

Spiritual Sterility

(Dominating theme of T.S Eliot's Early Poetry)

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'I had not thought Death has undone so many' (T.S. Eliot : The Waste Land)

Anxiety, frustration, alienation and disillusionment have always been there in almost every age. The only sure remedy has always been reinstatement of the religious view of life. Many creative writers and critics of Eliot's age realized the importance of religion and preferred to write religious rather than secular poetry. Strength and confidence grew among those who had religious approach & attitude to life as they had witnessed the damage done by secularism. Eliot realized the seriousness of this inner or spiritual crisis and also the need of his time. Referring to the constantly deteriorating standards of morality; he writes: "The whole of modern literature is corrupted by what I call secularism."¹

Eliot possessed a deep insight into the nature of things and thus was able to relate contemporary experiences to the universal experiences of man. When we read his poems, we find that his poems are not a mere rendering of contemporary disillusionment but also of universal human predicament and its fundamental causes. His first collection of mature poems-- Prufrock and other observations has several such characters as are highly sophisticated and decadent. Figures like Aunt Helen, Mr. Apollinax, Prufrock etc. live in the sordid, squalid, stale, drab and dull surroundings of the town. Their modes of living are trivial and artificial. They are, in a way, objects of satire or even ridicule; but Eliot's satire, unlike the satire of Alexander Pope, has an

element of pity and even smiling indulgence since he himself feels one of these products of the secular urban society, devoid of faith and spiritual values and finds it really offensive and disgusting. V.de.S. Pinto rightly observes:

Here is a poet who has thoroughly immersed himself in the destructive elements, the sordidness, stupidity and the ugliness of the modern urban life, without surrendering to its values, which he treats with the curiosity of an artist and the irony of a keenly critical intellect.² Most of the characters of this volume are representatives of the Bostonian society. They belong to the fashionable upper class, which is morally and ethically corrupt and solely degenerate. Hence they are morally and spiritually degraded. To be with them is either in the city streets or in some haunt like saloon or in some other trivial situation of the sophisticated urban society. The readers listen to their conversation that is also frivolous and are told what is going on in their minds. Through various images and allusions Eliot exposes the anxiety, frustration, boredom and ennui of city dwellers. The fundamental sources of anxiety are often implicit in the imagery of the poems. Eliot's Prufrock is replete with rich and evocative images, observes Leonard Unger:

The poem 'Prufrock' is like a series of slides. Each slide is an isolated, fragmentary image, producing its own effect, including suggestions of some larger action or situation of which it is

but an arrested moment. For example, Prufrock proceeds from the half-deserted streets at evening, to the women coming and going, to the yellow fog, to Prufrock descending the stair, and so on, to the mermaids at the end of the poem.³

Prufrock, who appears to have a mission to fulfill, is unmanly, unheroic, entirely neurotic, and a mere bundle of hesitations and indecisions. He is the personification of an unredeemed life and if there is any affirmation in the poem, it is that Prufrock is lost. He is a lost soul but not because of his incurable romanticism. Though middle-aged, his outlook towards life is still romantic. The realities of life had not yet made their impact on him. He is powerless and impotent. He is dimly aware that he is lost and that he should choose a more purposeful course of life. His ability to choose heightens his despair. Ennui and futility of life stare him in the face. Prof. Williamson and Elizabeth Drew point out that Prufrock is a split personality and it is the consciousness of this spiritual distress that prompts his confessions. This spiritual aridity is not of Prufrock alone, the tragedy of Prufrock is the tragedy of modern age.

In "Prufrock", not to talk of Prufrock, but the lady's room is a party place of those cultured ladies and gentlemen of the middle class who collect Art pieces and talk highly of artists of the heroic school, though practically they know nothing about them. The ladies are dressed in "skirts that trail along the floor". (16) and gowns that are sleeveless and the room is softly lighted with lamps turned down. The men are equally well dressed: "My morning coat, my collar mounting firmly to the chin, / My necktie rich and modest but arrested by a simple pin" (14).

The environment created by Eliot is the world of genteel social ritual, where all come with prepared faces, putting on social masks. "To

prepare a face to meet the faces that you meet". (Prufrock 14).

In such a morbid atmosphere, the problem of Prufrock is that the social world has imposed upon him a role in which he has lost his self. Secondly the sexual urge forces him to make his visit, though he is coward, indecisive, unmanly and sexually sterile. His problem is that the social masks require from him a stasis, complete inactivity, while the erotic impulse compels him to act. The image of fog accelerates the situation and the protagonist Prufrock prevaricates on the theme of time : "There will be time, there will be time / To prepare a face to meet the faces that you meet" (14). For a moment he takes even to heroic posture: "There will be time to murder and create, / And time for all the works and days of hands (14), but the heroic gives way to the 'bathetic'; "That lift and drop a question on you plate"; (14)

All this makes him feel that he has been reduced to something less than a man. Same is the fate of other protagonists of the poems of this volume. "Cousin Nancy", "Aunt Helen" and "The Boston Evening Transcript" are still life studies of lonely souls of this society. Cousin Nancy rode to hounds over the hills, smoked cigarettes and danced all the modern dances and thought that this was modernity. Her life bears no relation to Matthew and Valdo, the guardians of faith. Aunt Helen, another woman protagonist of this volume dies, the decorum she had maintained through a life regulated by Dresden clock and "servants to the number of four" (Aunt Helen 31). is broken. The lines :

And the footman sat upon the dining-table

Holding the second house maid on his knees (31)

clearly expose the deteriorating moral and ethical standards.

The maiden Aunt Harriet has reduced her life to reading the gossip columns of the evening papers. However, we notice in these poems the emergence of a force, tentatively introduced, which embarrasses and disturbs the surface decorum of polished manners. It is the force, which makes the footman hold the housemaid on his knees, and, awakens the "appetites of life" in some. Plainly it is the sexual urge or desire in general. These sterile women have covered this urge under social mask, not disciplined it. The recurrence of this urge shatters the social world and leads the inhabitants of this world to strange behaviour. The sterile women, who are as important in Eliot's poetry throughout his career as a poet, are the symbol of the barrenness of their society.

"Portrait of a Lady", Eliot's more sophisticated poem, exhibits the same experience. The lady here appears to be more active partner than the young man who is timid and evasive, if not absolutely passive. She had arranged the rendezvous and set the stage---a darkened room, with four candles. Like the "Nocturne" we are reminded of a great passionate love of the heroic age. "An atmosphere of Juliet's tomb" (18), but here is artificial and synthetic rather than real, "Prepared for all the things to be said, or left unsaid"(18).

The conversation that goes on in "Portrait of a Lady", relates to art and music, the latest concert by a Polish musician, who transmits his magic "through his hair and finger tips" (18), a bold symbolic image. The lady uses the allusion to the musician to draw the attention of the young man to the intimate atmosphere of the room :

- Let us take the air, in a tobacco trance,
Admire the monuments,
Discuss the late events,
Correct our watches by the public clocks.
Then sit for half an hour and drink our

bocks. (19)

Here, the young man is not responding to the very natural suggestion of the lady. May be there is an inadequacy in him --- a strong distaste for sex or an incapacity. If the women of this social world are sterile, the men are inadequate and they hide their inadequacy in 'trances' artificially induced by tobacco and insensitivity brought about by drinking bocks.

Then the image of a girl with bouquet in her hand, when the lilacs are in bloom and the blooming of flowers renews vitality and desire in human beings. The lilacs and vigour of life in "Portrait of a Lady" are closely related :

'Ah, my friend, you do not know, you do not know

What life is, you who hold it in your hands';

(Slowly twisting the lilac stalks). (19)

She even tries to appeal to his sympathy and compassion by referring to her dull routine life and approaching death : "Only the friendship and sympathy / of one about to reach her journey's end. (20). The lover, on the other hand, takes to flight and finds refuge in the odds and ends of the social camouflage :

The banalities can cover the inanity of his life, of which the sap has dried up. Yet there are moments when he feels disturbed, moments when the memories of these experiences stir up something not completely dead within him. His social equipoise is disturbed by the hearings of an old tune of music or smelling the scent of flowers, which reminds him of what other people have desired. When in October, the lady finds the young man going abroad; her regret becomes an accusing insinuation. The youngman feels hardly human. He mounts the stairs, like the one in "Ash-Wednesday" which is a symbol of spiritual effort. At the top of the

stairs, he feels like a quadruped "You will find so much to learn" (21). But the lady insists on correspondence and this restores his self-confidence for a moment. She is still giving him importance, which is so essential for his continued faith in himself after his failure to respond to her. Ultimately when she refers to the fact which he wants to forget -- why they have not become 'friends' : "My self-possession gutters, we are really in the dark" (Portrait of a Lady, 18). The pathos of the lady's life is intensified by the sterile repetition : "I shall sit here, serving tea to friends" (21). The young man's assumed indifference now becomes a violent hysteria of the impossibility of communication. The social masks are not enough. He must become a savage or an inhuman animal so that he can escape from sterility.

Thus, Eliot's old man, Gerontion without religion or rather, as a result of the degeneration of religion into empty ritual and the drying up of sexual impulse, is reduced to an atom lost in the ferocious winds. His thoughts are like: "Thoughts of a dry brain in a dry season". (39).

In Poems 1920 Eliot associates Christianity with the desiccation of society, symbolized by sexual failure. In "Mr. Eliot's Sunday Morning Service", Origen, the Father of the church is castrated and so his impotence is the cause of the enervation of existence. The church is also associated, through the Jew, with the world of finance that has resulted out of the liberal principle culminating in the present barrenness of European culture, the fall from the grandeur associated with the heroic Roman & Greek civilization. Even in "The Hippopotamus" the theme of religion, the theme of sex and the desiccation of society are joined and all result in the destruction of the heroic element. Apart from this the church is scoffed at being called the "walls of marble".

Eliot's early poetry mentions lower classes as "damp souls of house maids" (29) in "Morning at the Window" and a prostitute going home in the "Rhapsody on a Windy Night" but the Poems-1920 are realistic pictures of brothels and characters like Sweeney, Doris and Mrs. Turner. The fashionable society women and the "ladies of the Corridor"(45) in "Sweeney Erect" live in the 'house' to entertain male visitors. The structures of the classes of which the society is formed are arranged according to their sexual conduct. The barrenness of the upper class is matched by the mechanization and brutalization of the sexual life in the lower classes. The decadence and barrenness are fast destroying the middle classes also.

The lady in the "Portrait of a Lady" had her buried life and Prufrock was frightened by his suppressed desires being aroused. The lady also deplores life-giving April because it arouses memory and desire. The only reaction is fear. The young lady's only memory of freedom is the memory of fear. Hence like Madame Sosostiris of "The Waste Land", she finds 'fear in a handful of dust' (64). The fear born of sexual frustration is variously described with a Wagnerian allusion and an image of a girl with flowers. Every doomed person runs to the astrologer to know his future. Then the crowd passing over London Bridge is also damned like Prufrock & Gerontion with heads down, downcast eyes and running in a hurry. Eliot writes in "The Waste Land" : "I had not thought that death has undone so many" (65). Mrs. Porter of "The Waste Land" is a modern Diana, attracting Actaeon to her charms. For her the vigorous and life giving bath in a pool of fresh cool water has been substituted by ablution in aerated water. The moon shone bright on Mrs. Porter and her daughter. "They wash their feet in soda water". (67) The incident of the typist and clerk, which is such an exquisite tour de force and that of the Rhine daughters

close this part with the reminder from St.-Augustine that lust is destructive through burning.

Eliot's Gerontion - the little old man and new man's Gerontius are portrayed as men in advanced old age. Both the poems deal with a deep crisis in the lives of their protagonists. Shakespeare's Measure for Measure reinforces moral struggle and visionary nature. The epigraph also serves to highlight the moral crisis of Gerontion. Eliot, in almost all his poems, focuses upon some moral and spiritual crisis in the lives of his protagonists. Eliot himself writes in After Strange Gods: "It is in fact in moments of moral and spiritual struggle depending upon spiritual sanctions, rather than in those 'bewildering minutes' in which we are all very much alike, that men and women come nearest to being real".⁴ Gerontion like Prufrock lived in an illusion, a form of existence which is worse than death. Even the Duke, in his speech to Claudio, from which the epigraph of "Gerontion" is extracted, asserts the negative nature of the joys of life. Life is a sequence of unrealities, delusion, a living death.

Gerontion is a "dull head among windy spaces" (39), who lacks vitality and maturity. These two virtues strengthen an individual to face life like Tennyson's Ulysses or W.B. Yeats's old man sailing to Byzantium, who went beyond the physical frontiers of life, taking journey into the realm of the Unknown. All these characters are ripe & mature because they are heroic. They are never 'decayed houses', as they have not transgressed their inner command. Their history is not the history of Gerontion, it is not replete with many cunning passages, contrived corridors, nor does it "deceive with whispering, ambitions", guiding man 'by vanities' (Gerontion, 39).

Gerontion has wronged himself, hence he is

unable to feel, know and be Christ. Inability to get at the heart of Christ's incarnation is a recurrent theme of man's failure. Like Eve tempting Adam to pluck fruit from the Tree of Knowledge, such ignorance diverts man from his religious responsibility by connecting him to unchristian forces such as Mr. Silvero, Hakagawa, Madame de Tornquist, and Fraulein Von Kulp. These vacant shuttles make history in their own image. Eliot himself writes: "Detached from tradition, alienated from religion and susceptible to mass suggestion, they represent a mode of the self hostile to the conscious pursuit of the Christian life in the world".⁵ Eliot further states that Human figures like Gerontion, removing themselves from "all that the belief in the supernatural has given to men; reduce themselves to 'extremely clever adaptable and mischievous', little animals who strive continually to remain inauthentic and, therefore, comfortable".⁶

This realization unnerves Gerontion so deeply that he falls into a state of emotional vacillation. His deep anguish resulting from a nihilistic approach to life embedded in clinging to taboos, an account for his negative attitude to History, which he himself is. Therefore, he waves between death and hope of a new birth. After an incongruous reflection on history corresponding to his being, Gerontion reverses his thought that borders on a flicker of optimism: "---Think at last / I have not made this show purposelessly" (40).

Again Gerontion relapses into a vision of chaos -- both individual and universal - that imprisons him in chilled delirium, "thousand small deliberations" and the sense "that has cooled" while arousing his memory "in a wilderness of mirrors". (41), The above lines convey "an agnosed sense of the possibility of renewal"⁷ against the utterance: "I have lost my sight, smell, hearing, taste and touch" (41) indicate his

total physical paralysis, and his utterance :

..... why should I need put to keep it
Since what is kept must be adulterated?
(Gerontion, 41)

highlights his clever way of avoiding his responsibility to reconstruct himself which further speaks of his error - the error which an empirical self is prone to. It is a negation that aborts self-actualization. Gerontion's tragedy is due to the hubris of his wrong apprehension and unethical employment of senses. Therefore, he remains unredeemed and having failed to gain an insight into himself laments that the 'spider' does not suspend its 'operations'. He fails to become one of those few people who reach the Beyond and thus, he remains one of the many others running along the shore, still unregenerate.

Rain is "the traditional symbol of grace and fertility"⁸ say Gordon, symbolizing it a creative force. In Rig Veda it is mentioned as God's Grace. Vidyalkar writes: "Even the fierce looking clouds come to us as benefactors"⁹ But Gerontion, the protagonist of the poem "Gerontion" remains parched while waiting for rain proposing "no action which can prevent the inexorable end",¹⁰ remarks Elizabeth Drew. Mere self-pity cannot save the self. The imperative is acting in consonance with the call within. He, being trapped in an inauthentic existence, has not yet covered the nine stages in the process of self-transcendence. He seems to have crossed the first two steps i.e. he has a feeling of general dissatisfaction with his life and secondly he has a very indistinct vision of possibilities leading him away from such a destined way of life. He is on the threshold of the third step i.e. the feeling of restlessness. His dissatisfaction, with his old way of life is evident. Yet what he is required to have is 'passion' or restlessness for intensification of a self-dialogue that will not give into the sterile despair.

In "The Hippopotamus", Eliot expresses his indignation about the way the churches were being run. He is worried about the irreligiosity of the Christians. He says that even the flesh---all hippopotamus, which have no consciousness about God, may get His Blessings, but not those Christians who, having consciousness and intelligence, do not use these for the service of God. Eliot makes the animal represent the weakness of the natural man, lukewarm in religious zeal but more acceptable to God than a disingenuous episcopacy. The Hippopotamus, though perhaps quite cold in faith, has ultimately more favours with God than apathetic Christians who sleep and feed at once. In spite of many defects, the hippopotamus is better than these Christians who neglect church and Christianity: The Hippopotamus says Gordon Lyndall, "is the fallible human individual vulnerable to sensuality. On the other hand the churchmen who are supposed to be moral mentors, practice 'empty idolatry' of forms."¹¹

This poem "The Hippopotamus" mirrors the animal plane of the existence of man who is engaged in the mundane activities of life and emphasizes the hope that by sincere prayer to God or Christ man can achieve salvation. The poet also makes fun of the Church, the so-called Church, which indeed is not true :

Flesh and blood is weak and frail,
Susceptible to nervous shock;
While the True Church can never fail.
For it is based upon a rock. (51)

The 'True Church' perhaps refers to the Roman Catholic Church, which claims direct descent from the ministry of St. Peter to Rome. The Church is true for it is based upon a rock' which reminds us of the words of Jesus Christ to Peter : 'Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church'. But here the Hippopotamus because of loss of faith in it laughs at the church. In the

modern secular society, the church has failed to inspire people, who are highly sophisticated but morally and spiritually hollow. These 'lukewarm' churches have become mere institutions 'mere collection of bricks and marbles' without true religious spirit because they are suffering from factionalism and sectarianism. Here Eliot has presented man's physicality as pure animality, living on 'merely flesh and blood' like the Hippopotamus, which enjoys rest in the mud. The mud for man symbolizes sexual and material pleasures. Human body is 'weak and frail', while the 'True church can never fail' for it is based upon a rock.

The insincere churchmen and their followers are totally dead to the real religious spirit of Christianity. Therefore the Church, which claims to provide religious food to the people, is itself spiritually asleep and barren, of no good to all. On the other hand, the Hippopotamus, who remains asleep in the broad day light of spirituality and collects the means of his subsistence and leads a pure sexual life in the dark night of ignorance, is capable of improving himself. The ways of the God are mysterious. Even an animal-man complex may rise from "the damp savannas" (52), from the dirt and filth in the world and be His true devotee. The blood of Christ would cleanse all his sins and he would be a saint living in Heaven among the immortals. But the lukewarm church: "--- remains below / Wrapt in the old miasmal mist" (52), from which we cannot hope any positive contribution towards spiritual upliftment. Despite spiritual sterility, here, Eliot seems to have high hopes of man's spiritual regeneration.

"Mr. Eliot's Sunday Morning Service" also condemns the church for its deteriorated condition. This degradation in the church appears similar to the degradation of 'Christ the tiger' in "Gerontion". In this poem Eliot attacks

churchmen and holds wrongheaded theologians responsible for weakening the unflinching belief in certain foundations of The Bible. Church services have lost their spiritual purpose; presbyters have become 'sapient sutlers trading in religion'. As the epigraph suggests, they are 'caterpillars' who abuse their high office by exploiting the laity in the name of religion and filling their own coffers. These merchants of the Lord are seen in the first stanza "Drift across the window-panes". (57), for their 'customers' who might be waiting for their religious blessings.

The role of the theological controversialists is even worse. Their minds always work like bees. They pick up some pollen grains from the stamen of the Bible, mix them with the dirt of the hairy wings of their own imagination and scatter them in the minds of the innocent people who have blind faith in them. In this way they pollute the innocent minds and misuse their noble vocation of being intermediaries between the religious truth and its seekers. The result of such departure from the authoritative version of religious principles is the birth of Sweeneys, animal men, who are completely blind to spiritual values and are prone to sensual pleasures. Eliot symbolically illustrates this in the following lines: "Sweeney shifts from ham to ham / Stirring the water in his bath" (Mr. Eliot's Sunday Morning Service, 58).

Eliot's "Sweeney Erect" is a sad tale of poor epileptic woman neglected by her pleasure-seeking husband. She has no wiles to attract Sweeney's heart, nor the artifice of decorating her drawing room to catch his eyes. She suffers from the fits of epilepsy but it does not matter for Sweeney who while sitting for shaving "wipes the suds around his face"(45). The society, of which Sweeney and the lady are a part, is more concerned with the smartness of the manners of its inhabitants. "The ladies of the corridor" (45)

fear that the woman is suffering from hysteria and "call witness to their principles / And deprecate the lack of taste" (Sweeney Erect, 45), while Mrs. Turner intimates, "It does the house no sort of good" (45). Doris thinks that she will recover her senses if she takes 'Sal volatile' and 'a glass of brandy neat' (45). Thus none of them understand the real nature of her suffering, her physical epilepsy is only the symptom of her spiritual epilepsy which is caused by the beastliness of Sweeney who makes gestures of love like an 'orang-outang' (44).

Besides this, we discern a vision of desolation and spiritual drought in his greatest poem 'The Wasteland'. The denizens of "The Waste Land" are spiritually and emotionally sterile. They suffer from neurosis, boredom, anxiety, despair and mental vacuity. Their sterility arises from corruption and sexual degeneration, which exists at all levels. According to Fertility myths, sex act is a source of life and vitality; it is an expression of love and it is to be exercised for reproduction. But in "The Waste Land", sex has become vulgarized, commercialized and mechanical. It is completely cut off from its primary function and is exercised either for momentary physical pleasures or momentary gains. Hence there is no obedience to the flesh in the contemporary wasteland.

A number of images used by Eliot depict desolation, dissipation, restlessness, emptiness and spiritual aridity. Helen Gardner remarks: "The genuine horror is in images which are not fantastic or romantically terrifying, but display the horror which inhabits the stalls, the monotonous, the wearisomely repetitive: 'The worlds revolve like ancient women, / Gathering fuel in vacant lots'.¹² The absence of positive man-women relationship as we have seen in Eliot's early poems, is seen in "The Waste Land", even on a larger scale in the images of Countess

Marie and her husband, Lil and Albert in "A Game of Chess", and the typist and the young man carbuncular in "The Fire Sermon". These images indicate very casual relationship between one person and the other. For instance the 'Hyacinth girl' of "The Waste Land" illustrates this theme: ---, I could not/Speak, and my eyes failed, I was neither/Living nor dead, and I know nothing/Looking into the heart of light, the silence. (64)

The above-mentioned lines convey the meaninglessness of life. It looks like the waste and empty sea reflected in the line 'Oed Und das Meer' from the sailor's song in Wagner's *Tristan and Isolde*. Even love does not exist in the wasteland.

Even the very first line of "The Waste Land", "April is the cruellest month, breeding----" (63) is an inversion of the popular poetic myth that April is the month of warmth, joy and jubilation. Robert Browning's poem *Home Thoughts From Aroad* also reflects the same. In the Christian calendar, April is invariably associated with Easter and the Resurrection of Christ. In the fertility myths spring is associated with the growth of potency in the Fisher King and with the fertility of his land. These events anticipate fear rather than hope. Hence April seems cruel than generous to the waste landers. Tiresias, the silent protagonist, observes, with despair and dismay the advent of April and its impact on the desiccated citizens of the wasteland. Eliot in his *Notes on The Waste Land* writes about Tiresias. He says,

Tiresias, although, a mere spectator and not indeed a character is yet the most important personage in the poem, uniting all the rest. Just as the one-eyed merchant, seller of currents, melts into the Phoenician Sailor, and the latter is not wholly distinct from Ferdinand, Prince of Naples, so all the women are one woman, and

the two sexes meet in Tiresias. What Tiresias sees, in fact is the substance of the poem.¹³

Ordinarily April is the harbinger of rain, sun, 'sweet showers' and 'life-giving waters', which fertilize the land and produce rich harvest. But for the denizens of "The Waste Land", April is most unwelcome because of their incapability to participate in the renewal process of the mother earth. Contrarily they greet and prefer the chillness and coldness of the winter than the warmth of the summer as they cannot endure the pangs of rebirth and are scared of the possibility of resurrection. Winter symbolizes spiritual decay of life, which is purely animalistic, a process of eating, sleeping and breeding, the life of survival by instinct.

The German Princess 'I am not a Russian at all --- - a pure German from Lithuania embodies the hollow roots of European civilization. For this society lady, summer and winter are mere seasons associated with bodily comforts or discomforts. For the gratification of senses, she with Archduke visits 'South in the winters'. Her childhood memories and staunch desire for carnival pleasures are both mundane aspects of her superficial sterile life. Similarly Eliot's conversion with Countess Marie Larisch, a close relative of King Ludwig who lived in the castle near Munich evidences Eliot's reading of Countess's Autobiography, *My Past* (1913) that records her experiences even sledding in the first section of "The Waste Land" :

My cousin's, he took me out on a sled,
And I was frightened. He said, Marie,
Marie, hold on tight. And down we
went (63).

Both sterility and fertility are central in the very first section of "The Waste Land". Sterility marks the love affairs of the Hyacinth girl as well as anti-religious attitudes of Madame Sosostris. The scene of the corpse in the garden and the

drowning of The Phoenician sailor are directly linked with death and decay. The Hyacinth girl with her arms decked with flowers and hair wet symbolizes the fertility festival and youthful passionate love elevated and profound but devoid of spirituality.

Sex in "The Waste Land" is replete with intrigue, falsehood and fraud. It is neither procreative nor spiritual or enlightening but rather deadening in its impact on the souls of lovers. "A Game of Chess" elucidates sterility and violence in mechanical sexual relationships and concreteness in the modes of communication through symbols, allusions and images. The luxurious mode of living and her chair "a burnished throne/ Glowed on the marble----" of the Lady reminds the readers of Cleopatra's burnished, exuberant throne (Antony and Cleopatra) as well as the most Royal apartment of Dido. Philomel's picture on the wall reveals nothing but the background of her rape. She symbolizes atrocity and violence inflicted upon innocent women's virginity and chastity and also the precariousness of women's moral existence.

Another character of "A Game of Chess", Belladonna, The Lady of Situations is fed up with her own futility and nervousness. She puts irrelevant questions like: What shall I do now? What shall I do? /I shall rush out as I am, and walk the street. /With my hair down, so. What shall we do tomorrow? /What shall we ever do? (67-68).

Through Lady of Rocks, Belladonna and Phlebas, Eliot attempts to expose the nightmare of modern urban living in which one hears a modern woman's voice with a tremulous tone expressing their predicament. Besides this, through the portrayal of two women belonging to different strata of society-----the rich lady Belladonna and the middle class woman Lil, Eliot highlights the violation of sex, innocence

deteriorating and moral values.

The portrayal of Lil strengthens the theme of sterility embodied in Belladonna. Lil, who already has five children, suffers from ill health due to repeated abortions and continuous consumption of pills. She seems to embody and betray fertility with a vengeance. Albert, her husband, represents masculine motif and reckless passion for women and sheer tremendous physical pleasures. The Lady of Rocks also suffers from neurasthenia. The boredom of the monotonous mechanical routine and neurasthenia are reflected in their lidless eyes. They simply wait for a 'knock' just as Sweeney did when he lost his soul. Hence both the women are unsatisfied in love and dissatisfied with life.

The third section of "The Waste Land" opens with the evocation of a nuptial song from Spenser's Prothalamion: "The river's tent is broken" (70). Spenser's song celebrates the wedding of two noble ladies ---Elizabeth and Katherine Somerset, the daughters of Earl of Worcester. Spenser emphasizes the beauty of 'Sweet Thames', the purity of river's water and the sweet & fragrant flowers on its bank, which decorate the auspicious occasion. But in 20th century England and the world of T.S. Eliot, the Thames has been contaminated by orgies of lust of the holy-decaying crowd of merry-makers. Lovemaking, empty bottles, cigarette-ends, handkerchiefs, card box boxes and other 'testimony of summer nights' corrupt the banks of the river by the modern waste landers. The Spenserian nymphs have departed, the modern nymphs are in the service of city directors who "have left no addresses" (The Waste Land, 70).

The theme of permissiveness and sexual sterility of modern western society is further elaborated with Sweeney, Mrs. Porter and her daughter and then with the typist girl and the estate-clerk. The

words 'Tereu', 'Twit, twit, twit' and 'Jug jug jug jug jug' invoke not only the rape of Philomel, the nightingale's legendary story and its background, but also the sexuality of Mrs. Porter and her daughter and the homosexual affairs of Mr. Eugenides, the Smyrna merchant. He arrives in the 'Unreal city', covered by brown fog, unshaven, with pockets full of merchandise and all necessary documents. Later he invites the protagonist to lunch, in vulgar Cannon Street Hotel and a weekend homosexual escapade at the hotel Metropole in Brighton. Eliot links this sordid affair with Jessie Weston's narration of the legend of ancient Smyrna merchants. They were the main communicators and carriers of the fertility cult in the Middle East and Europe. They had two eyes --- commerce and religion. They were the custodians of the temples and counting houses at the same time. But Eliot's Mr. Eugenides, a modern incarnation, is a victim of stark immorality and unnatural sexuality and entirely devoid of religion.

The sense of futility, frustration and boredom implicit in love and sex in "The Waste Land" is skillfully exposed in the scene of the typist girl and her 'young man carbuncular'. The images of machine, taxi and gramophone provide appropriate settings to the immoral, loveless and mechanical love affair. Laying out food in tins suggests both the mechanical quality of life and man's complete divorce from the natural organic world :

When lovely woman stoops to folly and
Paces about her room again, alone,
She smooths her hair with automatic
hand,
And puts a record on the gramophone
(72).

Here Eliot seems to draw a contrast between Oliver Goldsmith's highly ethical and moral world of 18th century England and the

permissive and morally abusive society of 20th century England. The assault on chastity is no longer a violation of moral law. 'Well now, that's done: and I'm glad it's over' reflects girl's indifferent attitude and their physical togetherness are in no way better than the coupling of animals. Even the three Thames daughters lament the loss of virginity and in consequence the loss of purity of the river Thames. The river water is filled with 'oil and tar' and hence it is contaminated. The second part of the 'Thames daughters' song recreates the romantic lovemaking scene between Queen Elizabeth I and Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester. This generation of the spirit of Renaissance serves as a contrast to the futile love of the typist girl and her sordid lover. But beneath the elegance and refinement of love affair of Elizabeth I and Robert Dudley, the aridity and sterility of relationship is also visible.

Madame Sosostris's unholy and profane temptation for Tarot pack of cards adds a new dimension to this episode. It is a kind of death in degeneration embraced by the self. Eliot's ironic representation of Madame Sosostris's "wicked pack" of cards points to the "contrast between its present disrepute and past authority"¹⁷, says George Williamson : "The wisest woman in Europe", (The Waste Land, 64), Madame Sosostris is a masquerades possessing a pack of cards. Her wisdom is earth-bound as it is helplessly confined to fortune telling. Her pack of Tarot Cards contains such characters as the drowned Phoenician sailor and Belladonna, The Lady of Rocks, The Lady of Situations who exploit purity in others. Belladonna is also Phlebas, a modern version of the Phoenician sailor. Madame Sosostris's ineptitude to fathom the religious import of water accompanied by her fear of death by water reflects her sorry state of affairs and consciousness. People like her distort reality, bring a negative death, which

shuts all possibilities of transcendence. The self divorced from religion, defeats the Christ-consciousness in it, thus attaches itself to the "Wheel" of the "unreal city."⁶⁴ of "The Waste Land" which is a region of impermanence and ignorance. The fate of the waste landers is similar to that of Sosostris who walk "round in a ring of the unreal" to be "undone" by "death" which drives home her inability to possess the esoteric or eschatological knowledge and experience of death. Another character Stetson at "King William Street" beside Saint Mary Woolnoth church is also confused between mundane and the spiritual. This failure shoots up two spiritual doubts : That corpse you planted last year in your garden / Has it begun to sprout? / Will it bloom this year? (65).

Spiritual and emotional aridity is the central theme of "The Waste Land". Cleanth Brooks, commenting on its theme of life-in-death, says that man has lost his passion i.e. his faith in God and religion and this decay has resulted in the loss of vitality, both spiritual and emotional. Consequently life in the modern wasteland is a life-in-death, a living death, like that of Sibyl at Cumae. According to Eliot's philosophy, in so far as we are human beings we must act and do either evil or good, and it is better to do evil than to do nothing. Modern man has lost his sense of good and evil, and this keeps him from being alive. In the modern desolate and barren land people are dead; they merely exist like dead things, leading a life of complete inactivity, listlessness and apathy. Hence they welcome winter and April is the cruellest of the months as it reminds them of the stirrings of life and "they dislike to be roused from their death-in-life".

Tiresias, the central protagonist of "The Waste Land" surveys the panorama of modern civilization and finds it spiritually barren and dead. The stones, the dead trees, dry stones

without any sound of water, the hot sun, all symbolize spiritual desolation. Nothing spiritual can grow in this dead, barren land. Broken images are the wrecks of old ideals and values in which man has lost faith. There is no relief, no shelter from the scorching heat of the sun, except under the shade of the Red Rock.

The protagonist mourns the pollution of the river water. Sitting on the river banks brings to him the sound of the senseless laughter of London crowds which move about rattling like "dried bones" while the "white bodies naked on the low damp ground" bring forth the momentary bodily pleasures leading to decay and death. This reminds Tiresias of Bonivard in the "Prison of Chillon" in Lord Byron's famous poem, lamenting his loss of freedom on the banks of Lake Lemane; or the captive Jews in The Bible weeping and shedding tears by the river Babylon. Since Tiresias is a spokesman of humanity, one who has fore-suffered all, one whose reminiscences go to the remote past, this scene reminds him of the brother of King Fisher, fishing for the regeneration of his brother and of Ferdinand, mourning the death of his father, the King. Water and fishing were symbols of transformation and regeneration in the past, but now they have lost their spiritual significance. The vicinity of the river is dirty, slimy rats creep by, naked dead bodies float on the river, bones are scattered all over and rattle as the rats move about. Such is the spiritual degeneracy in the modern wasteland. It is further accelerated and symbolized by the fact that Mrs. Porter and her daughter wash their feet in soda water, not for their spiritual purification but to make their flesh fairer to attract more males. "Sound of Horns and hunting" in Day's "Coy Mistress" puts us in mind of Actaeon being brought face to face with Diana, the goddess of chastity. But in Eliot's "The Waste Land" the 'horns' are the horns of motorcars and they carry the beastly and coarse

Sweeney to Mrs. Porter, a brothel-keeper.

Eliot's unreal city reminds us of Baudelaire's Paris, Dante's Inferno or Laforgue's city in which he strongly presented not only the sense of horror but also the plight of barren mechanical sexuality, monotonous life and spiritual emptiness breeding fear and hysteria. It is a city both of the mind and a phantasmagoric evolution of London. From this point of view Eliot's "The Waste Land" is a full-fledged picture of Hell which is called Limbo, where the unbaptised and unbelievers live unperturbed, but seem to be aware of their eternal loss: "That corpse you planted last year in your garden / Has it begun sprout?" (65). The city is unreal because it has no real civil life and is robbed of all the vitality of a throbbing vital, communal life. Human beings seem like ghostly figures. They are victims of machine-ridden civilization, the slaves of a deadening routine, divorced from real life.

Eliot's "The Waste Land" encompasses simultaneously several levels of experience arising out of various waste lands: the waste land of religion in which there are rocks but no water: the waste land of spirit from which all moral and spiritual springs have evaporated; and the waste land of the instinct for fertility where sex has become merely a mechanical means of animal satisfaction rather than a potent, life-giving source of regeneration. Many readers are of the opinion that here Eliot has endeavoured to impart poetic expression to his feelings of futility and anarchy in the face of contemporary civilization. F.O. Matthiessen writes:

It may be that the large task which Eliot set himself in "The Waste Land" of giving a shape and a significance to the immense panorama of futility and anarchy" of contemporary history, caused some of the

experiments which he made to gain that end to appear too deliberate.¹⁵

The theme of sterility and fertility are central to the first section. Sterility marks the love affair of the Hyacinth girl as well as the anti-religious attitudes of Madame Sosostriis and her wickedness. It is also linked with the theme of decay and death in the form of the drowning of the Phoenician sailor, as well as the scene of the corpse in the garden. The fertility theme dominates the symbolism of spring rain, wet hair, vegetation and the lilacs. The fertility of spring is contrasted with the aridity of the speaker's personality, and thus the main thematic conflict is unfolded with great effect.

The references to the planting of the corpse in the garden or to the dog who will 'dig it up again', are part of the web of the allusion to be traced in John Webster's *The White Devil*. The song in *The White Devil* includes words 'keep the wolf for thence that is foe to man'. In "The Waste Land" Eliot has altered the hostile wolf into a friendly dog. The planting of the corpse evokes the Christian rituals of planting dead bodies, referred to in St. Paul's pronouncements. It also alludes to the Egyptian ritual of the disposal of the dead body of Osiris, the fertility God. The Dog Star, Sirius, is also associated with the Egyptian fertility cults and to the rising and falling of the waters of the Nile. But the planting of the corpse in the modern wasteland is no longer ritualistic; it has in fact become much too mundane and matter-of-fact. The dog, too, has become destructive in the sense that it wants to dig up the corpse with a view to prevent it from blossoming into new life. Death wish seems to govern and dominate modern civilization and that there is little or no hope of spiritual rebirth.

To conclude, we can say that Eliot's early poetry from "Prufrock" to "The Waste Land" emphasizes the fallen nature of man. In almost all his poems

we find Eliot's over-whelming sense of man's innate sinfulness - the consciousness of the brute within and of the need to get rid of it. In "The Hippopotamus", the poet explicitly states that 'Flesh and blood is weak and frail'. In "Sweeney Erect" he scoffs at Emerson's notion that man is different from other animals by virtue of his capacity for moral rectitude. In "Sweeney Among the Nightingales", the protagonist is tormented by the presence in him of the 'Apeneck Sweeney' who rules over his animal instincts. In "Mr. Apollinax" Eliot observes behind the shy figure of a Fragilion, a Priapus, or laughing in the shrubbery, 'Gaping at the lady in the swing' or laughing 'like an irresponsible foetus' and the readers of "The Boston Evening Transcript" are discerned swaying in the wind 'like a field of ripe corn'. Even in "The Love Song of Alfred Prufrock", the overpowering instincts account for the protagonist's moral prevarication. The moment of his greatness 'flickers' because : "In a minute there is time / For decisions and revisions which a minute will reverse" (14). It engenders in him a sense of his unworthiness so much that he apprehends 'the mermaids will not sing to him'. It is this tormenting sense of sin, which discourages Gerontion from entering into a state of mystic communion with the Divine:

Eliot's early poetry upto "The Waste Land" presents a picture of fallen humanity inhabiting an inferno of lust, passion and sin. The terrible dreariness of the great modern metropolitan cities exhibits the atmosphere in which the waste landers live. It is a place not merely of desolation, but of anarchy, chaos and dissipation. In the post war world of shattered institutions, strained nerves and bankrupt ideals, life no longer seems coherent - we have no belief in the things we do and consequently we have no heart for them.

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