CHAPTER –I

INTRODUCTION

T.S Eliot was born on September 26, 1888 in St. Louis, a small town in Missouri. His family descended from Devonshire and had migrated, from the East Coker, Somerset, to Massachussets “long back in 1670.”¹ His father, Henry ware Eliot, was a wine merchant, however, his skills never precipitated in Eliot's traits. He was the seventh child of his parents. His mother, Charlotte Eliot, was the figure behind Eliot to imbibe the intellectual as well as the “moral atmosphere”² in him. If a real analysis of Eliot’s personality as a man and the poet is made, William Green leaf Eliot, his grandfather, only appears as the guiding force behind his literary as well as critical feets. Eliot, among other things, is but an out-come of his family atmosphere which made him a great literary figure in the contemporanuity. His mother and his grandfather, those who had definitely expired long before Eliot was born, paved way in making Eliot’s point of view to life and literature. His mother was “admirable woman”, ³ one who had” strict standards of conduct”⁴ and a high moral living. Her religious bent of mind and moral passion along made the atmosphere of the family which consisted of a hard and sincere style of living. Where the poetic taste of Charlotte Eliot has much been analyzed by the critics, it is remarkable to note that her religious feelings always overpower her literary taste. She was primarily given to the cause of humanity and, as a natural rule, exposed herself to its service at large. It is one factor common to her several human services that she developed wide
interest for seeking equal rights to the woman in St. Louis. Likewise, green leaf
Eliot contributes largely to the conceptual growth of Eliot’s mind and thought-
process. Eliot was basically a sensitive creature and the impacts of his
grandfather, in the atmosphere of his family, made him aware of the good and
the socially acknowledged values. The puritan atmosphere of his family does not
warm him so fiercely as much as does the impressions of his mother and the
grandfather.

Eliot’s early years included the puritan faith of the family as one of the
dominant factors behind his spiritual and religious thinking. The family religion
was “Unitarianism”\(^5\) which Eliot has himself described as a” Boston doubt: a
scepticism difficult to explain… not destructive but dissolvent.”\(^6\) The queer sort of
his comment not only described the extreme Puritanism as a family religion but
also opened doors for Eliot's being indifferent in religion in his coming years.

Eliot’s was, by nature, a man of sincere rule made for himself and could
live a disciplined life if obstacles on way did not ruffle his course. It is, perhaps,
because of his love of a discipline living that Eliot called Unitarianism a ‘Boston
doubt’. He felt a sigh of relief when he left the hard but amiable atmosphere of his
family, after finishing his is schooling at “ Smith Academy 1905.”\(^7\) His days at
Milton Academy ware numbered and he left it in1906 for onward studies at
Harvard. He joined Harvard with an ambition of a highest degree and stayed there till 1910-11.

Harvard alone proved the workshop off his personality building and the real Eliot of the future took birth here, both as the man and the poet. He came in touch with eminent teachers like Bertrant Russell, Irving Babbitt, George Santayana, William James, Josia Royce and Mr. Sastri Sanskrit was one of his subjects and the undergraduate level, which left him in a “state of illumination.”\(^8\) The majority of his early poems were written by Eliot during his Harvard days and, on that account, was made the editor of the literary magazine, Advocate.

Eliot was gifted for hard work and a desire to get high kind of leering. It was in view of his ambitions that he planned to complete his dissertation on “experience and the objects of knowledge in the philosophy of F.H. Bradley.”\(^9\) His taste was philosophical as his approach had been to achieve as what is universally true and absolute. In connection with his dissertation, and as a matter of his literary pursuit, Eliot visited Paris in June 1910, to listen to Bergson face to face. He lived in Paris in “Left Bank pension, rue St. Jacques, at college de France.”\(^10\) He enjoyed full literary relishment in this study of Julien Benda, Charles Maurras, and Jules Romains. Andra Salmon.
Baudelaire, Remy de Gourmont, and several others. The French classics left indelible impacts on Eliot and his thought. The impressions recollected by Eliot are well discernible in his thought and philosophy.

Eliot got a fellowship in 1914 for study at “Marburg, Germany.” The misfortune befell upon him and his efforts shuttered down as the World War I broke out and he could not carry out his studies. The only place, where Eliot could find refuge in, was England from where he once went and never returned back to the States. This was, perhaps, the moment which force-shadowed many havocs as well creations in his life as a man and a writer.

Ezra Pound was the man whom Eliot met first in England; he was also the last who attended Eliot’s funeral in 1965. He was not only his host in England but as well as the literary adviser all the years long. If any incident, which can be held responsible for causing turning point in Eliot’s life, was his meeting with Vivienne Haighwood. He met Haighwood at Oxford over the London Bridge and “were married in June 1915.” Eliot was jobless and his parents refused his alliance with the catholic girl, Vivienne. Since Eliot’s family was protestant, the indication, particularly from his father, was clear that Eliot would either choose Vivienne, or never come back to the States. He was a man of values, and a man of sincere nature. He preferred Vivienne than ever going to his family again. Bertrand Russell was his teacher at Harvard and, however, he extended him every possible help but proved ‘mephistophilistic’ in his “seduction of Vivienne.” His
married life was most unhappy for reasons of matrimonial debauch. The whole literary career of Eliot is one reflection of his haunted feelings which he could bring out in the form of verse, but never expressed those failures, of love and faith. Both Russell and Vivienne pursued him as ghosts and apparitions, which often have come out as real dramatic situations in his life.

The series of his minor and creative work begins with *Prufrock and Other Observation* (1917), *Ara Vos Prec* (1919), and Poems (1920). *The Waste Land* (1922), *The Hollows Men* (1924-25) and *Gerontion* (1926) form the crucial part of his literary crusade.

Eliot has contributed with his *Sacred Wood* (1922) and other criticism on Donne and metaphysical poetry during these years.

The literature, after 1927, is, however, consistent in its philosophical and the spiritual note, but its perfection has been effected by three major happenings in his career, Eliot feels sentimentally saturated and his mental conditions compel him to seek compromising balance, resulting in the changes from one possibility to the another. Vivienne goes lunatic and Eliot converts himself into Anglo-Catholic. Like-wise, his shift from poetry to drama establishes the change from the literary tradition to the social tradition. The most dominant part played by his preparedness to live, and to live happily is a change from poetry to drama. The poems, exhibiting the years of transition from one tradition to the another, are the
Journey of the Magi, Sweeney Agonistes (1932) and Ash-Wednesday (1930). The Family Reunion (1939) is on the tradition of “Sweeney Agonistes,” written at the advent of World War II. The Four Quartets (1944) expresses his maturity in philosophy, including the East and F.H. Bradley. The years between 1948 and 1958 are the years of his literary richness. The Family Reunion is followed by The Cocktail Party (1949), The Confidential Clerk (1954), and The Elder Statesman (1958). The year 1948 is fruitful to him in double ways. On the either hand, he is awarded the Nobel Prize and, on the other, he associates himself with the social drama. His post-Nobel-prize days lead him to his towers of gusty lectures over the world.

Eliot’s life had been “almost a crime; but a crime of passion”¹⁴ for his marriage with Valerie Fletcher Mrs. Eliot, now the custodian of his property, is his second wife whom he married at the age of sixty-two.

The closing years of Eliot’s career consist of his activities as a laureate and a critic. He visited the States more than thrice, but could never see his home personally.

He died of hypochondria, double hernia, on June 14, 1965 and had expressed that his body be cremated and the ashes be buried at East Coker, Somerset.
Eliot’s ashes were sent to Somerset as his will went. He was cremated at Westminster Abbey, and the choir sung at his burial was from Little Gidding, Part IV.

Any sort of literary greatness is but an individual excellence reached at in the experience and its natural communication. Eliot is deemed as the greatest among the modernites in view of his intricate, intense and explicitly uncommon experience, channelized to the readers through his writings. These are the little but grand moments of life which constitute the form of his verse. Whether it is sentiment, or the idea behind the situation, Eliot attains perfection through synthesis of the idea and the emotion. As he said of the sensibility in his Criticism, Eliot attains perfection through synthesis of the idea and the emotion. As he said of the sensibility in his criticism, Eliot, of course, maintains the synthesis in combining the emotion to idea and the vice versa. It can also be said that the real experience can be attained by transforming the idea into emotion and emotion into idea. The sensibility, which is the transformation of the emotion into idea and vice versa, equates the fullest experience at a situation. If Eliot’s experiences are counted and considered in the light of its criticism, he always succeeds and stands par-excellent. But, it is doubtful if Eliot has taken or communicated only the experiences of the others as he summarizes in his theory of impersonality.
Eliot speculates that “Poetry is not a turning loose of emotion but an escape from emotion, it is not the expression of personality but an escape from personality.” Eliot has to say here that poetry should not be personal. His definition implies that poetry should be impersonal, that is, poetry must objectify the experiences of the others than describing one’s own involvements in different situations. Eliot has antagonized the romantic view of poetry as ‘an overflow of powerful feelings.” when Wordsworth say poetry “as a recollection of powerful emotions in tranquility.” he means that the impression made after observation of a thing are reproduced after refinement and make verse in its fuller expression. Eliot as a great critic opposes his view saying that the mind should not work as a machine for reproducing all that we have.

Experienced and felt. He further reacts that mind should work as a peaceful negotiator between good and bad impressions.

All that Eliot says about poetry is acceptable and stands far above Wordsworth; so long his critical capacity is concerned. There can’t be any objection about Eliot’s critical summary of poetry, but what really matters is the practice in his own verse of all that he has said in this criticism. In fact Eliot, at least in his Waste Land, has never adhered to all that he has said in his theory of impersonality in art. Eliot wrote The Waste Land in 1922 and his theory of impersonality appears somewhere in 1948. There is no doubt if Eliot follows the rule he had explained him self in 1948. The crux of the discussion is that Eliot is
most personal in *The Waste Land* and, instead of describing *The Waste Land* of
the modern word, he has brought foreword is own world of frustration, failure and
imperfection. If *The Waste Land* is described as an “oily puddle of emotional
noises”\(^\text{18}\), it implies that Eliot has expressed his personal wounds of the
unsuccessful married life by covering up the experience with different borrowings
and dragging it for combining it to different parallel’s. The fact is that the theme of
*The Waste Land* is, in short, the personal failure of the poet for which he has
burnt his self for many years and wept without a job continuously. It is another
thing that he has made a balance for himself by objectifying his losses and
frustration as the loss and frustration of the world as whole.

**EZRA POUND**

MR. ELIOT and I are in and agreement, or ‘belong to the same is school
of critics, in so far as we both believe that existing works form a complete order
which is changed by the introduction of the ‘really new’ work.

His contempt for his readers has always been much greater then mine, by
which I would indicate that I quite often write as if I expected my reader to use his
intelligence, and count on its being fairly strong, whereas Mr. Eliot after enduring
decennial fogs in Britain practically always writes as if for very feeble and brittle
mentalities, from whom he can expect neither resilience nor any faculty for
seeing the main import instead of the details or surfaces.
When he talks of ‘commentation and elucidation’ and of the correction of taste’, I go into opposition, or rather, having been there first, I note that if I was in any sense the revolution I have been followed by the counter-revolution. Damn your taste, I would like if possible to sharpen your perception, after which your taste can take care of itself.

‘Commentation’ be damned. ‘Elucidation’ can stand if it means ‘turn a searchlight on’ something or preferably some work or author lying in shadow.

Mr. Eliot’s flattering obeisance to ‘exponents of criticism’, wherein the say that he supposes they have not assumed that criticism is an ‘autotelic activity’, seems to me so much apple-sauce. In so far as the bureaucracy of letters has considered their writing as anything more than a shortcut to the feeding trough is or a means of puffing up their personal importances, they have little else for the past thirty years than boost the production of writing about writing. Not only as autotelic. But as something which ought to receive more attention from the reading victim then the great books themselves.

Granted that nobody ought to be such a presumptuous imbecile to hold up the autotelic false horizon, Mr. Eliot describes a terrestrial paradise and not the de facto world, in which more immediate locus we observe a perpetual exchange
of civilities between pulex, cimex, vermiformis, etc., each holding up his candle before the shrines of his similars.

However, accepting for the moment Mr. Eliot’s monumental or architectural simile: the KRINO, ‘to pick out for oneself, choose, prefer’ (page 381 my edition of Liddell and Scott) which seems to me the major job, is to determine, first, the main form and main proportions of that order of extant letters, to locate, first the greater pyramids and then, possibly, and with a decently proportioned emphasis, to consider the exact measurements of the stone-courses, layers, etc.

Drydeng gives T.S.E. a good club wherewith to smack Milton. But with a modicum of familiarity of familiarity or even a passing acquaintance with Dante, the club would hardly be needed.

So outlandish did Corbiere appear even from the point of view of the Romantics that he was dismissed, when he was noticed at all, as not merely unseemly but insane—till Paul Verlaine, in 1883 did him honor in a series of articles, “Les Poetes Maudits,” which was one of the important critical events in the development of symbolism Verlaine himself, a more accomplished artist, but a less original and interesting personality, had been strongly influenced by, “Les Amours Jaunes” he seems, indeed, to have caught over from Corbiere, nor only certain artistic effects but even something of his own poetic personality, his peculiar accent of wistful naiveté: compare Corbiere’s “Rondels pour Apres” with
Verlaine’s sonnet which begins, “L’espoir luit comme un bin de paille dans l’etale”; or “Paria “ with “Casper Hauser.”

But another French poet, Jules Laforgue, nineteen years younger than Corbiere, had independently developed a tone and technique poignant-ironic, grandiose-slangy, scurrilous-naïve- which had much in common with Corbiere’s Laforgue was the son of a school master and, for all his nonchalance in handling rudely the conventions of French poetry, much more a professional man of letters than Corbiere Laforgue even errs through preciosity in his fashion; what with Corbiers seems a personal and inevitable, if eccentric, manner of speech, in Laforgue sounds self-conscious and deliberate, almost some times a literary exercise. He was tubercular, as Corbiere was also, and dead at twenty-seven and his gentleness and sadness are still those of a sick well cared for child; his asperities, his surprising images, his coquetries, his cynicism, and his impudence, are still those of a clever schoolboy. Laforgue’s friends procured him a post as reader to the Empress Augusta of Germany; and, falling under the spell of German philosophy, he brought its jargon into his verse, contributing thereby to Symbolism perhaps the one element of obscurity which it had lacked.

“The Waste Land,”\textsuperscript{20} technique in method as well as in mood, has left Laforgue far behind. Eliot has developed a new technique, at once laconic, quick, and precise, for representing the transmutations of thought, the interplay of perception and reflection. Dealing with subjects complex in the same way as
those of Yeats’s poem “Among school-children” and Valery’s “Cimetiere Marin,” Eliot has found for them a different language.

But Eliot’s most complete expression of this theme of emotional starvation is to be found in the later and longer poem called “The Waste Land” (1922). The Waste Land of the poem is a symbol borrowed from the myth of the Holy Grail: it is a desolated and sterile country ruled by impotent king, in which not only have the crops ceased to grow and the animals to reproduce, but the very human inhabitants have become incapable of having children. But this sterility we soon identify as the sterility of the Puritan temperament. On the other hand, his attitude was always a little that of the Beef Eater in the Tower of London, who assumes the transcendent value of the Crown Jewels which he has been set to guard and does not presume to form a personal opinion as to their taste or their respective merits; and the moral passion of Paul Elmer More has ended by paralyzing his aesthetic appreciation. But T.S. Eliot, with an infinitely sensitive apparatus for aesthetic appreciation, approaching English literature as an American, with an American’s peculiar combination of avidity and detachment and with more than the ordinary English critic’s reading in the literatures, ancient and modern, of the Continent, has been able to succeed as few writers have done in the excessively delicate task of estimating English, Irish and American writers in relation to one another, and writers in English in relation to writers on the Continent.
The extent of Eliot’s influence is amazing: these short essays, sent out without publicity as mere scattered notes on literature, yet sped with so intense a seriousness and weighted with so wide a learning, have not only had the effect of discrediting the academic clichés of the text books, but are even by way of establishing in the minds of the generation now in college a new set of literary clichés. With the ascendancy of T.S. Eliot, the Elizabethan dramatists have come back into fashion, and the nineteenth-century poets gone out. Milton’s poetic reputation has sunk, and Dryden’s and Pope’s have risen. It is as much as one’s life is worth nowadays, among young people, to say an approving word for Shelley or a dubious one about Donne. And as for the enthusiasm for Dante— to paraphrase the man in Hemingway’s novel there’s been nothing like it since the Fratellinis.

Eliot’s role as a literary critic has been very similar to Valery in France: indeed, the ideas of the two men and their ways of starting them have corresponded so closely that one guesses they must influence each other a good deal. Like Valery, Eliot believes that a work of art is not an oracular outpouring, but an object which has been constructed deliberately with the aim of producing a certain effect. He has brought back to English criticism something of that trenchant rationalism which he admires in the eighteenth century, but with a much more catholic appreciation of different styles and points of view than the eighteenth century allowed. The romantics, of course, fare badly before this
criticism. Vague sentiment vaguely expressed, rhetorical effusion disguising bad art—these Eliot’s laconic yet so beautifully rounded out, is completely self-contained and does not lead to anything beyond itself; and finally, for all their brilliance, we begin to find them tiresome.

Now there is a good deal in T.S. Eliot of this pedantry and sterility of his age. He is very much given, for example, to becoming involved in literary Houses—that-Jack-built: “We find this quality occasionally in Wordsworth,” he will write, “but it is a quality which Wordsworth shares with Shenstone rather than with Collins and Gray. And for the right sort of enjoyment of Shenstone, we must read his prose as well as his verse. The ‘Essays on Men and Manners’ are in the tradition of the great French aphorists of the seventeenth century, and should be read with the full sense of their relation to Vauvenargues, La Rochefoucauld and (with his wider range) La Bruyere. We shall do well to read enough of Theophrastus to understand the kind of effect at which La Bruyere aimed. (Professor somebody-or-a-other’s book on ‘Theophrastus and the Peripatetcs’ gives us the clew to the intellectual atmosphere in which Theophrastus wrote and enables us to gauge the influences on his work—very different form each other—of Plato and Aristotle.)” At this rate (though I have parodied Eliot), we should have to read the whole of literature in order to appreciate a single book, and Eliot fails to supply us with a reason why we should go to the trouble of doing so. Yet against he background of the criticism of his time. Eliot has stood out unmistakably as a man passionately interested in literature. The real intensity of
his enthusiasm makes us forget the primness of his tone; and his occasional dogmatism is redeemed by his ability to see beyond his own ideas, his willingness to admit he relative character of his conclusions.

But if Eliot, in spite of the meagerness of his production, has become for his generation a leader, it is also because his career has been a progress, because he has evidently been on his way somewhere, when many of his contemporaries more prolific and equally gifted, have been fixed in their hedonism or despair. The poet of “The Waste Land” was too serious to continue with the same complacency as some of his contemporaries inhabiting that godforsaken desert. It was certain he would not stick at that point, and one watched him to see what he would do.
NOTES AND REFERENCES


4 Ibid., p.9.


6 Ibid., p.2.


13 Ibid., p.43.


15 T.S. Eliot, *Notes Towards the definition of Culture* (London: Faber & Faber)

\(^{16}\)Ibid., p.98.

\(^{17}\)Ibid., p.98.

\(^{18}\)Max Eastmen. Quoted by Donald Davie in “The end of an Era.” T.S. Eliot ed.


\(^{19}\)T.S.Eliot, From Axel’s Castle. p.131.

\(^{20}\)Edmund Wilson, p.179.