

The Journey from the Inferno to the Purgatory: Eliot's Religious Odyssey

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Abstract—The poetry of T.S. Eliot is akin to a full term conception of spiritual faith that inevitably ushers in the birth of spiritual salvation after a long period of suffering and labour. This pattern is not perceived in one single poem or a specific collection of poems, but rather in the entire corpus of Eliot's poetry. It is rendered tangible when we trace the process of questing for spiritual faith in his early poetry where the need for faith is the sorest after the panorama of suffering that the human beings brought upon themselves. Throughout his poetic career, Eliot attributed this suffering to mere futility, greedy materialism and loveless existence marred by lechery rather than genuine feelings. This paper tries to prove that Eliot's poetry delineates a mental process that takes the reader from the inferno of contemporary life to the purgatory of religious faith which is potentially capable of lifting Man before falling into the abyss of loss. This being said, the paper aims at drawing the features of Eliot's perception of salvation which seems similar to a piece of mosaic which gets clearer and clearer as every piece is put in its proper place.

Index Terms—poetry, twentieth century English poetry, T.S. Eliot, Eliot's religious odyssey

I. INTRODUCTION

Being religiously inclined, T.S. Eliot, with unrivalled craftsmanship and timeless memorableness portrays stages of spiritual consciousness which start with a world of sickening monotony and agonizing boredom and then develops into an intense recognition of uprootedness and spiritual metamorphosis of a civilization reduced into "a heap of broken images," a recognition which ushers in spiritual contemplation. After a long process of contemplation, Eliot's quest ends with a recognition that faith is Man's only way out, but it is lost and should be regained, and this is the ultimate goal of the religious odyssey that Eliot's poetry aims at pursuing.

As a religious poet, far from being blindly dogmatic, Eliot's poetry reveals deep respect for all religions which show spiritual faith and esteem for life. He possesses a profound and piercing insight into the human nature which, according to Eliot, aspires to and yearns for the same things despite some essential differences. Eliot's thorough study of the wisdom of the East and the West has enhanced his awareness of their being complementary and the need for an interpretation which accounts for both. Eliot's western ideology was not enough for his attempt to arrive at the unknowable, and, hence he pursued a religious odyssey which took him to the wisdom of the east before going back to anchor himself to the Anglican faith.

"Eliot was nothing if not a seeker: seeking to reconcile the culture he saw with what he hoped it to be; seeking to reconcile an inner despair with a parallel want of faith" (Dobrinska, 2015, p.1). It seems that Eliot's awareness of the schism between what is and what should be forms the very backbone which links his early poems to his latest.

In his early poems Eliot deems it necessary to start first by What Spurr (2010) calls evoking "the nihilism of modern lives and societies" (p.1) before recommending any amendments or solutions. However, "part of the problem with Eliot's late use of Christian spirituality to fill the void of modern times is that in his early and middle poems he made the void so large" (Bottum, 1995, p. 25). Nevertheless, Eliot's readers should not overlook his exploration of other beliefs specifically those of the east before he returns to the west and offers his own version of Christian spirituality.

For Eliot, there are common grounds among all religions. Hindu and Christian belief, for example, urge their followers to seek perfection through mortification of senses and fleshly desires (Chiari, 1979, p.144). Life itself is a quest for perfection that human beings have been striving to achieve, and this is exactly what can be gleaned from reading literature since old times. All religions eventually share the same ultimate goal, but the means and the details of its attainment are different.

Apart from Eliot's allusions to other beliefs, he portrays the quest for spiritual fulfillment by drawing contrasts between the past and the present. Eliot explores modern Man's loss in the realms of angst and aimlessness and denounces spiritual stagnation which obstructs the attainment of faith. Apart from the juxtaposition of antiquity and contemporaneity, Eliot lays much stress on the parallel between spiritual drought and the drought of the land, between spiritual starvation and yearning for water and between the cracked land and the split within the human psyche. When the poet reaches with his readers to the spiritual apprehension and meditation, he makes it explicit that the true believer can never be absolutely sure that he is perfectly attained to God's grace.

II. METHODOLOGY

The research methodology requires a profound reading of a good number of Eliot's poems and then reading a thorough analysis of these poems from different sources basically books and articles written by major critics who analyzed and interpreted Eliot's poetry like Gardner, Chiari, Southam, Drew, etc. The research is basically analytical and descriptive aiming at spotting a pattern that relates Eliot's early poems to the ones he wrote later in his poetic career. The hypothesis of the paper revolves around the idea that Eliot's poetry seems to have pursued a religious odyssey from the hopeless world of despair and futility to the world of salvation and redemption after a horrid portrayal of the imagery of waste, suffering and lack of any spiritual anchor.

III. THE ANALYSIS OF ELIOT'S POETRY AS A JOURNEY TOWARDS REDEMPTION

Eliot's conception of spiritual faith can be best comprehended within the context of his writings. In other words, a close examination of Eliot's poetic achievements would shed light on Eliot's gradual absorption of spiritual faith.

In his earliest poem "The Love Song of J Alfred Prufrock", Eliot probes subtly into the world of the tormented psyche of the sophisticated modern man—highly cultured, extremely involved with details of his existence, neurotic, emotionally disturbed, thirsty for love and craving for fulfillment. Prufrock, the poem's speaker, seems to be absorbed in the process of finding someone to love and to be loved by. On the other hand, Prufrock being a prototypical modern man, experienced too much of life to possess the courage to directly approach a woman. The comments others make about his inadequacies are still buzzing in his ears and obstruct any step he might take. The poem roams some concrete physical settings and then shifts to describe the attractive things a man may see in women with meticulous details. This causes Prufrock's frustration to build up, and then to vent itself by distancing himself emotionally from the world. The vague imagery of the ocean in the poem, one can argue, might be placed in the context of the sea of faith that retreated in our contemporary life and rendered us unable or rather unwilling to have in anyone or anything.

"The Love Song of J Alfred Prufrock" is, therefore, "an essay of the soul which takes place in a world of illusions, suffering and hypocritical self-deception." Oddly enough, this world is the world that we as readers consider real. These allusions, however, indicate a reality which lies "behind the shadow of the world of illusion and deceit" that both the poem and the epigraphs of the poem allude to. (Ward, 1973, p. 13).

Similarly, in Eliot's poetry, it is implied that modern civilization is nothing but soulless materialism which offers no anchor, no crutch and that it betrays those who rely on its efficacy and, most likely, they will shrivel to nothing but a dreary realm of paralysis and formlessness which is skillfully delineated in "The Hollow Men."

Shape without form, shade without colour

Paralysis force, gesture without motion. (11-12, p. 89)

After "The Hollow Men," Eliot has written religious poems the emergence of which is hardly predictable, but they "follow in natural sequence from such persistent absorption in the nature of spiritual reality." These poems do not reveal "easy faith"; they significantly show how Eliot's experience has been leading him upwards away from the "pit of his Inferno." They reiterate the thirst for faith, the comprehension of "its importance to the human spirit, the impalpable movements of the poet's mind from doubt towards acceptance, his gradual comprehension of what he himself believed to be a very great but difficult Christian virtue, humility" (Mathiessen, 1968, p. 99). Eliot seems to have been trying to conclude that it is by "the awful daring of a moment's surrender that we exist by praying" (Gardner, 1991, p. 172). In Eliot's later poetry, "the intensity of apprehension is replaced by an intensity of meditation" (Gardner, 1991, p.100) which is vital for moments of spiritual insights.

In "The Hippopotamus," Eliot explores decay which has crept into religion. The poem exposes the devitalization of the "True Church." The hippopotamus stands for man's fallibility and limitations. At the end, it is suggested that perhaps the "True Church" is the hippopotamus, mud-bound, whereas fallible man may ascend to heaven and be blessed by the choring angles (Headings, 1964, p. 40). This entails that the individual himself enjoys more access to God's grace than religious institutions which might get marred by corruption which hinders assuming the role of ushering believers to salvation.

To put this point more clearly, the hippo represents "the weakness of men, lukewarm in religious zeal but more acceptable to God than a disingenuous episcopacy" (Smith, 1956, p. 39). It brings into contrast—the "more or less innocent materialism of the secular world" and the "hypocritical materialism of the church (Drew, 1949, p. 37).

"The hippopotamus is the church, broad-backed, resting on its belly in the mud, and merely flesh and blood, therefore capable of errors and misdirection" (Chiari, 1979, p.54).

Flesh and blood is weak and frail

Susceptible to nervous shock;

While the true church can never fail

For it based upon a rock

The hippo's feeble steps may err.

In compassing material ends,

While the true church need never stir

To gather its dividends (5-12 p. 51).

One might add that Eliot presents the contrast between an animal that cannot help but be controlled by physical needs and an institution which is supposed to be governed by faith. Ironically enough, the materialistic needs of the hippo are nothing if compared to the avaricious materialism of the church.

Likewise, in "Sweeney among the Nightingales," Eliot implicitly criticizes contemporary life, and presents "a nostalgic rebuke to drab materialism in contradistinction to the vanished glories of a remote epoch when culture rested on ritual and religion, on piety and faith" (Smith, 1956, p. 46) and not on soulless materialism which weakens the angelic side of the human nature and nourishes the carnal desires which lead human beings astray.

A similar example can be found in the epigraph of "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" which introduces Guido as a man condemned to hell for his continued attachment to the world that he treats as a reality which is desirable, but can never be achieved again (Ward, 1973, p.13), a belief that hinders the attempt to rise.

In the same way, in "Gerontion" Eliot exposes a civilization based on materialistic values and secular ideologies with no spiritual communion or sense of human society, of irritated nerves, mental exhaustion, emotional fossilization and spiritual petrification (Drew, 1949, p. 48). Hence, one should ask about the reason behind Gerontion's crisis.

Drew (1994) thinks that Gerontion's dilemma lies in his lack of values; he never "fought" for the sake of what he believes in. This kind of spiritual stagnation is accompanied by physical sterility, a recurrent motif in Eliot's poetry which often depicts weariness. For instance, the goat is "starving and unhealthy" and the woman is not "a mother" or "a helpmate" but a "pretty housekeeper with petty ailments" (p.50).

To drive this point home, Gerontion is surrounded by emblems of decadence and futility. Gerontion has "shrunk to an abstract intelligence, anchored to nothing stable, with no organic relationship between himself and a living culture" (Drew, 1949, p. 51). It is spiritual faith, which is now missing, that gives human beings a feeling of security and a sustaining sense of relatedness that modern life has failed to provide.

Moreover, Gerontion is frustrated spiritually and sexually (Smith, 1956, p. 63) so much so that he has developed an awareness of the presence of guilt (Kenner, 1959, p.114):

After such knowledge what forgiveness (32, p. 40)!

This state of feeling proves that the Inferno of the human mind is a situation that one needs to experience in order to be able to pass to the Purgatory. These two states are not only physical but primarily spiritual, a realization that modern man needs to reach before he sets on his religious odyssey to attain a state spiritual equilibrium.

Gerontion proceeds by talking to Christ to excuse his behavior by explaining the reasons of his failure. Firstly, history gives no help and no security. The tree of life becomes "wrath-bearing tree" producing agonizing suffering. Secondly, he lives in a place which is not his and over which he has no control. Thirdly, he has lost his faith and senses and this loss thwarts intimate contact (Chiari, 1979, p.50-1). The knowledge here is knowledge of the sign which is his apology to the Word (Williamson, 1974, p.110). Figuratively, modern Man's suffering is identical with that of "Gerontion", for modern life caused Man to go back to the first square to seek a sign anew.

Gerontion thinks that his consciousness damns him (Kenner, 1959, p.113). In addition, forgiveness is the outcome of love, but a world crushed by hatred and conflict cannot produce it (Rai, 1986, p.36), for even the tree of knowledge bears God's wrath. To know is to suffer more and to forgive one needs to love, but modern knowledge thwarts all that leads to the noble type of love that leads to forgiveness.

In this poem, "the mythical background becomes Christian. The birth of Christ opens a new epoch within which the kind of civilization represented by Gerontion is decaying. Christ is perceived as a tiger, but Gerontion is incapable of revitalizing his life or entering any communion with that elemental source of juvenescence" (Drew, 1949, p.7). In the juvenescence of the year the sign of new life manifested itself differently. Christ, the tiger, has come, an image of terror or a springing form of terror and beauty which anticipates the feeling of waste land" (Williamson, 1974, p.109). Obviously, the imagery of the poem and its mythical background add to its pessimistic view.

The tiger springs in the new year. Us he devours. Think at least

We have not reached conclusion, when I

Stiffen in a rented house (47-49, p. 40).

It is substantially relevant to know that the poem suggests that Christ, the redeemer, turned as an avenger. Christ's change is due to human sins and deviation from the teachings of religion. It is equally important to add that April, the month of Christ's coming becomes cruel because people's conceptions of what is genuine and beneficial have become upside down.

April, in Eliot's poems, "the month of Christ's coming, the month of Chaucerian pilgrimages, is followed by depraved luscious May, overflowing with fruit, to be eaten, to be divided, to be drunk" so as to forget the terror of the tiger, through the pleasures of the senses in the shadow of flowering judas and Judas is also the name of the betrayer of Christ" (Chiari, 1979, p.49).

Obviously, salvation is followed by regression towards desires and pleasures. This is modern Man's way of betraying Christ, the Savior. The images here function to spot light on Man's tendency towards Epicurean ways even after they somehow reach some sort of spiritual awareness which they soon overlook. Man is pulled down every time he aspires to God.

For Williamson (1974), the fearless and resolute honesty of Gerontion's confession is redemption from sheer despair. Without faith, waiting for rain would be futile (p.112) because Eliot associates the aridity of the land with spiritual dryness caused by Man's abandonment of religious teachings.

In the past the Pharisees (members of an ancient Jewish sect) asked Christ for a sign and Jesus gave them the sign. Now "the modern world has taken the revelation with doubt and questioning." The new paganism betrayed the tiger, bringing not communion but division. The clear "Word" has lost all its resonance and is only a confusion of "whispers". (Drew, 1949, p.50-51). Modern consciousness seems to have turned deaf ears to faith and received any sign with resolute skepticism. Man's dilemma throughout time seems to be obviously similar.

Gerontion, one might argue, is a microcosmic figure representing modern man whose soul has become sapless after having lost the spiritual roots that clutch him. Gerontion is one among a countless number of people who dare not ask for salvation because they are burdened with sins. This establishes a recurrent motif in Eliot's poetry which implies that spiritual faith is something lost and must be regained. This poem has developed the theme of boredom and emptiness caused by the loss of faith and, therefore, belongs to the first stage of Eliot's poetic achievements.

Helen Gardner (1991) describes this stage as a kind of "apprehension" which is "a dark glass through which life is seen with strange clarity ... (99). But one might argue that it is not Eliot's glass which is dark, but it is the reality of modern life. What Eliot does is exposing the harsh realities to shock his reader into a kind of awareness.

When "The Waste Land" and "Gerontion" were written, Eliot's poetry was concerned with revealing the self "who does not speak" and disclosing "the self that wills" (Bush, 1984, p.43) and, hence, there seems to exist a state of inertia and inability to act as strong faith requires.

In "The Waste Land," Eliot presents the reader with the immense panorama of the contemporary civilization of broken images, barrenness, mechanicalness and imprisonment in life. The condensed portrayal of modern dilemma is meant to make the reader comprehend the situation and the urgent need for the fertilizing showers which are connected with spiritual revitalization. Physical sterility is related to spiritual sterility. The dilemma is multiple. The land is a desert where the cycle of life is thwarted because of spiritual petrification. People are impotent; animals are incapable of production; the land is dry.

Vegetation rites, Williamson (1974) contests, are impotent in the development of religious consciousness (p.199). Mrs. Weston links the Holy Grail with sex symbols. Therefore, the Grail which symbolizes revitalization assumes a great value for nature and Christian rituals (Williamson, 1974, p.122). This entails that if the lost Grail, faith, is regained, life will be restored for the waste land.

In "The Waste Land," the diseased soul is in search for faith. After having gone through the most agonizing aspects of the western civilization: fruitlessness, unrelatedness, sterile passion, loveless sex marred by mechanicalness, the Fisher King pursues a persistent quest for water and lost potency and, finally surrenders to the possibility of salvation.

The journey of the Fisher King, however, is not easy. "Physical and spiritual anguish distorts his vision as he walks with the last shadow of his fortune, the fisher king, once guardian of the grail (Williamson, 1974, p.48). Metaphorically, it seems that Eliot suggests that any quest one embarks on cannot be crowned with success unless one is armed with faith.

The sexual experience has "universal or religious" importance because it is related to the "state of the land". The "vegetation myths erect the cycle of the seasons into a series of divinely ordered event; and this cycle of life is based on sex and personified in ritualistic figures. The fortune of the land depends on the treatment of these figures and thus upon religion" (Williamson, 1974, p.118). Love itself is a quest for belonging in which spiritual satisfaction is paramount to physical gratification: otherwise, love will turn into mechanical sensuality exactly like prayers without belief. It is Providence that orders the cycle of the seasons in equal proportions with human devotion and readiness to perform the required rituals and, by the same token, love of God leads to spiritual peace and genuine love among human beings.

Eliot's "waste land suffers from the dearth of love and faith. At certain points, physical and spiritual symbols become indistinguishable." Like "Gerontion," the frustration of love is associated with spiritual gloom. The people of the waste land care too much for physical love and little, if at all, for spiritual love (Smith, 1956, p.71), and this in itself is a manifestation of failure in belief which leads to failure in any other significant relationship.

The Grail is considered to be "a supremacy holy Christian relic. It was lost, and search for the Grail became a powerful narrative image for man's search for spiritual truth ..." (Southam, 1974, p.70). For Kenner (1964), the quest for the Grail is "a quest for vision" (P.147). The theme of "The Waste Land" is the possibility, not the certainty, of regaining spiritual, intellectual and emotional vitality. This theme is developed by drawing upon myth, religion and vegetation myths in which the god must die to be reborn so as to bring fertility to the land and "potency" to the people and this parallels with Christ's crucifixion and resurrection (Southam, 1974, p. 69).

"The Waste Land" clearly portrays the unbridged gap between the past and the present which rested on rituals and religious concepts and the vicious materialism of today's people who lack religious orientation and commitment. But human deviation from spiritual norms does not go unpunished, for loss of faith, as Eliot's poetry implies, ushers in omnipotent waste.

The distortion with which the poem starts is extremely significant and its relevance to the development of the current theme of spiritual consciousness is subtly handled:

April is the cruelest month, breeding

Lilacs out of the dead land, mixing
 Memory with desire, stirring
 Dull roots with spring rain
 Winter kept us warm, covering
 Earth in forgetful snow, feeding
 A little life with dried tubers (1-7, p.63).

It is indeed strange that April which nourishes the very vein of life becomes dreary. Water has lost its efficacy. Roots are not revived by spring water; they are dull. Winter keeps them warm. Snow covers the earth and also freezes people's hearts and does not remind them of desire. Above all, spring seems to have lost its resilient touch.

Winter, according to Rai (1986), is a symbol of "spiritual death" (p. 81). This prepares the reader for the full horror of spiritual stagnation as experienced by the inhabitants of the waste land. Southam (1974) maintains that this waste is not caused by the devastating effect of the First World War as such but because of the "emotional and spiritual sterility of western man." (p.69). Southam's view overlooks the fact that Man brought the catastrophic effects of war upon himself. Above all, wars occur because of Man's loveless practices and deviations from the direct path of right.

Christ and Vegetation gods are now dead. The people of the waste land experience a different kind of death; it is death-in-life. Salvation, which comes only through sacrifice, is what the people of the waste land aspire to (Mathiessen, 1968, p. 112) and that is why, the poem is conceived with Christian symbolism pertaining to Christ's sacrifice, baptism and resurrection.

'That corpse you planted last year in your garden
 Has it begun to sprout? Will it bloom this year?
 'Or has the sudden frost disturbed its bed?
 O keep the Dog Far hence, that's friend to men,
 'Or with its nails he'll dig it up again? (71-75, p. 65).

The idea of having a corpse in the garden is horrifying enough and, therefore, it reinforces the theme of horror which is significant for religious awareness. These lines remind the reader of Vegetation rites, but obviously the corpse will not sprout. Furthermore, the "Dog" might dig it up and if it does, this grotesque parody of Vegetation gods will not give fertility to the land. Digging the corpse with the nails is extremely horrifying and indeed annuls the possibility of revitalization and, hence, salvation.

To the ancient people, the city was a symbol of maturity, but now it is deprived of "natural and spiritual sources of life" and because it has lost its "old sense of community" (Drew, 1949,p.73), the city which can be any European city, is now under the cover of "brown fog" which symbolizes the blurred vision of modern man. People in such cities are moving like robots roaming the streets.

Vulgarity and inertia have devitalized everything including spirituality. Tiresias, the man who also lived as a woman, sees, understands and endures everything and, yet, cannot do anything about it. According to Chiari (1979), he is "merely a passive sufferer and knower, but he is incapable of action" (p. 67). Ironically enough, Tiresias is a blind man whereas modern man has been living as though he were blindfolded. Tiresias' vision furnishes a common background for the understanding of the dilemma of Man through ages. Although Tiresias is blind, he comprehends what sighted people utterly failed to see. For instance, sexual corruption enacted in the contemporary world seems to be a typical extension of ancient depravity:

(And I Tiresias have foresuffered all
 Enacted on the same divan or bed
 I who walked among the lowest of the dead (43-6, p.72).

Madame Sosostris does not have the vital role that fortune-tellers used to assume. Vulgarization of spiritual rites has marred everything including prophecies (Brook, 1968, p. 133). Madame Sosostris "the vulgarized version of Egyptian diviners" cannot fathom the depths of prophecies. She tells the protagonist to fear death by water and does not speak of later associations with Adonis who has hailed the reborn god, speaks nothing of baptism because she does not see beyond the surface level (Drew, 1949, p.71). She is held for ridicule; she has a bad cold and practices fortune-telling under an atmosphere of fear of the police. Paradoxically, she is the wisest woman in Europe.

Madame Sosostris, famous clairvoyante
 Had a bad cold, nevertheless
 Is known to be the wisest woman in Europe,
 With a wicked back of cards. Here, said she,
 Is your card, the drowned Phoenician Sailor?
 (Those are pearls that were in his eyes. Look!) (43-8, p. 64)

In the last section of the poem, "What the Thunder Said," the drought becomes (among other things) a thirst for the waters of faith and healing, and specifically religions enter into the orchestration of the poem." But the sterility of the thunder suggests no renewal, no resurrection (Leaves, 1986, p. 94). Resurrection and renewal are conditioned. If the people do not accept the dictates of the thunder, there will be no revitalization or productivity.

Eliot commends ancient Hindu wisdom as a remedy for drought and impotency that face the modern world. Eliot utilizes the episode from *Birhadaraynaka Unpanished* which describes "how in a moment of doubt and confusion,

men, gods and demons approached Prajapati, the giver of wisdom, for guidance. In his answer to their prayers, the divine teacher uttered in thunder only one Sanskrit word thrice - Da, Da, Da which is interpreted by each group in a different way as " Datta, Dayadhvam, Damyata: give , sympathize and control. As man himself is the single center of the three properties- human, angelic and demonic, the terms may be taken together to form the three-fold path of deliverance from the darkness of and sterility of spiritual life " (Rai, 1986, p.40). In other words, Eliot employs the Indian faith, which had a strong influence on him to transcend despair and to move to a more positive note.(Bernard, 1972, p. 96). This despair, however, results from the decay and disillusionment of the European civilization which followed the First World War (Bergonzi, 1972, p. 93).

The thunder asks people to sympathize, to rid themselves of selfishness, to understand one another and to help the needy. Giving is the highest value in all religions; it prevents egocentricity. To control is to give subservience to the spirit not to the physical needs, to govern and fight looseness.

"The Waste Land" ends with the dilemma of human situation rendered tangible: "the beginning of wisdom is fear" (Gardner, 1991, p. 98).

I sat upon the shore

Fishing and the arid plain behind me

Shall I at least set my hands in order? (423-5, p. 79)

The theme of " The Waste Land," therefore, is the aridity of life without faith, an aridity that finally echoes with sickening horror and despair in " The Hollow Men" (Mathiessen , 1968, p. 99). It follows, then, that the quest for spiritual faith in "The Hollow Men" is a step forward in Eliot's religious odyssey.

After " The Waste Land", Eliot's poetry seems to be an attempt to find meaning in his experience as a whole to include all that he has passed through. Bergonzi(1972) contests that the aim of the various cultural references in the poem is meant to communicate the themes of the poem pertaining to "sexual disorder" and the need for religious faith which is obviously unrepresented (1972, p. 95). Consequently, Eliot employs allusions thematically to satirize Man's loss of anchor and to condemn his tendency to deviate from the road of righteousness by responding to the distractions of modern life. Bergonzi's "sexual disorder" is but one aspect of modern Man's various plights.

The angst of "The Hollow Men", the despair which is the darkest moment before the dawn, or as Dostoevsky, as quoted by Chiari (1979), puts it, of the one who stands on the last rung but one before the attainment of the most perfect faith (p.145).

We are the Hollow men

We are the stuffed men

Leaning together

Head piece filled with straw. Alas!

Our dried voices, when

We whisper together

Are quiet and meaningless

As wind in dry grass

Or rats' feet over broken grass

In our dry cellar. (1-10, p. 89)

The epigraph of the poem implies that people make "a game of religion" the way children make a game of make-believe out of Guy Fawkes." It is because of that suggestion that the church services are alluded to (Williamson, 1979, p.155). It is then understood that Eliot's poetry suggests that religion should be taken seriously and sincerely if it is meant to offer a salvation of any type.

The epigraph which alludes to Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* lays much stress on spiritual faith. Kurtz allows himself to lose contact with the belief that holds man in one place and keeps him anchored to one solid thing. In both cases, religion is misused and abused to exploit others. The hollow men and Kurtz, who claims that he goes to Africa to teach Christian faith, deceives Christ. It is because they have lost their spiritual faith that they are hollow at the core. Like Kurtz, the hollow men represent a civilization which has drastically reduced the indispensable role of religion, and by doing so, it has lost its bearings. What is left of this civilization is a heap of broken images which constitute sapless materialism, where people walk helplessly roaming their waste land.

In "Ash Wednesday," Eliot seems to have "broken with his own past" (Gardner, 1991, p.78). The poem reflects a religious experience of a soul which yearns for God and eventually manages to find the union it was longing for. It is a quest for a new awareness and heavenly wisdom. Actually, Eliot did not break with his past, as many of his critics believe, but he reached the final stage of his elaborate persistent spiritual quest.

As the title implies, it is "a poem of purgation, it deals with the mortification of the natural man, the effort to conform the will" (Gardner, 1991, p.104). It is a poem of religious submission. Eliot moved step by step from the Inferno of loss to the Purgatory of submission.

May the judgment not be too heavy upon us (33, p. 96).

The poem delineates "stages of despair, self-abnegation, moral recovery, resurgent faith, need of grace, and renewal of will toward both world and god" (Williamson, 1974, p.184). Love is conceived as spiritual but earthly power (Smith 1956:136). Meditation in the poem is "transformed into the ageless prayer of the Church" (Gardner, 1991, p. 63).

Meditation eventually led to a realization that submission to God which in turn leads to salvation. This is the last stage of Eliot's religious odyssey which comes to an end as Eliot's poetry drives the human soul back home. Man needs to go back to God to survive life's acid test.

This was the ultimate goal of Eliot's poetry; it must have been the spiritually-oriented mental labour that remained with Eliot from the beginning of his poetic career. Since poetry may be said to be the ongoing search of the poet for the role of faith in Man's life, Eliot must have continued writing poetry even when he felt that the journey faith has achieved its task: portrayal of the journey from the inferno of waste to the threshold of the Purgatory where entrance is a personal option.

IV. DISCUSSIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

T.S. Eliot's poetry portrays the immense panorama of waste and futility which have become an inherent characteristic of the western civilization. For example, the people of "The Waste Land" fail to capture the essence of love and human feelings, but they excel splendidly in pursuing materialistic gains. This tendency resulted in the metamorphosis of the human nature and the degradation of its essential aspects such as: faith, love, social communion, marriage, effective communication and so on. Therefore, for many, despair seems to be the only proper reaction to this chaotic and soulless existence.

However, a thorough reading of Eliot's poetry proves that Eliot steers the helm towards the Christian faith which could be a viable solution for the predicament of modern Man. It is no wonder then that a glimpse of hope sparkles through the futility of Eliot's waste land and some essence from his hollow men.

T.S. Eliot's conception of spiritual faith emerges from the entire corpus of his poetry. It is rendered tangible when we trace the process of questing for spiritual faith in his early poetry the labor of which led to the birth of "Ash Wednesday."

Consequently, spiritual faith in Eliot's poetry is envisaged as something lost and it has to be regained because it could be. Religion is viewed as a broken image among the heap of broken images crushed by soulless materialism. The outcome of spiritual stagnation is disastrous. Progress is proved to be nothing but a myth, a lie which offers no graspable anchor and no crutch.

Spiritual petrification ushers in inertia, aimlessness, despair and hollowness. It is implied that those who are not anchored to spiritual faith are hollow to the very core, "shape without form"; in short, they are stuffed men.

A significant inference is that Eliot's poetry undergoes a striking shift. In his early poetry, the center is a secular community which is portrayed meticulously and exposed with extremely ironic and merciless clarity and detachment. At that stage, the fossilization of the spirit yields the self to nightmarish horror which condenses gradually till it reaches the darkest hour before dawn.

In his later poetry, Eliot ascends with his readers to the glorious regions of "Ash Wednesday" which depicts bewilderment and despair which precede the faith. Then, the tormented self submits to God's will and aspires to God's grace.

In short, Eliot's poetry has pursued a journey from the inferno of loss and despair to the purgatory of submission, prayers and tranquility. Eliot's poetry is actually a quest for the spiritual faith which aims at culminating these relentless efforts by winning the Holy Grail to attain redemption and to peacefully pass from the Inferno of the stagnation of faith and the lost sense of relatedness to the Purgatory of communion and peace.

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