Gerontion, which anticipates *The Waste Land*, depicts the secular phase of modern civilization. With the emergence of what Eliot laments as the 'scientific attitude', old ideas about God, immortality of soul and morality, and the Christian concepts of heaven and hell, have become antiquated. There has been such an unprecedented explosion of knowledge that, in the bewildering market-place of ideas, it is rather difficult to distinguish the right from the wrong. It has only deepened the uncertainty about the raison d'être of human existence. Gerontion, like Tiresias of *The Waste Land*, throbs 'between two lives', the old and the new, and as the epigraph suggests, 'Dreaming of both.' The poem is steeped in Eliot's 'sense of the spiritual degeneration' of contemporary civilization wherein he felt himself to be a 'resident alien'.

At the outset of the poem, Gerontion introduces himself as 'an old man in a dry month', 'waiting for rain'. The phrase 'in a dry month' indicates the secular phase of spiritual dryness and sterility which has overtaken mankind. But Gerontion, being 'old', belongs to the old tradition of faith in God as the central reality of life. He
is, therefore, waiting for the showers of God's grace, for the redemption of faith. The situation is reminiscent of the mythical wastelands cursed with both physical and spiritual barrenness. And Gerontion is not unlike the Fisher King, maimed and impotent, waiting for the rains that may redeem his land and his people from the curse of sterility. An echo of Gerontion's lament about man's loss of faith is to be heard in 'What the Thunder said' in The Waste Land:

He who was living is now dead
We who were living are now dying
With a little patience.²

What Eliot says here in poetry he reaffirms later in prose. For, an exact echo of these thoughts can be heard in the last sentences of Eliot's Thoughts After Lambeth: 'The world is trying the experiment of attempting to form a civilized but non-Christian mentality. The experiment will fail; but we must be very patient in awaiting its collapse; meanwhile redeeming the time: so that the Faith may be preserved alive through the dark ages before us; to renew and rebuild civilization, and save the World from suicide.'³ The first two lines of Gerontion underline the cause of human malady as well as the way of redemption from it.

Gerontion is a tenant in a house, this world, 'which is not his real home'. It is in a state of decay, subject to
the sordid domination of the landlord, "a cosmopolitan inheritor of mixed and confused cultures." Doomed to be a denizen of a secular civilization, "founded on money values," Gerontion finds his life singularly lacking in heroic ideals. He has never felt inspired by an ardour to make a sacrifice in a noble cause. "Memory!", remarked Eliot in his *Rhapsody on a Windy Night*, "You have the key." Gerontion's mind falls back upon memory to recall moments in human history when man risked death to uphold his moral and spiritual state against the onslaughts of barbarism. The reference to "the hot gates" is an allusion to the battle of Thermopylae where a handful of Greek soldiers fought to defend their civilization and culture against the heathen hordes from Persia. Then there is the memory of those who were not given to living merely on the material plane and who, to quote from Tennyson's *Ulysses*, felt:

It little profits that an idle king,
By this still hearth, among these barren crags,
Match'd with an aged wife, I mete and dole
Unequal laws unto a savage race,
That hoard, and sleep, and feed, and know not me.7

They, in the course of their voyages, fought like Ulysses "in the warm rain":

Thro' scudding drifts the rainy Hyades
Vext the dim sea...8

116
The allusion to "knee deep in salt marsh" could refer to the arduous and no less painful struggle of those who discovered new continents and set about reclaiming the marshy and barren lands. In contrast, Gerontion can derive little satisfaction from having fought in the first World War which was waged on political and commercial considerations alone.

What plagues Gerontion's civilization is the evil of rank commercialism "Spawned' in some cheap and sordid 'estaminet' of Antwerp. Here 'Spawned' in its association with 'the breeding of the lower animals, suggests a repulsive promiscuous sexuality' while 'blistered', 'patched' and 'peeled' in conjunction with 'estaminet' imply 'the diseased debasement of brothels'.\textsuperscript{9} (cf. 'one-night cheap hotels/And sawdust restaurants' of \textit{Prufrock}) The symptoms of the disease appeared first in the commercial centre of Brussels and subsequently, in their worst form, in London.

The indiscriminate hunger for pelf got allied to another degrading hunger, the gratification of lust: 'The goat coughs at night in the field overhead'. The pursuit of baser passions has debilitated and debased man. The inner corruption is reflected in the polluted environment of an industrial city littered with 'Rocks, moss, stonecrop, iron, merds.' The disease has made inroads into men's homes to afflict family life. The woman who 'keeps the kitchen' caters
also to the baser hunger of man. She has, like the goat who "coughs", grown sickly. Notwithstanding her demented state, she appeases his lust. The phrase "poking the peevish gutter" is indicative of her rousing herself to the task in the same manner as one pokes a cold hearth to rouse a flame. The word "gutter" has repeatedly been used in Eliot's early poetry to connote abject lust. There has also been a reference to "basement kitchens" (where the fires of lust burn) and "damp souls of housemaids" (suffering from spiritual dampness).

Surrounded as he is by "windy spaces", i.e. by a wide and pervasive ambience of sterile passions, Gerontion, with his outmoded ideas of God and morality, is dismissed as no more than a "dull head".

In the second passage, which is brief but central, Gerontion underlines the crux of the malady that afflicts mankind. It is man's alienation from God that is at the root of all his perversions, and that accounts for the decay of modern civilization. For without God at the centre of things, everything departs from its basis in truth and becomes hollow, meaningless and untrue. It is only Truth, as the Bhagavad Gita says, that endures while untruth has no existence. Gerontion discovers this state of untruth in man's distortion of the meaning of religion. Religion which is the science of union with God and which has to do with the
moral and spiritual evolution of human consciousness has been confused with the pseudo-religion of magic and witchcraft. Thus, whosoever can perform a miracle is taken to be a man of religion:

Signs are taken for wonders, 'We would see a sign!'

It reminds Gerontion of the unbelieving Pharisees who called upon Christ to prove his divinity by performing a miracle, and of Christ's answer that 'an evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign'. It is a pity that the greatest miracle of all, the divine Revelation of the Word of God through his chosen prophets is wilfully ignored and remains unperceived, 'Swaddled with darkness'. For, as in John i, 1: 'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.'

Eliot's source here, as pointed out by Southam, is Bishop Lancelot Andrewes' Nativity Sermon based on Luke ii, 12-14: '.. that is a miracle...Verbum infans, the Word without a word; the eternal Word not able to speak a word: a wonder sure and...swaddled; and that a wonder too... to come thus into clouts, Himself!' ('clouts', the baby's swaddling clothes).

Line 18 ('The word within a word, unable to speak a word') quoted 'almost word-for-word' from Andrewes' sermon is cited in Eliot's 'Lancelot Andrewes' essay as one of the
"flashing phrases' which 'never desert the memory'.\textsuperscript{15} Southam has, however, observed one significant difference: Andrewes has 'the Word without a word', Eliot 'within'. He considers it to be 'an anomaly that exists too in the 'Lancelot Andrewes' essay, where the unforgettable 'flashing phrase' is not Andrewes' but Eliot's!\textsuperscript{16} In this context, it may be observed that the use of 'within' for 'without' seems to be not an anomaly but a deliberate modification. Retaining the conventional allusion to the fact of Christ's Incarnation as the greatest miracle, Eliot makes the phrase more comprehensive in import. It implies that true religion manifests itself in words that are not always to be taken literally, that these words are in the nature of symbols and signs which have to be unfolded to decipher the 'word within a word'. It is through the perception of the hidden meaning of words, or of the Word, that one can discover the miracle and glory of religion and of God. Only then can the Revelation of Word have a miraculous hold on one's mind and imagination so that one's whole being emerges 'baptized', and not in a ritual sense either. Only thus can an inner transformation and a metamorphosis of one's consciousness come about. It was perhaps in this sense that the slight change that suggested itself to Eliot, brought about a sea-change in the aspect of the phrase so that it gripped the poet's imagination and, as he admits, was imprinted on his memory.

120
The next sentence in the passage 'In the juvescence of the year/Came Christ the tiger' carries the full thrust of the meaning that mankind, in its failure to be informed and inspired by the true impulse of religion, strays from the path of good to one of evil, from that of truth to one of untruth, from that of light to one of darkness. Thus, by immersing itself in the mire of evil and sin, it invites the wrath of God who then, instead of Christ the Lamb, assumes the frightfully destructive aspect of Christ 'the tiger'.

What follows the 'juvescence of the year' in Gerontion's secular milieu is not the sacrament of communion with the Holy Spirit but the May-time enchantments of sense. In terms of the historical movements, however, while the 'juvescence of the year' points to the birth of the Christian civilization with the 'Word' or God at the centre of things, 'depraved May' points to 'the birth of a new paganism, and opposes the Renaissance to the Nativity.'

Ignorant as they are of the spiritual significance of Spring (cf. the spring in the opening lines of Chaucer's Prologue to The Canterbury Tales) and of the spiritual potency of the Word which can redeem life, the sceptics of Gerontion's day give themselves up to a life of self-indulgence rather than one of self-abnegation. Gerontion perceives the 'depraved May' bring dogwood, chestnut and flowering judas. There is a 'concentrated allusion' here to a
passage in *The Education of Henry Adams* (a work that greatly impressed Eliot) which describes the "brooding heat of the profligate vegetation" in May as "sensual, animal, elemental", signifying a life of "passionate depravity".\(^{18}\)

Considering Eliot's habits of mind\(^ {19}\), the very names of flowers such as "dogwood", "chestnut" and "judas" must have signified to him the betrayal of man by his reckless sensuality. Mark the following lines from *Rhapsody*:

> Smells of chestnuts in the streets,  
> And female smells in shuttered rooms...\(^ {20}\)

The thing "To be eaten, to be divided, to be drunk/Among whispers" too has its antecedent in

> A twisted branch upon the beach  
> Eaten smooth, and polished...\(^ {21}\)

or along the reaches of the street

> Held in a lunar synthesis  
> Whispering lunar incantations...\(^ {22}\)

The line "To be eaten, to be divided, to be drunk" no more signifies partaking of Christ "in the sacrament of communion, the bread his body, the wine his blood, to be consumed in the mass by the priest and congregation".\(^ {23}\) To the secularists, it means nothing more than an epicurean delight in the sensuous pleasures of the world. These pleasures are meant to be enjoyed "Among whispers" which suggests the re-emergence
of the Renaissance cult of the senses which has now been adumbrated as the new religion of the secularists.

The new cult has found its champions among the modern aesthetes. Gerontion has in mind the example of one Mr. Silvero, typical of his class, at Limoges (a holy place known for its china) caressing the statues, the sensuous experience so ravishing his mind that he "walked all night in the next room", beleaguered by dubious fantasies perhaps. Hakagawa is another such, "bowing among the Titians", worshipping the sensuous incarnations of beauty in art which have replaced the Incarnation of the Word in Christ.

An extreme manifestation of the cult, however, is to be found in the practice of hypnosis, magic and witch-craft. The priestess of this cult is one Madame de Tornquist. The phrases "in the dark room" and "shifting the candles", apart from describing the scene, carry certain pejorative connotations. The Madame is in a state of "darkness". The "candles" which would otherwise be symbols of divine light (reminiscent of candles at the altar) serve as instruments of her occult practices. They may also carry, in the given context of "depraved May", lewd suggestions of sensuality. Fraulein von Kulp is one of the clients. The phrase "one hand on the door" may indicate apprehensions and fears vis-a-vis the sinister cult. It is more likely, however, that Fraulein von Kulp is an equally seedy character who walks into the hall rather cautiously.
It would be interesting to make a comparison between Madame de Tornquist here and Madame Sosostris, the famous clairvoyant in *The Waste Land* in whose hands the Tarot cards, instruments of divination, degenerate into "a wicked pack of cards'. The latter too carries on some shady business, evident from her note of caution:

Tell her I bring the horoscope myself: One must be so careful these days.\(^{24}\)

Gerontion considers such cults as vain attempts at self-deception whereby one is, to quote from "Burnt Norton', "Distracted from distraction by distraction/Filled with fancies and empty of meaning'.\(^{25}\) Or, as Gerontion says: "Vacant shuttles/ Weave the wind.'

Gerontion's admission that he has no ghosts shows that, unlike the cosmopolites of his day who, losing faith in the miracle of Revelation, turn to magic and witchcraft, he has not turned to spiritism. The admission may, however, underline the sad fact of Gerontion's having lost the supernatural dimension of his life whereby he could enter into a spiritual communion with God. Nonetheless, he is an 'old' man, holding on to an old tradition, living in a house which is swept by the winds of change. The image of 'knob' ('a rare dialect word for a rounded hill') is suggestive of sensual charms. Living under 'a windy knob', therefore, could signify a life exposed to the winds of desire.
Gerontion wonders what use is "the increasing complexity of human knowledge," if it leaves man to revel in sensuality and sin and deprives him of God's mercy. As Chesterton's Father Brown remarks, "What we all dread most...is a maze with no centre. That is why atheism is only a nightmare." The sin becomes doubly culpable since it is committed in the face of true knowledge given to man in the 'Word' of God. 'Yet the Word exists; it is only history which cannot find Him, history with a positivistic conception of the universe, a deterministic view of causation, a pragmatic notion of morals.' And man has chosen, like Marlowe's Faustus, to turn away from Him and His divine grace.

The burden of the passage on history is that secular ambition is not a reasonable alternative to faith. Interestingly, in his later prose writings (Essays Ancient and Modern) Eliot was to assail the dominant position of secularism in contemporary culture and anticipate the barbarism which would descend. And, in a radio talk given in February 1937, Eliot was to voice a similar concern at the failure of Western civilization, and in particular the signal inability of liberal democracy to sustain moral or intellectual values which might effectively confront the ideologies of fascism or communism. The need, according to him, was for the society to renounce 'many wrong ambitions and wrong desires' and maintain its allegiance to God.
may be observed here that the ideas that Eliot was to formulate in *The Idea of a Christian Society* and *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture* had their basis in 'certain fundamental ideals which had preoccupied him since the early Twenties'.

Having denounced secular knowledge, Gerontion lambasts the secular history of man which concerns itself with the material station of man, as opposed to his spiritual station in life. Gerontion considers history to be a mistress who 'panders to men's vanities and deludes them with bogus favours, sometimes indeed granting them more than they expect, but in the end leaving them graceless and baffled.'

In this passage, Gerontion becomes a strong mouthpiece of the poet who 'consistently deplored contemporary life and secular history, not with the helpless voice of his generation, but with the authoritative voice of Old Testament prophet or New England divine. He speaks most like Emerson who said 'the centuries are conspirators against the sanity and authority of the soul....History is an impertinence and an injury if it be anything more than a... parable of my being and becoming'.'

In Gerontion's view, man, duped by history, resorts to much falsehood, cunning and deception. The 'contrived corridor' is an instance of it, referring to an act of political intrigue and deception whereby 'a strip of land was
taken from Germany under the terms of the Treaty of Versailles and awarded to Poland. It was in this context that W.H. Auden in his September 1, 1939 attributes the cause of the second World War to 'the whole offence/From Luther until now/That has driven a culture mad' and remarks that 'Those to whom evil is done/Do evil in return.'

The most opportune time for history to load man's mind with a bewildering variety of secular knowledge is when his mind is distracted from the 'Word' of God which is the only source of true knowledge. The dubious knowledge thus imparted, however, leaves man thirsting for more knowledge:

Think now
She gives when our attention is distracted
And what she gives, gives with such supple confusions
That the giving famishes the craving.

And once she has succeeded in imparting us her dubious knowledge, (as in the case of Macbeth and Faustus, for instance), she 'deceives with whispering ambitions,/Guides us by vanities.' Or, as in the case of these two Renaissance characters, true knowledge is withheld and imparted a little too late in the day. To such as these, history has been a treacherous handmaid of ideas who

Gives too late
What's not believed in, or if still believed,
In memory only, reconsidered passion.

127
Or, as in the case of Faustus, she endows man quite early with so much of true knowledge that he easily parts with it. It is a case where history

\[
\text{Gives too soon} \\
\text{Into weak hands, What's thought can be dispensed with} \\
\text{Till the refusal propagates a fear.}
\]

What ultimately saves man, then, is not the 'fear' of God's wrath (cf. Faustus), nor a misdirected 'Courage' (cf. Macbeth). Instances such as these only go to prove that

\[
\text{Unnatural vices} \\
\text{Are fathered by our heroism.}
\]

Paradoxically, however, the end-result of vice is a belated and painful realization of the true value of virtue: 'Virtues / Are forced upon us by our impudent crimes.' A deep sense of remorse and penitence overtakes the sinner. He learns the value of virtue the hard way through suffering the ire of God. Nevertheless, the tears are cleansing of his soul, for 'These tears are shaken from the wrath-bearing tree.' The forces of God symbolized in the 'tiger' destroy evil and regenerate good: 'The tiger springs in the new year. Us he devours.'

This thought sustains Gerontion and makes him look forward to a positive and hopeful conclusion of his travail when 'I/Stiffen in a rented house.' He hopes that his view of
history and of human life is not pointless, that it is not the creation of some conjuring trick of devils. The image of the 'backward devils' not only points to the conventional image of the evil spirits' literally walking backwards with inverted feet but also to their prompting man along a spiritually retrogressive course.

Gerontion assures the reader that he would meet him 'upon this honestly', implying thereby that he would vouch for the truth of his ideas if he encounters him in some spiritual domain of existence. This line, however, and the ones that follow (in this passage) in which he makes an honest admission of his truth, could have been addressed either to his beloved, or to God, or even to his own inner self.

Vis-a-vis his beloved, the implied context of lines 55-60 is one of his having renounced her in view of the grossness and unreality of the relationships of sense. The lines seem to be based on the following lines from The Changeling by Thomas Middleton:

I that am of your blood was taken from you
For your better health; look no more upon 't,
But cast it to the ground regardlessly,
Let the common sewer take it from distinction.
Beneath the stars, upon yon meteor
Ever hung my fate, 'mongst things corruptible;
I never could pluck it from him; my loathing
Was prophet to the rest, but never believed.

(v,iii)37

129
`To lose beauty in terror' finds its equivalent in the hyacinth girl passage of *The Waste Land* where the young man seems to have a vision of the world as a place of meaningless flux overtaken by desolation. It is a vision of such terror that

```
I was neither
Living nor dead, and I knew nothing,
Looking into the heart of light, the silence.38
```

It finds corroboration in the `flashing phrase' from *Tristan und Isolde*: `Oed' und leer das Meer'39 (desolate and empty the sea). It was as a result of this vision perhaps that the young man renounced the hyacinth girl. Gerontion too seems to have lost his `beauty' (beloved) overwhelmed by a similar vision, though he would honestly admit to her, if they meet, that this world is in the nature of an illusion. He seems to have realized the full import of the words in the epigraph:

```
Thou hast nor youth nor age
But as it were an after dinner sleep
Dreaming of both.
```

This realization has led him to make an `inquisition' of the whys and wherefores of existence. Living in a debased milieu, Gerontion has lost his passion for love. Had he kept his passion alive, it would have been sullied by the very air that he breathes. For have not his senses been corrupted by
base use? And so, how can he express his love with these debased instruments of desire? "And cold the sense', says Eliot in 'East Coker', "and lost the motive of action."\textsuperscript{40}

Vis-a-vis God, Gerontion would honestly admit his feelings about life when he meets Him in after-life. He was removed from God's grace by his secular knowledge that pointed to the utter meaninglessness of creation. The terror of the world as an unresolved riddle distracted him from his spiritual moorings in the Word of God so that he was lost in a futile maze of ideas, perplexed by the darkness of uncertainty and confusion. He was then wholly given to an intellectual inquisition of the \textit{raison d'etre} of this world. As a result of this, he has lost his passion for God. He has, however, chosen not to mix up matters spiritual with matters secular, for the latter would only corrupt the former. His senses are no more instruments to discern the immanence of God. They have lost their capacity for that. How can then he use them to feel, as he used to feel once, his closeness to God? There is great spiritual anguish, and craving for communion with God in the lines ("I have lost my passion....I have lost my sight, smell, hearing, taste and touch") which are an allusion to Newman's sermon on 'Divine Calls' quoted in \textit{Apologia Pro Vita Sua}: "Let us beg and pray Him day by day to reveal himself to our souls more fully, to quicken our sense, to give us sight and hearing, taste and touch of the
The unflinching honesty of Gerontion's confession, comments George Williamson, 'redeems it from utter hopelessness, for without such honesty no faith will be possible and there will be little hope in "waiting for rain".'

The tragic irony and paradox, however, of Gerontion's situation is that whereas 'These with a thousand small deliberations' should make him renounce the world and its sinful ways, he finds himself sinking deeper into the mire. Through the complex character of Gerontion, the poet here seems to underline, what he described in 'Eeldrop and Appleplex' as 'the strange double nature of the artist - both the drifter to whom things happen and the sharp-eyed creature coldly looking on.' As a drifter in a depraved milieu, Gerontion appears to be a helpless victim of the earthly mirage. In this sense, at least, he is not indistinguishable from those who

Protract the profit of their chilled delirium,
Excite the membrane, when the sense has cooled,
With pungent sauces, multiply variety
In a wilderness of mirrors.

But what else will he do since, as the Bhagavad-Gita says, 'nature' is very potent and it is a formidable task to overrule her; it requires a great effort of will. Living under the sinister spell of 'a dry month' ('depraved May'), Gerontion, to use a phrase from The Waste Land, in spite of
all his "Memory and desire",\textsuperscript{45} is not unlike the hopeless protagonist of \textit{Ash-Wednesday} who laments

\begin{quote}
The air which is now thoroughly small and dry
Smaller and dryer than the will...\textsuperscript{46}
\end{quote}

And left to itself, "nature" will have its inexorable course:

\begin{quote}
What will the spider do,
Suspend its operations, will the weevil
Delay?
\end{quote}

When the spiritual centre cannot hold, remarked Yeats in \textit{The Second Coming}, "Thing fall apart".\textsuperscript{47} A Godless world gets dissolved "In Fractured atoms". An echo of this dissolution is heard in "East Coker":

\begin{quote}
O dark dark dark. They all go into the dark,
The vacant interstellar spaces, the vacant into the vacant...
\end{quote}

It is futile to fly in the face of the wind. For, whether flying in the "Windy straits/ Of Belle Isle" pervaded by the enchantments of desire, or "running on the Horn", i.e. on the horns of dilemma of this dark and confused world of mutation and flux, the relentless fate of utter destruction awaits the "Gull":

\begin{quote}
White feathers in the snow, the Gulf claims.
\end{quote}

\begin{quote}
Gerontion turns from the world deprecatingly, for everything here is a commodity to be traded. He finds this
\end{quote}
kind of life, to use a phrase from Wordsworth, 'a sordid boon!'\textsuperscript{49}. It drives him to 'a sleepy corner'. At the end of the day, therefore, Gerontion finds himself in a detached state of indifference to the world: 'a dry brain in a dry season.'

II

In the opinion of this researcher, the reader should have no difficulty in making a final estimate of Gerontion for he himself has summed his situation up in three telling phrases of great artistic merit, the one at the beginning, another in the middle, and the last at the end of his monologue: 'an old man in a dry month... waiting for rain', 'An old man in a draughty house / Under a windy knob', and 'an old man driven by the Trades / To a sleepy corner.' The 'dry month' in the first phrase refers to the secular phase of human civilization. Being an 'old man', though, rooted in his old tradition of faith in the Word, Gerontion waits for rain, the traditional symbol of grace. The second phrase refers to the condition of the world in this secular phase: It is 'a draughty house...' with its maze of conflicting ideas without the spiritual centre. It perturbs the 'old' man who, however, remains the one constant factor in all the three phrases. As such, be it his reverie of the re-emergence of the pagan cult of sense in 'depraved May' or his
tour de force of history, or his spiritual anguish at the
depletion of his sense and spirit, or, finally, his
realization of the inevitability of dissolution irrespective
of on which side of the hedge you stand, Gerontion looks at
things in the one constant perspective of the 'Word'. That
accounts for the redeeming fact (in the third phrase) that
'the Trades' can only drive him to 'a sleepy corner' so that,
in a mood of placid indifference, he sleeps to the world.
Interestingly, Eliot was recur to it in 1933, in a foreword
to Harold Monro's Collected Poems, 'There is no way out.
There never is,' ending with a quotation, 'Sleep, and if life
was bitter to thee, pardon'.50 The attitude is reminiscent of
Yeats' own epitaph:

Cast a cold eye
On life, on death.
Horseman, pass by .51

This vision of man's essential solitude and his suffering, as
also of the ultimate meaninglessness of life has been known
to induce, in sensitive individuals, especially those having
a predisposition towards things metaphysical, a religious
craving for union with the divine. Eliot's subsequent poems
indicate the course that such a sensibility may take:

Blessed sister, holy mother, spirit of the fountain,
spirit of the garden,
Suffer us not to mock ourselves with falsehood
Teach us to care and not to care
Teach us to sit still
Even among these rocks,
Our peace in His will
And even among these rocks
Sister, mother
And spirit of the river, spirit of the sea,
Suffer me not to be separated

And let my cry come unto Thee.

It is also necessary to reaffirm Miss Drew's claim that the poem offers "the antithesis between human life conceived in a framework of myth and the lack of all meaning in contemporary secularism".\textsuperscript{53} Birje-Patil's observation that such a claim is "hardly sustained by the events unfolded in the poem itself"\textsuperscript{54} is not tenable. For the modern secular world's departure from a sense of Christian tradition rooted in the myth of Incarnation of the "Word" is keenly felt, as our analysis shows, all through the poem. John B. Vickery has rightly considered Gerontion "the Old Wise Man possessed of both good and evil, light and dark aspects, whom Jung regards as the personification of the spiritual principle."\textsuperscript{55} Gerontion does act as a Guide "in helping man to thread the "cunning passages" and "contrived corridors" of history, in exploring the religious mysteries, and in confronting the terrors of the natural world."\textsuperscript{56} Indeed, the one enduring note in the monologue is of an unstated but implied belief that "Dust thou art, to dust returneth" was not said of the soul:

Think at last
We have not reached conclusion, when I
Stiffen in a rented house.

136
This note of "consolation and the hope of release on a deeper level' finds its echo in "East Coker":

There is only the fight to recover what has been lost
And found and lost again and again: and now, under conditions
That seem unpropitious. 58

Gerontion's ranting monologue may seem pathetic but, as Gordon observes, "from a historical distance this lone man's impulse to think and question seems sensible and brave." 59

One cannot agree with Professor Smith that the poem "points no way inward; it shows the outward, the eccentric propulsion of the damned", or his view that it "describes only "the unstilled world," the turning wheel, the hollow passages -- not "the Garden/Where all love ends,"...The point at which time ends and eternity begins...is lost to the world of the poem." 60 Nor can one concur with the view that Gerontion marks "the rockbottom of despair in the development of Eliot's poetic vision", or that the "movement of the poem is circular" so that we "leave Gerontion exactly as we find him." 61 For in terms of the inner evolution, Gerontion, "driven by the Trades / To a sleepy corner", stands at the threshold of, what St.John of the Cross called, "the dark night of the soul'. His final state is, to quote from "Burnt Norton', one of:

137
Internal darkness, deprivation
And destitution of all property,
Desiccation of the world of sense,
Evacuation of the world of fancy,
Inoperancy of the world of spirit;\(^62\)
as also of:

\[\ldots\text{abstention from movement ; while the world moves}\]
\[\text{In } \& \text{ appetency, on its metalled ways...}\]\(^63\)

It is quite plausible to visualize him say to his soul:

be still, and wait without hope
For hope would be hope for the wrong thing; there is yet faith
But the faith and the love and the hope are all in the waiting.
Wait without thought, for you are not ready for thought...\(^64\)

The reader can only hope that, as for the protagonist of the
Four Quartets, so for Gerontion, "the darkness shall be the light' even though the ordeal points "to the agony / Of death and birth'.\(^65\)

We may compare Gerontion with the hero of Newman's
The Dream of Gerontius "who looks forward with such full and serene joy and faith to the moment of dissolution and the acceptance of purgation.'\(^66\) Considered thus, the poem anticipates the experience of Ash-Wednesday and Four Quartets.

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138
This poem, which Eliot considered "intensely serious" and among the best that he had ever done\textsuperscript{1}, contemplates the supremacy of the moral law, any deviation from which seems to meet with divine retribution. Eliot works out, in terms of living human experience, the inexorable truth that "Only the divine endures: the rest is smoke."\textsuperscript{2}

The poet looks at Venice through the eyes of Burbank, an American tourist. A man of artistic and idealistic sensibility, Burbank comes to the ancient city, guided by a Baedeker (a guide-book), expecting to find a mode of civilization famed for a sublime synthesis of the material and the spiritual.

Burbank's first disillusionment comes with his dismal failure in love with Princess Volupine who, he discovers, is simply a remnant of the decadent and corrupt aristocracy. He is shocked beyond belief at her gross sensuality: "goats and monkeys, with such hair too!" Contact with her seems to defile him. The "Defunctive music under sea" sounds ominous, for it presages the departure of divine strength from him. And indeed, as with Antony,

\begin{quote}
the God hercules
Had left him, that had loved him well.
\end{quote}
The phrase 'Defunctive music', derived from Shakespeare's 'The Phoenix and the Turtle' brings in a host of associations. In great agony, Burbank seems to recall 'the phoenix and the dove, / Co-supremes and stars of love': 'How true a twain / Seemed this concordant one!' Elliot himself had this ideal in mind when, in 'East Coker', he wrote of the association of man and woman: 'A dignified and commodious sacrament / Which betokeneth concorde'. The ideal evades the poet as it does Burbank. To both of them, love and constancy seem to be dead in this fallen world. The phoenix and the turtle have fled, in 'a mutual flame'. 'The nymphs are departed.' No wonder, the 'Defunctive music under sea' also sounds funereal.

All the same, the divine force that deserted Burbank when he 'fell', now manifests itself in its full effulgence and glory in the image of the dawn. Burbank watches the sun rising in great splendour over the peninsula of Istria. He has seen the sun's chariot represented on the sculptured bronze doors of the Cathedral of St. Mark in Venice. Its horses indeed seem to 'Beat up the light with their bright silver hooves', as described by John Marston in the Venetian tragedy *Antony and Mellida*. Burbank could not have failed to perceive the spectacle as an emblem of spiritual ascension. However, he is also reminded of Horace to whom the sun's horses 'Beat...with even feet', measuring time impartially,
ruthlessly and unremittingly, bringing death among all mankind. Nevertheless, they fly, as he learns from George Chapman's *Bussy D'Ambois* (a passage which was Eliot's favourite):

Where men feel The burning axletree, and those that suffer Beneath the chariot of the snowy Bear...

Burbank thus seems to view human life in its relation to a cosmic order governed by the laws of divine dispensation which are inexorable.

In this context, it is necessary to learn that, in 1917, Eliot's passion was to unravel the truth behind the appearances. Here are "moments of pure observation and insight." The poet grasps "the uniqueness of each event, a sense of which had vanished with the decline of the religious view." Eliot was intrigued by the medieval mind's perception of evil through the punishment that overtook the sinner.

Burbank watches the ironical juxtaposition of the spiritual burning of the sun in the sky and the sterile burning of "the shuttered barge" of Princess Volupine on the waters of sensuality. Eliot was to reaffirm this distinction between fire and fire in his later poetry:

We only live, only suspire Consumed by either fire or fire.
In discerning the "modern drama contrasting the higher and lower worlds of man coexisting in the setting", Burbank "takes to himself the artistic and spiritual values; he is the appreciative embodiment of the enduring spirit whose works are catalogued in the guidebook."\(^{13}\)

The voluptuous music of "Tra-la-la-la-la-la-la-laire" enchants the Venetian air. It is akin to the "Weialala leia/ Wallala Leialala" carried down stream with the "peal of bells" in *The Waste Land*. Burbank observes Venice turned from Gautier's "city joyous, free and light / of Canaletto's day"\(^{14}\) to a hunting ground for gross vulgarians. A rootless rover such as Bleistein -- "Chicago Semite Viennese" -- reduces the city to his own level of "the protozoic slime". He is akin to *Gerontion*'s Jew, "Spawned in some estaminet of Antwerp, / Blistered in Brussels, patched and peeled in London."\(^{15}\) His cigar symbolizes "fleshly greed and gluttony".\(^{16}\) He seems to have plagued human civilization with the disease of greed and lust. Unlike the past, therefore, it is the spirit of sordid commerce that rules the Rialto. The place is infested with cheap wealth mating with unbridled lust:

> The rats are underneath the piles.

In *The Waste Land* too, Eliot remarks that "we are in rats' alley / Where the dead men lost their bones."\(^{17}\)
The 'gondola' fragment of the epigraph takes its full meaning in relation to Princess Volupine's pleasure boat landing beside the old palace where the foxy voluptuary 'entertains' Sir Ferdinand Klein. He has 'apparently made his money in the fur trade'. The boatman smiles as one who shares in their secret. In the epigraph, the old dilapidated palace, emblematic of a degenerate aristocracy, gets associated in the poet's mind with the image of lust: 'how charming its grey and pink'.

Burbank sees through the facade of a corrupt aristocracy to discern the Bleistein hidden underneath, for 'this or such was Bleistein's way'. The symptoms of a diseased civilization visible in his 'saggy bending of knees / And elbows, with the palms turned out', and his 'lustreless protrusive eyes' are also apparent in Princess Volupine's 'meagre, blue-nailed, phthisic hand'.

In this dismal scenario of decay and death, it is ominously significant that Niobe, 'the bereft' mother, passes on her fate, in a cabinet, to the present-day Countess. The situation invites comparison with that in Auden's *The Shield of Achilles* where

```
Thetis of the shining breasts
  Cried out in dismay
At what the god had wrought
  To please her son, the strong
Iron-hearted man-slaying Achilles
  Who would not live long.20
```
Remarkably, in *The Waste Land*, we hear of the 'Murmur of maternal lamentation' even as the poet has a vision of the Apocalypse:

Falling Towers
Jerusalem Athens Alexandria
Vienna London
Unreal

'The smoky candle end of time / Declines.' 'nil nisi divinum stabile est; caetera fumus'.

As to 'Who clipped the lion's wings...' (the winged lion being the emblem of the Venetian Republic), the poet and Burbank seem to merge into one character to meditate on 'Time's ruins, and the seven laws'. The allusion here is apparently to John Ruskin's *The Seven Lamps of Architecture* and *The Stones of Venice*. Ruskin had linked the greatness and decline of Venetian art to the moral and cultural decline of this Jewel of the Adriatic. He had also insisted that spiritual life is necessary for sustaining art.21

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**Sweeney Erect**

Most of Eliot's poetry is occupied with his sense of disenchantment with earthly passions and his incipient desire to cultivate those 'disinterested passions of the spirit
which are inexhaustible and permanently satisfying. The Sweeney poems are no exception.

In *Sweeney Erect*, the poet contemplates the suffering that earthly lovers are heir to:

> And the trees about me,  
> Let them be dry and leafless; let the rocks  
> Groan with continual surges; and behind me  
> Make all a desolation...

and the utter debasement brought about by one's pursuit of lust:

> This withered root of knots of hair  
> Slitted below and gashed with eyes,  
> This oval O cropped out with teeth:  
> The sickle motion from the thighs...

He also realizes, vis-a-vis Sweeney, that, devoid of humanity, man is no better than a beast:

> Sweeney addressed full length to shave  
> Broadbottomed, pink from nape to base...

The poem opens on a note of agony and despair wrought by the denial of love. There are three instances representative of this suffering, evenly spread in time: one derived from a Greek legend (Ariadne), another from a Renaissance tragedy (Aspatia), and the last from our own time (a nameless epileptic). These underline the universal and timeless nature of the experience.
The epigraph blends the agony of Ariadne and Aspatia into a single note as there is a pattern common to both. Both suffer betrayal in love. This note is made to signify, in the opening lines of the poem, the continuation of the same tragedy into our own times. The Aspatia of _Sweeney Erect_ is the epileptic whose agony in the absence of love has been compounded by her subjugation to a relentless round of lust.

In all the three cases, the poet views life without love in terms of an inferno. Remarkably, the imagery used in the poem and the epigraph to depict the desolation and suffering is not unlike Dante's that describes the torment of hell to which guilty lovers and "carnal sinners" are subjected. For, in the second circle of hell, such sinners are punished by being "tossed about by a mighty wind":

```
Bellowing there groan'd
A noise, as of a sea in tempest torn
By warring winds. The stormy blast of hell
With restless fury drives the spirits on,
Whirled round and dash'd amain with sore annoy.
When they arrive before the ruinous sweep,
There shrieks are heard, there lamentations, moans...
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Eliot's opening lines, therefore, evoke not simply the pathetic sense of love's loss but also the grave sense of carnal sin.

It should be interesting to observe that in "The Dry Savages", the poet views in similar terms the unending grief in which earthly love and lust terminate vis-a-vis eternity:
The sea howl
And the sea yelp, are different voices
Often together heard: the whine in the rigging,
The menace and caress of wave that breaks on water,
The distant note in the granite teeth,
And the wailing warning from the approaching headland
Are all sea voices, and the heaving groaner
Rounded homewards, and the seagull:
And under the oppression of the silent fog
The tolling bell
Measures time not our time, rung by the unhurried
Ground swell, a time
Older than the time of chronometers, older
Than time counted by anxious worried women
Lying awake, calculating the future,
Trying to unweave, unwind, unravel
And piece together the past and the future
Between midnight and dawn, when the
past is all deception,
The future futureless...

As for Sweeney, the poet observes him in the light of what Emerson had to say on Man. "All history", remarked Emerson, "resolves itself very easily into the biography of a few stout and earnest persons.... A man must be so much that he must make all circumstances indifferent. Every true man is a cause, a county, and an age." In Sweeney Erect, Eliot alludes to Emerson's dictum that "an institution is the lengthened shadow of one man". In the use of the word 'Erect' for Sweeney, the poet makes an ironic reference to the following lines from Emerson's essay on 'Self-Reliance':

He who knows that power is inborn, that he is weak because he has looked for good out of him and elsewhere, and, so perceiving, throws himself unhesitatingly on his thought, instantly rights himself, stands in the erect position, commands his limbs, works miracles; just as a man who stands on his feet is stronger than a man who stands on his head."
In thus exhorting man to turn to his inward resources of goodness, Emerson, in Eliot's view, had failed to take into account people like "the oblivious, pleasure-loving Sweeney in a brothel" who, devoid of conscience, is incapable of making the moral distinction between good and evil. Eliot who believed in Original Sin and the fallen state of man contemplates the presence of Sweeney within himself.

The Sweeney poems of the 1920 collection have often baffled critics who wonder why the poet directed so much of his satirical energy in laying bare the abominations of a creature as "patently tarnished and futile" as Sweeney. They are apparently oblivious of the fact that Eliot's poetry cannot be separated from his biography. In howsoever disguised a manner, the personal experience, and the more personal of his feelings, form the raw material of his poetry. The poet must have felt the need to put into objective images, and thus make universal and representative, the struggle that went on in his soul. One must have feelings, the poet-critic had said, before one can begin to escape them. And he had learnt from Jules Laforgue how to "veil personal agonies with impersonal ironies". The poem may, therefore, be read as the poet's guarded attempt to present in an impersonal form his own agony caused, in the first place, by the loss of his youthful love (cf. La Figlia Che Piange), and exacerbated by an unhappy married life.
wherein he felt betrayed into the disgusting experience of lust. (cf. *Hysteria*) Living through the ignominy and sin of lust, - "the inflections of the sexuality which so unnerved him,\(^{11}\) - the poet could not have helped feeling, in his sensitive imagination, being brought as low as Sweeney and, much to his chagrin, appearing to be as cruel as Polypheme. As a matter of fact, he did sometimes speculate about the nature of "the savage" and even its presence within himself.\(^{12}\) It is quite likely, therefore, that in *Sweeney Erect* the poet gives a disguised expression to his own savage lust. He visualizes himself as Sweeney playing "the role of heartbreaker,\(^{13}\) so that, even when he sits down to shave, testing the razor on his leg, he is persecuted by the notion of being in the role of "the fictional Sweeney Todd of penny-dreadful fame", the Demon Barber who is a "shock-headed villain in the trade of butchering his clients to make meat pies'.\(^{14}\) One is afraid if the poet, like Eeldrop (in "Eeldrop and Appleplex") is "musing on the moral fate of a man who has murdered his mistress.'\(^{15}\) The poem is part of the poet's desperate attempt perhaps to get "Sweeney" out of his system.

The poem needs to be read in the light of the fact that Eliot's marriage was "the grim underside of his life, the secret inferno to be traversed before he might be worthy of the genuine awakening only Christianity could supply.'\(^{16}\) Both Eliot and his wife had used the image of "a couple in a
cage'. For Vivienne, the cage signified 'deadly isolation'. The epileptic in the poem may even have been modeled on her as she too suffered from hysteria and was, in a way, the poet's Nausicaa in that she had, for a brief spell, 'liberated Eliot emotionally', but who 'ended tragically as the emblem of the material world against which Eliot's religious impulse tugged, to free itself.' At any rate, the fact that the narrator of Sweeney Erect opens the poem in the first person indicates that the poem might be an expression of the poet's personal agony, his grudge against life.

The context of the poem also invites comparison with some of the poems written between 1916 and 1919 but not published (except the Ode in Ara Vos Prec). The Death of the Duchess describes a couple trapped in a hotel bedroom, unable to communicate their separate needs. In the Elegy, the wife is 'a complex of victim and demon'. Her effect on the husband is to fill him with 'a horror of women as of unclean creatures. In the Ode, the poet's agony has to do with the degradation of his love into a deflowered bride, degraded to a 'succuba'. Love, which should have been a Hippocrene (the fountain of Pegasus) has been replaced with lust, from which rises the stench of a 'mephitic river', an Acheron.
Poems 1920 are thus part of the poet's experience of pain in relation to the world. By way of these poems, he implicitly implores his readers to renounce the world of sin and pain in the manner of Dante's Arnaut Daniel and pass through the fires of purgatory. That is why the collection of poems was also titled Ara Vos Prec.

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A Cooking Egg

This poem is another instance of Eliot's disillusionment with the temporal world. At the age of thirty, three years after his marriage, the poet likens himself to a cooking egg, i.e. an egg which has become stale, precluding the possibility of hatching into a new life so that it can only be used to appease hunger. To the poet, it seems to represent, metaphorically, his present state of debasement. It indicates to him the loss of his childhood world of Edenic innocence ('the penny world'), - 'perpetually lost and perpetually sought for'1, as also the loss of hope of spiritual regeneration.

Pipit whom the poet remembers as a childhood playmate is now, like himself, grown up. Having paid her a visit, perhaps in fancy, the poet reflects on the changes that now
\`divide\' them. He seems to find her \`old-fashioned, prim and proper\'.\(^2\) No doubt, she too, in her own way, has been reduced to a cooking egg. The visible hiatus between the poet's expectations and the reality seem to give a jolt to his sensibility. The poet seems to realize the ravages of time as bitterly as did Lord Byron:

\begin{quote}
There's not a joy the world can give like that it takes away. 
When the glow of early thought declines in feeling\'s dull decay: 
\`Tis not on youth\'s smooth cheek the blush alone, which fades so fast, 
But the tender bloom of heart is gone, ere youth itself be past.\(^3\)
\end{quote}

\`Pipit sate upright in her chair / Some distance from where I was sitting\'. There now exists between them, more than a mere physical distance, a distance of time. \`A lapse of, say, twenty years is sufficient for a man of thirty to feel hopelessly estranged from what was probably a sweetheart of his childhood.\(^4\) The difference obviously is one between the \`Oxford Colleges\' (and what they represent) and what her \`spinsterish habit of knitting\'\(^5\) and her middle-class ambience imply. What seems to have been left of his love is the fond memory of an \textit{Invitation to the Dance}, the poet's unrealized ideal of

\begin{quote}
The association of man and woman 
In daunsinge, signifying matrimonie --
A dignified and commodious sacrament.\(^6\)
\end{quote}
It now adorns Pipit's mantlepiece as a memento perhaps of "What might have been" (cf. La Ficlia's "I wonder how they should have been together!") , which is, as the poet contemplates in "Burnt Norton", only

\[ \text{an abstraction} \]
\[ \text{Remaining a perpetual possibility} \]
\[ \text{Only in a world of speculation.} \]

In the middle section of the poem, the poet enumerates his most essential, but as yet unrealized, earthly desires. One of them is for a little literary recognition to sustain him in his profession as a creative writer, a profession for which he had staked everything in life. His first collection of poems *Prufrock and Other Observations*, published in 1917, did not "sell out" until early in 1922. `The reviews in the English press were characteristically short and dismissive, the major complaint being that this was verse rather than poetry because it had no conception of "the beautiful". It was "amusing" but no more.'

The poet seems to mock at the notion of what he might get in Heaven. For, there seems to be little point in being placed, in some remote heaven, beside the embodiments of honour like Sir Philip Sidney and great historical figures like Coriolanus, if a little acclaim is to be denied him on earth.

The poet's next earthly need is for a little money. For, during the years following his marriage, he was in
desperate straits. What use would "Capital" be to him if he lived in utter penury on earth and, "in Heaven", "meet Sir Alfred Mond" and "lie together, lapt / in a five per cent. Exchequer Bond."

Likewise, it was during his early years in London that the poet, as an alien, was in need of some congenial company. Getting Lucretia Borgia for his bride in Heaven would be of no avail to him on earth. The poet would rather listen to Pipit's humble talk (now denied) than Lucretia's fabulous anecdotes in heaven.

Apropos of his present state of religious uncertainty and doubt, all the poet asks for on earth is humble Pipit as a spiritual guide. That being denied, it will not help him a wee bit here if, "in Heaven", Madame Blavatsky instructs him in the Seven Sacred Trances and Piccarda de Donati conducts him to some paradise.

The poet's reflection that he "shall not want" Honour, Capital, Society and even Pipit "in Heaven" underscores the fact that these are his unrealized earthly needs. The refrain "I shall not want", however, alludes to Psalms (xxiii, I): "The Lord is my shepherd: I shall not want". Nevertheless, vis-a-vis his present state of total deprivation, there seems to be bitter irony in the poet's exaggeration (Mark the capitals of Honour, Capital, Society,
which must not be ignored\(^\text{12}\) of what he might get in heaven. The stinging irony is suggestive of the poet's as yet inchoate faith in the Christian Gospel and his lurking doubts as to the existence of Heaven.\(^\text{13}\) But, as Eliot remarked later in life, doubt is inevitable for people of intellect. 'The doubter is a man who takes the problem of his faith seriously.'\(^\text{14}\)

In the last part of the poem, the poet reflects again on the tyranny of time. Just as later, in Animula, an 'Ariel' poem, the poet was to take a cue from Dante's description of 'l'anima semplicetta'\(^\text{15}\), so here does he contrast the world of infancy with the world of time and experience which robs the former of its glory:

\begin{quote}
But where is the penny world I bought
To eat with Pipit behind the screen?
The red-eyed scavengers are creeping
From Kentish Town and Golder's Green;
Where are the eagles and the trumpets?
\end{quote}

The 'scavengers' of time descend, with a vengeance, on the earthly Eden and sweep away his dreams of life. For a time, at least, it appears to him that 'Heaven itself offers no consolation'\(^\text{16}\) for the loss of these dreams. These, along with the eagles and the trumpets - his hopes of spiritual endeavor and achievement - seem to lie buried under mountains of snow, frozen in time. The image of The Alps aptly suggests 'both the height of the hope and the depth of the disappointment.'\(^\text{17}\)
In the last stanza of the poem, the poet lumps his lot with the "Weeping, weeping multitudes" who "Droop' in a hundred A.B.C.'s over 'buttered scones and crumpets' (Eliot's metaphors, perhaps, for women as 'strumpets'). The ignominy and shame that the poet experienced in suffering this inferno of lust (cf. Prufrock, Preludes, Hysteria, Gerontion, Burbank, Sweeney Erect and Sweeney Among the Nightingales) find poignant expression in the epigraph from Villon's Le Grand Testament: "In the thirtieth year of my life, / When I drank up all my shame'. The last lines of the poem are reminiscent of Byron's lines in Youth and Age:

Then the few whose spirits float above the wreck of happiness
Are driven o'er the shoals of guilt or ocean of excess:
The magnet of their course is gone, or only points in vain
The shore to which their shiver'd sail shall never stretch again.19

The experience of the poem is, obviously, not individual but representative. 'The "weeping multitudes" personate the whole world caught in the same trap'. Since Eliot's poetry is in the nature of his 'spiritual autobiography', albeit in a disguised form, this poem marks the state of dubiety that the poet experienced in the course of his spiritual evolution. It was to be a long time before he would apprehend, as in the Four Quarters, the mystery of the loss of earthly hopes and come to terms with his pain:
Who then devised the torment? Love.
Love is the unfamiliar Name
Behind the hands that wove
The intolerable shirt of flame
Which human power cannot remove.

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Le Directeur

This poem represents Eliot's humanitarian view of the social chasm between the affluent and the indigent. The point is quietly, but poignantly driven home to us through the juxtaposition of two brief images and one lone opening comment.

The first image is of the opulent share-holders of what one may presume to be an art gallery, moving arm-in-arm, ever so softly and slyly in a circle, in a corporate conspiracy as it were, albeit unconsciously. The other image is of a love-starved, pug-nosed little girl in rags, standing in a gutter outside, gaping at the scene inside.

The picture the poet evokes of the Director of the gallery is one of a rich, over-fed, generously-proportioned man who farts frequently fouling the air. The repeated use of 'Conservative' (the word forming a line by itself thrice, at

157
regular intervals) to qualify the Director and the art
gallery, accentuated by the attributive 'Reactionary' for the
share-holders of the gallery, underlines the fact that the
art gallery is a purely profit-making outfit, completely
devoid of the humanitarian motive. The Spectator, therefore,
comes to be perceived by the poet as representing the
quintessentially commercial mind which is wholly indifferent
'to truth, to love, and to religion - all things, in fact,
Eliot tried to recover.'

Viewed in this light, the abominable image of
pollution in the poem becomes an apt metaphor for the
desecration of the moral environment of humanity. One may
recall here a parallel situation in *The Waste Land* where the
profanation of modern civilization is reflected in the
external scene:

The river sweats
Oil and tar

The little one in tattered clothes, however, seems
visibly bowled over by the apparent splendour of the gentry.
Little does she know that, devoid of what Auden called in
*September 1, 1939* 'the ethical life', such people move about,
elegantly though, in 'the conservative dark'. The Director,
and his cohorts, are unburdened by moral awareness of the
plight of the underdog living close by in utter destitution.
Remarkably, in the "Fire Sermon" of The Waste Land, it is "the loitering heirs of City directors" who are responsible for the gross exploitation of the poor Thames daughters. Later in life too, Eliot was admittedly depressed at how the progress of industrialization was creating an apathetic citizenry.

The poet's close encounter with this instance of what Disraeli pithily characterised as The Two Nations, and his painful recognition of "a civilized but non-Christian mentality" account for the sigh of despair in his opening comment:

Malheur a la malheureuse Tamise
Qui coule si pres du Spectateur.
(Woe to the hapless Thames / That flows hard by the Spectator.)

Implicitly, the poem stresses the need to foster the virtue of Christian love.

The present poem, however, is not the sole instance of Eliot's humanitarian concern for the poor and the oppressed. It reverberates in his Preludes and Rhapsody on a Windy Night and is reaffirmed in his poetic drama The Murder in the Cathedral:

CHORUS: We have not been happy, my lord, we have not been too happy. We are not ignorant women, we know what we must expect and not expect. We know of oppression and torture,
We know of extortion and violence, 
Destitution, disease, 
The old without fire in winter, 
The child without milk in summer, 
Our labour taken away from us, 
Our sins made heavier upon us.6

Significantly, in his Boutwood Foundation lectures at Corpus Christi College, Cambridge, in March 1939 (later published under the title of The Idea of a Christian Society), Eliot was to offer the ideal model of a Christian order: a society which actively advanced the spiritual and ethical principles and values of Christianity among its citizens.7

*****

Translated into English, the poem reads:

The Director
Woe to the hapless Thames
That flows hard by the Spectator.
The conservative
Director
Of the Spectator
Fouls the air.
The reactionary
Shareholders
Of the conservative
Spectator
Arm-in-arm
Go round and round
Tip-toe.
In a gutter
A little girl
In tatters
Pug-nosed
Looks at
The Director
Of the conservative
Spectator
Starved of love.
The poem seems to be an occasion for Eliot, when he was nearing thirty, to take stock of his mental and spiritual growth. For, as Kristian Smidt has remarked, 'In the development of every man it is the first thirty years or so that count most. Knowledge and experience come to him with the greatest novelty in those years, his interests become clear to him and his profession is chosen or forced upon him.'

On the face of it, the poem is a facetious account of the haphazard and turbid course of Eliot's worldly career. It seems to make fun of the mutually contradictory passions that swayed him. However, in point of fact, it is a resume of what may be called Eliot's 'spiritual autobiography' wherein each experience contributes to the evolution of the poet's spiritual consciousness. As Yeats remarked, a poet is not a 'bundle of accident and incoherence that sits down to breakfast; he has been reborn as an idea, something intended, complete', although it is hard to say exactly how or when the

For the translation of Eliot's French poems, the researcher drew upon the expertise of Professor S.S Jethol and Dr. Cecilia of the Department of French, Panjab University, Chandigarh.
commanding idea is born. The poet seems to apprehend, justly though, that in evaluating his biography, the world is likely to be concerned with his "formal history and circumstance" rather than with what he called the "unattended" moments. More often than not, it fails to take into account "the definitive inward experiences" that form the invisible graph of his spiritual development. The poem is, in part, an ironical derision of the world ("Vous me paierez bien la tete.") for its failure to see his poetry and his life as "complementary parts of one design, a consuming search for salvation" and, in part, a vindication of the hidden design.

The poem provides certain signposts and leaves it to the reader to chart out the course of Eliot's inner life in the light of his poetry and his biography. The poem may be analysed in terms of five major phases of the poet's life: his formative years in America, his temporal experience of Paris et al., his grappling with philosophy and religion, his mystic conversion, and, finally, his vision of a saint and a martyr.

En Amerique, professeur;

This pithy line seems to have a dig at the world for its tendency to dismiss his career in America as a linear line of academic progression culminating in his being a
professor at Harvard. (Eliot taught a course in contemporary literature at Harvard.) There is implied censure of the world for its failure to perceive all those factors which shaped his psyche and which made him feel oppressed in America and decide to leave that country.

It would be apt to point out certain prominent strands of Eliot's American experience which reached a point of intersection in 1910 and led to his departure for Paris. It was primarily through his mother that Eliot imbibed the Emersonian trust in the individual's private light. Led by a yet nebulous 'notion of perfection', the poet instituted the uncompromising dichotomy between body and soul. This background was reinforced by Eliot's solitary habits, his growing distrust of family norms, especially its Unitarianism, his uneasiness in Boston, a society in decline, and, most important, his reading of Arthur Symons and the French poets and his secret wish to know the Absolute. This intersection marks the beginning of Eliot's religious quest.

C'est a Paris que je me coiffe
Casque noir de jemenfoutiste.

Led by a genuine urge for experience, the poet donned the metaphoric black cap of one-who-would-not-care-less and cast himself upon the current of worldly life, exhorting
himself to have his fling. Incidentally, it was probably during his year in France that he started to smoke French cigarettes. Temporarily though, he succumbed to la ferveur bergsonniene in Paris in 1911. His mind discarded solid intellectual supports, admitting only the fluid states of consciousness and intuitions in the making.\(^5\) (cf. *Rhapsody on a Windy Night*). The poet remembered this period rather nostalgically as a "romantic year". Desires curled upward like a wave as he dreamt of young Ariadne abducted by Bacchus.\(^6\) But, as in *The Smoke that gathers blue and sinks*, a dinner in a Parisian nightclub induced only torpor. The French sauces, the smoke of rich cigars, the after-dinner liqueurs seemed to blur his perceptions.\(^7\)

The poetry he wrote during 1910 and 1911 suggests that he felt more isolated than ever. The Parisian experience seems to have left him feeling like the young Emerson who wrote, "I am solitary in the vast society of beings; I consort with no species; I indulge no sympathies. I see the world, human, brute and inanimate nature; I am in the midst of them but not of them..."\(^8\)

Remarkably, in Paris, the poet pursued decadence and allowed lust and drunkenness to circle round him so that he might contemplate with horror a life bereft of morale or dignity.

164
But whatever the city - Boston, Paris, London - he saw people who were too apathetic and undisciplined to hope to escape their dreary fates. It was the poet's tour de force of what might represent to him the modern wasteland. Like the protagonist of The Little Passion⁹ (written in Paris), the poet is 'a lost soul in a bar' who continues to waste his energies in futile diving into dark retreats. He is the prototype of Prufrock and Gerontion, those wanderers of the city, the heroes of wasted passions.

After his insistent but inane explorations of the fleshpots of Europe and America, Eliot seems to have felt an overwhelming need to question an abhorrent world based on 'attrition, poverty, and drabness'. He came to Paris to be a poet; he left a philosophy student. Eliot returned to Harvard in September 1911. From 1911 to 1915 philosophy engulfed him. However, the study of philosophy sans religion at Harvard left Eliot unfulfilled. He craved philosophy in an ampler sense of wisdom. There was one teacher at Harvard, Josiah Royce, the chief exponent of Kantian idealism in America, who seems to have helped Eliot effect the transition between philosophy and religion. Royce posited an absolute, a world soul that reconciled the antithesis between the finite and the infinite. He perceived evolution as the form in which the
temporal constantly yearned to overreach itself, and, with
the ever-increasing growth of consciousness, strove for the
eternal.\textsuperscript{10}

A short stay in Germany, the haven of transcendental
philosophy, in 1914, included the unforgettable experience of
witnessing Professor Eucken of Jena University, pounding the
table, asserting the existence of spirit: `Was Is Geist?
Geist ist....'\textsuperscript{11} For Eliot, the memory of `an old woman on a
German mountain path' had a symbolic value, `but of what we
cannot tell', for it came to represent `the depths of
feeling into which we cannot peer.'\textsuperscript{12} The poet seems to have
experienced a sense of great spiritual exaltation, like
scaling mountains of some transcendent truth:

\begin{quote}
En Allemagne, philosophe
Surexcite par Emporheben
Au grand air de Bergsteigleben;
\end{quote}

Eliot came to believe that `there was no adequate truth in
the study of religion short of an absolute truth. And that
would be found, not through methodological inquiry, only
through intuitive sympathy.

It was at this time in his life that Eliot read
several works on psychology, mysticism, and theology. He
appears to have been intensely absorbed in exploring mystical
states of consciousness. His growing interest in
consciousness, however, first came to him through Symons who presented the artist in the role of a privileged seer. Like Henry James, Eliot turned away from the barren chaos of worldly life to the certitudes of Dante and St. Thomas.

Eliot's conversion, however, appears to have been not a sudden transformation but the culmination of a long process. "Towards any profound conviction", Eliot wrote later, "one is borne gradually, perhaps insensibly over a long period of time, by what Newman called "powerful and concurrent reasons"."13 "Every man who thinks and lives by thought", he observes in his essay on Pascal, "must have his own scepticism, that which stops short at the question, that which ends in denial, or that which leads to faith and which is somehow integrated into the faith which transcends it."14

This poem is concerned with the actual experience of searching, doubting and believing. There is celebration of the moment of conversion, in metaphoric terms though:

Je celebrai mon jour de fete  
Dans une oasis d'Afrique  
Vetu d'une peau de girafe.

It is a moment of spiritual birth, of recovery of the Eden-like state of innocent bliss. The oasis of spiritual regeneration has, however, been discovered after a long and arduous struggle in an equally metaphoric desert of the world. It would be apt to remind ourselves too that Eliot
attached great importance to the divine symbolism inherent in nature and primitive life. The 'moment' is also a vindication of Emerson's belief: 'In the solitude to which every man is always returning, he has a sanity and revelations which in his passage into new worlds he will carry with him.'

It has rightly been said that the turning point in Eliot's life came not at the time of his baptism in 1927, but in 1914 when he was caught in a whirligig of agitation, on the edge of conversion. This supposition is based on a group of intense religious poems Eliot wrote before he left Harvard in June 1914: 'After the turning...' I am the Resurrection...', 'So through the evening...', and 'The Burnt Dancer'. 'The Love Song of Saint Sebastian' was written in Germany in July 1914 and 'The Death of Saint Narcissus' at the end of 1914 or beginning of 1915. In these poems, a bold convert, a passionate martyr or saint displaces the frustrated philosopher of the 1910-12 poems. In his essay on 'Dante', Eliot speaks of 'the Catholic philosophy of disillusion'. This is the philosophy that he embraced. One of the things it teaches is 'to look to death for what life cannot give'. Like Rimbaud, the poet visualizes revolting against civilization and disappearing into the deserts of Africa. He aspires for what Arthur Symons described as Verlaine's struggle towards an ideal of spiritual consolation.
On montrera mon cenotaph  
Aux cotes brulantes de Mozambique.

The closing lines of the poem reveal Eliot's longing for metaphysical metamorphosis. The imaginary character dramatizes 'but in no obvious form, an action or struggle for harmony in the soul of the poet.'

Eliot's other experiences, as a lecturer, a banker, and a journalist, apparently adventitious, may be subsumed under the motif of the spiritual quest. 'En Yorkshire, conferencier' refers to a course of six afternoon lectures on Modern French Literature Eliot delivered in Ilkley, Yorkshire. The lectures had as their theme the reaction against Romanticism formulated in terms of a new classicism, the main tenets of which were 'an attack upon humanitarianism and liberal democracy, the espousal of a hard classicism after the flatulence of Rousseausist 'self-expression', the affirmation of absolute and objective values, and the recognition of the need for order and authority to discipline man's fallen state.'

As for being with Lloyds ('A Londres, un peu banquier'), the routine of the banking day gave 'a rigour and formality' to his life. The nine years with Lloyds marked the flowering of his creative instincts. It may here be observed that to the end of his life, Eliot faithfully
performed the kind of responsible daily labour that had been, for generations, the self-affirming activity of the Eliot family. Also, during his stint with Lloyds, Eliot, like John Davidson's personage in *Thirty Bob a Week*, saw through the more sordid aspects of the modern metropolis. And, as a 'literary journalist' ("En Angleterre, journaliste"), through his essays and reviews, Eliot was formulating his views on Tradition, Impersonality, and Unified Sensibility - concepts not without certain religious implications.

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Translated into English, the poem reads:

**An Odd Mixture**

In America, a professor;
In England, a journalist;
You will have to stride along and sweat
 Barely keeping pace with me in my tracks.
In Yorkshire, a lecturer;
In London, somewhat of a banker,
You will very much make fun of me.
It's in Paris that I wear a black cap
Of one who couldn't care less.
In Germany, a philosopher
Overexcited by a sense of elation
In the grand air of a mountaineer;
I wander always here and there
And get lost in fleshpots
From Damascus to Omaha.
I celebrate my birthday
In an oasis of Africa
Wearing a giraffe skin.

They'll point out to my cenotaph
On the burning coast of Mozambique.
Instead of the *joie de vivre* one would associate with *lune de miel*, the poem focuses on the harrowing experience of a honeymooning couple. The poet, however, views their earthly engagement against the backdrop of the Absolute. As a result, he seems to read in their travail implications of great spiritual import. He discerns, perhaps, in their journey the pilgrim motif which could point to a psychic movement away from the physical towards the divine. That impulse, however, belongs solely to the poet. For, the honeymooning couple is not cognizant of any such implications of their mundane experience.

The capitals of "Terre Haute' in the opening line indicate that the couple's transition from the low countries (the Netherlands) to the High Land of the Alps is viewed by the poet metaphorically as a pilgrimage from the 'low' life of this world to the sublime life of a higher realm. That again may, however, be only the poet's own reflection, not of the honeymooning couple. Their experience of a night's stay at Ravenna is nightmarish, what with the summer heat, a strong smell of dog, the company of two hundred bugs and four soft legs of the young honeymooners all swollen by the bites. They had to remove their sheets so as to scratch better.
These torments would, of course, have been compounded by their 'fleshly interests'.

Eliot, remarks Lyndall Gordon, 'could not glide swiftly past evil and ugliness' which 'oppressed him as the most commanding of his experiences.' However, as the poet himself said later, 'the contemplation of the horrid or sordid or disgusting by an artist, is the necessary and negative aspect of the impulse toward the pursuit of beauty. The negative is the more importunate.' In the poem, one observes that the poet's latent interest in the metaphysical reality of life in counterpoised against the distractions of the immediate surroundings. The latter seem to symbolize to him the 'infection' of the material world. The poet, in fact, strongly believed that 'the only perfection lay beyond it, with the Absolute'.

To the poet, the couple exemplifies the modern secular world's 'cultural apathy'. They just do not seem to be aware of the fact that less than a league from Ravenna is the holy basilica of Saint Apollinaire whose capitals of acanthus have the power to turn the wind ('tournoie le vent') i.e. divert man from his lust for physical union to the spiritual ardour for a union with the divine.
As a part of their ongoing tour, the honeymoonging couple resume their journey from Padua to Milan. For this they have to catch the eight o'clock train. Already in bad shape, mauled by the 'bugs', they cannot help carrying their misery and pain with them. When they reach Milan, at a late hour perhaps, they are somehow able to find supper and a cheap restaurant. They feel so wretched that it seems to be the last supper of their life. Financially too, they are in a tight corner. Consequently, they are preoccupied with such trivial matters as tips and similar calculations. Nevertheless, they have covered the whole continent and, presumably, seen Switzerland and passed through France.

In his description, however, the poet employs irony and *double entendre* as part of his poetic strategy. Unlike the couple, he views things in a philosophic perspective. A potential saint that he was, he apparently reflects upon man's misery caused by his earthly engagements as an inescapable fact of the temporal experience. It might pave the way for his alienation and exile from this world, symbolized here in Leonardo da Vinci's fresco, the *Last Supper*, housed in the convent of the church of Santa Maria delle Grazie at Milan. The poet would perhaps stand at the intersection of life and eternity, bidding adieu to the temporal in order to embrace the spiritual. He would be inspired by the lofty example of the twelve Apostles of
Christ standing in God's holy fire in the gold mosaic of Saint Apollinaire. Like Arnaut Daniel in Dante's *Purgatorio*, he too would ask the world to remember his pain, and plunge into the purifying fires of purgatory. A realization of the ultimate futility of mundane obsessions would exact from him the same response as that of the protagonist of *Ash-Wednesday*: 'And after this our exile'. It is thoughts such as these that seem to flit through the poet's mind. One can visualize him looking back at the honeymooning couple and, finding them gone, remarking, in the manner of Gerontion: 'Vacant shuttles / Weave the wind.'

The poet has another look at the basilica of Saint Apollinaire. He views it as 'Vieille usine...de Dieu' (an old factory of God that once produced holy men in the likeness of Him) now being put to another use. As basilica, however, like the Chapel Perilous in the Wasteland of Fisher King, it lies deserted:

There is the empty chapel, only the wind's home.

There is a note of poignancy in the last lines, prompted by the thought that there is no place for the spiritual values of Saint Apollinaire in the modern secular world. Nonetheless, the poet does not fail to perceive the fact that the old abandoned abode of God still preserves in its crumbling edifice the precise form of Byzantium, renowned for
its perfect synthesis of the material and the spiritual. It is in a place like this that man can be gathered into what Yeats called, the 'artifice of eternity'.

In the poem's debate between body and soul, therefore, it is the values of 'Terre Haute' that seem to triumph. For, both Saint Apollinaire and the Last Supper point towards a higher reality and seem to confirm the lower status of the world. In this context, one may observe that in the image of the crumbling stones of the monument, the poet perceives the insubstantiality of the material world. The image may be viewed as part of his 'poetic fantasies of a dissolving world'. Later, it was to be the impulse behind Eliot's *Whispers of Immortality*, as also the falling towers of London, Jerusalem, Alexandria, Athens, and Vienna in *The Waste Land*. No wonder Eliot came to feel the need to transcend the temporal world.

In *The Sacred Wood* Eliot says that 'Permanent literature is always a presentation'. The poet, he remarks, can deal with philosophical ideas, 'not as matter for argument, but as matter for inspection'. Viewed in this light, *Lune de Miel* may be perceived as an 'objective correlative' of the poet's vision of 'time' versus 'eternity', of 'the world' versus 'the Word'. As the poet observes in *Ash-Wednesday*,

175
Against the Word the unstilled world
still whirled
about the centre of the silent Word.

*****

Translated into English, the poem reads:

*The Honeymoon*

They saw the Netherlands, they are returning to High Land;
But on a summer night, here they are at Ravenna,
Comfortable between two bedsheets, in the company of two hundred bugs;
The summer sweat, and a strong smell of dog,
They lay on their back with their legs asunder
Four soft legs all swollen by the bites.
They remove the bedsheet so as to scratch better.
Less than a league from here is Saint Apollinaire
En Classe, basilica known to lovers
Of capitals of acanthus which turn the wind.
They are going to take the eight o'clock train
To prolong their misery from Padua to Milan
Where they find the Last Supper and a cheap restaurant.
Thinking of tips and doing one's calculation.
They will have seen Switzerland and passed through France.
And Saint Apollinaire, stiff and ascetic,
An old abandoned factory of God, still preserves
In its crumbling stones the precise form of Byzantium.
The Hippopotamus

In this poem, Eliot comes down hard on the clergy, especially the Unitarian clergy of New England, for having strayed from the high ideals of its office. In doing so, the poet makes a clear distinction between the 'True Church' founded by Christ and the latter-day 'Church' (each mentioned thrice in the poem). If the former is considered to be the soul of religion, the latter is thought to be mere 'flesh and blood'. The poet realizes the degradation of the Unitarian Church in terms of gross animality. The hippopotamus of the poem symbolizes the clergy of this debased Church.

The poet deprecates the Unitarian clergy for its lack of faith in the spiritual rigours enjoined upon it by true Christianity. He satirizes its easy life and its false notion of God's benevolence. Through the epigraph, he reminds the Unitarian ministers of St Paul's Epistle to the Colossians (iv, 16) exhorting the early Christians at Colossae and Laodicea to get right their Christian beliefs and observe their Christian duties in the true spirit. In glancing at 'the church of the Laodiceans', the poet reminds the Unitarian Church of God's strictures on the Church in Laodicea:

I know your works: you are neither cold nor hot. Would that you were cold or hot! So, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold
nor hot, I will spew you out of my mouth. For you say, I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing; not knowing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked....

(Revelation iii, 15-18)³

The poet distinguishes the True Church from the False through the contrastive metaphors of 'rock' and 'mud'. St Peter whose name meant 'rock' was a true apostle of Christ. Christ had proclaimed: 'thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it'. (Matthew xvi, 18). According to St Ignatius, the ministers of the Church constitute 'the assembly of the Apostles'.⁴ It is their strong self-discipline and sturdy character that form their religious mettle: 'the True Church can never fail / For it is based upon a rock'. It was, therefore, ordained that they give themselves over, with unremitting zeal, to their spiritual discipline eschewing material comfort: 'the True Church need never stir / To gather in its dividends'. Their sustenance was to be taken care of by the community they served by way of tithes.

Having drawn an outline of the True Church, the poet makes it a backdrop against which he satirically delineates the depravity into which the present-day Church has sunk. The broad-backed hippopotamus (reminiscent of the 'Broadbottomed', 'Apeneck Sweeney', 'pink from nape to base') is an emblem of the latter-day clergy. His posture of resting on his belly in the mud is a metaphor for the clergy's
idleness and indolence as also of its spiritual apathy. It seems to wallow in the mud of sordid materialism. And though, like the hippo, it presents a formidable look and 'seems so firm', it is 'merely flesh and blood'. Since 'Flesh and blood is weak and frail', it cannot be relied upon in times of crisis.

The poet jibes at the Unitarians' distortion of the notion of God's mercy. To them, God is benevolent enough to make light of their sinful craving for material comforts: 'The hippo's feeble steps may err' in this direction. And though, on account of their sedentary life-style, they are incapable of any physical effort, ('can never reach/The mango on the mango-tree'), epicurean delights drawn from all over the globe 'Refresh the Church'.

In spite of its abysmal failure on the spiritual front and its rank animality ('At mating time the hippo's voice/Betrays inflexions hoarse and odd'), however, the Unitarian clergy audaciously boasts of man's 'innate nobility' and 'likeness to God' and rejoices 'at being one with God'.

Like the hippopotamus's, the clergy's day is passed 'in sleep'. It is in the darkness of night that it prowls in search of the preys of its lust. In the line 'God works in a mysterious way', the poet obliquely refers to the opening
lines of William Cowper's *Light Shining out of Darkness* ("God moves in a mysterious way,/His wonders to perform") and makes them "a point of departure" for his satire. God indeed is so benevolent that even as the Unitarian clergy remains (spiritually) asleep, its creature comforts are taken care of. And, though it be in a state of total "Darkness", "Light" yet shines through it! Or so it fondly believes.

No doubt, the poet has a hearty laugh at the Unitarian clergy's presumption of ascending to heaven after death and being received in the folds of "the Church Triumphant" with the tumultuous honour that awaits a martyr and a saint. The satire hinges on "the absurdity of the gross hippopotamus entering heaven" while the True Church remains below, "Wrapt in the old miasmal mist":

I saw the `potamus take wing  
Ascending from the damp savannas,  
And quiring angels round him sing  
The praise of God, in loud hosannas.  
Blood of the Lamb shall wash him clean  
And him shall heavenly arms enfold,  
Among the saints he shall be seen  
Performing on a harp of gold.  

He shall be washed as white as snow,  
By all the martyr'd virgins kist...

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180
Dans le Restaurant

The theme of the poem is how the sensual urge grips the human psyche at a very tender age, and stalks it through life, even though with man its meaningless iteration terminates in a sense of guilt and remorse. The poem suggests a passage to salvation through the agony of `death by water'.

The title of the poem is highly symbolic. The definite article preceding `Restaurant', paradoxically though, tends to take the reader from a specific place in time to a universal one so that `le Restaurant' carries the connotations of this world being a place where, driven by physical appetites, man is under certain biological compulsions to seek their gratification.

The poem opens with its focus on the desperate plight of a ruined waiter. With a rounded rump (emblematic of his strong physicality, perhaps), and innumerable stains on his waistcoat (possibly signifying a life soiled by incessant acts of debauchery), he is shown rubbing his hands, seeking to share his agony with the narrator. He is the quintessential man, a victim of insatiable lust.

The first lines coming from the waiter (`Dans mon pays...des gueux') are saturated with irony. Eliot places a conventional persona in a context (the description of the place suggests Cornwall, the south-west coastal county of
England, which has wind-swept moors, hot sun, rain, thickets of blackthorn and willow and patches of primroses) that evokes a deeper reality of which he is unaware. The narrator, however, given the nature of his sensibility and experience, seems poignantly aware of it. For him, the waiter's country has features which may have a certain metaphoric value. The shower of rain ('de la pluie') may be a metaphor for divine grace that redeems man from his state of sin. It is for such a shower that Parsifal yearned in the course of his journey to the Chapel Perilous and, finally, when he reached it, there was 'a flash of lightning' and then 'a damp gust/Bringing rain'. Likewise, the time of hot sun ('du grand soleil') would signify to him what Eliot was to call in 'Dry Salvages', 'a lifetime's death in love,/ Ardour and selflessness and self-surrender'. He would recall the death of Saint Narcissus who danced to God on the hot sand even as arrows pierced his flesh. A part of the same pattern of divine symbols would be the wind ('du vent') whose prophetic message is heard by the devout in the quietude of their soul. The poet, whose alter ego the narrator seems to be, had this aspect of the wind in mind when he wrote:

And God Said
Prophesy to the wind, to the wind only for only
The wind will listen.
Unlike the narrator, the waiter symbolising perhaps the humdrum mass of ignorant humanity, is quite incognisant of the spiritual significance of the wind, the sun, and the rain. This ignorance is writ large in *The Waste Land* where

Summer surprised us, coming over the Starnbergersee With a shower of rain; we stopped in the colonnade...6

There, 'the sun beats',7 and 'The wind / Crosses the brown land, unheard'.8 The narrator apprehends that in the country of the waiter, the elements of nature foster temporal desire in contrast to their role as agents of spiritual transformation. The shower in the waiter's country, thus, has its parallel in Eliot's *Preludes* where

A gusty shower wraps
The grimy scraps
Of withered leaves about your feet
And newspapers from vacant lots;
The showers beat
On broken blinds and chimney-pots...9

Likewise, the sun might serve no better than keep one warm. And, as for the wind, it could be wind of desire that sweeps man off his feet. The narrator shares the sensibility of Gerontion, perhaps, who finds himself

An old man in a draughty house
Under a windy knob10

or a

Gull against the wind, in the windy straits
Of Belle Isle...11
The narrator, therefore, apprehends a state of spiritual
distemper obtaining in the waiter's country.

Equipped with this background, it should be easy for
the reader to stand alongside the narrator and grasp the
implications of being enmeshed in lust among thickets of
blackthorn and willow - the wet willows (conventional haunt
of lovers), and the buds on the brambles (temptations of
young love which are not without their share of pain). The
lines look forward to the scene of young love in the hyacinth
girl passage in *The Waste Land* that brings the lover the pain
of disillusionment:

-- Yet when we came back, late, from the hyacinth
garden,
Your arms full, and your hair wet, I could not
Speak, and my eyes failed, I was neither
Living nor dead, and I knew nothing,
Looking into the heart of light, the silence.  

To proceed with *Dans le Restaurant*, the waiter
narrates how he, when just seven, and a little girl younger
to him, took shelter under a willow-tree in a downpour. She
was all wet. It was at that moment that he had given her
primroses. (cf. "You gave me Hyacinths first a year
ago..."13) While tickling her to make her laugh, he was
overpowered by a sudden impulse. It was a moment of power and
of frenzy. (It comes almost as a revelation to the narrator
that sexual urge burgeons in man so early: "Mais alors,
vieux lubrique, a cet age...") For the little boy then, it
was a hard nut to crack. And, while they were cuddling, there came a big dog, who bounded at them. The boy was scared, and left her midway. Later, he cursed himself for his fear and cowardice, and regretted his loss of sensual pleasure. That's how it all begins, in innocence, suggests the poem, but invariably ends up with much pain.

The waiter finds himself in a quandary because there is no respite from the malady afflicting him. This is, what Eliot was to call in *Ash-Wednesday*, the

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torment
Of love unsatisfied
The greater torment
Of love satisfied
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The waiter wept inconsolably over his inability to rid himself of the curse. But the narrator discovers in his grief, his overweening sense of remorse and penitence:

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Mais alors, tu as ton vautour !
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He asks him to wipe the ripples ("les rides") from his face, which have the potency to purge his sins, as Phlebas' were after his "death by water":

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A current under sea
Picked his bones in whispers.  
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Almost like a priest at a confessional, the narrator proceeds to initiate the waiter into, as it were, a course of
religious purification. He passes him his fork, with which to "strip the flesh from your skull' as a vulture would do. He enjoins upon him to go and take a ritual bath. (cf. the ceremony of foot-washing which precedes the restoration of the Fisher King by Parzival in *The Waste Land*.) Significantly, the narrator, while wondering how the waiter will make amends for his sins, makes an unwitting admission of his own similar transgressions. As such, the vulture of "secret obsessive agony' gnaws, Prometheus-like, at the heart of both. Significantly, in a letter written several years later, Eliot was to compare himself to "Prometheus, whose liver was perpetually gnawed by vultures. But he needed that vulture and indeed in some ways he became his own, perpetually feeding upon himself and watching his own torments." It is said that he was "tormented by remorse and the weight of the past'.

The last passage of the poem depicts the way out of the throes of despair. It is the way of 'death' which, paradoxically, is the way into 'life'. It was 'death by water' which liberated Phlebas, the Phoenician sailor, from the curse of earthly desires and material obsessions symbolized in 'the cry of gulls and the deep-sea swell off Cornwall' and 'the cargo of tin'. (Tin and copper mined in Cornwall were traded with the Phoenicians of the Mediterranean as long ago as the 6th century BC.) But the
expiation was not easy. After having been drowned for fifteen days, he had to pass, as in a flashback, the stages of his life and atone for every sin in great penitence and pain. The myth of Phlebas, however, in its association with the vegetation and fertility myths, with their death-life motif, symbolizes the eternal dilemma of man vis-a-vis earthly desires, as well as the way through the maze. It prompts one, as Eliot observes in his essay on 'Dante', 'to look to death for what life cannot give'. It is the way of the ascetic, the saint and the martyr. This alone, suggests the poem, can bring about the spiritual metamorphosis of man.

It is in the context of this poem, as well as *Prufrock* and *Mr. Apollinax*, that one may observe that Eliot breathed in 'the climate of ideas made by Frazer, Freud and Jung'. No doubt, 'philosophy, depth psychology, and ritual anthropology' coalesce in the poem to recover, what Eliot characterized in *The Use of Poetry* as, 'the deeper, unnamed feelings...to which we rarely penetrate.'

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187
The ruined waiter has nothing to do
Apart from rubbing his hands and leaning on my shoulder:

`In my country it will be rainy season now,
Of wind, of hot sun, and of rain again;
That's what one calls the day of the beggars' wash.'

(Garrulous, slobbery, with a rounded rump,
I pray, at least do not dribble into my soup).

The wet willow-trees, and the buds on the brambles --

It's there, in a downpour, that one takes shelter.
I was seven years old, she was younger.
She was all wet, I gave her the primroses.'
The stains on his waistcoat rose to the number of thirty eight.

`I was tickling her, to make her laugh.
I felt a moment of power and frenzy.'

But then, lewdly old, at that age...

`Sir, the act is tough.
There comes, with us cuddling, a big dog;
I was scared, I left her midway.
It's a pity.'

But then, you have your vulture!
Go and clean the ripples from your face;
Take my fork, and pick your head.
In which way will you pay back experiences like mine?
Take, here're ten sous, for the bathroom.

Phlebas, the Phoenician, for fifteen days drowned,
Forgot the cry of gulls and the swell off Cornwall,
And the profit and the loss, and the cargo of tin:
A current from under-sea carried him far back,
He passed the stages of his (past) life.
Imagine then, it was a painful fate;
And yet, he was once a handsome and very tall man.
The title of the poem focuses on what probably is the saturation point of human perception, which enables man to relate himself to the absolute truth, hear whispers of immortality, and enter into a living communion with the divine. In choosing to write on the subject, the poet had perhaps at the back of his mind an experience he had of a "timeless moment' when he was suddenly enfolded in a great silence.¹ "You may call it communion with the divine or you may call it temporary crystallization of the mind', Eliot said later.² (cf. Wordsworth's *Tintern Abbey*) The communion, however, depends on man's capability to hear

The Word without a word, the Word within
The world and for the world...³

The burden of the present poem is that before one can hear the Word or the whispers of immortality, one has to undergo a certain kind of death which results in a new life. The ordeal involved in this process of death and birth finds poignant expression in Eliot's *Journey of the Magi*:

this Birth was
Hard and bitter agony for us, like Death, our death⁴.

An evolved state of human consciousness is reached as a result of man's close brush with life and his capacity to make a 'unified' response to it.
The first part of the poem illustrates how man can deduce wisdom from his experience so as to reach beyond experience and seek the ultimate truth of life. The second and last part is given to people who are lost in the maze of experience and do not learn anything from it. In the last two lines, the poet rues the fact that youngsters in America with a Unitarian background were a repressed lot, deprived of a full-blooded participation in life's rich and variegated experience so necessary for their inner growth.

In 'A Sceptical Patrician' (Athenaeum, May 23, 1919), Eliot wrote: 'It is probable that men ripen best through experiences which are at once sensuous and intellectual'. To Webster, for instance, the thought of human mortality and transience of man's 'infirm glory' was part of his sensuous apprehension of the 'lusts and luxuries' of life. When he held a buxom lady in his sensual embrace, says the poet, he would see through the facade of external charm to 'the skull beneath the skin'. He would visualize her already as a 'breastless' creature in her grave leaning backward with a 'lipless grin'. In the 'grin', he might as well discern 'death' mocking at the vanities of life.

In grappling with lust, Webster saw through the nature of carnal desire. It tightened its grip over man's
thoughts and seemed to linger beyond death, staring from the
sockets of the eyes. It would, doubtless, sprout again like
the `Daffodil bulbs'. It should be helpful to consider how,
in Eliot's *Portrait*, the lady talks of `these April sunsets,
that somehow recall / My buried life' even as the `lilacs' of
her desire bloom again. And, in *The Waste Land*, the burial of
the (spiritually) dead leads to the breeding of `lilacs'
which bring back the agony of insatiable desire.

Webster experienced life passionately and intensely
and emerged from its ordeals sadder but, nevertheless, wiser.
Ambition, pleasure, beauty, passion, the lust of the eyes
and the pride of life -- to look to these for happiness, he
learnt, was to court disappointment and disillusionment. The
lesson he learnt from life, however, was a practical one and
not a theoretical formulation. To Eliot, Donne was such
another for whom the `torment / of love unsatisfied' or `The
greater torment / of love satisfied' were no abstract
notions. He had a searing experience of `the anguish of the
marrow / The ague of the skeleton'. But he too realized that

No contact possible to flesh
Allayed the fever of the bone.

Eliot himself may, in fact, have learnt from his study of
Buddhist thought of the `cause productive of misery, which is
the selfish desire, ever renewed, of satisfying one's self,
without being able ever to secure the end.\textsuperscript{8} The realization, such as Webster's or Donne's, is, quite plausibly, ancillary to man's aspiration for, and apprehension of, the ultimate reality of life. Significantly, in 1919 Eliot was to discuss the sermons of John Donne and compare the work of this divine with Buddha's 'Fire Sermon'. And, in March 1921, he was to describe the human wisdom of certain Elizabethan and Jacobean poets which led towards and was only completed by `the religious comprehension'.\textsuperscript{9}

It is also significant to observe that the protagonist in \textit{Ash-Wednesday}, having realized the grim truth that what was dust returned (also re-turned) to dust, visualizes what the Hindu scriptures call the `siddh-avastha' (the self-realized state) which ushers in

\begin{verbatim}
End of the endless
Journey to no end
Conclusion of all that
Is inconclusible.\textsuperscript{10}
\end{verbatim}

The protagonist there recovers his receptivity to the divine and hears `Speech without word and / Word of no speech'. Finally, in `the Garden / Where all love ends', the fever of the bone is allayed and the bones sing `in the cool of the day', under a juniper-tree, glad to be scattered.
For those, then, who 'by gift of genius' are set apart, life is a pilgrimage (cf. Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress*) from the mortal to the immortal. But this course is open to those who, possessed of a spiritual sensitivity, savour experience but do not get bogged down by it. They are able to arrive, through the moment, at the 'timeless moment'. For, as Eliot observed in 'Burnt Norton': 'Only through time time is conquered.'

Much to his dismay, Eliot discovered that the 'timeless moment' was an area of experience which contemporary images of life could not encompass. The second part of the poem, beginning with Grishkin, brings us face to face with a different sensibility. Whereas Webster and Donne found no substitute for sense, they were yet 'Expert beyond experience'. The people in Grishkin's 'drawing room' also find no substitute for sense (mark the irony), but they do not go beyond it. For them, the fragrance of Grishkin's uncorseted 'friendly bust' offers the ultimate in 'pneumatic' (derived from a Greek word meaning 'spiritual') bliss. The uninhibited sensual pleasure offered by Grishkin reminds us of the pagan delights of the modern secular world in Gerontion

To be eaten, to be divided, to be drunk
Among whispers...
These are the modern-day surrogates for the whispers of immortality.

By comparing the feline Grishkin with the 'Couched Brazilian Jaguar' laying a trap for 'the scampering marmoset' with her 'subtle effluence', the poet leaves us in no doubt that he intends us to view Grishkin as 'the dangerous enchantress'. Sinister and emasculating, she radiates an energy that Poe and Hawthorne regarded as perverse and dangerous. Eliot too regarded a seductive woman not as a human being, but as man's ordeal, a figure of sin with whom he had heroically to consort. So great, however, is Grishkin's siren charm that even the 'Abstract Entities' (a pejorative appellation for modern day philosophers who deal in abstract ideas that do not stem from life) are drawn to her. They do not perceive 'the skull beneath the skin' because they are incapable of making a 'unified' response to life. Eliot was probably disturbed by the idea in Remy de Gourmont's essay on Laforgue that in living 'one acquires the faculty of dissociating intelligence from sensibility'. Whereas for people like Webster and Donne, thought was an inextricable part of experience, which modified their sensibility, for the 'Abstract Entities', philosophy exists in the abstract. It is what Allen Tate calls 'the inhuman abstraction of the modern mind'. It does not stem from experience and, as such, fails to modify sensibility. Nor is
the 'sense' informed by 'thought'. For, swayed by the humanistic cult of 'sense', the modern-day philosophers do not bother about the past or the future. In their example, Eliot discerns the alienation of philosophy from religion. For, they dismiss the religious notion of the absolute as 'vague non-sense'. They consider truth as relative rather than absolute, and do not, as such, uphold absolute moral standards of good and evil. The poet seems to decry the fact that they do not crave for philosophy in an ampler sense - wisdom, insight, revelation. No doubt, the Word remains 'Swaddled with darkness'.

Nevertheless, despite the modern secular world's failure to gain spiritual insight from its experience of 'sense', the poet envies it the experience denied to him by his Unitarian background. It may be observed in this context that Eliot found the religion taught by his grandfather, William Greenleaf Eliot, to be 'morally strict rather than spiritual'. The poet rued the fact that his early training in self-denial had left him permanently scarred by an inability to enjoy even harmless pleasures. Such an upbringing, however, was not peculiar to the Eliot home. In Axel's Castle (1931), Edmund Wilson points to the fact of Henry James and several other New England writers, as well as

The wind
Crosses the brown land, unheard.
Eliot, having regretted an emotionally undernourished youth, the main cause of which was the Puritanism of their environment and upbringing.  

No doubt, in the closing lines of the poem, Eliot complains that sensitive individuals of his generation in America were debarred by the 'metaphysics' of their religion from experiencing life intensely. They were obliged to remain content with crawling between the 'dry ribs' of what Emerson had described as 'corpse-cold Unitarianism'. The note of pathos here, underlined by grim humour, remains unrelieved. Thus viewed, the poem is part of the poet's 'grouse against life'.

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Mr. Eliot's Sunday Morning Service

Prompted by Eliot's disgust of the Sunday morning services conducted by his cousin, Fred Eliot, a Unitarian minister, the poem is a strong indictment of this sect. The poet finds in the 'Service' an instance of the religious deception perpetrated by the presbyters on the laity.

The epigraph from The Jew of Malta alludes to the clergy's exploitation of their religious office. (cf. epigraph of Portrait of a Lady). In Marlowe's play, the two
friars, tempted by the love of lucre, undertake to absolve the Jew of the ghastly sin of having poisoned a convent of nuns. They are, however, duped in this, as the Jew, knowing them to be 'religious caterpillars', merely plays upon their pecuniary vulnerability. The poem views the presbyters in this adverse light.

In the first two stanzas, the presbyters seem to base their religious discourse on the Bible. They harp on John i: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God". In arguing about the birth of Christ, however, they stray from the Christian theology to blend it with the Greek concept of the Logos, the One. The attributive 'Polyphiloprogenitive' might be Eliot's fusion of polyphyletic (i.e. derived from more than one common ancestor) and progenitive (i.e. capable of begetting). The image of Christ that the 'sapient subtlers of the Lord' engender in the mind of the devout is one of 'Superfetation' of 'the One'. The Lord thus produced by this intellectual hybridization is no different from 'enervate Origen' (the attributive 'enervate' telescoping his castration into weakness of doctrine). It detracts from the divinity of Christ. In the poet's view, the presbyters' pompous and learned preoccupation with the controversial aspects of Christianity serves only to mystify the devout. By drifting 'across the window-panes' (cf. the image of the fog rubbing...
its back upon the window-panes in *Prufrock*), they obscure the congregants' perception of the true significance of the Incarnation. Nevertheless, the mystery of the Incarnation endures.

The original significance of the eternal Word is visible within the Church in the mural of the Baptized God. In this painting of the Umbrian school, despite the spiritual 'wilderness' created by time's erosion of faith, and despite the water of faith having turned 'pale and thin', the 'unoffending feet' of 'the human form of the Word made flesh... shine through the baptismal waters'. Remarkably, there is 'a revealing lyric note' in the description of the painting that seems to affirm to the poet his faith in the Trinity. For, according to the account of the Baptism in *Matthew* iii, just after the ceremony the Holy Spirit descended and God addressed his Son. The third and fourth stanzas should, however, be studied the light of what Eliot complained later in a book review in *The Criterion* of July 1931, decrying the fact that in the form of Unitarianism in which he was instructed, the 'Son and the Holy Ghost were not believed in', though they were 'entitled to respect as entities in which many other people believed'. It is interesting to note that an engraving of Murillo's Immaculate Conception, which hung in his parents' house, made an enduring impression on Eliot's mind.
The fifth stanza returns to the "sable presbyters' (the attributive signifying their inner darkness) as "religious caterpillars', passing "a gaping collection plate among the pews", only too glad to peddle the Word like "a catchpenny commodity". The young sinners with red and pimpled faces, a mark of their dissolute living, are waiting with their expiatory pennies with which to purchase the remission of their sins. The prelates here, who are easy in penance-giving, remind us of Chaucer's Friar: "Sweetly he heard his penitents at shrift / With pleasant absolution, for a gift". The poet's satire here is directed both at the youthful members of the congregation who naively believe that money can buy forgiveness for sins and the presbyters who propagate this belief and presume to grant pardon for sins in return for money. In its implicit indictment of empty idolatry of forms, and of the clergy who are "insatiate of gain", the stanza echoes the sentiments of the poet's mother expressed in Savonarola:

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The church of old
Had chalices of wood, while all of gold
Her prelates were. Now are her prelates wood,
Her chalices of gold, and it is good
For this to rob the poor.
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One might recall here the indictment of corrupt clergy by Chaucer.
In 1916 and 1917, Eliot had criticized writers who tried to reformulate Christianity so as to make it more palatable to the 'enlightened' bourgeoisie. He was opposed to the removal of asceticism and radicalism from Christianity. It made the religion too tepid and liberal. In the poem, the scene of 'fruitless formalism' whereby the atonement of sin is made easy, is followed by a picture (perhaps another painting) of true expiation. It shows 'the entrance to Purgatory, through which the souls must pass to be cleansed of sin before they may enter Heaven'. There, in the Purgatory, the souls of the penitent burn 'invisible and dim', sustained by the image of the Seraphim who belong to the highest order of angelic beings and who are gifted with love and associated with light, ardour, and purity. The presbyters, however, fail to inspire in the devout a religious fervour of this kind.

The seventh stanza, therefore, provides a sharp contrast between these 'sapient subtiers' and the bees who in Nature perform the 'Blest office of the epicene'. Whereas the bees are the subtlers (i.e. suppliers) who, maintaining their own neutrality, bring about fertility in Nature by carrying the pollen from the stamen of one flower to the pistil of another, the presbyters, like the physically (and spiritually) castrated Origen, bring the mind of the devout in touch only with a lifeless and uninspiring image of the
Lord which fails to impregnate them spiritually. As such, "their proper reproductive function, that of conveying pollen of truth to their spiritually unfertilized parishioners, is thwarted by religious sterility".20

In the last stanza, the presbyters are likened to Sweeney, the vulgarian, in the bathtub. They have given themselves up to a life of sensual delights, shifting "from ham to ham", stirring the water in their bathtubs. (cf. The Hippopotamus). In doing so, they are as oblivious of the spiritual significance of Baptism as Sweeney. Children of Origen, they are arch-heretics who are masters of the art of subtlety, which they sustain by shifting from one meaning to another of some obscure Biblical truths. Ironically, they are the "polymath", the learned, who cannot see the Word in the maze of their own words.

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Sweeney Among the Nightingales

In plot, setting, and characters, this poem has been considered as opacity itself.1 This is primarily because the protagonist of the poem has erroneously been identified with Sweeney, the ape-man. The poem, however, does not seem so much about what happens to Sweeney, a creature of the world

201
of lust, intrigue, violence and death, who is an individual outside of the protagonist of this poem. It seems to be about the Sweeney within him, representing the "continuous instinctual drives, the unconscious forces in man" meant to illustrate, as in Mr. Apollinax, "the inveterate conflict between spiritual and fleshly man". The title of the poem refers to Elizabeth Barrett Browning's *Bianca Among the Nightingales* where the nightingales "sing for doom". Even as the protagonist is swayed by lust in the midst of the "Nightingales" (a slang for prostitutes), the poet chooses to call him "Sweeney". However, he seems to do so with his tongue in his cheek, in a tone of deprecation. This is plausible because, even though he visualizes him in terms of the "Apeneck", the "protagonist participates in mythical experience as authentic as that of Oedipus or Agamemnon, and "embodies the knowledge of conflict and death which Oedipus possessed near the end of his life, as he rested in a grove sacred to the furies and listened to the song of the nightingales". It is this awareness of the portents of his "fall" (a kind of spiritual death) vis-a-vis the base intrigues of lust, and the "golden grin" of triumph on escaping such a fate that distinguish the protagonist from Sweeney, the brute, who is totally devoid of the "human" dimension.
The epigraph drawn from *Agamemnon*, "Alas, I am struck deep with a mortal blow.\(^7\) should be deciphered in the light of the *Ode* (a poem included in *Ara Vos Prec* but subsequently suppressed) where the grievous hurt is caused by "a deflowered bride, degraded to a "succuba".\(^8\). As a result, the "sacred wood" there is silent (the only voices being raised 'celebrate the ugliness of sex'), and the concluding image shows the protagonist vanquished by the wounds of his struggle.\(^9\) The hurt could also, however, have been caused by a sense of 'sexual infidelity and brutality' implied in the allusion to the Philomel myth in another epigraph prefixed to the poem as published in *Ara Vos Prec*: "Why should I speak of the nightingale? The nightingale sings of adulterous wrong.\(^10\)

The opening stanza describes the protagonist in terms of his animal relationship:

Apeneck Sweeney spreads his knees
Letting his arms hang down to laugh,
The zebra stripes along his jaw
Swelling to maculate giraffe.

The external loosening of the limbs here, associated with animal laughter, is suggestive of a corresponding inward slackening of moral controls. The act carries overtones of vulgarity even as the animal in man takes over. It facilitates the protagonist's easy drift into a more vulnerable state.
There are, besides, forces of evil in the firmament alongside those of good. And there are moments when the former conspire with the evil tendencies in man to bring about his doom. The protagonist, closetted with his 'Nightingales' in a tavern, is captivated by low appetites that rise from the underworld, emerging through 'the horned gate' in the form of true dreams, and enchant him in the shape of two temptresses. The 'circles of the stormy moon' slide westward toward the River Plate. As a result, the metaphoric river is flooded at its tidal mouth. It threatens to engulf the protagonist and sweep him into the foul sea of sensuality. The irony of the situation is that while 'Death and the Raven' drift above, our Sweeney, oblivious of the peril, is conniving with the forces of doom by literally guarding the gate of this 'underworld' lest his act of lechery is exposed. His state of inebriation is thus a curious blend of the unconscious and the conscious impulses - the former given over to low desires, the latter keeping an eye on the door of the tavern!

The threat of 'death through lechery' looms large despite the presence of auspicious constellations like the 'Orion and the Dog' which forecast the approach of the harvest rain and the fertilizing floods. Such positive influences as these, signifying the flowering and consummation of love in marriage, have, however, been
obfuscated by the clouds of sterile lust. As a result, the seas of love are ‘shrunken’ and ‘hushed’. There is total lack of communication and communion. Despite the privacy of the dive-room, there is no exchange of emotions, only certain animal movements which are a prelude to the copulation of the beasts. It is at this stage when the protagonist has been brought low by his primal instincts to the level of a Sweeney, that the ‘person in the Spanish cape’ attempts to seduce him by sitting on his knees.

The protagonist, however, is Sweeney only in name and lacks the formidable lust and virility associated with the prototype. The sexual act, therefore, ends in a fiasco with the woman slipping from his knees to the floor. She, however, reorganizes herself in another seductive posture, albeit with a yawn (a sign of weary drudgery) but, finding no response from the protagonist, draws her stocking up. The image of the coffee-cup overturning insinuates the ‘cheap extinction’ of a momentary pleasure not distinct from one to be derived from a cup of coffee. The sex act in this sordid world has no more significance than that.

The silent man in mocha brown is perhaps the host who keeps the den. It is strange, however, that he continues sprawling at the window-sill, gaping at the goings-on between the protagonist and the women, as in a peep-hole show. (cf. the gaping Priapus in Mr. Apollinax).
The waiter brings in oranges, bananas, figs and hothouse grapes meant to bolster the sexual urge in the protagonist. The host shows half an inclination for them but withdraws in favour of the customer. The protagonist, however, watches the formidable Rachel nee Rabinovitch tearing at the grapes with her 'murderous paws'. It is this sight that seems to wake him up to the awful reality of being in the midst of ravenous beasts for whom he is no more than a prey of their wild lust. He sees through their conspiracy to bring about his fall by one means or another. A learned critic has indeed considered the approaching disaster as possibly sexual. The protagonist, therefore, 'Declines the gambit', makes an excuse of fatigue 'with heavy eyes', and leaves the room. The fact that he realizes in time his state of moral peril and consciously eschews the pleasures of lust is evident from his 'golden grin' of triumph framed in the branches of wistaria even as he leans in at the window to have a last look at the place of his possible doom from which he has escaped almost unscathed.

As the protagonist leaves the place, the host is seen conversing with someone indistinct (behind the door apart), may be another customer. The protagonist emerges from the stuffy atmosphere of the place into the open and hears the nightingales singing near The Convent of the Sacred Heart. He can hear in their song the note of Christian love to which
man should turn from his earthly engagements. Later, in an epigraph to the fragments of *Sweeney Agonistes*, Eliot was to quote from St. John of the Cross: "Hence the soul cannot be possessed of the divine union, until it has divested itself of the love of created beings."¹⁵

The song of the nightingales, a symbol of spiritual regeneration (as of Philomel), first associated with the suffering and knowledge of Oedipus, now seems to echo the tranquillity of the convent and to suggest the permanence of its values that exist within a world of continuous violence and death.¹⁶ The nightingales are "singing" of it now, as they "sang" of it in the past in the "sacred wood". Their "inviolable voice"¹⁷ is ranged against the profanity of the "Nightingales" who continue to defile love, even as they did in times past.

In the poet's imagination, the grove of the Furies at Colonus filled with singing nightingales,¹⁸ and his own "sacred wood", a grove of the Muses,¹⁹ get associated with the "bloody wood" because of the painful memory of Agamemnon's cruel murder at the hands of his adulterous wife. Unlike him, the base "Nightingales", unaware of the spiritual significance of suffering and death, continue to "stain the stiff dishonoured shroud" of Agamemnon with their "liquid siftings".

207
In Eliot's poetry there is a constant awareness of 'two worlds, two planes of existence', the physical and the metaphysical. And there is a decided movement, even if, at moments, at the level of contemplation only, from one plane to the other. The early poetry of Eliot is as much rooted in this awareness, and as keenly concerned to transcend the physical, as the later.
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210
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215
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218
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220