One of Eliot's main services to English literature is said to be the recovery of the historical consciousness and the rehabilitation of literary tradition. Eliot's awareness of his poetic antecedents is shown by the early poems in the frequent use of allusions, quotations and epigraphs. As all these devices have closely related functions, they might be dismissed together under the single term allusiveness. This allusiveness is made possible by the presence of the past in the form of tradition. The allusive technique makes use of two basic forms, those of parallelism and contrast. It affirms the unity of past and present and shows how our complex modern life is both similar and dissimilar to the past. As I.A. Richards has observed, allusion is often a technical device for compression. Eliot's statement that the erudition of Lancelot Andrewes is essential to his originality, is equally true of himself. Far from being a vain display of learning the use of literary allusion, the contrasting of past and present and the abrupt juxtapositions are inseparably bound up with his concern with tradition. By
means of it Eliot has enlarged the frontiers of historical consciousness. In order to gain some idea of the nature and scope of allusiveness in the work of Eliot, his method is worth comparing with that of Milton.

We can well illustrate chiefly from the 'Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock', how Eliot enlarges the scope of allusiveness by expanding its function. In his use of the epigraph from Dante's *Inferno* Eliot tries to exploit fully the evocative power of past literature to create a proper mood and setting for his poem. The prefatory motto to 'Prufrock' does not stand isolated as in the conventional use of epigraphs. It combines with the title and the tone of the poem and evokes a symbolic situation. It is taken from the twenty-seventh Canto of Dante's *Inferno*. We are in the eighth circle of Hell which is divided into ten pits containing those who committed malicious frauds upon mankind. In the eighth pit we come across the councillors of fraud like Ulysses and Count Guido de Montefeltro, each wrapped in a tall flame. These spirits are shrouded in the flame and it torments them, because this was a furtive sin. We have to rid ourselves of a few common prejudices and misunderstandings about the conception of Dante's Hell if we are to enter into a sympathetic misunderstanding of the presentation of Guido by Dante and Eliot's Prufrock, Guido's counterpart. The first misunderstanding that we should get rid of is the commonly prevalent notion that Hell is a place to which damned souls are sent by God. It has been pointed out that so far as Dante
and all serious Catholics are concerned, Hell is simply the state of the self-condemned soul fixed for ever in the evil which it has obstinately chosen. Guido is enshrouded in the fire of his own torment because Hell is the image of perverted choice itself. Yet another idea which might be enlightening in our reading of 'Prufrock' is that in Dante's conception of the Divine Comedy, the journey to God is the journey into Reality; to behold God is to see reality as it truly exists. The corollary of this is that Hell is the antithesis of Reality; it is one's own deliberately willed delusion. Having lost the good of the intellect, the damned souls in Hell cannot profit by their own prescience. On meeting Guido's shade which is fixed for ever in its own delusion, Dante imagines that he is a damned soul and prefaces the story with the words that form the epitaph to 'Prufrock':

"... If I thought that I were making
Answer to one that might return to view
The world, this flame should evermore cease
shaking.
But since from this abyss, If I hear, true,
None ever came alive, I have no fear
Of infamy, but give thee answer due." (1)

It is interesting to note that neither Dante nor Virgil undeceive him, but leaves the counsellor of fraud to his own delusions. By comparing Prufrock and Guido, Eliot is expressing an important historical idea. The basis of comparison is the vital historical

principle of the oneness of human experience and the universal of all periods. By portraying In Prufrock an image of the deepening possibilities of human evil in the human soul and comparing him to a thirteenth-century abuser of the good of the intellect, Eliot brings out the contemporaneity of all ages and the unity of the human mind.

In Eliot's poetry, allusions serve a variety of purposes. Very often an allusion may contain at once a parallel and a contrast. The quotations serve illustrative purposes. But generally Eliot creates something new and rich out of them. For example, the reference to Hesiod's *Works and Days* in *Prufrock*:

There will be time to murder and create, And time for all the works and days of hands That lift and drop a question on your plate. (1)

These lines by being woven cleverly into the passage are given immediate force and relevance. They reinforce the suggestion of contrast between worthwhile and worthless activity. The allusive technique enables Eliot to compress a great deal into a little space. For example, the reference to John the Baptist:

Though I have wept and fasted, wept and prayed Though I have seen my head (grown slightly bald) brought in upon a platter. I am no prophet. (2)


2. Ibid., p. 16.
In sharp relief the contrast between the passivity and morbid introspection of Prufrock and the fire and passion of the herald of the new dispensation: Prufrock's neurotic anxiety to shed his manhood and become "a pair of ragged claws" brings him into sharp contrast with John who met his cruel fate by courageously denouncing the sinfulness of the tetrarch Herod.

Frequently in Eliot's poems two or more quotations are telescoped together and these perform a number of tasks simultaneously. The reference to Lazarus in Prufrock:

I am Lazarus come from the dead,
Come back to tell you all, I shall tell you all. (1)

is a good example of allusive technique. It unifies together the image of Lazarus of Bethany whom Jesus raised from the dead, and the Lazarus of the parable of Dives and the Leper. The utmost economy is accomplished and the poet communicates at a high pitch of intensity by telescoping the varied associations and these blended quotations with them. The most distinguished feature of allusions in Eliot is that they serve a creative function. In Eliot's poetry the past which we experience through its association with the literary tradition is made real by relating it with present day experience: the two blend to form a new whole. The memory of the past literature which constitutes the poetic tradition,

links the individual poet to his cultural past. The transference of a well-known passage with all its emotional associations to a different context becomes a new creation.

The allusive technique is not unrelated to the theory of the objective correlative. In Eliot allusions are not simply citations of parallel thoughts. They relate different planes of experience—past and present. For example, when Eliot suggests Prufrock's mental state with the words quoted from Dante's the *Divine Comedy* he is making use of objective correlative i.e. words producing the mental state which is as close as possible to that of the poet when he composed the lines. A second illustration of Eliot's historical consciousness is widened in his preoccupation with the whole range of the connotative meanings of words. It is inevitable that he should show a deep interest in the potentialities of poetic language. Eliot's concern with words goes much further and deeper than an interest in the possibilities of language. His interest in language goes back to his Harvard days. There is a long section in Chapter II of *Knowledge and Experience*, exploring the significance of words as symbolic carriers of ideas. Thus, the problem of communication engages his early attention, and as late as *Four Quartets* and later, he is still seen wrestling with the same problem – yet another proof of the astonishing unity displayed by his work. In *Knowledge and Experience*, Eliot disagrees with Bradley's view that an idea is simply a sign.
Eliot refuses to accept that words are mere counters because they have power of words. The symbolic function of words with their universal validity, and general applicability is what distinguishes language from a system of signs like the Morose Code. Signs and symbols belong to two different universes of discourse; a signal represents the physical world of being; a symbol represents the human world of meaning.

The potential meaning of a word is of virtually indefinite extension; it exceeds all actual and possible content, or definition. As Eliot has pertinently pointed out:

Nothing can secure you against the possibility that new experience may add to the meaning by extending the use. (1)

Words are capable of being the carriers for two kinds of meanings, denotative and connotative. Denotative meaning has only limited possibilities for poet's communication. Eliot's primary concern is to explore the connotative power of words, that is to say, he's interested in exploring all the resources of connotative signification. In actual practice this means that a word must be made suggestive by varying its context in a communication. The idea that meaning subsists only in a pattern is fundamental to Eliot's experiments with connotative meanings.

1. Eliot, Knowledge and Experience, p.46.
In the 'Frontiers of Criticism', Eliot set the limits of the critical faculty. Characterising the major part of our critical ventures as 'workshop criticism' he pointed out that the 'criticism of explanation by origins' is fraught with numerous pitfalls. John Livingstone Lowe's Road to Xanadu which is the supreme example of this school of criticism has certainly filled our minds with amazement when we pursue, through the chapters of this monumental piece of investigation, the road of the human spirit and the imagination voyaging through chaos and reducing it to clarity and order. But, he says, it is doubtful if it has enhanced our enjoyment of Coleridge's Kubla Khan and The Ancient Mariner. Another category of criticism called 'Interpretations' exemplified in the work of I.A. Richards and William Empson is also looked upon with serious reservations by Eliot. Eliot has clearly brought out the power of the creative function in his statement that "when a poem has been made something new has happened, something that cannot be wholly explained by anything before." It will be therefore a mistake to think of a poem as any one of its interpretations or to suggest that an understanding of its sources is the same as an understanding of the poem, For poetry as complex and allusive as his, explanation is a necessary preparation for understanding and enjoyment. The apparently

paradoxical statement of Eliot that "we do not fully enjoy a poem till we understand it... We do not fully understand a poem unless we enjoy it" seems to assign explanation its right role in our endeavour to grasp a poem's central idea.

A critical study of the poems in the light of the various manifestations of his historical awareness, such as the use of allusions, symbols, and myths, can throw a flood of light on his poetry. Now coming to 'Gerontion' (1920) the poem seems to have been suggested by Cardinal Newman's 'The Dream of Gerontius'. Eliot's Gerontion— the little old man and Newman's Gerontius are portrayed as men in advanced old age. 'Gerontion' shares the characteristics of Newman's poem. Both poems deal with a deep crisis in the lives of their protagonists. These two characteristics of historical and visionary nature are strengthened by the epigraphs from Shakespeare's \textit{Measure for Measure} by adding another dimension to theme. The central theme of \textit{Measure for Measure} is the moral nature of man. The epigraph thus serves to highlight the moral crisis of Gerontion. As in 'Prufrock' an antithesis is suggested between two kinds of life (or two kinds of death) Of these two kinds Prufrock and Gerontion share the life lived in an illusion. In his speech to Claudio, from which the epigraph has been extracted, the Duke asserts the negative nature of the joys of life. Life

\begin{itemize}
\item[1.] Eliot, \textit{The Frontiers of Criticism}, p.17.
\end{itemize}
is a sequence of unrealities, a delusion, a living death.
The parallels between the states of Gerontion and Claudio are elucidated by the motto:

Thou hast nor youth nor age,
But as it were an after dinner sleep
Dreaming of both.

Gerontion has neither youth nor age because his life is a sequence of unrealities strung together in a time of succession. Such a life is best compared to a dream. The title, the epigraph and the cumulative associations of Newman's poem and Shakespeare's play, place in clear relief the state of Gerontion. In Prufrock also we saw that one of the purposes of the epigraph was to point out this subjective, visionary nature of the situation presented. Gerontion is a type. He is the Old Man, the Old Adam of Pauline theology. He lives in a world of illusions like Prufrock. His is a life of vacillation, indecision, and negation like Prufrock's own but he is capable of brooding over the destiny of man. Gerontion looks back to Prufrock and forward to Tiresias. This is a fundamental aspect of the unity of Eliot's work. With each new poem, Eliot seems to be rewriting his earlier poems by further exploring their meaning. The poems which he wrote up to The Waste Land may be looked upon as preparation for that great work. When we remember that Gerontion was initially meant to form part of The Waste Land, We shall fully appreciate the logic of this method of treatment of comparing and contrasting each of the poems with the others. The opening line
Here I am, an old man in a dry month,
Being read to by a boy, waiting for rain.

establishes Gerontion's kinship with the Fisher King who is also waiting for rain. The fact that he is being read to by a boy prepares us for the revelation that he is bereft of the powers of sight. Blindness is an important symbol in the poem, Gerontion's loss of the power of perception indicates that he cannot come to grips with reality. His physical blindness is symbolic of his moral and spiritual decay. The boy is presumably reading a book about the past of European civilization and this excites the old man's reveries. The next four lines

I was neither at the hot gates
Nor fought in the warm rain
Nor knee deep in the salt marsh,
heaving a cutlass,
Bitten by files, fought.....

present the old man as a symbol of the past. Indeed he appears to be the incarnation of the spirit of history. These lines can best be understood in the light of Eliot's idea of tradition. In his reverie Gerontion recalls the heroism of the men of the past at Thermopylae and the exploits connected with civilization by Western man. Gerontion's voluntary rejection of tradition, his mental and physical inaction, are behind his shadowy death-like existence. The attempt to deny the past, the failure to recognise our place in the pattern is a form of self-destruction. As Eliot has said in Four Quartets we cannot revive the old values, but we can become the partakers of
tradition precisely because the past is a present reality.

"My house is a decayed house," Jerontion's own house is his own degenerate nature physical and spiritual. At the same time it is European civilization of which he is but a part. Individual life is closely bound up with the life of the race, because the human race constitutes a unity. The Jew represents the rootless mongrel nature of Western culture. Traditionally, he is also a symbol of usury, which is a sin against God's bounty. The rootless wandering Jew stands for the heterogeneous nature of society. According to Eliot, our civilization ought to be unified and universal but it has only managed to become chaotic and unassimilated. The reason is that we are divorced from historic past and valuable tradition.

After having described the decayed state of the old man, and that of present-day European culture, the poet gives the reason for the depraved nature of individual and collective life. It is the wilful rejection of the spiritual that has brought him to this sort of predicament. Eliot's ironic contrasts between the past and the present have led many readers to conclude that the poet is glorifying the past and denigrating the present. Eliot thought that what we call 'progress' is simply the symptom of the decay. Human activity, according to him, reached its points of highest intensity in the Middle Ages, with the Crusades and the Cathedrals. Since then human vitality has been waning rapidly. Adam's belief that the universe is steadily moving towards its inevitable extinction may well be at the back of the view of
history presented in Gerontion.

Apart from the indirect historical modes such as his use of allusions and symbols, history appears as an explicit theme in Eliot's poetry. We have one such long passage here:

"..............Think now
History has many cunning passages,
contrived corridors,
Guides us by vanities.......... Are forced upon us by our independent crimes. (1)

The fatal consequences of disbelief in Christianity is a central theme in Gerontion. Here we find adumbrated one of Eliot's principal beliefs that the corruption of civilization is directly due to the decay of religious belief, an idea subsequently developed in The Waste Land and The Hollow Men and in his prose writings 'The idea of a Christian Society' and 'Notes Towards the Definition of Culture'. In his essay on The Metaphysical Poets, Eliot wrote:

Our civilisation comprehends great variety and complexity, and thus variety and complexity, playing upon a refined sensibility, must produce various and complex results. The poet must become more and more comprehensive, more allusive, more indirect, in order to force, to dislocate if necessary, language into his meaning. (2)

In his attempt to grapple with the complexity of modern life and bring the seemingly chaotic material of contemporary life within the confines of ordered art, Eliot used allusive devices. The Waste Land is full of allusions and unsympathetic early critics who dismissed the work as a 'pompous parade of erudition' failed to appreciate his true artistic purpose. It is the poet's recourse to allusiveness that has enabled him to compress, within decent compass, the complexity and variety of life portrayed in The Waste Land.

Before we proceed further, it is important to note that the operation of the theory of impersonality is clearly evident in the early poetry of Eliot. The non-dramatic poetry of Eliot also presents us 'characters' or poetic personae. In fact, some critics have gone to the extent of calling the early poetry 'dramatic' and that rightly. But they are agreed wherein lies the dramatic element. According to Edmund Wilson, the dramatic quality of Eliot's non-dramatic poetry lies in the creation of characters. According to Professor Mattheson, this element is to be traced to its power to communicate a sense of 'real life', a sense of the immediate present - that is, of the full quality of a moment, as it is actually felt to consist. The dramatic quality of his early lyrics lies in the nature of personae in this poetry, and not merely in the creation

1. Edmund Wilson, Axel's Castle, (Charles Scribner's Sons, N.Y. 1931), pp.112-115,
of characters. Poetry can represent characters without being dramatic for instance, the satire or the narrative poetry, but it is the conception of the characters realized in the poem and the mode of this realization that makes the poem 'dramatic' in Eliot's work.

What then is the nature of the characters like Prufrock, the lady in the 'Portrait of a Lady', Mr. Apollinax, Gerontion, Sweeney of the Sweeney poems, and the hollow men in the poem of that title? Are they characters? In 'The Three Voices of Poetry', Eliot says that 'a dramatic monologue cannot create character'.

If this be true, then none of these is a typical character and the poems are not 'dramatic'. Prufrock is not a dramatic character for he is neither clearly conceived in the poem nor precisely delineated. He neither acts nor is he acted upon. He is a representative of Eliot's persona of early poems. Through the consciousness of Prufrock Eliot is only presenting the dialectics of the struggle to transform disparate experience into the unity of a personality. Within the context of the poem, the struggle of the persona is not successful and Prufrock does not emerge as a 'personality' and his personality remains in the region of indedision. The dramatic quality of the poem lies in presenting this dialectical struggle. The struggle of Prufrock is unsuccessful and futile. The sense of futility and the note of irony, which

strike our sensibility as we read the poem originate in the dramatic struggle of Prufrock to superimpose a pattern on his experiences. The frustration and disappointment which emerge from the poem are generated by Prufrock's or Eliot's failure to transmute 'his private agonies into something rich and strange, something universal and impersonal.' In other words, Prufrock is not able to succeed in ordering his chaotic experience into an integrated whole of significant experience.

Professor Hugh Kenner in *The Invisible Poet* remarks:

> Alfred J. Prufrock is a name plus a voice. He is not a 'character' cut out of the universe. He is certainly not a person. (1)

This is true that Prufrock is not a character, not a personality. He is a self without body, a character without qualities and a personality without integral unity. This is characteristic of Eliot's minor poems and their personae.

The main theme of the book *The Invisible Poet* is concerned with the analysis of the influence of the philosophy of F.H. Bradley on Eliot's sensibility and on his critical theory of impersonality. Kenner tries to prove that a figure like Prufrock is not a 'person' because he is a Bradleyan 'finite centre' and that most of the persons in the early poetry are Bradleyan finite centres. A Bradleyan finite centre is merely

an epistemological unit which is both aesthetically and ethically neutral, and such a neutral centre cannot be the mantlepiece through which Eliot voices his concern with reality.

Moreover, Bradley's philosophical idealism and the epistemological inference which derive therefrom has been grossly overexaggerated. Professor Hugh Kenner equates Eliot's term 'sensibility' with Bradleyan feeling. Bradley's 'feeling' is, as he explains in Appearance and Reality, an undifferentiated feeling which is prior to the distinction between the self and the world, the subject and the object. Eliot, however, uses the term 'feeling' in the aesthetic sense. The dialectics of Eliot's theory is a dialectic of experience and the orientation of his dialectics is towards Impersonality. It is in this emphasis on the primacy of experience in which the typical 'Americanness' of Eliot's poetry and criticism lies.

The antithesis between 'life in death' and 'death in life' had formed important consideration in both Prufrock and Gerontion. Both these earlier poems look forward to 'The Waste Land' and throw a considerable light on this poem. Eliot's statement that the past is altered by the present as much as the present is directed by the past is true of his own work as a poet.

At the time of his writing The Waste Land Conrad's Heart of Darkness, seems to have been very much in Eliot's mind. Like the legend of the quest of the grail which provide
so much of the framework and symbolism of *The Waste Land* Conrad's novel is 'at a profound level' a spiritual journey of Marlowe, the narrator. Conrad's picture of the moral decay of hollow men like Kurtz is similar to Eliot's picture of the Waste Land where the life-giving springs have become exhausted. The comparison is between the Waste Land of the legendary literature and our modern life affected by spiritual draught. Through the fusion of the myths which had their origin at different stages of human development, through the stories of fertility rituals, the legend of the Fisher King, and references to sterile societies chastened by prophets such as Ezekiel, Augustine, Buddha and Tiresias, Eliot brings out the important idea that the Waste Land is an ever present dimension of human civilization.

The contrast suggested in *The Waste Land* is between an ideal past where existed a perfect harmony between human culture and natural environment and the destruction of this balance in modern times. The mythological framework is of great value to Eliot as it telescopes the remoteness of our civilization from the rhythms of our natural life. It enables the poet to give order and meaning to the contemporary chaos.

*The Waste Land* falls into five sections which, following the musical analogy, might be compared to movements. The first movement *'The Burial of the Dead'* is exposition in which Eliot establishes both the theme of the 'stony rubbish' of modern life set against the prophetic Biblical questioning
This is followed by the first section which begins with the statement 'April is the cruellest month', and rapidly proceeds to 'summer surprised us, coming over the stanbergerssee' raises the most terrifying questions. 'What are the roots that clutch'? then declares its handful of dust. From there it proceeds to the accusation of the wound - failure of sexuality and, more than that, of love. Madame Soëstris serves as junction connecting system of poem's symbolism, and also is herself prime symptom of the decay of religion into superstition.

'The Burial of the Dead' ends with a Dantesque vision of London as a city of the dead and a strange encounter with the past or of antiquity in the form of a soldier who was the narrator's companion in the naval battle at Mylae, and to whom he addresses sinister questions that seem from a tragedy of Webster or Tourneur. Finally, the poet addresses Baudelaire's famous appeal to the hypocritical reader: "You hypocrite lecteur! mon semblable mon frere!" Being in the same situation as the poet who addresses him, the reader belongs to the general conspiracy of the civilization which has at its centre the sexual wound.

The second section 'A Game of Chess' shows deeper insight into the failure of love. In the magnificent opening lines, the poet with a kind of buried irony portrays a lady sitting at dressing table. He brings to bear all the forces of past great art upon this woman. She seems painted with the brush of Titian, evoked with the poetry of Shakespeare describing Cleopatra, seated in her barge. The whole passage is said to be orchestrated
with an over-rich corrupt music like that of Richard Strauss in *Salome*. In this description, Eliot brings together all the resources of his aesthetic sense of the past in lines of original invention which nevertheless convey the sense of *pastiche*, as though all these phrases assembled were fragments from wonderful masterpieces of the past.

The opening of the third section, "The Fire Sermon" like that of "A Game of Chess", weaves together the theme of past and present. It is a prelude before the curtain has gone up on the dream of seduction between the small house agent's clerk and the typist.

In the opening lines, Eliot's method of portraying the past parallel with the present is very much in evidence. The part of the Thames wryly celebrated is that invoked by Edmund Spencer in "Prothalamion" a poem which sets up echoes in these lines:
"Sweet Thames, run softly, till I end my song" But this is the modern Thames and the nymphs have departed to be replaced by girls whose 'friends, the loitering heirs of City directors;/Departed, have left no addresses.'

Different ages and histories and states of consciousness fuse, and Eliot employs a characteristic method for making them blend into one another by making a statement, which one reads as both negative and positive:

*The river bears no empty bottles, sandwich papers, Silk handkerchiefs, cardboard boxes, cigarette ends, Or other testimony of summer nights.*
'The Fire Sermon' focusses on the scene between the small house agent's clerk and the typist on the divan, exposed to the prophetic vision of Tiresias. There follows three scenes of London, one of which, about Elizabeth and Leicester, resumes the scene of the Thames in the time of Spencer's England. After a mention of 'Margate Sands', there is a reference to St. Augustine's arrival at Carthage and his account of this in his Confessions. It is also a reference to the Buddha's 'Fire Sermon':

Burning burning burning burning
0 Lord Thou pluckest me out
0 Lord thou pluckest
burning.

Here we find a mixture of mythology, theology and history and this provides a contrastive background for the contemporary life.

The title of Section V takes us to the message of thunder with which the poem comes to an end. The message gives the answer to the ills of The Waste Land. By the use of his historical technique, Eliot telescopes at the beginning of this section, scenes of the trial, suffering and death of Jesus and the death of Fisher King and the barren state of the Waste Land.

The aridity of the Waste Land is due, not to physical causes, but to moral corruption. It is only when we learn to respond to the demands of the spirit that we are capable of redeeming our lives.
The mythological structure of 'The Hollow Men' is personal, but by no means private to the poet. The poem has numerous parallels with Dante's *The Divine Comedy*. A reading of the poem in the light of Dante's work will be enlightening. Here, Eliot's sense of tradition is shown in his recognition that the self-knowledge of the potentialities of evil, is our personal understanding.

Eliot's acute historical consciousness is displayed in his knowledge that words have a history of their own. The lines:

*Shape without form, shade without colour,*  
*Paralyzed force, gesture without motion.*

gain in emphasis and meaning if we pay attention to the sources of the different terms used. For example, consider the word 'form'. In scholastic philosophy 'form' is said to be identical with the *entelechy* or the essence of a thing. The word has lost this force in contemporary speech. If we are able to bridge this semantic gap, we may notice that Eliot is talking of moral and spiritual deterioration and not of physical forces.

The theme of *Ash Wednesday* (1930) is penitence, it is a purgatorial experience. Dante's vision of death's second kingdom is best exemplified in literature of the potential experience objectified into a state or kingdom. *Ash Wednesday* might yield its meaning more easily if we bear in mind its analogy with Dante's *Purgatory*, since both poems deal with similar state of mind. Penitence is possible because it is a temporal process. Time can be redeemed only through the temporal purgatorial
experience. 'Only through time, time is conquered'. That is precisely why the poet rejoices in a world of time and place. Only in the temporal scheme any amendment of past errors is possible. The third stanza of the poem becomes understandable when read with this explanation.

The experience treated in the poem is an intensely personal one, but the allusions to similar states of mind in other places and times help to give the theme an atmosphere of impersonality and universality. What the penitent observes at the turning of the stairs is the reflection of his own sins. He looks inward and sees the corruption in his heart. This self-knowledge is the prelude to purification through suffering and return to the attitude of the presence of God. The restless movement up the ladde of love is a true eros, for the soul fixes its eyes upon God.

Eliot's sense of tradition is demonstrated in his exploiting the connotative significance of single words for the purposes of poetic communication. The ambiguity contained in the term 'turning' is used to describe the penitential attitude of mingled hope and despair. The penitential experience is a turning away and turning towards— it is the flight of the alone to the Alone. It is the symbol of the natural desire of the soul to return to God's abode.

In 'Four quartets', we are presented with a summation of his thinking on time and history and the significance they have for human mind. In this work the poet is looking upon time and history in a variety of ways. Indeed, the entire poem is structured in a
dialectical manner. Different pairs of opposites are formulated in the poem, all to be finally reconciled and resolved by a profoundly religious apprehension of reality.

The epigraph from Heraclitus sets the tone of the poem and suggests the method of dialectics that forms the underlying structural principle of *Four Quartets*. Heraclitus was profoundly aware of the fact of constant change in the universe. But what the common man has missed in his estimate of the philosophy of change is that for Heraclitus 'it was the obverse idea of the measure inhering in change, the stability that persists through it was of vital significance. While Heraclitus saw the dominance of change and the existence of opposites which undergo constant transformation, the purpose of his thinking is to perceive the universe as a unity by the reconciliation of opposites and through the vision of the 'Logos'. The structural method based on a system of antitheses foreshadowed in the fragments quoted from Heraclitus suits Eliot's purposes also admirably. The basic pattern of *Four Quartets* is antithetical. In this work the temporal is set against the eternal, flesh against the spirit and word against the Word.

Each of the poems in the *Four Quartets* has a clearly defined geographical location. In the classical view of time it is

impossible to talk intelligibly of time without the spatial analogy. In Aristotle's physics space and time are inextricably joined as time is conceived of as a measure of motion and there can be no motion without space.

The place name with which each of the quartets is associated is said to provide a framework for the poet's exploration of the meaning of time and history. The first quartet (1936) is said to have taken its name from the seventeenth century manor house at Ebrington in Gloucestershire revaged by fire, rebuilt and deserted at the time of the poet's visit during the summer of 1934. The vacant manor house, the garden now untended and the dried up pool are the background of Eliot's rumination on time and eternity, motion and stillness, word and the Word. The problem of time is enunciated in the opening lines of 'Burnt Norton'. In the method of dialectic that Eliot employs the affirmation of the reality of any one kind implies also the existence of its opposite. For instance, we cannot posit the existence of time without the antithetical idea of experience 'out of time'. The antithesis between the temporal and the eternal forms the theme of 'Burnt Norton'. The second motto from Heraclitus, 'the path up and down is one and the same' also alludes to the unity of opposites which we perceive through dialectical distinctions.

The historical thread running through Eliot's work, is his belief in historical time. According to this view, all times are co-existent in the human mind. We may recall that this assumption is the basis of his theory of tradition. In
"The Waste Land" period the co-existence of all time had expressed itself through allusions and symbols. In 'Burnt Norton' the reality of time is treated directly through philosophical reflection. In Ash Wednesday the problem of redeeming time is bound up with the whole purpose and meaning of our temporal life. Physical phenomena constitute a never-ending process of flux. But man's consciousness cannot apprehend the flux as a unity, and the various modes of time as a single experience of awareness.

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

The apparently meaningless flow that the universe appears to our perception is but the appearance. It has been pointed out that in 'Burnt Norton' the poet sets up an antithesis between the temporal and the eternal, the experience of change and the moment in the rose-garden:

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

Paradoxically enough, it is the spatio-temporal dimension that allows us to experience the rose-garden. The experience is in time and yet out of time. The temporal and the timeless are anti-theitical, yet they are related. This shows how Eliot has been under the influence of the same ideas both in his criticism and in his poetry. His conception of time in his poetry is inextricably related to his conception of tradition
in literature. When he asks the poet and the critic to have a sense of tradition he wants them to have sense of the past and also its continuity into the present.

Thus, we can say that Eliot has striven to achieve impersonality in his poetry and the devices he employs for this make an interesting literary history. His use of allusions, symbols, myths, quotations from different sources, personae and connotative use of language bring about a universalisation of experience. The idea of impersonality brings a unity to his poems and an understanding of it enables one to understand Eliot's poems on a deeper and comprehensive level.