CHAPTER-1

INTRODUCTION
Introduction Thomas Stearns Eliot (1888-1965) a critic as well as a poet is considered one of the well acknowledged representative figures of the twentieth century whose literary talent speaks of itself so boldly and vividly through his remarkable and distinguished poetry, that has no match. His literary career extended over a period of forty-five years. He dominated the English literary scene with a wide poetic authority and influence. He tried his hand at poetry, at drama, at criticism, both literary and social, and at journalism, and achieved eminent success in each of these fields. No other English poet of the 20th century has shown such versatility and originality; his greatness is not a recognized fact which no longer requires any assertion. F.R. Leaves remarks:

“Eliot’s genius is that of the great poet who has a profound and acute apprehension of the difficulties of his age”
T.S. Eliot was born in St. Louis, Missouri. He came to London during First World War and became a British Citizen in 1927. He was educated at Harvard, Paris and Oxford. He married an Englishwoman in 1915, settled in England and proclaimed himself ‘classicist in literature, royalist in politics and Anglo-catholic in religion’. He was a poet, dramatist and literary critic.

**Teaching, Lloyds, Faber and Faber**

After leaving Merton, Eliot worked as a schoolteacher, most notably at Highgate School, a private school in London, where he taught French and Latin—his students included the young John Betjeman. Later he taught at the Royal Grammar School, High Wycombe, a state school in Buckinghamshire. To earn extra money, he wrote book reviews and lectured at evening extension courses. In 1917, he took a position at Lloyds Bank in London, working on foreign accounts. On a trip to Paris in August 1920, he met the writer James Joyce and the artist Wyndham Lewis. Eliot said he found Joyce arrogant—Joyce doubted Eliot's ability as a poet at the time—but the two soon
became friends, with Eliot's visiting Joyce whenever he was in Paris.

In 1925, Eliot left Lloyds to join the publishing firm Faber and Gwyer, later Faber and Faber, where he remained for the rest of his career, eventually becoming a director. Wyndham Lewis and Eliot became close friends, a friendship leading to Lewis's well-known painting of Eliot in 1938.

**Conversion to Anglicanism and British citizenship**

On June 29, 1927 Eliot converted to Anglicanism from Unitarianism, and in November that year he took British citizenship. He became a warden of his parish church, Saint Stephen's, Gloucester Road, London,[18] and a life member of the Society of King Charles the Martyr. He specifically identified as Anglo-Catholic, proclaiming himself "classicist in literature, royalist in politics, and anglo-catholic [sic] in religion."[20][21]

**Separation and remarriage**
By 1932, Eliot had been contemplating a separation from his wife for some time. When Harvard offered him the Charles Eliot Norton professorship for the 1932-1933 academic year, he accepted and left Vivienne in England. Upon his return, he arranged for a formal separation from her, avoiding all but one meeting with her between his leaving for America in 1932 and her death in 1947. Vivienne was committed to the Northumberland House mental hospital, Stoke Newington, in 1938, and remained there until she died. Although Eliot was still legally her husband, he never visited her.

From 1946 to 1957, Eliot shared a flat with his friend John Davy Hayward, who gathered and archived Eliot's papers, styling himself "Keeper of the Eliot Archive." Hayward also collected Eliot's pre-Prufrock verse, commercially published after Eliot’s death as Poems Written in Early Youth. When Eliot and Hayward separated their household in 1957, Hayward retained his collection of Eliot's papers, which he bequeathed to King's College, Cambridge in 1965.
On January 10, 1957, Eliot at the age of 68 married Esmé Valerie Fletcher, who was 32. In contrast to his first marriage, Eliot knew Fletcher well, as she had been his secretary at Faber and Faber since August 1949. They kept their wedding secret; the ceremony was held in a church at 6.15 a.m. with virtually no one in attendance other than his wife's parents. Since Eliot's death, Valerie has dedicated her time to preserving his legacy; she has edited and annotated The Letters of T. S. Eliot and a facsimile of the draft of The Waste Land. In the early 1960s, by then in failing health, Eliot worked as an editor for the Wesleyan University Press, seeking new poets in Europe for publication.

**Death and honors**

Eliot died of emphysema in London on January 4, 1965. For many years he had had health problems caused by his heavy smoking, and had often been laid low with bronchitis or tachycardia. He was cremated at Golders Green Crematorium. In accordance with Eliot's wishes, his ashes were taken to St Michael's Church in East Coker, the village from which his ancestors had emigrated to America.
• A wall plaque commemorates him with a quotation from his poem "East Coker": "In my beginning is my end. In my end is my beginning."

• In 1967, on the second anniversary of his death, Eliot was commemorated by the installation of a large stone in the floor of Poets' Corner in London's Westminster Abbey. The stone, cut by designer Reynolds Stone, is inscribed with his life dates, his Order of Merit, and a quotation from his poem, "Little Gidding": "the communication / Of the dead is tongued with fire beyond / the language of the living."

**Poetry**

For a poet of his stature, Eliot produced a relatively small amount of poetry. He was aware of this early in his career. He wrote to J. H. Woods, one of his former Harvard professors, that, "My reputation in London is built upon one small volume of verse, and is kept up by printing two or three more poems in a year. The only thing that ters is that these should be perfect in their kind, so that each should be an event."[26]
Typically, Eliot first published his poems individually in periodicals or in small books or pamphlets, and then collected them in books. His first collection was *Prufrock and Other Observations* (1917). In 1920, he published more poems in *Ara Vos Prec* (London) and *Poems: 1920* (New York). These had the same poems (in a different order) except that "Ode" in the British edition was replaced with "Hysteria" in the American edition. In 1925, he collected *The Waste Land* and the poems in *Prufrock* and *Poems* into one volume and added *The Hollow Men* to form *Poems: 1909–1925*. From then on, he updated this work as *Collected Poems*. Exceptions are *Old Possum's Book of Practical Cats* (1939), a collection of light verse; *Poems Written in Early Youth*, posthumously published in 1967 and consisting mainly of poems published 1907–1910 in *The Harvard Advocate*, and *Inventions of the March Hare: Poems 1909–1917*, material Eliot never intended to have published, which appeared posthumously in 1997.

*The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*
In 1915 Ezra Pound, overseas editor of Poetry magazine, recommended to Harriet Monroe, the magazine's founder, that she publish "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock". Although the character Prufrock seems to be middle-aged, Eliot wrote most of the poem when he was only 22. Its now-famous opening lines, comparing the evening sky to "a patient etherised upon a table," were considered shocking and offensive, especially at a time when Georgian Poetry was hailed for its derivations of the 19th century Romantic Poets. The poem follows the conscious experience of a man, Prufrock (relayed in the "stream of consciousness" form characteristic of the Modernists), lamenting his physical and intellectual inertia, the lost opportunities in his life and lack of spiritual progress, with the recurrent theme of carnal love unattained. Critical opinion is divided as to whether the narrator leaves his residence during the course of the narration. The locations described can be interpreted either as actual physical experiences, mental recollections, or as symbolic images from the subconscious mind, as, for example, in the refrain "In the room the women..."
come and go." The poem's structure was heavily influenced by Eliot's extensive reading of Dante Alighieri, in the Italian, and refers to a number of literary works, including Hamlet and those of the French Symbolists.

Its reception in London can be gauged from an unsigned review in The Times Literary Supplement on June 21, 1917: "The fact that these things occurred to the mind of Mr Eliot is surely of the very smallest importance to anyone, even to himself. They certainly have no relation to poetry...

**The Waste Land**

In October 1922 Eliot published The Waste Land in The Criterion. Eliot's dedication to il miglior fabbro ("the better blacksmith") refers to Ezra Pound's significant hand in editing and reshaping the poem from a longer Eliot manuscript to the shortened version that appears in publication. It was composed during a period of personal difficulty for Eliot—his marriage was failing, and both he and Vivien were suffering from nervous disorders. The poem is often read as a representation of
disillusionment of the post-war generation. That year Eliot lived in Lausanne, Switzerland to take a treatment and to convalesce from a break-down. There he wrote the final section, "What the Thunder Said," which contains frequent references to mountains. Before the poem's publication as a book in December 1922, Eliot distanced himself from its vision of despair. On November 15, 1922, he wrote to Richard Aldington, saying, "As for The Waste Land, that is a thing of the past so far as I am concerned and I am now feeling toward a new form and style." The poem is known for its obscure nature—its slippage between satire and prophecy; its abrupt changes of speaker, location, and time. Despite this, it has become a touchstone of modern literature, a poetic counterpart to a novel published in the same year, James Joyce's Ulysses. Among its best-known phrases are "April is the cruellest month", "I will show you fear in a handful of dust"; and "Shantih shantih shantih," the Sanskrit mantra that ends the poem.

The Hollow Men
The Hollow Men appeared in 1925. For the critic Edmund Wilson, it marked "the nadir of the phase of despair and desolation given such effective expression in The Waste Land."[31] It is Eliot's major poem of the late twenties. Similar to other work, its themes are overlapping and fragmentary: post-war Europe under the Treaty of Versailles (which Eliot despised); the difficulty of hope and religious conversion; and Eliot's failed marriage.

Allen Tate perceived a shift in Eliot's method, writing that, "The mythologies disappear altogether in The Hollow Men." This is a striking claim for a poem as indebted to Dante as anything else in Eliot's early work, to say little of the modern English mythology—the "Old Guy Fawkes" of the Gunpowder Plot—or the colonial and agrarian mythos of Joseph Conrad and James George Frazer, which, at least for reasons of textual history, echo in The Waste Land. The "continuous parallel between contemporaneity and antiquity" that is so characteristic of his mythical method remained in fine form. The Hollow Men
contains some of Eliot's most famous lines, notably its conclusion:

This is the way the world ends
This is the way the world ends
This is the way the world ends
Not with a bang but a whimper.

*Ash Wednesday*

*Ash Wednesday* is the first long poem written by Eliot after his 1927 conversion to Anglicanism. Published in 1930, it deals with the struggle that ensues when one who has lacked faith acquires it. Sometimes referred to as Eliot's "conversion poem," it is richly but ambiguously allusive, and deals with the aspiration to move from spiritual barrenness to hope for human salvation. The style is different from the poetry that predates his conversion. *Ash Wednesday* and the poems that followed had a more casual, melodic, and contemplative method.

Many critics were particularly enthusiastic about it. Edwin Muir maintained that it is one of the most moving poems Eliot wrote,
and perhaps the "most perfect," though it was not well-received by everyone. The poem's groundwork of orthodox Christianity discomfited many of the more secular literati.

**Old Possum's Book of Practical Cats**

In 1930, Eliot published a book of light verse, *Old Possum's Book of Practical Cats* ("Old Possum" was Ezra Pound's nickname for him). This first edition had an illustration of the author on the cover. In 1954, the composer Alan Rawsthorne set six of the poems for speaker and orchestra, in a work entitled *Practical Cats*. After Eliot's death, the book was adapted as the basis of the musical, *Cats*, by Andrew Lloyd Webber, first produced in London's West End in 1981 and opening on Broadway the following year.

**Four Quartets**

Eliot regarded *Four Quartets* as his masterpiece, and it is the work that led to his being awarded the Nobel Prize in
Literature.[4] It consists of four long poems, each first published separately: *Burnt Norton* (1936), *East Coker* (1940), *The Dry Salvages* (1941) and *Little Gidding* (1942). Each has five sections. Although they resist easy characterisation, each begins with a rumination on the geographical location of its title, and each meditates on the nature of time in some important respect—*theological*, *historical*, physical—and its relation to the human condition. Each poem is associated with one of the four *classical elements*: air, earth, water, and fire.

*Burnt Norton* asks what it means to consider things that might have been. We see the shell of an abandoned house, and Eliot toys with the idea that all these merely possible realities are present together, invisible to us. All the possible ways people might walk across a courtyard add up to a vast dance we can't see; children who aren't there are hiding in the bushes.

Footfalls echo in the memory
Down the passage which we did not take
Towards the door we never opened
Into the rose-garden.
*East Coker* continues the examination of time and meaning, focusing in a famous passage on the nature of language and poetry. Out of darkness, Eliot offers a solution: "I said to my soul, be still, and wait without hope".

*The Dry Salvages* treats the element of water, via images of river and sea. It strives to contain opposites: "... the past and future/Are conquered, and reconciled".

*Little Gidding* (the element of fire) is the most anthologized of the Quartets. Eliot's experiences as an air raid warden in *The Blitz* power the poem, and he imagines meeting *Dante* during the German bombing. The beginning of the Quartets ("Houses ...

.../Are removed, destroyed") had become a violent everyday experience; this creates an animation, where for the first time he talks of Love as the driving force behind all experience. From this background, the Quartets end with an affirmation of Julian of Norwich: "all shall be well and 'All manner of thing shall be well". 
The *Four Quartets* cannot be understood without reference to Christian thought, traditions, and history. Eliot draws upon the theology, art, symbolism and language of such figures as Dante, and mystics *St. John of the Cross* and *Julian of Norwich*. The "deeper communion" sought in *East Coker*, the "hints and whispers of children, the sickness that must grow worse in order to find healing," and the exploration which inevitably leads us home all point to the pilgrim's path along the road of sanctification.

**Plays**

With the important exception of his *magnum opus* *Four Quartets*, Eliot directed much of his creative energies after *Ash Wednesday* to writing plays in verse, mostly comedies or plays with redemptive endings. He was long a critic and admirer of *Elizabethan* and *Jacobean* verse drama; witness his allusions to *Webster*, *Thomas Middleton*, *William Shakespeare* and *Thomas Kyd* in *The Waste Land*. In a 1933 lecture he said:

"Every poet would like, I fancy, to be able to think that he had some direct social utility. ... He would like to be something of a

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popular entertainer, and be able to think his own thoughts behind a tragic or a comic mask. He would like to convey the pleasures of poetry, not only to a larger audience, but to larger groups of people collectively; and the theatre is the best place in which to do it."

After *The Waste Land* (1922), he wrote that he was "now feeling toward a new form and style." One project he had in mind was writing a play in verse with a jazz tempo featuring Sweeney, a character who had appeared in a number of his poems. Eliot did not finish it. He did publish separately two pieces of what he had written. The two, *Fragment of a Prologue* (1926) and *Fragment of an Agon* (1927) were published together in 1932 as *Sweeney Agonistes*. Although Eliot noted that this was not intended to be a one-act play, it is sometimes performed as one.

A pageant play by Eliot called *The Rock* was performed in 1934 for the benefit of churches in the Diocese of London. Much of it was a collaborative effort; George Bell, the Bishop of Chichester, had been instrumental in connecting

**Literary criticism**

Eliot also made significant contributions to the field of literary criticism, strongly influencing the school of [New Criticism](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/New_Criticism). While somewhat self-deprecating and minimizing of his work—he once said his criticism was merely a “by-product” of his “private poetry-workshop”—is considered by some to be one of the greatest literary critics of the 20th century. The critic [William Empson](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_Empson) once said, "I do not know for certain how much of my own mind [Eliot] invented, let alone how much of it is a
reaction against him or indeed a consequence of misreading him. He is a very penetrating influence, perhaps not unlike the east wind."

In his critical essay “Tradition and the Individual Talent,” Eliot argues that art must be understood not in a vacuum, but in the context of previous pieces of art: “In a peculiar sense [an artist or poet] ... must inevitably be judged by the standards of the past.” This essay was one of the most important works of the school of New Criticism. Specifically, it introduced the idea that the value of one work of art must be viewed in the context of all previous work, a “simultaneous order” of works. Also important to New Criticism was the idea—as articulated in Eliot’s essay "Hamlet and His Problems”—of an “objective correlative,” which posits a connection among the words of the text and events, states of mind, and experiences. This notion concedes that a poem means what it says, but suggests that there can be a non-subjective judgment based on different readers’ different—but perhaps corollary—interpretations of a work.
More generally, New Critics took a cue from Eliot in regard to his “classical’ ideals and his religious thought; his attention to the poetry and drama of the early seventeenth century; his deprecation of the Romantics, especially Shelley; his proposition that good poems constitute ‘not a turning loose of emotion but an escape from emotion'; and his insistence that ‘poets...at present must be difficult.’”

Eliot’s essays were a major factor in the revival of interest in the metaphysical poets. Eliot particularly praised the metaphysical poets' ability to show experience as both psychological and sensual, while at the same time infusing this portrayal with—in Eliot's view—wit and uniqueness. Eliot's essay "The Metaphysical Poets," along with giving new significance and attention to metaphysical poetry, introduced his now well-known definition of "unified sensibility," which is considered by some to mean the same thing he term "metaphysical."

His 1922 poem The Waste Land—which at the time of its publication, many critics believed to be a joke or hoax—also can be better understood in light of his work as a critic. He had
argued that a poet must write “programmatic criticism”; that is, a poet should write to advance his own interests rather than to advance “historical scholarship”. Viewed from Eliot's critical lens, *The Waste Land* likely shows his personal despair about *World War I* rather than an objective historical understanding of it.

In 1946 Eliot was a member of a group otherwise composed of senior clergy which produced a report entitled "Catholicity" published in 1947 as a contribution to the process which resulted in the Church of England's Report on Doctrine (1948).

In 1958, the *Archbishop of Canterbury* appointed Eliot to a commission that produced *The Revised Psalter* (1963). A harsh critic of Eliot, *C. S. Lewis*, was also a member of the commission, where their antagonism turned into a friendship.

**Critical reception**

**Response to his poetry and literary criticism**
Eliot's poetry was first criticized as not being poetry at all. Many critics attacked his practice of widespread interweaving of quotations from other authors into his work. "Notes on the Waste Land," which follows the poem, gives the source of many of these, but not all. Eliot defended this as a necessary salvaging of tradition in an age of fragmentation, and completely integral to the work, adding richness through unexpected juxtaposition. Other critics have condemned the practice as showing a lack of originality, and for plagiarism. The prominent critic F. W. Bateson published an essay called "T. S. Eliot: The Poetry of Pseudo-Learning". Eliot wrote in The Sacred Wood: "Immature poets imitate; mature poets steal; bad poets deface what they take, and good poets make it into something better, or at least something different."

Canadian academic Robert Ian Scott pointed out that the title of The Waste Land and some of the images had previously appeared in the work of a minor Kentucky poet, Madison Cawein (1865–1914). Bevis Hillier compared Cawein's lines "... come and go/Around its ancient portico" with Eliot's "... come

Many famous fellow writers and critics have paid tribute to Eliot. According to poet Ted Hughes, "Each year Eliot's presence reasserts itself at a deeper level, to an audience that is surprised to find itself more chastened, more astonished, more humble." Hugh Kenner commented, "He has been the most gifted and influential literary critic in English in the twentieth century." However, other writers have not supported this view.

C. S. Lewis thought Eliot's literary criticism "superficial and unscholarly". In a 1935 letter to a mutual friend of theirs, Paul Elmer More, Lewis wrote that he considered the work of Eliot to be "a very great evil." In a 1943 letter to Eliot, Lewis expressed both admiration along with antagonism toward his views when
he wrote: "I hope the fact that I find myself often contradicting you in print gives no offence; it is a kind of tribute to you—whenever I fall foul of some widespread contemporary view about literature I always seem to find that you have expressed it most clearly. One aims at the officers first in meeting an attack!"

**Allegations of anti-Semitism**

The depiction of Jews in some of Eliot's poems has led several critics to accuse him of anti-Semitism. The book that makes the strongest case for anti-Semitism in Eliot's work is Anthony Julius's *T. S. Eliot, Anti-Semitism, and Literary Form* (1996).

There are quite a few examples from Eliot's early poetry that have been characterized as anti-Semitic. For instance, the poem *Gerontion* contains a depiction of a landlord referred to as the "jew [who] squats on the window sill." Also, the poem *Burbank with a Baedeker: Bleistein with a Cigar* contains the lines: "The rats are underneath the piles/ The Jew is underneath the lot." Julius writes of this poem that, "the anti-Semitism is
unmistakable." In A Cooking Egg, Eliot writes, "The red-eyed scavengers are creeping/ From Kentish Town and Golder's Green" (Golders Green is a largely Jewish suburb of London). On the other hand, the publisher of Gerontion and Burbank was John Rodker, himself Jewish. Additionally, Eliot mailed a draft of Gerontion to his friend Sidney Schiff, also a Jew, for pre-publication editing and commentary. A third "anti-Semitic" poem, Sweeney Among the Nightingales, was published by Eliot’s Jewish friend Leonard Woolf. None of these men considered the poems anti-Semitic.

In a series of lectures delivered at the University of Virginia in 1933, later published under the title After Strange Gods: A Primer of Modern Heresy (1934), Eliot wrote, regarding a homogeneity of culture, "What is still more important [in society] is unity of religious background, and reasons of race and religion combine to make any large number of free-thinking Jews undesirable." Although he later disavowed the book, it is unclear which aspects of the book Eliot found objectionable and whether his disavowal was a refutation of the anti-Semitic
comments in the book (which are limited to a few sentences out of the entire work).

One of the first protests against Eliot on the subject of anti-Semitism came in the form of a poem from the Anglo-Jewish writer and poet Emanuel Litvinoff, read out during an inaugural poetry reading for the Institute of Contemporary Arts in 1951, attended by Eliot. Only a few years after the Holocaust, Eliot had republished lines originally written in the 1920s about "money in furs" and the "protozoic slime" of Bleistein's "lustreless, protrusive eye" in his Selected Poems of 1948, angering Litvinoff. Litvinoff read out his poem, entitled "To T. S. Eliot," to a packed but silent room, ending with the lines, "Let your words/tread lightly on this earth of Europe/lest my people's bones protest".

There was an absolute shocked silence. When I finished reading it Herbert Read said to me "if I had known that you were going to read such a poem I would never have allowed it" and I thought "eh and you're an anarchist?" Then hell broke loose and I remember particularly Stephen Spender getting up and
saying "as a poet as Jewish as Litvinoff, I'm outraged by this unwanted, undeserved attack on my friend T.S. Eliot" and so on and so forth ... Apparently Eliot was heard to mutter, he had his head down leaning on a chair, to his entourage "it's a good poem."

Leonard Woolf, husband of Virginia Woolf, who was himself Jewish and a friend of Eliot's, judged that Eliot was probably "slightly anti-Semitic in the sort of vague way which is not uncommon. He would have denied it quite genuinely." In 2003, Professor Ronald Schuchard of Emory University published details of a previously unknown cache of letters from Eliot to Horace Kallen, which reveal that in the early 1940s Eliot was actively helping Jewish refugees from Germany and Austria to re-settle in Britain and America. In letters written after the war, Eliot also voiced support for the state of Israel.

In 2009, Faber published Volume 2 of Eliot's letters, and reissued Volume 1 with 200 new letters. Craig Raine, who is one of the few critics to try to defend Eliot against charges of anti-Semitism, writes that the letters reveal some of Eliot's
correspondents as flagrant anti-Semites, though Eliot himself was more restrained. Eliot's mother writes, "I have an instinctive antipathy to Jews, just as I have to certain animals," while his legal and literary representative in New York, John Quinn, writes of the streets being "infested ... with swarms of horrible looking Jews, low, squat, animal-like." Eliot complains to Quinn that he is annoyed with his publisher in the U.S., Horace Liveright, who was Jewish, and that, "I am sick of doing business with Jew [sic] publishers who will not carry out their part of the contract unless they are forced to," though he goes on to write in not dissimilar terms about Christian publishers too: "I wish I could find a decent Christian publisher in New York who could be trusted ..."

The collected edition of his poems contains the following: Prufrock and Other Observations (1917), Poems (1920), The Waste Land (1922), Hollow Men (1925), Ash Wednesday (1930), Ariel Poems (1927-1930), Choruses from The Rock (1934), Four Quarters (1935-1942). His important literary criticism is
contained in Selected Essays (1932) and On Poetry and Poets (1957).

T.S. Eliot was invested with the Order of Merit (O.M.) in 1948 and the same year he was awarded the Noble Prize for Literature. The first edition of his published poems appeared in 1915. But it was The Waste Land (1922) that firmly established his reputation as a great poet. In his poetry, T.S. Eliot has dealt with a great variety of themes. The themes of the early phase of his poetry are urban which are satirical and ironical. Spiritual emptiness and barrenness, religious dogmas, decay of human values, moral degradation and above all the most prominent theme like degenerated morals, have been depicted successfully.

This excruciating self-consciousness (‘when I am pinned and wriggling on the wall’) is characteristic also of the speakers in ‘Portrait of a Lady’ and ‘La Foggia Chi Peonage’ and the hyacinth girl passage in The Waste Land:

I could not
Speak, and my eyes failed, I was neither

Living nor dead, and I knew nothing.

Particularly it inhibits declarations of love, or any emotional commitment, Eliot was all too familiar with it.

Prufrock's own spiritual paralysis spreads across the sky and colors the whole scene with its inertia like a yellow fog. To venture out into these sordid streets (where Sweeney would be at home), to undertake to make his visit to the salon where he is invited to tea, where the women congregate to one of whom he must sing his love song, is to expose himself to being asked the 'overwhelming question', the same question Dante asked Guido, 'who are your? who do you think you are?' To give an honest account of himself would entail speaking his ridiculous name, admitting that it fits him well, since he is 'almost ridiculous, almost, at times, the Fool'. In the past he has tried to present a face to meet the faces that he meets, but his efforts are betrayed by his bald spot; to mask his real self by careful presentation of a sartorial 'front':

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My morning coat, my collar mounting firmly to the chin,

My necktie rich and modest, but asserted by a simple pin

but lie cannot conceal the thinness of his arms and legs. That pin and those thin legs and the idea of being fixed in a formulated phrase generate the terrible image of the pinned and wriggling insect.

And what if he were able to drag himself there yet again and presume to speak of his need to one of these women, these pretentious and affected dilettantes, what, exactly, could he say with any hope of being understood? He tries out a possible opening:

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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 . . .

He is virtually proposing to go back to the beginning of this poem and use *that* as his love song. Impossible. Prufrock wishes
he could shed the terrible burden of self-consciousness, of any kind of consciousness, and just grab what he wants, like a crab:

I should have been a pair of ragged claws

Scuttling across the floors of silent seas.

Yet even here, Prufrock cannot escape the duality of his nature — perhaps the claws would not agree which way to scuttle; and the words tagged and scuttling also import into the fantasy his sense of his own worthlessness. The floors of silent seas are clearly the depths of the unconscious into which he will sink at last.

Unable to visualize himself in the role of lover, Prufrock now attempts to cast himself in the role of prophet, the prophet whose revelations are never understood, who is always ignored or persecuted, but whose very persecution guarantees his greatness. A prophet persecuted by a woman would fit the bill. John the Baptist, beheaded by Salome. But the incongruous image to his own head – grown slightly bald – brought in upon a platter, soon punctures these pretensions.
Unconsciously, Prufrock is still yearning to be the great lover. He half-remembers one of the greatest love poems ever written, Marvell's 'To His Coy Mistress', There the lover proposes:

Let us roll all our strength, and all

Our sweetness up into one ball:

And tear- our pleasures with rough strife,

Thorough the iron gates of life.

The image is of warfare, with cannon balls smashing through the iron gates of cities. But in Prufrock's lines

To have squeezed the universe into a ball

To roll it toward some overwhelming question

the lover sounds more like a dung-beetle or a child with a soft ball which never even leaches its target. All the strength is in the ‘overwhelming question’.
Even if Prufrock were to make some shattering statement in answer to that question, such as

I am Lazarus come tromp the dead,

Come back to tell you all, I shall tell you all —

in other words, to communicate to the living the truth of his buried life, this would cut no ice with the bored woman, who would turn away, saying:

That is not what I meant at all.

That is not it, at all. 34

At this point Prufrock finally abandons the role of tragic hero, and the attempt to say what he really means, to answer the overwhelming question. Perhaps Polonius would be a more appropriate part than Hamlet; but his analysis of Polonius reveals to him to be

At times, indeed, almost ridiculous —

Almost, at times, the Fool.
Perhaps Prufrock is reminded of Orrick and the grave. He knows that he will never now sing his love song. What chance he ever had of love or passion is now gone. There is nothing before him but old age. In panic he plans trivial excesses, wild hysterical gestures against age and nonentity:

I shall wear the bottoms of my trousers rolled.

Shall I part my hair behind? Do I dare to eat a peach?

I shall wear white flannel trousers, and walk upon the beach.

The peach is a particularly sensuous, fleshy fruit, with a bloom like the skin of a plump girl. Hopkins could never sink his teeth into one without a sense of sin. Of course Prufrock will never do any of these things. For him they are imaginings in the same category as listening to mermaids. The mermaids are a dream version of the women in the salon. Prufrock had there been particularly excited by the women's arms ‘downed with light brown hair!’. In the dream this erotic feature is grossly exaggerated; the mermaids are ‘wreathed with seaweed red and
brown’. Yet even in his wildest fantasies, the mermaids sing only to each other, not to him.

Prufrock’s needs, especially his sexual needs, cannot be resolved in real life, only submerged, thrust into the unconscious (the ‘chambers of the sea’). The two dissociated halves of Prufrock’s psyche, the you who wants to dare and live, and the I who prefers oblivion at the bottom of the sea, are unified at last only in death. Neither can survive the demands and the ridicule of other people. ‘You and I’ become ‘we’ for the first and only time in the poem’s last words —

Till human voices wake us, and we drown.
Eliot, like Beckett, was fascinated by a passage in Dante's *Inferno* where Dante sees the shades of ‘those unfortunates who never were alive’, those who, from cowardice, ‘made the great refusal’; that is, those who lacked the courage to be either good or bad, who opted out from the challenge of life. Perhaps Prufrock is one of those, living out his damnation this side of the grave.

![Image of Walter Secker: The Camden Town Murder](image_url)

**Walter Secker: The Camden Town Murder** c. 1908

Sweeney is the exact opposite of Prufrock, an aggressively male being with no self-consciousness or sensitivity whatever. Eliot said that he first saw *37* ney’s prototype in a bar in south Boston, and that he thought of him as a mildly
successful pugilist who retired to keep a pub. Indeed a bar, dive, brothel or seamy boarding-house is Sweeney's home ground, whether in Boston, London's dockland or Buenos Aires.

The name cannot fail to evoke Sweeney Todd, the demon barber of Fleet Street. And there was a key witness, McSweeney, whom Dr Cripple was unable to produce at his trial in 1910. Sweeney is a denizen of an underworld peopled by pimps, prostitutes, and, perhaps, murderers. Sweeney is as unlikely as Prufrock to sing a love song, for the opposite reason — he is constantly surrounded by all-too-available women, with whom his relationship seems to be predatory.

The title 'Sweeney Among the Nightingales' is therefore highly incongruous. We do not expect Sweeney to be interested in the romantic beauties of the natural world. But 'nightingales' is a slang term for prostitutes; and even real nightingales do not always 38 erature and mythology have romantic associations. The title echoes Elizabeth Barrett Browning's 'Bianca Among the Nightingales', which ends:
They sing for spite,

They sing for hate, they sing for doom,

They'll sing through death who sing through night,

They'll sing and stun me in the tomb —

The nightingales, the nightingales!

In *The Waste Land* Eliot refers to the myth of Philomela, who was raped by her brother-in-law Teresa, who then cut out her tongue to prevent her telling. She was transformed into a nightingale and continually retold her story in her song.

‘Sweeney among the Nightingales’ was originally published with two epigraphs, one of which said:

Why should I speak of the Nightingale?

The nightingale sings of adulterous wrong.

The surviving epigraph is 39 memnon’s dying words from Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*: ‘I am struck a mortal blow within’. The story of Agamemnon is also one of hate and doom and
adulterous wrong. Agamemnon raped Clytemnestra and murdered her husband. He then married her, but later sacrificed their youngest daughter Iphigenia to gain favorable winds to take the Greek fleet to Troy. During his ten-year absence, Clytemnestra and her lover Aegistheus planned to murder Agamemnon on his return. He brought with him as concubine the ravished Trojan princess Cassandra. His wife, preparing him for a bath, put on him a bath-robe she had cunningly sewn to be virtually a straight-Jacket. Wearing this, he was as helpless as Sweeney Todd’s victims in his barber’s chair (destined to become meat pies). She butchered him and buried him without honors. Thus the epigraph prepares us for the otherwise unexpected shift from Sweeney to Agamemnon at the end of the poem.

We notice at once how different in style the Sweeney poems are from ‘Prufrock’ . Short lines, short regular stanzas, bald rhymes. The free, spontaneous, insinuating verse of ‘Prufrock’ had been perfect for expressing the hysterias and squirming of his interior monologue. None of Prufrock’s
thoughts emerged into action. None of Sweeney’s actions appear to have been preceded by thought. Since the characters in the Sweeney poems have no inner life, the poems can only be narrative, describing their external actions, observing them with fascinated repulsion from the outside, as one might watch the behavior of insects in a laboratory. In the middle of the poem Sweeney and the woman are being gaped at through a window. Later Sweeney gains the ascendancy by being the one who is outside looking in.

Sweeney is constantly associated with basic appetites and functions, and with wild animals — ape, zebra and giraffe in the first stanza alone. The first thing we are told about Sweeney is that he is laughing, and the last that he is grinning. Why? In 1921 Eliot’s friend Wyndham Lewis invented some characters he called Tyros, whom he described as ‘elementary persons ... primitive creatures, immersed in life, as much as birds, or big, obsessed, sun-drunk insects’.
These immense novices brandish their appetites in their face, lay bare their teeth in a valedictory, inviting, or merely substantial laugh. A laugh, like a sneeze, exposes the nature of the individual with an unexpectedness that is perhaps a little unreal. This sunny commotion in the face, at the gate of the organism, brings to the surface all the burrowing and interior broods which the individual may harbor.

The other characters in the Sweeney poems are equally low, direct and unselfconscious. The lady in the cape does not wait to be invited to sit on Sweeney's knees, seems equally happy to sprawl on the floor, and seems to be involved in some low conspiracy against Sweeney. Rachel tears at the grapes with murderous paws, echoing Prufrock's pair of ragged claws.

The sultry atmosphere is laden, ominous. We need not look for any very specific meanings. Eliot stated that all he set out to create in this poem was a sense of foreboding. The constellation of Orion and the Dog star were associated by the
Egyptians with the coming of the fertilizing rains and Nile floods; but here they ate ‘veiled’. The seas themselves are ‘shrunken’, suggesting a drying-up of the sources of life. The waiter's bringing of oranges, bananas, figs and hothouse grapes seems like a mock fertility-offering, but somehow overheated and artificial. The eroticism of Sweeney's world is no more fertile or creative, no more likely to produce children or fulfillment, than the prudishness of Prufrock's.

The lines

Branches of wisteria

Circumscribe a golden grin

for the first time place the actions of the poem within an artistic frame; dignify them with Latinate and poetic diction — but only ironically, since the golden grin presumably refers to Sweeney's gold fillings.

The next lines

The host with someone indistinct
Converses at the door apart,

again created an ironic distance between the formal diction and the banal, potentially sordid subject-matter. Then suddenly, with no change of rhythm or diction, in what ought to be a new sentence, but follows a mere comma, we find ourselves among nightingales and nuns, and a moment later, still in the same sentence, among the heroes of classical antiquity. It used to be the standard commentary on Eliot that, here as in *The Waste Land* and elsewhere, he juxtaposes ancient and modern simply to point the sordidness and meaninglessness of modern life in contrast with the glory and grandeur of the distant past, particularly classical antiquity. This we now recognize to have been (with a few local exceptions) a radical misreading, a wanton blindness to Eliot's real meanings. What he is pointing to is the continuity of ancient and modern. The fact that characters have resounding names like Agamemnon and Clytemnestra and that their lives were made the subject of myths, legends, epics and tragedies, does not make those lives any less sordid than the lives of characters called Sweeney and
Doris. The romantic idealizing poetic tradition would dignify the death of Agamemnon with the warbling (‘liquid siftings’) of nightingales. The last line forces on us the unwilling realization that beneath the formal rhetoric what is actually being said is that the ‘liquid sittings’ are not songs but droppings. The nightingales, singing, if at all, of adulterous wrong, stained the shroud of Agamemnon with their shit. And he deserved no better ending.

‘Sweeney Erect’ was probably written in 1919, a year or so after ‘Sweeney Among the Nightingales’. 'Erect' is suggestive, It we are familiar with the earlier Sweeney poem, where Sweeney had to repulse the woman's sexual advances because he suspected her of being involved in some plot against him, we might well take the sexual meaning first, that Sweeney has an erection. And the first thing we are told about him in the poem is that he has spent the night with a woman. 'Erect' also suggests 'homo erectus', a primitive hominid formerly known as Pithecanthropus, which means 'ape-man'. The second thing we are told of him in the poem is that getting out of bed he looks
like an orang-utan. Halfway through the poem we discover that the literal meaning of ‘Erect’ is that Sweeney is ‘addressed full length to shave’. Ironically it also suggests the large claims made for the species by idealists:

(The lengthened shadow of a man

Is history, said Emerson

Who, had not seen the silhouette

Of Sweeney straddled in the sun.)

The epigraph is from *The Maid's Tragedy* by Beaumont and Fletcher. The lines are spoken by the heroine Aspasia — a betrayed maiden suggesting a fittingly desolate background for her portrait. Two more abandoned maidens from antiquity, Arianne and Nauseas, are mentioned in the first few lines, while Sweeney is compared to the monstrous Cyclops Polypemus. Again there is continuity as well as ironic contrast, for Sweeney is no more brutal in his relations with women than Theseus and Odysseus. But the woman Sweeney (who ‘knows the female temperament’) is about to abandon is no beautiful
betrayed maiden. Nauseas when she first appears to Odysseus early in the morning is a vision of loveliness; this woman looks appalling;

This withered root, of knots of hair

Slatted below and gashed with eyes,

This oval 0 cropped out wily teeth

and her shrieks are not spiritual desolation but an epileptic fit. On the contrary, it seems likely that all the ‘ladies of the corridor’ (including Doris, who reappears in Sweeney Agonist’s) are prostitutes, and Mrs. Turner the madam. Sweeney’s woman has offended their principles not by entertaining Sweeney all night, but by shrieking so loudly as to draw attention to ‘the house’.

Arianne hanged herself for grief. In the world of Sweeney and Doris there are e no problems which cannot be cured by ‘sale volatile / and a glass of brandy neat’.
L.G. Salinger\(^1\) disliked the technique of the Sweeney poems, particularly their endings: ‘What these lines emphasize most is not the horror of the spectacle but its monotony. Technique is not a means of clarifying the tangle of human experience but of withdrawing from it towards an artificial objectivity’. In much the greatest of the Sweeney poems, *Sweeney Agonists*, Sweeney undergoes a transformation. Having murdered a woman, he finds he can no longer inhabit a world consisting of nothing but ‘birth and copulation and death’; and Eliot develops a new technique to express his horror, to reveal, in F. O. Matthiessen’s words, ‘underneath the resolute purpose of the planning animal, the victim of circumstance and the doomed or sanctified being’. For that purpose Eliot invented in 1926 in *Sweeney Agonist’s*, a dramatic verse thirty years ahead of its time.

The present study is an attempt to analyses the theme of Nature Versus Degenerated Morals in *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock* and *The Waste Land*. The problems raised in the

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poems are eternal questions pertaining to the clash between evil and good, between belief and disbelief and thus, it has a universal appeal. In the words of Eliot:

“The real conflict is not between one set of moral prejudices and another, but between the theistic and the atheistic faith; and it is all for the best that the division should be sharply drawn.”

Degeneration means one’s passing into a worse physical, mental or moral state than one, which is considered normal or desirable on the part of human beings. This sort of chaotic transformation on the part of modern materialistic and mechanical human beings can be seen in abundance in The Waste Land. In today’s scien... materialistic world man is degenerating day-by-day. In a bound materialistic pursuit, he is forgetting all his moral and spiritual grandeur. In fact, the entire moral, spiritual, intellectual and physical traits, which are essential for a human to be humane, are vanishing day-by-day leaving him behind like a waste land where there is only
barrenness that can never nourish the goodly tree of human being to survive or flourish in the poisonous environment of the modern social set up. He is on the verge of extinction because he has got completely degenerated.

In other words, today’s man has got degenerated, morally, spiritually, intellectually, emotionally, physically as well as mentally. And the root causes behind this degeneration in him are numerous like his lack of faith in religion, lack of inclination towards moral values, lack of mutual affection, lack of the sense of brotherhood, lack of kindness and sympathy towards his fellow beings, lack of the sense of belongingness and above all his irrepressible selfishness which can be called the illegitimate child of his self reliance married to his too much rationality. He is becoming materialistic and in the worldly glories, he is ready to sacrifice all his morality and spirituality at the slightest temptations offered to him by the modern world.

About the condition of modern world Charles Gore observes:
"The World in which we live today can only be described as chaotic in the manner of religious beliefs." 

In every sphere of life, whether it be moral, spiritual or emotional, he uses the weapon of his rationality to win over the enemy of his unlimited desires neglecting the assistance offered to him by his morality, spirituality and emotionality. He sees only through the glass of materialism and rationalism. And the ultimate result of this is his indifference towards moral, spiritual and emotional values. He turns into beast; forgets his humanity; and thus, he is subjected to eternal miseries and misfortunes. The cluster of degeneration in today’s modern man can be defined in terms one by one.

First of all, Moral Degeneration. This sort of degeneration in today’s man has taken place because of the scarcity of the long cherished traditional moral values, virtues and qualities which a human being should possess to be humane. These are vanishing speedily leaving him morally blank. Today’s modern man lacks in courtesy, politeness, honesty and civility. He
doesn’t consider others equal to him. He doesn’t respect others’ existence whether it is of a man or of an animal. He has become dead like a stone. He has neither kindness nor sympathy towards his fellow beings. He has forgotten how to behave how to talk how to treat his fellow being, and thus, he has turned into a haughty creature, who believes in the philosophy of his own and strives to fulfill his selfish ends. In such a morally degenerated environment nothing good can flourish.

Spiritual Degeneration, which means loss of faith in religion resulting in the death of one’s spirituality. In today’s world spirituality has no place. Man is becoming spiritually barren and dead. He hears no more the call of his spirit. He sees through head, not through heart and thus, his plight goes on increasing day-by-day. At every step in life, he neglects the spiritual aspect of things needed for his overall welfare and betterment. Thus, he can be called spiritually degenerated and its remedy, once and for all, is to restore the rapidly vanishing spiritual values from his heart.

“A heap of broken image, where the sun beats,
And the dead tree gives no shelter, the cricket no relief,

And the dry stone no sound of water”

Emotional degeneration means degeneration of man at emotional level. To be emotional means possessing emotions of love, kindness and sympathy for others. In fact, these emotions make one sensitive and humane as well. In other words, to be humane means a true human being, and showing oneself emotionally dead or barren means proving oneself inhumane and inhuman as well. One’s emotionality enables him to respond to others and so, but when one becomes emotionally static or indifferent to others, there remains no difference between a machine and a human being. And this is the grim condition of today’s modern man. Due to this lack of emotional intensity, he is converting into a machine.

“She smoothes her hair with automatic hand,

And puts a record on the gramophone”.

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Modern man is no longer an emotional human being. His all relations are based on his self-centeredness. He is leading an artificial life with mechanical smiles, scientific tears, controlled speech, borrowed thoughts.

“The yellow fog that rubs its back upon the window-panes,

The yellow smoke that rubs its muzzle on the window-panes”6

Social Degeneration means that today’s materialistic man is turning into a selfish being. He is forgetting his responsibilities, which he owes to the society where he lives. Now, he has started living for himself. Every action of his is directed by his self-interest. He never tries to think that his actions may be harmful to society. He bothers not a bit. He murders social norms; He breaks the laws of society, for his own betterment only. At every step in life, he discards the social norms, codes of the system of society. And it is obvious that a
social order can not exist, especially, when there is an absence of any stream, norms and discipline. Ultimately the situation becomes chaotic and mere anarchy can exist in that situation and that is what happening in the modern world. Thus today’s man is socially degenerated. W. B. Yeats’ words are quite appropriate when he says in *The Second Coming*.

> “Turning and turning into the widening gyre;

Falcon cannot hear the falconer,

Things fall apart; the center cannot hold;

Here anarchy is loosed upon the world.”

Cultural degeneration means the negligence towards glorious past, its values and its system which was based on moral, spiritual and cultural values. Modern man is ignoring his customs, his rituals and his traditions. He no longer cherishes that tender faith in his cultural values, which supported his valuable past. He is trying to flourish the stem of
his existence without nourishing the roots of his glorious past. He is doing so willingly, unaware of the fact that in the absence of these roots, he will never be able to sprout, to flourish. Thus he is becoming culturally uprooted and degenerated as well, and the world where he is living is nothing but a spiritually, morally, socially and culturally degenerated wasteland.

T.S. Eliot’s *The Waste Land* and *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock* depict this sort of degeneration. The age in which T.S. Eliot started writing poetry was the age of depression and disillusionment. The end of the nineteenth-century came with the beginning of rapid industrialization of England, and with it, arrived an urbanization. Result of this was prosperity that gave birth to evils and affected the very basic aspects of life deeply. Materialistic outlook towards everything and the economic prosperity brought about a breakdown of values cherished so far. Money became more important than human affection and relationship. The greatness of man became more and more dependent upon his wealth and economic well being.
The qualities of mind and heart, no longer, held much importance. It naturally led to a breakdown of spiritual and religious values and beliefs. Moreover, the First World War worsened the situation i.e., the feeling of loneliness, despair, confusion and cynicism increased. This all was happening because:

“Our sensibility is constantly changing,
as the world about us changes............

Our language goes on Changing

Our way of life changes.”

It was the age in which feeling of doubt and uncertainty, and the erosion of human relationship was hastened and heightened by the new discoveries in the field of psychology. Freud emphasized that irrationality and the unconscious had a great power to affect human conduct. Irrationality, indeed, came to be regarded as fundamental to human nature. Forces lying deep in human beings could easily triumph over the so-
called rationality. It was a deeply disturbing discovery; it naturally helped in aggravating the atmosphere of confusion and anxiety. Subjects hitherto considered taboo came under discussion freely. The study of the subconscious became very much a part of literature.

Man was no longer seen as a rational being as far as his behavior was concerned. Family relationships underwent a change. The assessment of the relative roles of man and woman changed. The younger generation and the older generation felt the gap between them widening, resulting in a change of relationship between parent and child. No doubt, the discoveries in science brought a better understanding and a widening of horizons, but the astonishing ultimate result of it was the break up of old traditional values and relationships and the ever-increasing feeling of footlessness in the hearts of individuals. This gave rise to tremendous spiritual barrenness and personal frustrations. The atmosphere is well presented in Eliot’s The Waste Land.
The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock is not a love song in traditional sense of the word. Eliot marks a break from the Romantic tradition of the nineteenth century. Romantic poetry, the stream of which ran at its highest flood in the first half of the nineteenth century, became weak and thin. By the end of the century, the romantic poets sought an escape from the realities of life into the world of nature and art. He also exploited the past for its pageant and glory. His poetry faces the problems of modern life and does not turn its back from urban civilization. Its settings are in the streets of London and the city slums. The ugliness of the factory surroundings and pollution of the smug and loneliness of city life, in-spite of its swelling crowd and exclusive parties, are represented by Eliot without any fear or favors. He does not white-wash the grim picture of urban surroundings. The restaurants smelling of oil and dust and rotten cabbages filled with saw dust, are found in The Love Song. Williamson says:

“In this poem (1917) we have the love song of a certain character, whose very name is suggestive of
The First World War brought in its wake further revolt against authority and existing beliefs and ideas. The post war period saw the generation gap widening still further. The older generation tried to keep up the belief in authority and the control of rationality in behavior. The younger generation felt that they knew better. The war had its terrible effect. It caused more cynicism and skepticism about values of the older generation. Virginia Woolf writes about the evil effects of war:

“So prying and in were the fingers of the European War, smashed a plaster cast of Ceres, ploughed a hole in the geranium beds, and utterly ruined the cook’s nerves at Mr. Brewer’s establishment at Maxwell Hill.”

General disillusionment resulted in a revolt in all fields of human behavior and thought. There was a rebellion against
accepted ideas in politics, morality and religion. There was a collapse of faith in established institution and beliefs. It reflected in the breakdown of social and family relationships. There was an atmosphere of ‘spiritual gloom’. The post war consequences gifted England with the depressed economy, widespread unemployment, great shortage of essential goods and mechanical human beings.

The despair and cynicism of the age resulted in the disregard of all established values. No values, moral, religious, social or ethical were considered to be absolute. In the field of politics, the Victorian complacency was being replaced by a questioning of the system. There was an increasing feeling that relationship should be based on equality. The feeling of Nationalism was giving way to internationalism, conflict was inevitable. During the years of war, life generally was lived in an atmosphere of hustle and restlessness.

Probably, the First World War brought in the feeling of being unsettled, a feeling of disillusionment and a growing sense of the impermanence of everything. A superficial gaiety
and frivolity was to be seen. There was a sense of hurry and haste in all fields of activity.

“HURRY UP PLEASE IT’S TIME

HURRY UP PLEASE IT’S TIME


Ta at. Goodnight. Goonight.”

A great poet, in writing of himself, writes of his age, said T.S. Eliot. This pronouncement of his is equally applicable to him. His poetry is deeply influenced by his age. All social, political, economic and literary tendencies of this age exercise a tremendous influence on him. It is an accepted fact that Eliot’s The Waste Land is the epic of the modern age, which presents a vivid and transparent panorama of the anarchy prevailing in the so-called contemporary civilization. Some critics call it ‘an age of Disintegration and Anxiety’. The industrial chaos due to migration of labor from rural areas, created abnormal
conditions of living for the lower classes. The moral chaos arising out of the violence and destruction caused by the war, could not be replaced by the new system of values. Sex perversities ruined the life of cities.

With the growth of literacy and automatic printing presses, key-books and magazines became very popular. As such, quality declined as compared to quantity. Other means of mass media like the cinema, radio and television, were exploited for commercial and entertainment purposes. Human relationships became coarse and vulgar. The lowering of public tastes left its mark on literature. The detective stories, comics, sexy magazines, pot boilers, blue films further relate to the decline of public morality and public tastes.

Eliot attaches great importance to ‘tradition’. His conception of tradition is essentially dynamic. He declares that we should not adhere to tradition blindly or timidly. There should be conformity between the old and the new. The past should be altered by the present as much as the present is directed by the past. A poet, who is aware of this, will be aware
of great difficulties and responsibilities. An adequate knowledge of the past is absolutely essential. The future cannot be built up in the absence of the past. Thus, a tradition is a connecting link between the past and the future. Keeping in view the intrinsic value of literary tradition Eliot remarks:

“What is to be insisted upon is that the poet must develop or procure the consciousness of the past and that he should continue to develop this consciousness throughout his career.”

Chaos cannot continue forever. The English writers showed a concern for a definition of their responsibility that would strike a balance between their desire for freedom of expression, of personal values and the sense of obligation to a wider and stricter social pattern.

“The people who cease to care for its literary inheritance become barbaric; the people which ceases to produce literature
ceases to move in thought and sensibility.

The poetry of a people takes its life from the people’s speech and in turn gives life to it.”^{13}

This sort of background of instability, uncertainty, confusion, and breakdown of values altogether awakened the sensitive heart in T. S. Eliot. It was against this background that he began his work. It was an atmosphere in which “things fall apart”, in which the best lack conviction, while the worst are full of passionate intensity. It was an atmosphere in which culture was threatened; where there was a corruption of taste; where there was desperate experimentation in all fields in a search for stability and new patterns. About the situation of the modern world, W.H. Auden writes:

“That girl are raped, that two boys knife a third,

Were axioms to him, who’d never heard?

Of any world where promises were kept,
Or one could weep because another wept"\textsuperscript{14}

Similarly, T.S. Eliot Says:

“One of the unhappy necessities of human existence is that we have to find things out for ourselves.”\textsuperscript{15}

The entire social, political, economic and literary tendencies of his age exercised a tremendous influence on him. The social milieu in which he was born has been reflected in the tone of his poetry. It is an accepted fact that Eliot’s \textit{The Waste Land} is the epic of the modern age, which presents a vivid and transparent panorama of the anarchy prevailing in the so-called contemporary civilization. About the problems of this age Bertrand Russell says:

“Brief and powerless is man’s life, on Him and his race the slow sure doom falls Pitiless and dark.”\textsuperscript{16}
Eliot is quite aware of the havoc created by the so-called material pursuits and he wants to make his readers realize their follies. Preoccupation with the doctrine of progress blinds us to the true significance of time and induces the belief that all human problems can be solved, in due course, purely by human ingenuity. As in The Criterion Eliot says:

“We fail to grasp the proper relation of the Eternal and the Transcendental in our overestimation of the importance of our time.”

He believes that a society without faith tends to drift and his firm conviction is that without faith in god, no scheme for social improvement can work. And this is the thing that is happening in this world, we are lacking in moral and spiritual values, and thus, we are moving towards our doom, because it is this faith that makes this earth move. This conviction too springs from his doctrine of human nature. He summons us urgently to a consideration of moral and spiritual problems through his literary works. Almost all his essays, poems,
dramas and other literary works deal with this basic theme. He writes in The Criterion:

> “We are being constantly told that the economic problems cannot wait. It is equally true that the moral and spiritual problems cannot wait; they have already waited too long.”

What he wants to assert is that it is due to our ignorance of moral and spiritual values that we are destined to suffer. This is, at bottom, the cause of our present day social evils. We ignore the present and the past for an uncertain future. And it makes us egocentric. Truth is never static or final. Hence, one, seemingly, becomes a victim of inconsistency in search of truth. Eliot wants to divert our attention towards the preservation of values inherited from the past, which are perceived to be under threat from some dominant trends in the present. By pointing out the defects of modern civilization, he is asserting an ideal that is to be attained in the future. Northrop Frye takes this futuristic stance of the cultural-critic rather too seriously when
he stresses the distinction of the cultural-critic from the historical critic on this count. As he says:

“Just as historical criticism uncorrected related culture only to the past, ethical criticism uncorrected related culture only to the future, to the ideal society.”  

It may finally come through proper education of the youth. Eliot’s views are free from uristic orientation. For him the historical sense is a perception, not only of the pastiness of the past, but of its presence. The emphasis is on making the past and the present inseparable and intimately linked together.

“The whole of the literature of his own country has a simultaneous existence and composes a simultaneous order.”

What can be possible relation between literature and religion? Eliot raises this question quite frequently in his critical works. Again and again, he reminds us that the decay of
civilizations begins with a transfer of dependence on God to dependence on the values of this world. But the feels that for social regeneration a more comprehensive faith is essential. He writes:

“But the believer, in the values only of this world, can offer himself a dilemma. If the progress of mankind is to continue as long as man survives upon this earth, then, as I have said, progress becomes merely change, for the values of man will change and a world of changed values will be useless to us.....”

Eliot is poet of moral nature of the history of man, not of physical nature or beauty or merely subjective life. He felt that the crises on the various levels of life were becoming more acute, even then poets were living in a world of make-believe born of their blind adherence to the faith in the perfectibility of man and as a natural corollary, in the inevitable progress of society. The concepts of the original sin, the eternity of pain and
suffering in human life, the struggle between the good and the evil, the hope of salvation through repentance and the possibility of the intersection of the temporal and the eternal occupied his mind., As Eliot tells us:

“The trouble of modern man is not merely the inability to believe certain things about God and man which our forefathers believed, but the inability to feel towards God and man as they did.”

Eliot considers the soul of man invaluable and feels that we should save our soul at any cost. No amount of intellectual sophistry can deny the urgency of the spiritual salvation, for thinking men. The problem of determining the influence of the age on a great poet is an intricate one and a great poet who is merely influenced by his time without influencing it in turn is a minor one. The genius gives more to his age that what he takes from it and helps in creating the contemporary time spirit. He is able to do this because of his insights into the nature of
things and because of his ability to interpret contemporary experiences in relation to the universal experiences of man.

Eliot’s poetry has relevance nor merely to the modern peculiar human situation but also to the universal human predicament. In his poetry and dramas we have a number of major characters that seem to betray the contemporary crisis. But we must be careful to distinguish between a tragic view of life and a superficial sense of disillusionment. Any newspaper columnist will tell us that an account of two world wars in half a century, a highly disastrous economic depression coming between them, the possibility of the total annihilation of the world, the rapid increase of population and a number of other major and minor, socio-political developments all intensify the complex of fear and anxiety in the mind of modern man.

All his poetry reflects his religious bent of mind. It is the connecting link between the earlier and the later phase. In the early poetry, his approach is negative but in the later phase, it is positive. However Eliot’s themes are usually urban in the
early phase of his poetry. The tone is satirical and ironical. He studies sophisticated city people and their habits and manners.

Eliot has forcefully expressed the spiritual and intellectual as well as moral degeneration. As far as emotional and physical degeneration is concerned, he has expressed it in various poems, such as *Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*. Prufrock belongs to the contemporary aristocratic world. His society shows the perfection of urban civilization with its sophisticated luxury, artificiality, hypocrisy, loneliness, make-belief and the gay-record of social parties. It is a world disgusted with itself, bored to death and finding some relief in love and gaiety. The words of Prufrock come straight from the drawing room and the fashionable clubs. This modern civilization preserved its formal manners and mechanical bits of conversation. Actually this society is rotten, and hollow at its core. It has no emotional or spiritual reservoir of strength. In this modern world, which is devoid of any moral and spiritual force, evening spreads?

“Like a patient etherized upon a table.”23
The Waste Land also describes a condition where there are no spiritual values and action is mechanical and meaningless. The lack of spiritual feeling is central to the modern wasteland, which is conveyed through the reflection of the mythical wasteland devoid of water, the source of life. However, since the poem appeared in 1922, have been contradictory reactions to it. Some have dismissed it as a joke against academic critics and have seen Eliot’s notes as his final trick. Some have assessed it as the finest example of modernist art, reflecting in its own difficulties the complexity of the modern world. Some have heard in the poem a whimper of despair. Some have sensed that behind the cleverness of the poem a tortured lover was seeking to justify himself. The theories, interpretations and assessments are amazingly diverse and this fact has led some critics to admire the poem that can stimulate so many reactions.

Eliot, in this poem, is only trying to draw our attention towards this degenerated modern world. All the five sections of the poem give voice to one kind of degeneration or the other. As
far as the first section *The Burial of Dead* is concerned, it makes us aware of the spiritual degeneration or the spiritual barrenness in modern man’s life. Eliot conveys a sense of apprehension and incomprehension in various characters presented in different situations. The lack of understanding is not helped by Madame Sosostris, a fortune-teller, whose enigmatic pronouncements only make sense later in the poem. The city, in particular London, is a place of people unable to live fully or see a way out of their deadness.

The lines from the poem express it clearly:

“What are the roots that clutch, what branches grow

Out of this stony rubbish? Son of man,

You can not say, or guess, for you know only

A heap of broken images.”

24
Part II A Game of Chess in The Waste Land, expresses the emotional degeneration. It offers two scenes showing the essential emptiness of people’s lives. The first scene presents this emptiness in a lavishly decorated room, a rich lady whose constant questions express her anxiety and lack of control. The second scene is set in a London pub where two women discuss the predicament in which Lil finds herself. The modern man is mentally impotent. He can \(76\) anything positive. In the poem, Eliot asks:

“Do you know nothing? Do you see nothing? Do you remember?

Nothing?”\(^{25}\)

The theme of sexual dissatisfaction is explored in Part III, The Fire Sermon, where Eliot, ranging about in time from Buddha and St. Augustine to the present day, has tried to show how man’s aspirations to a higher i.e. more spiritual mode of living are constantly thwarted by his subservience to his bold appetites and his self awareness. It is too late when he realizes:
“To cartages then I came

Burning

O Lord Thou pluckiest me out

O Lord Thou pluckiest

Burning”

Materialistic degeneration is presented in the brief Part IV, *Death by Water*. In this section, a drowned merchant’s body decomposes in the sea. He seems to have achieved nothing.

Part V, *What the Thunder said* beings with a description of the death of Jesus and goes on to relate a difficult journey through the desert to an empty chapel. The traveler has to suffer hardships, delusions and a sense that all is chaotic and meaningless, before he arrives. In the final section of the poem the arrival of rain is intimated and the voice of the thunder offers three words of advice: ‘give’, ‘sympathize’, and ‘control’. The poem ends with hope of salvation. The poem gives an advice
to regenerate themselves and wishes that everywhere in the world should be

‘Shanty shanty shantih’²⁷

Thus we find that there is degeneration in every sphere of life. T.S. Eliot has expressed this sort of degeneration in his poems and it is apparent that and cultural degeneration is in the helm of Eliot’s poetry. Present study has attempted to explore the moral and cultural degeneration in The Waste Land and The Love Song. These poems present a vision of spiritual death in the modern world that has never lost its power. But we should keep this view in our mind that the present wasteland is only another wasteland, different in external from but old in its internal spirit of hollowness and barbarity. The emotional and spiritual sterility are not new to human world. The senseless meaninglessness of the world does not paralyze or stupefy Eliot. As Cleanthes Brooks says:

“The poem is not merely a cry in the wilderness over something past and gone. It is a positive
assertion of the need to rehabilitate a system of belief known but now misdirected.”

REFERENCES


17. “Commentary”, The Criterion, XII (July, 1933) 75.

18. The Criterion, 647.


