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# An introduction to the poetry of T.S. Eliot : a selective handbook

Jean Katherine Collins

# AN INTRODUCTION TO THE POETRY OF T. S. ELIOT: A SELECTIVE HANDBOOK

BY

JEAN KATHERINE COLLINS



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## PREFACE

From the day the writer considered T. S. Eliot and his works as a possible subject for her thesis, she was faced with the problem of making her paper into something original and creative; of finding a way to do something that had not been done before. The further she got into research, however, the greater was her realization that she was faced with an almost hopeless task. The futility of uncovering any new material was brought home to her in the letter reproduced at the end of the preface. It was at this point that she began to toy with the idea of a handbook. If she could not make her paper original, why could she not make it useful? Hence, the formulation of the following aims:

To make of the paper a handbook, a guide that might be used by the beginner to aid him in the study of symbolism and Eliot--not an end in itself, but a beginning;

To include in the paper those things which would answer the layman's questions--the definition, the aim, the method of symbolism;

To present Symbolism and Eliot in terms that the average reader would not find it hard to understand;

To choose for presentation those poems of Eliot which are most characteristic, most significant of his growth as a poet, namely:

The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock, because it was among Mr. Eliot's earliest poems and because it pointed the way towards The Waste Land. Indeed, it was the very evidence of the "growing pains" which preceded that poem;

The Waste Land, because it is most characteristic and because it raised the question with which Mr. Eliot was to be most concerned. It presented a problem but left it unsolved;

Ash-Wednesday, because it is a religious poem and marks a turning point in Mr. Eliot's philosophy, and because it offers a solution to the unsolved problem of The Waste Land;

Four Quartets, because it is a recent work, but, more important, because it reaffirms Mr. Eliot's new-found convictions as stated in Ash-Wednesday;

The Cocktail Party, because it is a play in verse which has been successfully produced on the stage, and because it is Mr. Eliot's most recent work, thus contributing to the over-all picture of his growth as a poet.

These are the aims of the writer. The handbook is the outcome of an intense interest in Eliot and the thing he

is trying to do with modern literature. It is presented in all humility, and not without the writer's all-too-real knowledge of her own limitations.

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7 February 1951

Miss Jean K. Collins
2021 Monument Avenue
Richmond, Virginia

Dear Miss Collins:

The T. S. Eliot collection now at Harvard has been restricted by Mr. Eliot, himself, so that the manuscripts in it may not be used without his permission. And since he does not welcome an investigation of his manuscripts on the grounds that he has published what he wishes to be judged by, I believe it would be futile to apply for permission from him to use them.

There are typescripts of some of his recent lectures there, but most of those have been published in the Atlantic Monthly and elsewhere.

Very truly yours,

Wm. A. Jackson

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# A SELECTIVE HANDBOOK

## INTRODUCTION

T. S. Eliot, one of the most discussed poets of our time, has registered a deep and sincere concern for the plight of modern society. That concern is mirrored in his poetry where he has spoken his message to those who will hear it. He seems to have put a supersensitive finger on the pulse of the world's ills, and he has suggested what he believes to be the only solution.

That Eliot's poetry is filled with scholarly allusions and sometimes mystifying symbols cannot be denied, for he has played a major role in the development of the Symbolist Method, which abounds in indefiniteness and mere suggestion rather than straight-forward narrative technique. That is one reason why the average reader has not concerned himself with understanding Eliot. However, where that reader might have been encouraged, he has only met with what might be called "intellectual snobbery." That statement is not unfounded as one will soon learn if he bothers to investigate; for, on the whole, the critical and analytical material on Eliot has been

done by the scholar, in scholarly terms, for the scholar. Thus the average reader has been deprived of the priceless wisdom which abounds in the pages of Eliot.

Eliot's method and technique can, perhaps, be better appreciated by those with literary or scholarly inclinations, but his message is a message for the whole of society. Indeed, it is one we can scarcely afford to ignore, and, with a little help, it is not beyond the comprehension of the average reader.

Eliot, through his poetry, has analyzed the case of society in a compact and concise manner. It would have taken the anthropologist, the philosopher, the economist, the politician volumes to cover the same ground, and still they would not have captured the beat of the human heart, the folly and the wisdom of the human mind as Eliot has done.

To read Eliot is to come face to face with oneself; to become acutely aware of what is wrong with the world and the people in it; to meet a kind of reckoning where one feels it is imperative to choose some immediate path of action. He is worth all the trouble it takes to understand him. Indeed, he should be required reading for all of contemporary society, and not just a boost to the ego of an intellectual few. If the average or beginning reader of Eliot finds it hard to understand Eliot's method and technique, he should be enlightened in terms that he can understand. Toward that end the research and analysis of this paper have been directed.

# CHAPTER I

## THE SUBTLE ART

Edgar A. Poe, whose critical writings provided the first scriptures of the Symbolist Movement, wrote: "I know that indefiniteness is an element of the true music (of poetry)--I mean of the true musical expression--a suggestive indefiniteness of vague and therefore of spiritual effect."[1]

To approximate this indefiniteness of music in poetry, Edmund Wilson tells us, was one of the principal aims of Symbolism. The effect was produced by confusion--confusion between the imaginary and the real world, and confusion in the way sense perceptions were recorded.[2] These perceptions went down on paper just as the poet had experienced them, and without any attempt at explanation.

Anne Ridler, settling "A Question of Speech," says that the life blood of poetry is symbolism; and that symbols are really hiding-places of power.[3] Her attitude is closely

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1. Edmund Wilson, Axel's Castle, p. 12.

2. Ibid., p. 13.

3. B. Rajan, ed., T. S. Eliot: A Study of His Writings by Several Hands, p. 110.

akin to that of Wilson in that she believes that, for the Symbolist, poetry is an art that "should not inform but suggest and evoke, not name things but create their atmosphere."[4]

Here it is perhaps necessary to clarify what is meant by symbol. When one thinks of reading or the communication of ideas, he immediately thinks in terms of the alphabet and words on the printed page. To do this is to under-estimate and place limitations upon the powers of the human mind. Even primitive man, with less equipment than his supposedly more civilized modern brother, was able to read meanings in signs and even footprints, and to interpret nature long before the alphabet came into use.

The symbols of symbolism differ somewhat, however, from these primitive symbols, and even from symbols in the ordinary sense. One might think of the Cross as a symbol of Christianity, or the Stars and Stripes as a symbol of the United States. These familiar symbols are conventional and fixed. This is not true of the symbols of the Symbolist School, for they are usually chosen by the poet to stand for his own special ideas. The symbols act as a sort of disguise for these ideas.[5]

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4. Here Miss Ridler has quoted C. M. Bowra, The Heritage of Symbolism, London, 1943.

5. Wilson, op. cit., p. 20.

One might ask at this point why it is necessary for the poet to disguise his ideas. The answer to that question might best be found in the words of Mallarmé, who contends that in making his symbols definite the poet deprives the mind of the joy of believing that it is creating. He says, "to suggest it [an idea], to evoke it--that is what charms the imagination."[6]

So we see that to intimate things rather than to state them plainly is clearly one of the primary aims of the Symbolists. However, it is all more involved than Mallarmé leads us to believe. As a matter of fact, the assumptions underlying Symbolism might lead us to formulate some such doctrine as follows:

None of our feelings, sensations, or moments of consciousness are the same. They are all different; therefore we cannot convey them to someone else by using the ordinary language of literature. Hence it is the task of the poet to invent a special language which alone expresses his personality and feelings. It follows that such a language will make use of symbols. Vague feelings, rare moments of illumination [which many of us have experienced, and during which time we have thought that we had the very answer to life itself, though we could not put it into words] cannot be conveyed by direct statement or description, but rather

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6. Ibid., p. 20.

by words and images which serve to suggest the experience to the reader.[7]

According to Wilson, the symbolists, full of the idea of producing poetry with the effect of music, tended to think of these images as possessing abstract value like musical notes and chords. However, the words of our speech are not musical notations; so the symbols of the symbolists are actually metaphors detached from their subjects. But we cannot, beyond a certain point, in poetry, enjoy just color and sound for their own sake; we have to guess what the images are being applied to. So Symbolism may be defined as "an attempt, by complicated association of ideas represented by a medley of metaphors, to communicate unique personal feelings."[8]

F. O. Matthiessen echoes the essence of the doctrine formulated by Wilson in his belief that in the Symbolists there is an increased allusiveness and indirection, a flexibility in verse to catch every shade of individual feeling. Matthiessen goes still further in pointing up the underlying motive of the symbolist. This motive should not come as a surprise to us, for it is completely in keeping with his revolutionary tendency that the Symbolist should break through convention to startle us into seeing the world through fresh

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7. Ibid., p. 21.

8. Ibid., p. 21.

eyes. The condensation of form demanded by the Symbolists builds effects upon sharp contrasts, and makes use of the element of surprise.[9] Matthiessen's conception of the successful symbol is at once sensible and enlightening. Of course, the success of the symbol lies with the poet and his ability to give to it a certain vitality. He must try to make the symbol stand for something larger than itself. By the uniting of the indefinite in the definite, the intangible in the concrete, the symbol can create the illusion that it is giving expression to the very mystery of life.[10]

In the first chapter of her book on Eliot, Elizabeth Drew concerns herself with what she calls "The Mythical Vision." She defines the mythical method as a presentation of experience in symbolic form, and reminds us that symbolism is the earliest and still most direct form of human expression.[11] It has given man a medium through which he might project his knowledge and experience of the outer and inner world into "direct sensuous embodiment." Thus, through his symbol-making instinct, man has been able to give life and

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9. F. O. Matthiessen, The Achievement of T. S. Eliot, p. 15.

10. Ibid., p. 117.

11. Elizabeth Drew, T. S. Eliot: The Design of His Poetry, p. 8.

meaning to his knowledge and experience. He has been able to turn force into form.[12]

Every poet, every author, is, perhaps, primarily concerned with contributing something new to the world through literature. If this "something new" is not in what he says, it is in the way he says it. And perhaps the latter is more important. For what intrinsic value would great ideas hold if they were not communicated so as to set up thought waves in the human brain and fire the human emotions? The artist's success in getting the desired response from his readers lies in his ability to awaken dormant thoughts and feelings, many of which we hold in common. Once he has done this he is ready to proceed in the pointing out of significant patterns of life itself.

The first duty of the writer, the poet, lies in challenging his reader. He makes of literature a creative process for the one who reads as well as for the one who writes. The writer projects a skeleton of his own ideas, but, more important, he stimulates his reader to fill in. He literally coaxes him to tell the story himself. That too is one of the indications of the "greats" in literature. Theirs is a subtle art. They operate on what might seem, at first, to be the theory of the line of least resistence.

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12. Ibid., p. 5.

But a closer glance tells us that theirs is a wisdom--one might almost call it an instinct--that forbids them to waste the flavor of an idea, a story, by telling all. They demand that the reader both think and feel. They become convincing without the use of logic. It seems that the conscientious poet or writer abides by an unwritten law--that of not saying things directly when they can be said indirectly. This medium of indirection varies with the writer. With the French Symbolists and T. S. Eliot it was the symbol.

The Symbolists and Eliot used not only the word as a symbol, but the image as well--coupled with a certain reliance upon a common ground of experience, emotion, feeling, and idea. They seem to be able to intensify the symbolic meaning of a word, an image, by prodding the depths of memory--the sum total of the individual experience. They do not rely upon the meaning of a word alone, but, rather, use it as a spring-board. Thus the receptive mind is freed. There are no limitations to its flight as it soars through the symbolic passages of Eliot. And that is as it should be, for the mind was meant to be free.

Perhaps this tie-up between symbol and the common ground of emotion and experience might be best understood in the following diagram:[13]

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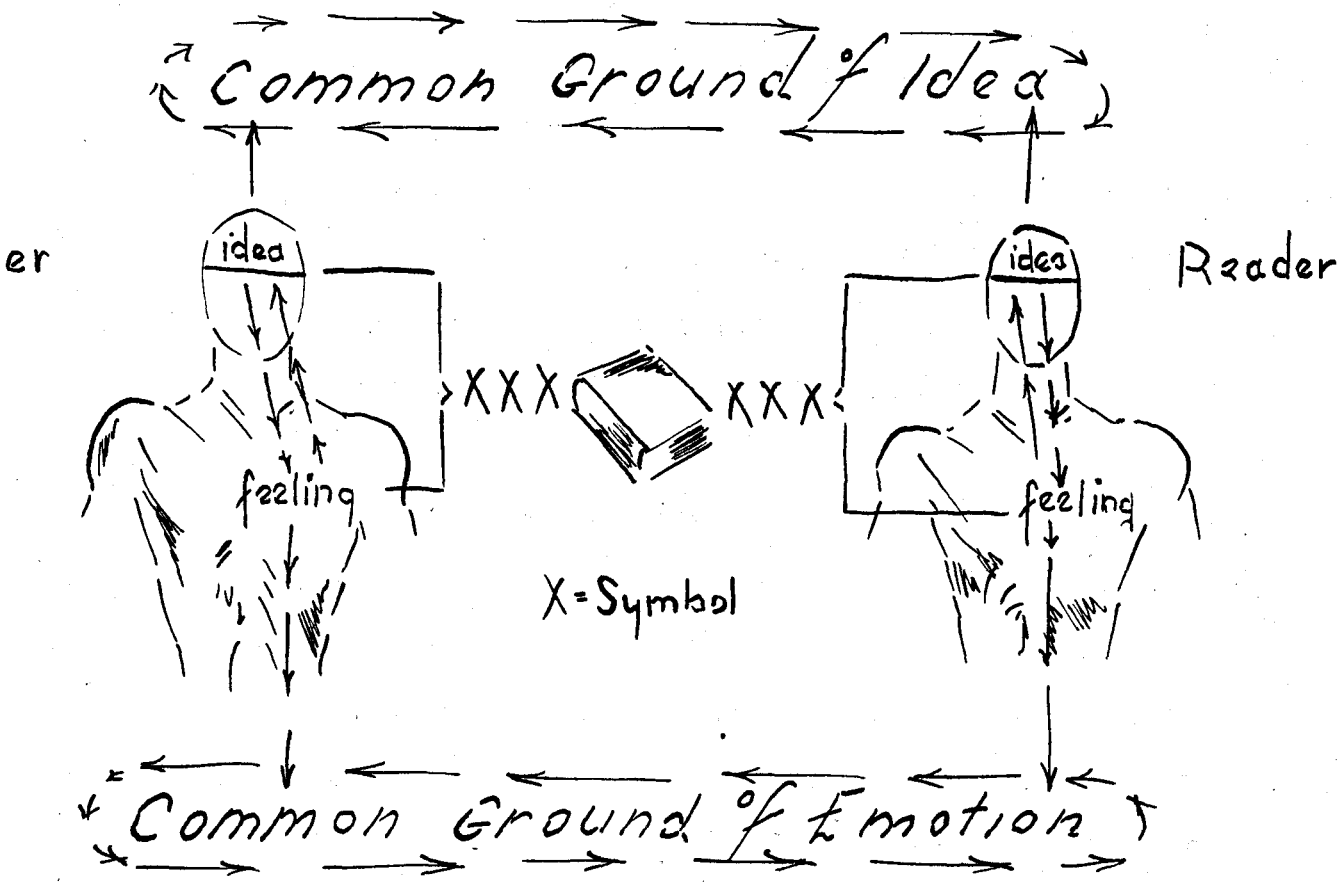
13. Diagram suggested by Dr. Leland Schubert in lecture at Madison College.




As one can see from the diagram, the symbol acts as a sort of catalytic agent, stimulating and hastening the memory process. Past emotions and experiences are recalled, thus setting up a somewhat direct communication between writer and reader.

Eliot himself has expressed this method of communication in these words:

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 particular emotion; such that when

the external facts, which must terminate in sensory experience, are given, the emotion is immediately evoked.[14]

Through the Symbolist's demand on the reader to both think and feel, he makes an active process of reading. Here is where one comes to appreciate and enjoy the writings of Eliot and the other Symbolists. One derives a feeling of satisfaction from their lines that is rarely felt in the passages of other poetry. It is a feeling closely akin to the very writing of poetry itself. As one reads, he ceases to be just a reader. Indeed, he becomes the poet. For this Symbolism, giving rise to the imagination, allows the reader to experience certain flashes of illumination, even as the poet himself has experienced them.

Psychology calls man's "symbol-making" instincts "the unconscious." Dr. C. G. Jung describes that part of the psyche as "the eternally creative mother of consciousness."[15]

But perhaps we should not concern ourselves too much with what psychology has to say of Symbolism. What we should remember is that Symbolism elevates the art of poetry to a more highly creative process than it has ever known.

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14. Hugh Ross Williamson, The Poetry of T. S. Eliot, p. 49.

15. Drew, op. cit., p. 5.

To repeat what was said before, Symbolism makes of poetry a creative experience--for the one who reads as well as for the one who writes; it makes of poetry a subtle art.

## CHAPTER II

### THE GROWTH OF SYMBOLISM

It seems that almost all literary movements that amount to very much are preceded by a revolt--a grand revolt from what has gone before. The Symbolist movement which took place in France in the nineteenth century was no different from the rest. It brought to French poetry a certain freedom that it had never before known, and sought to remove from it the highly personalized element which had been so indicative of the Romantics along with the rigidity of form which had been characteristic of Parnassian[1] verse. This freedom which the Symbolists gave to French verse was not an easy freedom. It was not characterized by complete abandonment of form and technique as one might expect, for the French Symbolists were never haphazard. Rather, they sought to enlarge upon existing forms and techniques, and to do away with the elements in French poetry which they believed to have become obsolete and useless.

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1. A school of poetry which developed in France about the middle of the nineteenth century. Its founders sought to develop the technical side of the art of poetry.

The Symbolist movement proper was at first largely confined to France. It was destined, however, to spread to the whole Western world. It reached its zenith in Germany in Wagner, in England in the Pre-Raphaelites, and in France in Villiers de L'Isle-Adam, Mallarmé and Maeterlinck, and, according to Yeats in 1897, stirred the imagination of Ibsen and D'Annunzio.[2]

The general trend of the Symbolist movement in France was towards intuitive inspiration rather than the materialism associated with modern science.[3] The early French Symbolist poets allied poetry to music by giving it a vague contour, a dreamlike inexactness, and a somewhat sensuous melody.[4] This was quite a contrast to the poetry of the Parnassians which had closely resembled sculpture in its sharp outline.

Individualism seemed to be the dominant note of Symbolism. This statement is borne out in the words of Adolphe Retté:

> If one should question Symbolist poets separately, one would receive as many different answers as individuals; Symbolism has never meant similarity of method, but unity of ideals.[5]

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2. Edmund Wilson, Axel's Castle, p. 22.

3. Pierre de Segcourt and J. W. Cunliffe, French Literature During the Last Half Century, p. 254.

4. Foster Erwin Guyer, The Main Stream of French Literature, p. 269.

5. De Segcourt, op. cit., p. 265.

Here, for obvious reasons, it will not be possible to concern ourselves with the individual ideals of every single French Symbolist poet. We will, however, take note of the most marked characteristics of those poets who exerted a direct influence on T. S. Eliot. Of their identity we are sure, for we have the poet's own statement as evidence.

> I myself owe Mr. Symons[6] a great debt. But for having read his book I should not, in the year 1908, have heard of Laforgue and Rimbaud; I should probably not have begun to read Verlaine; and but for reading Verlaine, I should not have heard of Corbière. So the Symons book is one of those which have affected the course of my life.[7]

There is also evidence of the influence of Gautier in some of Eliot's poetry. But we cannot call Gautier a true Symbolist poet, for he stood, rather, as a transitional figure between the Parnassians and the Symbolists. His works were among the first in a reaction against the Romantic concentration on self. By his insistence on purely objective description and the importance of form, he prepared the transition to an impersonal type of art.[8]

Almost as detached as Gautier in his first two volumes of verse was Paul Verlaine. His poetry is often characterized by a melancholy tone such as is found in "The Goodly Song."

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6. Arthur Symons, The Symbolist Movement in Literature.

7. Quotation from a review Eliot wrote of Peter Quennell's Baudelaire and the Symbolists in 1930.

8. H. H. Berthow, Nine French Poets, p. 256.

Sad and lost I walked where wide
And treacherous the roadways are.
Your dear hand was still my guide.

Pale on the horizon rar
A frail hope of day was shed.
Your glance was my morning-star.

No sound but his own echoing tread
Brightened the poor wanderer's thought.
Your voice spoke of hope ahead.

My heart with gloom and terror fraught
Wept at the melancholy sight;
Love the exquisite victor brought

Us to each other in delight.[9]

More important than this melancholy note of Verlaine's poetry was the element of musicality that it possessed. One critic[10] contends that Verlaine's one aim was to write musical verses. Some of the sweetest melodies he wrote are found in his Romances sans paroles. In the following poem from that volume we are given evidence of not only the lyricism of which he was capable, but the mysticism as well:

Je devine à travers un murmure
Le contour subtil des voix anciennes
Et dans les lueurs musiciennes,
Amour pâle, une aurore future!

Et mon âme et mon coeur en délires
Ne sont plus qu'une espece de'oeil double
Ou tremblote à travers un jour double
L'ariette, hélas! de toutes lyres!

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9. Translation from Ludwig Lewisohn's The Poets of Modern France, p. 77.

10. Cuyer, op. cit., p. 270.

O mourir de cette mort soulette
Que s'en vont, cher amour qui t'épeures,
Balancant jeunes et vieilles heures!
O mourir de cette escarpolette!

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I divine, through the veil of a murmuring,
The subtle contour of voices gone,
And I see, in the glimmering lights that sing,
The promise, pale love, of a future dawn.

And my soul and my heart in trouble
What are they but an eye that sees,
As through a mist an eye sees double,
Airs forgotten of songs like these?

O to die of no other dying,
Love, than this that computes the showers
Of old hours and of new hours flying;
O to die of the swing of the hours![11]

Verlaine, suffering always from emotional instability, often gives us the impression of being childishly naïve in respect of ideas and emotions. Despite that, however, we detect in the form of his verse the sure stroke of a conscious and accomplished artist.

Closely associated with Verlaine from the standpoint of time and temperament is Arthur Rimbaud. Indeed, the two were close friends until Verlaine, in a fit of jealousy, killed Rimbaud. The poetry of Verlaine and that of Rimbaud is closely allied, but there exist marked differences between the two. Rimbaud is far more obscure than

NOT TRUE

HE MISSED

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11. Translation from Arthur Symons' Symbolist Movement In Literature, p. 408.

Verlaine, for it was his intention to give to his poetry an effect of vagueness. Hence it is necessary that the reader exert all of his power of imagination in the reading of it. Also, Verlaine acquired much of his poetic ability and technique; Rimbaud was born a poet.

In addition to Rimbaud's natural poetic gift, he possessed the eye of the artist. He saw all things in color. That color went into the writing of his poetry in much the same manner as an artist might apply pigment to his canvas. When Rimbaud did not use the words "green," "blue," "red," and the like to suggest a mass of color, he used words which stood as symbols for colors--such as the fire, iris, sky, river of "The Sleeper of the Valley."

> There's a green hollow where a river sings
> Silvering the torn grass in its glittering flight,
> And where the sun from the proud mountain flings
> Fire--and the little valley brims with light.
>
> A soldier young, with open mouth, bare head,
> Sleeps with his neck in dewy water cress,
> Under the sky and on the grass his bed,
> Pale in the deep green and the light's excess.
>
> He sleeps amid the iris and his smile
> Is like a sick child's slumbering for a while.
> Nature, in thy warm lap his chilled limbs hide!
>
> The perfume does not thrill him from his rest.
> He sleeps in sunshine, hand upon his breast,
> Tranquil--with two red holes in his right side.[12]

Here Rimbaud seems to have done more than just write a poem.

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12. Translation from Lewisohn, op. cit, p. 81.

He has painted a picture. He has contributed the element of color which added so much to the life of Symbolist poetry.

Also important among the French Symbolists are Corbière and Laforgue. We find traces of their influence everywhere in Eliot's early poetry. Edmund Wilson calls Corbière's poetry "poetry of the outcast," for it is colloquial and homely, and contains a wealth of fantastic slang. Corbière is quick to humiliate himself in terms of self-mockery in his poetry, thus revealing a somewhat Romantic tendency.[13]

Jules Laforgue, younger than Corbière, developed a tone and technique which closely resembled that of Corbière. His verse too was flavored with slang, and marked by a scurrilous tone. This likeness to Corbière was, however, developed unconsciously. Laforgue was a more professional poet than Corbière. What in Corbière seems a personal, eccentric manner of speech, in Laforgue becomes a self-conscious, deliberate literary exercise.[14]

Much of Laforgue's poetry is characterized by cynicism and impudence, as in "Another Book":

> Another book! How my heart flees
> From where these pinchbeck gentry are,
> From their salutes and money far,
> And all our phraseologies!

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13. Wilson, op. cit., p. 94.

14. Ibid., p. 95.

Another of my Pierrots gone!
Too lonely in this world was he;
Full of an elegance lunary
The soul that through his quaintness shone.

The gods depart; the fools endure.
Ah, it grows worse from day to day;
My time is up, I take my way
Toward the inclusive sinecure.[15]

Also interspersed throughout Laforgue's poetry is the flavor of German philosophy. After falling under the spell of its influence, Laforgue brought its terms into his verse. In this way, he contributed to Symbolism the element of obscurity.[16]

To point out all of the likenesses between the poetry of the French Symbolists and that of Eliot, would prove an almost interminable task, and comparatively uninteresting to any but the advanced scholar. Besides that, is it not human nature to be more interested in a new product than the raw materials which go into its making? So perhaps it will suffice here to suggest and illustrate the likenesses most often alluded to for the purpose of proving to the reader that they do exist.

One striking resemblance between Eliot and Laforgue is noted in the end of Eliot's Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock and Laforgue's Légende. The subject matter of Laforgue's

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15. Translation from Lewisohn, op. cit., p. 96.

16. Wilson, op. cit., p. 96.

poem--the inability of a timid, disillusioned man to bring himself to make love to a woman who evokes pity and stirs his stifled emotions--is closely allied to that of Eliot's. This is not surprising, however, for M. Teupin in his Influence du Symbolisme français sur la poésie Américaine de 1910 à 1920 says that "for Eliot, as for Laforgue, the problem was to be able to cover with cultivated modernity the chronicle or the diary of a man of his time with the proper décor of the time."[17]

Notice also the irregular metrical scheme employed in the two poems:

> I grow old... I grow old...
> I shall wear the bottoms of my trousers rolled.
>
> Shall I part my hair behind? Do I dare to eat a peach!
> I shall wear white flannel trousers, and walk upon the beach,
> I have heard the mermaids singing, each to each.
>
> I do not think that they will sing to me.
>
> I have seen them riding seaward on the waves
> Combing the white hair of the waves blown back
> When the wind blows the water white and black.
>
> We have lingered in the chambers of the sea
> By sea-girls wreathed with seaweed red and brown
> Till human voices wake us, and we drown.
>
> *****
>
> Hier L'orchestre attaqua
> Sa derniere polka

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17. Hugh Rose Williamson, The Poetry of T. S. Eliot, p. 70.

Oh! L'automne, l'automne!
Les casinos
Qu'on abandonne
Remisent leurs pianos!...

Phrases, verrotiries
Cailloux de souvenirs.
Oh! comme elle est maigrie!
Que vais-je devenir?

Adieu! Les filles d'ifs dans les grisailles
Ont l'air de pleureuses de funérailles
Sous l'autan noir qui veut que tout s'en aille.

Assez, assez,
C'est toi qui as commencé.

Va ce n'est plus l'odeur de tes fourrures.
Va, vos moindres cils d'yeux sont des parjures.
Tais-toi, avec vous autres rien ne dure.

Tais-toi, tais-toi,
On n'aime qu'une fois...

Hugh Ross Williamson has contended that Eliot was influenced by the "vers libre" of Jules Laforgue. Here we find apparent evidence. However, it is not the same type of free verse that we have come to recognize. Rather, it is an alteration of the traditional French measure.

In addition to likenesses in subject matter and form, Eliot often parodied or adopted lines from Laforgue, just as Laforgue parodied lines from other poets. In La Figlia che Piange Eliot made Laforgue's "Simple et sans foi comme un bonjour" into "Simple and faithless as a smile and shake of the hand."

Also, Laforgue's

"Là, voyons, mam'zelle la lune
Ne gardons pas ainsi rancune"

becomes in Eliot:

"Regard the moon,
La lune ne garde aucune rancune."

Both Eliot and Laforgue tended at times to become pedantic. Some of the words they employed were unusually long, stiff, and learned for verse. Compare Laforgue's

"Et que jamais soit tout, bien intrinsèquement,
Très hermétiquement, primordialement"

and Eliot's

"And all its relations
Its divisions and precisions"

Here let us take leave of the details of similarity which exist between Eliot and Laforgue lest they should seem to become more important than they really are. What we should remember is that Eliot was far more influenced by the mood and temper of Laforgue's verse than he was by the form and the little mannerisms that he borrowed from that poet.

Just as Laforgue influenced the writing of Eliot's 1917 volume of poetry, so Corbière is heard in the 1920 volume. His scurrilous, almost coarse and vulgar tone is, without a doubt, reproduced in Mr. Eliot's Sunday Morning Service. There too, one finds traces of Corbière's "fantastic slang." But between these two volumes, Eliot's writing underwent a change evidenced in both the tone and

technique of his new poems. The tone was Eliot's own, perhaps flavored with that of Corbière; but Williamson[18] is convinced that Eliot's new technique was evolved from his close association with Ezra Pound who, in turn, had come under the influence of Gautier and his strict quatrain. Nowhere is there clearer evidence of Gautier's influence on Eliot than in a comparison of Gautier's L'Hippopotame with Eliot's The Hippopotamus:

> L'Hippopotame au large ventre
> Habite aux jungles de Java;
> Où grondent, au fond de chaque antre,
> Plus de monstres qu'on n'en rêva.
>
> *****
>
> The broad-backed hippopotamus
> Rests on his belly in the mud;
> Although he seems so firm to us
> He is merely flesh and blood.

Part of the originality of Eliot's verse lay in this ability he had of capturing the tone and techniques of the poetry of another language and infusing it into his own. His originality did not stop there, however; for he was quick to note the similarity which existed between the French symbolists and the subtle-minded seventeenth century English metaphysicals. Evidence of this is found in Mr. Eliot's own statement that the ironic French poets "are nearer to the 'school of Donne' than any modern English poet."[19]

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18. Hugh Ross Williamson, The Poetry of T. S. Eliot, p. 71.

19. Quotation from a critical essay, The Metaphysical Poets, written in 1921 after the publication of Herbert Grierson's Metaphysical Lyrics and Poems of the Seventeenth Century.

Eliot made his own poetry a link between these two schools. He said that he did not know of any other writer who had started from exactly that point.

It is not difficult to spot certain qualities in the poetry of the English Metaphysicals which one knows--almost instinctively--would appeal to the erudite mind of T. S. Eliot. Donne, in particular, was fond of obscure allusions and subtle intimations. He inserted scientific, philosophic, and religious terms into his poetry, and was able to capture almost any experience by a combination of intellect and emotion. These same characteristics might be as easily applied to Eliot. And Donne, like Eliot, took delight in startling his reader into thought by all sorts of wild comparisons and great leaps of the imagination. Take, for instance, his "Song" beginning

> Go and catch a falling star,
> Get with child a mandrake root,
> Tell me where all past years are,
> Or who cleft the devil's foot.
> Teach me to hear mermaids singing,
> Or to keep off envy's stinging,
> And find
> What wind
> Serves to advance an honest mind.....

Also, Donne and the Metaphysicals, like Eliot, were concerned with the problem of soul. Take Donne's "Hymn to God the Father":

> Wilt Thou forgive that sin where I begun,
> Which was my sin, though it were done before?

Wilt Thou forgive that sin through which I run,
And do run still, though still I do deplore?
When Thou hast done, Thou has not done,
For I have more...

and compare it with Eliot's "Ash Wednesday"

And pray to God to have mercy upon us
And I pray that I may forget
These matters that with myself I too much discuss
Too much explain
Because I do not hope to turn again
Let these words answer
For what is done, not to be done again,
May the judgment not be too heavy upon us...

both poets seem to have recognized poetry as an apt medium for religion, and they have suited it to their own purposes, which do not seem to be alien.

From what has gone before, the reader will perhaps conclude that Eliot's expansion of the Symbolist Method involved far more than just a native interest in creating poetry. He had become dissatisfied with both the form and method of existing verse, and he seemed to be striving to inject into his poetry a life force which had been lost in narrative-type verse. This he did by adapting the tone and technique of the poetry of another language to his. No doubt, the reader will recognize Eliot's ability to do this as nothing less than a stroke of genius. Eliot did not stop there, however. For he recognized in the poetry of the English Metaphysicals many qualities which, linked with the Symbolist method, would enhance the forcefulness of his own poetry. By a linking up of these two traditions Eliot evolved a new

poetry and a new poetic language whereby he was enabled to minimize time and space and capture any type of human experience. Indeed, his poetry does move "as live thoughts in live brains."[20]

Eliot created consciously and with great vigor, which fact, no doubt, indicates that he exerted some discipline in the writing of his poetry. Here we are reminded of the high purpose of Eliot's verse and the hard labor which went into its making. If the reader were to compare the recent The Cocktail Party with the early French Symbolist poetry and the early poetry of Eliot himself, he would probably gain no small amount of insight into the course which the Symbolist movement has taken. But, more important, he would realize the major role that T. S. Eliot himself has played in the history of Symbolism.

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20. Edmund Wilson attributes this statement to May Sinclair. See Axel's Castle, p. 108.

## CHAPTER III

## THE CONTINUITY OF THE POEMS

The writer has chosen for analysis the poems which follow because, first of all, they are most representative of Eliot's development as a Symbolist. Added to that, they reveal a certain continuity that is easily communicated to the reader. They fall into a pattern which at once betrays Eliot's philosophical as well as technical development, and provide the beginner-reader of Eliot with certain essentials which are necessary to the understanding of his other poetry.

Every writer who takes his writing seriously seems to be confronted with the same problems. The method and technique of solving these problems vary with the writer, but one thing is certain, they all share the common aim of purging themselves of the ideas which bother them, and doing it in the most effective way possible. Some even experience a certain "winter of the mind," as Robert Nathan calls it, when they wonder if spring will ever come again. The ideas are there, seething within them, and causing a restlessness that is disturbing, agonizing; but these thoughts and ideas

will not form into word patterns. It is as if they are not ready to be possessed. It is this writer's theory that this bottling-up of ideas on the part of the artist is what goes into the making of the superior artist. Just as the aging process itself gives to wine its worth, so the ripening of ideas, thoughts, and feelings that will not easily give way to expression determine the worth of the artist's finished product.

T. S. Eliot is no different from the rest. His ripening process is easily traced from his earlier poems to his most recent ones. He has been accused of being coldly intellectual, but how could anyone fail to see that more, far more, than the intellect is bound up in his coming of age as a poet. Eliot himself sought to exclude the personal element from his poetry. In a way he did; for always he has been concerned with not just representing his own feelings or an individual or a segment of society, but the whole sick world, along with all its ills. True, he sometimes chose individual representatives, but he mirrored the world's ills in them. So the indication here might be that while Eliot sought to exclude himself from his poetry, he took on the larger job of thinking and feeling for the whole of society. The intellectual aspect of his poetry was bound up in his technique; his thoughts, his emotions, his feelings were incorporated with the characters he portrayed, and

thus with the thoughts and the feelings of the people of the world in general.

In the Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock, Eliot gives us a hint of what is to follow. Between the lines of that poem, the essence of Eliot's philosophy is evolved. A part of that which had been seething within him has been released. We see clearly that his concern is to be with the turn that contemporary society has taken. There is no doubt in the reader's mind but that Eliot is dissatisfied with what he perceives, but it is also clear that he does not have a remedy. He seems to have a sort of intuitive perception of the wrongness of things, and a disgust that is communicated to the reader in the character of Prufrock himself. Eliot succeeds in conveying the mood of his poem in symbol and clear-cut, forceful imagery. In this he is straightforward and sure. But in his attempt to diagnose the case, to see through to the cause, he is not so sure. He is groping. This factor does not, however, detract from the poem. It even adds to the whole tone of the poem; for is not Prufrock himself floundering and groping like the author?

So one might conclude that the Prufrock poem is evidence of the growing pains that had to precede Eliot's growth into a mature artist. One must not from that minimize its worth, however; for it was the first stage on Eliot's very important journey into The Waste Land.

The Waste Land magnifies the problem with which Eliot was concerned in The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock. It presents the barrenness of contemporary society on a grander scale, and reveals the continuing growth of Eliot's philosophy and technique. The symbols and images are more numerous, and the literary allusions have grown more difficult, but the reader is rewarded by a feeling that the poet is becoming increasingly more sure of himself and the direction of his poetry. While the mood and tone of The Waste Land are closely akin to the Prufrock poem, the intensity and vigor of the poet have increased. He seems to have closed in on his problem, and now he wrestles with it. He sees clearly that a loss of spiritual values and a reversion to sensuous pleasures have occasioned the situation in which those in the waste land find themselves. He sees too the ugliness and futility of such a life, but still he does not have an answer. He explores the cause to its fullest, and he has carefully recorded the symptoms. Clearly a climax has been reached in the poet's philosophical development. Some have said that Eliot leaves us without hope in The Waste Land, that he ends it on a note of despair. The writer prefers to think that the general tone of despair and futility are for effect. They intensify the problem to the reader. But one thing is sure--the poet is too concerned with the plight of contemporary society to leave it suspended

in the dead life of a waste land without hope of salvation. That hope could only be anticipated in The Waste Land. It was later to be revealed in Eliot's first religious poem, Ash-Wednesday.

Ash-Wednesday is further evidence of the evolution of Eliot's philosophy. In that poem he turns to faith, Christianity, God, as man's only hope of deliverance out of the oblivion of the waste land. Before, Eliot has relied upon reason, but now he seems to realize, as others have before him, that some things are beyond the powers and comprehension of little man. The time has come to build upon faith alone. Some have detected in this turn of events a weakness on the part of the poet. They contend that he is not being consistent. But the fact that Eliot, who has hitherto been startlingly realistic and reasonable, should take such a course in his philosophy, seems to add strength to its plausibility. There must be something in the Christianity-faith idea, or Eliot with an intellect such as he possesses would not give to it his attention. Neither is it likely that he used it as an easy "out," for Eliot does not take the easy way, ever. He is unquestionably sincere.

Four Quartets, composed of a series of four long poems, further strengthens and reinforces Eliot's new-found faith as stated in Ash-Wednesday. Eliot has found his

métier, and he now writes with the sure touch of a matured and polished poet. The symbols in Four Quartets are not so numerous as those in The Waste Land, but they are no less effective. Eliot seems to see implications in things which have hitherto left him puzzled. It is as if this new-found faith has given him a certain insight into the mystery of things, an awareness of relationships. However, Eliot is ever the subtle artist, and the answers he has found he imparts only in "hints and guesses."

The Cocktail Party, the most recent of Eliot's works, is the first of his plays to enjoy such a grand-scale success. Despite the fact that critics have called the play essentially "high-brow," it has had a certain popular appeal for the general public. Perhaps they see in the characters that pass before them on the stage certain qualities which are not alien to some of their own. And there we see Eliot running true to form; for again he takes a few people that make up a segment of society, and he endows them with certain strength and frailty--even as the whole human race is endowed with strength and frailty. Neither is this play lacking in hope. Proof of this is found in the following lines from the play:

> The best of a bad job is all any of us make of it,
> Except of course, the saints.....

One might call this a strange brand of hope, but it is

typically and unmistakably Eliot--in his latest work, as in his earliest, not saying directly what can be said indirectly.

So we see that a thread of continuity runs through all these poems, from the first to the last. That thread is strengthened by the recurrence of symbols and theme, but, more important, by the growth of Eliot's philosophy. We trace that growth, step by step, from Prufrock to The Cocktail Party, and perhaps become startlingly aware that we have had a glimpse of the creative process--might even feel that we have had a share in it; for Eliot has a way of making his readers create along with him. Eliot, like Browning, is not for the mentally lazy. He must be read with both the emotion and the intellect--the sum total of the individual experience.

## CHAPTER IV

## JOURNEY INTO THE WASTE LAND

In the analyses of the poems in this chapter and the two which follow, the writer will not attempt a detailed analysis of each individual symbol and allusion. Rather, it is her intention to point out those symbols and allusions which are absolutely necessary to a General understanding of the poems. Too many explanations would, perhaps, tend to confuse the beginner-reader of Eliot rather than to enlighten him. The analyses are intended, not as an end in themselves, but a beginning, an introduction to the Eliot technique and method.

As was shown in the last chapter, Eliot's The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock is closely tied to The Waste Land. Indeed, it is a preview in mood, technique and subject matter of what is to follow. The poet is undoubtedly concerned with the turn that modern civilization has taken. In Prufrock, however, we get the feeling that he views but dimly the full implications of man's plight in modern society. He sees the irony of Prufrock's predicament, but it is not made at all clear to the reader how the little dilettante arrived at his

state of indecision, nor how he will escape from it. That does not, however, detract from the effectiveness of the poem.

The interest the poem holds for us is two-fold. First of all, Eliot has drawn a startlingly real picture of the confusion and frustration which is characteristic of contemporary society. It is as if he is trying to shake the world out of its complacence. We do not resent his realistic attack; for, almost instinctively, we know that he is right. Secondly, the poem furnishes us with tangible evidence of a phase in Eliot's growth as a poet. We see it as a necessary station on the main line of Eliot's journey into the waste land. For that reason, the two poems are treated together here.

The very title of the earlier poem, The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock, at once catches the eye of the reader and makes him wonder why Eliot has called it a love song. As he reads he sees that there is some irony involved in that title, for Prufrock's song is one that will never be sung outside the bounds of his own mind. A clue to that same irony is found in the introductory lines which are taken from Dante's Inferno. In translation they read as follows:

> If I thought my answer were to one who ever could return to the world, this flame should shake no more; but since, if what I hear be true, none ever did return alive from this depth, without fear of infamy I answer thee.[1]

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1. Translation from Louis Untermeyer, ed., Modern American Poetry, Modern British Poetry, p. 393.

This quotation from Dante along with the opening stanza of the poem seem to establish Prufrock's mood of sick helplessness. Eliot says

> Let us go then, you and I,
> When the evening is spread out against the sky
> Like a patient etherized upon a table;[2]

The simile there, no doubt, might seem contrived, but it serves its purpose; for the reader immediately associates helplessness, and certainly sickness with the patient etherized upon a table. The mood is further emphasized by the series of images which follow. Eliot speaks of "restless nights in one-night cheap hotels," of "sawdust restaurants with oyster-shells," and "streets that follow like a tedious argument of insidious intent." Through this series of images, Eliot creates for us an impression of sordidness and loneliness. Hence the reader, if he uses his imagination, is able to sense the kind of civilization about which Eliot is writing.

The refrain which follows the first stanza:

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

gives some indication as to the type of gathering at which Prufrock is present--perhaps an art soirée. The very rhythm of those lines seems almost flippant. Perhaps Eliot is hinting at the type of superficiality we shall find surrounding Prufrock.

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2. The text used for this poem, The Waste Land, and Ash-Wednesday is Collected Poems of T. S. Eliot, 1909-1935, New York, N. Y., Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1936.

In the following stanza the very atmosphere seems to be closing in on Prufrock. Eliot employs the metaphor of the yellow-fog cat to communicate the sulfurous, choking, creeping atmosphere of Prufrock's spiritual pollution. Here one is momentarily reminded of Sandburg's cat-like fog.

Now Eliot brings us face to face with the fact that Prufrock is not a man of action. The truth is that he is too deep in the mire of convention to be actively employed. All he has on his hands is time.

> There will be time, there will be time
> To prepare a face to meet the faces that you meet;

Here Prufrock betrays the mask of artificiality worn in the society in which he moves. But still toying with the idea of time, he insinuates that all he has to look forward to is a series of indecisions punctuated by "the taking of a toast and tea." Prufrock sees his future loom up before him,

> with a bald spot in the middle of my hair--
> (They will say: "How his hair is growing thin!")
> My morning coat, my collar mounting firmly to the chin,
> My neektie rich and modest, but asserted by a simple pin--
> (They will say: "But how his arms and legs are thin!")

and it is not a pretty picture. The real tragedy here, however, is not what is happening or what is going to happen, but the fact that Prufrock sees his predicament all too clearly, and yet cannot bring himself to do anything about it; for he is not a man of action. Added to that, he is a victim of his own stifled emotions.

The stanza which follows contains one of the most pitiful, and yet one of the most effective lines in the whole poem. Prufrock says,

I have measured out my life with coffee spoons;

When one thinks of measuring out one's life with a tiny little coffee spoon, he realizes it would be an almost interminable process. And that is what Prufrock's life has been. One sees the coffee spoons, perhaps, as a symbol of the parties, the art gatherings at which Prufrock has spent his time talking small talk to falsely sophisticated people who dabble with only a superficial knowledge in matters of art.

The writer might comment here that this line just quoted is one of the most often cited examples of Eliot's "objective correlative."[3]

Now in the lines,

> And I have known the eyes already, known them all--
> the eyes that fix you in a formulated phrase,
> And when I am formulated, sprawling on a pin,
> When I am pinned and wriggling on the wall,
> Then how should I begin...

we begin to sense Prufrock's dread of being put on the spot. He does not want to talk about himself. The fact is that he does not quite know how to begin "to spit out all the butt-ends" of his days and ways.

Not only is Prufrock unable to talk about himself, but he is also incapable of any passionate display. The

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3. See Chapter I, p. 10.

white, bare, bracelated arms that he speaks of will caress him only in his own day-dreams--never in reality. His emotions have become so stifled that he does not know how to begin to make love to a woman; or how to tell her of the loneliness he has felt as he has "gone at dusk through narrow streets/ And watched the smoke that rises from the pipes/ Of lonely men in shirt-sleeves, leaning out of windows..." The lonely, helpless feeling that the poet has expressed here is, no doubt, symbolic of the loneliness, the helplessness that envelops the world.

In the lines which follow,

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

Prufrock reveals a longing for a simple, uncomplicated animal existence. But why does he choose the crab? Perhaps because the crab, like Prufrock, is incapable of movement in a straight-forward direction. Prufrock wishes to be relieved from human problems. He does not want to be bothered with the future, for as he says,

> I have seen the moment of my greatness flicker,
> And I have seen the eternal Footman hold my coat,
> and snicker,
> And in short, I was afraid.

It may be that the reader will wonder why Eliot has used the word "claws" instead of "crab." This is simply another example of Eliot's tendency to intimate rather than to state plainly what he means. It is all a part of his method, and it is necessary that we accept it as such.

Now Prufrock begins to rationalize. What is the use of telling anyone anything, he asks himself, for they would never understand. And indeed, if the society in which Prufrock moves is anything like what Eliot has led us to believe, we can readily understand Prufrock's attitude. And besides, Prufrock says,

> It is impossible to say just what I mean!

In the stanza which begins

> No! I am not Prince Hamlet, nor was meant to be;

Prufrock furnishes us with a short character sketch of himself. More important, however, he reveals to us that he has a very real knowledge of his own shortcomings. If we have not before felt a deep sense of pity for Prufrock, we feel it now. For it is one thing to be caught up in such a frustrated society, but to realize the inanity of it all as Prufrock does is worse. He is tortured by his own weaknesses. Indeed, it would be better for him if he did not know them at all, for he is beyond rising to any action.

In the last two stanzas of the poem, Eliot employs the sea as a symbol of creation and destruction. In the next to the last stanza, Prufrock reports that he has seen the mermaids riding on the waves, enjoying their natural environment. We know instinctively that that is the type of existence that he longs for. For him, however, there are only the

chambers of the sea where he lingers

Till human voices wake us, and we drown.

Here the voices wake us not from peaceful slumber, but from dreams, imagination; and we drown, not in a sea of forgetfulness or relief, but in a sea of reality. In that line we recognize the sea as a destructive element. This does not come as a shock to us, or it should not; for is not that what Prufrock has been preparing himself for? And is not that what Eliot has prepared his readers for? Eliot does not deal in happy endings, but with life and stark reality.

In Prufrock Eliot has examined the symptoms which accompany the sick helplessness which has overcome society. He has not, however, revealed the cause. That he leaves for <u>The Waste Land</u>. There he brings us face to face with the horrible truth about man's spiritual decadence, his utter loss of a meaning for living. There in the dry, barrenness of a waste land, life has become futile, purposeless. Man operates in each the hum-drum fashion of a machine, for there is no soul-force present to elevate his thoughts, his actions. He is motivated by sensual desires. The very life cycle has been upset, for through his loss of spiritual values, man has lost his capacity for genuine love. It has been replaced by a kind of sterile lust which leads nowhere, for the sexual act has become an end in itself.

Eliot has taken the title and the basic structure upon which he has hung The Waste Land from Miss Jessie L. Weston's book on the Grail legend: From Ritual to Romance. The story goes back to the Fisher King who ruled over the Waste Land. He was wounded in the genital organs; therefore the land was to remain barren until the pure knight should come along and heal the Fisher King, thus redeeming the barren land. Eliot tells us that not only is he indebted to Miss Weston for the title and the basic structure of the poem, but also for much of the incidental symbolism that he employs.

Before attempting an analysis of The Waste Land, perhaps it would help the reader to a better understanding of the poem if the writer made more explicit Eliot's method of "telescoping" time and space. Through his sometimes seemingly disconnected allusions to mythological, literary, and factual incidents out of the past, the poet is enabled to cover a tremendous amount of ground, and at the same time, to conserve space and words. Of course, he relies on the reader's ability to relate the allusion or the reference to the material at hand. In so doing, he assumes that the reader's knowledge is on a level with his own. It goes without saying that this is not often true, and it is this element in Eliot's poetry that contributes to his reader's difficulty. However, furnished with some aid, the reader comes to appreciate this ability of Eliot to say so much and to cover so much ground in so few words. He, perhaps, may even come to recognize it as the stroke of genius that it is.

The first section of the poem, "The Burial of the Dead," conveys to the reader the dryness, the desolation of the waste land and the seemingly hopeless plight of its people. In the first line of the poem, the poet has called April the "cruellest month," and, indeed, it is a cruel month for those who inhabit the waste land, for there they experience no regeneration of life. There are only memories of lilacs and spring rain to ease for them the reality of dry, barren land. There are reminiscences, too, of summer in central Europe, which constitute some of the few pleasant lines in the poem.

> Summer surprised us, coming over the Starnbergersee
> With a shower of rain; we stopped in the colonnade,
> And went on in sunlight, into the Hofgarten,
> And drank coffee, and talked for an hour.

These lines, however, stand as a contrast against those of the following stanza,

> ,where the sun beats,
> And the dead tree gives no shelter, the cricket no relief
> And the dry stone no sound of water.

This dry stone, this red rock we may associate with a place of refuge, but why Eliot has made it red is not clear. Perhaps it was an attempt at alliteration. Then again it may have suggested heat to him.

The little German song which follows is the sailor's song from Act I of Wagner's Tristan und Isolde. To those who are familiar with the story, it brings to mind a legend of romance and unlawful passion which led to treachery and death.

The images of the hyacinths and the hair found in the next stanza have, since ancient times, stood as symbols of fertility.[4] Eliot has employed them as such here, but they really serve to emphasize the failure of desire in the waste land.

> --Yet when we came back, late from the Hyacinth garden,
> Your arms full, and your hair wet, I could not
> Speak, and my eyes failed, I was neither
> Living nor dead, and I know nothing,
> Looking into the heart of light, the silence.
> Öd' und leer das Meer.

The last line is from the last act of Wagner's Tristan and Isolde, and in translation reads, "Waste and empty is the sea." Thus the sterility of the waste land and its people is further emphasized, for even the sea, the element from which all life sprang, is waste and empty. The reader might note here the strategic placing of the experience in the garden between the two references from Wagner's opera. The sailor's song which preceded the passage was a happy song, for the tragedy had not then occurred. The words of the second reference are spoken as Tristan lies dying. Hence they come to symbolize for us here, as in the opera, waste and death.

The Madam Sosostris episode which follows is, for the reader, a valuable addition to the poem. First of all,

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4. Cleanth Brooks, "The Waste Land: An Analysis," in T. S. Eliot: A Study of His Writings by Several Hands, edited by B. Rajan, p. 27.

we are made to feel the emptiness in relying on the fake clairvoyante to see the future. To feel the need to place one's faith in some one or some thing is only human. Those in the waste land, having no one else to turn to, rely on the wisdom of Madam Sosostris, which, like her voice is muffled; for hers is a lost art. She is a fake, and practices in dread fear of the law. Despite the fact that she is unable to see the real implications behind the figures on the Tarot cards, she does serve a purpose here; for she introduces to us some of the main characters of the drama. They are best identified by Eliot himself in his notes to the poem:

> I am not familiar with the exact constitution of the Tarot pack of cards, from which I have obviously departed to suit my own convenience. The Hanged Man, a member of the traditional pack, fits my purpose in two ways; because he is associated in my mind with the Hanged God of Frazer, and because I associate him with the hooded figure in the passage of the disciples to Emmaus in Part V. The Phoenician Sailor and the Merchant appear later; also the "crowds of people," and Death by Water is executed in Part IV. The Man with Three Staves (an authentic member of the Tarot pack) I associate, quite arbitrarily, with the Fisher King himself.[5]

In the last stanza of this section, the poet describes London, which has been called "the capital city of civilization," as a waste land; thereby bringing the situation closer home to us. He describes the "unreal city" as "Under the brown fog of a winter dawn," and taking a line from Dante's

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5. Text of Eliot's notes to The Waste Land found in Untermeyer, op. cit., pp. 411-414.

Inferno he says, "I had not thought death had undone so many." He refers to the living death of the waste land where

> Sighs, short and infrequent, were exhaled,
> And each man fixed his eyes before his feet.

Stetson, the man who is stopped on the street, stands as a symbol for man in general. Eliot's choice of the name "Stetson" we may attribute to the connotation the word holds for us. Have we not come to associate it with clothing (mercantilism)? The corpse Stetson is asked about is, no doubt, a reference to the myth of Osiris, the corn god, who gave his own body to the fertilization of the soil that his people might be saved. The allusion to the Dog here has been taken by some critics as standing for a symbol of humanitarianism. Others have heralded it as a reference to the dog star which, in ancient Egypt, was believed to foretell the floods. Whether or not we know exactly what Eliot intended here is of no great consequence. There are many places in the poem where we are not at all sure of a symbol or an allusion, but that does not spoil the impression of the whole: for while sometimes he may fail in the communication of an idea, he seldom fails in the communication of a feeling, the emotional equivalent of the idea.

The last line of this section, which comes directly from Baudelaire,

You! hypocrite lecteur!--mon semblable,--mon frère!

seems to connect the reader with the stupidity and sin present in the waste land. In the first part of the stanza, the waste land was identified with London, but now it is identified with the reader himself. Thus this first section of the poem is ended on a note of immediacy.

In the second section of the poem, "A Game of Chess," the poet, through two dramatic dialogues, illustrates to the reader the fruitless relationship which exists between men and women in the waste land. The opening scene, reminiscent of Shakespeare's Antony and Cleopatra, reveals to us the richness of the surroundings. Hence, we are led to believe that the characters of this first dialogue are members of an upper class. However, as we read, we see that the sickness which prevails in the waste land has no respect for class or station. It has afflicted both high and low in the same manner.

The writer might point out here the effectiveness of the suggestion of the Antony and Cleopatra scene. Eliot has employed the device which he champions in his essay, "Tradition and the Individual Talent."[6] He believes that by making literary allusions to the past, the poet enables himself to

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6. T. S. Eliot, Selected Essays, "Tradition and the Individual Talent," pp. 6-11.

intensify feelings and emotions in the present. This transfer of emotion, he believes, keeps the emotion of the poetry impersonal, which is as it should be; for our interest should be centered in the poetry, not in the poet.

The reference to the "sylvan scene" echoes Milton's Paradise Lost. The violation of Philomel by the "barbarous king" and her transformation into a nightingale is a statement of Eliot's metamorphosis theme, which is later repeated in the fourth section in the drowning of the Phoenician sailor. This theme is hinted at in Section One in the words of Madame Sosostris when we recognize in her words echoes from Shakespeare's The Tempest.

> Here, said she,
> Is your card, the drowned Phoenician Sailor,
> (Those are pearls that were his eyes. Look!)

The conversation between the man and woman here is dry, lifeless, dull, leading nowhere, just as their relationship will lead nowhere. The woman's desperate questioning

> What shall I do now? What shall I do?
> I shall rush out as I am, and walk the street
> With my hair down, so. What shall we do tomorrow?
> What shall we ever do?

emphasizes the lack of activity in the waste land. Nothing is done with a purpose. The afternoon ride, the game of chess are nothing more than means of passing away the time that hangs too heavily upon them. The man's attitude towards the

woman is made clear in the passage where the woman registers fear. He makes no attempt to reassure her or to quiet those fears. Rather he summarizes realistically the degradation into which the two of them have fallen:

> I think we are in rats' alley
> Where the dead men lost their bones.

In his reference to the "game of chess" in this section, Eliot tells us in his notes that he had in mind Middleton's Women Beware Women. The game of chess there was used as a blind while the duke seduced a lady. The seduction was described in terms of plays on the board. Here the reader may be again reminded of the violation of Philomel.

The whole passage just referred to serves to illustrate the utter lack of interest on the part of the man and the woman in their situation and surroundings. The game of chess they play seems to symbolize the limitations of their activity. Even their interest in the game is passive, however. It serves only to bridge the gap to death.

The other dialogue in this section takes place between two lower-class women in a London pub. Eliot emphasizes the matter-of-fact way in which society has come to accept the violation of the life cycle through the conversation of these two women. In the same tone that they speak of a set of new false teeth, they speak of abortion. The

fruitless union of man and woman is further emphasized when one of the women inquires of the other

What you get married for if you don't want children?

The pub-keeper, impatient to close up, interrupts the conversation four times with

HURRY UP PLEASE ITS TIME

Perhaps Eliot, in the words of the pub-keeper, is communicating to the reader his own impatience with those who rot away by their own inactivity into this dead life of a waste land. Perhaps he thinks it is high time they took some course of action and moved on. This, however, is only supposition. One cannot be quite sure what Eliot meant to convey in the words of the impatient pub-keeper.

The third section of the poem, "The Fire Sermon," takes its title from the fire sermon of Buddha, and illustrates in its several scenes examples of the sterile burning of lust.

The river scene in the opening stanza is reminiscent of a happier river scene in Spenser's Prothalamion. The river, however, has degenerated just as has everything else in the waste land. It has become littered and dirty, and anything but a symbol of fertility, for around it lie

White bodies naked on the low damp ground...

and rats creep "softly through the vegetation." In the background is heard the sound of a horn, heralding Sweeney's approach to Mrs. Porter--a far cry from Day's Parliament of Bees where

> when of the sudden; listening, you shall hear,
> A noise of horne and hunting, which shall bring
> Actaeon to Diana in the spring,

The vulgarity of the relationship between Sweeney and Mrs. Porter is communicated to us through the lines which Eliot has parodied from an Australian ballad:

> Oh the moon shone bright on Mrs. Porter
> And on her daughter
> They wash their feet in soda water...

In the lines which follow, we are again reminded of the violation of Philomel by Tereus, but the song is not the lovely song of a nightingale. It is heard as "jug, jug" by "dirty ears." Aside from the fact that the song of the nightingale has degenerated to "jug, jug" to "dirty ears," the writer might point out here that in Elizabethan poetry "jug, jug" was the conventional way to denote the bird's song.

In the invitation of Mr. Eugenides, the Smyrna merchant,

> To luncheon at the Cannon Street Hotel
> Followed by a weekend at the Metropole

we recognize what must be a hint at the perversion of sex.

At this point we are introduced to Tiresias. His importance is emphasized by Eliot himself in his notes.

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

Eliot has chosen for us to see the episode here through the eyes of Tiresias because, though blind, Tiresias is associated with Ovid's Metamorphoses III in the role of a prophet; and, too, he has experienced life as both male and female. So it is through Tiresias that we see the episode of the typist and the "young man carbuncular" unfold before us. The episode itself is just another example of sterile lust, of complete indifference to chastity. The girl, while she does not respond enthusiastically to the young man's caresses, does not attempt to defend herself from them. Her attitude is one of indifference, but then

> His vanity requires no response,

She is, if anything, relieved at his departure. Eliot employs a clincher to his ruminations here with a line from Goldsmith:

> When lovely woman stoops to folly and
> Paces about her room again, alone,
> She smoothes her hair with automatic hand,
> And puts a record on the gramophone.

The experience has meant nothing to her. Indeed, the love experience in the waste land has degenerated into an empty thing, for it is totally lacking in the element of idealism.

There is another suggestion of a love affair of the past in the reference to Elizabeth and Leicester. The reference is based on factual material as recorded by Eliot in his notes to the poem.

The song of the three Thames-daughters, a striking parallel to the song of the Rhine-daughters of Götterdämmerung, quoted before and after the Elizabeth and Leicester episode, is now heard. The three maidens now speak by turns, and seem to be attempting to link their loss of chastity with the unhealthy surroundings of the waste land. They, perhaps, see themselves as victims of circumstance. Is this not a typical attitude of all those enmeshed in the sordid tragedy of the waste land?

Eliot has used the line

To Carthage then I came

to call to the reader's mind that passage from St. Augustine's Confessions: "to Carthage then I came, where a cauldron of unholy loves sang all about mine ears."

This seems to serve as a transition to the next lines which are taken from Buddha's Fire Sermon:

Burning burning burning burning
O Lord Thou pluckest me out
O Lord Thou Pluckest

burning

Here the fire has ceased to be a symbol of burning lust, and, through the words of Buddha, has become a cleansing agent. Thus the poet brings "The Fire Sermon" to an end.

The very short fourth section, "Death by Water," represents a release from what one might call the man-made misery of this world. The Phoenician Sailor's drowning is a drowning into forgetfulness. Here we might be reminded, for a minute, of Prufrock's longing for an uncomplicated animal existence, where he would no longer feel the need of wrestling with human problems. The passage also serves as a relief to the reader, who, in the first section of the poem was identified with the action in the waste land. Whether or not Eliot intended this section as a means of relief to the reader is not known, but it seems to serve such a purpose. The very movement, rhythm of the lines seems to suggest sleep, forgetfulness.

Phlebas, the drowned Phoenician Sailor and the one-eyed merchant, seller of currants seem to melt into one here, as Eliot has said they do.[7] This is perhaps accomplished by the poet's clever use of the word "current," and by his reference to "profit and loss" in the first stanza.

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7. See Eliot's note as quoted on p. 53 of this chapter.

In the second stanza the metamorphosis theme reappears, perhaps suggesting rebirth in baptism, and the symbol of the whirlpool appears suggesting eternity.

The last stanza of the fourth section, which is addressed to both Gentile and Jew, contains the symbol of the wheel which is perhaps symbolic of fortune, or even synonymous with the whirlpool symbol of the preceding stanza.

In the first part of the fifth section, "What The Thunder Said," Eliot tells us that he has employed three themes: the journey to Emmaus, the approach to the Chapel Perilous and the present decay of eastern Europe. The waste land here has, if anything, become dryer, more barren, more parched. The travelers, overcome with a great thirst, wish for even the sound of water; but, instead, there comes to their ears only the sound of the "dry, sterile thunder."

The reference to the hooded figure perhaps requires clarification here. The reader will perhaps recall Eliot's one reference to it in the notes to the first section.[8] In his notes to this last section he says the lines

> . . . . were stimulated by the account of one of the Antarctic expeditions (I forget which, but I think one of the Shackleton's; it was related that the party of explorers, at the extremity of their strength, had the constant delusion that there was one more member than could actually be counted.

The passage beginning with the allusion to the woman fiddling whisper music on her long black hair seems to point

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8. See page 46

towards a climax. At least that is the general impression left with the reader, for it is a noisy stanza, filled with action. The hair apparently has some significance here. Since ancient times it has stood as a symbol of fertility. Perhaps Eliot is pointing towards some sort of rebirth that is to take place.

In the next stanza, the chapel is reached, but it is an empty chapel,

> only the wind's home.
> It has no windows, and the door swings,
> Dry bones can harm no one.

For a minute the reader wonders if this too is not as unreal as everything else in the waste land, but just then the cock crows, and there is a flash of lightning and a damp gust which heralds rain. The poet passes on to the message of the thunder, "Datta, dayadhvam, damyata," which in translation reads "Give, sympathize, control." Eliot tells us that he found the fable of the meaning of the thunder in one of the Upanishads. Under the surface, the reader will, no doubt, recognize the thunder as the voice of the Almighty, giving instruction to the lost ones in the waste land. Here we see clearly that, for them, there is no middle way out. In the words of the thunder they have been given a key, but it is left to them to unlock the door to their own salvation.

In the final stanza of the poem, we are presented with a picture of the Fisher King, sitting upon the shore fishing, with the arid plain behind him. The fish symbol, also since ancient times, a symbol of fertility, gives a note of hope. We also might read some significance into the fact that the arid plain is <u>behind</u> the Fisher King. And even in the midst of all the chaos of the waste land, emphasized by the nursery rhyme line,

> London Bridge is falling down falling down falling down,

he thinks of setting his land in order.

The fragments which he has shored against his ruin follow. They are taken from Dante's <u>Purgatorio</u>, "Pervigilium Veneris," a medieval poem of uncertain authorship, and Gerard de Nerval's sonnet, "El Desdichado" ("The Unfortunate One") respectively. They are echoes of those in literary history who have been faced with much the same uncertain fate as the Fisher King. And since misery does love company, he finds comfort in their memory.

In the line,

> Why then Ile fit you. Hieronymo's mad again.

the poet intended to call to the reader's mind <u>the Spanish tragedy</u> of Kyd, where Hieronymo "fixed" the lines and action

of a play that he might avenge the death of his son, and then bit off his tongue to avoid confessing. Kimon Friar, in his notes to this passage, says that this is a reference "to the role of the poet who in The Waste Land must apply himself to 'fruitless poetry,' whose tongue is symbolically severed, for works of art today are but 'stumps of time'." He calls both the poet's wit and grief here ironic.[9]

"Shantih," repeated as a formal ending to an Upanishad, is, quite appropriately, repeated three times in the last line of the poem. Our equivalent to this word is "The peace which passeth understanding." Thus the miserable ones of the waste land are left in peace and with at least a hope for salvation if not salvation. Of that we should not despair, for have not more things than we have dreamed of been built of hope?

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9. Kimon Friar and John Malcolm Brinnin, ed., Modern Poetry, p. 497.

## CHAPTER V

## THE WORD AND THE WAY

In Ash-Wednesday,[1] the poet has clearly reached a climax in his philosophy. He seems to have reached a dead end in reason and doubt, and he can proceed no further under his own power. And just as there comes a time in the life of every deep-thinking man when he realizes that there is a power beyond the power of little man, so Eliot is faced with that realization, and thus becomes humble in submission.

A clue to the theme and content of the poem is found in the title itself. Ash-Wednesday, the first day of Lent, signifies a day of penance, a time when one thinks on the passion of Christ in penitence and humility.

In the first line of the poem, the poet tells us that he does not wish to turn again, and, indeed, we understand that he would not want to experience again the hellish horrors of the waste land--even in memory. This first line is almost a literal translation of the first line of a ballata by Guido Cavalcanti.[2]

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1. Text of Ash-Wednesday found in Collected Poems of T. S. Eliot, 1909-1935, New York, Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1936.

2. Leonard Unger, "Ash-Wednesday," T. S. Eliot: A Selected Critique, edited by Leonard Unger, p. 351.

In translation it begins:

> Because I think not ever to return
> Ballad, to Tuscany,--
> Go therefore thou for me
> Straight to my lady's face,
> Who, of her noble grace,
> Shall show thee courtesy.

This quotation is significant beyond the fact that Eliot has employed the first line in Ash-Wednesday. Indeed, the poet's reference to the "noble grace" of the lady links nicely with Eliot's attitude and reference to the lady in his poem, as the reader will soon see. In the lines beginning with a line reminiscent of a Shakespearian sonnet,

> Desiring this man 's gift and that man's scope
> I no longer strive to strive towards such things
> (why should the aged eagle stretch its wings?)
> Why should I mourn
> The vanished power of the usual reign?

we see clearly that the poet does not mourn the fact that he has realized the limitations of his power. His attitude is one of acceptance, for, as he says,"Why should the aged eagle stretch its wings?" The critics have thoroughly exhausted that line. They see it as highly comical that Eliot should, at the age of forty (the poem was published in 1930), see himself as an aged eagle. This writer prefers to think that the poet referred to his intellectual maturity, which, at forty, was well aged. He knew that he had proceeded as far as he might under his own power. He was unable to stretch his wings any further, and with a kind of mystical wisdom, turned to faith.

The poet beseeches God to have mercy, and prays that

he might forget those things which hang too heavily upon him. He says that he knows what has been done cannot be undone, but

> May the judgment not be too heavy upon us

There is another reference to wings that "beat the air," and it is here that we become increasingly sure that Eliot referred to his intellectual rather than his physical maturity in the first stanza. The poet's wings of thought no longer soar, but beat the dry air.

In the last two lines of the first section the poet resorts to prayer:

> Pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death
> Pray for us now and at the hour of our death.

Thus the mood of repentance and submission which persists throughout the poem is firmly established.

In the second section of the poem, the poet presents the image of the Lady, who associated with the Virgin, seems to stand as a mediator. It may be interesting to note here Unger's comment on Eliot's conception of the Lady:

> Cavalcanti's line, as it is used in Ash Wednesday, performs much of its original function, for, as we shall note in dealing with later sections, the ideas of devotion to a woman and the religious experience of approaching union with God are held by Eliot in a single conceptual pattern.[3]

The poet seems to beseech the Lady's compassion and to seek her intercession. The three white leopards who sit with the Lady under the juniper-tree are, no doubt, supposed to register some

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3. Ibid., p. 352.

symbolic significance. Critics have been consistently mystified by this passage, and have offered many theories concerning it. That of Elizabeth Drew, however, seems the most plausible. She links the passage of the leopards with the mythological story of the hero who was devoured by the leopard and emerged rejuvenated.[4] Here the poet is undoubtedly hinting at spiritual rejuvenation, and the leopards stand, not as a force of evil, but as a force of good. The poet relates that the leopards have fed

> On my legs my heart my liver and that which had been contained
> In the hollow round of my skull.

But the bones which are left "chirp" of the goodness of the Lady, and of her loveliness. They seem to rejoice in the loss and forgetfulness of flesh. This passage points not towards death, but towards spiritual rebirth, for the bones are "glad to be scattered." "Forgetting themselves," they are "united in the quiet of the desert," and beseech the Lady to "terminate torment." The Lady still does not speak, but her very silence seems to indicate a hope of salvation.

In the very short third section of the poem, the poet has successfully communicated a feeling of struggle, but a feeling of progress too; for though the devil sets all manner of temptation in the way, the shape on the stair, the protagonist, mounts the stair undeterred, and this section of the poem is ended in triumph

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4. Elizabeth Drew, T. S. Eliot: The Design Of His Poetry, p. 107.

and on a note of humility as revealed in the prayer:

> Lord, I am not worthy
> Lord, I am not worthy
>
> but speak the word only.

In the fourth section of the poem, the images seem to be disconnected, as in a dream, and yet, there is a slim thread which tends to unify the whole. Perhaps it is the poet's clever use of the word "between." We have the feeling that he himself is between the time of "sleep and waking" that he speaks of, no doubt a necessary stage in the mysterious process of spiritual rebirth. He has a vision of the Lady standing between the slender yews. The Lady still does not speak, but, rather, utters a sigh, thus giving the first sign of her grace, a token of the Word still unspoken. Hope is not dead, however, for the yews themselves stand as symbols of immortality, and when the Lady sighs, the fountain springs up and the birds sing.

The fifth section of the poem renews the feeling of conflict. One might note here the poet's play on "word" and "Word." Kimon Friar in his notes to Ash-Wednesday has clarified Eliot's intent:

> As in the distinction which Eliot makes between the capitalized "Rose" and the uncapitalized "rose," he here distinguishes between the "Word" which is God Himself and the "word" which is the things of this world which God has created and by which he has made himself manifest and through which we apprehend Him darkly." [5]

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5. Kimon Friar and John Malcolm Brinnin, Modern Poetry, p. 471.

The poet does not doubt the existence of the Word, for he says

> Still is the unspoken word, the Word unheard,
> The Word without a word, the Word within
> The world and for the world;

but he fears for himself and his people that the Word will not be heard. He feels that "the right time and the right place are not here" for those who walk in darkness "among noise and deny the voice." He prays that the "veiled sister" will pray for those "who offend her." In the last lines of this section of the poem, the conflict seems to subside, and this section of the poem ends in triumph in the act of "spitting from the mouth the withered apple-seed." The apple-seed, at once associated with the original sin, is, no doubt, symbolic of the abandonment of things of the sense and the flesh.

The sixth and final section of the poem ends neither in death nor rebirth as one might expect. The poet is still in that twilight between sleep and waking, the "time of tension between dying and birth." The weaker self has earthly dreams of the white sails, the sea, the sandy earth, but the higher spirit prays to the "blessed sister, holy mother" to

> Suffer us not to mock ourselves with falsehood
> Teach us to care and not to care
> Teach us to sit still
> Even among these rocks
> Our peace in His will

And from that knowledge of peace in God's will the poet prays not to be separated. In patience and humility he waits among the

rocks, a temporary refuge until his cry shall be allowed to "come unto Thee." Thus we feel that the poet has found a kind of peace through his discovery of "the way," despite the fact that it has not as yet been opened to him.

Four Quartets,[6] a group of four long poems, follows closely upon the theme of Ash-Wednesday. In fact, it is in the quartets that Mr. Eliot reaffirms his new found convictions as stated in Ash-Wednesday. The structure of Four Quartets, as the name implies, is a musical one. The reader might compare the transitions in the poem to the movements of a quartet or symphony.[7]

In "Burnt Norton," the first of the four Quartets, the reader is at once made conscious of the poet's power of abstraction. "Burnt Norton" takes its title from a Gloucestershire manor near which Eliot had stayed. Perhaps he experienced some moment of illumination there which was closely akin to that experienced in the first movement of the first of the quartets. Perhaps the dust of his memory was disturbed, even as he attempts here to disturb the dust of the reader's memory.

We see clearly that this is the work of a man who has found his way, but he does not attempt to impose his faith or religion upon his reader. After reaching some understanding of the symbols and allusions employed, we can, however, experience

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6. T. S. Eliot, Four Quartets, New York, Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1943.

7. Friar, op. cit., p. 460.

vicariously what it feels like to be the possessor of a strong rock of religious faith--whether we share the poet's beliefs or not.

An understanding of the poet's conception of time is, perhaps, a necessary approach to the understanding of the whole poem. It is the tendency of most to separate time into past, present, and future, but Eliot does not conceive of time in that way. Rather, he sees the three merging into a whole:

> Time present and time past
> Are both perhaps present in time future,
> And time future contained in time past.

They are so interrelated that they cannot be separated, and the reader comes to sense the very timelessness of time, and to accept the fact that time knows no bounds, and cannot be broken up into neat divisions. It is an all-encompassing element which devours action; and both

> What might have been and what has been
> Point to one end, which is always present.

In the poet's allusion to "what might have been," he has hit upon a certain common ground of experience, a point at which each reader is able to relate the poet's ideas and feelings to his own. For have not each of us, at one time or another, been haunted by the possibilities of "what might have been"? Have we too not entered into the rose garden of possibility and viewed life as it might have been behind the door that we did not open?

In the formal pattern of the garden, the poet is, no doubt, reminded of the pattern which life, too, assumes. And as we move in formal pattern in this garden, we look into the pool which is drained and empty, but the sunlight appears, giving the illusion of a pool filled with glittering water, perhaps symbolic of the "what might have been." Then a cloud passes, and we are brought back face to face with reality, for the pool stands empty. And the bird who led us in at the gate says, "Go, go, go," for he knows that "human kind cannot bear very much reality."

In the last lines of this movement, the poet summarizes the experience in the rose garden, for he repeats again that

> Time past and time future
> What might have been and what has been
> Point to one end, which is always present.

The garlic and sapphires passage of the next movement is, perhaps, one of the most puzzling in all of Eliot. However, it begins to clear as one comes to see the axle-tree as representative of life, and the garlic and sapphires as impediments which block its progress, interfere with its pattern.[8] Then we come to see in the lines which follow, that these very impediments are traced as a part of the whole over-all pattern, even as the pattern of the boarhound and the boar (pursuer and pursued) are traced in the constellation of the heavens.

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8. Philip Wheelwright, "Eliot's Philosophical Themes," T. S. Eliot: A Study of His Writings By Several Hands, edited by B. Rajan, p. 100.

The poet's concern with "the still point" here in this movement is of primary importance. We come to view the still point as a moment of illumination, a moment when life ceases to be confusion and takes on meaning and pattern. The pattern is epitomized in the poet's allusion to the dance. He says that

> Except for the point, the still point,
> There would be no dance [pattern], and there is only
> the dance.

This moment of illumination he does not place in time, and describes it as a kind of release from desire, action, and suffering; a time when that which was only understood in part is understood "in the completion of its partial ecstasy, the resolution of its partial horror." However, he says that time allows us but a bit of this "consciousness," and weaves it in with the change that is the natural law of things, thereby

> Protects mankind from heaven and damnation
> Which flesh cannot endure.

The third movement of the poem is a very active, moving portion. There is a suggestion of the unpleasantness of life in the unhappy faces, "empty of meaning," and the "eructation of unhealthy souls" in the London scene. The very absence of a pattern here makes for nice contrast when we think of the pattern which existed in the formality of the garden.

In the lines which follow, the poet is concerned with finding a way of escape from the confusion of this life without pattern. He suggests a withdrawal into solitude, a kind of for-

getfulness of self. This is one way; the other is the same, "not in movement"

> But abstention from movement; while the world moves
> In appetency, on its metalled ways
> Of time past and time future.

In the "metalled ways" of this passage, the poet is, perhaps, alluding to the mechanistic tendency of the times, the waste motion, leading nowhere.[9] Here we do not find the kind of escape we seek. We must look for it beyond the movement and the confusion, which means a kind of detachment from the ordinary ways into which this society has fallen.

In the very short lyric passage of the fourth movement of the poem, we are reminded of the nature element as expressed in the rose garden of the first section. However, the echoes of nature here are in very different terms. Having chosen a withdrawal into the world of darkness and solitude, the poet is faced with certain terror of the unknown. He sees the possibility of disharmony between nature and man.

> Will the sunflower turn to us, will the clematis
> Stray down, bend to us; tendril and spray
> Clutch and cling?
> Chill
> Fingers of yew be curled
> Down on us?

Yet the symbolic implication of the yew is immortality. And the flash of light on the kingfisher's wing is, no doubt, an indication

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9. Drew, op. cit., p. 158.

that the protagonist is allowed a glimpse of what eternity holds.

In the fifth and final movement of "Burnt Norton," the poet has united the elements of time and timelessness, of movement and stillness, and has intimated that they are one and the same, and that they merit a place of equal importance in the over-all pattern. Indeed, their "co-existence" gives meaning to that pattern, and ties ends to beginnings; for as Eliot says,

> Or say that the end precedes the beginnings,
> And the end and the beginning were always there
> Before the beginning and after the end.

Words and notes form the movement or pattern of speech and music. After that the words and the music reach into silence; but the meaning which their movement has conveyed rests sure and constant in a place of stillness. Thus the end has been reached through the medium of the beginning. And the beginning exists because the end was first present. Thus, in the words of Eliot, we come to realize that "the end and the beginning were always there."

From this abstract concern with words, the poet turns to talk of the "word in the desert," more than slightly reminiscent of the reference to the word in Ash-Wednesday. The poet says that the Word

> Is most attacked by voices of temptation,
> The crying shadow in the funeral dance,
> The loud lament of the disconsolate chimera.

The chimera is an imaginary she-monster that vomits flames. She also stands as a symbol of vain or foolish fancy. Her loud laments leave us here with an impression of confusion, pain, and sadness.

In the next measure of this movement, the poet communicates a sense of progression in "the figure of the ten stairs." This is a reference to the conception of St. John of the Cross, concerning the soul's ascent to God.[10] Then in another moment of illumination that comes in the guise of "a shaft of sunlight," the poet attempts to reveal to his reader how

> Ridiculous the waste sad time
> Stretching before and after.

It is only in such rare moments of illumination as these that we can ever come to sense a pattern, or to realize the unimportance and ridiculousness of the element of time.

In "East Coker," the second of the Four Quartets, Eliot is concerned, not with the abstract sequence of time, but with the physical, natural order of things, with progression, rise and fall, birth and death.

East Coker, from which this poem takes its name, is a small village in Somersetshire where Eliot's ancestors lived until their emigration to the coast of New England in the middle of the seventeenth century. Thus the situation which Eliot creates here is somewhat personal, but not outside the bounds of human experience in general.

In the opening passage of this first movement, the poet concerns himself with the cyclical pattern of life in the rise, fall, and decay of a house, for houses live and die even as people.

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10. Frier, op. cit., p. 464.

And in the last lines of this passage there are Biblical echoes in the poet's attempt to specify a time for all the actions and activity of life.

> there is a time for building
> And a time for living and for generation
> And a time for the wind to break the loosened pane
> And to shake the wainscot where the field-mouse trots
> And to shake the tattered arras woven with a silent motto.

In these lines, the poet has succeeded in communicating a sense of progression and orderly arrangement. The "silent motto," which might cause the reader to wonder, has been explained by one critic[11] as a reference to the Eliot motto: "Be silent and act." That this should be an allusion of a personal nature is quite appropriate, since the house and its furnishings are all reminiscent of those of the ancestral Eliot house at East Coker.

The order and arrangement of the first passage of the first movement are not repeated in the second passage. Rather, a haze falls over everything, and nature does not sparkle and glitter as it did in the rose garden. The poet seems to be suspended in a state of inaction, confusion. He glimpses a "deep lane" where once an open field stood. The lane serves as a means of transition here, for in the following passage it becomes again the open field which is the scene of what first appears to be some sort of barbaric ritual.

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11. Drew, *op. cit.*, p. 165.

In the pattern of the dance, the poet, no doubt, sees man and his relation to the pattern and the order of the universe. The rhythm and the harmony of the dance he likens to

> The time of the seasons and the constellations
> The time of milking and the time of harvest
> The time of the coupling of man and woman
> And that of beasts. Feet rising and falling.
> Eating and drinking. Dung and death.

We recognize in this entire passage the poet's insatiable desire for some order out of the chaos of civilization, perhaps the dawn of a new era where all would be harmony and concord between man and nature.

In the very short passage which brings this movement to an end, the poet seems to identify himself with the pattern and the order of the civilization in the preceding passage. For he says,

> I am here
> Or there, or elsewhere. In my beginning.

He sees himself as a part of all that has been, as well as all that is; hence his concern with the historical setting of his beginning.

In the opening passage of the second movement of "East Coker," we are again faced with confusion and discord, which the poet communicates to us in such phrases as "disturbance of the spring," "scorpion fights against the sun," "destructive fire," and the like. Both the heavenly and the earthly bodies seem to be out of tune.

In the next passage, the poet himself seems to be wrestling with the "words and meanings" that he speaks of. He concerns himself with a study of deceit and wisdom and knowledge. In his reference to

> the quick-voiced elders,
> Bequeathing us merely a receipt for deceit?

he, no doubt, refers to what he believed to be the false wisdom of the humanists.[12] For, as we can easily see here, it is his belief that history does not fall into a pattern whereby we can learn from experience. Rather, the world and the people in it are in a constant state of change.

> For the pattern is new in every moment
> And every moment is a new and shocking
> Valuation of all we have been.

It is the poet's conviction that

> The only wisdom we can hope to acquire
> Is the wisdom of humility: humility is endless.

In the last two lines of this movement, the houses and the people fade away as in a dream, and we are prepared to meet the darkness of the third movement.

It is in the third movement that the poet points out that this act of fading away into the darkness is the way that every man must take who seeks God; for, as he says, the very darkness is "the darkness of God." It is a period without hope, without love, "for hope would be hope for the wrong thing,"

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12. James Johnson Sweeney, "East Coker: A Reading," Unger, op. cit., p. 402.

"and love would be love of the wrong thing." "There is yet faith," however, which sustains till the "darkness shall be light," and until some pattern is glimpsed in the stillness.

In the following passage, reminiscent of the moment of illumination in the rose garden, the poet infers that any illumination which man experiences must issue from this darkness, this "agony of death and birth."

In the last section of this movement, the poet emphasizes, through repetition, the necessity of choosing a way that is hard and disciplined in order to arrive at a place of enlightenment. The movement comes to an end in the paradoxical lines:

> And what you do not know is the only thing you know
> And what you own is what you do not own
> And where you are is where you are not.

As in the other three poems of Four Quartets, Eliot has made the fourth movement of "East Coker" a lyrical one. Here, with the aid of the symbols of the "wounded surgeon," "fever chart," "dying nurse," "ruined millionaire," and "roses," the poet has revealed the necessity of spiritual sickness and death in the interest of redemption.

In the first stanza, Eliot sees man in the hands of a compassionate "wounded surgeon," Christ. The reference to the fever chart is, perhaps, a hint at the record of man's spiritual confusion and disease.

However, in the second stanza, the poet says that if we are to be made well and whole again, "our sickness must grow worse." Through the "dying nurse," the church, he points

to the fact that our health can only be restored by a recognition of the disease, the spiritual disorder.

The "ruined millionaire" of the next stanza, who endows the earth-hospital, is none other than Adam. The poet says that if we "do well" in this hospital, we shall die in the assurance of ever-present "paternal care." Here again we are reminded of the grace and compassion of Christ.

The reference to the purgatorial fires does not, as one might expect, point towards destruction, consumption; for the "flame is roses," symbol of love. So we come to see the purgatorial fire here as a means of spiritual union with God himself.

In the final stanza of the fourth movement, the poet touches upon a weak spot in man's make-up, his lack of humility; for he likes to think that he is "substantial flesh and blood." However, Eliot sees some slight leaning on the part of man toward humility in his commemoration of Good Friday. In this, at least, he sees some hope.

In the first section of the last movement of "East Coker," the poet becomes personal again with a piece of self-criticism. He has come to a place where he feels that that which he is able to express no longer needs expressing. Thus he is overcome by a sense of waste

> Because one has only learnt to get the better of words
> For the thing one no longer has to say, or the way in which
> One is no longer disposed to say it.

Each new experience must be wrestled with because there is always present the emotional "mess," the spiritual confusion, the constant change. We can hope to conquer nothing; we can only go on trying; for, after all, the act of trying is the important thing. As the poet says, "the rest is not our business." Here Eliot has turned his own personal experience with words into a kind of wisdom which is equally applicable to the experience of human kind in general.

The last section of the final movement of "East Coker" serves as a summary, pulling together all the ideas of the poem. The poet sees his own struggle as a part of the larger struggle of man since time began. As he says,

> And not the lifetime of one many only
> But of old stones that cannot be deciphered.

He picks up the litany of the first movement,

> There is a time for the evening under starlight,
> A time for the evening under lamp light
> (The evening with the photograph album).

but from these things of the physical world he quickly detaches himself; for he says that we must be still in the world of the flesh if we are to move with intensity in the world of the spirit. The way to that "deeper communion" of the spirit is

> Through the dark cold and empty desolation,

but the poet is steadfast in purpose for he says,

> In my end is my beginning.

He has come to believe that in the end of earthly life lies the beginning of a future life, and on that strong note of faith, "East Coker" comes to an end.

The instrument heard in "The Dry Salvages," the third of the "quartets," is water. In Eliot's note to the poem, he tells us that The Dry Salvages "is a small group of rocks, with a beacon, off the N. E. coast of Cape Ann, Massachusetts."

In the opening line of the first movement, the poet confesses his ignorance of gods; and then he employs the metaphor of the river as "a strong brown god." He traces its usefulness to civilization

> at first recognized as a frontier;
> Useful, trustworthy, as a conveyor of commerce;
> Then only a problem confronting the builder of bridges.

Once the problem was solved, the brown god was forgotten. Here this writer wondered if Eliot did not have in mind modern civilization's attitude towards God. For has it not degenerated to a matter of convenience? Faced with a problem, most men turn to the Deity, but once the problem is solved, He is forgotten, "unhonoured, unpropitiated by worshippers of the machine." In the last lines of this section, we come to see the river as a part of man's natural past, the very source from which he sprang. Hence he cannot disassociate himself from it, for

> His rhythm was present in the nursery bedroom,
> In the rank ailanthus of the April dooryard,
> In the smell of grapes on the autumn table,
> Andthe evening circle in the winter gaslight.

Now the poet turns to an analysis of the great power of water. First, he recognizes it as the source of all earlier creation; then he communicates our sense of helplessness in the face of it; for does it not toss up our losses. In the following lines the poet links the sea and the land.

> The salt is on the briar rose,
> The fog is in the fir trees.

Even the elements of land are not left unmindful of its presence and its power.

In the lines which follow, bringing the first movement to a close, all manner of sea sounds are heard. There are "the whine in the rigging," the noise of the surf breaking on shore, the whistle of the buoy, the "tolling bell." The rhythm of these noises seems to measure out the time, not time as we think of it in relation to all our earthly and insignificant activity, but time in the sense of life pattern and rhythm. The poet has cleverly made these sea sounds into the very symbol of that life rhythm.

> And the ground swell, that is and was from the beginning.
> Clangs
> The bell

of death.

The second movement of the poem opens with a sestina, where Eliot traces the agony and misery of man's life. He sees him as

> In a drifting boat with a slow leakage,

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13. Drew, op. cit., p. 178.

and, indeed, man without some brand of faith is prone to endless drifting, and Death becomes his God. In the last line of the sestina, however, the reference to Mary's prayer at the Annunciation changes the tone of what has gone before; for her prayer points to rebirth, not destruction.

Eliot, in the other section of the movement, pursues the same subject in a philosophic-conversational tone. The poet looks for something permanent in the midst of all the confusion and change. He is reminded of the moment in the rose garden, but he realizes that, while he experienced that moment of illumination, he missed its meaning. And he realizes that any attempt to approach again the meaning would result in the restoring of the experience in a different form. Here he restates his theory of past experience. In it, he traces not just the experience of one life, but of "many generations." In fact, he says that we can come nearer to appreciating the significance of agony in the experience of others than we can in our own, for our agony is covered by currents of action. The agony, however, abides, despite the fact that people change. Time sees to that. Now in the last lines of this movement, he seems to identify his own agony as the ragged rocks in the "restless waters" of time.

The third movement of "The Dry Salvages" has an Oriental flavor; the poet has sought to relate certain Oriental Philosophies

with his own. In this movement, he is still concerned with finding the "meaning"; but instead of seeing man suspended in time in a boat with a slow leakage, he now sees him as a voyager on an ocean liner, as a passenger on a train journey. He sees the time of the journey, the time between the "hither and the farther shore," as a time of faring forward, not faring forward in the terms of knots and miles, but in terms of spiritual enlightenment: for between the shores of a journey, time seems to be withdrawn. One can consider past and future "with an equal mind." To find the "meaning" in spiritual enlightenment, in a withdrawal from time in its ordinary sense, is the real destination of every voyager. Thus the poet, in the words of Krishna, says

Not fare well,

But fare forward voyagers.

The lyrical fourth movement comes in the form of a prayer to the Virgin. It is a prayer for those who are afloat or lost in the waste, and sea of time.

The opening of the final movement of "The Dry Salvages" is reminiscent of the Madame Sosostris episode in The Waste Land. Eliot expresses the futility and ridiculousness involved in man's reliance upon methods of clairvoyance and superstition to see past and future. But he says that these are "usual pastimes,"

And always will be, some of them especially
When there is distress of nations and perplexity

Whether on the shores of Asia, or in the Edgware Road.
Men's curiosity searches past and future
And clings to that dimension.

To be concerned with the point at which time and timeless meet, the poet says, "is an occupation for the saint." He apprehends clearly the "point of intersection," because his whole life is dedicated to "selflessness and self-surrender." For most of us, however, there is only an occasional moment of illumination, which can sometimes be found in nature and sometimes in art. These moments are only hints and guesses of the meaning, the pattern we seek, but they can serve as clues to right action. The freedom from past and present which issues from right action can never be realized, but the fact that we go on trying leaves us undefeated, with at least a vision of the yew-tree, symbol of everlasting life.

"Little Gidding," the last of the quartets, is the fire poem of the lot. It takes its name from an Anglican religious community founded in 1625. Soon afterward, the community broke up, but the ruined chapel was restored in the nineteenth century.[14]

In the beginning of the first movement, the poet seems to be suspended in a false season, "midwinter spring." It is an unreal season, thus this experience which the poet describes seems unreal and illusionary too. He calls it a time "between melting and freezing." We are perhaps reminded of the voyager's

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14. Gardner, "Four Quartets: A Commentary," edited by Rajan, op. cit., p. 72, 73.

time between shores in "The Dry Salvages." Everything is bathed in light, and reflection of light. This recalls the moment in the rose garden, and the flash of light on the kingfisher's wing. Thus we come to recognize this seasonal experience as one of these rare moments of illumination too.

In the passage which follows, the reader is conscious of the fact that a journey is in progress. The purpose of the journey is not sure. In fact, the poet says that the purpose must be "altered" if the journey is to end in fulfillment. The end he calls the "world's end," the leaving off of the temporal, the physical. There are other ways to reach this end,

> at the sea jaws,
> Or over a dark lake, in a desert or a city--

but he says that the way of this journey "is the nearest, in place and time."

It is in the next passage that we are aware of the fact that the way of the journey leads to the chapel at Little Gidding; for the poet says that

> You are here to kneel
> Where prayer has been valid.

The poet makes it plain that the traveler is not here to instruct himself or to satisfy idle curiosity, but "to put off sense and motion," to pray, and to commune with those long since departed from the chapel, who can communicate now what they had no speech for when living. Here again the poet has identified himself and his contemporaries with those of another generation; and in this

communion he recognizes a moment out of time where time and timeless meet.

In the first three stanzas of the second movement, the four life elements, air, earth, fire, and water, which have been used consistently throughout the poem, disintegrate, as does the symbol of the rose. The elements have become elements of destruction, bringing flood and drouth, rotting the "marred foundations" of "sanctuary and choir." The fire and water no longer symbolize the union of the spiritual with the physical, nor rebirth through baptism. Rather, they bring death and destruction. And so it shall always be to those who deny sacrifice and are forgetful of the foundations of spiritual truths. For them, the elements that could mean life bring only death.

In the passage which follows, the poet is on some sort of night patrol, perhaps air raid duty as one critic[15] has suggested. As he walks the dark streets, he comes upon a figure who also walks the darkened ways. Through the conversation of the dialogue which follows, we recognize him as the spirit of some dead poet. The spirit of the dead poet declines to speak in terms of theory. He says his poetry has served its purpose:

> Last season's fruit is eaten
> And the fullfed beast shall kick the empty pail
> For last year's words belong to last year's language
> And next year's words await another voice.

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15. Drew, op. cit., p. 192.

Rather, he imparts some of the wisdom he has found since he left his body "on a distant shore." And so he discloses to the poet what he calls the "gifts reserved for age." It is a promise of disillusion, disenchantment, realization of human folly, and shame. However, he says that there is a possibility that the human spirit might be restored at this point by the "refining fire."

Where you must move in measure, like a dancer.

Action must be plotted, controlled, given meaning through illumination. One must come to sit still in flesh and time, but fare forward in spirit where the time and timeless meet. The day breaks, the spirit of the dead poet fades, and the second movement comes to an end.

In the beginning of the third movement, the poet explores two separate and distinct kinds of love--the love of attachment and the love of detachment. The first is a personal kind of love, revolving around self and people and things; the second is impersonal, unselfish, reaching beyond desire, but no less love. This second type of love brings with it a kind of liberation "from the future as well as the past." At this point, the reader is again reminded of the poet's stand in his essay, "Tradition and the Individual Talent." There, he stated clearly that he did not believe in a slavish adherence to history and the ways of the past, but rather a "consciousness" of the

past. This involves the acquisition of an historical sense, whereby we are enabled to relate the past to the present, indeed, to see it in the present. The reader might recall here the use the poet made of the Anthony and Cleopatra allusion in The Waste Land.[16] Thus we come to have some understanding of what the poet means when he says:

History may be servitude,
History may be freedom.

In the last lines of this stanza, we see the people, the places, and the self vanish. They "become renewed, transfigured, in another pattern"--perhaps the larger pattern of time present, past, and future.

In the passage which follows, the poet accepts sin as necessary. He thinks of the great and not so great figures out of the past, those "not wholly commendable," but some "of peculiar genius"; but he cannot see celebrating them for any single aim for which they fought:

We cannot restore old policies
Or follow an antique drum.

Rather, we are to be concerned with a higher aim of a spiritual nature where the motive and the drive is love. We have been furnished a symbol of that love by all those who have died in the interest of a high cause, and, more important, by Christ himself. Thus

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16. See Chapter IV, p. 48.

All manner of thing shall be well
By the purification of the motive
In the ground of our beseeching.

In the lyrical fourth movement of "Little Gidding," the flame which issues from the dove is symbolic of the discharge of sin in the fires of purgatory. The dove is a symbol of the Holy Spirit.[17] The poet says that this purification by fire is man's only hope. There is, however, one alternative leading to despair. That too is fire, but a fire of destruction, not purification. Both ways mean torment and suffering, but in the fires of purgatory there is the reward of redemption which is a device of love, furnished as an approach to God. Human power cannot remove the torment, but human power can choose, for

We only live, only aspire
Consumed by either fire or fire.

The final movement of the poem restates the old theme of end and beginning, of rebirth in death. The poet then makes an analogy of words in a sentence, and action in life.

Every phrase and every sentence is an end and a beginning,
Every poem an epitaph. And any action
Is a step to the block, to the fire, down the sea's throat
Or to an illegible stone: and that is where we start.

Every step that is taken towards physical death leads but to a new beginning in another life, a life of the spirit. Thus the end is in the beginning.

The poet now reveals again his history "consciousness,"

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17. Drew, op. cit., p. 195.

for he relates the past to the here-and-now. He sees past and present as component parts of a larger pattern, giving to both a meaning that they could never have possessed in isolation; for they are of equal importance.

> The moment of the rose and the moment of the yew-tree
> **Are of equal duration.**

**And**

> **History is now and England.**

In the finale of the poem, the poet communicates a sense of arrival, and in the last lines of the poem, we realize that he has represented an arrival at Christianity, a place where physical and spiritual merge. This merging is communicated to the reader through the symbols of the fire and rose. This is the end of all our exploring, the end of our journey through the agonies of the unknown with only an occasional illumination to spur us on. This is the condition which has cost "not less than everything." But all shall be well now, for the fire and the rose are one.

Thus we begin to hear clearly the pattern of the melody of Four Quartets. But that pattern is only a part of the larger pattern of all the poet's works. Now we can easily trace its outline from The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock to Four Quartets. In Prufrock, the poet recognized the symptoms of a disease, sensed almost intuitively that human kind was sick; in the Waste Land, he examined the cause of the illness, and explored it to its

source; in Ash-Wednesday, he recognized a solution beyond his own human power of doubt and reason, thus turned to faith and surrendered in humility; and finally, in Four Quartets, he accepted the burden of faith which is suffering, but a suffering the end of which is liberation in the union of the spiritual and the physical, arrival at Christianity, man's only hope of salvation, his only means of escape from the torments and agonies of flesh.

# CHAPTER VI

## COCKTAILS AND CHRISTIANITY

In The Cocktail Party,[1] produced in 1950, and T. S. Eliot's first play since The Family Reunion in 1939, verse has, perhaps, come closer to being a natural medium for drama than it has since the days of Shakespeare. Unlike Eliot's two earlier plays, Murder In The Cathedral and The Family Reunion, The Cocktail Party has enjoyed a rather wide popular acclaim. This is somewhat surprising, for the play is not like the run-of-the-mill Broadway hit. Rather it is Eliot at his subtle best, communicating a feeling where he fails to communicate an idea. The key to Eliot's success with this play can, no doubt, be found in his aim as stated, just this year, in his Harvard lecture.[2] He said that in writing The Cocktail Party he attempted to adapt the meter and language of his verse to a contemporary setting. This he has done rather successfully, for, once absorbed in the play, one forgets that the medium is verse rather than prose.

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1. T. S. Eliot, The Cocktail Party, New York, Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1950.

2. T. S. Eliot, "Poetry and Drama," Atlantic Monthly, CLXXXXVII, (February, 1951), 36.

Nor does the verse seem unnecessarily artificial. Indeed, Eliot has communicated shades of feeling and emotions in the play that would never have been so successfully communicated in prose. He has not done this unconsciously, however. In the same Harvard lecture, he said

> It seems to me that beyond the namable, classifiable emotions and motives of our conscious life when directed towards action--the part of life which prose drama is wholly adequate to express--there is a fringe of indefinite extent, of feeling which we can only detect, so to speak, out of the corner of the eye and can never completely focus; of feeling of which we are only aware in a kind of temporary detachment from action.... This peculiar range of sensibility can be expressed by dramatic poetry, at its moments of greatest intensity.[3]

Contrary to the rest of Eliot's poetry, The Cocktail Party is not weighted down with symbols and obscure allusions. True, Eliot claims to have taken his inspiration for the play from Euripides' Alcestis, but even the critics failed to perceive that and remained unconvinced until Eliot himself offered detailed explanation. However, while Eliot does not employ the symbol as such, the play does retain trappings of the Symbolist Method.

One of the effects produced by Symbolism is that of confusion--confusion between the imaginary and the real world. Eliot has successfully achieved that effect in his play. One striking example can be found in the characters of the Uniden-

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3. Ibid., p. 37.

tified Guest and his two cohorts, Julia and Alex. A veil of mystery surrounds the Unidentified Guest from the first, but Julia and Alex seem real enough until we discover their true role. Then a sense of "other worldliness" creeps upon us, and we are not at all sure of their reality. The discovery of their roles is, too, a surprise. This in itself is characteristic of the Symbolist Method, which makes use of the element of surprise.

The plot of the play itself is both tangible and intangible. Anyone can unravel the surface plot, but the difficulty comes in interpreting the implied meanings, the words behind the words, in seeing beyond the cocktails and the sophistication to certain very old and not unchristian truths which lie beneath. Thus Eliot has created the illusion that he is giving expression to some great mystery of life. This he has done by uniting the definiteand the indefinite, another characteristic of the Symbolist Method.

In The Cocktail Party, Eliot has communicated the sense of frustration that is so prevalent in contemporary society. He has stripped human frailty of all its misplaced values, misconceptions. This is actually not so different from what he has done in his other poetry, but in The Cocktail Party he proceeds unaided by historical settings and allusions. He has chosen a typical contemporary setting, a cocktail party, which is a convenient point of departure for the situations and train of events which follow. The revelation, the wisdom, the implied

principles of Christianity which rise to the surface, above the sophisticated patter and chatter, at the cocktail party, would not have been so effective in a more conventional religious setting. There, perhaps, they would have degenerated to mere dogma. Here, whether or not Eliot realized it, he has built an effect upon sharp contrast, another distinguishable characteristic of the Symbolist Method.

Eliot's message in The Cocktail Party is clearly there for those who will find it. It is a message of hope to all of us to make the best of a bad job. Each must work his own salvation, each must find his way out of his own waste land of sin, error, and folly. We must first, however, be motivated and guided by certain christian principles, namely, self-knowledge, unselfishness, suffering, and service.

The reader may wonder why Mr. Eliot has chosen this particular group of intellectuals to convey his "Christian" message in The Cocktail Party. The answer to that can be found in his description of his "Community of Christians" in The Idea of A Christian Society:

> The Community of Christians — a body of very nebulous outline — would contain both clergy and laity of superior intellectual and/or spiritual gifts. And it would include some of those who are ordinarily spoken of, not always with flattering intention, as "intellectuals." [4]

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4. T. S. Eliot, The Idea of A Christian Society, p. 37.

In the outline of the play which follows, the reader will, no doubt, recognize themes already employed by Eliot, enlarged and expanded, brought closer to the level of contemporary understanding. Lavinia, Edward, Celia, and Peter experience the horrors of their own individual waste lands. And each finds his way back through hiw own salvation; and, in Celia's case, through spiritual rebirth. Eliot in Ash-Wednesday saw Christianity as the answer to the world's ills. As was stated before, here in The Cocktail Party each frustrated individual finds his own salvation through adherence to certain very old truths not very far removed from the tenets of Christianity.

The play opens in the drawing room of the Chamberlaynes' London flat, where a cocktail party is in progress. Edward Chamberlayne, in the absence of his wife, seems somewhat at a loss as to what to do with his guests, an odd assortment, to say the least. There are Julia Shuttlethwaite, who appears to be nothing more than a talkative, nosy old woman; Celia Coplestone, a young society girl with an interest in the arts; Alexander MacColgie Gibbs, a man-of-the-world type with "connections"; Peter Quilpe, a young writer, who shares Celia's interest in the arts--the cinema, in particular; and an Unidentified Guest, whom no one seems to know.

Through the drift of conversation, we are led to believe that Lavinia Chamberlayne has been called to the bedside of a sick aunt. However, through Julia's effort to pin Edward

down as to Lavinia's whereabouts, we see clearly that she is somewhat skeptical of his story. And, indeed, we become skeptical, too, for, as Celia says, "There isn't much that Julia doesn't know."

The banter of conversation wears on, and finally the guests leave, and the cocktail party comes to an end. One guest, however, remains, the Unidentified Guest, still unidentified. Edward, through a desire to relieve his mind, pours out his troubles to the stranger. It is here that we learn that Lavinia has left him. The Unidentified Guest puts a few pertinent questions to Edward. Edward tells him that there is neither another woman nor another man involved, and that he wants his wife back. But when the stranger offers a suggestion, Edward is quick to raise an objection. As the Unidentified Guest so aptly put it, all Edward wanted was "the luxury of an intimate disclosure to a stranger." The stranger, however, undaunted, proceeds to sum up the situation. He tells Edward that the truth of the matter is that he suffers a loss of personality away from Lavinia. Edward himself reaches the conclusion that he must get Lavinia back to find out about himself. During the five years of their marriage he has been completely in the dark. He does not really know himself, nor does he know Lavinia. Besides her departure makes him seem ridiculous, and that he cannot stand. But the stranger tells Edward to resign himself to the fool that he is. He says that that is the best advice that he can

give him, for to survive humiliation is an "experience of incalculable value." Then Edward begins to wonder if he really wants Lavinia back, or if it is merely the stranger's suggestion. The Unidentified Guest's reply to that is:

> We do not know yet. In twenty-four hours
> She will come to you here. You will be here to meet her.

Already Edward and the stranger have been interrupted once by Julia, who came back for her umbrella. Now she returns a second time to hunt for her glasses. This time she is accompanied by Peter. The Unidentified Guest greets her with his "One Eyed Riley" song. ( Here the writer was reminded of the one-eyed merchant in The Waste Land who had only one eye to business.) He finishes his song, reminds Edward of their appointment and leaves. Julia departs soon after, but Peter remains. He tells Edward he wants his help. Edward asks him what his trouble is, and Peter replies:: "It's about Celia. Myself and Celia." At this point, they are interrupted by Alex who has returned to concoct for Edward a "toothsome meal." As he putters about in the kitchen the conversation continues. In the words of Edward, Celia has simply "lost interest" in Peter. But Peter says:

> You put it just wrong. I think of it differently.
> It is not her interest in me that I miss--
> But those moments in which we seemed to share some perception,
> Some feeling, some indefinable experience
> In which we were both unaware of ourselves.

Here we are given the first clue to the fact that Celia is perhaps

more of a child of the spirit than she is of the flesh. We are also brought face to face with the fact that Edward is without the ability to dwell on such spiritual planes. As Peter says, he simply does not understand. But Edward agrees to talk with Celia, for Peter says that he can content himself with a memory if he knows "the truth about the past, for the sake of the memory." Peter takes his leave and so does Alex. The curtain falls on the first scene of the first act as Edward makes a telephone call to Miss Celia Coplestone.

The second scene of the first act takes place in the same room just a quarter of an hour later. The doorbell rings, Edward answers it, and we hear Celia's voice. It is in this scene that we discover that Edward has lied to the stranger, for he and Celia have been having a little affair all of their own. Hoever, this is the scene of Celia's disillusionment, for she begins to see Edward for the first time as he really is. Faced with his freedom, he no longer wants her. He says that for the first time he knows what it is to feel old, to have lost the desire for all that is most desirable. Celia begins to realize that the man she had thought Edward to be was only a projection of something that she wanted to exist. Before she leaves, however, they drink a toast "To the Guardians" that Edward has made reference to earlier, and Celia says, "It may be that even Julia is a guardian." And indeed, it may well be that Celia has figured her role out perfectly, for at that very moment Julia is on the other end of the

telephone inquiring about her glasses.

The third scene of Act One takes place on the afternoon of the following day, the day of Lavinia's return. The Unidentified Guest is present, and the same cocktail guests, having received mysterious invitations from Lavinia by telegram, are also present. However, it turns out that Lavinia did not send the telegrams. So upon Lavinia's arrival, the guests decide to depart and leave the couple to themselves. Before they leave, however, Celia and Peter declare their intentions to go away--not together, though. Peter has made connections through Alex, and is going to California to make a film. Celia does not know where she is going.

When Edward and Lavinia are left alone, we soon see that there is not much change in their relationship. The only difference now is that their feelings about each other are out in the open. Each is quite free with a diagnosis of the faults and shortcomings of the other. Edward wishes he might return to the day before, the time before he made the decision that he knows he must stick to. On that note the first act ends.

The second act of the play takes place in the consulting room of a psychiatrist, Sir Henry Harcourt-Reilly, who, as the reader has probably already suspected, is the Unidentified Guest of the cocktail party. During the course of the act, he diagnoses the case of Edward and Lavinia, as well as that of Celia.

To Lavinia, he relates the affair of Edward and Celia, and to Edward's complete surprise, he reveals the affair between Lavinia and Peter. Now Sir Henry begins to point out how much Edward and Lavinia have in common. He diagnoses their case as:

> A man who finds himself incapable of loving
> And a woman who finds that no man can love her.

He tells them that in this knowledge they have a bond that might hold their marriage together. The psychiatrist's last words to them sound very much like words one might find in a church benediction.

> Go in peace. And work out your salvation with diligence.

Here we are perhaps conscious that Reilly's role seems more closely akin to that of a priest or a man of God than that of a psychiatrist.

Celia's case is a bit more involved. It seems that first she suffers from a feeling of solitude, and second from a sense of sin, not sin in the ordinary sense, however. Rather, she feels a sense of emptiness, of failure towards some one, some thing, outside herself. Probably thinking of her relationship to Edward, she tells Sir Henry that she has had a vision of something wonderful, but that she now fears that the vision was as unreal as the relationship. To recapture that vision is her one concern, for she is not willing to settle for the second-rate type of happiness which the psychiatrist sees as one possible solution to her type of problem. He tells her,

however, that the vision she had was, no doubt, real. She had simply looked for it in the wrong place. He prescribes another way to Celia--a way unknown, requiring courage, but that is the path that Celia chooses.

Here we are again reminded that Celia is a rare specimen, possessing a kind of spiritual awareness completely alien to such people as Edward and Lavinia.

It is in this act that we discover that Reilly, Julia, and Alex are all in league, playing the role of what one might call "good angels." There is an intimation, too, that they are beingsquite apart from the rest of us. Recall Julia's conversation with Reilly :

> You and I don't know the process by which the human is
> Transhumanised: what do we know
> Of the kind of suffering they must undergo
> On the way of illumination?

The last lines of this act are again reminiscent of church liturgy. Julia, Alex, and Reilly offer what might be called a prayer, first for Lavinia and Edward, and then for Celia. There is one, however, for whom the words cannot yet be spoken. And that is Peter Quilpe. But, as Alex says, he has connections--even in California.

The third act of the play takes place two years later. Eliot himself has been critical of this last act. He said:

> I am aware that the last act of my play only just escapes, if indeed it does escape, the accusation of being not a last act but an epilogue.[5]

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5. Eliot, loc. cit., p. 37.

And indeed this act does seem to function as an epilogue, for it ties together all the action of the play. One might even say it seeks to justify the action.

The occasion is another cocktail party at the Chamberlyne flat. We see very soon that Lavinia and Edward have made something halfway decent of a bad job. Indeed, they even express concern for each other's feelings. Whether or not the concern is real is not important. It is, however, important that they have at least made an attempt to throw off the cloak of selfishness. Those same guests who were present at that first cocktail party gather early before the other guest arrive. Sir Henry Harcour-Reilly is there to complete the scene. Peter, just in from California, and full of enthusiasm, brings news of his work. Alex, just home from the eastern island of Kinkanja, entertains with the story of the natives and their plight with the monkeys. One just might read satire into that tale. Alex also brings news of Celia. It seems that two years before, she joined a religious nursing order which was dispatched to the island of Kinkanja also, where an epidemic of the plague was rampant. Unwilling to leave the dying natives, she was crucified very near an ant hill when an insurrection broke out among the heathen. At this Peter is completely crushed, for he had it in his mind to give Celia her chance in the films that he says she had always wanted. It was not until he saw himself a success that he allowed himself to think of her, and now his

dreams are shattered. But Julia attempts to show him that his "going on" with his career, in spite of Celia's death, is the consequence of his chosen way, just as Celia's death was the consequence of her choice. Lavinia tells him that he must cease to think of her in relation to himself, and that not until then will he understand her as she really was. Edward leads him to believe that only then will he find out about himself. He tells him that if he begins to find out about himself now, while he is young, it will not be so hard to recover. The validity of the Chamberlaynes' words can, no doubt, be found in their own bitter experience. Perhaps this chance to give a word of advice to Peter is, in some degree, a reward for their own self-made salvation. And they seem to have communicated some meaning of his own predicament to Peter, for when they have finished, he says:

> One thought has been going round and round in my head--
> That I've only been interested in myself:
> And that isn't good enough for Celia.

Julia, however, offers Peter some hope of happiness. She tells him that he must come to look at Celia as he does at people with an eye for the films, and without concern for himself. Then, she says, he will come to understand her and be happy in the thought of her.

Now Lavinia and Edward express their reaction to the news of Celia's death. Reilly is quick to see the impli-

cations in their words. He tells them that because they see her death as waste they blame themselves, and that because they blame themselves they think her life was wasted. He views it, rather, as a triumphant life. He tells Edward and Lavinia that they must learn to live with their memories, must make those memories into something new, for only in their acceptance of the past will they alter its meaning.

Peter, Alex, Julia, and Reilly depart, and Lavinia and Edward are left alone to face their other guests. It is an ordeal which they do not relish, but they realize, too, that it is a part of the burden of their consequence, and that it must be borne. The doorbell rings and Lavinia says, "Oh, I'm glad. It's begun." It is there that we are sure of their triumph.

That parts of The Cocktail Party are mystifying and open to question cannot be denied; but Eliot's message is clearly there for those who will find it. Behind the cocktails and the conversation and sophistication, Eliot has projected a formula for making the best of a bad job, which, he says, is all any of us can do, "except, of course, the saints."[6] He has taken the muddled lives of a few miserable sophisticates and has given them pattern and form and meaning. This he has, no doubt, done consciously, for that is the indication as stated in his aim in dramatic verse:

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6. The Cocktail Party, Act II, line 13, p. 126.

I have before my eyes a kind of mirage of the perfection of verse drama, which would be a design of human action and of words, such as to present at once the two aspects of dramatic and of musical order....To go as far in this direction as it is possible to go, without losing that contact with the ordinary everyday world with which drama must come to terms, seems to me the proper aim of dramatic poetry. For it is ultimately the function of art, in imposing a credible order upon ordinary reality, and thereby eliciting some perception of an order in reality, to bring us to a condition of serenity, stillness and reconciliation. [7]

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7. Eliot, loc. cit., p. 37.

# CONCLUSION

The reader should, by now, recognize T. S. Eliot as a man with a deep sense of awareness of the spiritual weakness and sickness that envelops the world. That same sense of awareness seems to be sharpened by his very real concern for and the identification of himself with all the people of the world along with their individual frailties. Perhaps therein lies the success of his diagnosis; for he has not withdrawn himself from his problem, nor has he assumed a righteous attitude. Rather, he himself has also become immersed in the whirlpool of disorder. He, too, has experienced the dry, barren waste of spiritual drouth, and finally, the sweet relief that issues from the springs of new-found faith and hope.

In the first chapter, the reader has been presented with an introduction to Eliot's method. It was pointed out that the poet never says directly what can be said indirectly. That is all a part of Eliot's subtle art. Where he fails to communicate an idea, he communicates a feeling, the emotional equivalent of that idea. This he has done with the symbol and with the device of the "objective correlative," which, as the reader will recall, was identified as a situation, a group

of objects or a train of events which serve to express an emotion.

In the second chapter, the writer attempted to show the turn that Symbolism has taken since the days of the French Symbolists, and thereby to show Eliot's debt to those poets along with that to the seventeenth century Metaphysical poets. The writer's real concern there, however, was to point out to the reader, not only the poet's indebtednesses, but his originality as well in the transfering of the tone and technique of the poetry of one language to that of another.

The analysis of the poems themselves seemed to the writer to require an introduction. She felt that she must justify her choice. The third chapter served that purpose, for there she was enabled to trace for the reader in the continuity of the poems selected, an outline of the poet's technical and philosophical development.

In the five works presented, the writer has sought to fulfill the promise of continuity in the poems, revealing the poet's technical and philosophical growth. If the reader will stop and consider what has gone before, he will perhaps perceive in the whole what he failed to perceive in part. And that is the way we must come to view the work of Eliot, for there is a thread of continuity that ties together all he wrote. While it is possible to read his works singly with some degree of understanding, one has in store a far richer experience in the relating of one to the other, in the piecing together of

the hints and guesses, in a view of the over-all pattern.

We recognize The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock as the work of a poet with something to say, yet groping for a way to say it. He seemed half in the dark, yet experiencing rare moments of illumination when he was the possessor of an answer which he was unable to present in words. This struggle with words was still of concern to him even in Four Quartets. Through experience he came to see that one found words only for the thing one no longer had to say.

In The Waste Land, the poet plunged deeper into symbol and allusion, and was thereby enabled to cover a tremendous amount of ground; but this he has sometimes done at the cost of the reader's understanding. Like Browning, Eliot assumes that the reader's knowledge and background are on a par with his own. But this is not often true. And indeed, the allusions sometimes become so personal that it is almost an impossibility to reach any understanding of them without some explanation. Hence, the reader must have come to understand that Eliot is not for the mentally lazy. On the other hand, his is a message that none of us can well afford to ignore, for it has an all-too-real bearing on the state of the world now. His concern is contagious to those who are exposed to it. The problem lies in the act of exposing the average reader.

In The Waste Land we were able to note the progress

of the poet's maturity. That maturity, however, we saw coming nearer to fulfillment in Ash- Wednesday and Four Quartets, where his philosophical as well as technical maturity was clearly evident.

The Cocktail Party, somewhat unlike the rest of Eliot's poetry, does, however, retain some of the trappings of Symbolism; for it too is obscure and sometimes communicates a feeling where it fails to communicate an idea. There too Eliot is still concerned with the plight of man in modern society, and does not end on a note of despair, but a note of hope. The play we come to recognize as the work of a man with a sound philosophy built on a solid rock of religious faith and hope. We are not even skeptical of the simple faith and hope theme, for we have seen it issue gradually from the poet's own experience--from Prufrock to The Cocktail Party. We have experienced with him his process of enlightenment, and, perhaps, in a still "moment out of time," it might even make sense to us.

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## APPENDIX

The precipitating forces behind this paper are many, and have extended over a period of approximately three years. A number of people have both consciously and unconsciously aided in the writing of it. The writer refers not only to the professional authorities on Eliot, but also to close friends and strangers, people who have taught her in the classroom, and people with whom she has had only casual conversation.

Her interest in Eliot dates back to her senior year in undergraduate school when she first turned back the cover on Four Quartets. What she saw there was baffling, disturbing, but completely fascinating. She didn't understand it, but it said something to her anyway. She recognized it as the work of one with great intellectual capacity, and she wanted to know more about him and what he was trying to do.

Her native interest was stimulated by a professor for whose literary opinion she had the highest regard. He directed the first light on those baffling pages of Four Quartets. He first made Eliot come alive for her.

During the period of floundering which preceded the actual writing of the paper, the writer, quite by accident, hit upon an idea that at least gave her inspiration for the content of the first chapter. She was in Washington at the

time. She was not in the Library of Congress as might be expected, but in a noisy cafe, which was the only convenient place a friend, who was then on duty at a local radio station, and she could find to talk. Their talk turned to writing, as it always did.

He said, "There's not very much left for anyone to say. It has all been said."

Her reply was, "The newness will have to come in the way one says it."

There was, perhaps, nothing very remarkable in those observations. Many people have thought and said the same things. But she knew she had a beginning--an approach.

During the time which elapsed, many people inquired of her what her thesis subject was to be. Her reply has brought all shades of response, and has furnished no small amount of amusement. She has found that the best way to identify Mr. Eliot is to tell her inquirers that he is the author of The Cocktail Party, a recent hit on Broadway. Even this fails to register with some.

This ignorance of Eliot and the Symbolist method on the part of the average reader was one of the main influences behind this paper. It has furnished the writer with a worthy field of endeavor, which has proved, for her, a rich and enlightening experience.

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# VITA

Jean Katherine Collins, the daughter of Katherine Lambertson and Elwood Brantley Collins, was born June 14, 1928 in Norfolk, Virginia. She attended Cape Charles High School, Cape Charles, Virginia, and received a college preparatory diploma from that institution in May, 1945. She entered Madison College, Harrisonburg, Virginia, in September, 1945 and graduated in June, 1949 with the degree of Bachelor of Arts. She accepted a position as Continuity Writer with Radio Station WLEE, Richmond, Virginia in July, 1949, and worked in that capacity until she resumed her education in the Graduate School of the University of Richmond in February, 1950.