CHAPTER-V
THE LITERARY INFLUENCES ON T.S. ELIOT

Eliot's range of studies and frame of references are very wide and diverse. From the Bible to Irving Babbitt and Donne to Baudelaire, there is a variety of sources from which Eliot has derived some sort of inspiration or other. The whole culture of Europe, from the Roman origins to the evolving Christendom, has been his sphere of work and interest. It would be enough, for the purposes of this dissertation, to discuss the major influences that went into the formation of Eliot's concept of culture.

Eliot paid a very generous tribute to Coleridge, feeling himself to be a kindred spirit. Coleridge 'was rather a man of my own type, differing from myself chiefly in being immensely more learned, more industrious and endowed with a more powerful and subtle mind.'¹ The 'idea' in 'The Idea of a Christian Society' is derived from Coleridge as much as from Plato. Coleridge's 'clerisy' becomes the consciously believing community in Eliot. Eliot did not like communism even as Coleridge had an apathy for Jacobinism. Roger Kojecky observes: 'Both Coleridge and Eliot looked to the traditional wisdom of the Church for the correction of a modern deterioration.'² Further, both Coleridge and

Eliot 'considered that classical studies had an important contribution to make since they constituted part of the foundation on which European Civilization had been reared.'³ The paper written by Eliot 'on the Place and Function of the Clerisy', in 1944, for discussing the problem of the guardianship of culture, clearly refers to Coleridge's work, 'on the Constitution of Church and State' (1830). Both of them define clerisy as an elite formed by individual merit and ability rather than any hereditary trait and claim. Inspite of this fundamental agreement, they appear to disagree on two important points. Coleridge visualises a clerisy as a class, by itself and consecrates it as 'national church'. He makes this elitist class the sole guardian of culture. But Eliot thought that if class and elite became the same, as in the case of clerisy, they would die of inbreeding. He did not like also that clerisy should be the exclusive trustees for and transmitters of culture. Obviously, Eliot's approach is more sophisticated. However, the term 'clerisy' for both, has an affinity with the clergy of the Church Establishment whose role in the dissemination of education and culture, through parish system, is stressed by both. They both felt that an enlightened elite should excercise within the whole nation a positive leadership.

The other significant influence was that of Matthew Arnold. Eliot observed in 'Arnold and Pater': 'we go to him

for refreshment and for the companionship of a kindred point of view to our own, but not as disciples.' He declared Arnold to be 'a fore-runner of what is now called Humanism.' Arnold's thoughts seem to have been the starting point for Eliot's deliberations.

The role of a critic in society and the importance of classical studies are the two fields in which both the writers agree. Roger Kojecky has made a very significant observation about the great tradition of cultural thought in English literature and the role of Coleridge, Arnold and Eliot in the aspect: 'Matthew Arnold's emphasis lay on a national achievement of the conditions for the free play of ideas and the prevalence of the best ones, rather than on arriving finally at particular truths or formations. He represents a more liberal and a more relativist aspect of the nineteenth century literary-prophetic tradition at opposite ends of which stand Coleridge and Eliot.' Eliot concludes that Arnold's books about Christianity seem only, to say again and again and again — merely that the Christian faith is of course impossible to the man of culture.' Eliot explains that 'they are negative in a particular fashion; their aim is to affirm that the emotions of Christianity can and must be preserved without the belief.' Summing up,

5. Ibid.
8. Ibid., P. 343.
Eliot feels that 'the effect of Arnold's religious campaign is to divorce Religion from thought.' He does not approve of the connection, as made out by Arnold between Religion and Culture: 'the facile assumption of a relationship between culture and religion is perhaps the most fundamental weakness of Arnold's "Culture and Anarchy". Arnold gives the impression that culture (as he uses the term) is something more comprehensive than religion; that the latter is no more than a necessary element, supplying ethical formation and some emotional colour, to culture which is the ultimate value.' Eliot is irked by the humanist angle of Arnold's view. Eliot is so much disillusioned with Arnold that he calls 'the intellectual Europeanism of Arnold' as the fore-runner of the aestheticism of Walter Pater, 'the degradation of philosophy and religion' and alleges that 'Art for art's sake' is 'the offspring of Arnold's culture'.

Arnold's view of culture, thus, provides the point of departure as well as the 'starting point' for Eliot's concept. But the close affinity between the two impels Eliot to make mutually conflicting explanations and reservations regarding his debt to Arnold. In many respects they are kindred spirits. Both show a genuine and deep concern with critical and literary honesty. Order, discipline, authority and standard are the objectives that Arnold

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aims at for insuring culture against anarchy, which Eliot
sets himself to pursue in his own time and in his own way.
Eliot and Arnold are both occupied with the question of
the use of poetry and the place of a poet in society.

Matthew Arnold, protesting against the insularity
of the English, urged them to adopt a continental outlook.
The French nation was chosen by him as representing this
continental outlook. The classical intellect and intelligence was preferred to romantic imagination and intuition.
Eliot amplified this preference of Arnold.

Arnold is a thinker from whom Eliot has learnt
much. Eliot is concerned about transmission of culture
from the past to the future. Arnold had worked for the
extension of education among a larger proportion of society
and was concerned about the diffusion of culture in his day.
Eliot writes: 'what I plead for is what Matthew Arnold
spoke of as "the knowledge of the best that has been thought
and said in the world" (and, I might add, the best that has
been done in the world, and that has been created in the
arts in the world); that this knowledge of history, in the
widest sense, should not be reserved to a small body of
experts-reserved to them and parcelled out among them - but
that it should be the common possession of those who have
passed though the higher grades of non-specialised education;
that it might well form, for most of them, the foundation for many of the more modern studies which now tend to be substituted for it. Again Eliot underlines the significance of 'an international fraternity of men of letters, within Europe', in a broadcast on 'the Unity of 'European Culture', shortly after the end of World War II. Thus Matthew Arnold seems to have exerted a tremendous influence on Eliot's cultural thinking.

Francis Herbert Bradley is another kindred spirit to Eliot. Eliot declares: 'In fighting the battles that he fought in the seventies and eighties, Bradley was fighting for a European and ripened wise philosophy, against an insular and immature and cranky one; the same battle that Arnold was fighting....' In his 'Ethical Studies', Bradley undermined the foundations of Utilitarianism, 'a great temple in Philistia', which Matthew Arnold 'hacked at the ornaments and cast down the images'. Bradley's distinction as a philosopher was based not so much on his logic as on his social philosophy, which 'replaced a philosophy which was crude and raw and provincial by one which was, in comparison, Catholic, civilised and universal.' In 'Culture and Anarchy', Arnold talked about 'the will of God', but the will of God appeared to have been superseded in

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15. Ibid., Pp.448-449.
importance by 'our best self, or right reason, to which we want to give authority.' Irving Babbitt set up 'inner check' to supply, in modern times, the old curbs of class, of authoritative government, and of religion. The doctrines of the 'best self' and the 'inner check' might seem to be supported by certain formulations of Bradley as well. In the concluding remarks of 'Ethical studies', he says: 'You must resolve to give up your will, as the mere will of this or that man, and you must put your whole self, your entire will, in to the will of the divine. That must be your one self, as it is your true self; that you must hold to both with thought and will, and all other you must renounce.' Bradley is very careful in maintaining a balance between 'man's mere will' and 'the will of the Divine' and does not exaggerate either of them at the expense of the other. Eliot appreciates this balance.

Eliot appreciates Bradley's wisdom and remarks that he was thoroughly empirical. He feels that Bradley's philosophy was fundamentally a philosophy of commonsense. Eliot has defined, in one of the choruses of 'The Family Reunion', his position by vividly portraying the world from which he is isolated and alienated. This practice is consistent with the Bradleyan philosophy. Hugh Kenner, pointing out Eliot's debt to Bradley, in the 'Invisible poet', has shown that much of Eliot's excessive caution, in dealing with

problems of individuality, consciousness, and communication, may well be attributed to his study of Bradley's system. Roger Kojecky states: 'Russell's attack on Bradleyan idealism, identifying it as an unacceptable monist synthesis, substituted the analysis of propositions as the proper activity of philosophers. This radically sceptical approach led in course of time to logical positivism and to the refinements of linguistic structuralism. Eliot did not of course share the discomfort felt by the tradition with metaphysical ideas, but he did share the ideals of analysis and detachment, which he regarded as a necessary preliminary to decision and action based on a complete idea.' However, Eliot is greatly impressed by the worldly wisdom of Bradley and considers him as an apostle of commonsense which is not a thing to be got at without maturity and study and thought.

One of his teachers by whom Eliot was most impressed and influenced, at Harvard, was Irving Babbitt. He was the professor of French literature and inspired Eliot with a taste for it, which became the most important continental influence for the latter's classicism. Babbitt was the leader of 'Humanism' in America. Roger Kojecky says: 'with Babbitt and Maurras, Eliot shared a distrust of most of what was associated with the idea of romanticism.' In a passage in 'After Strange Gods', Eliot mentions Babbitt's book 'Democracy and Leadership' as one of those works in which

18. Ibid., P. 62.
there is a tendency toward a higher and clearer conception of reason, and a more severe and serene control of the emotions by Reason. Irving Babbitt was also concerned with the relation of the artist's thought to society, just as Eliot was. In criticism, Eliot 'looked to America and to the Humanist school which stemmed from Irving Babbitt, for support of his view that there was a community of values between literature and life.'

Eliot called Babbitt 'a stout upholder of tradition and continuity.' Eliot found that the tenor of Babbitt's thought was in keeping with a Christian ethical outlook.

Eliot remained under the spell of his former teacher till 1927 when he was baptized in the church of England. Consequently owing to his close association with Humanism, Eliot explained his points of disagreement with the leaders of this movement, chiefly Irving Babbitt. Eliot thought that the problem of Humanism was undoubtedly related to the problem of religion which is not accepted by the leaders of the movement of Humanism.

Another important influence on Eliot has been that of T.E. Hulme. Hulme's 'Speculations: essays on Humanism and the philosophy of art' challenges the tradition of humanism at its very roots, whereas Eliot wants to accommodate 'the correct and necessarily vague Humanism.'

'Hulme's point is that the humanist tradition, which has dominated Europe since the Renaissance, is breaking up; and this is to be welcomed, since the fundamental beliefs of humanism are in fact false. He sees romanticism as the extreme development of Humanism, and is concerned to reject it, and prepare for a radical transformation of society, according to different principles which he calls classical.'

From his classical position, Hulme not only rejects the naturalism of Rousseau but also denounces the principles of the French Revolution. The importance of this stand lies in its emphasis on order. 'But from its beginning in Burke, and in a direct line down to Arnold, this emphasis on order was associated with the idea of perfectability - the gradual perfection of man through cultivation.'

Hulme rejects this saying that perfection cannot be placed on the human plane, and that it belongs properly to the divine.

Eliot agrees with Hulme's analysis and criticism of Humanism, as propounded by its modern protagonists. Eliot asserts that Hulme's use of the term 'Humanism' is traditional and just. 'Eliot had found an answer to the problem of authority. He agreed with Hulme that "classicism" summed up an outlook which he believed was valid in literature and beyond it, but went further than Hulme in personal acceptance of a supernaturally sanctioned system.'

23. Ibid., P.91.
Hulme had an influence on Eliot's attitude to romanticism and classicism. He helped Eliot, as Arnold did, to connect classicism with discipline and tradition.

Eliot had not known Hulme personally, though he had heard much about him from Pound. Hulme was killed in action in 1917. His essays were not published until 1929 by which time Eliot's own theory of poetry had already ripened. Yet Eliot alone deserves the credit for developing Hulme's ideas into a complete literary system. Eliot approvingly quoted Hulme in his works.

Roger Kojecky remarks: 'Irving Babbitt at Harvard predisposed him (Eliot) to read Maurras, and as it happened, Maurras was one of Eliot's spiritual guides up to the time of his adoption of the Christian faith.' Eliot dedicated his book on Dante, in 1929, to Maurras. Charles Maurras, the leader of the 'Action Francaise', was a staunch nationalist, monarchist and classicist. He was committed to rationalism as a philosophy. He thought intelligence to be the force of decisive importance in the life of a nation, and laid much emphasis on the place of intellectuals therein, giving due importance to the role of the church in this respect. He wanted to bring about a synthesis of thought and action. Eliot defended Maurras when the Pope denounced and proscribed the 'Action Francaise'. He testified that

far from deflecting him from Christianity, as alleged against the 'Action', the effect of reading Maurras was to draw him towards it. From the middle of 1920s, Eliot was interested in seeing an elaboration of a Catholic social philosophy in the form of the Action Française. Maurras's concept of hierarchy was attractive to Eliot and it brought him in to an easy association with Catholicism. So was the concept of monarchism, which allowed the social order to be surmounted by a spiritual order. Eliot valued also the elitism of the intellectual variety in Maurras's thought, which he developed in to the concept of the community of Christians in 1970.

Eliot's originality has been enriched by a variety of inspirations from a diversity of sources.