CHAPTER FIVE

THE POET:

I

Eliot wanted that his criticism should be read in relation to his creative writing. He has described it as 'a by-product' of his 'private poetry-workshop', or 'a prolongation of the thinking' that went into the formation of his own verse. Again, with reference to his other writings in prose he has stated that he was trying to examine the possibilities of the ideal. But the constant reminders of the empirical actual released an undertone of disenchantment and produced a cool and sceptical tone. Only in the writing of poems, he can, as he has stated, 'deal with actuality. It is a fact that Eliot's criticism has been enmeshed in a certain cultural situation and has been charged with the forces needed to make that situation creative.' Part of the milieu illuminated and ignited by his criticism is reflected or expressed in his own poetry, and motifs predominant in the criticism find their substantiation in the creative work. There is always a continuous presence of a literary personality capable of creating...
and sustaining a significant process and a meaningful world, Eliot was intensely alive to the problems confronting poetry, and his theories of conscious classical traditionalism and orthodoxy with its implications of artistic discipline, order and objective standards, of personality and sensibility synthesizing disparate experiences of life, and of the purification of the debased 'dialect of the tribe', were some of the answers to the problems of the age.

T.S. Eliot was a poet deeply concerned with the essential nature of modern life, and burdened with a profound and acute apprehension of the difficulties of his age. It is remarkable to note the extraordinary resourcefulness, penetration and stamina with which Eliot's creative mind explores the concrete actualities of modern life below the conceptual currency. Eliot's poetry is based on a discipline of the intelligence and sensibility, which is an education intellectual, emotional and moral, calculated to promote an enhanced consciousness of the problems of his time and endlessly insistent in its effort to reach down to the living reality. The new poetry of the early part of the twentieth
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century expressed the disintegration of the self-
satisfied material progress of nineteenth century
Europe. The Georgians, steeped in the sweet wine
of the 'poetic' and the 'sublime', could not cope
with the new age because of their inherited artistic
complacency combined with a soft and sentimental
attitude to the poet's task, which proved irrelevant
to a time when honest thinkers and serious artists
were forced to consider truth (reality) and self-
discipline more important than pleasant assurances
and indulgence in dreams. Eliot, who took literature
seriously, was intensely aware of the problem. In
1920 he wrote:

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

(Selected Essays, p. 289)

Away from the devitalised poetry of the time,
the new poetry which, according to Maritain, showed
'a fearful progress in self-consciousness,' had to
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enact reality and charge the language with new energy
and new significance, so that it became serious in
purpose, deep in significance and real in relation to
experience. But in England at that time poetry was,
on the whole, what Hopkins described as 'Parnassian',
that is to say a kind of poetry using or repeating old
forms without any fresh content. It was, in a way,
escapist poetry meeting the needs of an escapist society
which did not concern itself with the profound change
giving rise to a new sensibility for the new age.
The attempt of

The Georgian poets, a sadly pedestrian rabble,
flocked along the roads their fathers had built,
pointing out to each other the beauty spots,
and ostentatiously drinking small beer in a
desperate attempt to prove their virility...(1)

to revitalise the failing romantic tradition resulted
in intensified enervation. But, writing of an incomplete
poetic world of 'niceness' and 'not-niceness', excluding
the spiritual significance of the concepts of Good and
Evil, poetry of the time, still based on the romantic
fallacy of the perfectibility of man, was like

... music which we seize
To body forth our own vacuity,

( Eliot : 'Conversation Galante' )

(1) C. Day Lewis : A Hope for Poetry, p. 2.
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In that context the revelation of an emerging new sensibility, or whatever one may call the inner forces or spirituality underlying the texture of man's action and behaviour, was the work and the achievement of T.S. Eliot. Eliot's poetry is based on an exquisitely intimate and personal experience of an existence, at grips with time and place, torn between the highest spiritual vocation and the most trivial reality, obsessed by a self-abnegation impossible to achieve and by a self-concentration impossible to sustain; constantly jarred and shattered by the invading universe of our civilisation. (2)

In his literary criticism he has stated that the modern period must produce 'difficult' poetry because of its nature. He has also suggested that the poets of his age might learn a lot from the Metaphysical poets of England and some of the Symbolist poets of France. In addition to this we have always to bear in mind that Eliot was an American who, starting with an agonizing sense of isolation and of lack of pattern and coherence in the American experience, turned to the European tradition for redemption. Another American, Henry James was

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cconcerned with the American in Europe. But Eliot could not but be concerned with the whole world and all history. He was a modern man who, confronted with the problems of the modern world, felt a twofold disquiet: estrangement and frustration. Eliot was also a modern poet who saw the basic failure of his time, a depressingly evasive age, always unwilling to submit to suffering, and refusing to act or do anything, whether good or evil, which is likely to satisfy man’s eternal spiritual needs. In 1933 he wrote:

A period of revolution is not favourable to art, since it puts pressure upon the poet, both direct and indirect, to make him over-conscious of his beliefs as held.

(Use of Poetry and Use of Criticism, p. 136)

This statement is highly relevant to Eliot’s world in which he tried to be a poet. It was in a world of liberalism and secular humanism, of reason, sentiment and material progress, with the decline of dogmatic and sacramental Christianity in Europe, resulting in the ‘dissociation of sensibility’ that Eliot launched his artistic journey, which was also his spiritual journey. In a fragmented world of whirling atoms, castrated because of the absence of the idea of original sin and of the
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absence of grace, Eliot yearned for order, integration and significance. In 'Thoughts after Lambeth' Eliot wrote that we should think of 'redeeming the time' busy with the 'experiment of attempting to form a civilized but non-Christian mentality'. He himself set about 'redeeming the time' of the 'unstilled world' with his eyes firmly fixed on the 'Still Point'.

Eliot's progress as a writer, particularly as a poet has a mainstream and eddies. It is one of pattern as well as movement; its outline is that of stage-wise achievement and consolidation advancing towards knowledge or a centre of recognition. Each poem represents a step forward or upward, building up on the position already gained in the previous poem. But the 'journey' across the 'desert', or up the 'stairway' to the 'rose garden' is highly precarious and perilous, requiring a constant...

(3) Generally a poet has an image-forming power, and his philosophy or body of ideas can be arrived at by studying the conceptual implications of the structure of his images. Again, poems are not mere statements in disguise but virtual events, and in Eliot's case the characteristic event is the effort of a mind attempting to discover some order within a chaos of hopes, memories, fears, feelings, acute sensuous responses, and speculative abstractions. Eliot's imagery belongs with this context and contributes to the total effect of his poetry by hinting at a synthesising clue in an inner spiritual allegory embodied in a pattern of recurring images. The implications of these images change during the poetic life of Eliot. For example, there is difference between the implications of the imagery of the early poems and that of post-1927 poems. Matthiessen in his The Achievement of T.S. Eliot has commented that the images of Eliot 'release markedly different shades of feeling according to their contexts'. In this connection, 'the unstilled world', 'the turning world', 'the Still point', 'journey', 'desert', 'stairs', and 'rose garden', are images belonging to the complex pattern of Eliot's imagery, and their implications will be explained when the contextual occasions arise.
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renewal of the quest and its conclusions:

We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And to know the place for the first time.

(Four Quartets)

But this search for knowledge or reality as an essential condition of human existence cannot end in decisive findings because 'human kind cannot bear very much reality', and because the enchainment of the dimensions of time and place protect him from heaven as well as damnation.

Now, the distinctive quality of Eliot's poetry which makes him so effective and overwhelming an influence in the context of any mass society organized for profit, for the depression of standards of art and culture, is the enactment of the conditions of religions awareness less obviously Christian in Prufrock and other Observations (1909-15), but emerging more explicitly so through 'Gerontion' (1919) and The Waste Land (1922) and The Hollow Men (1925) till in 'Ash Wednesday' (1927-30) the Church becomes the only means for the discovery of human purpose. Then in the Ariel Poems (1927-32), Coriolan (1931-32) and the Four Quartets (1935-42) he manages to resolve the
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dichotomy of body and soul and thus bring about the union - momentary it may be - of the flux of time with the stillness of eternity. Eliot has conceived, with deliberate care, a world of moral and spiritual values through his subtle use of language, his neat and deliberately constructed phrases, his elaborate and complex pattern of images and metaphors, and his variety of structural organization extending the mystery of language. Eliot's poetry begins and ends not merely in a search for a pattern in the diversity of human experience in the sequential order of history but in recognizing and affirming Christianity as a moral and spiritual force and in the enactment of the moral and spiritual wisdom of Christianity. In his poetry there is a gradual unfolding of Christian awareness, with each new gesture becoming more explicit and expansive than the earlier one, yet always pointing to the same sense of reality of human life, which is clearly defined in moments of intense moral and spiritual struggle depending on spiritual sanctions. This sense of reality - this centre of reference and recognition in the life of man is the subject which dictates the whole complex of Eliot's critical values and utterances, and this is also the subject of his poetic vision.
The early poems of Eliot deal with defeat, frustration and boredom. The problem of reality in the life of man or the problem of man's true significance in life is at the heart of the century's trouble. The attempt to find significance has not be successful, and the poems report the defeat and the resulting frustration and boredom. Commenting upon Arnold in The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism Eliot wrote in 1933:

But the essential advantage for a poet is not to have a beautiful world with which to deal; it is to be able to see beneath both beauty and ugliness; to see the boredom, and the horror, and the glory.

The phrase 'the boredom, and the horror, and the glory' is very revealing because it seems to be a 'Summary of the development of Mr. Eliot's vision of the World'.

The term 'boredom' is the key word for the early poems collected in the first volume, Prufrock and other Observations (1917). They are Laforgian poems with the Laforgian method based on the assumption of an ironic mask.

or attitude, mock-heroic in effect but witty. Indulging
in self-mockery and the deflation of serious feeling, it
expresses a mixed mood, mixed reaction to things and the
discrepancy between appearance and reality.

'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock' (1910-11)
is a poetic monologue of a mysterious indefinable charac-
ter suffering in a hell of defeated idealism and unappea-
sable desires. The epigraph to the poem:

If I believed that my reply would be to someone
who ever could return to the world, this flame
would wag no more. But since none ever did return
alive from this depth, if what I hear be true,
without fear of infamy I answer thee.

read with the epigraph to the whole volume:

Can you understand, then, how much love warms me
towards you when I forgot our vanity, treating
the shadows as a solid thing.

points to the heart of the poem which deals with the
world as a place of shadows in contrast to another, more
real world. Guido, a man condemned to Dante's hell for
his continued attachment to the world and for perverting
human reason with guile is willing to identify himself.

Prufrock is also in hell - the modern hell - and this
makes him sing his song. Prufrock's song is a song of the
soul sung in a world of illusion, suffering and hypocritical
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self-deception. But this illusion implies a reality, and that reality lies behind the shadow-world of illusion, deceit suggested in the epigraphs and the poem.

The poem is a song of love in a world of shadows, of love which itself is a shadow of real love possible only in a world of light. In a world of shadows, then, 'You and I' begin a journey. Here, the subjective 'I', the objective 'You' and the reader, the 'hypocrite lecture, mon semblable, mon frère' of The Waste Land refer to a paradox which can be solved with the help of Bradley by regarding them as components of a unit and a persona drawn together by an insidious invitation. As a matter of fact the subject 'I', the object 'You', the reader, time and space - all are used by the mind as tools for understanding and shaping immediate experience.

Anyhow, the journey has started:

Let us go then, you and I,
When the evening is spread out against the sky
Like a patient etherised upon a table.

The implication is plain: this is a journey like that of Dante, gently guided by Virgil, through Inferno. It is evening, tea-time, but the atmosphere is etherized, with no desire for action. Through the meditated visit
Prufrock tries to escape from the oppressive seclusion of his hell, which is physical, psychological and spiritual, but he cannot escape. His world is a closed one surrounded by various oppositions built up of impotent inferiority, dreary division and inhibiting isolation. The journey, conducted along muttering streets through the squalor of town, tediously but insidiously leads to an 'overwhelming question'. But, because of a psychological and spiritual block the question is not defined, and the 'visit' seems to lead to a room where women 'come and go;/Talking of Michelangelo'—no doubt a trivial talk, but of a sculptor of strength, magnitude and divine power, with whom Prufrock cannot compete. From the prospect of the visit he distracts himself by considering the inertia of the yellow, somnolent and sexy fog, and tries to seek escape through the contemplation of 'time':

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

time to 'murder and create', time to 'drop a question on your plate', time for a hundred indecisions, visions and revisions, time for all sorts of inanities 'before the taking of a toast and tea'. Then, doubt and terrified self-consciousness seize him. An un-heroic or mock-heroic
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Prufrock of wispy frame, but with his 'collar mounting firmly' and a rich and modest tie 'asserted by a simple pin', asks:

Do I dare
Disturb the universe?

This is compounded of fear and desire suggesting the awful separation of potential passion and any actualization possible in life. Floating in a world of shadows and resonant inanities, Prufrock is constantly called back to a world of sunsets, dooryards, sprinkled streets, novels, teacups, cakes, ices and skirts trailing along the floor. Entering that world with an experience of life measured out 'with coffee spoons', voices, eyes and arms fix him with a formulated phrase like an insect 'pinned and wriggling on the wall'. The terrified and dissected Prufrock feels dehumanized:

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

In the midst of this the climax comes with the questions:

And should I then presume?
And how should I begin?

But he has no 'strength to force the moment to a crisis'. He has nothing more than a humiliating but presumptuous obsequiousness:
Shall I say, I have 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.

Inspite of heroic parallels suggested by Michelangelo
and John the Baptist, Prufrock realizes that he is merely
a self-conscious, perplexed, unheroic, inhibited modern man
with the 'eternal Footman' snickering at his inadequacy and
failure. However he tries to rationalize his failure:

Would it have been worth while,
To have bitten off the matter with a smile,
To have squeezed the universe into a ball
To roll it towards some overwhelming question?

Prufrock desires to be Lazarus coming 'from the dead'
to pose the 'Overwhelming question' and reveal the secret
of reality but he is afraid of the failure of communication
and integration: 'It is impossible to say just what I mean!'
He vacillates between visions and revisions, and disclaims
all his pretensions. He cannot even dignify his accidia by
associating it with that of Hamlet, even though there is
something of a Hamlet in his hesitations. There is nothing
Heroic in him: he is merely an attendant, a Fool, 'almost at
times, a Fool'. Prufrock is old, and ineffective: 'I grow
Old, with a few pathetic and futile gestures. Then he goes
down to the seashore where he may, for a while, masquerade
in his dandyish flannel trousers, part his hair to conceal
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his boldness, and eat a peach. But, here again, the mermaids like the lady in the room will not sing to him. He is simply caught in a delusion like the legendary sailors lulled to sleep and dragged down to perish in the sea by the sirens, but he is recalled into the intolerable world by the human voices.

Eliot’s Prufrock is a pathetic figure of a hesitant, inhibited man, an aging dreamer trapped in decayed, but genteel surroundings, aware of beauty and faced with sordidness. He is also a character for whom love is beyond achievement but still within desire. In his transactions with reality his will is paralyzed and his desires cannot be turned into action, and his dreams become snares. In his engagement with life and reality, Prufrock, a shuffling, indirect, evasive and irrelevant person with wincing self-consciousness, reaches out like grasping claws to take life into his embrace, to define the discrepancy between appearance and reality, and to bring about a consummation of the necessary duality of human experience in a singleness, which is a spark of reality. Prufrock’s quest has not ended in success. But Eliot has started a journey: by writing this poem of metaphysical longing and metaphysical fear mixed with erotic desire and erotic defeat, the poet has started an unending enquiry which looks forward to an end.
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Prufoot's love song has not been sung for the world because he cannot define and confront the 'overwhelming question', which points to another order of reality:

It is Lazarus and John the Baptist who are the proper ambassadors of reality to the salon, who can convey to it the angry, clawing truth. Prufrock still lives (and fails to live) by a minor and less taxing scale of values. (5)

Prufoot has failed, his visions and decisions shade off into revisions, but he has started his journey and explorations into 'death's other kingdom' of defeat, frustration and the resulting boredom in his situation.

'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufoot' is a poem which dramatizes the duality of human experience: 'You and I' are dramatizations of human experience in its necessary duality, seeking, yet fearing its consummation in a singleness, which is at the other end of thought. These are metaphysical fear and metaphysical longing, which may be the subject of a poet just as much as they may be for the philosopher. For a poet, they may be combined with other fears and longings. In St. John of the Cross, Dante or Donne, they merge into the language of

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sexual desire and sexual defeat. Eliot's poem deals with both sexual and metaphysical problems; each problem is an image for the other, and the interpenetration of metaphysical or religious and sexual motifs takes place in an entirely new way.

The next poem, 'Portrait of a Lady' (1915) is a dramatic monologue in which the drifting invertebrate Laforguian reflections are given verbal energy and thickening effect by the use of late-Elizabethan and Jacobean dramatic verse-technique. The title recalls Henry James, but there is not much of Isabel Archer in the poem. However, the situation and atmosphere have some of the quality of a James' short-story dealing in muted desperation and polite betrayal.

The epigraph refers to the moral callousness and spiritual obsolescence in the poem. Under a sophisticated surface built up of the inanities of modern life the poet develops a conflict of feelings, which suggests the process of dissolution and disintegration underlying the poem.

The lady does most of the talking and the young man silently ruminates on the disturbing situation created by a complex impasse - psychological, moral and spiritual -
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of a person from whom life and reality have been withheld. The poem progresses by presenting scenes or episodes of observation and analysis through which the sensuous imagery weaves into patterns of changing mood and significance. Thus, as in 'Prufrock' among the smoke and fog of a December afternoon, 'in the depressing atmosphere of the lady's parlour, 'An atmosphere of Juliet's tomb', a futile attempt is made to compose a harmony between two persons. With words charged with impelling nervous energy the lady demands a response from the young man:

You do not know how much they mean to me, my friends, And how, how rare and strange it is, to find In a life composed so much, so much of odds and ends, To find a friend who has these qualities, Who has, and gives Those qualities upon which friendship lives. How much it means that I say this to you --- Without these friendships --- life, what cou'hemar!

The lady speaks to the young man as a possible friend and lover but he is confused, and teased by what he considers to be a 'false note' somewhere. With a Laforguian nudge to himself: 'Let us take the air, in a tobacco trance', he tries to escape into the unproductive freedom of the externals, which mocks his confusion. Time passes and the lilacs are in bloom, but the quiver of life in lilacs and hyacinths is futile. The lady and
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the young man plunge helplessly into an emotional mess compounded of frustration, embarrassing uncertainty, solitude, futility and boredom. Plucked and artificially arranged, the April lilacs will die, and the lady will fail to invoke spontaneous life and harmony:

Ah, my friend, you do not know, you do not know What life is, you who hold it in your hands;

(Slowly twisting the lilac stalks)
You let it flow from you, you let it flow.

She hopes for the harmony, 'Sure that across the gulf you reach your hand,' but reference to her 'buried life, and Paris in the spring,' the story of a wasted human heart, and her plangency:

But what have I, but what have I, my friend, To give you, what can you receive from me?

only enhance his callousness. He smiles and goes on taking tea. Trying to master his self-assurance and refusing to accept responsibility, after the original tentative involvement, the young man tries to save appearances by puzzling about how to 'make a cowardly amends' for what she has said. But, even if he distracts himself with his cynical perusal of 'the comics and the sporting page'; her voice of unfulfilled desire and
boredom; 'some worn-out common song' floats 'with the
smell of hyacinths across the garden', and he poses the
question whether his reactions to the situation are
right or wrong. The young man is morally outraged.

Then, despite his ennui, in an October night of
crisis he visits the lady and tries to extricate himself
from the falseness of his position by telling her of
his decision to go abroad. Mounting the stairs (like
Pruifrock) as if on his hands and knees, he smiles again,
but this time the smile 'falls heavily among the bric-a-brac
that is the world and the longed-for harmony he has
shattered to pieces. When the lady brings the issue to
a head with 'why we have not developed into friends,' and
with 'Perhaps it is not too late', his 'self-possession
gutters', and he is stripped naked morally and spiritually.
Now, feeling dehumanized, he will borrow the changing
shapes of animals and, perhaps, escape by taking 'the
air, in a tobacco trance'. Even if the lady should die
some day the perplexity of his situation will not be
resolved, but that event may give her some advantage (emo-
tional, moral and spiritual) and his final discomfiture
will be to become doubtful of his 'right to smile'. The
epigraph from Marlowe's The Jew of Malta is quite revealing.
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The young man has not 'committed fornication' physically, but he has committed an emotional and spiritual rape by penetrating to the depths of the lady's desolate emotional and spiritual life. The lady and the young man unsuccessfully contest for possession, and the poignancy of the lady's failure to gain possession of the young man's friendship is matched by his anxiety to maintain self-possession. Throughout the poem there is something held back, a restraint or a refusal to commit oneself precisely to meaning and purpose. There is a profound drama of ideas or unanswered questions resembling the overwhelming question in 'Prufrock', held in suspension in the midst of the trivialities of the surface action.

III

The poem, 'Preludes' (1910-11) dwell on some desolate aspects of urban life. Some critics describe them as imagist, but Hugh Kenner in his book, The Invisible Poet has denied the presence of Imagist element in them, saying that they are haunted by the need for an absent significance, whereas the Imagists relied simply on the self-sufficiency of an image. Much of the atmosphere in them, the sinister atmosphere of a meaningless society, with souls 'stretched tight across the skies' and the streets having conscience:
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The conscience of a blackened street
Impatient to assume the world,

is absorbed from Baudelaire and Charles Louis Phillipe.
The plight of the street and of the people whose souls
are mere congeries of fugitive images of desolation and
hopelessness points to the meaninglessness and worn out
mechanism of the universe moving in endless epicyclic
paths, without any destination:

The worlds revolve like ancient women
Gathering fuel in vacant lots.

But the yearning emotion of the last 'Prelude'
gives a hint for an undefined redemptive vision:

I am moved by fancies that are curled
Around these images, and cling:
The notion of some infinitely gentle
Infinitely suffering thing.

This could be a redeeming figure like that of
Christ or the Virgin. A critic has stated quite appropria-
tely:

'Preludes' contain some of the most memorable
epiphanies of urban experience in English. (6)

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Then, 'Rhapsody on a Windy Night' written in Paris in 1911, continues the merciless exposure of the horrifying squalor and meaninglessness of town life, in cadences reminiscent of Verlaine and Laforgue. Perhaps, 'Babu de Montparnasse provided again the atmosphere of loneliness, demimondaine sterility, and cultural desolation.'(7) The poem gives a record of noctambulistic movement of a mid-night stroller straggler rambling through the city streets under the 'lunar incantations'. Orderly thought is dissolved into an irrational and almost surrealistastic collage of discontinuous mental impressions. Finally the wanderer in the night, with his soul composed of depressing and horrifying images like a madman shaking the geranium, a corner of an eye twisting like a pin and the lapping tongue of a cat devouring rancid butter, mounts the stairs to his bed. But, this furnishes no escape from the horror of his own trapped human situation because release from ordered memory is not a release from horror, but this memory is the key to the unalterable reality, and this knowledge pierces him like 'the last twist of the knife'.

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The next poem, 'Morning at the Window' (1915) with its 'damp souls of housemaids sprouting despondently at area gates' and 'aimless smile that hovers in the air/And vanishes along the level of the roofs,' tries to recover faintly the depressing and oppressive atmosphere of 'Preludes' and 'Rhapsody on a Windy Night'. The other small poems of 1915, 'The Boston Evening Transcript', 'Aunt Helen' and 'Cousin Nancy' are satires of the genteel tradition of Boston, the stultifying shallowness of which irked the sensitive and hungry soul of the poet. 'Conversation Galante' (1916) is built on a Laforguian contrast of moods which mock one another. Further, failure in integration, failure in communication and the consequent boredom is suggested by the conversation between the 'seriously' speaker with his 'mad poetics' and the 'indifferent and imperious' lady who is 'the eternal humorist/The eternal enemy of the absolute'.

A longer and more energetic poem, 'Mr. Apollinax' (1916) is based on a paradox suggested by the shy Fragilion and the gaping Priapus. Mr. Apollinax, laughing like 'an irresponsible foetus' and presented with images of Priapus, the old man of the sea (Proteus) and a galloping centaur, is a baffling combination of elements which suggest ebullient vitality, which subvert the genteel tradition
of the mystified Mrs. Philacus and her fusty guests. In this poem, the poet tries to probe into the dainty superficies of an effete tradition suggested by 'a slice of lemon, and a bitten macaroon' to seek means of achieving significance which defines reality in a world of appearance, futility and boredom. 'La Figlia Che Piange' (1916) is a beautiful lyric based on a subtle exploration of memory and experience involving beauty, pain and cynicism. The poem opens with the memory of beauty and pain -- of a girl, standing on the stair, clasping flowers, weaving the sunlight in her hair, and bidding farewell. But this is a memory formed by desire and will, or by a sense of aesthetic fitness:

So I would have had him leave,
So I would have her stand and grieve.

This invention of the painful parting betrays cynicism leading to failure to establish emotional harmony suggested by the epigraph from Virgil: 'O maiden, how may I call thee?' This invented way of parting may be cruel and callous: 'Simple and faithless as a smile and shake of the hand' but when the girl 'turned away' the experience makes him lose 'a gesture and a pose', and the unexpected 'cogitations' haunt him.
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The poems in Eliot's first volume, *Prufrock* and Other Observations objectify an atmosphere of aimlessness and of the futility of life without significance. The ironies and twists of responses and attitudes, the mnemonic rhythms echo Laforgue, Corbiere, Verlaine and Gautier. The sense of squalor, despair and boredom, the viscosity of the past from which the limbo world of the present cannot escape, connect with Dante and Baudelaire. The allusiveness, the suggestiveness, the juxtaposition of contrasted images, the swift change of moods, the sharp confrontation of past and present, of the commonplace and the horrible, and the symbols used for embodying certain emotions or attitudes, constitute a meaningful innovation which Eliot brought to the world of poetry.

For Eliot, experience presented itself in an intensely realized but desperate series of components which could not possibly be organized into larger structures by the power of intellect or by relying on popular literary forms. But, he possessed an extraordinary ability which operated below the level of consciousness and synthesized the fragments. This is sensed in the strong yet immensely subtle sense of rhythm in his poems, a rhythm that seems to go deeper than mere aural values. For Eliot
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the act of creation called for a kind of organization, of order and form, which demanded complete surrender of the artist to something obscure and possibly dangerous, but definitely higher than himself. This was nothing less than the spiritual exercises of penance and prayer. In this connection his praising of Dante in The Sacred Wood for 'the most comprehensive, and the most ordered presentation of emotions that has ever been made', is highly relevant. Dante's order is simultaneously moral, intellectual and spiritual -- a kind of order not within the easy compass of Eliot, however much he might have valued it as a critic. But Dante dominates Eliot's œuvre starting from the epigraph of 'Prufrock' to the superb Dantesque re-creation in 'Little Gidding'. But the poet's use of literary sources and influences has troubled many critics, who have sometimes accused him of plagiarism. In this connection one can simply say that Eliot is not, in principle, doing anything different from Chaucer or Spenser or even Shakespeare. His use of literary sources is both existential and aesthetic, to help him understand and express his own experience, which was a very sensitive modern mind's experience of a haunted world -- a world haunted by ghosts of different types trapping man helplessly in an isolation of unreality like that of the schizophrenics.
The title of Eliot's next collection of poems in 1920 shows again Dante as an early and a continuing influence. After looking back to the dedication of the 'Prufrock' volume, the title taken from a petition of Arnaut Daniel, *Ara Vos Prec*, meaning 'Now I pray you,' implies more than a cry for relief from pain: it points to the concealed spiritual anguish beneath. George Williamson has written of this volume:

This volume continues the satiric vein; but it is concerned not so much with social satire, or religious satire, as with the plight of modern man; his institutions are taken as signs, not causes, of his state of being. (8)

In these poems Eliot continues the exploration of the shadow world of boredom and horror in the attempt to reach the realm of light.

The poem, 'The Hippopotamus' (1917), perhaps, the earliest of the quatrain poems, resembles a mock sermon. In an immaculately impassive manner, it develops a pseudo-conceit to show the antithesis between the Hippopotamus and the true church. The animal is firm, but 'weak and frail' because it is 'merely flesh and blood', representing the natural man, lukeworm in its religious zeal but more acceptable to God than a disingenuous episcopacy. The

epigraph also refers to the spiritual condition of a lukewarm church, 'the church of the Laodiceans'. The ways of God are mysterious, and this is shown in the definition of the spiritual condition of the hippopotamus. The clumsy animal with its gross fleshliness, resting its belly in the mud and making odd noises at mating time has a better chance of heaven than the Church with its unworldly pretensions. The fleshly grossness and wallowing muddiness is necessary for the hippopotamus before he is spiritually transformed. In other words, the salvation of man through his acceptance into the community of Christ is impossible without his worldly existence and the accompanying original sin. On the other hand, the True Church, despite being based upon the rock of Peter, and rejoicing 'at being one with God' may be spiritually asleep and incapable of doing anything good. So, when the hippopotamus is in heaven,

... the True Church remains below
Wrapt in the old miasmal mist.

This poem may be regarded as a versified epistle conveying a serious message for apathetic Christians. Its irony, its fun with the flat language of the hymnal
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and its naive imagery -- all point at an anxious concern with the promises and paradoxes of Christianity.

'Whispers of Immortality' (1918) is a teasing poem in which the poet sets the attitude of Donne and Webster against that of the moderns to try to hear the 'whispers of immortality.' Sensual experience like sexual gratification is a way of experiencing death and something beyond death or experience, 'the anguish of the marrow/The agony of the skeleton' and 'the fever of the bone.' Webster and Donne, who fused thought and feeling could use the pleasures and agonies of the flesh to explore the region beyond physical experience, to seek and express the yearnings for reality, which is built on an intertwining awareness of the physical and the spiritual. Grishkin who is endowed with a 'friendly bust' giving 'promise of pneumatic bliss' is an image of the necessary interpenetration of the sexual and spiritual in man's desire. Like the fleshly hippopotamus she shows that flesh and spirit are interdependent:

And even the Abstract Entities  
Circumnambulate her charm;

Any division will break the harmony, and the ascetic mortification of the flesh will produce sterility, like crawling

... between dry ribs  
To keep our metaphysics warm.
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The next poem, 'Mr. Eliot's Sunday Morning Service' (1918) is another satiric thrust at the Church and Christianity. The epigraph from Marlowe's The Jew of Malta, bringing religion and caterpillars together implies revilement of the morals and the spiritual condition of the ecclesiastics. The clergy, 'The sapient sutlers of the Lord' are intiatiate of gain, only too glad to collect the 'piaculative pence' from the young whose faces are far from being immaculate as the soul of Barabas, but

Under the penitential gates
Sustained by staring Seraphim

their devout souls 'Burn invisible and dim'. Then comes 'enervate Origin', who took Paul's injuction to mortify one's members only too literally and castrated himself in the service of God, and who disseminated subtilized and weakened spiritual doctrine. But the original significance of the Word is still visible within the Church in an icon of the Baptized God, which clearly depicts the whole mystery of Incarnation and baptism. The human form of the Word made flesh and his 'unoffending feet' still shine through the baptismal water, and confutes the degradation of the presbyters and Origen. As in other
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quatrain poems, the poet uses sexual metaphors to express spiritual matters: -

In the beginning was the Word.
Superfetation of ... ...
And at the mensual turn of time
Produced enervate Origen.

The implications of the metaphor and of the word 'superfetation' apparently referring to a blasphemous canard that the Son, being coeternal and consubstantial with the Father, was superimposed upon His own prior existence and self-begotten (nullifying the mystery of Incarnation), go back to the 'Polyphiloprogenitive' priests, who are fecund in proselytes but barren in body. But the Incarnation, the Word being one with the Father and yet begotten by Him, expresses in worldly form the magnificent creativeness of the Father. The disabling paradox is that the propagation of the Word, 'Blest Office of the epicene' (Christ) is entrusted to the neuter bees of the caterpillar world, the presbyters and Origen, who are sexually and spiritually unproductive. Exposing this sterility, there is Sweeney, the human counterpart of the hippopotamus, shifting

... from ham to ham
Stirring the water in his bath
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when the truth of Christianity is made unproductively 'controversial and polymath' by the 'masters of the subtle schools'. Baptism is the sacrament which joins man with Christ, and the baptized God represents Christ in man and man in Christ. So Sweeney (hippopotamus that he is), in his baptismal bath, is a bizarre imitation of Christ, nearer to God than the neuter bees of the Church. In this poem again Eliot builds up the ironic conflict between sensual life and the life of askesis. In a teasing and deliberately blasphemous way, the poem presents the entirely serious debate by a game of ideas. It may be that the active and sensitive mind of the poet was driven close to desperation by unresolved conflicts. The world of his poetic feeling seems to be controlled by his metaphysical anxiety. In other metaphysical poets like Donne, Marvell or Herbert the conflict is seen pointing towards some solution in living. But, Eliot's 'quatrain poems remain imprisoned in terrible doubt and uncertainty'.

(9) In these poems Eliot introduces the figure of Sweeney who will be found to be very important in the image structure of his poetry. David Ward writes about Sweeney in his exquisitely perceptive book, T.S.Eliot : Between Two Worlds :

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He is the ordinary sensual man, the focus of all metaphysical and theological problems; mortal in flesh, yet the figure without whom the thousands of years of debate about the spirit, the sacrifice of Christ, the elaborate theology of Trinity, would all be meaningless. (10)

Again in 'Sweeney Among the Nightingales' (1918), Sweeney is presented in a bafflingly complicated and ominous situation, full of images of animality and adulterous sexuality. The epigraph from Agamemnon of Aeschylus echoes Agamemnon's cry when his adulterous wife Clytemnestra murdered him; and the deleted epigraph from Raigne of King Edward the Third: 'Why should I speak of the nightingale? The nightingale sings of adulterous wrong', refers to the Ovidian myth of Philomel. The combination of the two epigraphs suggests a situation of death and rebirth. F.O. Matthiessen has recorded Eliot once saying that 'all he consciously set out to create in "Sweeney among the Nightingales" was a sense of foreboding'. (11) In a way he is correct because Sweeney is apparently threatened with disaster, possibly sexual, through two women (nightingales are harlots, in low slang, according to Grover Smith) in a public house.

(10) Ibid., p.32.
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It is to be noted that sexual imagery is frequently used by Eliot for spiritual matters. In this poem sexual infidelity and violence is suggested by Agamemnon and Philomel when indiscreet sexuality brings the shadow of disaster in the life of Sweeney. But sex and death may also lead to metamorphosis or rebirth in another form. The ordinary sensual man, Sweeney, 'Apeneck Sweeney' with 'zebra stripes along his jaw/Swelling to maculate giraffe', stands guarding 'the horned gate', the gate through which, according to Virgil, the true prophetic dreams emerge from the under-world. There are some sexual overtones also in the phrase. Further the constellations have ominous mythological associations of disaster at the hands of women. Sweeney suspects 'Rachel nee Rabinovitch' and 'the lady in the cape' and 'Declines the gambit'. No murder takes place actually, but the whole process along with the imagery hints at something else.

In 'The Hippopotamus' Eliot suggests the process of regeneration in terms of the Ascension, when it is in terms of baptism and Incarnation in 'Mr. Eliot's Sunday Morning Service'. This poem seems to suggest the sacramental mystery of the Eucharist, which reenacts the communion of men in Christ when they, in the words of the Anglican
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service, 'spiritually eat the flesh of Christ, and
drink his blood'. Through communion, which is the con-
version of many into one, Christ enters the communicants
and the communicants enter Christ. In the poem this is
suggested by the fruits brought in by the waiter and
the 'someone indistinct' with whom the host converses.
The nightingales singing near 'The Convent of the
Sacred heart' seems to give a Christian orientation to
the pattern of rape, death and rebirth in the myth of
Philomel. The 'bloody wood' where Agamemnon cries at
his death is probably the grove of the Furies, a sacred
place of death, rebirth and oracular prophecy, in
Sophocles' Oedipus at Colonus, and the dishonouring of
the dead body by the nightingales with 'their liquid
siftings' seems to suggest that the body is rejected by
the triumphant soul in its spiritual regeneration.

In the next poem, 'Sweeney Erect' (1919),
Emerson's definition of history as the 'lengthened shadow
of a man', is given a sardonic twist by associating it
with the 'silhouette/Of Sweeney straddled in the sun'. The
epigraph from The Maid's Tragedy, recalls a sorrowful
scene in which Aspatia abandoned by her lover, bids her
attendant women to weave her story into a tapestry depicting
Ariadne's desertion. In the modern drama presented in the poem, gross and unkempt Sweeney, with the 'Gesture of orangoutang' and 'Broadbottomed, pink from nape to base' is the hero, and his Aspatia or Ariadne is a nameless epileptic who has hysteria when he gets out of bed and starts to shave. Compared with this the case of Nausicaa and Polyphemus was not so absurd. The behaviour of the victim of Sweeney is variously interpreted or misinterpreted by others. The ladies of the corridor call it hysteria, and Mrs. Turner is concerned with the reputation of the house. Sweeney calls it 'female temperament', and Doris, an appropriate mate for him, regards it as a physical condition to be cured by stimulants. There is no sign of understanding, or integration or harmony in this modern drama which has shown a picture of horror as the import of history seen as the 'silhouette of Sweeney'.

In 'Sweeney among the Nightingales' Sweeney took the role of Agamemnon, and here in this poem, he is associated with another Greek hero, Theseus. There is a farcical contrast between Sweeney and Theseus, however, they are still linked together in a mysterious way which suggests that 'Sweeney is a potential hero, a man who lives in two worlds, capable of heaven and hell.'

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in the bed is laconically rejected and Sweeney seems to be moving towards a higher destiny.

Then, the title of the poem, 'A Cooking Egg' means an old egg which is not so bad but not new and good enough. The epigraph from Villon's Testament: 'In the thirtieth year of my age/When I have drunk up all my shame', suggests a mournful review of the unrealized past and of unfulfilled hopes. In the context of the title and the epigraph, the poet presents a poem suggesting a difficult but necessary choice in a world of shadows. When he reflects on what he shall not want in Heaven, the unrealized hopes of the past and the meaningless reality of the present are depicted. Pipit, who is perhaps a childhood sweetheart and now hopelessly estranged from him, is symphical of the critical situation, which is moving towards a definition. She also resembles, in some way, the other deserted ladies in 'Portrait of a Lady', 'La Figlia che Piange' and 'Sweeney Erect'.

In a frame of ironies which cut both ways, Pipit and all that is desired on the earth like Honour, Capital and Society, are posed against the realities of Heaven. But the choice of the lover and worldly man is clearly indicated. In the beginning the promise of heaven is gently
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parodied and Pipit tenderly regretted, but when
Piccarda de Donati, who wrote: 'And His will is our
peace; is that sea towards which everything moves, that
which it creates and which nature makes', enters, the
choice is made. The poem suggests a quest which will
lead the protagonist away from Honour, Wealth, Society
and sensuous delight to the peace of submission to the
love of God:

But where is the penny world I bought
To eat with Pipit behind the screen?
The red-eyed scavengers are creeping
From Kentish Town and Golders Green;
Where are the eagles and the trumpets?

Here is a suggestion of the rejection of the
cheap and comic 'penny world', of heroic eagles and
trumpets of immature mind and boyish imagination shutting
out the unpleasant realities, the boredom and horror of
modern life. The protagonist, who is one of the 'Weeping,
weeping multitudes' drooping 'in a hundred A,B,C.'s'
over 'buttered scones and crumpets' (not trumpets),
desires to leave this city of the earth for the City of
God.

In the last quatrain poem, 'Burbank with a
Baedeker : Bleistein with a Cigar'(1919), Venice is
evoked as a chaotic, decayed and inglorious city of the
modern world, through a composite epigraph suggesting a
complex of emotions. Against a background of obsolete Venetian splendour suggested by the series of bathetic contrasts between gaiety and sobriety, dignity and lust, and nobility and decline, given in the epigraph, the poem stages a modern drama of conflict between the higher and the lower orders of existence and between time and timelessness. In this the duality already shown in Sweeney has been depicted in an aggravated form.

Burbank, the artistic and spiritual part of Sweeney comes to Venice, descends at a small hotel, meets a worldly and voluptuous princess and 'falls'. This is a kind of death, which recalls the 'fall' of a Christian, which is a loss of divine power, the strength of a Hercules:

... the God Hercules
Had left him, that had loved him well.

Now, fallen Burbank is drown'd, in the same sea as Prufrock; while the world changes, and decays, revolving around the axle tree. Princess Volupine, a modern diminutive counterpart of Cleopatra, requires more than the artistic and impracticable love of Burbank. She goes for the puny commercial lover Sir Ferdinand Klein who has probably made 'money in furs'. Bleistein, who represents
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the gross and sensual part of Sweeney, is a commercial traveller, loitering like rats and staring 'from the protozoic slime/At a perspective of Canaletto'. He knows nothing but the material aspect of life, and cannot understand the Herculean destiny in which Burbank failed because of his 'fall'. But everyone fails: 'Nothing endures unless divine'. At the end of the poem Burbank, himself, withered away because of the fall, meditates upon the Venetian Lion of St. Mark, the ruins of time and the seven laws of growth and decay given by Ruskin. The city itself has decayed and lost its divinity. The winged lion, symbol of the divine qualities of the city has been degraded by someone:

Who clipped the lion's wings
And flea'd his rump and pared his claws?

Princess Volupine, herself a symbol of the spirit of the city, is 'meagre, blue-nailed, phthisic', an image of decay and 'Time's ruins'. Nothing except the divine will endure and 'the rest is smoke'. Burbank, Bleistein, Volupine and Klein, -- all will change and decay, because they are creatures of Time, creatures of Venice, not a city of St. Mark, but of Time. They are far from being the creatures of the timeless universe of the spirit, and thus the boredom and horror of their lives.
Eliot's quatrain poems revealingly record a distinctly changing attitude towards the problems dealt with in his poetry. The continuing debate on the discordance of flesh and spirit seems to have become more urgent and more critical. Sweeney, with all his absurdity, grossness and doubleness, is seen as an amiable figure living with humour and poise in 'The Hippopotamus' and 'Mr. Eliot's Sunday Morning Service'. But in 'Burbank with a Baedeker : Bleistein with a Cigar', Sweeney is split into the two poles of his nature, Burbank and Bleistein. In the conflict between the relative claims of the ascetic and the sensual in sex, which was, in the beginning, disadvantageous for the ascetic, the distaste for the body has now become more evident. The poetic form also, the rhyming quatrain with all its narrowness, neatness and cleverness, seems to have intensified the conflict. The poems' farcical atmosphere steeped in coarse sentiments, melodramatic vagueness and sugerings of blasphemies has somewhat debased the seriousness of the debate, and the slight but compelling note of hysteria and the defensive neatness and cleverness has produced no resonances and reverberations of meaning beyond the surface.