

T.S. エリオットが描写した大戦のトラウマ

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コロナ禍の現在にあって、今ほど1910年から1920年代にかけてのヨーロッパの精神風土に酷似した時期はない。当時は経済不況が暗い影を落とし、ヨーロッパの国々はそれまでのキリスト教を基盤とした共通の価値観を共有できなくなり、各国の利害を求めて突き進むようになった。

ウイルソンの提唱した国際連盟の理想も絵に描いた餅に過ぎず、第一次大戦の勃発を避けることはできなかった。世界の恒久的な平和を唱えた国際連盟の条文も国際政治の現場では生かされることはなかった。しかもそのような恒久的な平和の理想は国際連合に引き継がれて後も各国の紛争の調停に力を発揮することはできないでいるのは言わずもがなである。

そうした失望感はEliotの『荒地』に所々表されている。特に最初の章の「死者の埋葬」ではエリオットの厭世的な世界観が反映されているととれる。特にロンドン橋を魂の抜けた亡霊のように通り過ぎて行く通行人の姿は、コロナ禍で人生の目的を失った2020年頃の日本人の姿と重ね合わせることはできないだろうか。キリスト教文化圏の西欧と非キリスト教文化圏にある日本の知的風景を単純には比較できないであろうが、グローバル化のもたらした人や物の交流が仇となり世界的なパンデミックを引き起こしたとは言えないであろうか。

論文の中ではEliotがパリ留学中に交流のあった、フランス語教師のJean Verdenalが第一次大戦で戦死したという悲劇が生涯にわたりEliotの心的トラウマとなり、『荒地』の中でVerdenalに呼び掛けたり、墓からの復活を願う詩行があるという点に触れた。少しオカルト的な側面もあるが、Carl Krockelの*War Trauma and English Modernism*を参考文献にしてEliotの内面に迫ったつもりである。

Eliotの『荒地』は難解で英文学専攻の学生の間でも避けられる傾向にあるが、この論文では非キリスト教文化圏にいる日本人でも今回のコロナ禍という視点からEliotの作品にアプローチできる一つの視点を提供する。

T. S. Eliot's traumatic depictions of the wars

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We haven't had any other periods than the present to seriously discuss a peaceful coexistence of the global community. A hundred years have passed since T. S. Eliot published *The Waste Land*. The global situation today bears some similarity to the one in the nineteen-twenties and thirties concerning the split of western culture at large after the Corona disaster. It may be a useful exercise in imagination to ask what Eliot said about situation of western society at that time.

One might argue that the United Nations Eliot referred to in his *Notes towards the Definition of Culture* has not been able to settle the ongoing conflict between Russia and Ukraine. Eliot introduces the text of a draft constitution for a "United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation" in the introduction of his *Notes*.

To develop and maintain mutual understanding and appreciation of the life and culture, the arts, the humanities, and the sciences of the peoples of the world, as a basis for effective international organisation and world peace¹

Eliot mentions himself that he did not cite the text for some specific purpose to consider political issues at that time. Eliot seems to pay some vague attention to the word *culture*² based on his pending issue of the integration of European culture.

When we read *The Waste Land*, we might associate the pessimistic climate after World War I with a current gloomy atmosphere in European society after the disaster of the Corona Pandemic. Furthermore, if such an elliptical depiction in the poem can be seen as a typical technique of modernist poetry, the ghostlike pedestrians crossing London Bridge may be associated with the soldiers on the battlefields at that time.

Unreal City,
Under the brown fog of a winter dawn,
A crowd flowed over London Bridge, so many,
I had not thought death had undone so many.

¹ T.S. Eliot, *Christianity and Culture* (London: Harcourt Brace, 1977) p.86.

² Ibid.

Sighs, short and infrequent, were exhaled,
And each man fixed his eyes before his feet. (Collected Poems 54-55)

It is generally said that a technique of modernism lies in deforming a lyrical expression to disclose an inner darkness, evilness, agony and grief by the use of eccentric images. When Eliot made public *The Waste Land* in the first issue of *The Criterion*, readers at that time had the impression that the poem had no logical sequence between each episode, jeopardizing an organic unity of poetry.

As Eliot uses a series of metaphoric expressions, the reader has to read between the lines to decipher the meaning hidden in the poem. Eliot seemed to be largely detached from the war as a modernist poet who tried to include an antiwar message through metaphor. Would it be a little far-fetched to say that Eliot might have been disappointed at the inefficacy of the League of Nations, founded in 1920, around when he was plotting out *The Waste Land* ?

The following passage is indicative of the organization's failure to deal with the conflict in Europe:

The League of Nations was further handicapped by its inability to apply sufficient pressure in clear-cut cases of aggression. According to its covenant, the League could introduce verbal or economic sanctions against an aggressor and, if these methods failed, intervene militarily. . . . the League had no army of its own, military intervention required member countries to furnish the necessary troops. . . . The League had not become, as Wilson had hoped, a "definite guaranty for peace."³

It would be worth considering the matter if Eliot had a pessimistic vision about the future of European society. One might say that the failure of the League of Nations would have an affect on his thinking to some extent. It might be safely said that Eliot did not become dependent on human wisdom and intelligence to realize his high-minded ideals of reuniting European culture, while staying away from any conflicts on the Earth. Eliot seemed at that time to have been torn between his belief in God and his devotion to intellectualism during the composition of *The Waste Land*. Additionally, Eliot's fear of a dark future in Europe can be found in Krockel's *War Trauma and English Modernism*. Krockel points out that Eliot expresses his mind in *The Criterion*.

In a 1927 "Commentary" Eliot revived his formerly assertive tone of the first years of *The Criterion* by setting the question of "how Europe can be organized," yet *The Criterion* was already failing as an instrument for answering the question. . . . he criticised the International Institute for Intellectual Co-operation of the League of

³ Jussi M. Hanhimki, *The United Nations: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1742) pp.12-13.

Nations for its “lack of coherence, of any unifying idea”. In its stead he called for “real *intellectual* co-operation . . . created by the state of mind of men of letters” who were “aware of the vital problems of European civilization as a whole” (C, V1).⁴

The Criterion was founded by Eliot as editor-in-chief for the purpose of exchanging ideas among men of letters, as an intellectual circle in Europe. However, the voices of these men of letters did not affect national and international politics. Krockel explains the reason why such an intellectual circle became powerless.

There was the dilemma, as he analyzed it retrospectively in *The Unity of European Culture* of 1946, between maintaining political openness to include the widest diversity of voices, and asserting a political perspective that could be influential in the political scene. The more *The Criterion* opened up to a broader range of contributors, the less cohesive it became, consisting of “various, divergent or even contradictory opinion of a widening group of individuals in communication” (C, V2).⁵

It seems that Eliot tried to make a strong commitment to spread all over Europe the voices of men of letters in order to avoid a recurrence of war. Eliot seemed to have believed that the opinions of intellectuals expressed in *The Criterion* might have a great deal of influence in various areas such as politics and the arts.

The concept of the international magazine, *The Criterion* might have come from Eliot’s Parisian year as an exchange student. It is said that the young poet was making contact with various intellectuals in the enlightened capital of France. Peter Ackroyd discusses aspect of Eliot’s experience in Paris.

Eliot was to call it a ‘romantic year’ although his own official account of the effect which Paris exercised upon him is couched in characteristically intellectual terms. He had travelled to the city drawn by that ineluctable sweet thread which connects poetry and place, but ‘la poésie’ was not a dominant presence there in the early years of the century. Paris had, instead, reassumed its role as a centre for conflicting ideologies and it was intellectual activity, as much as anything else, which animated Eliot during the period. He listed some of the eminent figures who were influential in Paris at this time. . .⁶

The names of Émile Durkheim and Henri Bergson are included in his list. Eliot might have realized the importance of exchanging ideas with various intellectual people at the center of this enlightened city on the Continent. One might say that the young poet had felt a kind of dynamic driving force that could change even the direction of international

⁴ Carl Krockel, *War Trauma and English Modernism* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011) p.162.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Peter Ackroyd, *T.S. Eliot* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1984) p.40.

politics after the war.

The fact that Eliot was attracted to the thought of Charles Maurras might be the reason that he became so positive in his thinking and action. Ackroyd describes Maurras.

Maurass was a man of deeply authoritarian temper, who espoused the principles of classical order and hierarchy in every field of human activity. . . . He was anti-democratic and rabidly anti-semitic (later to be incarcerated for his association with Vichy regime). His organization, the Action Française, encouraged student riots. . . against free thinkers and Jews. . . ⁷

It might be safely said that any violent or aggressive element dwelling deep inside his Psyche never appears in his poems, except his controversial remark in “After Strange Gods,” in which he deals with the unity of homogeneous society. “After Strange Gods: A Primer of Modern Heresy” is Eliot’s infamous lecture at the University of Virginia in 1933. He made a slip of the tongue even after a criticism against a series of anti-semitic passages since *Poems 1920*.

Eliot compares the war in Europe to the Civil War, which was regarded by Eliot as the most sad case of dividing the United States into two. Krockel discusses how Eliot felt about the Civil War.

. . . remembrance of previous trauma struck Eliot in “After Strange Gods” where he transposed the consequences of war in Europe onto his American mid-Western audience: “The Civil War was certainly the greatest disaster in the whole of American history; it is just as certainly a disaster from which the country has never recovered, and perhaps never will: we are always too ready to assume that the good effects of wars, if any, abide permanently, while the ill-effects are obliterated by time.” A “southerner” brought up in St Louis, of New England family, Eliot had personally experienced the divisions inherited from the Civil War. . . . this memory did not enable him to formulate a preventative of future war, since his notorious answer was to not be “invaded by foreign races”, especially free-thinking Jews, since “Tradition” was “of the blood”, a single race (ASG, 16-18, 30). ⁸

Krockel points out that Eliot gave some credence to a kind of “literary fascism,” because the country had to be controlled by those who are good at writing and speaking the English language. Eliot’s favorite regime seems to be a limited dictatorship based on the will of the people. It seemed to Eliot that Americans are very liberal in their behavior and thought. Eliot might have learned from French republicanism that central authority is necessary up to a point in order to unify the multi-ethnic nation.

⁷ Ibid., pp40-41.

⁸ Krockel, Ibid., p.177.

Ackroyd asserts that Eliot formed a firm friendship in Paris with Jean Verdenal, a lodger in his pension as well as his French tutor, Alain-Fournier, both of whom passed away on the battlefields of the war.⁹ It can be said that the presence of Jean Verdenal influenced Eliot's poems from time to time. The following passage is indicative of that.

Verdenal was perhaps the most compelling choice for his poetic fantasy of escape since he belonged to Eliot's most idealised year while providing a link with the war; however as a victim of the event which continued to dominate Eliot's present, he could not offer a satisfying alternative. Eliot had perhaps been trying to conjure up Verdenal during séances with the mystic P.D. Ouspensky in autumn 1920. He took a nostalgic trip to Paris that December, while staying in the student lodgings which he had shared with Verdenal . . .¹⁰

It is generally said that a sense of fear, lamentation, anger or worry after the war runs through the whole of *The Waste Land*. If we take the forementioned point into consideration, we can find some passages haunted by the presence of Verdenal. The opening passage of "breeding Lilacs out of the dead land . . . stirring Dull roots with spring rain" represents the wraith of Verdenal as a dead soldier. Krockel, as a matter of fact, points out that Eliot recalls Verdenal "waving a branch of lilac" in a "Commentary" of April 1934.¹¹ Additionally, the passage at the ending section of "The Burial of the Dead": "A crowd flowed over London Bridge, so many . . ." represents the casualties of the war.

Ghostlike people crossing the London Bridge might partly symbolize Verdenal's presence as a victimized soldier of World War I. According to Lyndall Gordon, Eliot imitated such a melancholic atmosphere of the city from Charles Baudelaire, the French Symbolist.¹² The passage of "Unreal City" could be associated with Baudelaire's "Les Sept Vieillards."

Fourmillante cité, cité pleine de rêves,
Où le spectre en pleine jour raccroche le passant !
Les mystères partout coulent comme des sèves
Dans les canaux étroits du colosse puissant.¹³

Baudelaire's morbid temperament might have brought about such a decadent depiction of the city. It is imaginable that Baudelaire would like to express a sense of horror at falling into Hell without a sense of sin. Both poets may be seen as sharing a sense of horror at the spiritual malady of their contemporaries.

⁹ Ackroyd, *Ibid.*, p.42.

¹⁰ Krockel, *Ibid.*, p.113.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p.121.

¹² Lyndall Gordon, *Eliot's Early Years* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977) p.30.

¹³ Charles Baudelaire, *Les Fleurs du Mal* (Ligaran Éditions, 1961) p.133.

‘What is that noise?’ in “A Game of Chess,” might indicate the shout of a critically wounded soldier at a field hospital, though the line was hitherto regarded as the stressful shout of Eliot’s first wife, Vivienne.

As for a chance of salvation for humans in the poem, the ending word of “Shantih shantih” might indicate a desperate state of Eliot’s mind unable to find any clues to human salvation from chaos. One might also posit that the poet wants desperately to resurrect the figure of Verdenal by reciting a prayer in a foreign language, all in vain.

Such a traumatic depiction continues until “Little Gidding,” which appears at the horrifying outbreak of the Second World War. “The dove descending breaks the air” ironically refers to German bombers attacking London. However, the deliberate reader can find a beam of hope in the ending passage “And all shall be well . . .”

It can be said that Eliot was seeking salvation to heal the trauma of the war after having converted to Anglo-Catholicism in 1927. Would it be too much to say that we find *Four Quartets* less desperate in its depiction of his war experience? The passage “in a secluded chapel/ History is now and England” is associated with Eliot’s statement in *The Idea of a Christian Society*. He discusses.

. . . no one today can defend the idea of a National Church, without balancing it with the idea of the Universal Church, and without keeping in mind that truth is one and that theology has no frontiers. . . . But if we allowed ourselves to entertain for Europe. . . the ideal merely of a kind of society of Christian societies, we might tend unconsciously to treat the idea of the Universal Church as only the idea of a supernatural League of nations. . . . the allegiance of the individual to his own Church is secondary to his allegiance to the Universal Church.¹⁴

Eliot stresses a tense relationship between the temporal and spiritual life in society. Additionally, a sense of loyalty to fellow-Christians is crucial in every country. It would be safe to argue that Eliot came to achieve a healthy state of mind devoting his energies to the idea of the Universal Church instead of relying on human politics and wisdom of the League of Nations or the United Nations. In other words, Eliot as a mature Christian poet left every human matter in the hands of God in order to secure human salvation. Eliot’s wisdom and poetic faith may well inform us in the current world-wide trauma that is the pandemic. If the Pandemic may be seen as a kind of Divine punishment, why don’t we humans put our faith in God and Divine mercy rather than our flawed political systems?

This paper is based on my presentation at the 43rd Annual Meeting of the International T.S. Eliot Society in September 2022.

¹⁴ T.S. Eliot, *The Idea of a Christian Society* (London : Faber&Faber, 1982)