THE THEME AND IMAGES OF AWARENESS IN T. S. ELIOT'S "THE FAMILY REUNION"

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This is to certify that the dissertation "The Theme and Images of Awareness in T.S. Eliot's "The Family Reunion" by Miss. Nahid Kamal Khan is an original piece of research done under my supervision. The work is suitable for submission for the award of M.Phil. degree of the Aligarh Muslim University.

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PREFACE

The highly allusive nature of Eliot's poetry and the amount of erudition required to decipher it have distracted critical attention away from an important aspect of his work: the basis of his creativity in immediate and felt experience. Of course, his debt to Bradleian epistemology is generally recognised: the 'finite centres' of consciousness entail isolation but the theory also implies an immediacy of apprehension of all that which isolates the individual from other 'finite centres' of consciousness. Critics generally agree as to the relevance of Bradley's views to Eliot's poetry. It is not that Bradley led Eliot to give salience to the immediately felt in his experience; it is rather that Eliot found a philosophical justification in Bradley for what he intuitively thought to be crucial to his poetry. Moreover, Eliot must have been encouraged in his practice by the example of the late nineteenth century French Symbolist poets also, and this debt, too, has been universally recognised. What has, nevertheless, escaped attention is the salience that the immediately felt in Eliot's experience
finds place in his poetry. Everywhere in his poetry and plays we find marks of Eliot's success in transmuting — even without Dantesque analogues and Jungian parallels — the immediately felt into concrete-universals of great poetry. Very few English poets have to this extent allowed the minutiae of everyday experience to enter and operate on their imagination and let them be transformed into symbols of such poetic power.

It is not just the process of the symbolisation of the familiar that is interesting in Eliot's poetry; it is the fact that such symbolisation is of a peculiar nature that is important. The immediately apprehended in experience opens the door to an awareness of a particular kind. The immediate is made to mediate a sense of the numinous. 'Reality' is subverted and becomes unreal and the shadowy becomes real. The pervasiveness of such imagery in Eliot's poetry and of the theme of the subversion of 'reality' is what helps Eliot achieve the most distinctive quality of his poetry — its union of contemporaneity with universality. Eliot is so greatly universal only because he is so intensely contemporary. His allusiveness is no doubt a universalising agent but his roots are firmly grounded in that which is immediately
It is on this foundation that his philosophical and religious imagination raises the edifice of neo-Thomist Christianity. 'The world around the corner' rouses his sense of the numinous. 'The agony in the ancient bedroom' gives him the awareness of the hell that he inhabits. 'Full arms' and 'wet hair' reveal the possibility of regeneration through natural love. What is taken to be 'modern' in his poetry is actually "contemporary", and what is 'contemporary' is nothing but that which is immediately apprehended.

The immediately apprehended rouses in Eliot an awareness of the numinous, and the poetic self in whom such awareness has been roused becomes an outsider. He is alienated from his society. It is the drama of this alienation, of conflicting and discrepant awareness, that occupies the centre of stage in _The Family Reunion_. Eliot's poetic self with its special awareness is abstracted and embodied in the character of Harry in the play. The present dissertation is a modest attempt to trace, through a few selected images, this special awareness of the poetic self in the early poetry and then to see how drama is created in _The Family Reunion_ out of the conflict of
discrepancy awarenesses. Incidentally, it may be pointed out that the use of the term 'awareness' in the present dissertation has nothing to do with the same in a well-known essay by Professor Unger. (See bibliography at the end). Professor Unger uses the term in the sense of self-consciousness and not in that of awareness of the numinous through the experience that is immediately apprehended.

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( NAIID KAMAL KHAN )
CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION
It is almost platitudinous to say that Eliot, more than any other poet in our century, has deeply influenced the course of modern English poetry and poetic drama, and has taken them to heights untouched in the previous century except in the best of the literature of the early nineteenth century. He enjoys respect not only as a great poet and playwright but also as a critic. It is equally platitudinous to say that Eliot's creative efforts are marked by a remarkable unity — the unity of what can only be described as a persistent religious quest. Through his poetry and plays he has tried to draw a clear picture of the chaos of the modern world which, he thinks, is a result of the secular thinking of his age.

Eliot's conversion to Anglo-Catholicism was not a sudden change in the middle of his life but the result of a long process of evolution in thought and sensibility that started early in his childhood. The profound religious vision which is mediated through his later poetry and plays was the product of factors that go back to his earliest years. In order to perceive the unity of his work and to see how he came to possess the unique awareness of the religious and metaphysical dimensions of
experience, it is necessary to consider briefly certain elements in his background and development.

Eliot was born in a very strict Unitarian family. The first family figure who influenced the mind of young Eliot was his grandfather, William Greenleaf Eliot. It appears that his grandfather exercised a great deal of influence on every member of the family. In one of his lectures at Washington University, Eliot said that, though he could not get the golden chance to meet his grandfather as he had died a year before his birth, his figure seemed still to preside over the family. "The Standard of Conduct was that which my grandfather had set;..., he had brought down the tables of the law."¹ This shows how much the young Eliot was in the grip of the strict Unitarian ethos. His young mind was distracted a lot as it needed something more appealing to his senses than the extreme form of Protestant rationalism known as Unitarianism. Eliot was instructed in a form in which things were either black or white; this made young Eliot's mind look somewhere else for the satisfaction of his imagination. What he got from his early background was stern enlightenment. Inspite of all these
limitations he was influenced a lot by his early back-
ground. He himself puts it in these words: "The
primary channel of transmission of culture is the
family: no man wholly escapes from the kind, or wholly
surpasses the degree, of culture which he acquired from
his early environment." Whatever the limitations of
"the degree of culture" inherited by Eliot from his
family, the fact is undeniable that it impressed on his
young mind the importance of religious faith. "Reli-
gious faith, in short, is for Eliot a mode of transcen-
ding historicism while remaining in its ambit." This
need for religious faith inherited from his grandfather
was reinforced by the influence of his mother, Charlotte
Eliot. His mother did considerable amount of social
work and was also endowed with literary gifts. It may
be surmized that the earliest stirrings of charity must
have come to Eliot through his mother's social conscience.
Eliot's wide cultural interests must have originated in
his mother's limited social activities. Speculation
about his mother's shaping influence on Eliot's character,
thought and sensibility, however, is not as fruitful as
the recognition that the content of Unitarian thought
(an important element, as we have seen, of his early background) does not mark any continuities in his development. As a matter of fact, it is Eliot's rejection of Unitarianism that is more important in the development of his thought. It may be pertinent here to recall Eliot's reaction to a comment made at the time of his conversion to Anglo-Catholicism in 1927. Eliot, we remember, sounded quite strange when it was remarked that his conversion to Anglo-Catholicism indicated his "return" to the Church. Eliot repeated the word "return" with a query, and said, "I was never there." Eliot's comment clearly brings out the fact that Unitarianism led to scepticism and rationalism rather than to faith and the true spirit of Christianity.

Thus, in our emphasis on the Unitarian background of Eliot it is significant to remember that it is not the content of Unitarianism as a Christian sect that influenced Eliot. As a matter of fact, it is the emotional quality of his early religious background — its earnestness and its evangelical zeal, its attempt to view experience in moral and religious terms — that is of crucial significance in a consideration of Eliot's development as a religious poet.
Apart from his family background, Eliot's mind also owed a great deal to the influence of his teachers. In 1906, he went to Harvard and there he found the atmosphere conducive to free and original thinking. This atmosphere was different from that at home. Here he met teachers like George Santayana and Irving Babbit. They gave a new turn to his conscious life. The most important influence in his Harvard days was that of Irving Babbit. Babbit's frank nature and outspoken temperament attracted Eliot. Babbit, in particular, influenced his ideas about the dynamic relationship between past and present, as well as encouraged him in bias against Romanticism. He gave Eliot's interests a proper direction. "He found in Babbit not merely a tutor, 'but a man who directed my interests, at a particular moment, in such a way that the marks of that direction are still evident." Babbit, in a way, exploited the hidden interest of Eliot towards authoritarianism and anti-romanticism and confirmed it. Eliot, no doubt, found Babbit's humanism rather uncongenial and came later to repudiate it altogether. Humanism, he was to discover soon, was a cul-de-sac, a blind alley that led nowhere, an indication and expression of hubris guilty of original
sin. It opened no way out of freedom from time-bound consciousness, and was indeed purely historicist and secular in its epistemological bearings. It was the chief malaise of the modern, post-Renaissance European society, and was, at the same time, inimical to poetry and to the life of the imagination.

Another force attracting Eliot at Harvard was G. Santayana, a teacher in the department of philosophy. He was a classicist. He seems to have influenced the raw mind of Eliot through his definition of art. He describes art as aiming at universality. According to him art can achieve universality by depicting universal and primary experiences and by expressing ultimate truth. Santayana's idea of naturalism and disillusion appealed to Eliot.

Besides these teachers, Eliot was also influenced by his reading, a brief account of which may be given below. However, it is important to remember that none of the elements in his background may be regarded as active agents in the evolution of his thought and sensibility. Our purpose would be adequately served if we succeed in bringing the reader of Eliot's poetry to the
point where his conversion to Anglo-Catholicism appears as a natural and inevitable growth from his earliest background.

A little more than half a century separates Baudelaire from Eliot, but each, in his own age, gave evidence of the same gifts and the same plans for a poetic work — the analysis and the affirmation of the self. Eliot was especially impressed by Baudelaire's feeling for his age. Baudelaire's art represented an awareness of man's situation in the modern world. What impressed Eliot most in Baudelaire was his insistent awareness of sin. Eliot presents this concept through different images of awareness throughout his poems and plays. Like Baudelaire, Eliot too manifests throughout his work, from Prufrock to the plays, a haunting and insistent awareness of sin. The principal characteristic of their age, according to both Baudelaire and Eliot, is disorder: disorder in every domain. Baudelaire influenced Eliot not merely as a poet but he also made it easier for Eliot to feel and understand the prevalent disorder and chaos in modern society. Baudelaire's idea of a modern city was that of a living hell. Eliot was encouraged
to feel the same way by his study of Baudelaire's work. He, too, sees evil around him. He is sickened by the vulgarity of a large city. Another characteristic of Baudelaire which influenced Eliot is his faith in moral values. Baudelaire was the first writer of modern poetry who claimed that all first rate poetry is preoccupied with morality. Both nurtured the impassioned plan to rediscover authentic human values.

Eliot's debt to French symbolism, specially in matters relating to poetic communication and technique, is well-known and would be necessary to determine and outline in a comprehensive account of his poetic development. However, in the present discussion we are not much concerned with Eliot's technique. Our main concern is focussed on Eliot's religious quest, the elements that ultimately helped him evolve images of extra-temporal, supra-mundane awareness, the images that make his later poetry and plays like "The Family Reunion" such wonderful works about transcendent reality.

Eliot himself has drawn attention to the fact that a reading of Arthur Symons' *The Symbolist Movement in Literature* was of crucial importance in the development
of his poetic career. Apart from matters of technique, specially those relating to the poetics of indirection (something with which we are not concerned here), Eliot also speaks of matters concerned with the impact of Symon's work on his sensibility. He describes the experience of discovering Laforgue and others as "an introduction to wholly new feelings, as a revelation." What attracted Eliot to Laforgue was not just the spoken idiom, the poetry of colloquialism but also Laforgue's fascinating talent for extracting unity from the fragmentation of experience and his haunting pessimism. The young Eliot's persistent awareness of the divisions in self was found echoed in Laforgue's poetry of modern consciousness, and this merged imperceptibly with Eliot's growing disenchantment with time-bound patterns of experience. It is in this way that the influence of the symbolists and specially of Laforgue is relevant to a consideration of Eliot's religious quest.

Soon, however, Eliot outgrew Laforgue and passed on to Dante, the supreme and the most pervasive influence on Eliot's mind. In Dante, Eliot found the example of metaphoric vision that laid the foundation for a vision
of spiritual order which Lacorgue lacked. The influence of Dante on Eliot should be of the greatest concern to a reader of the latter's poetry since Dante remained for Eliot as the poet "per se," the great European classic who is of much more relevance to the modern poet than even Shakespeare. It is interesting to contrast Eliot's attitude to Dante with that towards Shakespeare. The latter's work contributes quite a good deal to the texture of Eliot's verse but Dante remains the poet to whom Eliot owed his total allegiance. Dante's incarnational symbolism and the archetypal organisation of experience in *The Divine Comedy* provided Eliot the means with which to fuse thought and sensibility and to perceive regenerative schemes for a decaying culture.

Eliot's profound Calvinistic awareness of sin — something that was a part of his puritanical background — found a reflection in Dante's hell. Dante's hell is the hell of Eliot too. The Dark Wood in Dante which leads into hell does not point to any particular sin; it is an image of the loveless heart which is the cause of all sins. It is nothing but "the great refusal to see the reality outside the self. In this condition the spiritual progress
of the protagonist is stopped by his own corruptions externalized as wild beasts... The only way out of the Dark Wood is through Hell, through a knowledge of the darkness of one's own soul. This is what Edward of The Cocktail Party says:

What is hell? Hell is oneself, Hell is alone.

The knowledge of Hell impels the soul to go up the way of purgation. Throughout Dante's work we find an awareness of sin covering different stages in the form of "Inferno" and "Purgatorio" leading to the positive end of "Paradiso." Like Dante, in Eliot also we find experiential images hinting at Inferno, Purgatorio and Paradiso — though he only hints at the paradiso. Keeping the pervasive nature of Dante's influence in mind it can be said that to read Eliot in ignorance of Dante is to neglect a dimension of meaning that the poet exploits throughout his major works. In "Prufrock" and some other poems Eliot relates the experience of modern man to the experience of mankind given to us by Dante. In a talk 'What Dante Means to Me,' given in 1950, Eliot paid his tribute to Dante as "the most persistent and deepest influence" on
his poetry. He has described his method, "I have borrowed lines from him, in the attempt to reproduce, or rather to arouse in the reader's mind the memory, of some Dantesque scene, and thus establish a relationship between the medieval inferno and modern life."

Eliot's search for a scheme which could bind up his fragments and unify his life and art sent him back to philosophy. In 1916, he completed a dissertation on the epistemology of F.H. Bradley. Eliot found in Bradley a doctrine which at least on the intellectual level, explains away the fragmentation and chaos which seems to mark the present culture. What attracted most of the absolute idealists and Eliot to Bradley's philosophy is his discovery that reality consists of parts which are all a part of a single system. Every existing thing is a part of the absolute. What Bradley offers others to derive from his philosophy is that any fragment, no matter how isolated it may appear, is connected to other fragments; every fragment is self-transcendent. It reaches beyond itself and participates in successively greater fragments until it reaches the all-inclusive whole. The primary emphasis of Bradleyan doctrine on reuniting fragments into
a whole is radically religious. The religious impulse is the impulse to rebind, to transcend fragments, to reunify. To be religious is, first, to be aware of fragmentation, of brokenness and finally. It means to be discontented with brokenness and to imagine that it can be transcended. Another aspect of Bradley's philosophy which influenced Eliot is his theory of knowledge. Eliot's keen interest in the quest for the sources of knowledge can be seen throughout his poetry and that too very clearly in his search for the nature of reality. "The phrase 'Unreal City' in The Waste-Land has far-echoing philosophical implications to a person familiar with Bradley's Appearance and Reality." Bradley's "Absolute" becomes Eliot's "Pattern". Bradley thought that the broken pattern of life which we perceive is completed in the reality which contains it. These broken patterns become a part of a larger pattern. The only change which occurs in Bradley's absolute is that Eliot gives it a religious mask; he interprets it in the spirit of Christian theology.

II

Having briefly delineated above some of the important elements in the development of Eliot's religious vision,
we now propose to give some thought to the mediation of this vision in his major poems. The central concern in the following analysis is the endeavour to trace the unifying principle of Eliot's work — his religious quest which, though finding no climactic expression in any analogue of the "Paradiso," is yet suffused, in theme and imagery, with Eliot's transcendent vision. In my analysis of poems, onwards from 'Prufrock,' I have concentrated only on the above thematic aspect. No attempt has been made to isolate the imagery or theme of Eliot's transcendent awareness in the poems of his early or middle phase since my concern in this dissertation is only with The Family Reunion. It is only in relation to that play that the theme and imagery of awareness of the reality beyond the real shall be adequately dealt with.

Stephen Spender, in an article in The Sewanee Review, remarked "that in different periods [Eliot's] imagination dwells on different phases of experience, but in each work the view of life is only partial." Spender is right since we find that in the early poetry life is seen exclusively as hell. Prufrock's world is a kingdom
of death. Prufrock is isolated, as are the other persons; there is no real contact among them. The epigraph, taken from Dante's "Inferno" presents the situation of a character who was called upon to reveal himself. The protagonist in the poem is also in the same situation. Prufrock appears to be submissive. He sees evening in the aspect of etherization, and it suggests the idea of spiritual stasis. What Eliot suggests by this is the idea that the Prufrock consciousness has remained indecisive between the hope of salvation and damnation. To get out of this situation we have to leave our state of "death-in-life," and attain spiritual rebirth or "life-in-death." "The possibilities of salvation are within our ordinary temporal experiences; we need only to reach out to secure them." Eliot in this poem highlights the theme of the essential triviality of existence in which Prufrock participates along with the social set he observes:

In the room the women come and go
Talking of Michelangelo.

Eliot has shifted the "Inferno" of Dante to a modern psychological context where everyone like Prufrock, is trying to suppress his self. The tired, sleepy evening
is an aspect of Prufrock's mind, which represents the whole modern mind in a state of dilemma. Grover Smith remarks that "Prufrock suffers in a hell of defeated idealism, tortured by unappeasable desires."\textsuperscript{10} Eliot's reworking of the Dantean theme of the inferno has a modern setting, and achieves its universalising effect through its insistent contemporaneity. The poem probes deep into the subconscious of the protagonist and exposes before us the rottenness, the corruption and the decadence of contemporary society. The condition of the present day man is like that of an etherised patient who is "conscious but conscious of nothing." The image suggests the mental vacuity of the speaker. Notwithstanding the poem's Dantean epigraph and the analogy of the 'Inferno' pattern, 'Prufrock' is more Jamesian than Dantean. It is perhaps because of its closeness to the Jamesian model that the poem contains fewer images of awareness — the kind we will look for in \textit{The Family Reunion}. It may, however, be interesting to note that in the course of his musings on vacuity and boredom Prufrock is shocked into a realization of life's utter futility by his contemplation of "certain half-deserted streets" and "sawdust restaurants with oyster-shells." The same surprising effect is also
achieved by the image, in the middle of the poem, of "lonely men in shirt-sleeves, leaning out of windows."

These two images transcend the Jamesian world of psychological subtleties and over-cultured sophistries to become incarnational symbols of time-bound experience. 'Prufrock' achieves its characteristic Eliot overtones also in its image of the "pair of ragged claws/scuttling across the floors of silent seas." The protagonist repudiates his world of meaningless social rounds as well as his "consciousness of nothing" through his shocked awareness of "strange modes of being." The pair of ragged claws are vague anticipations of the furies that peer through the windows of common, mundane experience to make the cosy comforts of Wishwood an impossibility.

In 1922 came "The Waste Land," Eliot's first long philosophical poem. The critics at once described it as an attempt by Eliot to express the disillusionment of a generation, but Eliot rejected it; he said "When I wrote a poem called 'The Waste Land' some of the more approving critics said that I had expressed the 'disillusionment of a generation,' which is nonsense. I may have expressed for them their own illusion of being
disillusioned, but that did not form part of my intention." He even denied there was any social criticism in it at all. Eliot was quoted by Professor Theodore Spencer as having made the following remark:

Various critics have done me the honour to interpret the poem in terms of criticism of the contemporary world, have considered it, indeed, as an important bit of social criticism. To me it was only the relief of a personal and wholly insignificant grouse against life; it is just a piece of rhythmical grumbling.

This is the clearest denial on Eliot's part of there being any impersonal, philosophical or cultural implications, concerns or themes in the poem. Notwithstanding this confession and in the light of Eliot's over-all development as poet and thinker, there is little doubt that "The Waste Land" has larger religious and metaphysical concerns. These might be unconscious but these concerns are unmistakably there. The epic sweep of the poem is indeed so vast and important that it has taken its rightful place as a classic of English poetry.

"The Waste Land" has been discussed threadbare but
in almost all interpretations emphasis has been laid on its cultural, philosophical and religious implications. Leavis\textsuperscript{13} and Brooks\textsuperscript{14} laid stress on its anthropological bearings in the forties, misled perhaps by Eliot's references in the Notes to the poem's debt to Miss Weston's \textit{From Ritual to Romance}. This is not to deny that there is quite substantial patterning of experience in mythical terms in the poem, and that this patterning is necessary to an understanding of the text. However, the poem transcends anthropology or rather finds in anthropological beliefs, as it does in Hindu philosophy, analogues for ways of feeling and thought that were more personal, a part of his own heritage, something towards which Eliot had all along been moving. It is possible to see "The Waste Land" as part of Eliot's comprehensive religious quest, an attempt on his part to go back to the medieval Christian \textit{via negativa}. Eloise Knapp Hay in her recent study describes "The Waste Land" as "a poem of radical doubt and negation, urging that every human desire be stilled except the desire for self-surrender, for restraint and for peace."\textsuperscript{15} That this is the truth is substantiated by the excellent biography of Eliot by L. Gordon: \textit{Eliot's New Life}, a biography that beautifully brings out
the underlying Dantean pattern in Eliot's own personal experiences as a human being.

The consensus of critical opinion has come round to the view that "The Waste Land" marks an important stage in the development of Eliot as a religious poet. Avoiding references to the plethora of commentary on the poem, I would discuss briefly its central religious concerns and then try to isolate a few images of awareness in it.

(The poem shows that the disorder of the soul is the real cause of the disorder of society. The need for regeneration is a recurring theme in the poem.) The true waste land is not so much our present day culture as the proud and barren heart that needs to obey a supernatural command. The Waste is not that of War's devastation and bloodshed, but emotional and spiritual sterility. The first part of "The Waste Land," "The Burial of the Dead," takes its title from the Anglican service for the burial of the dead. It conveys the idea of resurrection, proclaimed through the assurance of Saint Paul, "the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed." Again the underlying idea is that of regeneration of spiritual life. This is the key idea around
which the whole poem moves. Tiresias, the protagonist of the poem, has been presented like the Fisher King, a type of all the mighty who are fallen. The people of the waste land inhabit the "Unreal City" which is a hell, for the people who inhabit it are totally ignorant of spiritual realities like those in Dante's "Inferno."

The Grail legend used by Eliot refers to the cup used by Christ at the last supper; thus it is regarded as a holy Christian relic. Eliot's intention in using this legend is to express the need for that which is lost. The Grail was lost and its search became an important and powerful symbol for man's search for spiritual truth. Eliot's vision is a gloomy, introspective and quasi-philosophical meditation upon the time-bound consciousness and life lived on the secular level ignorant of reality — the chief malaise of modern civilization. In "The Waste Land" we find a contrast drawn between two kinds of death. Life devoid of meaning is death, a kind of living death, a death-in-life. On the other hand, dying to the world in and through love is life-in-death, a kind of living in the perspective of eternity, a realisation of true life. This life-in-death brings in its wake the knowledge of
good and evil which gives us the status of being alive. The people who inhabit the waste land are indeed dead because they are unable to differentiate between good and evil. In the first part of the poem we are faced with the people who are afraid to live in the light of Reality. April, the season of joy and rebirth, is the cruelest month for them since it kindles desire, the stirring of new life which, according to Eliot, is a painful experience. "The dried tubers" of secular humanism that fed a little life in the winter of "forgetful snow" are preferred to the awakening of spiritual life in April through "giving," "sympathising" and "controlling" of the way of Negation for which Eliot finds an analogue in Eastern philosophy. Eliot is making sense of his own experience, of his awareness of the perspective of eternity through shocking and horrible images of mundane life and every-day occurrences — the flow of the morning crowd on London Bridge, the young man Carbuncular "on whom assurance sits/As a silk hat on a Bradford millionaire," the scene of seduction where lovers are "in rats' alley/Where the dead men lost their bones." Eliot's awareness of the timeless perspective in "The Waste Land," however, is not positive; it comes to him through a negation of
the negatives, a consciousness of sin, a haunting sense of the hollowness and meaninglessness of what is confined only in time. We have already seen how he deliberately distanced himself from the late nineteenth century humanistic philosophies. His reading of Dante, too, helped him acquire a keen sensitiveness to the dire needs of modern civilisation, specially to the absence of a coherent, wholeistic vision based on divine, supernatural sanctions for ethical life. "The Waste Land" is Dante's 'Inferno,' a cry of protest against the soul's imperviousness to what would nourish it if it only overcame its disintegration. Eliot makes the reader live through this hell. As in Dante's Divine Comedy, it is not actual hell but a vision of hell. "Sin is behovely" since it awakens the soul, and a consciousness of sin is the first necessary step towards life spiritual.

Eliot creates significant poetry out of his awareness of loveless sinfulness. He does it, among other things, through his imagery of everyday life which shocks the reader into a consciousness of the timeless dimension. This imagery of ordinary life which is part of the process of symbolisation and idealisation of felt experience is
reinforced by Eliot's wide reading. Reading, as Eliot elsewhere insisted, becomes a part of the poet's unified sensibility, it is impossible to disengage it from direct observation and feeling. The "Unreal City" where "death had undone so many" is not just the London of Eliot's personal observation but also the "fourmillante cite" of Baudelaire and the city of Dis in Dante's "Inferno." The shocking consciousness of these various layers of meaning is also present in the Madame Sosostris passage. Eliot brings real life, the memory of a scene in a novel by Aldous Huxley (part of Huxley's satirical observation of the decadent contemporary society), to coalesce with the legendary characters of the Tarot pack of cards, originally part of man's link with the beyond but now used in vulgar fortune-telling. We have all the contours of a real voice in a real life situation speaking in low tones and secretively, and asking the hearer to tell "dear Mrs Equitone" about the horoscope. "Dear Mrs Equitone", whoever she was, has here achieved immortality by her name alone. She is not the one to lose her poise, her "equi-tone," her intense self-concern, her unconscious choice of serial time (past, present, future) — vide her interest in fortune-telling. She looks
forward to the chorus of Uncles and Aunts in *The Family Reunion*, and may be taken as an example, among so many, of Eliot's symbolisation of experience through images of awareness.

"Ash-Wednesday" may be regarded as a testament of faith. The title refers to the ritual in which the priest, dipping his thumb in ashes, marks the sign of the cross on the forehead while he intones: "Remember, man, that thou art dust, and unto dust thou shall return." Thus, what Eliot wants to convey is the idea of the need for man to turn to the world of God. E.E. Duncan Jones in an article on "Ash-Wednesday," says: "It is religious poetry which is not didactic in any degree; it doesn't explain the doctrine or discipline of his faith, but it communicates something of what is felt in apprehending and undergoing them." Throughout the poem Eliot is concerned with states of feeling. He has taken the help of various images, especially religious one, to express the intense emotion present in his heart. As we go through the different poems of "Ash-Wednesday," we notice Dante's pervasive influence. However, Eliot doesn't limit the suggestiveness of his symbols to Dante's meanings alone. All the six poems of "Ash-Wednesday" are concerned with
the spiritual side of life. The series of poems start with a vision of spiritual renewal dominated by a Beatrice figure, which can also be interpreted as the church. This is followed by the image of stairs, which has been interpreted as suggesting the idea of spiritual stairs. Then there is the image of a garden (which can be a churchyard) presenting the transformed and glorified figure of Beatrice.

The first poem begins with self-exploration and self-examination, "Because I do not hope to turn again," this line suggests the theme of worldly loss and resignation; the inherent idea in it is to turn to God. The reference to the aged eagle point towards the medieval fable in which the aged eagle is able to renew its youth in the light of the sun and then by dipping into the waters of a fountain. It is possible that through this reference Eliot wants to reveal the possibility of spiritual rebirth by turning to God. Having found hope in nothing he decides to begin at the bottom and "to construct something upon which to rejoice."

In the second poem we have three white Leopards, who unlike Dante's spotted sinister beasts, are also agents of good. The themes running in this poem are the renewing
power of grace, the church and the doctrine of the communion of Saints. The vision prevailing here is that of death. It is not just physical death but spiritual death also. The idea of spiritual blindness is contained in these lines:

Under the Juniper-tree the bones sang,  
Scattered and shining.  
We are glad to be scattered, we did  
little good to each other.

In the third poem it seems that the speaker has already climbed the first stair. Now he is "At the first turning of the second stair." He finds "the same shape" which he had seen below. Then he passes through the trial of despair, "dark, damp, jagged," indicating age and decay. These stairs can be seen as the usual images of spiritual progress. Critics interpret these three stairs in different ways. Some compare them to the three stages of Dante's purgatorial mount. K. Hazaresing recalls a conversation with Eliot in which Eliot "wondered if, in writing 'Ash-Wednesday,' he had not been unconsciously influenced by some aspect of Indian Philosophy."17 This statement leads E.K. Hay to think that the three movements of the poem are related to the three stairs imaged in the
Buddhist way of purification.

There is much of Dante in the fourth poem of "Ash-Wednesday." In this section Eliot makes general references to the final cantos of the 'Purgatorio,' where Dante reaches the summit of the Mount of Purgatory, enters the earthly Paradise and sees Beatrice, and recalls his sinful past. Beatrice is veiled, before Dante is permitted to see the divine beauty of her face.

The Silent Sister veiled in white and blue
Between the yews.

The yew associated with the church is a generic symbol of eternal sorrow.

Part fifth deals with the revelation of the Word in the present world. The silence of the Word is that of the speechless Babe and of the Christ who before his accusers 'opened not his mouth.' Throughout 'Ash-Wednesday' Eliot has laid stress on silence as the condition of spiritual events.

The last poem is in many ways like the first poem. But, unlike the first poem where the emphasis was on not hoping, not striving, here are aspirations after natural
vigour. Here the author is not asking "why should the aged eagle stretch its wings?" but here in this poem we have a wide window revealing the beauty of the world.

From the wide window towards the granite shore
The white sails still fly seaward, seaward flying Unbroken wings.

The 'lost heart' rejoices again in its lost delights, and the "weak spirit quickens to rebel," for the lust of the senses. Thus, 'Ash-Wednesday' is a poem of penance and preparation. The whole sequence is completed with the hopeful look out on to the sea in the last part of the poem while the first part had started by renouncing the face and the voice. Coming half-way between 'The Waste Land' and 'Four Quartets,' "Ash-Wednesday" marks an important stage in the development of Eliot's religious consciousness. Its rhythmic virtuosity, its deep feelings focussing on the speaker's spiritual struggle and its highly resonant, almost scriptural, imagery and symbolism go to make it a distinguished achievement. Nevertheless, the poem does not fare as well as 'The Waste Land' or 'Four Quartets.' The main reason, perhaps, may be found to lie in the fact of its lesser dramatic immediacy. It is deficient in incarnational symbolism and the absence of
location in the actual. There are fewer images of awareness in the poem. It may not have been due to the poem's more abstract concerns only since in the 'Pour Quartets' the greater abstractness of the theme is enlivened everywhere by images derived from felt experience.

Having said that 'Ash-Wednesday' is not 'The Waste Land,' we may nevertheless suggest that the image of the stair in the third poem of the sequence achieves its purgatorial overtones through its placement in time and space. Equally powerful in its combination of actuality and symbolic suggestiveness is the image of "brown hair over the mouth blown,/Lilac and brown hair" — reminiscent of the hyacinth-girl passage in "The Burial of the Dead" in 'The Waste Land.' In the last poem there are the images of "the lost lilac" and "the lost sea voices" followed by greater actuality in the images of "the bent garden-rod" and "the lost sea smell" for which "the weak spirit quickens to rebel." There is some point in the suggestion made by L. Gordon that in the late twenties Eliot starts to turn more and more towards his American boyhood and begins to invest childhood images with greater symbolic power. Nevertheless, it is difficult not to agree with Grover Smith that there is
something cryptic about 'Ash-Wednesday', and that the poem is grounded in certain facts of Eliot's biography to which we have little access. There is a feeling, we might add, that the poem does not transmute actuality into timeless symbolic counters with the zest that Eliot's other major poems do.

From Ash Wednesday we can go on straight to the play Murder in the Cathedral to trace further the contours of Eliot's religious quest. We will, however, begin by recalling a few well-known facts about Eliot's interest in the revival of poetic drama. We know that Eliot was opposed to the realistic prose drama of the modern age. He once wrote, "I believe... poetry is the natural and complete medium for Drama." For Eliot to have insisted that poetry was germane to drama was not merely a result of his pique against the use of prose in early twentieth century drama though to some extent it was that too. We remember that so far as English stage was concerned, revival of drama at the end of the nineteenth century had come about as a result of the Ibsenian urge to fuse drama with social purpose and utility. Ibsen himself ended up with poetic drama when, late in his career, he
realized that prose was not adequate enough for the communication of his deepest apprehension of life. However, what Shaw and Galsworthy discovered in Ibsen was social utility and propaganda. Realism on the stage brought in its wake a facile kind of verisimilitude which, Eliot thought, was too high a price to pay for the loss of the deepest poetic insights. To be able to understand why Eliot thought that poetry was the appropriate vehicle for drama, it is useful to recall what he thought of poetry itself. Poetic endeavour for Eliot consisted in the attempt to retrieve the primeval from the welter of experience. Poetry, and not prose, is the appropriate vehicle for the recovery of the primitive mentality, and the highest kind of drama, too, is engaged in a similar activity. In his own poetic plays Eliot was going to deal with the area of experience — primitive horror and anxiety — from which not only great poetic drama but also religion springs. It was, therefore, natural for Eliot to bring poetry back to the stage. The attempt to revive poetic drama seems logical in the perspective of his unitive religious quest.

In a sense *Murder in the Cathedral* is a dramatization
of arguments for and against faith. It is possible to see
that the ostensible theme of the play — Becket's martyr-
dom — is only an objective correlative for the play's
deeper concern, an affirmative metaphor for faith in the
religious, supernatural scheme of things. The play,
no doubt, is a study in Sainthood. However, the way
Eliot has dramatized Becket's inner conflict, his spiri-
tual struggle, the play also comes to include in its range
Eliot's own endeavour to affirm faith in a setting of
doctrine and negation.

When the play opens we are presented with the
chorus of the women of Canterbury who are religiously
unconscious and prefer to go on in the misery of their
half-lived lives. Becket comes as a ray of new religious
hope for them. What Eliot wants to convey through them
is the relevance of Christianity in daily life, and the
assertion of its value by way of offering religious solu-
tions to the problems of the individual. "The soul of
the play is Christian. It is the story of a Saint who
has been elected by God to be a martyr of his religion.
The story naturally falls into two major parts: the first
is occupied with the psychological preparation of the Saint
for becoming a worthy instrument of the Divine Will, while the second part depicts the actual murder of the saint whose blood will redeem the body of the worshippers and strengthen the foundation of the Church."21 The play is a self-exploration by Becket which has been done through different instruments - like the Canterbury women, the tempters and the Knights. Eliot presents the wretched life of the chorus on account of their lack of religious consciousness. Eliot brings into focus the unregenerated consciousness of the chorus and their attempt to come out of this state with the help of Becket. Becket is quite aware of the situation in which the women of Canterbury are. He knows that what they are doing is out of ignorance.

They know and do not know, what it is to
act or suffer.
They know and do not know, that action is
suffering,
And suffering is action.

On the one hand, he paves the way of salvation for the chorus but, on the other hand, he himself suffers from the mental trauma caused by the appearance of the tempters. Hugh Kenner suggests that the play "retraces in specific terms the zone traversed by 'Ash-Wednesday.'"22 Hence,
the play depicts the sacrifice of a Saint, a means of salvation, not only for Becket, but also for the chorus. Through Becket's sacrifice, Eliot is trying to dramatize the need for total submission before the will of God. Eliot is able to project the mental dilemma of a man hanging between doubt and faith in the scene between tempters and Becket before achieving the state of a martyr.

"Before that great catastrophe occurs the Archbishop has to rehearse his part by engaging himself in 'Strife with Shadows.' These shadows are transformed into tempters. It is said that these four tempters are nothing but the four stages of Becket's life. Becket is able to overcome the first three tempters easily, but it is the unexpected fourth tempter, who creates real struggle inside the Archbishop's mind. The fourth tempter claims that the Archbishop knows him but has never seen his face. It indicates the inner wish of Becket to achieve martyrdom.

When Becket murmurs, 'I have thought of these things' it gives the tempter a chance to woo him. He grabs the chance and says:

Yes, Thomas, yes; you have thought of that too.
What can compare with glory of Saints
Dwelling forever in presence of God? ...
Seek the way of martyrdom, make yourself the lowest
On earth, to be high in heaven.

However, when Becket meditates on all the pros and cons, he realises the horrible mistake he was going to commit in wishing to achieve heavenly glory. This was the most dangerous temptation since it is blasphemy to use martyrdom in order to achieve personal glory. The wish to be 'high in heaven' was the wish of Lucifer. At last, Becket wins over all these temptations. This play is a record of Becket's struggle for Sainthood; for Eliot it is a search to find religious truth. The main interest of the play lies in Becket's struggle for self-purification and its resulting effect on others.

The reader may or may not agree with our suggestion, made earlier, that the real theme of Murder in the Cathedral is the affirmation of a supernatural order of experience though the ostensible subject-matter of the play is the trials and tribulations of martyrdom. One thing, however, is undeniable: much of the material in the play is remote from everyday concerns. We will see that The Family Reunion remarkably succeeds in bringing
its coherent vision of the world beyond to bear on its drawing-room drama through its imagery of awareness. However, in the play under review the nature of the subject-matter has entailed a loss of immediacy. Nevertheless, Eliot does allow the vocabulary of contemporary political manipulation and intrigue to intrude into a medieval drama of the conflict between Church and state — and this at the risk of making the play anachronistic. Immediacy in introduced into the play by the invocation of the fear of the unknown by the chorus of the women of Canterbury. The chorus is more intelligent than it knows, and, like the chorus of Aunts and Uncles in The Family Reunion, it is caught in a web of circumstance that it vaguely fears and which it cannot fully understand. "Living and Partly Living" they have their "Private terrors", their "Secret fears".

But now a great fear is upon us....
A fear like birth and death, when we see birth and death alone
In a void apart.

The great drama of martyrdom is played out against a background of everyday existence in the perspective of time. Eliot does so by overlaying images of awareness by
experiential patterns derived from quasi-scriptural sources. This results in a dilution of immediacy but, at the same time, leads to greater universalisation. As a strategy this is just the opposite of what Eliot does in *The Family Reunion* and the later plays. While there the concrete is universalised, here the universal is made to focus at the concrete and the immediate. In *The Family Reunion* the present is viewed in the perspective of the mythical. Harry fades into Orestes. In *Murder in the Cathedral*, on the other hand, the medieval is sought to be brought close to the present. It is for this reason that despite the attempt to introduce the vocabulary of modern politics into the speeches by the Tempters and the Knights, the play is not very rewarding from the point of view of our present concern.
NOTES: Chapter I


CHAPTER II

ELIOT’S POETIC CREED
In the previous chapter we traced the outline of Eliot's religious quest in search of the fundamental unity of his work. A study, however, of Eliot's overwhelming sense of sin and of his quest for the imprint of the beyond in and through time, should also take into account the largely experimental nature of his work. The great success achieved by his poems is, to a great extent due to the innovations he made in poetic technique and to his rejection of some of the conventional features of poetry coming down to us from the past. Even as a writer of poetic drama, his greatest achievement is his flexible and powerful versification. He was of the view that one has to avoid imitating Shakespeare in order to produce great poetic dramas in the modern age. The emphasis thus was on conscious effort to renovate rather than to blindly follow the convention. Similarly, with regard to poetry Eliot believed that it was more a product of "organised labour of intellect rather than the fortuitous stimulation of emotion."¹

Some of his important poetic techniques are: the use of the objective - correlative, and the theories of impersonality, the dissociation of sensibility and of
tradition and the individual talent. We may briefly refer to them later but, first of all, it is important to focus attention on Eliot's use of symbolist technique and to see how his imagery of awareness is ultimately derived from the earliest use of this technique by Eliot.

The symbolist technique, it has been suggested, "ignited in him the sparks of new goals and promised a new technique suited to his genius."\(^2\) Eliot was fascinated by the technique of the French Symbolists because of its basic character of suggestiveness. Another feature which attracted Eliot towards symbolism was that it worked by association. It gave birth to new hopes in Eliot's mind, and at the same time gave him a chance to exploit fully different objects of experience by giving them the status of a symbol. The repeated use of some of these objects gives them a general validity. "A symbol, one might say, is a point at which pure form and concentrated meaning strive to come to terms, so that the more the poet relies on symbolism, the more formal as well as meaningful does his expression become."\(^3\) Though the most important use of symbols is in language but symbolism is all-pervasive in every kind of art, because it lends
itself to rapid, comprehensive and compact use. The very school of symbolism was designed to convey impressions by suggestion rather than by direct statement. The practitioners of the school, all influenced by Baudelaire, include Mallarme, Laforgue, and Rimbaud.

As already pointed out in the first chapter, it is through Arthur Symon's book *The Symbolist Movement in Literature* that Eliot came to know the mystery of the French Symbolists. It opened a whole new world for young Eliot. Symbolists like Laforgue and Rimbaud made it easy for Eliot to incorporate the chaos of personal experience into his poetry. "Conversation Galante" (1909), the earliest poem in Eliot's published collection, is an example of the influence of Laforgue and his practice of bringing the modern world and its language into poetry. Another aspect of Laforgue which influenced Eliot was the element of self-parody. As an example we may quote the following lines from "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock:"

Time to turn back and descend the stair,
With a bald spot in the middle of my hair -
(They will say: 'How his hair is growing thin.')

The next aspect which shows the influence of Laforgue is
his preoccupation with trivial routine: "I have measured out my life with coffee spoons."

"Prufrock" contains the same delicately ironic expression. On the one hand, Prufrock is occupied with the mystery of life and, on the other hand, he is thinking of trivialities - 'Do I dare to eat a peach?'

Grover Smith in his book *T.S. Eliot's Poetry and Plays* writes that 'Prufrock' uses Laforguian devices to create a tragic satire. The poem deals with the psychological impasse of the sensitive person from whom life has been withheld. Eliot learned from Laforgue some sensible techniques for disguising ordinary romantic material. After going through some of his poems we come to the conclusion that Eliot's poetry rarely tells us directly what the poet thinks or feels. It relies to an unusually great extent on images and symbols. "Symbolist technique is adapted to his purposes and the work of individual symbolist poets helps to form his conception of the essentials of modern life." The picture of the industrial civilization, which comes out of Eliot's pen, combines with those of Baudelaire, Verlaine, Laforgue.
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.

The fog, in 'Prufrock,' 'Portrait of a Lady,' 'the brown fog of a winter dawn' in 'The Waste Land' - is so consistent a feature in Eliot's scene that it becomes something more than a fog in literal sense; it achieves the status of a symbol of the chaos and confusion of modern civilization. It attracts our attention to that waste land in which man only knows, 'a heap of broken images.'

Eliot takes the help of different techniques of symbolism to communicate his themes successfully. The carefully selected juxtapositioning appears in various forms. The spiritual uneasiness experienced by the poet at a personal level as also prevailing in society in general finds its most concise expression in the following line in "Prufrock":

Restless nights in one-night cheap hotels.

Even without re-iteration life acquires symbolic force and compels attention to the anxiety experienced by all of us - an anxiety that shocks us into the awareness of
spiritual disconsolation. Without the use of symbolist technique Eliot's poems would be bereft of much of their compulsive power and most of his material — objects of everyday experience — would not achieve their transcendent force and suggestiveness. In most of his works, plays and poems both, Eliot tries to show the boredom and horror that lie beneath the commonplace and the ugly. The best way to do this is to disguise it in some beautiful symbol. In "Sweeney Agonistes," the boredom and horror, according to Helen Gardner, are masked by the instruments like telephones, gramophones, cars and all the paraphernalia of parties and drinks.

With the development of Eliot as a writer, his symbols and images also developed, and he started using them with more confidence. As Smit puts it "By the time he wrote the Four Quartets, the poet had developed almost a complete code of symbols with which one has to have some familiarity in order to understand and appreciate these poems." Now he started exploring spiritual life more easily with the help of already established symbols and sometimes by creating new symbols. Many symbols found in his works are personal and had their
origin in his past experiences. The repeated use of these incidents for the communication of some deeper message, gave them a general validity and established them as symbols.

In a greater part of the *Four Quartets* Eliot meditates upon time. In all the four poems of the *Four Quartets* there is an underlying unity. "In the *Four Quartets*, underlying the balance or contrast of such images as the river and the sea, the rose and the yew, spring and winter, frost and fire, there are the great unifying themes of Time and Eternity which are embodied in these images and which the four poems attempt to reconcile."\(^5\)

Here it is not a simple meditation on time and eternity but the Christian understanding of time and eternity. For Christians, it is the Incarnation which gives meaning to human history.

In *Four Quartets* with the help of proper images and symbols Eliot is trying to recover the lost sense of man's spiritual possibilities. In "East Coker," Eliot has presented Christ as the 'wounded surgeon' identified by
the 'bleeding hands;' the church is now a 'dying nurse,' and the world is a hospital where we are lying ill. In 'Little Gidding' the naturalistic fire becomes the Christian fire of purification and damnation.

Eliot's symbols are sometimes quite well-known and come from anthropology and depth psychology. Other symbols, however, are private signs having achieved symbolic state. The symbol of water comes very near to Eliot's private experience as he spent most of his childhood near rivers. He said that Missouri and the Mississippi had made a deeper impression on him than any other part of the world. "Symbolism may be said to be the link between Eliot's art and his life, or rather the channel by which his beliefs flowed into his poetry and his poetry into his beliefs."  

Eliot has fully exploited the universal symbol of water. In 'The Waste Land' he plays with the symbol of water, here the meaning coming from its absence. As water is a symbol of fertility and life, so the absence of water is suggestive of sterility, death, decay. The absence of water gives the images of dryness and decay, desert rocks, dry bones, drought and dryness. All these
images give Eliot a chance to play his game of juxtaposing the beautiful and the ugly. The technique of juxtaposition helps Eliot in giving an intensified picture of ugly and horrible. We may say that the drama of The Waste Land is built upon the contrast of repeated and varying symbols of drought and rain.

Just like water, Eliot also plays with the double meaning of the basic symbol of fire. In 'The Fire Sermon' fire comes as a destroyer and stands for the pure lust of the people of the modern age, but in the closing lines of the final section its meaning takes a turn and becomes a symbol of purification.

   Burning burning burning burning
   0 Lord Thou Pluckest me out
   0 Lord Thou Pluckest

Some of the important images and symbols in Eliot's poems are those of flowers and gardens. The rose is one of the most important images in Eliot's poetry. "Eliot's rose garden is nothing like the rambling area that surrounds an English cottage, but 'The Single Rose/Is now the Garden.'" 7

Another important image is that of stairs. In the
Prufrock group, the image of stairs occurs five times. Usually stairs symbolise spiritual progress or spiritual degeneration. In 'The Fire Sermon' Eliot uses the image of stairs to suggest spiritual degradation. When the young lover parts from the typist girl, he

        Bestows one final patronizing kiss
        And gropes his way, finding the stairs unlit...

As already mentioned in the first chapter the image of stairs is prominent in Ash-Wednesday and suggests spiritual progress.

Even in his plays Eliot has used beautiful imagery and symbols to convey his themes. In Murder in the Cathedral, Eliot makes his chorus use the imagery of all the senses, especially that of smell, to express its awareness of evil.

        There is no rest in the house. There is no rest in the street
        I hear restless movement of feet. And the air is heavy and thick
        Thick and heavy the sky. And the earth presses up beneath my feet.
        What is the sickly smell, the vapour?

Murder in the Cathedral is a play about the struggle between
the material and the spiritual sides of life. Most of the characters develop themselves as symbols. Thomas Becket and the priests are the embodiment of spiritual side while the Knights and the Tempters are the embodiment of material side. Sometimes it appears that Thomas is less a man than an embodied attitude.

Thus we see that Eliot has successfully employed the symbolist technique in his poetry and plays. The dominant mode of communication in Eliot's work is the symbolic. Some of his most private and personal images thus acquire the transparency of universal symbols.

Going on from this to some of Eliot's theories relating to poetics, we may briefly refer to his view of the use of objective correlative in art in general and then see how this theory conditions his use of imagery, especially what we have chosen to call his imagery of awareness.

"Objective Correlative" is a term introduced by Eliot in his essay on "Hamlet and His Problems" (1919). Against all expectations, this term acquired a currency that surprised Eliot greatly. What Eliot perhaps wants to convey through this term is that it is important for a writer to be precise and compact in order to write a great
piece of literature. The use of the objective correlative is the technique through which he can achieve this end. It is the technique which lays emphasis on the fact that "The only way of expressing emotion in the form of art is by finding an 'Objective Correlative'; in other words a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events which shall be the formula of that particular emotion," and which will evoke the same emotions in the reader. This theory of Eliot has been subjected to severe criticism because most critics think that no object or situation is in itself a "formula" for an emotion. Through this Eliot wants to emphasise that the main concern of the poet should not be so much with thought as with finding 'the emotional equivalent of thought.' Even Eliot's frustration and longing found their expression in this objectively transmuted form. Eliot rejected the romantic poet's idea that the inner voice of the artist, which represents his personality, is the most important thing. What he wants to say is that the inner voice is not altogether wrong but its direct application to the poetry is wrong; a poet may listen to inner voice but it should be communicated through a proper objective correlative. Eliot projects in his "Prufrock" the most recurrent theme of the horror of a life without
faith. A similar scenario is presented in *The Waste Land* which has been seen through the eyes of Tiresias. Eliot states in a note: "What Tiresias sees, in fact, is the substance of the poem." The relationship between the typist and the clerk points towards the whole idea of a degenerate society. The incident of the Fisher King mentioned here in this poem, presents before us the whole panorama of fertility myth through suggestion. What could have taken many pages if Eliot had tried to explain it directly, took only a few lines through this technique. Similar is the reference to Madame Sosostris; the objective presentation of her character highlights the vulgarity of modern civilisation. Eliot's aim is to give the exactly perceived detail, without comment, and let that picture carry its own connotations. The very title of the poem *Ash-Wednesday* has got spiritual connotations because it refers to a religious ritual. Each turning of the stair gives us a distinct stage of the spiritual struggle. By implicating Dante's *Inferno* in his poem Eliot is capable of presenting the whole chaotic world and the resultant hell before his readers.

His theory of objective correlative reveals the
dramatic nature of all his poems because, as he points out in his "Dialogue on Dramatic Poetry," "we are human beings, and in what are we more interested than in human action and human attitudes," and through this technique he communicates a sense of real life and human action. This is the theory which helps in bringing coherence and vividness in his poetry. "Beyond doubt, Eliot desires the order and completeness of classical poetry. The task of the critic is to discover an objective authority that will enable the poet to produce such poetry, to escape from the expression of personality to the expression of something more universal."8

The above mentioned completeness of classical poetry can also be achieved through the medium of tradition, "the common inheritance"9 of all artists. Eliot puts great emphasis on his theory of tradition and of individual talent. It cannot be argued that the basic material of modern poetry is nothing but the chaotic world. A great deal of talent is required to depict this chaotic world with a sense of complete coherence and order, and a writer can do it successfully if he looks back to his great tradition, as most European writers did. "The mind of Europe
is a universal mind by virtue of its involving all the philosophy and all the art of the dead writers. Of this universal mind tradition is the expression. In this lies the universal quality of tradition, for the collective mind of Europe, with its immense variety of thought, can appeal equally to all.\(^{10}\) Eliot thinks that a writer is wrong if his sole aim is to differentiate his poetry from that of others by disordered experiment; the greatness of a poet lies in his experiment to utilise whatever material he has got for his poetry according to the methods recorded in tradition. He can always introduce some changes which suit his needs and the needs of his time.

Another aspect which can be seen as an extension of his theory of tradition, is his theory of impersonality. By this Eliot means a sort of depersonalization of art. It is, in a way, a continual surrender of the poet for something more valuable. "The progress of the artist is a continual self-sacrifice, a continual extinction of personality."\(^{11}\) Eliot insists that an artist as a man who is suffering, should separate himself from the artist who is going to create something. He says "the more perfect the artist, the more completely separate in him will be the
man who suffers and the mind which creates." It is often said that inspite of his theory of impersonality, Eliot has depicted himself in "Prufrock." Sometimes, while reading this poem, it seems that Prufrock is nothing but his mouthpiece. To some extent the poet and the person are similar but Eliot also differs from Prufrock in the sense that the poet is aware of the situation and wants a remedy for it while Prufrock appears to be totally ignorant about his surroundings; he is unaware of the spiritual crisis around him. Thus, we cannot say that Prufrock is an image of Eliot. In fact, Prufrock becomes an objective correlative to show Eliot's inner voice. Prufrock does not appear to be a living human being; he has been reduced to a state of mind, equivalent to Eliot's inner emotions. Prufrock is the picture of that degenerate society which Eliot wants to present before his readers. In The Waste Land what we find is the poet's personal feelings and ideas about the modern degenerate society and the spiritual darkness prevailing all over the world. Eliot, however, subtly transforms all these personal experiences into impersonal facts by introducing the character of Tiresias, who is neither a man nor a woman but a state of consciousness.
Eliot, in *The Waste Land* has changed his private agony into something rich and strange.

In a commentary in the *Criterion* (Oct. 1932) Eliot says that "...in the greatest poetry there is always a hint of something behind, something impersonal, something in relation to which the author has been no more than the passive medium." Eliot's suggestion here about an impersonal order in great poetry is extremely significant not only in itself but also from the point of view of our present concern here. Elsewhere, Eliot has pointed out that great poetry is an attempt to recover the primitive mentality; the horror and the ugliness at the heart of immediate personal experience is what still survives from the days when there was no civilisation. Eliot's own poetry retrieves this primitive consciousness beneath the superficial polish of civilisation. It is in this sense that it achieves impersonality. The primitive horror at isolation, at the unknown and the uncanny is what Eliot's poetry achieves, particularly through its imagery of awareness. The images in "Prufrock" of "restless nights in one night cheap hotels," of lonely men in shirt sleeves, of streets that follow you like an insidious
argument, the images elsewhere of turning at the stairs, of going down and going up, of the tube train staying too long between stations, of drains that cannot be cleansed, of horror in the ancient bedroom, etc. are all part of Eliot's endeavour to shock us into an awareness of a different order of experience, the unreality of that which is familiar, the impersonality that inheres in the intensely personal.
NOTES : Chapter II


7. *Ibid.*, p. 113


CHAPTER III

MODES OF AWARENESS IN THE FAMILY REUNION
We are so... perverted in every part of our nature that by this great corruption we stand justly condemned and convicted before God, to whom nothing is acceptable but righteousness, innocence and purity.

Calvin, Institutes of the Christian Religion.

I

The Family Reunion is Eliot's Hamlet — perhaps not a perfect and satisfying work of art, not a dramatic success, but, to use Eliot's own description of Hamlet, 'interesting'. We may recall that in his essay on Hamlet Eliot obliquely suggested that the reason why he thought Hamlet was an artistic failure was that Shakespeare, in this play, had been struggling with some intractable material which refused to come to the surface. In Hamlet, thought Eliot, Shakespeare failed to give a coherent objective form to an emotion that was too personal, and it is this personal, vaguely autobiographical element in the play, that makes it 'interesting'. The Family Reunion, too, is 'interesting' if we keep the context of Eliot's
use of the word in mind. Of all Eliot's plays — including *Murder in the Cathedral* — this one is the most crucially related to the core of Eliot's creative endeavour. That the play is most intensely, interestingly and delightfully autobiographical has been excellently brought out in Lyndall Gordon's remarkable recent book, *Eliot's New Life* (1988), to which reference has already been made. There is little doubt now that, his theory of impersonality notwithstanding, Eliot is, at the deepest level, one of the most autobiographical poets in English. We have already quoted Eliot's own comment on *The Waste Land* (now standing as epigraph at the head of the Facsimile edition of the poem prepared by the late poet's widow) in which he disclaims any large, impersonal, concern in the poem: 'To me it was only the relief of a personal and wholly insignificant grouse against life.' Lyndall Gordon's recent study as well as her earlier volume, *Eliot's Early Years* (1977), shows how deeply rooted Eliot's work is in his personal experiences. The evolving patterns in his work acquire depth and relevance from those in his inner life.

We may rightly remind ourselves at this stage that
our basic concern in this dissertation is with what we have preferred to call the theme and imagery of 'awareness' in *The Family Reunion*. It is contended that a study of the play from this point of view will bring us close not only to its core but also to what is poetically most interesting and significant in Eliot's work. Eliot's religion and his metaphysical vision are not something arrived at through abstract ratiocination and arid schematisation: he speaks to us through the immediacy of felt experience. His earliest readers were put off by his 'modernity'. As a matter of fact this 'modernity' was nothing but an attempt to discover the pattern of ultimate meaning in contemporary phenomena and to communicate to the reader the awareness of that pattern. Eliot's own consciousness of the pattern of ultimate significance in the intractable minutiae of experience made him an 'outsider' — an intensely private person who wove a camouflage of impersonality to hide his ordeals from public gaze. He, nevertheless, speaks to us through his poetry and plays, and in *The Family Reunion* he has presented the highly personal drama of the 'outsider' with his special awareness in conflict with his obtuse social group — a society that can make out nothing of the
protagonist's 'election', his choice of a special destiny for himself. The drama of the modes of consciousness and of the patterns of awareness is the central drama in *The Family Reunion*. We will see in what follows that the theme of awareness, the consciousness of a pattern behind surface reality (the realization that the horror and the glory of everyday experience fit into an everlasting scheme of significance) — becomes prominent in this play, is indeed focalised through schematised discrimination among characters though, as we have already seen, a concern with the awareness of the hidden patterns of reality had all along been expressed in Eliot's poetry through the imagery of awareness. There is, however, one difference between Eliot's poetry and *The Family Reunion*: the poems register Eliot's consciousness of the hidden patterns while the play dramatizes the conflict between a person with such consciousness and the society which utterly fails to understand him. Thus the play is basically not a naturalistic drama of individualized characters but a kind of Morality which presents, half-allegorically, mental attitudes towards experiential reality.

As we said at the beginning of this chapter,
The Family Reunion may be an artistic and dramatic failure but the immediacy of its appeal cannot be denied. Eliot becomes a greatly human poet and the reality of his poetry comes alive to us if we approach the play in the context of his deeply personal and existential quest for salvation. It is, therefore, interesting to place the play first in its personal context before we come to analyse its drama of the modes of awareness and the mediation of this theme through its imagery.

As we have already seen in an earlier chapter (pp. 5-6), Eliot's main quarrel with the humanism of some of his mentors had centred round his conviction that the philosophical outlook of humanism does not take into account the phenomenon of the degenerate and corrupt nature of man. The Rousseau-esque myth of human perfectionability was contrary to the facts of human experience. The Unitarianism into which Eliot was born, too, left him cold since it took a very superficial view of the fact of evil and sin. It was only traditional Christianity, specially, its Pauline and Calvinistic insistence on the corruptibility of the flesh, that appealed to Eliot's ingrained puritanism. It is difficult to disagree with
Ms Gordon when she contends that the New England puritanism of Eliot's American background constitutes the substance not only of his early poetry but also suffuses the texture of a play like The Family Reunion where the rind of the English comedy of manners hides the core of the New England puritanical conscience (Gordon, p.84). Eliot's introspective awareness of sin and his obsessive preoccupation with degeneration, decay and death were intensified, during The Waste Land phase, by his unhappy marriage and his years with Vivienne. His moving away from his early agnosticism towards Christianity helped him recover his sanity and inner coherence. Not only as a poet but also as a person — as the man who suffers and not only as the poet who creates — Eliot discovered in the via negativa of medieval, mystical, Christianity the only way out of the morass of the waste land. Eliot realized that Crucifixion — the corner-stone of the edifice of the Christian dogma — was a recurrent reality and not a once-occurring historical phenomenon. Incarnation or the Divine in human or the timeless in the temporal is also a recurring phenomenon. He felt himself to have been 'elected' and to suffer that time may be redeemed. He was thus led to validate the Christian dogma of original sin through
his own awareness of the meaning of experience.

Redemption could come to Eliot through natural, regenerative love. Life with Vivienne was a nightmare, but memories kept on coming back from early youth of an almost paradisal experience of 'friendship' and 'understanding' (there was nothing 'physical' about the relationship). Emily Hale, a family friend and, later, a college teacher of dramatics, had been known to Eliot since his early days. During the years of separation from Vivienne — in the late twenties and the early thirties — nobody belonging to the inner circle of Eliot's friends and acquaintances would have been surprised to find Eliot engaged in legal proceedings to obtain divorce, and then married to Emily Hale. The High Anglicanism of Eliot's new faith, however, precluded the possibility of divorce. Emily Hale could not, therefore, be assigned any other role except that of waiting. It may be mentioned in passing that Eliot's family in America — who had been extremely unhappy at Eliot's impetuous marriage with Vivienne — would have been only too happy with Eliot returning to the fold and getting married to Emily Hale.
Eliot, as we know, never married her. However, they met each other during Emily's visit to England and, in 1933-34, during Eliot's visit to the United States. 'New Hampshire' in Landscapes, the opening passage of Burnt Norton and an early draft of the scene between Mary and Harry in The Family Reunion are all strong evidences of Eliot's intense feeling for Emily Hale. During all these years Eliot explored the possibilities of regeneration through natural love. The experience of romantic love had always appeared to Eliot to open a way into a rose-garden — but it was a passage that Eliot never took. What came back to him again and again was the reality of sin and the nightmarish years with Vivienne. There was a self-pity in all this: Eliot's gift for introspection and self-analysis was too good for that. He was haunted, like Harry, by his own possible guilt in his dealings with his first wife, and he was surprised at the discovery of his own potentiality for violence. He knew that the age-old rhythm of human life — love and marriage and procreation — was now not for him. He also knew that he was being pursued — by the Furies of divine vengeance. The realization was deep in Eliot's mind that he could not now return to an untarnished self. His vision — part
of his New England Puritanical heritage — of the taint of flesh reaching down to the marrow was too clear and intense for him to return to natural love. Eliot's ideal self went on to explore the possibilities of the Christian way of negation. It is interesting to recall here that when, during rehearsals, the actor playing the role of Harry in *The Family Reunion* persistently asked Eliot what happened to Harry at the end when he left Wishwood, Eliot replied that he went to work among the poor in the East End. This was said in order to satisfy the curiosity of an actor. In reality, Eliot was too close to the creature of his imagination to know the answer.

The facts of Eliot's biography outlined above show how close these are to the substance of *The Family Reunion*. The autobiographical element was recognised without any difficulty by those who were close to Eliot. Virginia Woolf at once identified Eliot-Harry as 'the chief poker' in the play. Commenting on an early draft of the play, Emily Hale significantly asked Eliot to revise the role of Mary and give her drama more prominence. (Eliot rejected the advice and, in fact, toned down her role to transform her only into 'a waiter and watcher'.) Eliot put into
the character of Harry the salient features of his inner biography; there is little doubt that Harry is Eliot. It is this special character of the play that lends it an extraordinary immediacy of appeal. It is here that Eliot has most significantly objectified the essence of his creative consciousness -- the awareness of the indistinct and the unfamiliar in the minutiae of everyday distinctions. It is, as we have already pointed out, this special mode of awareness that makes Eliot-Harry an 'outsider' -- someone who has seen too deeply and experienced reality in all its nakedness to be able to return to normal life in an ordinary way. Awareness entails unawareness, and insight brings obtuseness into sharp focus. A conflict between the two is natural, and it is Eliot's natural conflict with his society that constitutes the substance of *The Family Reunion*. The play brings into public view that side of his ideal self which was most precious to him in his spiritual struggle.

II

With some knowledge of its autobiographical character we can now return to the play to analyse at some length
its drama of the modes of awareness.

The core of the play lies in the impingement of Harry as the 'outsider' on an obtuse society. Harry's special mode of awareness is refracted from the varying reactions of the remaining characters in the play. The focus throughout remains on Harry — what he has been doing while away from the family, his marriage, the death of his wife, his possible future plans and what he actually decides to do at the end. We have already seen how Eliot had rejected a suggestion from Emily Hale, his American friend, regarding Mary's role. She wanted greater salience to be given to Mary's drama — possibly how she suffers at being rejected by Harry. (Eliot did give salience to the role of Harry's mother so much so that Eliot thought in retrospect that Amy was the only deeply human character in the play.)

The suggestion above that the society to which Harry returns at Wishwood is obtuse and fails to understand him is a slight distortion of the facts. Those who are at Wishwood or come to it during the course of the play are not a homogenous group. At the bottom in the scale of percipline are the uncles Charles and Gerald, the aunts
Ivy and Violet, and the absent brothers Arthur and John. We will comment on their special kind of impercipience in a later section of this chapter; it may suffice at this stage to say that they are characters derived from the ordinary English comedy of manners — smug and self-comp­lacent, endowed with the milder social vices, and totally unaware of the choice they have made in life or even of the fact that they made any choice at all. Amy is different: she is an exceptionally 'organised' person. She is conscious of the choice she has made: she has excel­lently organised life at Wishwood in accordance with her limited percipience. She is a more conscious being than her sisters or brothers-in-law. She is a truly tragic figure since the 'trap' she has so carefully laid for her son fails in the end to restrain him. Dr Warburton, too, fails to understand Harry and his problems. His impercipience, however, is of a special kind; half-allego­rically, he represents modern science, specially psychology, which makes guesses at problems which by its very nature it is precluded from understanding.

Mary, Downing and Agatha are the three characters in the play who have an understanding of Harry's special
destiny — though they, too, are excluded from participating in it except as guardians, waiters and watchers. Mary, in accordance with Amy's wishes, would have liked to change Harry's destiny, but — as we shall later see in some detail — her inability at first to see the Furies seals her own destiny. Downing, the Apollo of the Orestes myth, is Harry's protecting angel guiding him along as the latter's relentless destiny unfolds itself. Agatha, the most important character in the play after Harry, is hardly a 'character' inspite of her naturalistically conceived role as the Principal of a Women's College and as Amy's sister and her rival. She is both less and more than a character: she is a 'voice' as well as the play's consciousness congealed. She is the one in the play who helps Harry in linking his own personal guilt with the inherited guilt in the family. She accelerates the process of Harry's growing awareness and encourages him to accept his destiny.

III

The range of symbolic reference in the play's poetry has led the critics to interpret Harry's dilemma at different
levels -- psychological, anthropological, mythological and religious. There is no denying the fact that all such implications are, in some way or other, present in the text. The Christian undertones of Harry's destiny -- his choice of a version of the *via negativa* -- are extended in scope and reinforced through the deliberate parallelisms with the Aeschylian trilogy. The mythological is subsumed under the religious, or rather the mythological is made to serve as parallel to the pattern of religious experience constituting the substance of the play.

Much above the level of Harry's consciousness in the play or the consciousness of any other character there is the poet's consciousness revealed, for example, through the mythological parallel. The dramatist seeks to identify, for the well-informed spectator, Harry with Orestes. The identification is made patently clear by the introduction into the play of the Aeschylian Furies/Eumenides. Another patent evidence of the identification of Harry with Orestes is the reference in the play to 'the curse' on the family. The curse on the House of Monchensey is parallel to the one on the House of Pelops. There is reason to believe that Eliot took keen interest in this
ancient story of sin and expiation and, in the light of modern researches in comparative religion and anthropology, found in this myth a paradigm of the Christian dogma of the Fall and Crucifixion just as in *The Waste Land* he had used fertility myths and rituals as analogues for spiritual experiences.

The story of the curse on the House of Pelops is indeed a tale of sin and crime. Eliot's preoccupation with human sinfulness and corruption was so pervasive and strong that this tale of incest, murder and cannibalism must have struck a familiar note in his inner being. It would not be out of place here to give the story in the briefest outline.

The story begins with the betrayal of Myrtilus by Pelops who invoked a curse on the latter's house. The curse manifested itself in the lives of Pelop's sons: Atreus and Thyestus. The latter seduced the former's wife; in revenge Atreus killed Thyestus' children and served their flesh as food to their father. The latter fled in horror and invoked a curse on the House of Atreus. Later, Thyestus married his own daughter Pelopia who bore him a son called Aegisthus. Aegisthus was brought up by
his uncle Atreus who sent him to kill his own father Thyestus. The latter, however, recognised him, and together they killed Atreus. Aegisthus then seduced Clytemnestra, the wife of Agamemnon who was the son of Atreus. Together — as we know from Homer — they killed Agamemnon. In turn, Orestes and Electra, Agamemnon's children from Clytemnestra, committed matricide. Aegisthus too, was killed.

It is at this point that the Aeschylean trilogy takes up the story. The first play of the trilogy, the Agamemnon, deals with the murder of Agamemnon by his wife and her lover. The Choephoroe, the second play, dramatises the story of the murder of Clytemnestra by her children. It is at the end of this play that the Furies — the goddesses of revenge — appear and begin to pursue Orestes for the crime of matricide. In the last play of the trilogy, the Eumenides, Apollo advises Orestes to go to Pallas Athene. Orestes obeys him and appears before the tribunal of judges. Athene's casting vote saves Orestes and, as a result, the Furies are transformed into the Eumenides — the kindly or gracious ones.

It is quite obvious from the above summary of the
story that Eliot has not sought to establish any very elaborate parallelisms between his play and the Oresteia. It is only in the essentials that the analogue operates, and the essentials comprise the crime, the curse and the expiation. It is important to remember that the curse is not personal but inherited. Orestes' matricide is part of a larger pattern: he was doomed from the beginning to commit the crime, the origins lying far back in the past — in Myrtilus' curse on Pelops and Thyestus' curse on Atreus and his house. In Eliot's play the protagonist's crime is not matricide though, as the critics never fail to point out, Harry is indirectly responsible for killing his mother at the end. However, it is not matricide for which Harry is pursued by the Furies. They appear after the death of his wife. Interestingly, Eliot adopts a more sophisticated version of his protagonist's guilt. Instead of actual, unambiguous murder, he involves Harry in doubt about the extent of his actual crime. Harry suspects that he pushed her overboard but she as well might have drowned herself since she had already expressed the desire to commit suicide. In any case, Harry's intention to kill her was definitely there. Intention is as good as the actual accomplishment of crime.
moreover, is not just personal. Agatha's account of what had happened prior to Harry's birth — his father's attempt to kill him in his mother's womb — makes him realize that (in Mary's incantatory words at the end)

A curse is written
On the under side of things
Behind the smiling mirror
And behind the smiling moon.²

It is now clear that the idea of the curse, derived by Eliot from the Oresteia, is an attempt on his part to subvert the humanistic values — the creed that he had long back rejected. Evil and corruption are ingrained in human nature and inherited from generation to generation. The nature of life, world and time is such that redemption is not possible within their purview. How may the curse be lifted and the Furies — the external embodiment of the sense of guilt that gnaws inward — propitiated is the central concern in the play. In the final play of the Aeschylean trilogy, Pallas Athene casts her vote in Orestes' favour. She also succeeds in placating the Furies by promising them a permanent abode in Athens. The Furies are thus propitiated and transformed into 'the Gracious Ones'. Critics have interpreted this change in various
ways but what Eliot perhaps saw in Aeschylus was a sym­
bo lic version of the idea that spiritual wisdom (= Pallas
Athene) consists in giving due recognition to our gnawing
sense of guilt (= Furies). Only through an awareness of
the Furies, that is, through a knowledge of our sinful
human destiny, can the burning fire of hell be transformed
into purgatorial flames. 'Sin is behovely', as Julian of
Norwich said in the fourteenth century.

Thus we see that the mythological -- a part of the
play's total consciousness though not an element in Harry's
awareness as he is only a part of the total design -- is
subsumed under the religious. Similar is the case with
the anthropological and psychological elements in the play.

A psychological theme operates at two levels. On the
one hand, there is the psychological state of Harry's
obsession with guilt. 'My Lordship is psychic', as
Downing says at one stage in the play. Dr. Warburton
is tactfully invited to Amy's birthday dinner. The family
generally adopt a psychological approach to Harry's prob­
lem: Harry is obsessed with guilt because of childhood
'repression'. A session with Dr. Warburton would bring
the repression to light and cure Harry of his 'possession'.

Another psychological theme in the play relates to Harry's 'fantasy' about the Furies. They are a projection of Harry's infantile complexes and present fears. Eliot introduces the two psychological themes in the play in order to finally reject them. Modern psychology, so Eliot would seem to say, is grossly inadequate in presenting us with a solution and cure for spiritual ailments. We will see in our final chapter how the play's imagery of awareness, specially that relating to filth and corruption, suggests that the malady lies much deeper and cannot be approached with the help of psychological tools. Psychology is inadequate because it is not wholistic and fails to take into account the religious dimension of experience. The Furies are not 'fantasies' and a product of Harry's overworked brain but objective realities whose presence must be recognised. They are real because sin is real.

IV

The anthropological dimension in the play is equally important though like the mythological and the psychological ingredients of the play, the anthropological element too is
subsumed under the central concern of the play -- the religious. The anthropological study of the early, pre-Christian, religions of the near East had brought out the provenance of the myth of the hanged god in them. It had been revealed that the psychological state of mind that envisaged the burial of the dead god underground as guaranteeing the return of spring and fertility to the soil was quite widespread in the regions that were later to witness the rise of Christianity. The myth derived its strength from sympathetic magic, and was closely related to the rhythm of natural life. The search for a scapegoat, moreover, as a means of self-purification is universal, and is an important element even in today's civilised life. It is in view of the potency of the myth of the hanged god and of the scapegoat that Eliot introduces the undercurrent of the anthropological in the play.

However, it is to be noted that the anthropological theme is not allowed by Eliot to come to the surface as it did in The Waste Land. It would perhaps have caused unnecessary complications. Nevertheless, the anthropological theme is certainly present in the play. Harry is obviously the scapegoat who must be sacrificed so that the
deeper life of the family may be rejuvenated. Amy has planned her son to take the position of the head of the family so that the day-to-day affairs of the household may be disposed of. Her planning has been meticulous: she has indeed made an attempt to arrest the course of change. She has always lived in serial time and she fails to recognise any other dimension of experience. She also fails to see that the family -- the society -- over which she presides is rotten to the core. It is Harry and Agatha who perceive the truth and the need for sacrifice. As Agatha tells Harry:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>It is possible</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>You are the consciousness of your unhappy family,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Its bird sent flying through the purgatorial flame.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indeed it is possible. You may learn hereafter,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moving alone through flames of ice, chosen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To resolve the enchantment under which we suffer.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

( p. 333 )

It is apparent from above as well as from the destiny that Harry chooses for himself that the religious theme of atonement fuses into and gets reinforcement from the
anthropological theme of the Scapegoat. Anthropology and Comparative Religion -- the chief enemies of dogmatic religion -- are thus subverted and made to serve the cause of the Christian way of Negation and the ascetic life.

In this section we saw how the mythological, the psychological and the anthropological are unified with the religious to serve as parts of the total consciousness of the play, an awareness available to us as spectators but not to any of the characters of the play. There is no doubt that we, too, achieve this full consciousness of the play's design as the characters, chiefly Harry, struggle through their partial awareness to reach the final meaning. We move with Harry and see reality as he does but at no time in the play does he, as we do, see the various parallels and analogues discussed above. In the next section we seek to enter his consciousness, trace his struggle and see things as he sees them. We will thus be able to acquire some idea of the discrepant awarenesses of the different characters and the drama proceeding therefrom.

V

There is little doubt that Harry as a character is
distinguished by the nature of his consciousness, his special kind of awareness that isolates him from the rest of the dramatis personae. It was not for nothing that we described him earlier as Eliot's Outsider and The Family Reunion as Eliot's Hamlet. The distinctive mark of Hamlet in Shakespeare's play is his isolation and the special nature of his consciousness. The remaining characters — Claudius, Gertrude, Polonius, Laertes etc. — are all Insiders in the sense that they have accepted life as they find it. They have all entered the game, observe its rule and play it with varying degree of gusto. Only Hamlet has registered his great refusal. Wilson Knight finds him touched with death-consciousness, and L.C. Knight characterises him as infected with evil-consciousness. The taint of corruption has entered his soul and sullied his consciousness.

Harry, like Hamlet, is a man who has lost his moorings in common life, and this mainly because of a sense of guilt that is gnawing away the core of his spiritual being. Hamlet's isolation had started with the discovery of his uncle's crime and his mother's marriage. There was nothing in his own actions that had led him to his corroding
sense of corruption and evil. However, he had generalised from his uncle's crime and his mother's guilt to include himself as well as Ophelia in universal corruption. Harry's case is slightly different. His years abroad with his wife, his unhappy marriage, the desire to kill his wife, the awareness of his own latent violence, and then the 'accident' on board the ship ('and then I pushed her over'), all these have created in him a powerful sense of guilt -- expressed, indirectly, in the very first words uttered by him on his return to Wishwood:

> How can you sit in this blaze of light for all the world to look at?
> If you knew how you looked, when I saw you through the window!
> Do you like to be stared at by eyes through a window?

( p. 291 )

'Blaze of light', 'window' and 'eyes' are the keywords here and interesting in psychological terms. They reflect the condition of a guilt-ridden consciousness. A gulf divides Harry from his family (except Agatha -- as we shall soon see). What separates him from them are the Furies -- the objective manifestation of Harry's awareness of sin. (E. Martin Browne wrongly thought that
the Furies should not be visible to the audience. Lyndall Gordon points out -- p. 67 -- that in the 1978 London production the Furies had a shattering impact on the audience, appearing on each exit door of the theatre with jarring noise.) It is the Furies that make Harry an outsider:

Harry. Look there, look there: do you see them?

Gerald. No, I don't see anyone about.

( p. 291 )

Harry is puzzled by the sudden appearance of the Furies at Wishwood:

Why should they wait until I came back to Wishwood?

There were a thousand places where I might have met them!

Why here? Why here?

( p. 292 )

The obvious answer is that with his special awareness of the tainted nature of existence he cannot now return to an untarnished self: the taint has reached the marrow. We must quote at length the haunting passage where Harry gives expression to his pervasive sense of corruption:

You do not know

The noxious smell untraceable in the drains,
Inaccessible to the plumbers, that has its hour of the night; you do not know

The unspoken voice of sorrow in the ancient bed-room

At three o'clock in the morning...

... I am the old house

With the noxious smell and the sorrow before morning,

In which all past is present, all degradation is unredeemable.

( pp. 293-94 )

Harry makes a distinction between external event and inner, spiritual, happening. The latter amounts to an awakening to the nightmare. It is not the 'event' of his wife's drowning -- as reported in the papers -- that matters but the state of his mind, his awareness, that ultimately led to it:

The partial anaesthesia of suffering without feeling

And partial observation of one's own automatism

While the slow stain sinks deeper through the skin

Tainting the flesh and discolouring the bone —

This is what matters, but it is unspeakable, untranslatable.

( p. 294 )
That Eliot's play is not a dramatisation of the conflict of wills, as in ordinary drama, but the presentation of discrepant awarenesses in conflict with each other is apparent from the fact that Charles, like others, misunderstands Harry when the latter refers to his killing of his wife. He attributes Harry's anguish to his uneasy conscience. Harry at once tries to make himself understood:

It goes a good deal deeper
Than what people call their conscience;
it is just the cancer
That eats away the self....
... It is not my conscience
Not my mind, that is diseased, but the world I have to live in.

( p. 295 )

We said just now that Harry tries to make himself understood. Actually he fails to do so. Understanding does not only proceed from intellect; at the deepest level, it is a matter of spiritual sympathy. His family is denied the special awareness that has turned Harry into an Outsider.

Mary symbolises the possibility of a late spring in Harry's life. On the simple dramatic plane, Mary is Harry's childhood friend whom he could marry now that his
wife is dead. On the autobiographical level, she has been identified with Emily Hale, a family-friend of Eliot's whom Eliot saw frequently after the disruption of his marriage with Vivienne.

Lyndall Gordon points out (p. 80) that, like Emily, Mary performs the role of a waiting woman, no longer young, with close ties to the hero's family and a possible choice for the hero. In the play, Mary represents the possibility of renewal in Harry's life through natural love. It is interesting to note that, as Lyndall Gordon points out (p. 81), the first scene of the play to be drafted by Eliot (in 1934-35) was the one in which Mary offers new hope to Harry -- soon after or at the time of Emily Hale's visit to England in 1934-35. It has also been pointed out that the opening lines of Burnt Norton, the scene of a door opening into a garden of love, had its origin in the early draft of the play. In Burnt Norton, however, the woman is faceless, without an identity and subsumed in the plural 'we'.

Mary can bring about a renewal in Harry's life; the possibility of redemption through natural love is there. Moreover, she does have something in common with Harry --
a shared past. Together they recall their childhood days (Part I, Sc.II). Soon, however, Harry points out that there is a region of experience where Mary cannot keep him company. She has no knowledge of the hell that he has inhabited, the damnation that he has experienced. Harry makes an effort to indicate the gulf that divides him from his childhood companion.

One thing you cannot know:
The sudden extinction of every alternative,
The unexpected crash of the iron cataract.
You do not know what hope is, until you have lost it.

You only know what it is not to hope:
You do not know what it is to have hope taken from you,
Or to fling it away, to join the legion of the hopeless
Unrecognised by other men, though sometimes by each other.

(p. 307)

For Mary such a mental state is only a hypothesis which she willingly accepts though she herself has never experienced it. However, she pointedly refers to the possibility of the renewal of hope on Harry's part; otherwise, why should he have returned to Wishwood.
You hoped for something, in coming back to Wishwood,
Or you would not have come.

(p. 308)

She hints at the possibility of an inner change in Harry. Could he not prepare himself again for life at Wishwood?
The reply that Harry makes to Mary brings out his dilemma clearly:

Something inside me, you think, that
can be altered!
And here, indeed! Where I have felt them
near me,
Here and here and here -- Wherever I am
not looking,
Always flickering at the corner of my eye,
Almost whispering just out of earshot --
And inside too, in the nightly panic
Of dreaming dissolution. You do not know,
You cannot know, you cannot understand.

(p. 308)

The dilemma is acute since Mary represents an option that could have saved and in a sense redeemed Harry:

You bring me news
Of a door that opens at the end of a corridor,
Sunlight and singing; when I had felt sure
That every corridor only led to another,  
Or to a blank wall; that I kept moving  
Only so as not to stay still. Singing  
and light.  

( p. 310 )

It is at this crucial moment that the Furies appear again. Mary's inability to see them seals her doom. Harry's choice is made. Though as yet he does not know wherein his salvation lay, he is sure that the door Mary seemed to open is finally and irrevocably shut. In the drama that is acted out before us in the second scene of part I, we see the entanglement of varying degrees of awareness of life and experience. In spite of the hints of "pulsating life" that Mary brings into Harry's consciousness, she is rejected because she has no awareness of "the world around the corner", the spectres that make Harry's return to 'normalcy' impossible.

Agatha, the other beneficent woman in the play, is more of a dramatic device than a 'character' in the ordinary sense of the word. To regard her as such would explain why most critics have found her unsatisfactory as a round character in her own right. She is not a part of the drama of discrepant awarenesses in the play since she
already inhabits the spiritual world to which Harry is a new entrant. Indeed she guides Harry through the mazes of the world of experience which he cannot fully comprehend. That she is different from the rest of the members of Amy’s fold is apparent in the opening scene of the play. Her awareness of time is diametrically opposite to that of Amy. While Amy exists only in time as succession, or in serial time, without continuities, Agatha’s awareness of time may be described as duration. She is used by Eliot to project into the play a view of time which is based on the idea of simultaneity. Contrary to Amy’s assumption that Harry, now that his wife is dead and his past with her buried, can make a new start, Agatha believes that the past cannot be so easily discarded:

... because everything is irrevocable,
Because the past is irremediable,
Because the future can only be built,
Upon the real past.

( p. 288 )

Agatha is already aware, even before Harry’s arrival, that Harry on his return will have to confront, and come to terms with, his buried selves. He will have to face the spectres embodying not only his own past but that of his
family as well. She is alive to the world of vital spirituality:

... the world around the corner
The wind's talk in the dry holly-tree
The inclination of the moon
The attraction of the dark passage
The paw under the door.

( p. 290 )

As Grover Smith has rightly pointed out (p. 197) she is the guardian of the threshold of the world that Harry is about to enter. When he recounts his experience in scene I, her advice to him is: "There is more to understand: hold fast to that/As the way to freedom." The meaning and purpose of Harry's drama would remain obscure if she were not there to clarify the issues. It is in this sense that we described her earlier as more of a dramatic device than a character. While dealing with the autobiographical element in the play we followed the vast majority of critics in identifying Harry with Eliot. We have also seen that the Harry-consciousness in the play is not the equivalent of the total design of the play; the design is obviously larger than Harry-consciousness. Much of this larger design, however, is brought into light through
Agatha's comments. She seems to have a foreboding of the future perhaps because of her knowledge of the larger design. In Part I, Scene II, for example, she seems to have foreseen the outcome of Harry's encounter with Mary since she tells her that 'The decision will be made by powers beyond us/Which now and then emerge...' She clearly has an idea of the role of the Furies in deciding the fate of Harry.

Harry's awareness of the nature of reality and of his own peculiar problem undergoes a radical change during his encounter with Agatha (Part I, Scene ii). He had always recognised in his aunt the presence of superior spiritual force, but as she recounts her past, he realizes that far from being a tower of strength she too is a fellow-sufferer:

I have thought of you as the completely strong,
The liberated from the human wheel,
So I looked to you for strength. Now I think it is
A common pursuit of liberation.

( p. 331 )

It is in the company of Agatha that Harry gropes his way to a new kind of perception:
That is the completion which at the beginning
Would have seemed the ruin.

(p. 333)

The years of agony and waste, his past life at Wishwood, his family's past history, everything that had appeared unendurable, were a kind of preparation for his new life. What had all along appeared as the end is actually a beginning. He has to carry the burden of his family on his shoulders but in a sense entirely different from what Amy, his mother, had intended. Agatha, his mother in a different sense of the word, tells him:

There's relief from a burden that I carried,
And exhaustion at the moment of relief.
The burden's yours now, yours
The burden of all the family.

(p. 334)

The Furies are transformed into the Eumenides, the divine messangers who have sealed Harry's election.

There is a perfect meeting of minds between Harry and Agatha and a sharing of awareness. It would, therefore, be wrong to say that she 'guides' him towards his
destiny. It is more appropriate to say that the knowledge she imparts about his family's history helps him discover the true meaning of his experience. For him there is the way of dispossession 'somewhere on the other side of despair':

... the worship in the desert, the thirst and deprivation,
A sacred sanctuary and a primitive altar,
The heat of the sun and the icy vigil,
A care over the lives of humble people,
The lesson of ignorance, of incurable diseases...

( p. 339 )

VI

In order to complete our account of the theme of awareness in *The Family Reunion* some space should also have been given to the characters who reveal a certain obtuseness with regard to 'the world around the corner' or the presence of the timeless dimension in immediate experience. However, by concentrating on the characters that bring out the Outsider element in Eliot himself we have done enough, we feel, to highlight what we have designated as the theme of awareness. As we have pointed out in the preface,
Eliot is remarkable among the major English poets for making use of immediate experience as the means by which to highlight the transcendent order lying hidden in everyday reality. *The Family Reunion* is a dramatisation of the consciousness that inverts the order of reality; the order of solid, time-bound reality is projected as a thin, unsubstantial, film of 'familiarity' that has to be removed in order to get at the really significant order of experience.

It is in the perspective of the unreality of 'reality' that the obtuse characters in the play are to be viewed. Ivy and Violet are pure drawing-room comedy figures who have their moments of boredom though the boredom never modulates into disgust or frustration precluding thus their entry into the Outsider world of mysterious spirituality. Charles is just a little more conscious than Gerald: he has his moment of mild terror in Burlington Arcade but the experience fails to wake him up to 'the world around the corner'. Amy is the character *per se* who inhabits the world of time. It is her pathetic trust in time according to the clock and her unshakeable faith in the arresting of change that makes her truly tragic figure.
She manifests a certain amount of hubris in her endeavour to possess everything. She is, however, cheated of everything that she seek to possess — including her husband and, later, her son. Her 'dispossession' at the end is not voluntary and contrasts sharply with the Negative Way of Life that Harry seeks in his endeavour to divest himself of the love of created things.

In the chapter that follows we will make a modest attempt to study the imagery of *The Family Reunion* in the light of what we have said about Eliot's concern with the theme of awareness. It is only through the imagery that the hidden patterns in everyday reality are brought into focus and made to yield their meaning.
NOTES: Chapter III


CHAPTER IV

IMAGERY OF AWARENESS IN THE FAMILY REUNION
We saw in the last chapter how Eliot has dramatized discrepant awareness in The Family Reunion. In this chapter we propose to analyse closely the images in the play that pertain to the world of immediate experience and yet create in us an awareness of a transcendent order of being. It may be necessary here to reiterate that, as Unger has pointed out in a slightly different context,¹ the dominant mode of the large majority of such images is symbolist and is ultimately derived from that source. Such imagery provides a link between Eliot's early poetry and a work like The Family Reunion. It may also be pointed out that, following Unger, we have kept the scope of such imagery wide enough to include not only visual items but all categories of reference.

A careful reading of the play reveals that certain objects have been used in the play first in a quite normal way, that is, without any symbolic significance attaching to them. However, their repeated use throughout the play gives them a certain symbolic resonance, and they acquire the status proper of what can be called a symbolic image. Since these images, integrated fully with the theme of awareness in the play, have the function,
of awakening us, as they do the characters themselves in varying degrees, to the profounder significance of immediate experience, they have been called images of awareness.

It is clear that during our exploration of these images we cannot afford to ignore even minor details or items of reference in the play. No matter howsoever opaque some of the elements in the dialogue, some reiterated word or even the place where the scene is located, may, owing to the resonance of its context, be transformed into a symbolic image.

As examples of such innocuous details acquiring an "idealized," symbolic, status, we may mention the use of the word "understand" in the text and the fact that "the library" is the location of the scene in a part of the play. The word 'understand' occurs so frequently and in such significant contexts that the spectator is forced to realize that the play is about "understanding" at different levels. Harry's mother and the rest of his family cannot "understand" him. He himself cannot "understand" part of the meaning of his own experience. It is Agatha alone who "understands"
Harry's plight. "Understand" is echoed throughout the play. The word is repeated 13 times in Part I, Scene I. Moreover, the scene of Harry's interview with Dr. Warburton takes place in the library; the doctor represents the world of science, and the probing questions he puts to Harry in part suggest a psychological approach to spiritual problems. The book-shelves in the library vaguely represent the world-view of humanism and its reliance on science. Dr. Warburton's probing of Harry is tantamount to a reduction of the spiritual problems of sin and expiation and redemption to a study of complexes and repressions and social maladjustments.

A greater part of the imagery in The Family Reunion can be grouped round a few categories. It is not being suggested that the following classification is in accordance with any scheme or pattern; the only unifying thread is the fact that they all pertain to immediate experience. With this qualification in mind we can say that a large number of the images of awareness in the play centre round time and the seasons, fog and cold, smell and disease, parts of a house, the sea and the desert, trees and the garden.
The occasion of the family reunion itself is loaded with meaning; it is Amy's birthday party. Eliot fully exploits the Christian association of the ideas of the family coming together and of birth leading to regeneration. By the time the spectator grasps that the play he is watching is not a story of crime and punishment but of sin and expiation, and also that what Harry has to exercise through his sacrifice is not a personal but a family curse handed down from past generations, the full resonance of the idea of the family helps him link the play with the archetypal image of Adam and his family. Eliot is not equating the two families in any quasi-allegorical fashion. What he is doing in the play is to infuse into the story of his choice, into the familiar pattern of drawing-room social comedy, the pattern of the dogma of original sin and Incarnation just as he has also introduced into the play the Aeschylean pattern of the Orestes story. Eliot has eschewed allegory but, using incarnational symbolism, makes the central image of a family reunion and of a birthday party resonate through the spectators' familiarity with traditional Christian lore. The theme of Harry's expiation through his choice of the *via negativa* is sharply in focus towards the close of the play. Hence, it is at the
very end that the birth-day cake is brought on the stage and Agatha and Mary, the waiters and watchers, speak their incantatory verses while going round the table. It is a birth-day though not of Amy. The forces of regeneration leading to birth have been released and set in motion, and the cake on the table is transformed into a potent symbol of this process. The twin images of the family reunion and birthday party are the central and crucial symbols in the play that compel recognition of the larger patterns inhering in common experience.

Before we proceed further in our concern with the imagery in *The Family Reunion*, it is advisable to remind ourselves that we are not dealing with all the implications of the study of imagery in the play but concentrating only on one aspect of the subject: its derivation from the fund of common and immediate experience. It may be reiterated here that what we call the images of awareness are in fact symbolic images of a peculiar kind. As we have already pointed out all symbolic imagery has an idealising role: it transforms concrete objects into larger universals of experience. What distinguishes Eliot from other poets is the fact that his idealising and symbolic imagery,
deriving as it does from immediate sensuous apprehension, surprises and shocks us into an awareness of what can only be called as the other and the beyond.

As we have just seen the entire play is based on 'the extended conceit' of a family reunion and birth-day party. We saw in the previous chapter that the main concern of Eliot in the play is with the drama of discrepant awareness which may also be said to be the central theme of the play. The drama of awareness, however, is focused round a few subsidiary themes. We will now see how one such theme -- that of change and time -- is woven round certain remarkable images of awareness deriving from immediate experience.

Like most people Amy lives in the world of serial time. Unlike most people, however, she is one who has done her best to arrest the movement of time. She has done so as she has sought to impose her will on the world outside. However, her very attempt to stop time in accordance with her own plan miserably fails and brings the fact of change into sharp focus. The imagery in the opening scene (using the word 'imagery' in the wider sense of total apprehensible reference) evokes the world
of time and change and juxtaposes it against a category that dissolves time and infuses into the world of the play a very different concept of change. Postponing a consideration of the two concepts of change for a while, we would first see how Eliot evokes the world of time and how he opposes it to the category that dissolves time and brings out its essential unreality.

Amy's opening speech evokes the world of time and the utter nullity of the time-bound existence. The passage recalls the Prufrockian ethos of futility: 'I have nothing to do but watch the days draw out.' Significantly, the painful process of watching the passage of time is associated with 'sitting in the house from October to June.' We shall see that 'the house,' specially Wishwood, is a potent symbolic image of awareness in the play. Amy regretfully recalls the days of her false trust in time:

O sun, that was once so warm, O Light that was taken for granted
When I was young and strong, and sun and light unsought for
And the night unf feared and the day expected
And clocks could be trusted, tomorrow assured
And time would not stop in the dark!

( p. 285 )
The clock and the fear of the stopping of the clock in the dark are the images that seem to haunt Amy's consciousness. The last line of the passage quoted above is echoed in 'I do not want the clock to stop in the dark' (p. 287). The image is compulsive for Amy and is associated with death and the fear of death:

You none of you understand how old you are
And death will come to you as a mild surprise,
A momentary shudder in a vacant room.

( p. 287 )

The time-bound world of Amy is shared by other characters in the play. Perhaps the most haunting image in the opening scene is Ivy's self-appraisal in

Nor freeze, as I do, in Bayswater, by a gas-fire counting shillings.

The images of the English holiday-makers in the south, though dramatically expressing the upper-class English snobbery, is yet poetically evocative of the banal and the futile in time-bound existence:

Go south! to the English circulating libraries,
To the military widows and the English chaplains,
To the chilly deck-chair and the strong cold tea.
The strong cold stewed bad Indian tea.

The soulless world of time evoked by such imagery is reinforced by a nervous echoing of 'time' and 'clock' and the constant reminders of the passage of time on the stage.

Ivy. And when will you have your birthday cake, Amy, And open your presents?
Amy. After dinner: That is the best time.

Ivy. It is the first time You have not had your cake and your presents at tea.

Amy. This is a very particular occasion As you ought to know. It will be the first time For eight years that we have all been together.

In Harry's anguished and tormented imagination time is associated with decay and corruption. His crushing sense of sin is peculiarly linked with specific 'times': 'The noxious smell untraceable in the drains, inaccessible to the plumbers, that has its hour of the night...' and 'The
unspoken voice of sorrow in the ancient bedroom/At three o'clock in the morning.'

The category that opposes time and subverts the illusion of the arrest of time as envisaged by Amy is introduced by Agatha in the play accompanied as her concept is by an alternative view of change. The word 'change' like the word 'time' acquires in the opening scene the status of a key-word and that of an imagery-substitute. 'Nothing is changed.' 'Nothing has been changed.' 'And everything the same.' Amy repeats the formula (p. 292), and, exasperated, Harry bursts out: 'nothing changed? how can you say that nothing is changed?' A little later (p. 293), Harry says:

Time and time and time, and change, no change!
You all of you try to talk as if nothing had happened,
And yet you are talking of nothing else.
(p. 293)

Harry makes a distinction between 'event' and 'happening,' between things that take place outside leaving the soul untouched and without revealing the unreality of time on the one hand, and, on the other, inner changes that
penetrate the bones tainting the flesh. Events are symbolised by 'the tight corners' that Gerald has been through during his military career and the 'nasty messes' he has dined at. This banal and half-comic world is contrasted with Harry's account of 'happening':

The sudden solitude in a crowded desert
In a thick smoke, many creatures moving
Without direction, for no direction
Leads anywhere but round and round in that vapour —
Without purpose, and without principle of conduct
In flickering intervals of light and darkness;
The partial anaesthesia of suffering without feeling
And partial observation of one's own automatism
While the slow stain sinks deeper through the skin
Tainting the flesh and discolouring the bone —
This is what matters...

(p. 294)

The images associated with 'happening' have a dual quality — immediacy of apprehension through sudden encounters and a slow-moving realization that ultimately grips the consciousness. The twin qualities can be seen at
work in the passage quoted above. The awareness of the unreality of the world of time is communicated through the nightmarish vision in the phrase where an oxymoron describes an almost literal truth: 'crowded desert.' The phrase, and the passage in which it occurs, re-enacts parts of The Waste Land, particularly the passage in which 'crowds' symbolise the 'death-in-life' state of the soul. 'Smoke,' 'vapour,' 'flickering intervals of light and darkness' and the whirling directionless motion are all images of unreality. However, the 'sudden solitude' that occasions the nightmare is a necessary step in a 'necessary' direction; it awakens the soul from 'sleep' to the nightmare that life actually is. The immediacy of such apprehension, the sudden awakening to life, is best expressed in Agatha's image of 'the world around the corner' (p. 290). The images in sharp contrast to sudden encounters are those where apprehension moves as slowly as the process of contamination which these objectify. In the passage quoted above the envisagement of human organism in terms of a self-observing machine entails slow realization of the facts of one's biological processes. Such observation is necessarily slow though ultimately it leads to an overwhelming and nauseating act of revulsion against
the reduction of the human spirit to a machine. The representative image, however, of this slow-moving apprehension is that of a contaminating disease. Apart from the image of contamination in the last line of the passage quoted above, we have that of the cancer 'that eats away the self' (p. 295). In the same passage Harry visualises life itself as a disease: 'It is not my conscience, / Not my mind, that is diseased, but the world I have to live in.' Even without the sudden encounters with 'the world around the corner,' the awareness of the need for a spiritual solution to the dilemma of existence would come to Harry since 'The contamination has reached the marrow' (p. 295). Apart from the reference to one of Dr. Warburton's patients 'who suffered from an incurable cancer' (p. 314), we also have the following passage (p. 327) where spiritual degradation is spoken of in terms of long-lasting disease:

You can't understand me. It's not being alone
That is the horror -- to be alone with the horror.
What matters is the filthiness. I can clean my skin,
Purify my life, void my mind,
But always the filthiness, that lies a little deeper...
Keeping in mind the Calvinistic bearings of Eliot's Christianity it is not surprising to find that Harry should speak of spiritual malaise in terms of a contagion:

In and out, in an endless drift
Of shrieking forms in a circular desert
Weaving with contagion of putrescent embraces
Of dissolving bone.

The passage, quoted above, about the 'sudden solitude in a crowded desert' contains an image of sudden encounter. The play, however, abounds in images of 'the world around the corner.' It would be worthwhile to isolate some passages where this kind of imagery helps Eliot focus on the numinous through the familiar and the immediate. This is a special feature of Eliot's poetry and one of the sources of the success of The Family Reunion as a poetic play.

A great number of such images relate to a symbolic idealisation of one's experience of the different parts of a house. This is not surprising in view of the fact that a house -- Wishwood -- occupies a central place in the figurative scheme of the play. The name of the seat of the Monchensey family in the north of England has a quasi-allegorical force. The name reminds us of the wood in
which Dante had lost his way. Wishwood is, therefore, a microcosm, a model of the world that we know through desire. Significantly, it is Agatha, the spiritually conscious of Harry's aunts, who comments: 'Wishwood was always a cold place, Amy'. It is interesting to note that Agatha's comment is immediately followed by the passage in which Ivy, unconsciously, presents herself as the pattern of the spiritually-isolated: 'Not freeze, as I do, in Bayswater, by a gas-fire counting shillings.' Wishwood had occasioned the numinous even in the innocent days of Harry's childhood. Agatha, however, had made Harry understand the inexplicable and the fearsome in his childhood experience:

I think I see what you mean,
Dimly — as you once explained the sobbing
in 'the chimney
The evil in the dark closet, which they
said was not there,
Which they explained away, but you explained them
Or at least, made me cease to be afraid of them.

( p. 296 )

Wishwood, Agatha has earlier implied, is also a measure of the spiritual distance Harry has traversed since his
childhood:

Wandering in the tropics
Or against the painted scene of the Mediterranean,
Harry must often have remembered Wishwood —
The nursery tea, the school holiday,
The daring feats on the old pony,
And thought to creep back through the little door.
(p. 288)

A little later Agatha again says:

Yes, I mean that at Wishwood he will find another Harry...
Round by the stables,
In the coach-house, in the orchard,
In the plantation, down the corridor
That led to the nursery, round the corner,
Of the new wing, he will have to face him...
And it will not be a very billy corner.
(p. 288)

The images relating to the parts of a house in the two passages just quoted are not images of awareness in our sense of the term — though the 'corner of the new wing' would be the place of the encounter between the new self of Harry and the one he had left behind. In the passages
quoted above Eliot is trying to isolate the different units of a human habitation for symbolic contemplation later. It is in later contexts that such images become images of awareness and communicate a sense of the numinous. It is in Agatha's speech on p. 290 that the film of familiarity is lifted from the face of the known and that which is immediately apprehended becomes a pointer to a different order of experience. We neglect, says Agatha:

all the admonitions
From the world around the corner
The wind's talk in the dry holly-tree
The inclination of the moon
The attraction of the dark passage
The paw under the door.

The chorus at the end of part I, scene I also uses the same kind of imagery in order to subvert the order of reality; they want to be reassured that the familiar in their experience will not be destroyed by the uncanny:

We only ask to be reassured
About the noises in the cellar
And the window that should not have been open.

Why do we all behave as if the door might suddenly open, the curtains be drawn,
The cellar make some dreadfuI disclosure,
the roof disappear,
And we should cease to be sure of what is
real or unreal?
Hold tight, hold tight, we must insist that
the world is what we have always taken
it to be.

(p. 302)

A few more images of awareness, evoking the fear of the
unknown and suggesting the unredeemability of temporal
existence and the unreality of serial time occur at the
end of part I. The chorus echoes Harry who had a little
earlier said: Everything is irrevocable, the past unre­
deeable (p. 315). The chorus now says that the past —
that of the family and of the entire human race owing to
the curse of the fall — "has desecrated/History....

Shamed
The first cry in the bedroom, the noise
in the nursery, mutilated
The family album, rendered ludicrous
The tenants' dinner, the family picnic on
the moors. Have torn
The roof from the house, or perhaps it was
never there.
And the bird sits on the broken chimney.
I am afraid.

(pp. 315 - 316)
The imagery of awareness relating to the parts of a house is ultimately unified and brought into sharp focus in Agatha's image in the line: 'The eye is on this house.' The 'world around the corner,' ultimately awakens the mind to the curse on the 'house' and also to the need to have the curse lifted through 'the pilgrimage/Of expiation.'

The 'parts of a house' imagery is not only negative in its function but also affirmative. It leads not only to the 'curse' but also opens 'a door into the garden.' We have already seen in the previous chapter that Mary represents in the play the possibilities of natural love. It is in the second scene of the first part of the play that we see how this possibility is first explored and then rejected by Harry. Some of the images that express the idea that romantic love could represent a way out of the hell of the time-bound experience are extremely beautiful and suggestive:

You bring me news
Of a door that opens at the end of a corridor,
Sunlight and singing, when I had felt sure
That every corridor only led to another,
Or to a blank wall; that I kept moving
Only so as not to stay still. Singing
and light.

(p. 310)

Singing and light, and a door opening at the end of a corridor, are images of regeneration through natural love and not images of the awareness of the numinous — the kind of images that we have been trying to trace in the play. However, Eliot's use of such images is frequent throughout his poetry, and these images celebrating the rhythm of natural life share with the images of the awareness of the numinous an element of pleasant surprise.

The passage quoted above (p. 310) is immediately preceded by stanzas uttered by Harry and Mary in a state of trance.

Here is Mary on the regenerative process in root and bud:

The cold spring now is the time
For the ache in the moving root
The agony in the dark
The slow flow throbbing the trunk
The pain of the breaking bud.
These are the ones that suffer least;
The aconite under the snow
And the snowdrop crying for a moment
in the wood.

(p. 310)
The contemplative vision of the regenerative process in nature continues in the following lines:

I believe the season of birth  
Is the season of sacrifice  
For the tree and the beast, and the fish  
Thrashing itself upstream.

Notwithstanding, the beauty of such imagery and even the element of surprise that it shares with the imagery of awareness ('The aconite under the snow,' 'the fish/Thrashing itself upstream'), the particular kind of imagery that we are trying to isolate in the play is the most characteristic feature of Eliot's poetry. The strategy that Eliot adopts in this play to break through the indifferent spectator's impercipient and shock him out of the familiar into the strange is largely, if not entirely, dependent on his use of the images of awareness. The later plays make less use of this strategy. It is only in parts of Four Quartets that the imagery of awareness helps Eliot to achieve some of his most characteristic effects. There are many passages in these poems where Eliot eschews his allusive technique and makes use of the transparently clear and the closely familiar and immediate in order to communicate a sense of the other and the beyond. One
could quote the well-known passage from the third section of *East Coker* beginning with the words 'As, in a theatre ...' (p. 180) where Eliot, using the imagery of contemporary life communicates a sense of the unreality of the real. It is better, however, to quote the following brief passage from the third section of *Burnt Norton* where unfamiliar diction hides a familiar image and where the familiarity of the image jolts us into a sense of the unfamiliar:

This is the one way, and the other
Is the same, not in movement
But abstention from movement; while the
world moves
In appetency, on its metalled ways
Of time past and time future.
CONCLUSION
From our discussion of the theme and imagery of awareness in *The Family Reunion* and (only in outline) in the early poems, it emerges that what we have called "awareness" is part of Eliot's strategy to make the modern and contemporary world available to poetry. Eliot's poetic world is a far cry from the inanities and trivialities of the so-called Georgian poets — the attempt to create a pseudo-romantic countryside inhabited by Wordsworthian shepherds and Keatsian swains. Eliot, on the other hand, brought reality to bear on the world of imagination though knowing full well that "human kind cannot bear very much reality." The real in Eliot is his own scheme for the Infinite though what is his own is also part of the tradition. Eliot would have avoided being called "a religious poet" since such a description would limit the scope of his imaginative operation. And yet Eliot was deeply religious because Christianity was for him a means of discovering meaning in the chaos of experience. Throughout his work, specially after "The Hollow Men" he seems concerned with the attempt to enliven dogma with reference to experience. It is in this sense that he brings his metaphysical and religious scheme...
Eliot's vision does not envisage Reality as something outside the pale of immediate experience—something that exists at the terminal point of that which is perceived through the senses. The sensuous and the transcendent are not mutually exclusive; in fact, they are co-terminous. That this indeed is so was confirmed for him not only by the technique he had early acquired from the French Symbolists but was reinforced by the Christian dogma of Incarnation. As we know Incarnation for Eliot was not an isolated, once-only, historical reality but an ever-recurring, constantly-present, phenomenon. In this juxtaposition, or rather co-presence of the artistic and the religious, Eliot found a solution for the modern poet. It is in incarnational symbolism, or, as Coleridge put it, in the consubstantiation of the object and the idea, that the possibility for freedom for the modern poet lay. The modern poet could thus and only thus seize the material reality of contemporary life surrounding him and make it a vehicle for the truly Real. Contemporaneity and universality, as we said in the Preface, could in this way co-exist.

The imagery of contemporary life in Eliot, the
imagery of immediate experience, thus, has a context of eternal verities behind it. However, in its superficial aspect of pseudo-modernity, this feature was seized upon by most "modern" poets -- Auden, Spender and others. Eliot's pervasive influence has made it a constant feature of all modern poetry. The surprising and unexpected (sometimes shocking in its irrelevance) image has come to stay in modern poetry. Numerous examples could be given of "ordinary" modern poems having these features -- from Auden to Philip Larkin and Ted Hughes. The influence, however, though pervasive is not deep. With the possible exception of later Auden and Ted Hughes, few of the modern poets make the imagery of immediate experience a vehicle for larger metaphysical content. "The Express" by Spender is a typical example. It is a beautiful poem, no doubt, but rather narrow in its larger bearings. The subject-matter itself is traditionally unpoetic and drawn from immediate experience. The imagery, however, does not create an "awareness" of larger realities. "The manifesto of the piston" is surprising and therefore delightful but it is lacking in any wide or profound political bearing. The train moves away, at the end, into the Infinite but the Infinite that it symbolises is vague
and colourless. Inspite of its novelty the poem and its imagery have only a limited scope.

W.H. Auden's "Musee des Beaux Arts," another poem that makes use of imagery drawn from everyday experience, may also be briefly mentioned here. The poem's images reinforce the central theme of the poem: universal indifference to suffering and the realization and depiction of this fact in at least some great art. "About suffering they were never wrong,/The Old Masters." The theme is then depicted by the poet himself with the help of images drawn from everyday common experience. Suffering -- anyone's suffering -- is juxtaposed with images showing indifference and total unconcern: someone "eating or opening a window or just walking dully along." The next image of indifference is that of children "Skating/On a pond at the edge of the wood." The climactic image is that of "the torturer's horse/Scratching its innocent behind on a tree." The concluding lines refer to Brueghel's painting about the fall of Icarus and show how the great artist perceived the truth (about the universal indifference to suffering) in his own masterly fashion.

There is little doubt that Auden's wonderful poem
re-enacts through its imagery the drama of its theme. The point, however, is: to what comprehensive and compulsive vision of life does the theme of the poem relate itself? Auden's imagery and theme remain indicative of his acute but isolated perception while Eliot's imagery of awareness, reiterated at intervals, compels us towards the realization of a significant vision of life. Our endeavour in this dissertation has been to hint at the possibility that Eliot's imagery of immediate experience, beautifully startling as it is in itself, is yet a part of a comprehensive vision of life.
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II


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