. D.E.S. Maxwell, *The Poetry of T.S. Eliot*, p. 15
18. *Ibid*, p. 15.
19. Edith Sitwell, *Poetry and Criticism*, p.23.
20. *Ibid*, p. 18.
21. Edmund Wilson, *Axel’s Castle*, p.92.

22. Grierson and Smith, *A Critical History Of English Poetry*, p.513.
23. See Hugh Kenner's *The Invisible Poet: T.S. Eliot*, p.ix.
24. D.E.S. Maxwell, *The poetry of T.S. Eliot*, p.13.
25. Octavio Paz, 'inaugural address', *Papers and Proceedings of a Seminar*, p.2.

2. T.S. Eliot's Life and Works

T.S. Eliot has become been a name of high fame in English poetry since the early twenties. He had governed the age in which he lived with an unchallengeable authority. The 20th century, as it is known to all, is quite complex and diversified in nature. It cannot be signalized by a single voice or authority. Still T.S. Eliot may be regarded as its best representative in English literature, perhaps more so than any other literary figure. Amongst the post-war poets, playwrights and critics, who have enjoyed honour and prestige, Eliot stands out as a towering personality. It is he alone who could face and relish the life of stark and harsh realities. He never liked to sit in an ivory tower by shutting his eyes to the intricate and baffling problems confronting the human race of his time. He rather came forward as one of ourselves and to presented a first –hand report on the formidable issues of the age.

As a poet, Eliot drew upon many different sources to gather his material. He was deeply influenced by certain glorious personalities of the past and of the contemporary scene. Shakespeare, Milton, Dryden, Ben Jonson, Arnold, etc. in general, and Donne and the Metaphysicals in particular contributed their shares in shaping Eliot's mind. Of the foreign impact upon him, mention may be made of the French Symbolists, especially Laforgue and Gautier, of the German philosophers, such as Hegel, Meinong and Bradley, and of the Indian religions and philosophies. By embracing influences so wide and diverse in nature, Eliot greatly increased his knowledge and enriched his sensibility. This also accounts for his being a universal poet. Eliot was a versatile genius, a highly talented man and an immortal soul. Eliot's universality is to be interpreted in the sense in which all great poetry, from the funeral chants of the pigmies to the Hai –ku of the Japanese, is the common heritage of all man; Eliot's appeal was not limited to the English speaking people or to the European tradition; he is rather a universal poet. And this necessarily presupposes that he is an English poet or an European poet.

In this context it is proper to say that Eliot was aware of a vastly rich tradition, which was not merely English or European, but had a wider application. He derives, for example, not only from "the best that is known and thought" in the Bible, or Christian theology, but also from Buddhism and Hinduism and many more religions. It is in this sense that Eliot's outlook is said to be catholic, not insular, not national, but international, nor peculiar to one tribe or people but to all tribes and peoples. For him creeds and castes do not matter; he is only concerned with the best. This also explains another stand taken by him, that of a classicist in literature. He held Aristotle's authority supreme, because he had a critical mind *par excellence*. Eliot is also a critic of the Aristotelian line. Correlated to this is his historic statement in 1928 that he was 'an Anglo – Catholic in religion' and 'a royalist in politics'. No doubt, Eliot's mind was wholly absorbed with Christianity, its burning problems, its reformative zeal; his poetry, tends to enact an attitude towards life, and this attitude is that of a devout Christian and spiritual fighter.

By 'royalist in politics' Eliot might have meant a conservative who does not believe in sudden and violent revolutions, like the one which the French enacted in 1789 against the monarchy. Eliot was a humanitarian beyond scruples, but it does not mean that he should be violent and aggressive to root out the stumbling blocks in the way. They are rather to be overcome with sympathy, which at once implies the sympathy of a critical mind. His manifesto of being a 'royalist' does not offer him an advantage of escape from the social and human responsibilities, which necessitates involving into action rather than fleeing into a solitary resort.

T.S. Eliot was born in 1888 in St. Louis, Missouri (U.S.A). His family was of Devonshire origin, which was traditionally interested in trade and commerce and academic studies. He was an undergraduate at Harvard during 1906 –1909. Here he came under the influence of the Symbolists and Laforgue. During 1909-10 he was

a graduate student at Harvard and completed his early poems, including *'Portrait of a Lady'* and began *'Prufrock'*. In the years 1910 and 1911 he went to France (Sorbonne in Paris) and Germany. He spent a year at Oxford reading Greek philosophy. Again he was back to Harvard University as a graduate student. It is then that he started work on the philosophy of Francis Herbert Bradley, whose *Appearance and Reality* influenced him much. During 1914–15 he resumed his study in Germany which was cut off by the First World War. He took his residence at Oxford, and worked on some short satiric poems. *'Prufrock'* was published in Chicago in June 1915. His marriage to Vivian Haigh - Wood took place in July 1915.

After a brief experience of teaching at Highgate School, Eliot entered business in 1916. He also completed his Bradley thesis in that year. Then he spent eight years as an employee of Lloyd's Bank. He took up various reviewing and editorial assignments. During 1917-20 he wrote many poems in quatrains after the French fashion. *'Gerontion'* deserves special mention in this connection. *Prufrock' and Other Observations* appeared in press in June 1917. He was an assistant editor of *The Egoist* (1917-19). He also published a collection of Poems and *The Sacred Wood* in 1920.

Eliot was the London correspondent for *The Deal* during 1921-22 and *La-Nouvelle Revue Francaise* during 1922-23. In October 1923 began his career as an editor of *'The Criterion'*. His epoch-making poem, *The Waste Land*, appeared in public in 1922. It is a much discussed poem with five movements. In it the poet has displayed the fears, doubts and distrust of the post war generation. It won for him the *Dial* award. In 1925 appeared his *Poems 1909-1925*, which included *'The Hollow Men'* written in the spirit of *The Waste land*.

During 1926-27 came out his satiric pieces *'Fragment of a Prologue'*, and *'Fragment of an Agon'*. In 1927 Eliot declared himself to be an Anglo-Catholic in religion and assumed British citizenship. *'Ariel Poems'* were published between 1927 and 1930. *'Ash Wednesday'*, the most difficult poem in six sections, appeared in 1930, before which he had written an essay on Dante (1929). The fragmentary *'Coriolan'* was out in 1931. The year 1932 saw the publication of *Selected Essays* in which were included most of the essays already published in *The Sacred Wood'* (1920). Thereafter *The Use of Poetry and The Use of Criticism* (1933) and *After Strange Gods* (1934) were produced which contain some of the highly qualified critical opinions of the poet-critic on the theory and practice of poetry.

The year 1934 witnessed a substantial change in the attitude of the poet. He had now sided with the poetic drama, which he renovated and energized during the later years of his life. Eliot's first work in this direction was *The Rock* (1934). Since then a spate of publications flooded the dramatic field. *Murder in the Cathedral* appeared in 1935. *Poems: 1909-1935*, including *'Burnt Norton'* was produced then. *The Family Reunion* in 1939 was a stage-failure, but the dramatist remained unshaken. During the years 1940-42 appeared *'East Coker'*, *'The Dry Salvages'* and *'Little Gidding'*. These three and *'Burnt Norton'* were combined together to form *Four Quartets* (1943).

The year 1947 brought a catastrophe for Eliot: the death of his first wife after long illness. In 1948 he wrote *'Notes towards the Definition of Culture'*. By now he had been honoured by his fellow poets, writers, literary associations and clubs on so many occasions. Among the many literary honours bestowed upon him, mention may be made of: Charles Eliot Norton Professor of Poetry at Harvard (1932-33), President, Classical Association, Nobel Prize for Literature (1948), and Order of Merit (1948). At different times he had received honorary degrees from no less than twelve Universities in Europe and America.

Eliot wrote *The Cocktail Party* in 1950, *The Confidential Clerk* in 1955 and *The Elder Statesman* in 1959. After *'Four Quartets'*, poetry was almost untouched by him, though poetic element was indisputably retained in his all dramas mentioned above. Earlier in 1957, Eliot had married Valerie Fletcher, his second wife, and had published *On Poetry and Poets*. Eliot's hectic literary life came to an end on January 4, 1965, and the news of his death was received in the world with a sense of deep loss and sorrow.

Needless to say that with the passing away of T.S. Eliot an age of Masters of English literature has closed its chapter, at least for the time being. But he will ever be remembered by us; he who gave us *'Whispers of*

Immortality’ while alive, will return invisibly to us to console, exhort, and guide the ‘erring humanity’. He would be ever remembered as one of the illustrious sons of the Muse who have secured a permanent place on the Parnassus. He is to be remembered as one who has enriched and enhanced the scope of English poetry. “He has given it (English poetry) a new intellectual dignity, new forms arising out of a new sincerity and a new spiritual depth. Like Dryden after the Restoration and Wordsworth at the end of the eighteenth century he has also given it a new policy. More than any other poet he has saved it ‘from becoming a mere pastime of the scholarly section of the upper middle class, like Latin poetry in the days of Claudian and Ausonius.’

3. Themes in Eliot's Poetry

Eliot is a representative poet of the twentieth century and hence he has voiced forcefully the moral and spiritual degradation of modern man, the loss of human values, and the prevalence of chaos, confusion and tension in the human world. His poetry is an expression of the age in which he lived. It does not take a recourse to the past or the medieval age. It tries to feel the pulse of man and articulates his problems and tensions in a touching way.

A critic has rightly pointed out that Eliot’s early poetry is the poetry of suffering and tension. As we know, he began his poetic career with “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock”, and this poem brings to the fore the dilemma and the pangs of a middle aged man in the presence of beautiful movement. The question that haunts him incessantly is: ‘Do I dare disturb the universe?’ Similarly, the poem “Portrait of a Lady”, highlights the same kind of dilemma and sense of futility in the life a lady advancing in years: ‘I shall sit here, serving tea to friends.’ In fact, all the protagonists of Eliot - Prufrock, the lady, Gerontion, Mr. Apollinax, Tiresias, etc. – are great sufferers in the drama of life.

In his early poetry, Eliot portrays persons and scenes full of disillusionment, repulsion and horror. His awareness of ‘the universe panorama of futility and anarchy’ in the human world is quite acute and intense. The imagery of the poems prior to *The Waste Land* is modern, urban, even cosmopolitan, and invariably tends to emphasize the boredom and sterility of modern urban life. The tedium of life, even the meaninglessness of existence, may be marked in the following extract from “Rhapsody on a Windy Night”:

*So the hand of the child, automatic,
Slipped out and pocketed a toy that was summering along the quay.*

I could see nothing behind that child's eye.

Here we have a glimpse of the utter emptiness and the lack of fulfilment in the child life. A grown-up man’s or woman’s life is no better in any way. The life of the middle-aged lady is painted as follows:

*And I must borrow every changing shape
To find expression... dance, dance
Life a dancing bear,
Cry life a parrot, chatter like an ape.
Let us take the air, in a tobacco trance –*

Clearly, her life is meaningless and no better than that of an animal. Prufrock is also faced with ‘the overwhelming question’ of seeking meaning in life. Gerontion, an old man, is also preoccupied with a sense of loss and nostalgia, of failure and frustration:

*Here I am, an old man in a dry month,
Being read to by a boy, waiting for rain.*

The ‘sign’ of Christ given in the poem is not taken by man.

With “Gerontion” onwards, Eliot’s poems deal with the depths of human depravity. In these poems, animal images become frequent, emphasizing thereby the bestiality and depravity of man. There is Princess Volupine, whose name suggests both a devouring wolf (‘vulpene’) and a voluptuary; there is Bleistein, like some creature

from a primeval swamp; there is Sweeney, the 'Apeneck', who is 'clawing' at the pillow slip', while a cosmopolitan woman associated with him is –

*Rachel nee Rabinovitch
Tears at the grapes with murderous paws.*

In "Whispers of Immortality" Grishkin is seen in a drawing soon, distilling a rank 'feline smell'.

The Waste Land (1922) employs the theme of 'the divitalization of human civilization' and 'the destabilization of human society'. Critics like F.R. Leavis and Paul Elmer More think that the poem begins with a description of a cruel season and a dead land, and that it ends on a chaotic note. But these critics have not been able to grasp the full implication of the Sanskrit words proper – 'Da Da Da' and 'Shantih Shantih Shantih'. The poem is highly suggestive of the loss of spirituality in the modern world; that is why London is called an 'unreal city' and the London Bridge is depicted as 'falling down'. The poem has a mythical structure. The Fisher King of the Grail legend suffers from a mysterious sickness, as a result of which the land he rules over turns into a waste land and suffers from infertility. This infertility can be healed and removed by the Deliverer. The subject matter concerns the entire humanity, though the focus is on modern London. The overall mood of the poet is one of despair not of exhilaration over the prospective dawn of a better future (as hinted at towards the close of the poem).

"The Hollow Men" continues the mood and ironic vision of *The Waste Land*. The poem is replete with sardonic tone and pessimism. The hollow men are the empty or stuffed men, with no bright hope. The poet's vision comes out vividly in the following lines:

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

Up to "The Hollow Men" the note of suffering and pessimism is predominant, but after this poem the Christian hope returns to the poet. The Ariel Poems definitely mark the break, and the dark vision of the poet yields place to a brighter vision –

The Ariel poems consist of "Journey of the Magi", "A Song for Simeon", "Animula", and "Marina". These poems make use of the religious theme connected with the life of Christ. The magi travel a long arduous way to see the infant Christ. The narrator, who is one of the magi, is sure that he has seen the saviour. In "A Song for Simeon", Simeon also has the impression of having seen the Saviour, but he feels that he is not to be redeemed. "Animula" is somewhat somber and gloomy in outlook; it paints a process of degeneration – from innocence to irresolution and selfishness and then to death. This poem asserts that the new life after death is the gift of Christ. The poet is acutely conscious of time here. The fourth of the Ariel Poems, "Marina", is based on the reunion of Pericles with his daughter (as celebrated by Shakespeare in his famous play), and subtly shows the graceful life leading to salvation through the intervention of Christ.

Thus, we have noticed that Eliot's poetry written since 1927 breathes in a fresh air of religious certainty and spiritual discipline. The poem "Ash Wednesday" (1930) is precisely steeped in spiritual atmosphere of self-abnegation. The earlier atmosphere of chaos and confusion, doubt and distrust, has now disappeared. By this time, the poet has achieved a new religion (Anglo-Catholicism) and a new hope for the salvation of man.

Four Quartets (1943), which is a bunch of four poems – "Burnt Norton", "East Coker", "The Dry Salvages", and "Little Gidding" – is the acme of religious meditation and eventual salvation. The poem combines in its texture the deep reflections on time and Eternity, word and word, speech and Silence, attachment and detachment, love human and love divine etc. It achieves 'a contemplative depth' that English poetry has hardly ever witnessed.

Eliot has also written some poems on the political theme. His "Coriolan" consisting of "Triumphal March" and "Difficulties of a Statesman" is of this nature. The two fragments have surprised many of Eliot's readers, as they deviate from the mainstream of his poetry of the two fragments, the first one exalts the hero of the

triumphal march at the expense of the admiring crowds. The second one mocks at the very democratic system. Eliot had announced in 1927 that he was a royalist in politics', and hence his anti – democratic stance should be taken as deliberate and purposive.

The themes mentioned above are all related to human life. Eliot is also a poet of Nature, though his treatment of Nature is neither Wordsworthian nor Shelleyan. To him, nature is the bare phenomenon of the human world, as it was to Pope in the eighteenth century. Man is the supreme consideration in Eliot's scheme of things. Eliot describes natural beauties in relation to urban surroundings rather than to rural countryside. He is concerned with the civilized rather than with the wild aspects of natural beauties. No doubt, he is a poet of towns and cities and of crowds to be seen there. Nature is to him nothing more than a scenery, a mere phenomenon, an object for sensual and concrete imagery – an evening 'spread out against the sky' and an afternoon 'grey and smoky'. Nature is neither or spiritual, nor ethical, nor metaphysical entity. She lacks any order or plan, which she had in store for the great Hardy. Nature contains no 'healing balm' for Eliot; neither does she have a plan or design for man's development. She is no longer a shelter or solace for the afflicted mind, as he was controlled by the rational man. This idea is clearly ventilated in the following lines of "The Dry Salvages" (*four quartets*):

*I do not know much about Gods, but I think that the river
Is a strong brown God – sullen, untamed and intractable
Patient to some degree....
The problem once solved, the brown God is almost forgotten
By the dwellers in the cities – ever....*

Thus, Nature is harnessed to serve the utilitarian ends of man. In fact, Eliot was so much preoccupied with the problems of life death, of man's moral and spiritual degradation, of the intersection of tirelessness with time, of God and the Universe, that he had hardly any time to get interested in natural descriptions, in some of his poems, Eliot uses the garden – scene (or, simply the garden) to symbolize the moment/place of illumination. According to a scholar, "A formal garden is an admirable symbol for man's attempt to impose a pattern on his experience and to discipline nature".¹ Eliot's treatment of nature is quite in keeping with his classical leanings.

4. Eliot's Contribution to English Poetry

As a poet, Eliot belongs to the Classical tradition. He has nothing to do with the Romantic excesses and 'purple patches'. A classicist remains crystal clear and controlled in his expression, and his guiding force is reason. He exalts the head over the heart, objectivity over subjectivity, reason over emotion. He owes allegiance to an external authority, like that of Plato, Aristotle, Horace, Homer, Virgil, or the three great tragedians of Greek literature, whereas a Romantic listens to his own 'inner voice'. No one can make such a threadbare distinction between 'classicism' and 'Romanticism' as R.A. Scott – James has done in his brilliant book, *The Making of Literature*:

Form, outward form, is the first distinctive element in classicism, and on this beauty of outward appearance, with its attributes of symmetry, balance, order, proportion, reserve, it takes its stand. And as contrasted with this the romantic tends to emphasize the spirit which lies behind form – not the formless but the freedom which is not content with any but the freedom which is not content with any one form, but experiments, and expresses itself now in this, now in that way, as the spirit dictates. The first tends always to emphasize the "this – worldliness" of the beauty that we know; the second, its "other – worldliness".... The one seeks always a mean; the other an extremity. Repose satisfies the Classic; adventure attracts the Romantic. The one appeals to tradition; the other demands the novel. On the one side we may range the virtues and defects which go with the nations of fitness, propriety, measure, restraint, conservatism, authority, calm, experience, comeliness; on

¹ See T.S. Eliot : A Study of His Writings by Several Hands, ed. B. Rajan, p.62.

the other, those which are suggested by excitement, energy, restlessness, spirituality, curiosity, troublesness, progress, liberty, experiment, provocativeness.¹

This long passage has been quoted here to acquaint the readers with the salient features of ‘Classicism’ (the school to which Eliot belongs) as contradistinct from ‘Romanticism’. And as we know, Eliot has publicly announced that he is a “classicist in literature”.² So, when we come to examine Eliot’s contributions to English poetry we have to keep in mind his artistic qualities as a classicist. First of all, Eliot remains a traditionalist throughout his literary career. As a creative writer, he follows the tradition of Sir Philip Sidney, Ben Jonson, John Milton, John Dryden, Alexander Pope, Samuel Johnson, Matthew Arnold, etc., but as a sound critic he does not spare his co-travellers for their faults. Milton, Pope and Arnold have been criticized by him for their respective weaknesses.

Eliot as a traditionalist or classicist accepts an always existing background, the function of which is to provide incidental symbolism to a poem. Pope in his *The Rape of the Lock* had designed the poem within the framework of a classical epic, using its accepted norms and symbols. It is in this acceptance that Pope is a new – classicist, and it is in the rejection of this that Shelley is not a classicist in his *Frometheus unbound Alastor* and *Mab queen*. Eliot, like Pope, accepts the value of traditional literature as his poetic world. In his monumental poem, *The Waste Land* (1922), Eliot blends European tradition with Eastern thought to provide a necessary background to the interpretation of contemporary human predicament. The basic symbolism in this poem is derived from the Grail legend, and in the last Section he employs the Journey symbol, which is well within the Christian fold.

Eliot regards ‘tradition’ as a substitute for the classical mythology to provide a background full of symbolism in his poetry. His sense of tradition allows due recognition of the illustrious past (which lives in the present). It intensifies the feeling of the artist, shapes the content of the poem, retains the quality of suggestiveness in it. It also “attempts to eliminate excessive blurring of the object, which tended to result from Romantic usage”.³ It does not require the Romantic atmosphere of mystery as found in Shelley’s *Alastor*. Eliot’s essays, “Tradition and the Individual Talent” (1919), is of far – reaching significance in propounding his views of ‘tradition’.

In order to fully understand Eliot’s concept of Classicism, we are tempted to go to the scholarly doctoral dissertation titled *T.S. Eliot: The Dialectical Structure of His Theory of Poetry* by Fei – Pai – Lee. This sound scholar summarizes Eliot’s classicism under three heads: Personality, Tradition and Orthodoxy. According to him, personality though extinct in a classical work takes the shape of individuality and enlivens it in a considerable measure. This idea is made so clear by Eliot in his famous essay, “Tradition and the Individual Talent”. Tradition or the sense of history should not suppress the individual talent, but should encourage it to flourish. What Eliot wants is that personality should not be allowed to intrude too much into a work of art, and that the poet is no more than a medium of expression. He thinks that the poet must remain objective, not subjective, working as a medium rather than an experience. If he concentrates on his own personality, he will be doing the same as a Romantic does. This will inevitably shift our attention from the poetry to the poet. Eliot warns us against this kind of poetic practice. He enunciates his ‘impersonal theory of poetry’, which forcefully lays down that the poet and the poem are two separate things. According to him, ‘the more perfect an artist, the more completely separate in him will be the man who suffers and the mind which creates; The impressions and experiences which are important for a man may find no place in his poetry, and *vice versa*. If this premise is accepted, there will be left very little of purely personal experience in a poem. As contrasted to the definition of poetry as given by Wordsworth – that ‘Poetry is a spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings, recollected in tranquillity’, etc. Eliot offers his own definition: ‘Poetry is not a turning loose of emotion, but an escape from emotion; it is not the expression of personality, but an escape from personality.... The emotion of art is impersonal; Poetry has its life ‘in the poem and not in the history of the poet’.

Evidently, Eliot is not interested in the personal history of the poet. Like W.B. Yeats, Eliot lays on the inner integrity of the personality. It is this to the work of a poet. It is due to this integrity that Eliot regards Dr. Johnson’s *The Vanity of Human Wishes*, Goldsmith’s *The Deserted Village*, and George Herbert’s *The*

Temple as the testimony of their greatness. In Eliot's view, Shakespeare, Herbert and Herrick are 'major' poets for the same reason.

As regards Tradition (about which we have already spoken earlier), it provides room for originality (what Eliot calls 'the individual talent'). Tradition is susceptible to 'petrification' if it is static and incapable of assimilation. It is threatened with dissolution if the new developments are odd and eccentric. It admits 'experimentation' to bring to it freedom of expression. It offers us 'the historical sense' or the sense of 'the garden mean' in the past. The historical sense is an instrument for self discovery, for "it is an instrument for the discovery of the whole."⁴

Fei – Pai Lu thinks that orthodoxy is a part of 'the social sanction' which consist of two parts, the second being Tradition. Eliot has made this sort of bifurcation in his *After Strange Gods* (1934). Orthodoxy is contrasted to Tradition. The former is the formulated system of common beliefs, while the latter is equated with communal habits and feelings. Orthodoxy calls for 'the exercise of all our conscious intelligence', but tradition remains largely 'unconscious' and represents the blood kinship of 'the same people luring in the same place'. Eliot points out in his sociological studies *The Idea Of A Christian Society* (193) and *Notes towards the Definition of Culture* (1948) – that religion, culture and society are the main considerations of Orthodoxy.

Society is a 'spiritual community', not the congregation of crowd. Culture is 'the incarnation of religion', not 'a flurry of uncoordinated activities'. Ordered society and common culture are essential conditions for the production of classics, which, for the most part, depend upon the vitality of religion. So, church and religion in a society contribute a lot to the shaping of culture.

After the Augustans, wit had almost disappeared from the poetic world. Credit goes to Eliot to have revived it again. He blends in it the Augustan wit (such as Pope used it in his verse) with the Metaphysical wit (such as Donne and Crowley used it in their poetry). Eliot does not simply aim at evoking wit or provoking amusement in his poetry. Instead, he explores the serious through the ludicrous, or he makes use of levity to intensify the grim and the gloomy. This artistic device he has learnt from the Metaphysical poets. Shakespeare has also employed this device in his tragedies; for example, the grave – digging scene in *Hamlet* and the porter scene in *Macbeth*. Eliot uses wit for 'resolution' or 'integrity' in his poetry. Wit is useful for brevity and clarity in expression and for promoting 'ironic vision'. Wit is usually associated with irony and satire, and the Augustans have amply displayed it in their verse.

Eliot has paid utmost attention to verbal precision, which demands a conscious choice of words and phrases and a thoughtful construction of sentences. The verbal precision needs the utmost care in making use of words the placing of words flawlessly. Eliot has hinted at it in the following lines:

*(Where every word is at home,
Taking its place to support the others,
The word neither diffident nor ostentations,
An easy commerce of the old and the new,
The common word exact without vulgarity,
The formal word precise but not pedantic,
The complete consort dancing together)
Every phrase and every sentence is an end and a beginning,
Every poem an epitaph.*

("Little Gidding," *Four Quartets*).

The poet's emphasis here is on verbal precision, which must not give the impression of stiffness or inaccuracy. Eliot's search for precision and accuracy makes room for clarity and propriety in poetry.

We have already pointed out that in Eliot's concept of poetry – which is the classical concept – the poet is a mere medium of expression. Eliot has also given his views about the role of 'emotion' and the role of 'thought' in the poetic process.

Eliot emphasises the role of emotion in poetry. But how should it be expressed? It cannot be simply transmitted from the mind of the poet to the mind of the reader. It has to turn itself into something concrete – the picture of a person, place or thing – in order to convey effectively the same emotion in the reader. And the picture of a person, place or thing into which emotion is thus bodied forth becomes its ‘objective correlative’ or ‘external equivalent’. Eliot makes use of the phrase ‘objective correlative’ in his famous essay, “Hamlet and His problems” (contained in *The Sacred Wood*, 1920). Eliot clarifies how emotion can be best expressed in poetry. He remarks: ‘The only way of expressing emotion in the form of art is by finding an ‘objective correlative’; in other words, a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events which shall be the formula of that emotion such that even the external facts, which must terminate in sensory experience are given, the emotion immediately evoked’. In Eliot’s view, Shakespeare was though a consummate artist in his plays, he failed in finding as ‘objective correlative’ to express the tortuous emotions of Hamlet. Eliot thinks that Shakespeare has superbly succeeded conveying the raging malady in Lady Macbeth’s mind by making her repeat the past actions in the sleep-walking scene in *Macbeth*.

Critics like Eliseo and Vincent Buckley have found fault with Eliot’s theory of ‘objective correlative’ for expressing emotion in poetry. They point out that Eliot devises the formula of ‘objective correlative’ to avoid a direct utterance of emotion, but he complicates the issue by praising Dante for his view of life and Shakespeare for his ‘emotional maturity’. These critics hold the view that it is erroneous to think that Eliot has a distrust for poetry based on emotion; for instance, Eliot holds Shakespeare superior to Ben Jonson due to the former’s ‘susceptibility to a greater range of emotion, and emotion deeper than an obscurer’.

What Eliot is concerned with is the expression of emotion in an objective way. He is opposed to the direct expression of emotion, and hence he propounds the theory of ‘objective correlative’. He is concerned with art – emotion, not with raw emotion that bursts forth spontaneously.

Eliot also gives his mind to the question of the role of ‘thought’ in poetry. The poet confronts a thought in the same way as we confront a man; he accepts or rejects it to build his artifice, to suit his poetic purpose. What comes to us is the semblance of thought, not thought at first hand, but the result of his conscious selection or rejection. According to Eliot, the poet thinks is merely the poet who can express ‘the emotional equivalent of thought’. Thus, what Eliot means by thought is its ‘emotional equivalent’. Like ‘significant emotion’ serving the poetic purpose, ‘significant thought’ (or ‘art – thought’) is the objective of Eliot as a poet. If a distinction could be drawn between ‘imaginal thinking’ and ‘conceptual thinking,’ we can say that the former is the prerogative of a poet while the latter is that of a philosopher or scientist. In imaginal thinking the poet ‘nothing affirmeth, and, therefore, never lieth’. The poet articulates his ideas in a state of illumined consciousness.

Further, Eliot maintains that a synchronization of emotion and thought effects the poetic sensibility. In his well-known essay, “The Metaphysical Poets”, Eliot is seized with this matter. In this essay, he speaks of ‘the dissociation of sensibility’ as well as of ‘the unification of sensibility’. By the latter phrase Eliot means “a direct sensuous apprehension of thought, or a recreation of thought into feeling”.⁵ When ‘the unification of sensibility’ is found, as in the poetry of Chapman and Donne, the result is good poetry. Then, thought is transformed into feeling to steal its way into the reader’s heart. It is the union of thought and feeling that constitutes poetic sensibility. But when the poet’s thought is unable to transform itself into feeling, the result is ‘the dissociation of sensibility’ – a rupture between thought and feeling – and hence bad poetry. For good poetry, it is essential that thought must issue forth as sensation. According to Eliot, the Victorian poets Tennyson and Browning do not pass this test, as ‘they think, but they do not feel their thought as immediately as the odour of a rose’. The poet’s function is not to versify ideas but to convert them into sensations.

As Eliot conceives sensibility, it is the faculty that enables a poet to respond to diverse experiences in a unified manner. In its function, it is close to Coleridge’s concept of ‘Secondary Imagination’, which also gives form to the shrubby undergrowth of experiences in life. The noted critic, F.W. Bateson, subjects Eliot’s concept of sensibility to a strict scrutiny. Bateson opines that Eliot’s concept of sensibility is a synonym for sensation, and if it is so how can it contain the element of thought? Bateson sees a paradox in Eliot’s concept of sensibility.

It would be, perhaps, in pace to draw a distinction between ‘sensibility’ and ‘imagination’. For one thing, the faculty which shapes experience is sensibility, not imagination. Eliot’s sensibility is a unifying faculty for disparate experiences. For Cloridge, imagination is a reconciling agent aiming at ‘recreation’ after dissolving, diffusing and dissipating the material at hand. Imagination does not allow a place to memory that plays a vital role in Eliot’s poetry. Eliot speaks of ‘mixing memory and desire’ in the beginning of *The Waste Land*.

Eliot’s poetic technique is consonant with the spirit of his time. Like the time itself, his technique is bare and stark, direct and unadorned. Eliot was highly impressed by the technical discoveries of John Donne. He thought that Donne’s great achievement lay in his ability to convey ‘his genuine whole of tangled feelings’. Like Donne and his school of poets, Eliot aimed at the ‘alliance of levity and seriousness.’ The use of irregular rhyme which was to Eliot’s taste, was actually inspired by Donne. Eliot largely used free verse in his practice, instead of conventional metric verse, his versification is essentially ‘a disturbance of the conventional’. His technique is, for the most part, allusive and suggestive. This sort of technique suits a poet of scholarly temperament. One can easily understand it when one keeps mind the vast number of allusions and references used by Eliot in *The Waste Land*. No fewer than 35 authors and six foreign languages have been alluded to or used by him in this difficult poem. Such a technique lends obscurity and complexity to the poem. According to Eliot, this kind of technique suits the temper of the age. In his brilliant essay on the Metaphysical poets, Eliot remarks that ‘Our civilization comprehends great variety and complexity’, and he tailors his technique to catch up this ‘great variety and complexity of the modern age. The employment of apt images and suggestive symbols by Eliot in his poetry consolidates his technique to a great extent. Eliot had learnt a good deal from the French Symbolists, and shaped his symbolistic and allusive technique under their irresistible influence.

To conclude, Eliot’s contributions to English poetry are quite substantial and abiding. Among his recognisable contributions are his classical and traditional stance, his impersonal theory of poetry, his formulations of the role of emotion and thought in poetry, his concept of sensibility, his insistence on the use of correct diction and verbal precision, and his bold application of *vers libre* and allusive and symbolistic technique. For all these contributions, he will ever be remembered by lovers of English poetry.

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SECTION II: CRITICAL NOTES ON “THE LOVE SONG”

1. Composition of "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prurock"

This dramatic monologue was composed sometime during 1914 – 1915, that is about the year when the first World War broke out. The time of the composition is significant, for there is relevance between the theme of the poem and the general psychological and spiritual climate of Europe in those days.

The poem was submitted to Ezra Pound for his suggestion and approval in October 1914. Pound wrote to Harriet Monroe, the editor of *Poetry*, which was considered at the time to be an *avant garde* poetry magazine, publishing mainly the work of the Imagists, as follows:

‘Here is the Eliot poem. The most interesting contribution I have had from an American.

P.S. Hope you’ll get it soon’.

Monroe probably failed to get at the meaning of the poem, and in his typically Georgian manner suggested that the poem should be made plain and easy for the general poetry – reading audience. Pound wrote back to Monroe :

‘Your objection to the Eliot is the climax No, most emphatically I will not ask Eliot to write down to any audience whatsoever.....’

In another letter he tried to explain to Monroe the central meaning of the poem:

“Mr. Prufrock’ does not ‘go off at the end.’ It is a portrait of failure, or of a character which fails, and it would be false art to make it end on a note of triumph..... A portrait satire on futility can’t end by turning that quintessence of futility, Mr. P, into a reformed character breathing out fire and ozone..... I assure you it is better, ‘more unique,’ than the other poems of Eliot which I have seen. Also that he is quite intelligent (an adjective which is seldom in my mouth).....’

The poem was published eventually in *Poetry* for June, 1915, as an end – piece of the issue. It was in June 1917 that the Egoist Ltd. published this poem along with a few others in a volume entitled *Prufrock and Other Observations*.

2. Title of the Poem

First of all, what catches the attention is the name J. Alfred Prufrock. ‘Prufrock’ may be said to have been derived from Eliot’s unconscious memory of the name of a furniture wholesale firm in St. Louis, Missouri, where he was born and bred. But ‘J. Alfred’ is the poet’s own invention of a fatuous – sounding prefix.

Maybe, it was the pattern of sound in ‘J. Alfred Prufrock’ suggesting inanity that appealed to Eliot. The addition of ‘Love Song’ is full of implications and stirs the whole gamut of feelings associated with the theme of love – poetry since Spenser.

Thus, an irony already lurks in the title, an irony emanating from the collocation of ‘Love Song’ and ‘J. Alfred Prufrock’. This irony deepens further when we proceed to read the poem and find that the poem could be anything but a ‘Love Song’. The irony which may appear facile in the title turns into a complex one as the poem proceeds.

3. Sources of the Poem

The epigraph indicates Prufrock’s resemblance to Guido da Montefeltro, one of the characters in Dante’s *Inferno*. Montefeltro meets Dante and asks him about happenings in Italy, and Dante narrates all that he knows. On being asked, Montefeltro confesses his sin, of which he is ashamed, and hence he is living in hell. Like Montefeltro, Prufrock is living in a hellish world for his sins. Professor Grover Smith points out that Prufrock’s sin is his passivity.

It has been suggested that the story and character of Prufrock were derived from Henry James’s story, *Craphy Cornelia*, written in 1909. The story revolves round one middle – aged man, White Mason. He once visits a young – looking woman, Mrs. Worthington, with an intention to propose marriage. He makes several efforts to propose but each time some psychological complex hinders the words which he should have uttered. He also realises suddenly the gap between his own age and hers and deviates into meaningless conversation. It is possible, as Dr. Grover Smith suggests, that some of the descriptive details as well as its theme and narrative derive from James’s short – stories. But whatever the initial source, Eliot has transmitted the entire material into his own poem.

It is also possible that Eliot might have got the initial inspiration from one of Laforgue’s *Sunday* poems which begins:

*‘To give myself to an “I love you” ! I was all set,
When I realised, with some regret,
That I didn’t really have myself in hand as yet.’*

and develops the themes of indecision, hesitation, postponement, etc. The theme of inability to 'take the first step' is developed further and more elaborately in another poem, "Solo by Moonlight" by Laforgue. There is a similarity between Laforgue's "Ennui" and Prufrock's sterility of will. Certain lines in Laforgue seem to contain the original of the echoes to be found in Eliot's "Love Song". Take these lines for example :

*'Ah my sterile heart !
I've behaved badly from the start.'*

And these:

*'And I pass by and leave them,
And lie down facing the sky.
The road turns.....
No one waits for me, I'm going to no one home.
I've only the friendship of hotel rooms.'*

Apart from these positive sources, there is one which may be called negative: Andrew Marvell. "The Love Song" has a similarity with Marvell's "Coy Mistress" in that this, too, is, according to the title, a poem about love. But it is, in reality, a total antithesis of Marvell's poem in that it is not a poem urging the beloved to vital love but one in which the lover flinches from even proposing love to his beloved.

4. The Character of Prufrock

Prufrock's consciousness forms the core of the poem. His consciousness impresses us as a representative consciousness of our time. 'We suspect', as Joseph Margolis says, 'he is Everyman', and thus his malaise comes to be seen as the affliction of everyman in the contemporary society.

But for all that, Prufrock is not an abstract character: he is concretely realised, the product of a felt experience, so much so that many have been inclined to identify Prufrock with Eliot. No doubt, Prufrock is Eliot in a way, for after all he is the latter's creation after his own image. But, at the same time, it must be understood that Prufrock is a person like Pound's Mauberley. As we proceed with the poem, he gradually emerges as a distinct character in his own right revealing a multi-dimensional nature.

Prufrock is a man in his own forties, or rather dressed as a man in the forties. The lines which suggest this are:

*Time to turn back and descend the stair,
With a bald spot in the middle of my hair—
(They all say : 'How his hair is growing thin !')
My morning coat, my collar mounting firmly to the chin,
My necktie rich and modest, but asserted by a simple pin.....*

The growing baldness suggests the middle-age and the carefully planned dress is designed to conceal the middle-age, though, at the same time, he knows such an effort will be worthless. The parenthetical line, 'they will say.....', suggests Prufrock's fear and anxiety but Prufrock is not an hypocrite. He is not trying or posing to be young. He wishes he could behave as a young man, but he knows he cannot. He knows that it is worthless: the memory of youthful days gives him no pleasure at all. He would not be young again, for it will be the repetition of the same cheerless, routine, meaningless relationships with the women. The lines which suggest this boredom of Prufrock's experience with women are to be found in the three stanzas beginning with:

'For I have known them all already.....' It is clear that Prufrock is an extremely sensitive, rather hypersensitive person, given to reflecting, silently debating within himself implications of this or that action, this or that word. He is highly cultured and widely read in literature and fine arts, as is obvious from the mention of Michelangelo, Lazarus, Hamlet, and so on.

The melody which has afflicted him is not frustration or anger; he is rather bored with life. Hence he considers no action, not even so much as making his proposal of love, worth anything. He has had experiences of action, and they have bred only boredom. So he flinches from the occasion which will require him to act: that is to make a choice and say it to the women.

Prufrock's melody is not physical, but deeply psychological, or spiritual, like Baudelaire's and Laforgue's 'emui' characterized by total lack of will – power and sterility of emotion. Prufrock is hypersensitive both intellectually and emotionally, but the intellectual hypersensitivity has sapped all life out of emotion. Dr. Grover Smith calls him a defeated 'idealist'.

5. A Critical Appreciation of the Poem

“The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock” is a monologue, and as such it owes a good deal to Robert Browning. It has ‘you’ and ‘I’ in the very first line. Although it is not needed to assume the presence of a second person and explicate its relationship to Prufrock in order to understand the meaning of the poem, the ‘you’ is significant in ascribing the character of a monologue to it. For one thing, the ‘you’ never speaks in the poem; it is the ‘I’ who does all the speaking from the beginning to the end. That is why the term ‘dramatic monologue’ may, strictly speaking, be inappropriate for the poem. In a dramatic monologue, the presence of the other character or characters is always felt: one character is speaking to the other, even though the latter may be silent. In this poem, Prufrock is more speaking to himself than to anyone else. It would, therefore, be more appropriate to call the poem an ‘interior’ monologue than a ‘dramatic monologue’. Prufrock's consciousness is the focal point here.

The poem consists of a number of sections put together in a manner which looks forward to *The Waste Land*. Sections are rearranged, lines put in, others taken out; and yet the poem does not suffer, for its coherence depends on consistency of feeling, not on a fixed sequence of idea or event.

The poem would appear as Eliot's first attempt to explore the nature of the spiritual state of the contemporary man. This is the germinal theme which is developed and presented in a pattern of opposites. In the words of Joseph Margolis, “And its themes, which are remarkably diverse, are offered in contrary pairs: youth and old age, work and idleness, spiritual life and death, commitment and loneliness, pride and disgust in the self, sincerity and hypocrisy, interest and boredom.” These ‘contrary pairs’ are not stated clearly; nor is one thing of a pair set in apparent conflict with the other. On the surface level, the entire poem deals with one set of themes associated with the spiritual sickness of Prufrock. Whether he flinches from asking ‘the over-whelming question’ or escapes into his own fantasy of fog or the party of his own self, he is a man who has totally lost his will to party of his own self, he is a man who has totally lost his will to action, is symbolic of his spiritual sickness. Each image, each picture – fantasy, reiterates with sharper precision, this theme of Prufrock's sterility. Eliot has not described how or why Prufrock has become spiritually sterile, though there are some hints to suggest that the root of his malaise is his being over – intellectualized and hypersensitive to things of emotional life. He is given to analyzing too deeply the pros and cons of his actions and others' reactions. Very subtly he analyses his own self.

Eliot's diagnosis of the contemporary human personality bears a slender resemblance to D.H. Lawrence's. For Lawrence too believed that the real evil of the contemporary mechanized, commercialized, society was the morbid growth of intellect which had sapped the vitality out of man–woman, and through it, man–world, relationship. And, in part, both Lawrence and Eliot up to this extent derive from Henry James's analysis of man – woman relationship as delineated in his novels.

And though the themes of Eliot's poem are not immediately related to the First World War, the outbreak of war did lend an urgency to the poem. Prufrock personified or symbolised a state of mind in which a war could break out. It is significant to note that whenever Prufrock escapes from the monotony and boredom of the human company into fantasy, his mind conjures up scenes or symbols of death or death-like situations. The evening is like a patient etherised for a serious operation struggling between life and death. The nights are restless, the

restaurants are cheap where acts of violence are common. The cat itself is associated with ferocity and destruction. Prufrock imagines himself 'sprawling on a pin' and 'wriggling on the wall'. He compares or contrasts himself to John the Baptist, Lazarus and Prince Hamlet, who were involved in violent or tragic deaths. Only in the last few lines, his fantasy brings into play the sea image which is symbolic of life, and yet the last line brings in the image of death — 'and we drown'. It is evident the Prufrock is fascinated by the idea of death, and this is because he is irretrievably bored by the contemporary life. In such a morbid spiritual state, war may even be welcome, war which brings death home.

The poem is rich in literary allusions. Michelangelo, for instance, stirs up the rich image of the mediaeval passionate love of God and man, the image of an artist who turned his sufferings into material of great art. But the women talking of him do not properly understand his value as an artist, and they are chattering about him as though he were a detective film hero. The other significant allusions in the poem are : John the Baptist, Lazarus, and Hamlet. These allusions tend to highlight certain inherent characteristics of the protagonist.

The drama of the poem is presented through soliloquy, the action being limited to the interplay of impressions, including memories, in Prufrock's mind (See Prof. Grover Smith, p. 16). A rather curious device complicates his reverie. By a distinction between 'I' and 'you', he differentiates between his thinking, sensitive character and his outward self. Prufrock is seen addressing, as if looking into a mirror, his whole public personality. His motive seems to repudiate the inert self, which can't act, and to assert his will. The ego alone 'goes' anywhere, even in fantasy, but it can't survive the disgrace of personality, and at the end of the poem it is 'we' who drown. The personal has become the general.

It is not so much the far-fetchedness of the objects of comparison but their opposition, contrariness, to one another that creates the dramatic tension and communicates the point sharply and precisely.

In fact, each image follows the same pattern. In the oft-quoted image : 'I have measured out my life with coffee spoons;' the first part is serious, noble and poetically grand, 'I have measured out my life,' but the other part, 'with coffee spoons' demolishes all the anticipation the first part raised. One would say, 'with coffee spoons' is Eliot's or Prufrock's way of ridiculing of the seriousness of the first part. It is again the same structure in another oft-quoted image :

*I grow old.....I grow old.....
I shall wear the bottoms of my trousers rolled.*

One common function of all these images is to trivialise whatever is romantic, serious, noble, grandious and conventionally attractive. And, therefore, the images are wholly functional, because they are integrated with the nature of the themes dealt with.

Trivialisation is the general feature of all the contemporary culture, trivialisation of all values, faiths and beliefs, trivialisation of love, passion, sex, art and human relationship. Each image trivialises something considered to be grand and noble valuable.

What remain to be considered is the diction of the poem, for apart from its imagery, much of the novelty of the poem in 1915 or 1917 was seen to lie in the strange use of words and phrases. It was the language of actual everyday conversation which Eliot has used so boldly in the poem. The Georgian poets too, it is true, had tried to use the real speaking language in their poems. Important contribution in this direction were made by Rupert Brooke, Siegfried Sarseon and Wilfred Owen. But their efforts were limited to using a word here and a phrase there, while by and large the language remained conventionally poetic both in the choice of idioms and rhythm. Eliot's revolutionizing contributions lay not in using part or snatches but the whole of the contemporary idioms and speech – rhythm.

It may be noticed clearly that the language of the poem is bare of any rhetorical features and devoid of any complicated structures. The words in general are most common, though the objects juxtaposed may be far – fetched. There can hardly be more commonplace language than:

*In the room the women come and go
Talking of Michelangelo.*

But the effect it exerts is stronger, deeper and at the same time more intimate than any rhetorical or conventionally poetic language is capable of. The complexity of Eliot's does not lie in the language he uses but in the complexity of his feeling the endeavors to communicate. "Prufrock" is a poem of a feeling of a mood, and all the words and phrases and images are used to create, strengthen and deepen the prevailing feeling or mood. Certain key words are repeated, certain phrases recur, so do certain images. Reception is a feature of everyday conversation, and so repetition very closely approximates the speech rhythm. Take the following lines, for example:

*And indeed there will be time
For the yellow smoke that slides along the street
Rubbing its back upon the window panes;
There will be time, there will be time
To prepare a face to meet the faces that you meet;
There will be time to murder and create
And time for all the works and days of hand.
That lift and drop a question on your plate,
Time for you and time for me,
And time yet for a hundred indecision's,
Before the taking of a toast and tea.*

But Eliot exploits the repetition of certain words for his own purpose; he repeats the key – words which suggest the central feeling or mood of the poem. Here 'time' is the key-word, as it is the key-word in the whole poem, and it is always the future time, and postponement of any action in the present time.

Thus, though these are repetitions and elements of verbosity in the poem, each word and each phrase has a precise function to perform. As Hugh Kenner says: 'Every phrase seems composed as though the destiny of the author's soul depended upon it. Yet it is unprofitable not to consider the phrases as arrangements of words before considering them as anything else. Like the thousand little gestures that constitute good manners, their meaning is contained in themselves alone-Eliot is the most verbal of the eminent poets: more verbal than Swinburne. If he has carried verbalism for beyond the extirpation of jarring consonants, it is because of his intimate understanding of what language can do. ' In Swinburne, language is an end in itself; in Eliot it is a means to an end. His verbalism evokes and contributes to the feeling, the mood ; it is an instrument of evocation, suggestion and implication. It is a deliberately created verbalism in which each word has significance beyond itself, and each phrase a resonance beyond itself.

Generally, metaphor and symbol replace direct statement in Eliot. In "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" we have what comes to be a familiar compound, observation, memory, and reflection, in which observation becomes symbol. The doctrine of the objective correlative means not only that the subjective is projected into the objective, or by means of it, but that it is expressed in other means – metaphor; objects become symbols, and personal feeling is set apart from the poet. Connection through imagery is characteristic of Eliot, who is likely to exploit a kind of imagery, not to use it at random. A particular kind of imagery becomes the expression of a particular kind of feeling, not only in the same poem but in different poems. Recurrent imagery may not only reiterate a theme, but provide a base for variations, or development; its recurrence usually is accompanied by a deeper plumbing or a richer exploration of its significance. For some of these uses witness in "The Love Song" the sea imagery, hair imagery, sartorial imagery, that of polite versus crude society, that of bare sensitivity versus the protective shell, images of relaxation or concentration of effort or will, and finally the heroic parallels which both magnify and mock the overwhelming question.

Such a method of indirection is appropriate to a character who never really faces his inner conflict or his frustrated self, and hence is capable of a direct expression of it, to say nothing of a solution. Here the most revealing lines in the poem are:

Is it perform from a dress
That makes me so digress?

But the observation ‘downed with light brown hair’ is no digression from the arms or from Prufrock’s problem. This is why the epigraph, with its conditioned response, provides an important clue to the intention of the poem; and the title shifts its context significantly. The title suggests the question for this song of indirection, made such by repression. The mock-heroic tone is not merely in the author’s treatment or in his character’s conception of the problem, but finally even in Prufrock’s evasion of himself.

This kind of imagery is more than usually dependant upon arrangement. But the order of parts will reveal an implicit method in an Eliot poem that is essential to its meaning. There is such a method in “The Love Song”; it is begun by ‘Let us go’ and ended with and we drown’. The going is developed and dramatized even by verb tenses, the time element. The ‘drown’ submerges again what has emerged in the ‘going’ – which is never directly said – and concludes the imagery of his submerged life. To this arrangement the author helps the reader in other ways. His punctuation, for example, is functional, not conventional. Verse, too, is a kind of punctuation, as Eliot has remarked, and he comes to rely upon it more and more as a poet. In the present poem, the phrasal separation in the short lines may be studied, and the effective chimes of the mock – heroic rhyme.

All verse – even nonsense verse is not quite free – depends upon an order and organization capable of being followed and understood ; requires an implicit, if not an explicit, logic – connections which can be discovered in the terms of the poem. If the words of a poem have syntax, they make sense, have a logic. Otherwise the poet has no control over his material except that exerted by meter. Only an ordered context can control the range of meaning set off by the single word ; and relevance to this context must be the guide for any reader in determining the range of meaning or the logic involved. William Empson’s *Seven Types of Ambiguity* is a misleading book in that it explores possible meanings without proper regard to their limitations by the context.

Lastly, why is the poem called a ‘Love Song’? In truth, the theme of love is so much subdued in it that it is difficult to say whether it is at all about love, and whether there is any evidence in it of the presence of Prufrock’s beloved. The phrase ‘you and I’ has been variously interpreted. Eliot himself is reported to have stated that ‘you’ is ‘some friend or companion of the male sex.’ If so, then how to justify the title of ‘Love Song’? If it is suggested that love is not the theme of the poem, then why call it ‘Love Song’? But ‘Love’ is certainly the underlying theme of it. Only if is a fruitless, sterile yearning for love, not the vital positive passion for love. There is nothing in the poem to suggest either that relationship between ‘you and I’ is anything like Homosexual, but it can’t be ruled out as absurd in the light of Eliot’s own remarks and the suggestion of frigidity, languor, and boredom in ‘I’s’ attitude to ‘you’. And yet, the suggestion does not seem to possess an acceptable validity. Prof. George Williamson explains ‘I and you’ in psychoanalytical terms.

6. Annotations of the Poem

The epigraph is taken from Dante’s *Inferno*, Canto XXVII, lines 61-66. Its English rendering goes thus: “if I believed my answer might be heard by anyone who could return to the world, this flame would leap no more. But since no one ever, returned alive from these depths, as far as I know, then I answer without fear of infamy,” It emphasises the lack of communication from which Prufrock also suffers. In the *Inferno*, the flame of Guido is asked to identify himself, and he replies in the words of, the epigraph.

You and I — Obviously, ‘I’ suggests the speaker (in a dramatic monologue we have usually one), and ‘you’ suggests a lady, as the title indicates, but the epigraph hints at ‘a scene out of the world.

When the evening is.....the sky — it is evening, tea – time as we shall see later on. The line also suggests a sick world.

Like a patient etherised.....table — Here we have startling modern imagery. The speaker sees the evening in the aspect of etherization, and the metaphor of etherization suggests the desire for inactivity to the point of enforced release from pain, ‘etherised’ means ‘put under ether/anaesthetic.

Let us go, through certain..... Retreats— After we learn the time of going, we learn the way of going, ‘retreats’ means retiring corners or refuges.

Of restless nights..... with syster-shells — It suggests ‘a surprising way, through a cheap section of town’; ‘sawdust restaurants’ means, ‘restaurants made of fine wood fragments’, and ‘oyster’ is a kind of fish.

Streets that follow.....overwhelming question — The way looks as dismal as a tedious argument smacking of a treacherous purpose, and leads to an ‘over – whelming question’. In the words of George Williamson, “The streets suggest the character of the question at their end as well as the nature of the urge which takes this route’. There is an abrupt break after the mention of the question, suggesting an emotional block on the part of the speaker.

Oh, do not ask — The speaker refuses here to identify the ‘over – whelming question.’ Implicitly, it is his emotional urge which he conceals, and which belongs to the ‘you’.

Let us go.....our visit — After suppressing the real urge, the speaker diverts the attention by pointing out another object or purpose of going in, - i.e. ‘our visit’.

In the room.....talking of Michelangel — Where are they to pay the ‘visit’? To the room, where women come and go and gossip about Michelangelo, a man of violent personality, an artist of epic grandeur, and a typical figure of the great creative period of the Renaissance. The slumness of the town is associated with the triviality of the conversation of women.

The yellow fog that rubs its back.....window – panes — With this line we find more of the twilight atmosphere, - the smoke and fog settling down. Here we have the image of the fog as cat, suggesting ‘desire which end in inertia’. It the cat-image suggests sex, it also suggests the greater desire of inactivity.

The yellow smoke.....of the evening — The yellow smoke, like the gathering fog, stole its way from the window – panes to the corners of the room, and the evening slipped in.

muzzle – snout (mouth and nose) of an animal, the image being that of a cat.

Lingered upon the pools.....in drains — By and by, the fog or smoke expanded its reign and moved on even to the pools without water.

Let fall upon its back.....from chimneys — The twilight world now deepened into the dark world.

Soot – black powdery substance.

Slipped by and fell asleep. — The image of the fog-cat continues. The fog or smoke, slipping by the row of houses (‘terrace’), leapt up suddenly, and seeing that it was a pleasant October night, sleepily lapped the house. The speaker or Prufrock can’t think of Nature except in terms of a cat rubbing its back and muzzle upon the window – panes, licking the dirty drain – water, allowing the chimney – soot to settle on its body, and finally falling asleep. On the one hand, Prufrock finds an escape from human company by thinking of the fog or smoke, on the other he discovers, to his discontent, that the world he wishes to escape into is the world of feline behaviors.

And indeed there.....the window – panes— This is the beginning of a fresh section (line 23-24). Prufrock decides to postpone taking interest in natural scenery, such as that the yellow fog or smoke.

Window – panes – window glasses.

There will be time..... faces that you meet — Here the motif of appearance and reality appears. It is clear that Prufrock prepares a mask for the world in order to lay a plot of momentous effect or to make small-talk over a tea cup. His thought now turns to the members (women) of the salon party.

There will be time..... create — It is now time for Prufrock to kill his natural self and create a concocted one.

And time for all the works..... on your plate — This is the time for toast and tea and dishes; morsels are lifted and dropped on the plate, suggesting that the party is now in full swing.

'drop a question on your plate' indicates the hesitation of Prufrock in entering into a conversation with the people in the drawing-room (for that is the scene) or even with his companion. The 'over-whelming question' of the first paragraph has returned to the speaker with a renewed tension and anxiety.

Time for you and..... me — Prufrock hopes to find time for the two, you and me, before the toast begins.

And time yet for Toast and tea— Before the actual event (celebration or feast) starts, there will be time for a number of indecision's, dreams and revision of previous decisions.

Vision – dreams.

Revisions – rethinkings on previous decisions.

In the room the women..... Michelangelo — Inside the room women keep on talking of Michelangelo, the great sculptor.

And indeed there will be time..... 'Do I dare?' — The time motif returns here. Prufrock is now taken into fear of the mocking and hostile eyes of the world that will avidly note all defects and failings (lines 37-38). This section increases the tension of the speaker by raising the question of daring

Time to turn back..... Of my hair — Prufrock's "terrified self-consciousness" (Grover Smith, p. 18) is exposed in these lines. He is thinking of turning back from the room and going down the stair, with all his weakness of the unromantic middle-age. He is afraid of his baldness.

'*a bald spot*' – indicates the old age.

[They will say..... thin!] — The thinness of hair is a sign of old age, and those present in the room will point out to each other the thinness of Prufrock's hair.

My morning coat..... A simple pin— Here one notices the mock-heroic touch in the speaker's 'collar mounting firmly' and the 'assertion' of his simple pin. He is also conscious of his morning coat and necktie 'rich and modest'. The suggestion here seems to be that even his dress does not allow him to introduce himself to the women in the room.

[They will say..... Legs are thin!'] — Like his baldness the thinness of this arms and legs makes Prufrock a misfit in the company.

Do I dare..... The universe? — His fear has now mounted to the image of daring to 'disturb the universe.' He cannot do so.

In a minute..... Will reverse — The wavering nature of Prufrock is obvious here. In a minute he might make some important decisions and revised ideas which will be reversed in the next minute.

For I have known them..... all — In this section and in the next two (lines 49-69), Prufrock tries to explain as to why he dares not disturb the universe. In this line, he asserts that the presents company of women does not at all entuse him because he is already familiar with them.

Have known the evenings.....afternoons — He is quite familiar not only with the women present there but also with what they do at different periods of the day.

I have measured out.....coffee spoons — Prufrock is disgusted with his tired and trivial life.

I know the voices dying..... a farther room — He knows about the voices gradually dying out with a highly vocal music from a distant room. In other words he is within sound and 'within the range of the other senses" (George Williamson, p. 62).

A dying fall – a highly vocal music.

So how should I presume? — He has known all this without doing what he now considers ; so how should he presume to disturb the accepted order?

And I have known the eyes.....them all — He has already known the inimical eyes.

The eyes that fix you.....phrases — Now the eyes fix him, give him his place in the accepted order, with a formulated phrase.

And when I am formulated..... On the wall — ‘Sprawling’ and ‘wriggling’ recall the image of an insect. When Prufrock has been classified like an insect, how can he deny his classification and break with his past? These lines also recall to our minds the austerities practiced by a ‘yogin’, a hermit. It is not unlikely that the speaker, who has met failure in life, should have turned to the austere practice for his consolation. ‘Sprawling’ means ‘crawling’; ‘wriggling’ means ‘struggling’.

Then how should I begin.....days and ways? — The speaker can’t change his ‘days and ways’. ‘Spit out’ means ‘change,’ and ‘butt-ends’ means ‘the ends of smoked cigarettes’, here ‘targets’ and ‘objects’.

So how should I presume — So how can Prufrock declare his love to his beloved?

And I have known brown hair! — Prufrock has known the arms already, the arms which are ornamented, white coloured and bare, but which are covered with light brown hair in the evening.

‘Braceleted’ means ‘ornamented’; ‘downed’ means ‘lowered’, but here ‘covered up.’

Is it perfume.....so digress? — He is distracted for a moment by the erotic symbol contained in ‘downed with light brown hair’ and ‘perfume from a dress’. The ‘arms’ and the ‘perfume’ together create a romantic and aromatic atmosphere.

‘Digress’ suggests ‘giving up his intention to speak out his love’.

Arms that lie..... a shawl — The places where the arms may be found lying.

And should I.....begin? — The insistent problem with the speaker is that of communication or ‘beginning’.

Shall I say.....of windows? — For a moment he gathers all his powers to ‘begin’. But again soon he digresses is fancying what he might say or might not say. These line emphasis the loneliness and depression of the speaker.

‘Dusk’ means ‘twilight

I should been.....silent seas — These lines indicate the kind of creature Prufrock should have been – ‘a pair of ragged claws’ in ‘silent seas’, not Prufrock in a drawing room.

‘A pair of ragged claws’ means ‘a kind of sea species with rough claws’; ‘Scuttling means’ ‘moving quickly’.

And the afternoon.....beside you and me — The scene is once more the drawing room where the afternoon, the evening, sleeps peacefully, or it pretends to sleep stretching on the floor beside the speaker and his companion.

‘Malingers’ means ‘pretends to be asleep’ (indicative of the sickening atmosphere in the room).

‘Stretched means ‘resting, spreading’.

Should I, after tea.....to its crisis? — Prufrock does not, after the party is over, have the strength to force or precipitate the crisis.

But though I have wept..... And here’s no great matter — Although Prufrock had been remorseful for his misdeeds, and although he has seen his bald head cut and dished, he is no prophet, as John the Baptist was, for we know that Baptist’s head was demanded by Salome because he had rejected her love.

‘Brought in upon a platter’ suggests the cutting of the speaker’s head and serving it in a dish; Prufrock is aware here of his limitations as well as certain eligibilities as a lover.

‘Prophet’ is John the Baptist. His ‘bald’ head indicates his weak, olds age.

I have seen the moment.....flicker — Prufrock has let his chance go, his ‘greatness’ (achievements) flicker.

And I have seen.....I was afraid — Timidity has suppressed his amorous self.

'The eternal Fooman' is 'Death'; 'snicker' means 'laugh decisively'.

And would it have been.....after all — Prufrock asks whether it would have been worth it to force the 'crisis'.

After the cups.....worth while — He thinks that the 'crisis' won't have been worth while after taking tea and jam and participating in a social gathering.

'Marmalade' is a kind of jam; 'porcelain' is crockery or china-ware.

To have bitten off.....with a smile — Should he have spoken of his love quickly with a smile? It would have been improper.

'Bitten off' means 'introduced quickly.'

To have squeezed.....a ball — Prufrock is presently out of the room in the street, and is rationalizing his failure at the party. He now feels that to force the 'crisis' would have meant to attempt an impossible task, for it is not possible to 'squeeze the universe into a ball.'

To roll it.....question — It won't have been worthwhile for him to rush toward the 'crisis' (which is real love).

To say: 'I am Lazarus.....tell you all — It won't have been proper for him to say that he is Lazarus, the beggar mentioned in Luke, 16, who was raised by Christ from the world of the dead. Here Prufrock imagines himself to be the representative of the dead people.

Lazarus – *He was a beggar lying at the richman's gate; was sent to Hell, but wanted re-life. This was granted to him by Jesus Christ.*

If one selling a pillow.....at all. — Prufrock is afraid the lady's rejection of him. It is likely that the lady, keeping her head on a pillow, should have said that she did not mean love.

'One' implies 'the lady of lady'; 'settling' means 'keeping'.

And would it have been.....and as much more? — Prufrock is struck by his own inadequacy. He feels that it would have been unwise for him to force the 'crisis' after attending the evening party.

'Sprinkled' means 'watered'; 'skirts suggest 'the dancing girls'.

It is impossible.....*I mean!* — He can't express his meaning or intention.

But as if a magic lantern..... a screen — Though Prufrock is unable to state precisely his feelings, he can still form vague ideas or patterns about them, which are not unlike 'a magic lantern' throwing pictures on a screen.

'Nerves' indicate 'inner feelings'; 'patterns' means 'pictures'.

Would it had been..... at all— *Once again Prufrock is afraid of the unfavorable reaction of the lady.*

No! I am not Prince Hamlet.....meant to be— The passage beginning with this lines provides, as Joseph Margolis says, 'the only occasion on which Prufrock has attempted to sustain an exact evaluation of his entire career, and the statement — including his denial of heroic pretensions — forms a part of a larger and most remarkable unity.' Prufrock asserts that he is not Prince Hamlet, though indecision might suggest it. One should remember that Hamlet proposed to Ophelia, but postponed the 'crisis.'

As an attendant lord..... the prince — Instead he is cautious attendant like Polonius, a courtier of King Claudius; he is the attendant who will be fit to increase the number of a procession, to begin a scene or two, and to advise the Prince.

'Progress' means 'procession'.

no doubt, an easy tool.....the Fool — Certain characteristics of a good attendant are detailed herein, – he will be compliant, easy to handle, respectful, useful, courteous, careful, full of wise words, but a little dull, sometimes laughable, and at the others playing the role of a fool (used in the Shakespearean sense).

‘Deferential’ means ‘respectful, obedient’; ‘politic’ means ‘courteous, mannered’; ‘meticulous’ means ‘careful’, ‘full of high sentence’ means ‘full of maxims’; ‘obtuse’ means ‘dull’ morose’.

I grow old.....trousers rolled. - Here Prufrock assumes the role of a prudent character and indulges in self – mockery. There is a sense of weariness in the repetition ‘I grow old... I grow old...’ Though he is resigned to his sad role and unromantic character, he resolves to be a little sportive in dress (by wearing his trousers cuffed).

Shall I part my hair behind?..... a peach? – Having resigned to his sad role. Prufrock would raise ‘the overwhelming question’ no more. Now the problem before him whether he should try to hide his baldness, whether he should dare to eat a peach.

‘Peach’ is a kind of stone – fruit.

I shall wear white flannel trouser.....beach. – The rising tempo of the lines suggests Prufrock walking hastily to the sea – beach after he has put on white woolen trousers.

‘Flannel’ means ‘woolen’.

I have heard the mermaids.....sing to me – Prufrock is an aging man standing on the sea – beach and wistfully watching the girls, who pay no heed to him. He is sunk into a vision or dream of beauty and vitality. These girls become mermaids riding triumphantly seaward into their creative natural element and singing to each other. But the mermaids, like the lady, probably will not sing to him (as to Ulysses).

I have seen them.....white and black – The reference here is to the mermaids riding seaward on the waves and floating on the white foam at a time when the wind blows the water white and black.

‘White hair’ stands for ‘foam’.

We have lingered.... and we drown – The concluding lines (129 – 131) take us to the mermaids, reminding us of Prufrock’s original situation: he has ‘lingered’, not in the drawing room surrounded by the women talking of Michelangelo, but in the ‘chambers of the sea’ surrounded by ‘sea – girls’, who are garlanded with red and brown seaweed. But such an experience is possible only in dream: ‘...human voices wake us’. And to wake is to return to the human world of suffocation and death: ‘and we drown.’

‘Lingered’ means ‘stayed’; ‘wreathed’ means garlanded’; ‘wake’ means ‘disturb’; ‘we drown’; implies suffocation and death. The dawn of reality on Prufrock and his friends, who are lost in visions so far, disturbs them and renders them sad and frustrated.

SECTION III: CRITICAL NOTES ON “THE WASTE LAND”

1. Composition of "The Waste Land"

The Waste Land was first published in the opening issue of the *Criterion* (October 1922) and then in the *Dial* (November 1922). Since its publication, it has taken the literary world by storm and become a classic representing the twentieth century in all its complexity and diversity. The poem is Eliot’s *magnum opus*, showing the birth of a new kind of English poetry with new patterns of speech and rhythm, with new poetic devices and technique. The composition of this great poem has a history of its own, and it is an interesting history by all means. This history is well reflected in *The Waste Land : Facsimile And Transcript Of The Original Draft* edited by Valerie Eliot (1971), in *Letters of Ezra Pound* (1950), in *An Exhibition of Manuscripts and First Editions of T.S. Eliot* (1961), and in the Quinn Collection of the New York Public Library.

The distinguished critic, Helen Gardner, has given her thought to the question of the composition of *The Waste Land*. She suggests that we should not speak of ‘the first version’ or ‘the original version’ of this poem. She

thinks that the only authentic version of *The Waste Land* is the published text. But many Eliot readers are not satisfied with this sort of suggestion.

The earliest drafts of *The Waste Land* were written as early as 1914. On 5th November, 1919, Eliot wrote to Quinn about this poem – ‘I have in mind’, and in December 1919 he informed his mother that he was to ‘write a long poem I have had on my mind for a long time’. In October 1921, Eliot’s health ran down alarmingly and he was advised complete rest for three months. He went to Margate in mid – October of the same year, and in November he joined a clinic in Lausanne for his treatment. He wrote *The Waste Land* – ‘a damn good poem of 19 pages’, according to Pound – partly at Margate and partly at Lausanne in 1921. Eliot was then recovering from a physical and psychological breakdown. At that time, Eliot was also engaged in writing the ‘London letter’ to the *Dial* (New York) which clearly vented his despair and helplessness over the threatened destruction of several churches in London which were designed by Sir Christopher Wren. His condition was no better than that of an imprisoned person who is always thinking of a way out:

... each in his prison
 thinking of the key, each confirms a prison....
 (*The Waste Land*, lines 413 – 414).

The allusion is to Dante’s *Inferno*, Canto XXXIII, where Ugolino is shown as confirmed to the awful tower in which he is destined to die of starvation. Modern man living in London is also leading a life of loneliness and imprisonment.

Eliot himself has acknowledged various sources contributing to the structure of *The Waste Land*. In his Notes on the poem, he specifically mentions Miss Jessie L. Weston’s book on the Grail legend, *From Ritual to Romance* (Cambridge, 1920), and Sir James Frazer’s book, *The Golden Bough* (1922). These two books have largely inspired the composition of Eliot’s poem. Also, the works of F.H. Bradley, Joseph Conrad, Ezra Pound, James Joyce and Henry James as well as the Indian Scriptures have contributed a good deal to the making of the poem.

2. The Theme of "The Waste Land"

The main theme of *The Waste Land* (1922) is the perversion and sterility of sexual desire in modern man which leads to loss of spirituality in the world. The theme of the poem operates on several planes of experience. As a result, different kinds of the waste land appear in it – the waste land of religion, the waste land of the spirit, and the waste land of the instinct for fertility. The poet has wonderfully given a poetic expression to ‘his feelings of futility and anarchy in the face of contemporary – civilization’. The contemporary civilization is a decayed and degenerated civilization, having lost roots in love and religion, in natural and spiritual existence. Consequently, the modern world is seen burning in the fire of sex and lust, and hence fallen on evil days. The spiritual waters which once revitalized European civilization have now dried up, and people are involved neck – deep in ‘birth, copulation and death’, particularly those living in the metropolitan city of London.

The Waste Land primarily deals with the theme of barrenness, which is symbolically related to the myth of the waste land. Miss Jessie Weston in her book, *From Ritual to Romance*, offers details about the quest for the Holy Grail (the cup used by Christ at the last Supper) and about the legends connected with this quest. These legends depict a region turned into a waste land by a cruel curse. Nothing can grow on this land; crops have withered; animals cannot reproduce. The land is without greenery, without water, without fertility. The land has become so because its ruler, the Fisher King, is excessively indulged in sexual exploits and has received a severe wound on his genitals. This wound has rendered him powerless to procreate. How can this curse be removed, or how can the rainlessness of the land be overcome? This can be done by a questing knight who asks the meanings of various symbols which are presented to him on his visit to a castle. In the original legend the sterility or barrenness is actually physical, but in Eliot’s poem it is basically spiritual. The poem under consideration depicts the visit of the knight to the Chapel Perilous, where the Grail is supposedly kept.

Apart from this, death is another theme of *The Waste Land*. Death is usually contrasted with life, Eliot's two favourite phrases are 'death in life' and 'life in death'. His 'Death by Water' in *The Waste Land* is an example of 'life in death', whereas most of his characters in poetry are living in a situation of 'death in life'. The degraded life of the denizens of modern metropolis (like London) is an instance of 'death in life' – the worst kind of life one can think of. As contrasted to this, 'life in death' promises a better time ahead in spiritual terms. Both kinds of life have been suggested by Eliot in *The Waste Land*. The negation of one kind of life signals the birth of another kind. Eliot is very fond of paradoxes and variations in his poetry, and this is one of his paradoxes. Another paradox to which he frequently resorts is 'the intersection of timelessness' with time (see his *Four Quartets*, 1943, for this).

Some scholars like Paul Elmer More and F.R. Leavis think that *The Waste Land* deals with 'the disillusionment of a generation' or with, 'the destabilization of an order'. Consequently, the modern man has become dejected and dispirited. Whether Eliot likes this sort of expression - that the poem is a mirror of its time – or not, the fact remains that *The Waste Land* is a vigorous and valid document of its age. This is well in tune with his statement in *The Sacred Wood* (1920) that a poet writes with an intense awareness of his whole civilization. *The Waste Land* is though claimed by Eliot to have been written to 'release his personal feelings', it is no doubt a very valuable document of its age. Paul Elmer More rightly thinks that this poem deals with 'the chaos of its time'.

Another scholar, Ian Hamilton, is of the view that *The Waste Land* effectively projects the 'superb trinity of culture, sex and religion. The culture that Eliot highlights in this poem is the European culture, and the religion that he treats of is the world religion (not mere one religion). The first three Sections of the poem stress the prevalence of sex and lust in modern human world. Is there any value of sex without love? What do you get married for if you don't want children? Eliot treats of the debasement of love – both inside and outside marriage – in a forceful manner in this poem. He dwells on the three vital aspects of human life – culture, sex and religion – in their social and spiritual contexts.

Only some important themes to be found in *The Waste Land* are discussed above. There are other related themes too in the texture of the poem, and they will be hinted at while discussing the other aspect of the poem. For example, Eliot mentions in his notes on the poem that "In the first part of part V three themes are employed: the journey to Emmaus, the approach to the Chapel Perilous (see Miss Weston's book) and the present decay of eastern Europe". Thus, there are themes within themes in the poem under discussion.

3. The Epigraph

The Epigraph is taken from the *Satyricon* of Petronius Arbiter and suggests the essence of the principal theme in *The Waste Land*. The *Satyricon* narrates the story of the sibyl of Cumae, the beloved of Apollo. Once the sibyl asked Apollo to grant her to live for as many years as the grains of sand in her hand. But she forgot to ask for eternal youth. Hence she became aged and shrank so small that she hung up in a bottle. When the passers –by, especially children, asked her what she wanted at that time, she could only say, 'I want to die'. Her statement shows unequivocally the predominant theme of the poem decay and destruction. D.G. Rossetti, the great Pre-Raphaelite-like poet of the mid – nineteenth century, has beautifully versified this story of the sibyl:

*I saw the sibyl at Cumae,
(one said) with rune own eye.
She hung in a case, and read her rune
To all the passers – by.
Said the boys, "what would thou, Sibyl?"
She answered, "I would die."*

As *The Waste Land* employs the primordial imagery of death and rebirth in accordance with the Grail legend, the Sibyl belongs to the machinery of initiation in the poem. The Sibyl appears in one of the Grail romances, and links the medieval legend to the classical myth. Her misfortune as mentioned in the epigraph symbolizes

the motif of *The Waste Land*. The hint is that the feminine power which should enable the protagonist to complete his quest for initiation cannot deliver goods to the waste land. Similarly, Tiresias remains blind and impotent. The Sibyl here symbolizes 'death in life', and can be identified with Madame Sosotris of Part I.

The epigraph to the poem may be translated as follows:

*For once I saw with my own eyes
the Sibyl at Cumae hanging in
a glass bottle, and when the children
said to her, 'Sibyl what do you wish?'
she answered, 'I wish to die?'*

The only escape from 'death in life' is death proper. That alone will release the Sibyl from her suspended, even painful, life. The words in the epigraph are spoken by the drunken Trimalchio in the *Satyricon*, which is a satire written by the Roman author, Petronius Arbiter, in the first century A.D. Trimalchio is, in a drunken state, boasting to his companions and telling them stories of wonder. The story of the Sibyl is actually one such story.

4. The Dedication

The Waste Land is dedicated to Ezra Pound, 'il miglior fabbro (i.e., 'the greater craftsman'), who edited the manuscript of the poem and 'reduced to about half its size'. As we know, both Eliot and Pound were of American origin and both had identical views about the art of poetry – that it should be meant for 'the minority audience. Hence they both made it esoteric and allusive, imagistic and concrete.

Pound (1885 - 1972) himself was a poet of stature, and it was his habit to promote other authors and poets. About Eliot he wrote thus:

*Eliot, in bank, makes \$ 500. Too tired
To write, broke down; during convalescence
In Switzerland, did Waste Land, a
Masterpiece, one of the most important
19 pages in English.*

- **D.D. Paige, ed. *The Letters of Ezra Pound (1950), p.171.***

Of course, Pound had done a lot towards reducing the size of *The Waste Land* through his pruning and expert advice. The great service rendered by Pound, to Eliot becomes so clear when we browse through *The Waste Land: Facsimile and Transcript Of The Original Draft*, edited by Valerie Eliot after the Poet's death on January 4, 1965.

Fortunately, Pound was alive when Eliot died. Eliot was buried in East Coker, as per his wish. Pound was present at the memorial service in Westminster Abbey, and travelled a long way – from Rome to London – specifically to attend it. Pound recalled Eliot as 'the true Dantescan voice' and urged the people to 'READ HIM'.

5. The Structure of the Poem

The structure of *The Waste Land* follows a circular pattern, not a linear one. The poem continually connects past and present, fertility and barrenness, life and death. The quests of various characters in this poem do not develop in linear directions; they do not arrive at a real end. The poem does not offer a hope of reaching a destination, does not promise a happy reunion. It rather articulates the failures of the protagonist's journeys.

The structure of the poem permits a new poetic technique to Eliot. This technique can accommodate a number of references and allusions in its texture. This is usually called allusive technique, which is 'at once laconic, quick, and precise, for representing the transmutations of thought' (as Edmund Wilson puts it). The technique

of allusiveness has its own merits and demerits. In his seminal essay on “Tradition and the Individual Talent”, Eliot expresses his ideas about the use of this technique. According to him, the use of allusions is one of the ways of enriching a tradition as well as of promoting the individual talent. In fact, it is very difficult to reconcile ‘tradition’ and ‘the individual talent’, but Eliot achieves this rare feat through his allusions. And his poem, *The Waste Land* is a living example of the use of his technique of allusiveness. With the help of allusions, Eliot is able to establish an association between such contrarities as past and present, sterility and fertility, death-in-life’ and ‘life-in-death’.

In his well – known essay, “The Frontiers of Criticism” (1956), Eliot clarifies that his endeavor as an artist is to ‘assemble the most desperate material to form a new whole’. His technique of allusiveness enables him to achieve this objective in a considerable way. To achieve ‘a new whole’, Eliot strives to master at least three kinds of maturity in his work – ‘maturity of mind’, ‘maturity of manners’ and ‘maturity of language; These three kinds of maturity have been his ideals in art, as he points out in his “What is a Classic?” *The Waste Land* is a powerful poem which reflects the three kinds of maturity. It aims at expressing “a wholeness of feeling, a completeness encompassing within itself the entire tradition of English culture and literature” (see Introduction to *The Waste Land*, ed. V.A. Shahana Delhi: O.U.P., 1987, P.18): Eliot’s sense of culture and literature is not limited to England alone; it rather extends to include the rich, old heritage of Greece and Rome and of the entire continent of Europe. The density of allusiveness adds the quality of suggestiveness in this poem.

In structuring *The Waste Land*, Eliot drew upon a number of past authors and contemporaries. He called ideas and methods from various literary *genres*, and from a variety of fine arts – from music, painting, the theatre, the novel, and films. But these literary devices employed by Eliot are directed towards exploring the basic theme of the poem and expressing his vision of life. Of course, Eliot’s vision remains gloomy and dismal here, though in the last Section it turns to be a bit optimistic and promising.

In *The Letters of Ezra Pound*, we come across a few letters about *The Waste Land*. From Pound Eliot seeks some suggestions, and asks him on the two points in particular:

1. Do you printing ‘Gerontion’ as a prelude in book or pamphlet form?
2. Perhaps better omit Phlebas also? And to this Pound replies thus:

I do *not* advise printing ‘Gerontion’ as preface. One don’t miss it *at all* as the thing now stands. To be more lucid still, let me say that I advise you NOT to print ‘Gerontion’ as prelude. I do advise keeping Phlebas. In fact I more’n advise, phlebas is an integral part of the poem

Eliot accepts Pound’s suggestion, taking him an accomplished craftsman. But Eliot does not accept the Master’s advice that the Sanskrit words proper be dropped.

Eliot’s scholarship comes out openly in his “Notes” to *The Waste Land*. The Notes clearly show that he is ‘a scholar poet’. Also why he writes these Notes, he gives the following explanation:

Then when it come to print ‘The Waste Land’ as a little book... it was discovered that the poem was inconveniently short, so I set to work to expand the notes, in order to provide a few more pages of printed matter, with the result that they became the remarkable exposition of bogus scholarship that is still on view today.

This pertinent statement of Eliot points out that the scholarly background to *The Waste Land* is not of great importance in understanding it. In his brilliant essays. “The Frontiers of Criticism” Eliot expresses the same idea when he remarks that he does ‘not think that most poetry... requires that sort of dissection for its enjoyment

and understanding.’ It is somewhat erroneous to approach a poem through the poet’s scholarship. Rather a reader should approach it by a consideration of the amount of transformation of the raw material at hand by his ‘poetic genius.’ The poet has to discover an ‘emotional equivalent’ to his thought for producing a gem of a poem. In its structural context, Eliot’s poem should be read in this light.

6. Myth in the Poem

Eliot makes use of myth in a discernible way. In this matter, he is deeply influenced by the method of James Joyce in *Ulysses* (published in 1922). Both the works appeared in the same year, and hence the question of borrowing does not arise. *Ulysses* contains parallels to Homer’s *Odyssey*. V. Larband reviewed Joyce’s *Ulysses* in the opening issue of *The Criterion* (October 1922), edited by T.S. Eliot. Reviewing *Ulysses* for *The Dial* (1923), Eliot lauded Joyce’s mythical method, thereby revealing the attractive malities of his own method in *The Waste Land*. He stressed the classical quality of Joyce’s novel. Speaking of the mythical pattern of the novel, Eliot remarked thus:

*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 and
ordering, of giving a shape and a
significance to the immense panorama
of futility and anarchy which
is contemporary history.*

(“*Ulysses, Order and Myth*”, *The Dial*, 1923, pp. 480-83).

Eliot also adopts the mythical method in the structuring of *The Waste Land*, but his method tends to be suggestive and selective. He makes use of the Grail legend in this poem.

The Grail legend is connected with the life – story of the Fisher king, an important ruler of the Waste Land. The grail was the disk 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. Subsequently, it came to be an object of devotion and dedication. But, after some time, the Grail disappeared mysteriously, and several bold knights went out in search of it. It was generally believed 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 perfect purity. Lord Tennyson dealt with this theme as the finale of his *Idylls of the King*, making Sir Galahad, the brave and pure knight of King Arthur’s Round Table, as the leader destined to succeed in his noble mission. In some other versions appearing in Germany and France subsequently, however, the protagonist is Sir Percival or Parsifal. Miss Jessie L. Weston in her book, *From Ritual to Romance*, one of the sources in the making of *The Waste Land*, has treated the legend critically and historically. She thinks that the Grail was originally connected with the fertility myth and associated with sexual symbols, but later it suffered a sea – change being associated with the founder of Christianity.

Parsifal and his fellow adventurers once arrived in a country ruled by a prince named the Fisher King. It was one of the regions where the Grail worship had been in vogue and a temple, known as the Chapel Perilous, still stood there, broken and dilapidated. At that time, the king himself had become a human wreck, maimed and impotent as a result of a sin committed by his soldiery in out raging the modesty of a group of nuns attached to the Grail temple. Because of this sin, the Fisher King had become impotent and his land barren. The king was, however, waiting with hope that one day the knight of the pure soul would visit his kingdom and the Chapel Perilous, answer questions and solve riddles prior to the ritual washing of his sinful body, which would purge it and renew its health and energy. Then, the land would also become watery and green, full of ‘soft incense’ and ‘lispings leaves’.

Eliot's poem under review is an allegorical representation of this story to modern society and religion. The modern human world is actually a waste land. We can have youth and health by journeying far, questioning our condition, and practising self – control and spirituality. Sex is certainly the source of life, and as such it was glorified and worshipped in ancient days by primitive communities. But sex is now debased in the human world and the whole universe is presently 'burning' in the 'fire' of lust. This 'fire' can be extinguished by the purification of the soul through the practice of asceticism and spiritualism. To teach this lesson, Eliot resorts to the Scriptures of India – to the *Rig Veda* and the *Upanishad*.

Thus, the use of the Grail legend in the texture of *The Waste Land* proves an effective tool to draw parallels between the ancient and modern situations. It renders the poem compact and compressed, suggestive and symbolical.

7. The Role of Tiresias

Tiresias is the central figure in *The Waste Land*, and it is through him that we watch all the events and situations taking place in it. What Tiresias sees from the substance of the poem. Writing about him, Eliot observes thus:

*Tiresias, although a mere spectator and
Not indeed a 'character', is yet the
Most important personage in the
Poem, uniting all the rest... and the two
Sexes meet in Tiresias. What Tiresias sees...
Is the substance of the poem.*

(“Notes” on *The Waste Land*)

Tiresias function as a unifier of all the episodes and experiences to be had in the poem. He is a representative of the entire humanity. His vision reflects the vision of the poem. He is derived from the Greek source, where he is a wise soothsayer. But in his youth he becomes blind. Why? The reasons are variously suggested – (1) that he once saw Athena taking her bath; since his mother was her friend, she did not cause her death, but blinded him and gave him the power of prophecy by way of compensation; and (2) that he one day saw snakes coupling and struck them with his stick, whereat he became a woman; later the same thing happened again and he turned into a man. He was asked by Zeus and Hera to settle a dispute as to which sex had more pleasure in love, he decided for the female. Hera got angry with him and blinded him, but Zeus compensated by granting him a long life and the power of prophecy.

Tiresias is a bi – sexual with a wide range of experience in life. This is how the poet has introduced him in the text of the poem:

*I Tiresias, though blind, throbbing between two lives,
Old man with wrinkled female breasts, can see
At the violet hour, the evening hour that strives
Homeward, and brings the sailor home from sea,
The typist home at teatime, clears her breakfast, lights
Her stove, and lays out food in tins.
... ..
On the divan are piled (at night her bed)
Stocking, slippers, camisoles, and stays.
I Tiresias, old man with wrinkled dugs
Perceived the scene, and foretold the rest –*

(“The Fire Sermon”, *The Waste Land* lines 218 – 229)

Here Tiresias is presented as an old, blind man, having the power of 'foretelling', and also a person combining the two sexes in himself – 'Old man with wrinkled female breasts'.

As a spectator, Tiresias has watched the depressing spectacle of modern humanity which has fallen on evil days. He is at once the relic of the past and a seer of the present, at once a prophet and a detached spectator of the contemporary scene. He is a representative of the whole humanity. His camera eye is seen rolling backwards and forwards. He can move about in history and in time; he can become a modern city – man, a medieval, or an ancient Greek at will. The Waste Land in his spiritual autobiography, his search through the junkheap of modern culture for an integrating principal. His search goes on several planes: autobiography, archeology, mythology, anthropology and religion. It is often accompanied by sufferings and frustration, and yet it does not give hope of rebirth and resurrection. The Grail legend aptly suggests it through symbols.

8. "The Waste Land" as and International Poem

T.S. Eliot's poetry presents an interesting example of the application of international themes. *The Waste Land* (1922), his *magnum opus*, combines in its texture a number of sources ranging from the fertility rituals, the Grail legends, the Tarot pack of cards (all representing the primitive pagan ways of life), through St. Augustine and the *Bible* (both forming the Christian tradition), the Greek myth and the creation of Tiresias, the Latin writers and poets (constituting the continental Classical tradition), Buddhism and Hinduism (both championing the Indian tradition), to a host of British, French, Italian and German authors (all betokening the various nationalities of Europe). There is nothing surprising in it because one who know Eliot's background, education and wide range of reading can easily understand his sound scholarship and varying interests. When Stephen Coote in his study of *The Waste Land* calls it "a central work of modernism," he implies thereby "its desperate engagement with the [entire] modern world"¹ (the word 'entire' mine). It is when we consider the work in its entirety that it really becomes "a seminal par of our heritage."²

1. Various Sources of the Poem

Eliot discovered a fine analysis of the fertility rituals in Sir James Frazer's monumental work, *The Golden Bough* (3rd ed., 1911 – 1919) in twelve volumes (out of which Eliot used only the two volumes *Adonis, Attis to Romance* (Cambridge, 1920) the two work which have "influenced our generation profoundly."³ Sir Frazer offers vivid accounts of the fertility gods, Adonis, Attis and Osiris, chosen from the ancient culture of the Eastern Mediterranean. Of these gods, Adonis (or Tammuz) belonged to the Babylonians and the syrian; Attis originated in Phrygia and was worshipped by the Romans; and Osiris was Egyptian. The worship of these three gods being common to the sources of European culture is "essentially similar."⁴ They were the divine yet mortal lovers of the Mother Goddess – in the shape of Ishtar, Cybele, or Isis – who personified 'the various potency of nature.' The union of the god and goddess guaranteed the fertility of the land. The death and the sexual maiming of the god followed by his consort's search for him in the underworld brought about the onset of winter and the land's infertility. With the departure of the god, the world turned into a Waste Land.

Miss Weston's book is another interesting anthropological document to which Eliot confesses his indebtedness in unequivocal terms. He observes: "Not only the title, but the plan and a good deal of the incidental symbolism of the poem were suggested by Miss Jessie L. Weston's book on the grail legend."⁵ The Grail legends are based on the tales of the Knights of the Round Table (e.g., Parcifal, Gawain and Galahad). Miss Weston claims to have found 'the origins of Grail imagery in the vegetation cults analysed by Frazer.' The Waste Land of the Grail legends is mainly due to the sickness of the king for an unknown reason, reduced as it is to 'the desolation of drought and death.' The king being the Grail's guardian has to be nursed back to health. In *The Waste Land*, the Fisher King is shown maimed like a fertility god. Miss Weston relates the Tammuz – Adonic cult of Frazer to her own Grail legends, and explains that the wound suffered by Adonis was in his genitals by Dolorous Stroke, and adds that this accounts for the infertility of the land. By associations, the wound of the Fisher King was identical. The hyacinth girl is the Grail bearer in Eliot's poem; she is an embodiment of love. But the Fisher King fails with the girl in the hyacinth garden (a place of water and flowers). Madame Sosostris,

who is advanced in years and who is a ‘wise woman’, is unmistakably another Grail – bearer, she is surely “a charlatan” and “an old witchwoman.”⁶ Another instance of the Grail – bearer is the tired typist in a luxurious boudoir whose helplessness is contained in the lines –

*What shall we do to- morrow?
What shall we ever do?*

(11.133 – 134)

It is quite clear that the Grail legend initiates a quester – in the poem under discussion; it is Tiresias – to go on, and set the land in order by breaking the magic – spell of infertility and sterility and thereby curing the wounded king. Through a maze of symbols, this legend is primarily “primitively associated with sex.”⁷ According to Sir Frazer, some of the primitive communities of the world used to indulge themselves in nocturnal orgies and sensuous merry – making for their welfare.

The Tarot pack of cards meant originally for divination has now degraded into fortune – telling. It consists of 78 cards out of which 56 form the Lesser Arcana (divided into four suits – Batons [Eliot’s ‘staves’], Cups, Swords and Coins) and the remaining 22 cards constitute the Greater Arcana, each depicting a symbolic figure or scene (such as the Wheel of Fortune and the Hanged Man). The cards were known in Western Europe by the late 14th century, but nothing definite can be said about their origin. Miss Weston suggests that the Tarot is “a possible repository of primeval symbols of fertility,”⁸ and traces its elements in antique Egyptian and Chinese monuments, and opines that it might have been introduced from India by the gipsies (pp. 73 – 76). In the initiation ritual, the four Grail talismans (Cup, Lance, Sword and Dish) have the ‘sexual value’ in essential details – the first and fourth being feminine and the second and third being masculine in their symbolic connotations. They are the life – symbols by all means. In the Tarot, the drowned Phoenician Sailor and the Hanged Man symbolise respectively ‘the loveless death’ and ‘the potential healing or rebirth of Tiresias’. Madame Sosostris sees ‘the crowds of people’ turning on the Wheel of Fortune; these people signify ‘a purposeless circle.’ In his Notes on the poem, Eliot tells us that the Hanged Man has been associated with the Hanged God of Sir Frazer, which in Part V of the poem gets transformed into ‘the hooded figure.’ The Man with Three Staves, an authentic member of the Tarot pack, is arbitrarily associated with the Fisher King himself.⁹ Taken as a whole, the Tarot cards and their reading denote the degeneration of spiritual health for man.

Fertility rituals or vegetation cults and the Grail legends and the Tarot pack of cards combinedly allude to primitive religion as represented by ancient communities of the world. In the Christian context, they are contained in the mysteries and miracles of the olden days. Another significant growth of early Christianity is St. Augustine, whose *Confessions* is “the European example of true autobiographical writing.”¹⁰ Though he appears briefly at the close of Part III *The Waste Land*, he is placed significantly beside Lord Buddha as the great exponent of Western asceticism. In his Notes, Eliot inform us that “The collocation of these two representatives of eastern and western asceticism ... is not an accident.”¹¹ St. Augustine fought vehemently with his own powerful sexual urge and ‘the restless sexuality of Carthage.’ He presents a graphic account of his spiritual and emotional bankruptcy – of his personal *Waste Land* – in his *Confessions* thus:

*To Carthage then I came
Burning burning burning burning
O Lord Thou pluckest me out
O Lord Thou pluckest
burning.*

(11. 307 – 310)

This meaningful passage highlights ‘the sordidness of urban pleasure’ in a big city, and should be read in the background of Part II (“A Game of Chess”) of the poem. It depicts sex without love, particularly within marriage, whereas Part III paints the same horror without marriage – if the former brings into sharp focus a category of women consisting of Imogen, Philomel, Bianca, and Ophelia, the latter highlights another category

of women comprising Madame Sosostriis, Belladonna, Lil (the pub woman having undergone an abortion), Cleopatra and Dido. The Fisher King receives his wound as a result of the gross violation of the norms of chastity, as a result of the immoral rape. Seen against such a background, the passage beginning with 'To Carthage then I came' is highly revealing. Modern man has to throw away all 'burning in lust' and the resultant restlessness and horror if he has to come out of the prevailing state of infertility and sterility around him. This is certainly the path of Negation, as opposed to the path of Affirmation, and this path of Negation has been best shown by Lord Buddha, the great Indian ascetic, who abjured his wife and son and grad palace for the sake of real enlightenment. The title of Part III is directly based on "The Fire Sermon" delivered by the Buddha at Sarnath (Varanasi) to his first five disciples immediately after his enlightenment. In his Notes, Eliot tells us that the Fire Sermon "corresponds in importance to the Sermon on the Mount."¹² In that historical Sermon the Buddha has shown that the entire world is 'on fire', which has got to be extinguished for the redemption of mankind. So important is the Fire Sermon that a noted critic like William Empson is prompted to remark that it "leaves Christianity far behind"¹³ in its insistence on spirituality and asceticism. Here at least is a possibility for the modern man to emerge out of his Waste Land. The well – known critic, E.L. Mayo, is of the opinion that the passage 'To Carthage then I came' remarkably fuses into one the three religious traditions – the Christian, the Hebrew and the Buddhist.¹⁴

The Bible has been occasionally by Eliot. The Jews' destiny of waiting for a Redeemer (in the Old Testament) resembles the destiny of human beings as described in *The Waste Land*. In line 20 of this poem, the vision of Ezekiel ('the son of man') is alluded to - the vision of the coming of the Messiah and the return of the Jews to the Promised Land – and in line 23 the cricket and in line 353 the cicada are borrowed from the vision of cataclysm in the Ecclesiastes. If the Old Testament presents a world without a Redeemer, the New Testament is its fulfilment. Christ is the risen God who triumphs over man's sin and wins forgiveness for him. In lines 322 – 326 of *The Waste Land*, the scenes in Christ's life just before the crucifixion, and in lines 359 – 365 the scenes of His life after the resurrection are beautifully recalled. The opening paragraph of "What the Thunder Said" has distinct analogies with the incidents in arrival of soldiers and the imprisonment before the trial. In his Notes, Eliot informs us that the first section of Part V employs three themes – "the journey to Emmaus, the approach to Chapel Perilous... and the present decay of eastern Europe."¹⁵ Eliot purposely compares the risen Christ to Sir James Frazer's Hanged God. But the world of the Waste Land is so much decayed and degraded that it cannot recognise the resurrected Christ or 'the hooded figure.'

Besides a fair use of *The Bible*, the Hindu scriptures have also been drawn upon in a bid to make the poem truly representative of the entire humanity. Eliot has used them in *The Waste Land*, *Four Quartets*, and the shorter piece "To the Indians Who Died in Africa." The hoary wisdom of ancient India is contained in the *Vedas*, the *Upanishads*, and the *Bhagavad-Gita*. Miss Weston traces the symbolism of the Grail legend to the *Rig Veda* (see p. 25 of her book for this). There are two self-evident references to the Hindu scriptures in *The Waste Land*, the first being 'Da Da Da' and the second being 'Shantih shantih shantih.' The first one is derived from the cryptic teachings of Prajapati to his disciples – gods, men and demons – as found in the *Brihad aranyaka Upanishad* (5.1-3). The father –preceptor enjoins upon them the necessity of practising the three laudable virtues of Love, Sympathy and Control (i.e., 'Datta,' 'Dayadhvam' and 'Damyata') by modern man for his deliverance from his self-created prison. The second one, as the poet puts it, is "a formal ending to an Upanishad,"¹⁶ which is also echoed *verbatim* by the noted critic, Elizabeth Drew.¹⁷ It is derived from the *Yajur Veda* (36.17) as well as from the *Upanishads* (which invariably end it). The triple 'shantih' actually reflects a peaceful state of mind attained after a complete resolution of all disturbances, anxieties and doubts.¹⁸ Very adroitly the poet has given a clear-cut clue to modern man to turn away from the selfish, worldly pursuits to the moral, spiritual quests to cure his otherwise incurable malady.

Tiresias, an omnipresent, mythic figure, is unmistakably Greek in origin, precisely to be found first in the Oedipus plays. His omnipresence in the poem creates a structural coherence and a psychological insight into the prevailing unhealthy conditions in the world. In his Notes, Eliot offers a detailed commentary on Tiresias in

the following manner:

*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 Substances of the poem.*¹⁹

From this commentary it is obvious that Tiresias is a blind old man combining both the sexes in himself – in other words, the entire humanity – and that his observations constitute the central core of the poem. His position is that of a silent spectator, not that of a redeemer or an active participant in the enactment of the tense drama of *The Waste Land*. Both Sophocles and Seneca opened their Oedipus plays when the plague was at its height on Thebes after Oedipus had unwittingly killed his father and married his mother Jocasta. The incestuous relationship with his mother caused the blight of the land, and the horrible plague descended on Thebes. In these plays, the blind prophet Tiresias could reveal the truth to Oedipus and thereby hasten his tragedy. “The Fire Sermon” contains three clear references to Tiresias : in the first, he is

*Blind, throbbing between two lives,
Old man with wrinkled female breasts...*

In the second, he speaks of himself as an ‘old man with wrinkled dug’s’ (line 228), and in the third he presents himself thus –

*And I Tiresias have foresuffered all
Enacted on this same divan or bed;
I who have sat by Thebes below the wall
And walked among the lowest of the dead.*

(11.243-246)

The Latin poet Ovid (who is referred to in line 99 of the poem) describes vividly about the transformation of Tiresias into a woman for seven years and then again into a man as a result of his striking of the two intertwining huge serpents in the depths of the green wood, and about his condemnation to ‘eternal blindness’ by angry Juno, for he had given his verdict in favour of Jupiter over a delicate issue – that ‘women get far more pleasure out of love than men do.’

No doubt, the most dominant classical personages to have influenced Eliot’s *The Waste Land* have been Sophocles, Seneca and Ovid, but some Latin works also contribute their shares to the making of the poem. These works are: the *Satyricon* of Petronius, the anonymous *Pervigilium Veneris*, the *Aeneid* of Virgil, the poets of *The Greek Anthology*.²⁰ Petronius clearly suggested the epigraph of the poem to Eliot wherein the Sybil of Cumae expresses her desire to die – ‘I want to die.’ The *Pervigilium Veneris* (meaning literally ‘the Vigil of Venus’) provides Eliot with one fragment for the close of *The Waste Land* – ‘Quanno fiam uti chelidon’ (meaning ‘When shall I be as the swallow’), - expressing a certain longing for singing in full freedom. The references to Virgil in “A Game of Chess” is very brief, and it focuses our attention on the panelled ceiling of the boudoir which is actually derived from the first book of the *Aeneid*. *The Greek Anthology* consisting of over four thousand epigrams on a variety of subjects is drawn upon in the Phlebas episode.

Amongst the various authors alluded to by Eliot in this poem, mention may be made of German poet Richard Wagner (whose *Tristan and Isolde* is the human world’s marvellous expression of romantic love, including torrential passion, sexuality and death, and who is alluded to in lines 31-34 and line 42 of *The Waste Land*), the French poet Baudelaire (who is referred to in lines 60 – ‘Unreal City’ – and 76 where Eliot is mainly concerned

with a powerful evocation of the picture of the gloomy modern city, the image of London as a contemporary Waste Land), the Italian poet Dante (who supplied Eliot with suitable incidents to ‘measure the moral bankruptcy of his times,’ as in lines 63-64 and in lines 411-412 –both from *Inferno*, Books III & IV, which describes the horrors, lamentations and tortures to the guilty like Count Ugolino), and in line 293 (which refers to the unhappily married La Pia) and in line 427 (which alludes to Arnaut Daniel slipping back into the cleansing fire – taken from *Purgatorio*, Books V and XXVI respectively), and noted German writer Herman Hess (whose *Blick ins Chaos*, i.e., ‘In sight of Chaos’ is alluded to in lines 366-376, pointing out the utter exhaustion of traditional Europe), and a host of British authors like William Shakespeare (whose plays *Antony and Cleopatra* and *The Tempest* have been specifically referred to in Eliot’s Notes), John Milton (whose *Paradise Lost* is mentioned in line 98), Webster (II.118 and 407), Middleton (I.138), Spenser (Prothalamion is alluded to in line 176), Marvell (whose *To His Coy Mistress* is mentioned in line 196), Goldsmith (whose *The Vicar of Wakefield* is drawn upon in line 253), Kyd (whose *The Spanish Tragedy* is touched upon towards the close of the poem), and a number of other minor sources.

II. Titles of the Five Parts

The title of part I of *The Waste Land* is “The Burial of the Dead,” and is derived from the majestic Anglican service for the burial of the dead. The theme of resurrection finds its counterpoint here in the rhythmic annual return of the Spring, which proves to be the cruellest month with ‘dull roots,’ and memory and desire blend an old man’s insert longing and lost fulfilment.²⁰ The speaker Tiresias is content to let himself covered up with winter ‘in forgetful snow.’ Blind and spiritually embittered, he wrestles with buried emotions which have been unexpectedly revived. The opening paragraph is actually a pointer to both joy and agony in human life.

The title of Part II is borrowed from the Jacobean dramatist Middleton’s play, *Women, Beware Women* (Act II, Scene 2). It recalls the scene of seduction of Bianca by the Duke, while her mother-in-law’s attention is diverted by a game of chess. Bianca is another Philomel in her woeful fate. Eliot also reinforces his theme by resorting immediately to a reference to *The Tempest*, wherein also a game of chess takes place between Ferdinand and Miranda (Act V, Scene I, lines 172-175), but which in contrast betokens amity and love. The overall subject of this Part is sex without love, particularly within marriage, which reduces it to a mere physical subjugation and bondage.

Part III also enacts the drama of sex without love, but this time outside marriage. Its title is taken from Lord Buddha’s “Fire Sermon.” First delivered at *Sarnath, Varanasi*, to his five disciples, the emphasis of which is ‘burning of the entire world’ in the fire of lust and passion. A similar voice was also raised by St. Augustine together herein, especially at the close. The wind that blows in the ‘Unreal City’ is quite unwholesome and unhygienic.

Part IV is very small and fragmentary; it symbolises failure in love and ascendancy of lust. It paints the picture of Phlebas the Phoenician. It is translated from one of Eliot’s earlier experiments in French, and underlines ‘the brevity of sensual life,’ according to Bullough. It suggests that man should give up ‘the traffic in worldly things and the lusts of the flesh’ in order to secure the love of God and humanity.

Part V has its title from the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* (5.1-3), which throws light on the teachings of Prajapati to his disciple-sons – men, demons and gods – to practise the triple virtues of Love, Sympathy and Control in the interest of all. In the first section of this Part, at least three themes are employed – the journey to Emmaus, the approach to the Chapel Perilous, and the present decay of eastern Europe. The poem ends on a note of ‘peace’ (‘shantih’); at least it throws up the possibility of man’s redemption by following the virtuous path.

III. The Subject and the Style

The subject-matter of *The Waste Land* is simply religious and spiritual: precisely speaking, it is the growth of the loss of religious feeling in man. This theme is set within the framework of primitive ritualistic sex. According

to V.de S. Pinto, “*The Waste Land* is an essay in creating a poem on a grand scale out of vision of a devitalized world that has denied or ignored the spiritual life. He had already treated this theme on a small scale in *Gerontion*... The central conception of *The Waste Land* is sexual impotence used as a symbol for the spiritual malady of the modern world.”²¹

The main theme and sub-themes of this poem are cast in the form of a series of scenes which are rather like film-shots fading and dissolving into each other, and are seen from the viewpoint of an impersonal observer, Tiresias (the protagonist of the poem), who is identified with the impotent Fisher King. The two cardinal motives in the poem are: Memory and Desire. The noted scholar, Anthony Thwaite, has rightly remarked that “*The Waste Land* is ... not a mere reflection of hopelessness but a panoramic view of spiritual exhaustion comparable in desolation to the ‘terrible’ sonnets of Hopkins. The soul is scoured, and waits in emptiness for its revival.”²²

I.A. Richards takes this poem as ‘a music of ideas,’ while Grover Smith regards it as “the possible release” from “the quandary of intractable flesh contending with reluctant spirit.”²³ The style of the poem is a typical compression of clearly visualised, often metaphysical, images, a vocabulary essentially modern, and a subtly suggestive use of the rhythms of ordinary speech. It tends to be highly allusive and over-burdened with literary and mythical references. Eliot evidently does not pay due regard to syntax and punctuation. Yet his skill in conveying a metrical sense is unquestionable, as observed by Helen Gardner – “*The Waste Land* (1922) represents the culmination of this period of metrical virtuosity. Its basic measure is the heroic lines, which it handles in almost every possible way.”²⁴ As the first section of this essay will indicate clearly, Eliot is quite derivative here in his technique and full of difficult scholarship. His notes given at the close of the poem will also confirm this view.

IV. Eliot's International

We have already thrown light on Eliot’s varied sources and vast scope in *The Waste Land*. He has culled his material from all possible sources, and this makes him truly ‘international’ and ‘universal.’ It may be pointed out here that Eliot’s ‘internationalism’ or ‘universalism’ does not get in the way of his American ‘individualism’ or his Catholic ‘Europeanism.’ It rather transcends the narrow limitations of caste, creed and clime, rendering his work readily acceptable to all mankind. *The Waste Land* is verily a poem of this kind, and it displays the poet’s, as well as the reader’s, readiness to accept ‘the best that is known and thought in the world.’ O. Paz comes very close to admitting this fact when he remarks that –

*Eliot is universal in the sense in which all great poetry from the funeral chants of the pygmies to the Hai-ku of the Japanese, is the common heritage of all men; and he is universal also because of his influence in world literature of our time, comparable to that of Klee in painting or that of Stravinsky in music: an influence which differs from others because it is a critical influence.*²⁵

The Waste Land definitely adds laurels to the creative cap of Eliot and helps build for him an internationally acceptable stature. It is this that M.C. Bradbrook suggests when she states that the poem is “certainly Eliot’s most influential poem,” and that “The generations which grew up in the later nineteen-twenties took it to themselves and absorbed it so that it became part of their habit of mind.”²⁶

V. Conclusion

Eliot was an American by birth and breeding, a British by acquired citizenship and anglo-catholicism, a European by culture and tradition, and an ‘internationalist’ by taste and outlook upon life. His liberal education and broadbased training enabled him to adopt a cosmopolitan outlook upon life and letters. He never hesitated to

take the services of any land or people in meeting his poetic purpose and furthering his literary designs. It is when *The Waste Land* is seen in this perspective that it becomes truly 'international' in its scope and structure, adding an extra punch to the reader's sensibility by enabling him to have a clear "vision of a devitalized world"²⁷ around him.

Notes and References

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9. See Eliot's Notes, p. 45.
10. Coote, *op. Cit.*, p. 127.
11. See Eliot's Notes, p. 49.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 48
13. "William Empson and the Fire Sermon," *Essays in Criticism*, VI, No. 4 (Oct. 1956), 481.
14. E.L. Mayo, "The Influence of Ancient-Hindu Thought on Walt Whitman and T.S. Eliot," *The Aryan Path*, XIX (Jan-Dec. 1958), 174.
15. See Eliot's Notes, p. 49.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 51.
17. Elizabeth Drew, T.S. Eliot: *The Design of His Poetry* (New York : Charles Scibner's Sons, 1949), p. 116.
18. For details, please look up my book, *T.S. Eliot's Major Poems: An Indian Interpretation* (Salzburg, Austria: University of Salzburg, 1982), pp. 53-56.
19. See Eliot's Notes, p. 46-47.
20. Coote, *op. Cit.*, p. 129.
21. See Pinto's Book, *Crisis in English Poetry: 1880-1940*, p. 170.
22. See Thwaite's book, *Contemporary English Poetry*, p. 60.
23. G. Smith, *op. Cit.*, p. 129.
24. Helen Gardner, *The Art of T.S. Eliot.*, p. 19.
25. O. Paz, "Inaugural Address," *T.S. Eliot: Papers and Proceedings of a Seminar* (Mumbai: Manaktalas, 1965), p. 2.
26. M.C. Bradbrook, *T.S. Eliot*, a British Council Pamphlet (London : Longmans, Green & Co. 1955), p. 19.
27. Pinto, *op. Cit.*, 170.

9. "The Waste Land": A Critical Study

The Waste Land appeared in 1922. It was the first attempt of the poet to create a major poem with a philosophical message the poem provides a good illustration of the use of 'objective correlatives' and the great economy of

words which such use can bring about. It is almost an epic in less than five hundred lines. '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'¹. According to Matthlessen, the poem expresses "the agony of a society without belief."²

Grover Smith sees *The Waste Land* as a consummation of 'Memory and Desire'. Leavis hails the work as one "that compelled recognition for the achievement". Of course, with the appearance of this poem in five Sections, the world began to realize Eliot's greatness as a modern poet. "In 1922 a new star became lord of the ascendant. Mr. Eliot's *Waste Land* was hailed by the rising generation as a landmark in English poetry comparable to the *Lyrical Ballads*."³

The title of the poem comes from Miss J.L. Weston's book. *From Ritual to Romance*, which has an anthropological theme: the Waste Land in that work has a significance in terms of Fertility Ritual. The question is – what is the significance of the modern Waste Land? The answer may be found in "the rich disorganisation of the poem."⁴ Leavis remarks that "the seeming disjointedness" of the poem is closely connected with the erudition so puzzling to the reader and with "the wealth of literary borrowings and allusions." The characteristics noted here reflect "the present state of civilization." As a result, traditions and cultures have mingled, and the historical imagination makes the past contemporary; no one tradition can digest so great a variety of materials. This naturally leads to a break-down of forms and the irrevocable loss of that sense of absoluteness which seems necessary to a robust culture.

Nobody would deny the fact that the poem is a difficult and complex one in content and technique; its details are inextricably woven together. The poem, as such, passes the comprehension of the common reader. It hints can be picked up, but they can't be easily explained. "It is no use approaching Eliot in a state of wise passiveness. You have to use your wits."⁵ It is partly so because it was written under the stimulus of Ezra Pound, whose ruthless abridgments sealed the shape of the poem. Pound was helpful to Eliot in more than one way.

In *The Waste Land* we have, in addition to the 'ritualistic figures,' 'legendary myths', complex structure based on analogy and anomaly, the abrupt progression through five Movements or Sections – (1) "The Burial of the Dead", (2) "The Game of Chess", (3) "The Fire Sermon", (4) "Death by Water", and (5) "What the Thunder Said". Throughout the poem appears the figure of Tiresias, representing entire humanity; it is his presence that gives unity to the work. The real unity of the work as the historian Albert has noted, lies in its "emotional atmosphere"⁶

One of the things that makes *The Waste Land* really difficult is the use of symbols by T.S. Eliot. The poem is built round the symbols of drought and flood, representing death and birth. This is a recurrent thought in the poem. Other symbols used in it are hardly capable of precise explanation. Mark what Bullough has to say in this respect in *The Trend of Modern Poetry*. 'Mr. Eliot uses symbols drawn from kindred myths and religion'. And F.O. Matthlessen says, "The drama of *The Waste Land* is built upon the contrast of repeated and varying symbols of drought and rain; much of its unified effect depends upon the frequent return of the Unreal City, with its 'trams and dusty trees', its murky streets 'under the brown fog of a winter noon', its dull canal made suddenly horrible by the slimy belly of a rat."⁷

Another much-complained thing contributing to the complexity of the poem is its remote references and recondite allusions. The opening epigraph of the sibyl legend, the *Tristan and Isolde* verses, Baudelaire's *Fleurs du Mal* (line 76), the *Aenled* remembrance (line 92), Ovid's 'Metomorphoses' and Philomela (line 99), Verlaine's *Parsifal* (I. 202), the Grail legends, the Vegetation myth, the Chapel Perilous in Part V, seen against the background of "the hyacinth garden" in Part I, the mystical teachings of the Indian sages and of the *Upanishads* are some of the references out of the reach of common reader. The poem is reminiscent of the Elizabethan and Metaphysical extravagances and conceits. In evoking the images Eliot seems to echo Baudelaire, and in adopting a symbolic device in poetry he is close to the French Symbolists. The echoes of Dante, St. Augustine, Lord Buddha, Miss J.L. Weston are heard throughout the poem. Yet George Morris has suggested another

figure who left deep mark on Eliot's *The Waste Land*; it is Countess Marie Larisch, who wrote "My Past". Morris says, "T.S. Eliot was certainly one who read it, and before he wrote *The Waste Land*,"⁸ He traces this fact on the philological basis.

The best way to begin reading the poem is to regard it as a phantasmagoria of futility a series of trains of thought in the mind of a social observer. Eliot has introduced such an observer in the person of Tiresias, the seer, who having been both man and woman represents the characteristics of all mankind.

Section I, called *The Burial of the Dead* to emphasise the inevitable dissolution which must precede new life, begins with a lament over the loss of fertility in what should be Spring-season, and illustrates this by means of typical chatter of cosmopolitan idlers, passing thence to symbols of our barrenness. The decay of love in the modern world is then suggested by a quotation from Wagner's *Tristan and Isolde* (romantic idolatory), with which is compared an instance of amorous sentimentality. That secret wisdom, too, has fallen on evil days is shown by the introduction of the Tarot pack of cards, used formerly for divination, now for fortune-telling. He ends with a vision of London as an unreal city in a nightmare of memories –

*That corpse you planted last year in your garden,
Has it begun to sprout? Will it bloom this year?
Or has the sudden frost disturbed its bed?*

The connection with the fertility cult is thus stressed here.

In Section II, called *A Game of Chess* to recall the dramatic irony of Middleton's Bianca and the fatal power of woman, the poet depicts two types of modern woman in contrasted literary styles. After a picture of a luxurious boudoir which rivals Keats's he gives the petulant conversation of its tenant, and her eternal question–

*What shall we do to- morrow?
What shall we ever do?*

The man replies –

*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*

Then the scene changes to a pub at closing time, and the garrulous mean talk of another woman follows.

In Section III, the tone of disgust deepens. It is called *The Fire Sermon* to suggest to the initiated the sermon of Lord Buddha, in which he spoke of mankind as burning in the flames of lust, hatred and infatuation. Here we are shown the sordidness of urban pleasures. Just as the poet introduced into the boudoir scene touches of Cleopatra and Dido, so now he recalls the river of Spenser's *Prothalamion*, and with equally devastating irony goes on to parody Goldsmith's *When Lovely Woman*, in order to contrast the cynicism of the modern girl with the 18th century sentimental ideal. So also is used Wagner's *Rheingold* melodies, and a picture of Queen Elizabeth flirting with Leicester in her barge, to emphasise the permanence of human sensuality and the degradation to which it has now fallen. With agony of soul the allusions are made to the repentance of St. Augustine and to the teachings of the Buddha :-

*O Lord Thou pluckest me out
O Lord Thou pluckest
burning.*

In the short fourth Section, called *Death by Water*; the picture of Phlebas the Phoenician is painted. This section is translated from one of Eliot's earlier experiments in French. It emphasises 'the brevity of sensual life' (Bullough). It suggests that man should give up 'the traffic in worldly things and the lusts of the flesh,' which separate him from love of God and humanity at large.

In Section V, called *What The Thunder Said*, several themes are recapitulated to assert the sterility of our life. The picture of a dreary desert is first painted. In this desert we suffer illusions; where two walk, there goes a shadowy third. There are murmurs and lamentations. When the seer reaches the a Chapel Perilous it seems empty; but as the doubting begins (betraying Christ), the cock crows twice. Thus God gives a sign, by thunder bringing rain. And the message of the thunder is delivered: *Datta, Dayadhvan, Damyata* (i.e., self-surrender, sympathy, self-control). These three ideals are the way to Salvation.

The poet then speaks of setting his own house in order, though the London Bridge is falling down. He must pass through the fire of purification, as Dante has shown us. He is obsessed by images of desolation, and a shower of literary allusions shows him slipping into frenzy. But like the charm of healing rain he repeats the message of the thunder and ends with the Sanskrit blessing : Shantih shantih shantih (“The peace which passeth understanding”).

We have so far given an interpretation of *The Waste Land*. Now we shall consider its theme. The subject is really simple and religious one – The growth and loss of religious feeling in man. The theme is set within the structure of primitive ritualistic sex. Pinto has observed about its theme and conception in the following manner : “All Eliot’s poetry converges on *The Waste Land* (1922)... *The Waste Land* is an essay in creating a poem on a grand scale out of vision of a devitalized world that has denied or ignored the spiritual life. He had already treated this theme on a small scale in *Gerontion*...The central conception of *The Waste Land* is sexual impotence used as a symbol for the spiritual malady of the modern world”.⁹

The themes of this symphonic poem are a series of scenes rather like film-shots fading and dissolving into each other, seen from the view-point of an impersonal observer, the protagonist of the poem, who is identified with the impotent Fisher King and also with Tiresias, the blind prophet of Greek legend. Two main motives in the poem are: Memory and Desire. One should rightly favour the judgement of Thwaite: “*The Waste Land* is thus not a mere reflection of hopelessness but a panoramic view of spiritual exhaustion, comparable in desolation to the ‘terrible’ sonnets of Hopkins. The soul is scoured, and waits in emptiness for its revival”.¹⁰

Almost all critics have given their unfeigned admiration to this epoch-making poem. To examine a few of them and heir utterances on *The Waste Land*, Miss M.C. Bradbrook emphasises the note of modernity in it which has been responsible to draw the younger generations to it. She says, “If it is not his greatest poem, *The Waste Land* is certainly Eliot’s most influential poem. The generations which grew up in the later nineteen-twenties took it to themselves, absorbed it so that it became part of their habit of mind.”¹¹ Leavis takes it as a representative poem of the age it was written in, and praises it for its “psycho-analysis”.¹² He does not subscribe to the view that “the poem lacks organization and unity.”¹³ Matthiessen commends its dramatic intensity “in the externallized structure of parallel myths”.¹⁴ This was achieved through the use of ‘objective correlative’. R.A. Scott-James thinks that in *The Waste Land* Eliot’s “imagination takes a higher flight”.¹⁵ I.A.Richards takes it as ‘a music of ideas’. D.E.S. Maxwell first notes its derivative nature and then praises its valuable execution: “The initial impulse comes from Baudelaire; its application is Eliot’s alone”.¹⁶ Grover Smith sees in it “the possible release” from “the quandary of intractable flesh containing with reluctant spirit”.¹⁷

The style of *The Waste Land* is a typical compression of clearly visualized, often metaphysical, imagery, a vocabulary essentially modern, and a subtly suggestive use of the rhythms of ordinary speech. It is highly allusive and over-burdened with literary and mythical references. As a modern poet, Eliot does not pay due regard to syntax and punctuation. Yet his skill in conveying a metrical sense is unquestionable, as has been noted by Miss Helen Gardner: “*The Waste Land* (1922) represents the culmination of this period of metrical virtuosity. Its basic measure is the heroic lines, which it handles in almost every possible way.”¹⁸ We can definitely say that *The Waste Land* is Eliot’s *magnum opus*.

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13. *Ibid*, p. 103.
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17. *T.S. Eliot's Poetry and Plays*, p.99.
18. H. Gardner, *The Art of T. S. Eliot*, p.19.

10. Indian Thought in “The Waste Land”

T.S. Eliot was a profound scholar of Sanskrit. He was well read in Indian philosophy and scriptures. Though he borrowed and derived his material from the Pagan and Christian sources, the influence of the *Rig Veda*, the *Upanishads* and Buddhism is quite explicit in *The Waste Land*. He was so lured by Buddhism that of the time of writing this poem, he seriously considered becoming a Buddhist, and he entitled the third Section of the poem as *The Fire Sermon* after *The Fire Sermon* of Lord Buddha.

Going through Eliot’s poetry, one may mark his irresistible attraction for the wisdom of ancient India, It is said of him that ‘but for Indian thought and sensibility he would have written altogether different kind of poetry’. In his poetry references exist to show that he had acquired knowledge of the *Vedas*, the *Upanishads*, the *Bhagavad-Gita*, Patanjali’s *Yoga-Sutras*, and Buddhistic lore and literature. For one thing, what is Upanishadic may also be Vedic for the simple reason that the *Upanishads* form the closing part of the Veda: for instance, the use of ‘Shantih Shantih Shantih’. *The Waste Land* is both Vedic in origin and Upanishadic in content. In the same poem, Eliot has drawn upon the *Brihadaranyake Upanishad* (5.1) in the threefold message of the Thunder – “Da Da Da”. These three words stand for *Datta*, *Dayadhvam*, *Damyata*, meaning ‘Given, sympathise, Control’ respectively. The message is symbolic in the context. It sums up the cryptic mode of Prajapati’s teaching to the three kinds of his disciples: gods, men and demons. When these disciples approach the father-preceptor, after the completion of their formal education, to ask him what virtues they should cultivate to lead a meaningful life, he utters the same word *Da* for three times, with a different meaning each time. For the gods, it means *Damyata* (Control yourself); for the men, it connotes *Datta* (Give in); and for the demons, it signifies *Dayadhyam* (Be compassionate). The clear-out-hint of Eliot in using this highly symbolical event from the *Upanishad* is at the prevailing sterility in the Waste Land, which can hardly be turned into an oasis unless the virtues exhorted by Prajapati are earnestly practised by mankind. The use of the *Upanishad* at a proper moment confirms Eliot’s digestion of the Hindu Scriptures. It shows that Eliot wanted the poetic fragments of the Hindu Scriptures incorporated in *The Waste Land* to be read and understood in a way alien to Western habit of thought. Hence the repetition of the actual Upanishadic words at the end of the poem. Conrad Aiken has brilliantly put it: ‘Why, again, ‘Datta,’ ‘Dayadhvam’, ‘Damyata’ or ‘Shantih’? Do they not say a good deal

less for us than ‘Give: sympathise: control’ or ‘Peace’? Of course; but Eliot replies that he wants them not merely to mean those particular things, but also to mean them in a particular way that is, to be remembered in connection with a Upanishad.’

Buddhism

*What we are today comes from our thoughts of yesterday,
and our present thoughts build our life of tomorrow: our
life is the creation of our mind.
If a man speaks or acts with an impure mind, suffering
follows him as the wheel of the cart follows the beast that
draws the cart.*

– *Dhammpada (trans. Juan Mascaro)*

Eliot took the title of one of the Buddha’s sermons for the title of the third Section of *The Waste Land*. At the close of this he fuses its subject-matter with reminiscences of St. Augustine’s *Confessions*, and comments: ‘The collection of these two representatives of eastern and western asceticism, as the culmination of this part of the poem, is not an accident.’ We should therefore try to trace the importance of *The Fire Sermon* in the Buddhist teaching.

At the heart of Buddhism lies enlightenment of the Buddha himself. Born a prince and sheltered from knowledge of the world’s ills, the inevitable contact with age, illness and death roused in him an irresistible desire to find the causes of the suffering and their solution. To this end, he gave up the life of his palace and for six years meditated on the problem of pain, imposing on himself the greatest physical austerity. Despite such discipline he found no answer. Eventually, at the age of thirty-five, he seated himself under a tree in the lotus position of meditation and vowed not to rise until he had achieved enlightenment. After a night of profound spiritual experience, he rose the next day as the all-Enlightened One.

Suffering and freedom from suffering lie at the heart of the Buddhist vision, and the cause of suffering is selfish desire. Each person sees himself as separate, unique, individual, and this self is the centre of his interest. How he wishes to exploit it may vary. A man may long to do good works or he may be consumed with lust. Either path is his ‘Karma’, the destiny that he has created for himself by the things he has yearned to do: ‘What we are today comes from our thoughts of yesterday.’ Desiring to act on the world weaves man into a net of cause and effect, and this binds him tight.

Man is caught on the wheel, the endless revolution of cause and effect, because he believes in the power of his separate, illusory self which wants now this, now that, now another thing. But this lower self is an illusion precisely because it is changed by its various wants. It is never the same but is in a constant state of flux. Such flux is suffering:

Birth is suffering, decay is suffering, disease is suffering, death is suffering, association with the unpleasing is suffering, separation from the pleasing is suffering, not to get what one wants is suffering.

The way beyond suffering is to realize that the self to which we are so attached has no fixed reality. Man must get beyond the circumstances that cause desire: ‘Our mind should stand aloof from circumstances, and on no account should we allow them to influence the function of our minds’. We must go beyond *Karma* and free ourselves from the Wheel of Life by right action and thought – what is known in Buddhism as the Nobles Eightfold Path and so enter *nirvana*, that state described as coming to pass when, after ‘the destruction of all that is individual in us, we enter into communion with the whole universe and become an integral part of the great purpose.’

Such freedom from desire – particularly sterile sexual desire – is one clear way out of *The Waste Land*. However, just as in his use of Dante Eliot could refer only to the world of the *Inferno* and *Purgatorio*, so with Buddhism it is not the final beatific end that is glimpsed in *The Waste Land*; rather, it is the analysis of worldly

suffering provided by religious experience. This is particularly clear in Eliot's citing of *The Fire Sermon*. This was actually preached to a group of Indian fire-worshippers whose beliefs formed its imagery. In the Sermon, Buddha describes how burning desire binds men to the world and to illusion and suffering. Freedom from these is the goal of the wise man:

All things are on fire: the eye is on fire, forms are on fire, eye-consciousness is on fire: the impressions received by the eye are on fire, and whatever sensation originates in the impressions received by the eye is likewise on fire. And with what are these things on fire? With the fires of lust, anger and illusion, with these they are on fire, and so were the other senses, and so was the mind. Wherefore the wise man conceives disgust for the things for the senses he removes from his heart the cause of suffering

In *The Waste Land*, the Narrator still feels consumed with desire, and in this he is at one with St. Augustine wrecked by the lust of Carthage. The two – Lord Buddha and St. Augustine – make a 'collocation' here because their experience of lust and desire is similar. So, too, was their belief that the solution to the problem was ascetic and spiritual.

The Rig Veda

The Waste Land opens with a description of Nature in April. The word 'nature' takes a different meaning if we relate to the primitive Aryan cult of nature, and the seasons have a different meaning if we try to imagine what they meant for the singers of the *Rig Veda*. More than a disguise of Eliot's convictions as a Christian, the allusions to Indian rituals are the whole foundation of the poem.' These rituals have never been completely lost: they still exist in various isolated manifestations of folk-lore, they have been observed, and transmitted by the Templars and the Knight of the Grail; they were preserved by the early Grail legends, then they were forbidden by the Church, and they make a last literary appearance with Tennyson, Wagner, E.A. Robinson and Matthew Arnold. The disappearance of these rituals in Western Europe coincides with a weakening of religious belief and with the corresponding meaninglessness of our life. *The Waste Land* of our epoch is a dry land, that is a land deprived of its connections with the help from supernatural forces and fertilizing deities.

In order to understand why water occupies such an important place in *The Waste Land*, it is necessary to remember *the meaning of water* for the Indian populations where the 'nature cult' and 'vegetation ceremonies' took place: 'We must first note that a very considerable number of the Rig-Veda hymns depend for their initial inspiration on the actual bodily need and requirements of a mainly agricultural population, i.e. of a people that depend upon the fruits of the earth for their subsistence, and to whom the regular and ordered sequence of the processes of Nature was a vital necessity.' (*From Ritual to Romance*) This passage throws an intense light on the opening lines of *The Waste Land*.

In the third Section of the poem, Eliot wants to show that passion and lust are inherent elements in human nature and they are the sources of suffering. Eliot finds the 'objective correlative' for this theme in the *Fire Sermon* preached by Lord Buddha to the assembled priests. The Section closes with the words of the Buddha and St. Augustine about the 'burning' of the human world in 'the fire of lust'.

In the fourth Section, "Death by Water", Eliot derives much from the Indian philosophy. When he writes:

*A current under sea
Picked his bones in whispers. As he rose and fell
He passed the stages of his age and youth
Entering the whirlpool.*

It seems that Eliot was acquainted with a basic conception in Indian Philosophy – that the sense-ridden soul is tied to the cycle of birth and re-birth through endless ages till it is disciplined and enlightened by subduing the strong pull of the senses which pave the way for its final release.

The allusion to water in “Death by Water” takes us to the hymns of the *Rig Veda*. What ‘death by water’ meant for the early Indian is well-explained by Miss Weston. ‘Tradition relates that the seven great rivers of India had been imprisoned by the evil giant, Vitra, or Ahi, who Indra slew, thereby releasing the streams from their captivity.’ The *Rig Veda* hymns abound in references to this feat...

‘Indra has filled the rivers, he has inundated the dry
land.’

‘Indra has released the imprisoned waters to flow upon
the earth.’

The Upanishads

In the whole of the world there is no study so beneficial and so elevating as that of the *Upanishads*. It has been the solace of my life – it will be the solace of my death.

- Schopenhauer

Near the end of *The Waste Land*, after the disappointment of the empty Grail chapel, the Narrator sees a flash of lightning and feels the promise of rain. We return to the vegetation cults, the rites that secured the fertility of the land, but we also move forward to the Hindu teachings of the *Upanishads*.

At the core of these Sanskrit gospels (which date from about 600 B.C.) is the idea that the goal of man’s religious quest lies in identifying his self, or *atman*, with *Brahman*, the supreme source of all things. It is a mystical union in which the ego frees itself and the soul is at one with the great cosmic force who fashioned the world out of his self-delighting creativity. The core of the individual is now joined to the essence of the universe. It is a state of heightened sense of being, consciousness and delight.

In *The Waste Land* Eliot draws upon the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*. It has a parable that tells how when the gods, men and the devils had finished their student days with Prajapati, the Lord of Creation, they asked him for some final words of wisdom. To each he uttered the syllable ‘Da’. The gods understood this to have been ‘Damayata’. Meaning ‘to be subdued’ or ‘self-controlled.’ Men thought, he said ‘*Datta*’ which is the Sanskrit for ‘give’; while the evil spirits thought they heard him say ‘*Dayadhvam*’ or ‘be merciful.’

The presentation here of the Lord of Creation as a god calls for some explanation. After all, the passages from the *Upanishads* make it clear that he is a force rather than an incarnate deity. In fact, Hinduism recognizes the supreme difficulty of visualizing a purely spiritual godhead and so allows incarnation in many forms as an aid to worship. In this particular case, the incarnation of the source of life as Indra, a deity who could take on an endless variety of forms at will, is important since he is the god who, with his thunderbolt in his right hand, is the dispenser of thunder and lightning. Indra is the god of rain and fertility who is constantly at war with drought.

It is this figure who thus brings to a head the vegetation gods who have their roles in the earlier sections of the poem. Indra, the God of Thunder, suggests the promise of a Waste Land redeemed through rain. But he is more than this. He comes in the lightning, and lightning is an Indian symbol of enlightenment. The enlightenment that he brings is the moral teaching of the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*:

The divine voice of thunder repeats the same Da Da Da, that is, be subdued, Give, Be merciful. Therefore let that triad be taught: Subduing, Giving, Mercy.

Here are the Hindu principles of ‘right action’, whose practice has little to do with the intellect and nothing to do with selfish desire. They are a form of moral teaching that also happen to be associated with fertility. They do not in themselves bring rain, but in Eliot’s interpretation. They are close to some of the Narrator’s most spiritual experiences (11.395-422), which are in turn connected with the possibility of a Waste Land redeemed. It is partly for this reason that Eliot can end his poem with the three repeated Sanskrit words that close an *Upanishad* and mean in a western, Christianized translation: ‘The Peace which passeth all understanding’.

11. Annotations of the Poem

The Epigraph

In Greek mythology Sibyls were women possessing great prophetic powers. The Sibyl at Cumae was the most famous of them. The Sibyl Cumae was the most famous of them. At her request Apollo granted her immortality, but in her excitement she forgot to ask for perpetual youth. Consequently she became aged and infirm, and though she held grains in her hand as a count of her years her powers of prophecy declined.

For once I saw with my own eyes the Sibyl at Cumae near Naples hanging in a cage, and when the children said to her, 'Sibyl, what do you wish?' she answered, 'I wish to die'.

These words are uttered by the drunken Trimalchio in the *Satyricon*, a satire composed by the Roman satirist Petronius Arbiter in the first century AD.

The Sibyl at Cumae is said to have guided Aeneas through Hades and this journey is described by Virgil in his Aeneid. However, the Satyrican or Virgilian prophetic woman seems to 'have degenerated into Madame Sosostris' in *The Waste Land*.

Ezra Pound (1885-1972): Well-known American poet and critic whose Cantos earned him an important place in the modernist movement in American and European poetry. Eliot dedicated *The Waste Land* to Pound as a token of his gratitude

il miglior fabbro: Meaning 'the better craftsman'. These words, in Italian, are used by Dante (*Purgatorio* ^{xxvi}, 117) as a tribute by Guinicelli to Arnaut Daniel, the twelfth-century Provençal poet and artist.

1. The Burial of the Dead

The burial of the dead: 'The Order for the Burial of the Dead' is the complete title of the burial service in the Church of England, as derived from *The Book of Common Prayer*. In a related context the burial of the dead is also intended to convey the burial of the fertility gods as explained by Jessie Weston and James Frazer. These myths are related to vegetation cults and harvest festivals, and the cycle of fertility and decay, spring and winter, in nature. In Egypt the cycles of fertility and decay were personified as gods, such as Osiris, who were buried or drowned in the sea and reclaimed in the spring.

Line 1, April...month: April, the harbinger of Spring, is also connected with the great event of Christ's resurrection, Easter. In the fertility rituals also, April is connected with the new harvest, and the strength and potency of the Fisher King, which give fertility to his lands. However, Eliot calls it 'cruellest' because resurrection and new harvests are looked upon with fear in the valueless waste land. The idea has already occurred to him in 'Gerontion' ('depraved May', line 21).

Line 2, Lilacs out of the dead land: Lilac flowers are symbols of spring, renewal in nature, and fertility Eliot reverses the implication of this allusion.

Lines 6-7, feeding/A little life with dried tubers: Eliot alludes to James Thomson (1832-82), 'To Our Ladies of Death': cf. 'Our Mother feedeth thus our little life,/ That we in turn may feed her with our death'.

Line 8, Starnbergersee: The name of a lake resort near Munich in West Germany. It is also known for King Ludwig's Castle, Schloss Berg. It was in this lake that Ludwig tried in vain to escape and was drowned, Eliot visited the place in 1911.

Line 10, Hofgarten: A public park in Munich: 'Royal Garden'.

Line 12, Bingar... echt deutch: 'I am not Russian at all. I come from Lithuania; I am pure, real German'.

Lines 15-16, Marie, Marie, hold on tight: An incident derived from *My Past* (1913), the autobiography of Marie Larisch, a countess and relation of King Ludwig. Eliot had met her and talked about the sledding which is referred to in the poem. Marie was interested in fortune-telling through cards and was assassinated on the banks of Lake Lemán.

Line 20, Son of Man: cf. Ezekiel 2:1. ‘And he said unto me, Son of man, stand upon thy feet, and I will, speak unto thee’. Eliot himself refers to ‘The Book of the Prophet Ezekiel’ (Old Testament) in his notes.

Lines 22, A heap of broken images: cf. Ezekiel 6:6: ‘And the word of the Lord came unto me saying, “In all your dwelling places the cities shall be laid waste, and the high places shall be laid waste, and the high places shall be desolate; that your altars may be laid waste and made desolate, and your idols may be broken and cease, and your images may be cut down, and your works may be abolished” (Old Testament).

Line 23, the cricket no relief: cf. Ecclesiastes 12:5. Eliot refers to this passage: ‘Also 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’.

Line 26, (Come in under the Shadow of this red rock): These lines seem very similar to the opening of one of Eliot’s early poems, ‘The Death of Saint Narcissus’ (written about 1912):

Line 30, I will...handful of dust: This significant phrase is found in John Donne’s *Devotions Upon Emergent Occasions* (1624), in Meditation_{IV}: ‘What’s become of man’s great extent and proportion, when himself shrinks himself, and consumes himself to a handful of dust. . . . The allusion is also Biblical: cf. Ecclesiastes 12:7: ‘Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was’.

Lines 31-4, Frisch...weilest du?: Eliot himself has referred to *Tristan and Isolde*,_I verses 5-8. The reference is to Richard Wagner’s opera *Tristan and Isolde* in which a young man sings of his absent sweet-heart: ‘The wind blows fresh to the homeland. My Irish girl, where are you lingering?’

Line 35, hyacinths: A flower presented as a symbol of resurrection. Hyacinthus was the name of a pre-Hellenic god. He was killed in an accident, and, in Greek myth, a flower grew out of his blood.

Lines 37-41, Yet when... silence: An experience of love which is partly mystical. The tragic passion of Tristan and Isolde, and the potion they drink, binds them together eternally. ‘Silence in the heart of light’ is an image derived from Dante’s *Paradiso*.

Line 42, Oed’... Meer: Another reference to the Wagnerian opera, *Tristan and Isolde*,_{III} 24. Tristan is about to die and is waiting for his beloved, Isolde, but a shepherd, appointed to watch for her sail, can only report that there is no sign of her ship: ‘Desolate and empty is the sea’.

Line 43, Madame Sosotris, famous clairvoyante: There appears a fake fortune-teller in Aldous Huxley’s novel *Chrome Yellow* (1921) in chapter_{XXXVII}, whose name is Madame Sosotris. Eliot had read this novel before writing *The Waste Land* (1922), but the borrowing is quite unconscious. Originally, it was an Egyptian name: Sesotris, the sorceress of Echatana.

Line 44, Had a bad cold: Eliot’s mode of creating bathos and an unexpected ironic touch.

Lines 46-56, With a wicked pack of cards: Eliot said he was ‘not familiar with the exact constitution of the Tarot pack of cards’ and that he made use of it to ‘suit my own convenience’. The four suits of the Tarot pack (described by Jessie Weston) are the cup, lance, sword and dish – the life symbols found in the Grail legends. Originally the Tarot pack of 78 cards was used by Egyptian priests to read the future or to foretell the rise and fall of the Nile waters. This ancient art has here been vulgarized by fortunetellers such as Madame Sosotris.

Line 47, Phoenician Sailor: He is kind of fertility god whose image was committed to the sea and later reclaimed. He is also shown as Phlebas in section_{IV} of *The Waste Land*.

Line 48 (Those are pearls that were his eyes Look!): This is a quotation from Shakespeare’s *The Tempest* (1610), part of Ariel’s song in which he tells Prince Ferdinand about the supposed drowning of his father Alonso, the king of Naples:

*Full fathom five thy father lies;
Of his bones are coral made;
Those are pearls that were his eyes:
Nothing of him that doth fade
But doth suffer a sea-change
Into something rich and strange.*

(*L.ii. 396-401*)

Line 49, Belladonna: In Italian this means ‘beautiful lady’, is also the name of one of the three ‘Fates’ in classical mythology.

Line 49, Lady of the Rocks: Eliot had in mind a passage from Walter Pater’s *The Renaissance* (1873) where Pater (1839-94) discusses Mona Lisa, La Gioconda, a picture painted by Leonardo da Vinci. The picture shows a woman with a haunting smile.

Line 51, man with three staves: He is identified with the mythical Fisher King. Here he is only a figure on the Tarot pack of cards.

Line 51, Wheel: The wheel of Fortune which rotates and shows the ups and downs of life.

Line 52, one-eyed merchant: He is described as ‘one-eyed’ (Jack) because only one eye is visible on the Tarot card picture. He is linked with the Smyrna merchant, Mr Eugenides. It is believed that these merchants carried on foreign trade and also communicated the mysteries to fertility cults of their fellow men in Syria and other places in the Middle East.

Line 55, The Hanged Man: Figure with a T-shaped Cross on the Tarot pack, a man hanging. Eliot obviously associates him with James Frazer’s Hanged God, the divine idol sacrificed for restoring fertility to the land.

Line 55, Fear death by water: A timely warning which reverberates in many places, particularly in section IV.

Line 60, Unreal city: In this allusion Eliot refers to the poem by Charles Baudelaire (1821-67) entitled ‘Les Septs Vieillards’ (The Seven Old Men). The ‘unreal city’ of Baudelaire (Paris) seems to merge with the other ‘unreal’ cities, such as Eliot’s London or Dante’s city in the Inferno.

Lines 62-3, so many,... so many: cf. Dante, *Inferno*, III, 55-7:

*It never would have entered in my head
There were so many men whom death had slain.*

(*trans. Dorothy Sayers*)

Dante spoke these words to Virgil as he observed the ‘damned’ in hell perpetually moving towards a constantly shifting ideal.

Line 64, Sighs... exhaled: cf. Dante, *Inferno*, IV, 25-7:

*We heard no loud complaint, no crying there,
No sound of grief except the sound of sighing
Quivering for ever through the eternal air.*

(*trans. Dorothy Sayers*)

Dante describes the state of the virtuous pagans in Limbo, excluded from the bliss of God’s presence.

Line 66, King William Street: A street in London where Eliot walked daily to reach his office.

Line 67, Saint Mary Woolnoth: A famous Anglican Church with beautiful interior decorations designed by Sir Christopher Wren. It was proposed to be demolished, but a report recommended its preservation.

Line 69, Stetson: A reference to Ezra Pound who was nicknamed ‘Buffalo Bill’. Pound was known for his very impressive stetson hat.

Line 70, Mylae: The Battle of Mylae (260_{BC}) was part of the Punic wars fought between the Romans and the Carthaginians.

Line 71, 'That...garden: This refers to ancient fertility rites in which the images of gods were buried in the fields or thrown into the sea.

Line 74: Eliot refers to the dirge in John Webster's play, *The White Devil*. This is sung by Cornelia as a lament for her son, Marcello (Act V, Sc. iv).

Line 76, 'You... frere!': Eliot alludes to Charles Baudelaire's book of poems *Fleurs du Mal* (Flowers of Evil). The last line in the poem 'Au Lecteur' (To the Reader) is translated thus: 'O Hypocrite reader, my fellow-man, my brother!' This is the prefatory poem in Baudelaire's volume.

II. A Game of Chess

A Game of Chess: The title is taken from the play *A Game Of Chess* (1624) by Thomas Middleton (1570-1627), a satire on an uneasy marriage forced by political necessity. In another play of Middleton, *Women Beware Women* (1621), is shown an actual game of chess played by Livia. She is the Duke's accomplice and plays with the mother. Meanwhile the Duke is seducing Bianca, which is another kind of game. The woman at the dressing table is reminiscent of *Belinda in Pope's The Rape of the Lock* (1714).

Line 77, The Chair...throne: This is based on Enobarbus's description of Cleopatra in Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*. The queen is travelling in a decorated barge on the river Cydnus in Asia Minor.

Line 80, Cupidon: The golden image of Cupid, the god of love.

Line 82, candelabra: A large, branched candlestick.

Line 87, synthetic perfumes: Artificial perfumes made out of chemicals. This is in tune with the artificiality of the lady's way of life.

Line 88, unguent: Oily.

Line 92, laquearia: A panelled ceiling. Eliot refers to Virgil's description of the banquet given by Dido, Queen of Carthage, in honour of her lover, Aeneas, who finally deserted her.

Line 93, coffered: Adorned with sunken, low panels.

Line 98, sylvan scene: Eliot has referred to the description in Milton's *Paradise Lost* of Satan's response to his first sight of the Garden of Eden:

Line 99: Eliot has referred to Ovid's (43_{BC-AD} 18) *Metamorphoses* (vi) and his version of the myth of Philomela. Philomela was raped by King Tereus of Thrace. She was the sister of Procne, wife of Tereus. The king cut out Philomela's tongue to prevent her from speaking about the outrage. Philomela depicted her misfortune on a piece of tapestry and sent it to her sister. In revenge the sister slaughtered Itys (the child of Tereus by Procne) and fed him to Tereus (the eating of human flesh becomes the symbol of Communion). The crisis grew to a pitch and the king then tried to kill both Procne and Philomela into a nightingale, Procne into a swallow and King Tereus into a hoopoe.

Line 103, Jug Jug: This was a conventional way of representing a bird song in Elizabethan poetry. Crudely, the term was also used as a suggestion for sexual intercourse, even as a joke. The tragic myth of Philomela is thus vulgarized.

Lines 111-23: This scene resembles the one described by D.H. Lawrence in 'The Fox' (published in *The Dial*, 1921).

Line 115, rat's alley: A meaningful image of spiritual darkness and modern man's sense of loss.

Line 118: The reference is to *The Devil's Law Case*, III.ii.162 by John Webster and to the surgeon's comments in it.

Line 125, 'Those...his eyes': Ariel's song in *The Tempest*.

Line 128, The ‘Shakespeherian Rag’: A very popular jazz song in the years of the First World War (1914-18). It was an American ‘hit’ of 1912. It was partly an adaptation of Kenneth Ball’s song, ‘O you Beautiful doll’:

*That Shakespeherian rag
Most intelligent, very elegant*

The ‘OOOO’ and the extra syllable catch the syncopated rhythm of ragtime music.

Line 137: Eliot refers to the game of chess in Middleton’s *Women Beware Women* II. ii. While Livia plays chess, Bianca is being seduced.

Line 139, demobbed: Discharged from the army; a slang expression, an abbreviation for ‘demobilized’.

Line 114, HURRY...TIME: The call of the bartender notifying the customers of closing time in a pub. The bartender’s call is perhaps an echo from Shakespeare’s ‘knock’.

Lines 142-70: This episode seems to have been based on a real experience as described to the Eliots by their house-maid, Ellen Kellond.

Line 166, gammon: Ham or bacon.

Line 171, Ta ta: (Slang) good-bye.

Line 172: These are the last words of the mad Ophelia as she leaves the royal room. She imagines she has been deserted by Hamlet and sings a song of St Valentine’s Day (*Hamlet*, IV.v.72). More importantly, Ophelia meets her death by water.

III. The Fire Sermon

The Fire Sermon: The subtitle is based on Lord Buddha’s great sermon to his disciples against the fires of anger, lust and malice, the temptations that consume men. It also evokes the sentiments of St. Augustine about unholy passions as well as the injunctions of St Paul against unholy alliances.

Line 173, The river’s ...broken: An image of the shelter provided by leafy branches of trees over-hanging the river.

Lines 175-9: Eliot cites the source in the refrain of the nuptial song in *Prothalamion* by Edmund Spenser (1552-99). Elizabeth and Katherine Somerset, daughters of the Earl of Worcester, were being married (1596) and the nuptial song was composed for that event. The Elizabethan nymphs of pastoral grandeur are gone; so are the modern nymphs – the call girls of London.

Line 182: The lamentation and sorrow of the Israelites recalling their exile in Babylon, when they remembered Zion. The local Swiss name for Lake Geneva in Switzerland is Lake Lemman. By a curious coincidence, parts of *The Waste Land* were composed near Lake Lemman in Lausanne. The common noun ‘leman’ is also associated with a mistress, hence ‘the waters of Lemman’ are linked with the fires of lust.

Line 185, But at my...I hear: cf. An ironic contrast to the lines of Andrew Marvell in his poem, ‘To His Coy Mistress’:

*But at my back I always hear
Time’s winged chariot hurrying near*

The lover urges his beloved to forsake coyness since time is fleeing. The reference to Marvell occurs again.

Line 189: cf. The Fisher King of mythology. To fish is to seek eternity and salvation.

Lines 191-2: Eliot refers to *The Tempest* I.ii and to the passage where Ferdinand is made to think of his father:

Line 196: Another ironic reference to Marvell’s *To His Coy Mistress*.

Lines 197-8: Eliot cites John Day (1574-1640), *The Parliament of Bees*, quoting:

*When of the sudden, listening, you shall hear,
A noise of horns and hunting, which shall bring
Actaeon to Diana in the spring,
When all shall see her naked skin...*

According to Greek legends the huntsman Actaeon shocked Diana (goddess of chastity) who was bathing with her nymphs. As a punishment she turned him into a stag and he was hunted to death.

Line 198, Sweeney: In Eliot's poetry he is the sensual sex-hungry man who occurs in three poems: 'Sweeney Erect', 'Sweeney Among the Nightingales' and 'Sweeney Agonistes'.

Lines 199-201: Eliot writes that these lines are derived from a ballad which was popular among troops in the First World War. The soldiers sang it as they invaded Gallipoli in 1915, and a reporter from Sydney, Australia, described that scene.

Line 202: 'And O those children's voices singing in the dome': In these words (translated) Verlaine is alluding to Wagner's *Parsifal*. Eliot says the source, the final line to the sonnet 'Parsifal' composed by Paul Verlaine (1844-96), describes how the questing knight – Parsifal – resists the seductive charms of Kundry. His feet are washed to the accompaniment of children's choir music. In the Grail Legend the food washing precedes the restoration of the wounded Antortas (the Fisher King) by Parzival, and then the curse on the waste land is lifted.

Line 205, So rudely forc'd: A phrase derived from 'A Game of Chess'.

Line 206, Tereu: Tereu is the Latin vocative form of Tereus, the king, who raped Philomela.

Line 209, Smyrna: Modern Izmir in the western part of Turkey, a great centre of trade.

Lines 209-14: The events described in these lines actually happened. A man from Smyrna invited Eliot, and he had currants in his pocket. The implication of homosexuality, however, is imaginary.

Line 211, C.i.f.: 'Cost, insurance and freight'. Valerie Eliot has corrected Eliot's original note: see *The Waste Land Facsimile*, p. 147.

Line 211, documents at sight: The bill of lading was to be given to the buyer upon payment of 'draft at sight'.

Line 212, demotic: Vulgar, abominable.

Line 213, Cannon Street Hotel: A hotel close to Cannon Street station in London.

Line 214, Metropole: A fashionable luxury hotel in Brighton, a seaside resort on the south coast, sixty miles from London. The proposals made by Eugenides to the protagonist for a 'week-end at Brighton' has homosexual implications.

Lines 215-23: These lines recreate the evening scene at the opening to the *Purgatorio*, viii.

Line 218, Tiresias: Eliot notes that Tiresias is 'the most important personage' in the poem and that 'the two sexes met in him'. He also quotes the relevant passage from Ovid's *Metamorphoses* which narrates the story of Tiresias's change of sex. Tiresias came across two snakes copulating in a forest. He hit them with his staff and, in consequence, was changed into a woman. Eight years later he repeated the blow in a similar situation and regained his masculinity. Later a dispute arose between Jove and Juno on the issue of whether in love the woman derives the greater pleasure than the man; Juno argued that the reverse was the truth. Tiresias sided with Jove and therefore Juno blinded him. To compensate for this Jove gave him the gift of prophecy and long life. Tiresias forgot to ask for the gift of youth.

Line 219, old man...breasts: A repetition of the phrases used by Ovid in *Metamorphoses*.

Line 221: Eliot mentions Fragment 149 written by the seventh-century Greek poetess Sappho, which is a prayer to the Evening Star. 'Evening Star, that brings back all that the sinking Dawn has sent far and wide, you

bring back the sheep, the goat, and the child back to the mother.’ But the connection with ‘Requiem’ by Robert Louis Stevenson is more immediate:

*Home is the sailor, home from sea,
And the hunter home from the hill.*

Line 227, Camisole: Under-bodice.

Line 227, stays: Corsets.

Line 231, the young man carbuncular: Pimpled. An echo, in Eliot’s mind, of ‘that old man eloquent’ in Milton’s sonnet ‘To the Lady Margaret Lay’. Car buncles are associated with lechery.

Line 234, Bradford millionaire: Bradford is a great centre of wool manufacture in Yorkshire and an abode of many millionaires in that trade. Rapid fortunes were made here during the First World War.

Lines 245-6 who...wall: This refers to Homer’s account of Tiresias, who sat in the market place at Thebes and prophesied. Later he did the same in Hades where Ulysses consulted him.

Line 253: Eliot notes the source, Olivia’s song in Oliver Goldsmith (1730-74), *The Vicar of Wakefield*. She returns to the scene of her seduction by Squire Thornhill.

Line 257: cf. *The Tempest*, I.ii.389, Ferdinand’s words recalling the music and responding to Ariel’s song. He expresses his grief over his father’s supposed death.

Line 258, Strand: A famous street in London, leading eastward.

Line 258, Queen Victoria Street: A busy street close to the Thames.

Line 260, Lower Thames Street: Near the Thames at London Bridge. Eliot worked in this area in Lloyds Bank.

Line 263, fisherman: These are not fisherman, but workers at the nearby Billingsgate fish market.

Line 264, Magnus Martyr: The beautiful church designed by Sir Christopher Wren, built in Lower Thames Street.

Line 265, Inexplicable...gold: Eliot says ‘the interior of St Magnus Martyr is one of the finest among Wren’s interiors’. In these lines Eliot suggests a world of true values which is now lost.

Line 266: The song of the three Thames daughters starts at this point. From line 292 to 306 they sing in turn. See *Gotterdammerung*, III.i. The Rhine daughters and their song are the theme of Richard Wagner’s lengthy opera, *The Ring of the Nibelungs*. The Rhine daughters express their sorrow over the loss of the magic hoard of gold of the Nibelungs, which they had guarded. The loss of the gold is symbolic of the loss of the beauty and charm of the Rhine. Eliot has tried to pattern these lines on Wagner’s rhymes.

Line 272, spar: Strout pole supporting the mast.

Line 275, Greenwich reach: The south bank of the river Thames of Greenwich, downstream from the centre of the city.

Line 276, Isle of Dogs: The river bank opposite Greenwich.

Lines 277-8: The lament of the Rhine maidens over the loss of gold. The refrain is from Wagner’s opera.

Line 279: Eliot refers to J.A. Froude’s *History of England*, vii, 349, and quotes the letter of de Quadra to Philip of Spain.

The river cited is the Thames; Elizabeth entertained Leicester (Lord Robert Dudley) at Greenwich House near Greenwich reach.

Lines 280-5: These lines represent Enobarbus’s description of Cleopatra (see note to line 77).

Line 281, stern: Hind part of the ship.

Line 293: Eliot in his Notes draws attention to Dante's *Purgatory*, v: 133; the sorrow of La Pia who was murdered by her husband. 'Remember me, who am La Pia; Siena made me, Maremma unmade me'.

Line 293, Highbury: A residential suburb in the northern part of London.

Line 293, Richmond and Kew: Two riverside districts on the Thames. Kew is well known for its botanical gardens.

Line 296, Margate: Part of the East End of London. Eliot used this underground station for this daily travel to Lloyds bank.

Line 300, Margate Sands: A seaside resort in Kent on the Thames Estuary. Eliot began composing *The Waste Land* here in 1921 while he was recovering from an illness.

Line 307: Eliot traces the source to *The Confessions* of St. Augustine. 'To Carthage then I came, where a cauldron of unholy loves sang all about mine ears'. St Augustine writes about the sensual temptations of his youth in Carthage.

Line 308: This is taken from the Buddha's 'Fire Sermon', where he says everything in the world is on fire:

Line 309: Eliot in his Notes refers to his source, the *Confessions* of St. Augustine: 'I entangle my steps with these outward beauties, but thou pluckest me out O lord, thou pluckest me out'.

IV. Death by Water

Death by Water: A reference to the practice at Alexandria (narrated by Jessie Weston) of throwing into the sea an effigy of a pagan fertility god such as Adonis as a symbol of the death of nature's power. The head was carried to Byblos. It was later retrieved and worshipped as a symbol of the resurrected god. The Christian sacrament of baptism could also be cited as another significant tradition in this context.

Line 312: 'Dans le Restaurant' in turn may have been suggested to Eliot by a passage in the *Life and Death of Jason* (1867) by William Morris (1834-96). In Book IV the song of Orpheus to the Argonauts speaks of a Phoenician sailor as a victim of the sea. Eliot was familiar with this.

Lines 315-16: Image of 'sea-change' is derived from Ariel's song in *The Tempest*.

Line 319: This is an reference to all mankind. The Bible distinguishes between the faithful, the Jews, and those who reject God.

Line 320, wheel: The wheel of fortune as engraved on the Tarot pack of cards, which is turned by a figure holding a sword and a crown. Perhaps the mysterious nature of man's fate is suggested in this picture.

V. What the Thunder Said

Eliot says the source of this subtitle is the Indian legend of the Thunder derived from the sacred book, the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* V.i(see note to line 400).

Eliot also says that in the first part (lines 322-94) three themes are explored. First, the story told in the Bible (Luke xxiv: 13-31) of the two disciples walking on the road to Emmaus (a village near Jerusalem) on the day of Christ's resurrection. Eliot's second theme is the final stage of the Grail Quest and the journey to Chapel Perilous of the Knight. This theme is interwoven with the theme of the Emmaus journey. Eliot's third themes is modern – the decay of eastern Europe in the twentieth century.

Lines 322-8: These lines evoke the course of great events from the betrayal and arrest of Jesus Christ, the agony and prayer in the garden of Gethsemane to the moment of crucifixion. Also, they are indirectly evocative of the death of the Fisher King.

Line 323, silence in the gardens: Gethsemane, the scene of Christ's final moments before the arrest (see Matthew 26:36) and Golgotha, the hill of Christ's crucifixion.

Line 324, agony...places: cf. Matthew 21:38: Then saith he unto them, My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death...'

Line 326: Christ was taken to the palace of the High Priest where he was publicly interrogated before being taken to Pilate, the Roman governor, in the Hall of Judgement. See Mark 15:13-14: 'And they cried out again, crucify him. . . And they cried out the more exceedingly, crucify him!'

Lines 326-8, reverberation...dead: At the death of Christ the whole earth shook. See Matthew 27:51: 'the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom; and the earth did quake, and the rocks rent. . .'

Lines 331-59: Eliot thought very highly of these twenty-nine lines and wrote about them to Ford Madox Ford in a letter (*See The Waste Land Facsimile*, p.129).

Line 339, carious: Decayed.

Line 346, If...rock: This is shown as two lines, but the line numbering in the text shows it as one line.

Line 353, cicada: An insect with a shrill sound.

Line 356: Eliot notes that the water-dripping song of the hermit-thrush is quite well known.

Lines 360-6: The vision of the risen Christ is revealed to his disciples on the road to Emmaus:

Eliot has also cited the event of the Antarctic expedition. He was moved by this account (in *South*, 1919) by Sir Ernest Shackleton. The tired Antarctic explorers were haunted by the delusion that there was one more persons with them who could not be counted, and this makes the Biblical parallel very interesting.

Lines 366-76: This is a nightmarish picture of the decay of eastern Europe brought home to Eliot by a reading of *Blick ins Chaos* (1920), written by Hermann Hesse (1872-1962). Eliot quotes a passage which refers to the Russian Revolution and other upheavals in Europe:

There is a close connection between this decay of eastern Europe and the destruction of the Roman empire by barbarian hordes (see St. Augustine in *City of God*).

Line 377: The hair is a symbol of fertility as well as an object of sacrifice to the fertility gods.

Lines 379-84: This nightmarish portrayal of macabre images is perhaps influenced by the paintings of the Dutch artist Hieronymus Bosch (1450-1516) Medieval versions of the Grail Legend portray the horrors of the entry into Chapel Perilous which were intended to test the Knight's nerves, and these nightmarish visions, including bats with baby faces, were encountered by him. Bosch's paintings of Hell also influenced Eliot in portraying this scene.

Line 391-2: An echo, perhaps, of Peter denying the Lord three times and then the cock crowing, as Christ had anticipated. There are two traditions of the crowing cock. The first tradition shows Peter denying acquaintance with Christ and then breaking down in tears at his own cowardice. Here it is seen as part of a ritual preceding the death of Christ and mankind's salvation. The second tradition shows the cock as the trumpet of the morn and is associated with ghosts (*Hamlet*, I.i.).

Line 395, Ganga: The original sacred Sanskrit word for the Ganges.

Lines 396-420: These important lines project the message of the Thunder.

Line 397, Himavant: The original Sanskrit name for high mountains in the Himalayan ranges.

Line 400, _{DA}: This is the voice of the Thunder. The parable embodying the divine message of thunder is found in the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*, V.i.

Eliot alludes to a very significant episode in the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* which describes how gods, men and demons approached Prajapati, their father-preceptor, for instruction and message after completing their formal education.

Line 401, Datta: Give.

Lines 403-4: In *The Waste Land* the act of giving has been generated into immoral acts such as sexual surrender.

Line 407: cf. *The White Devil*, V.vi, by Webster. Eliot refers to Flamineo's speech warning against the frailty and inconstancy of women:

*they'll re-marry
Ere the worm pierce your winding –sheet, ere the
Spider
Make a thin curtain for your epitaphs.*

Line 411, Dayadhvam: Sympathize.

Line 411, I have ...key: Eliot cites Dante, *Inferno*, xxxiii: 46, quoting the words of Ugolino della Gheradesca, the thirteenth-century Italian nobleman as he recalls his imprisonment in a tower. He, his two sons, and two grandsons were starved to death in that tower.

Line 416, broken Coriolanus: The hero of Shakespeare's play, *Coriolanus*. He was broken because pride and selfishness brought about his death. He scorned the hostile Roman mob, but was broken by his own pride.

Line 418 Damyata: Control.

Lines 418-22: The young Eliot was a keen yachtsman.

Lines 423-4: cf. *From Ritual to Romance*. Eliot cites the story of the Fisher King described by Jessie Weston.

Line 425: Prophet Isaiah's words to King Hezekiah, a sick person whose Kingdom was ruined by the Assyrian conquest.

Line 426, London...down: This is the refrain in a well-known English nursery rhyme.

Line 427: Eliot cites the source as Dante, *Purgatorio*, xxvi: 145-8.

Line 428: This is a quotation from an anonymous Latin poem, *Pervigilium Veneris* (The Vigil of Venus). The poet's lament is that his song is unheard and he awaits the coming of spring to give it voice, like the swallow. Eliot, in his Notes, also cites the story of 'Philomela and Procne'.

Line 429: This line is quoted from a sonnet 'El Desdichado' (The Disinherited) by Gerard de Nerval (1808-55), a French poet. The poet calls himself a disinherited prince, stressing the lost tradition of troubadour poets. A Tarot card showing a tower strick by lightning symbolizes the lost tradition.

Line 430, These fragments...ruins: This is also a reference to the broken kingdom of the Fisher King.

Line 431: Eliot cites the source in *The Spanish Tragedy* by Thomas Kyd (1557-95). The play's alternative title is *Hieronimo is mad againe*. Hieronimo is driven mad due to the murder of his son. He is asked to write a court entertainment and replies, 'Why then Ile fit you!', ironically suggesting that he would give them (the murderers) their due. He arranges that his son's murderers themselves are killed in his play, which is composed of poetic fragments in several languages.

Line 433, Shantih: Eliot says the Sanskrit word signifies 'the peace which passeth understanding' and is a meaningful repetition of the well known formal ending of the great *Upanishads*.

SECTION IV: MISCELLANEOUS ITEMS

1. Possible Short Answer Questions

(Answer to be in 200 words each)

- 1 Attempt a short note on the composition of "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock".
2. Throw light on the appropriateness of the title of this poem.
3. What are the sources of this poem?
4. Comment on the line 'Like a patient etherised upon a table' in the poem.

- 5 Critically examine the following lines:

*In the room the women come and go
Talking of Michelangelo.*

6. Critically analyse the following:

I have measured out my life...coffee spoons.

7. Explicate the following:

*I should have been a pair of ragged claws
Scuttling across the floors of silent seas.*

8. Explain the following lines:

*I grow old...I grow old...
I shall wear the bottoms of my trousers rolled.*

9. Point out the contributions of Ezra Pound to the shaping of *The Waste Land*

10. Is it correct to state that *The Waste Land* lacks a formal structure? Furnish details.

11. Do you consider the poem to be dramatic in quality? Give reasons in support of your answer.

12. Examine the mythical method used by Eliot in this poem.

13. How does Eliot treat of earthly love in this poem? Illustrate your answer.

14. What do you consider to be the main theme of the poem? Give details.

15. Do you agree with the view that *The Waste Land* ends on 'a note of chaos' as it began? Give a reasoned answer.

16. Consider *The Waste Land* as a religious poem.

17. What is the message of this poem?

18. Evaluate *The Waste Land* as a symbolist poem.

19. Comment on the following:

*April is the cruellest month, breeding
Lilacs out of the dead land, mixing
Memory and desire, stirring
Dull roots with spring rain.*

20. Critically analyse the following lines:

*Unreal city,
Under the brown fog of a winter dawn,
A crowd flowed over London Bridge, so many,
I had not thought death had undone so many.*

- 21 Explicate the following:

*The 'change of Philomel, by the barbarous King
So rudely forced; yet there the nightingale
Filled all the desert with inviolable voice
And still she cried, and still the world pursues.*

- 22 Tell briefly, how does Tiresias represent 'the entire humanity'?

- 23 Explain the following:

*When lovely woman stoops to folly and
Paces about her room again, alone,*

*She smooths her hair with automatic hand,
And puts a record on the gramophone.*

24. Comment on the following:

*To Carthage then I came
Burning burning burning burning
O Lord Thou pluckest me out
O Lord Thou pluckest
Burning.*

25. Explicate the following:

*Ganga was sunken, and the limp leaves
Waited for rain, while the black clouds
Gathered far distant, over Himavant.*

26. Attempt a brief note on the source of “The Fire Sermon”.

27. Which is the source of “What the Thunder Said”? Does Eliot follow that source *Verbatim* or not? Give full information about it.

28. Comment briefly on the last two lines (432-433) of *The Waste Land*.

2. List of Possible Long Questions

1. Discuss Eliot’s contributions to the development of English poetry.
2. What are the main themes of Eliot’s poetry and how does he deal with them? Give details.
3. Critically examine Eliot’s impersonal theory of poetry.
4. Write a detailed note on the use of imagery in “The Love song of J. Alfred Prufrock.”
5. Give a pen-portrait of J. Alfred Prufrock.
6. Assess “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock” as a modern poem.
7. Discuss *The Waste Land* as a poem dealing with “the chaos of life” or “the disorganization of life” (F.R. Leavis).
8. Throw light on the title and structure of *The Waste Land*.
9. Comment on the poetic technique (“the technique of allusiveness”) used by Eliot in *The Waste Land*.
10. Examine *The Waste Land* as a poem embodying “the release of personal feelings” (Eliot).
11. What are the various sources of this poem?
12. Discuss *The Waste Land* as an international poem.
13. Comment on the role of Tiresias in this poem
14. Critically analyse *The Waste Land* as a mythical poem.
15. Consider the relevance or otherwise of the use of the Hindu Philosophy (or, the Sanskrit words proper) in *The Waste Land*.
16. I.A. Richards consider *The Waste Land* as “a music of ideas”. Comment on the statement.
17. Bring out the story of the Fisher King and the appropriateness of its application in this poem.

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