

T.S. ELIOT: A REVIEW OF THE LIFE AND POETRY OF THE GROUND-BREAKING MODERNIST POET

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ABSTRACT

*Thomas Stearns Eliot (1888-1965), was an American who made England his home and left behind him a wealth of influential literary works in prose, poetry, and drama. He came under the sway of contemporary European trends of art and literature and became one of the influential leaders of the modernist movement in poetry. He was a profound scholar and thinker, a product of diverse influences- literary, anthropological and philosophical. The literary influences of Elizabethan dramatists, English metaphysical, French symbolists and imagists are paramount in his poetry. As he had deeply studied the French imagist and symbolist poets, he gave imagism a dialect as well as a symbolist dimension and a tone of intellectual irony. His poetry marks a complete break from the nineteenth-century tradition. Reacting against subjectivism of romantic theory, he advocated his famous theory of impersonality of poetry. He demanded an objective authority of art and appreciated the order and completeness of classical poetry, the qualities which he tried to achieve in his own practice as a poet. His philosophy grew from continuous meditation through which he blossomed into a spiritualist. In his pursuit of giving a realistic representation in his poetry to life around him, he many a time becomes critical of the spiritual degeneration and expresses his despair over the utter hollowness of the contemporary civilization. By producing the poetic masterpieces like *The Waste Land*, *The Hollow Men* and *Four Quartets*, he inspired a young generation of English poets who appeared on the English literary scene in the years following the First World War.*

KEYWORDS: *Modernist Poetry, Philosophy, Symbolism, Imagism, Subjectivism, Impersonality*

INTRODUCTION

T.S.Eliot's Life (1888-1965)

Thomas Stearns Eliot, a major figure in English literature from the early 1920s until his death in 1965 whose influence has been immense on English poetry, was born to industrialist and philanthropist Henry Ware Eliot (1843-1919) and Charlotte Champe Stearns Eliot (1843-1929), a school teacher, poet, and social work volunteer at the Humanity Club by St. Louis, on 26th September 1888 at St. Louis in Missouri state of the U.S.A. The prosperous couple had seven children-five daughters and two sons. Their first son, Theodora Sterling Eliot died in infancy. T.S. Eliot was the seventh or the youngest of them. His ancestors had lived in America for the last couple of centuries since Andrew Elliott, a Calvinist had left East Coker, a village in Somersetshire, England and emigrated in 1667 to settle in a colony of New England on the east coast of North America. In 1834, T.S. Eliot's reverend grandfather, William Greenleaf Eliot (1811-1887), a leading philanthropist of his time, civic leader and educator, moved from Boston to St. Louis, and established the first Unitarian church there west of the Mississippi River and also co-founded Washington University in St. Louis in 1853,

donated funds for its construction and served as its chancellor from 1870 till his death in 1887. T.S. Eliot's father, Henry Ware Eliot, a graduate of Washington University first worked as an employee of Reed and Green, a wholesale grocery business, then a partner in Eliot and Larkin, a firm of manufacturing chemists. From 1877 to 1919, Henry Eliot was on the Board of Directors of Washington University and in 1902 he also served as the President of the Academy of Science of St. Louis. In addition to this, he was also a successful businessman and served as the president of the Hydraulic-Press Brick Company in St. Louis. The family background had an important role in shaping T.S. Eliot's poetic sensibility. His renowned paternal grandfather and his mother, an accomplished lady by most standards contributed a lot to his development as a writer, especially as a religious poet.

In 1898, T.S. Eliot, the American-born future British poet, playwright, critic, author and editor was sent to Smith Academy, originally named Eliot Academy, a Boys' school founded in 1854 by his notable paternal grandfather William Greenleaf Eliot, founder and chancellor of Washington University in St. Louis. At Smith Academy in St. Louis, Missouri, where he studied till 1905 until he was sixteen, he was considered a brilliant student in his studies which included, among other subjects, Ancient Greek, Latin, French and German and in 1900 he earned a distinction by winning a gold medal for his Latin. As he was afflicted with a congenital double hernia, he was in the constant eye of his mother and five older sisters and at home spent most of his time reading the stories. As a schoolboy, he took great interest in Mark Twain's 1876 novel *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*. He inherited his mother's literary skill and was infatuated with literature from his early childhood, writing his first poetry at the age of fourteen.

In addition to receiving a classical education at Smith Academy and privately with St. Louis, Eliot had his favorite writers at school like G.G. Byron, P.B. Shelly, Conan Doyle, A.C. Swinburne, D.G. Rossetti, Edgar Allan Poe and R.L. Stevenson. In 1905, Eliot graduated from school and in preparation for admission to the prestigious Harvard College, the undergraduate arts college of Harvard University; he went to Milton Academy in Massachusetts for a year. In 1906, at the age of seventeen, he went to Harvard College for the study of philosophy. From 1906-1910, he was at Harvard, where he pursued a wide-ranging course of studies in language and literature; the classics and German, French and English literatures. During his years at Harvard, he was greatly influenced by two of his teachers, George Santayana(1863-1952), the Spanish-American philosopher, novelist, essayist and poet and Irving Babbitt(1865-1933), American literary critic and professor of French and comparative literature. At Harvard, he continued writing and made a good impression by contributing regularly to *The Harvard Advocate*, Harvard College's undergraduate journal of fiction, poetry, art and criticism. In December 1908, he found the Arthur Symons's book *The Symbolist Movement in Literature (1895)* in the Harvard Union library- a collection of books housed in the old Harvard Union. This recent book of literary criticism offered him an introduction to avant-garde French poetry. This book changed his life as it introduced him to the French poets of the nineteenth century especially to the poetry of symbolist-impressionist poet Jules Laforgue (1860-1887), the sophisticated master of lyrical irony and one of the inventors of the free verse(French: vers libre), whose combination of ironic elegance and psychological nuance gave his juvenile literary efforts a voice, Jean Nicolas Arthur Rimbaud (1854-1891), the French poet famous for his contributions to Symbolism and Paul-Marie Verlaine (1844-1896), the poet associated with Decadent Movement. Reading Jules Laforgue turned out to be the catalyst for T.S. Eliot's growth into a genuine poet as the technical ability of Laforgue fascinated him. The typical Laforgian device which Eliot copies is to speak with two voices, one serious, and sentimental, other derisive and flippant.

At Harvard, Eliot covered his four-year undergraduate course only in three years and received his Bachelor of Arts Degree in comparative literature in 1909 and M.A. Degree in English literature in his fourth year in 1910. It was at Harvard that Eliot, for the first time, read some works of the renowned French poet Charles Pierre Baudelaire (1821-1867), with whom he discovered poetical possibilities that he had not found in any of the English poets. By 1909-1910, Eliot's adoption of poetic vocation had been confirmed. Prompted by his deep interest in the French symbolists, Eliot went to France soon after getting his M. A. Degree in 1910 and spent a year at the Sorbonne University in Paris to study French literature and philosophy. There he came under the influence of the renowned French philosopher of the school of continental philosophy, Henri-Louis Bergson (1869-1941) whose lectures he attended in Paris for enhancing his knowledge of philosophy. In 1911, Eliot returned to Harvard and registered himself as a graduate student in philosophy as he intended to pursue philosophy as an academic career, and studied Indian philosophy, Sanskrit literature and Pali. The Bhagvad Gita was one of the Indian classical texts that he studied with much interest. He also learnt about Buddhism, the influence of which remained with him for many years. In 1913, he was elected the President of the Harvard Philosophical Club and the very next year he was awarded a scholarship to Merton College, Oxford.

In 1914, at the age of twenty-five, Eliot went to Germany to spend the early summer of the year at a seminar in Marburg, Germany, with plans to study in the autumn at Merton College, Oxford but the impending world war quickened his departure from there. Now he went to Merton College, Oxford in England on the fellowship already awarded to him and continued working on his doctoral dissertation 'Knowledge and Experience in the Philosophy of F.H. Bradley', that he had begun at the University of Harvard, on the British neo-idealist philosopher Francis Herbert Bradley (1846-1924). Though he finished it in April 1916 and it was also accepted soon after its submission, but due to the ongoing war he could not travel to America to defend it. Feeling bored and lonely in Oxford, Eliot started to prefer metropolitan life and often visited London, where, among more highbrow pursuits he enjoyed dancing-parties at large hotels. In London, his Harvard classmate Conrad Aiken introduced him, on 22 September 1914, to Ezra Pound (1885-1972), the famous American modernist poet and co-founder of the Imagist School of Poets, who had come to Europe and lived in London from 1908 to 1920 and established himself as a reputed poet in the literary circle of London. Eliot's meeting with Ezra Pound in 1914 was a remarkable literary event of the first half of the twentieth century. Ezra Pound recognized the poetic talent in Eliot and facilitated his entry into the international avant-garde, where Eliot mixed with a literary circle including the ageing Irish poet W.B. Yeats (1865-1939), the English painter and novelist Percy Wyndham Lewis (1882-1957), and the Italian futurist writer Tamaso Marinetti (1876-1944) and encouraged him to settle in London, the city that has something special for everyone. He also met other prominent writers like E.M. Forster (1879-1970), D.H. Lawrence (1885-1930), Middleton Murray (1889-1957), Ford Madox Ford (1873-1939) and James Joyce (1882-1941) and the circle grew as Eliot stayed on in London. The Modernist mode popular in British and American Poetry from the early 1920s to the 1950s was dominated by Ezra Pound and T.S. Eliot. Modernist Poetry was characterized by a prodigious appetite for assimilating the disparate and fragmentary experiences of a complex and heterogeneous civilization. The Modernist mode of poetry is a combination of fin-de-siecle formalism and aestheticism, impressionism, symbolism, and Imagism.

In March 1915 when Eliot was studying philosophy at Merton College, Oxford he met Vivienne Haigh-Wood, who was working as a governess in Cambridge and was like him a writer, poetry-lover, and a Francophile. On 26 June 1915, they got married at the Hampstead Register office. After his marriage, he went on a short visit to America to see his family where his parents demanded that he should return to America to teach philosophy at Harvard, but he had made up

his mind to settle down in England and returned from America on 4th September 1915. As Eliot had not informed his parents before marrying Vivienne Haigh-Wood and also rejected their proposal to return to America, his father cut off his allowance due to which he and his wife were hard-up. To earn money, he started teaching French and Latin at Highgate Junior School in London and took evening extension classes at Birkbeck, University of London, where he taught English. In 1917, he gave up teaching when he was employed as a clerk at the Lloyd's Bank in London, where he worked till 1925. From 1917-1919, he also worked as the assistant editor of *The Egoist*, a London literary magazine, which mostly published articles on modernist poetry and the arts. Around this time, Eliot's poems began to appear first in magazines and journals, and later in small volumes.

A collection of his poems entitled *Prufrock and other Observations* was published in 1917 and *The Sacred Wood*, his first collection of criticism which contained his influential essays, 'Tradition and the Individual Talent', in which he argues for the impersonality of poetry; 'Hamlet and His Problems', in which he applied the phrase 'Objective Co-relative' too poetic and dramatic creation and 'Ben Johnson', which asserted the merit of Johnson's 'flat' characterization. With the intention of providing the standard literary review, Eliot founded a new literary quarterly, *The Criterion* in 1922 and worked as its editor until the outbreak of the Second World War in 1939. It was with the publication of his 433-line poem *The Waste Land*, in the first issue of *The Criterion* in 1922 that Eliot came to be recognized as the voice of a disillusioned generation and a leading light of English poetry in the period following the First World War. The poem was mostly written in 1921, when Eliot was under great strain, partly due to his own nervous disorder and partly due to a breakdown suffered by his wife, Vivienne who had earlier suffered from multiple health problems in her childhood about which Eliot did not know before their marriage. Her illness and mental instability made Eliot, who was now himself feeling mentally exhausted, increasingly detached. In 1925, Eliot left Lloyd Bank and joined a newly formed publishing firm *Faber and Gwyer* which later became *Faber and Faber*, of which he became a director and worked in that capacity till the end of his days. As one of the directors of the firm, Eliot built up a list of poets including Ezra Pound, W.H. Auden, Herbert Reed, Stephen Spender and George Barker.

T.S. Eliot, born a Unitarian, gave up his Calvinist faith and converted to Anglicanism on 20 June 1927 and became a naturalized citizen of Britain in November 1927 and also joined the Church of England that every year and in 1928, declared himself in the preface to his prose collection *For Lancelet Andrews* (1928) as a 'classicist in literature, royalist in politics, and Anglo-Catholic in religion'. This statement caused a flutter in the English literary circles where such firm personal beliefs were not publicly expressed. The move to take British citizenship made him feel closer to British culture and marks an epoch in his poetic career. The poems written after that as *The Journey of the Magi* (1927), *Ash Wednesday* (1930), reflect the stage of Eliot's thinking and feeling about his adoption of Anglicanism. When his reputation continued to grow, he was offered the Charles Eliot Norton Professorship for the 1932-1933 academic years. He accepted it and set sail for the U.S. leaving his wife Vivienne in England. He sent Vivienne a letter reassuring her that he would not be away from her for more than seven months or so. In addition to teaching at Harvard, he also delivered two series of lectures at the Universities of Harvard and Virginia in 1932. These lectures were later published as *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism* (1933) and *After Strange Gods* (1934). He also wrote and lectured on a variety of literary and social topics. After his return from the U.S. in 1933, he resumed his job at Faber and Faber and had a deed of separation served upon Vivienne in the same year, which she did not sign. The letter Eliot had sent her after reaching the U.S. in 1932 turned to be the last she was to hear from him. During next four years of separation from Eliot, Vivienne spiraled into the

anorexia, drug-dependency and mental instability, the condition that made her brother Maurice Haigh-Wood, to commit her to a lunatic asylum in 1938 where she died in January 1947, after a prolonged mental illness.

As the editor of *The Criterion*, Eliot exerted far-reaching influence upon the English literary world. When this quarterly journal stopped publication in 1939, Eliot turned his attention from literary criticism to the poetic drama which, for several years, he had been trying to revive in England. He was commissioned to write *Murder in the Cathedral* for the Canterbury Festival of 1935. Eliot wrote the play, which proved to be a highly successful play and a great masterpiece of poetic drama. After this successful poetic drama, Eliot wrote *The Family Reunion* (1939), *The Cocktail Party* (1949) and *The Elder Statesman* (1958). By this time, Eliot's reputation and authority had considerably grown on both sides of the Atlantic, i.e., in England and America. While interpreting the age to which he himself belonged to it, he maintained the standards of the highest literary excellence in whatever he wrote, whether it was poetry, prose or drama. In the wake of his literary success, several prestigious awards were bestowed on him. Internationally lauded, he was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1948 for his outstanding contribution to present-day poetry. In the same year, he was awarded with the Order of Merit by the British monarch. He also received the Presidential Medal of Freedom from the USA in 1964, the Dante Gold Medal, the Goethe Prize and twelve honorary doctorates from various universities, which included Harvard, Oxford, Cambridge, and Sorbonne.

Almost ten years after the death of his first wife, Eliot married Valerie Fletcher, his secretary at Faber and Faber, on 10 January 1957. The couple remained married till his death in 1965. The lady was the companion of his last days and nursed him tenderly when his health deteriorated after a severe illness in the winter of 1962-63. The great poet and critic, a philosopher and social thinker, an innovator and trendsetter and a classicist in literature, a royalist in politics and an Anglo-Catholic in religion died at his home in Kensington in London, on 4 January 1965. He was cremated and as per his wishes, his ashes were buried in the small village of East Coker in Somerset, from where his ancestor, Andrew Eliot had emigrated to America in 1667. After Eliot's death, Valerie Eliot dedicated herself to preserving his legacy. Before her death in 2012, Valerie Eliot edited the drafts of *The Waste Land* (1971) and one volume of *The Letters of T.S. Eliot* (1988).

Eliot's Poetry

T.S. Eliot's literary talent started blooming during the period he was still a schoolboy at Smith Academy in St. Louis, Missouri. Though the poems of this period are immature, juvenile productions, mere schoolboy exercises, yet they show the signs of his growing poetic talent quite early in his life. Eliot wrote a number of very gloomy, downbeat and despairing quatrains under the inspiration of Edward Fitzgerald's *Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam*, the English translation of the quatrains of Persian astronomer and poet, Omar Khayyam (1048-1131), which he claims he, later, himself suppressed completely-so completely that they do not exist today. At Smith Academy, the exercises he prepared for class assignments had a great role in his early development as a poet. At the age of 17, Eliot got his school exercise poem *A Fable for Feasters*, which he had written in the manner of Lord Byron's *Don Juan*, published in the *Smith Academy Record* in February 1905. Another excellent school exercise poem titled '*A Lyric*', a sixteen-line poem with the eight-line stanzaic pattern, written in imitation of Ben Jonson, as a class assignment and for which Eliot was praised by his English teacher at Smith Academy, appeared in the *Smith Academy Record* in April 1905. This poem was later revised and published in *The Harvard Advocate* under the title '*Song*'. Between 1907 and 1910, the years during which Eliot was at Harvard College, ten of his poems were published in *The Harvard Advocate*, Harvard College's student-run undergraduate journal

of fiction, poetry, art, and criticism. After proving his poetic talent at Harvard, he also achieved the distinction of serving on the Board of Editors of *The Harvard Advocate* for some time during this period.

As a professional poet, Eliot first wrote his 140-line poem *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*, between February 1910 and August 1911 and after moving to Merton College, Oxford in 1914, got it published in the June 1915 issue of *Poetry: A Magazine of Verse*, a leading monthly poetry magazine in Chicago, with the help of his friend and mentor and overseas editor of the magazine, Ezra Pound, who saw this poem as a work of genius and recommended it to the magazine's founder, Harriet Monroe, for publication. The poem is one of the best known of Eliot's poems and is in the nature of an 'interior monologue', as in it only one character, its protagonist does all the talking. In it, the poet exploits the 'stream of consciousness' technique to communicate the drama of a human soul. Its narrator, Prufrock is the member of the cultured society of a modern metropolitan city Boston, London or any other, and what passes within his consciousness forms the substance of the poem. Unable to face the challenges of life, he longs to escape from it to some world of romance but the harsh reality of life has always intruded upon his romantic dreams and awakened him to a sense of actuality. Prufrock himself is a symbolic character symbolizing the frustration and neurosis of modern life, its sick hurry, and divided aims. By his deft and skillful touches, the poet has highlighted the hollowness, the barrenness and the triviality of modern urban life. This poem with ironic title, is a medley of images, of mixed metaphors, a combination of the grand and the prosaic, the material and the spiritual. The images used in the poem reveal the influence of the English Metaphysical poets of the seventeenth century and the French symbolist poets, particularly Jules Laforgue, whom Eliot had studied deeply. This poem was later printed as part of Eliot's first volume of verse titled *Prufrock and Other Observations*, a twelve-poem pamphlet, published in 1917. The other important poems of this volume are *Portrait of a Lady*; *Preludes*; *Rhapsody on a Windy Night*; *The Boston Evening Transcript* and *Mr. Apollinax*. The poems were written in Boston, the capital of Massachusetts, USA, and during his first year in England. In them, Eliot portrays with poignancy, the rottenness, corruption, decadence, hollowness, boredom, and pessimism of modern age in bitter, ironical and satirical verse. With the publication of this first volume of his poems, Eliot emerged as an original and skilled poetic craftsman.

His first volume of verse was followed by another twelve- poem collection titled *Poems* which was published by Leonard Woolf and Virginia Woolf at their Hogarth Press in Richmond, Surrey in England. The significant poems of this collection are *Gerontion*; *Burbank with a Baedeker*; *Bleistein with a Cigar*; *Sweeney Erect*; *A Cooking Egg*; *Whispers of Immortality* and *Sweeney Among the Nightingales*. The poems of this volume mark a considerable advance in Eliot's poetic workmanship and the setting continues to be urban as in the previous volume. The theme of these poems is the spiritual sterility and the decay of the urban society which is caused by loss of spiritual faith, betrayal, infidelity and sexual perversion. The monologue *Gerontion*, the longest poem in this volume, shows Eliot's free adaptation of the blank verse of the later Elizabethan dramatists. *Gerontion* is the name of a broken old man waiting for a rain of divine grace in a dry month with dryness symbolizing not only the spiritual barrenness of *Gerontion* but also of the civilization which he represents. The rented house he lives in is owned by a Jew and is a decayed house symbolizing contemporary decay and desolation and the Jew symbolizes the commercialization of human relationships in the modern world in which materialistic values prevail and humane and spiritual values are at a discount.

His much-discussed poem *The Waste Land*, a masterpiece considered as an important landmark in the history of English poetry that expresses the post-world war disillusionment of a generation, death, destruction, trauma, loss of faith and other devastating aftereffects of the War, appeared with much éclat in 1922 in the first issue of his own literary

periodical *The Criterion*. The poem was mostly written in England and Lausanne, Switzerland in 1921 where Eliot had gone for treatment for his nervous disorder. The poem is dedicated to Eliot's friend and mentor, Ezra Pound who had, before its publication, suggested far-reaching modifications and had revised and edited the draft of the poem. In addition, it was Pound who had induced Eliot to remove a quotation from Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* which originally formed *The Epigraph* to the poem, and also not to use *Gerontion* as the prelude to it. It is a long poem of 433 lines in five parts entitled (i) *The Burial of the Dead*, (ii) *A Game of Chess*, (iii) *The Fire Sermon*, (iv) *Death by Water* and (v) *What the Thunder Said*. Though Eliot thought of the poem as a 'series of poems' but Ezra Pound persuaded him that its five parts should appear as a single sequence, for it was likely to lose its full meaning if the parts were taken up one by one. Hence, the poem is a unified work of poetic art with a unified pattern like that of the different movements of a single musical composition. In *The Waste Land*, Eliot presents several symbolic wastelands of modern times, such as the wasteland of religion, where there is no water (faith); the wasteland of spirit, where all moral springs have dried up; and the wasteland of reproductive instinct, where sexual perversion has led to the spiritual death of the denizens of this wasteland due to commercialization of sex. The poet communicates to the reader his own sense of anarchy, moral decay and spiritual sterility that he finds everywhere in the contemporary world. Based on the Arthurian legend of the wasteland of Fisher King whose kingdom had been laid waste by his own sexual perversion and that of his soldiers, the poem presents the poetic vision of the distressing scene of Europe immediately after the First World War, where all normal values of society have turned upside down, and there is little hope of redemption. What Tiresias, the prophetic central voice of *The Waste Land*, discovers and comments on is the poet's vision of the futility of human endeavor in a social context. The 'unreal city' of the poet symbolizes any city in Europe, America or Asia where men and women are ghostly figures without a vital social life, and the crowds flowing over London Bridge are not independent human beings but the slavish victims of a mechanical way of life. At the end of the poem, the poet is optimistic that, in the midst of spiritual dryness, there is hope in Christ's sacrifice and the teachings of the *Upanishads* that people should give in charity sympathize with fellow human beings and control their desires to get redemption. *The Waste Land* ends on a note of peace with the repetition of Sanskrit word for peace: '*Shantih, Shantih, Shantih*'. In fact, *The Waste Land* is in many ways a compressed epic that does for its period what Vergil's *Aeneid* (19 BC) and Milton's *Paradise Lost* (1667) did for theirs, though, of course, its scale is considerably smaller than them.

Eliot's next poem, *The Hollow Men*, which is a ninety-eight-line poem, divided into five parts, was originally devised to form the epilogue to *The Waste Land*, but subsequently revised and modified and published separately in 1925 in Eliot's *Poems: 1909-1925*. The poem is provided with two epigraphs which indicate its main theme. In the first epigraph, '*Mistah-Kurtz-he dead*', which was taken from Joseph Conrad's novella *The Heart of Darkness* (1899) the death of Mistah Kurtz, the white man who had tyrannized over the poor and hapless natives, is reported by his servant, Marlow. Mistah Kurtz, a white man, is the agent of a trading company in a remote area of Africa with savage natives. Mistah Kurtz takes to drinking, becomes more savage than even the natives themselves and meets his death knowingly as he is one of the 'lost violent souls' referred to in line sixteen of the first section of the poem. What Eliot wants to convey is that Mistah Kurtz is different from the hollow men who are victims of inaction and indecision as in his philosophy, it is better to be dead than to be deadened like the hollow men of moral and spiritual death in the poem. The second epigraph, *a penny for the old guy* is an allusion to Guy Fawkes who, in the notorious *Gun Powder Plot of 1605* of the extremist English Catholics, tried to blow up the parliament to assassinate King James I and restore a Catholic monarch to the throne. The king got wind of the plot

before its execution and Guy Fawkes was arrested in the cellars of the House of Lords where he had been placed in charge of the gunpowder that had been stockpiled there and was later hanged. Thus he too was one of the 'lost violent souls'. To find out the meaning of the poem, one has to have the knowledge of the story of Conrad's *The Heart of Darkness*, of the *Gunpowder Plot of 1605* and of the story of Dante's *Divine Comedy*. This poem of Eliot is a terrifying exposure of the meaninglessness of life without belief, spirituality, and morality-the driving forces of life.

His next major poem, *Ash Wednesday*, predominantly lyrical, divided into six parts and published in 1930, the first of Eliot's long religious poems after his conversion to Anglicanism in 1927, is the poem in which he draws on Christian liturgical literature, Catholic symbols, and Catholic poets such as Dante to provide the underlying pattern of symbolic reference. It marks a new phase in Eliot's life as his overwhelming sense of the need for redemption transformed him into a religious poet. According to the Christian calendar, *Ash Wednesday* is the first day of the month of Lent, a period of prayer, fasting, and penance, when the Christian repents for his past sins and turns away from the world towards God. In the Church ceremony for this day, the priest rubs ashes on the foreheads of the congregation and thus reminds it that it is of the dust, and to the dust, it shall return. Eliot's poem of this title depicts the struggle of the human soul trying to work out its own salvation. Its six parts are six impressions of the mental and emotional state of a person trying to attain salvation. In *Ash Wednesday*, the element of drama is provided by the tension within the soul of the poet between the attractions of this world and his desire for spiritual discipline. The poet finally finds consolation in the fact that the pleasures of this world are transitory, momentary and fleeting and decide to renounce them for the achievement of God's grace and the poem ends with the poet's wish that he may never be separated from the Divine.

CONCLUSIONS

Eliot's last major poetic work is *The Four Quartets* (1944), the work which he himself regarded as his masterpiece and which brought him The Nobel Prize in Literature in 1948, is a poem in four parts. The first part 'Burnt Norton', was the final poem in *Collected Poems: 1909-35* published in 1936. The other three parts, 'East Coker', 'The Dry Salvages' and 'Little Gidding' first appeared in the *New English Weekly* in 1940, 1941 and 1942 respectively, and were then published separately in pamphlet form by Faber and Faber. Although written individually, all of them have a common theme, which is man's relationship with Time, the Universe and God and as one poem follow another, we see the poet groping his way towards truth. In them, we become aware of the intensity of Eliot's search for religious truth, which leads him to a new hope in the Christian idea of rebirth and renewal. The four quartets represent the four seasons and the four elements; the imagery of the first centers on a Cotswold garden; that of the second round a Somerset village, from where Eliot's own ancestor had departed in 1667 for the New World; the third mixes the landscapes of Missouri and New England, the landscapes of Eliot's youth; and the fourth was inspired by the landscape and history of St. John's Church, Little Gidding, Cambridgeshire. These were the first of Eliot's poems to reach a large number of Christians as they were seen as a unifying force in the war years and they succeeding in communicating in modern idiom the fundamentals of Christian faith and experience. In fact, *Four Quartets* represent an impressive achievement and are considered as the best religious poetry of its time.

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