



## Eliot's *Ariel Poems*: The Predicament of the Modern Man in Quest of Spirituality

### POÈME D'ELIOT ARIEL: SITUATION DIFFICILE EN QUÊTE DE SPIRITUALITÉ DE L'HOMME MODERNE

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#### Abstract

This article tries to make a religious reading of five of Eliot's *Ariel Poems*. T.S Eliot took to the composing of poetry in order to impart religious cognizance among his readers which has a refined under-pattern of great validity in changing the life outlook of men and women with an average sensibility. He was very much concerned about the fate of a society moving inexorably toward thoroughgoing secularism and the materialism which accompanies it. Apart from Eliot's literary and critical vocations, his *Ariel Poems* are of great significance in underlining Eliot's efforts to express his thoughts and feelings in regard to the difficult experiences one has to face in the course of a human soul's bid to take a religious ascent and crystallize its integration both from within and without. This is how Eliot got deeply committed to religion in terms of poetic sensibility though, his contemporaries labeled him as an iconoclastic innovator of literary form and language. With this perspective in mind, in this article the predicament of the modern man in ascending spirituality and search for reality in the Eliot's *Ariel Poems* is undertaken to be examined. This article also argues that through his vocations Eliot touches on the various problems connected with modern man's religious awareness and liturgical values.

**Key words:** Eliot; Spirituality; Quest; Predicament; *Ariel Poems*

#### Résumé

Cet article tente de faire une lecture religieuse de cinq

d'Eliot, *Poèmes d'Ariel* AOS. TS Eliot a pris le composant de poésie afin de conférer connaissance religieuse parmi ses lecteurs, qui dispose d'un raffiné sous-motif de validité grande dans l'évolution des perspectives de vie des hommes et des femmes avec une sensibilité moyenne. Il était très préoccupé par le sort d'une société en mouvement inexorablement vers la laïcité en profondeur et le matérialisme qui l'accompagne. En dehors de Eliot, AOS vocations littéraires et critiques, ses *Poèmes d'Ariel* sont d'une grande importance en soulignant Eliot, les efforts AO pour exprimer ses pensées et ses sentiments à l'égard de l'expérience difficile on a à faire face au cours d'une âme humaine, l'AOS offre aux prendre une ascension religieuse et cristallisent son intégration à la fois de l'intérieur et en dehors. Voilà comment Eliot s'est profondément attaché à la religion en termes de sensibilité poétique que ses contemporains lui étiqueté comme un innovateur iconoclaste de la forme littéraire et la langue. Avec cette perspective en tête, dans cet article la situation de l'homme moderne dans l'ordre croissant de spiritualité et de recherche de la réalité dans la Eliot, AOS Poèmes Ariel est entrepris pour être examinés. Cet article affirme également que, grâce à ses vocations Eliot touche sur les différents problèmes liés à l'homme moderne, AOS sensibilisation aux valeurs religieuses et liturgiques.

**Mots clés:** Eliot; Spiritualité; Quête; Predicament; *Poèmes d'Ariel*

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#### INTRODUCTION

Many readers and critics of Eliot's poetical vocations and temperaments, especially the intellectual world

of the 1927 and 1930s at first doubted his rather new commitment to liturgical Christianity and Anglican Church. As Cooper has aptly put it,

The confused response to most of his plays and poems between the years 1920s and 1930s was typical. There were even suggestions, from some of his friends, that it had about it the disagreeable scent of skillful social climbing. That it was the Church of England to which he wrote spiritual allegiance deepened the suspicions; that Eliot, the bohemian artist, had simply tendered his soul to the Establishment and to the mainstream society rather than to true religion (2007, p.26).

That this unexpected Anglo-Catholic choice was regarded as an unfashionable and abrupt resolution since his former work had earned him a reputation of, as pointed out by Strandberg, “an iconoclastic innovator of literary form and language” (2002, p. 137). However, such typical sarcasms were transparently changed to delicious ironies. A pioneer of the modernist movement, T. S. Eliot, known for his fragmented, elusive poetry, became, in his own words, a classicist in literature, royalist in politics, and Anglo-Catholic in religion. “The author of *Ariel Poems*, as Cooper points out further, and his interest in religious belief and question of the religious faith were not of recent birth, nor were they motivated by mercenary self-interest” (2007, p.27). Similarly, in a note published in the first number of Wyndham Lewis’s magazine *The Enemy* in January 1927, Eliot claimed that he did not conceive poetry as separate from what he called ‘belief in religion’ (Sharpe 1991, p.113).

He truly believed that the very existence of Western civilization was threatened and knew of only one alternative: a vigorous rediscovery of what it means to live Christianly. Eliot was deeply convinced that there is a close relationship between art and religion and believed that without it, the recourse to any form of utopian vision would not be of much avail. His studies in anthropology at Harvard had already introduced him to the sociocultural importance of religion as a primordial binding force in society. A common set of transcendental beliefs made it possible for a people to experience the plenitude of a vital communal life and the psychological and emotional reassurances that come with authentic belonging (Cooper, 2007, p.26). This wide-awakened sensibility along with his vigorous appetite for spiritual comfort and maladies of the soul with his disposition and intellectual rigor which required something more substantial to solve his inner conflicts led Eliot to introduce religious elements in his poetry and in one way or another, each of his *Ariel Poems* touches man’s religious side (Gervais, p. 1995).

Eliot has tried to convey something deep and culturally meaningful through his poetic vocations. They explain the way Eliot looked at the pace of things and events that affect modern man in one form or another. In his *Ariel Poems*, he is primarily concerned with illuminating the areas of life which are shut off from the ordinary work-a-day awareness. In them, his theological tendencies

and interest have come out as poetry of salvation and submission to God in an age increasingly devoted to the secular panaceas promised by the mechanized production of wellbeing through the wanders of modern materialism, down to earth commodity consumption and wealth accumulations (Cooper, 2007, p.27). With this perspective in mind, in this article the predicament of the modern man in ascending spirituality and search for reality in the Eliot’s *Ash Wednesday* (1930), *A Song for Simon* (1928), *Animula* (1929), *Mariana* (1930) and *Choruses from the Rock* (1934) is undertaken to be examined. We therefore start analyzing these poems, foregrounding man’s struggle to retain their spiritual identity in an age increasingly devoted to the secular remedies. The article ends, conclusively, by briefly speculating on the reasons for the above phenomenon. The modern man’s religious struggle and complexity can be explored through analysis of each poem, and the extracts cited in each part serve mainly to contextualize and support the fragmented loss and religious identity of the modern man who in the modern world are lost in a welter of confusion arising out of the clash of ideologies and vested interests pitted against one another.

## 1. ASH WEDNESDAY

‘Ash Wednesday’ is the title of a sequence of poems, published in 1930; and it makes, poetically, the conversion of the poet to Christianity. As otherwise, in the liturgical practice of the Catholic Church, it is the first day of the religious season of Lent, a day of penitence when the penitents have their foreheads marked with ash. It is considered a time of fasting on commemoration of Christ’s fast in the wilderness. (Matt, iv.2). It is a period when a Christian repents for his past sins and turns away from worldly mundane towards God.

Eliot has pleaded, time and again, with his readers through his prose writings, to change life-style in order to make it a truly religious one. Precisely, he has developed in *Ash Wednesday* a poetic argument in favor of renunciation. His plea for renunciation stems from a deeper perspective of life. It has a religious commitment. Why should one renounce the magnificence of the world when so much pain has been taken to build it? The answer is that for the sake of religion one should embark upon renunciation from one stage to another.

Psychologically, when one is fatigued with the state of affairs, personal or social, one can understand the spiritual importance of renunciation. There is a penitential flavor, highly compressed and allusive, right at the beginning of the first section of *Ash Wednesday*:

Because I do not hope to turn again  
Because I do not hope  
Because I do not hope turn  
Desiring this man’s and that man’s scope  
I no longer strive to strive towards such things

(why should the aged eagle stretch its wings?)  
 Why should I mourn  
 The vanished power of the usual reign? (Eliot, 1987, p. 89).

The poet is fatigued with the order of things; so he wants to retrace the steps, beginning with his own person. The poet first gets disenchanted with the dispensation of things; and then is impelled to affirm his faith in the spirit of renunciation. When the poet says, 'Why should I mourn/ The vanished power of the usual reign?' he is conscientiously aware that it does not make any sense in repenting over things and values which the poet has already outlived intellectually. The next stanza is an affirmation, in an extended form, of the philosophy of renunciation projected in the preceding one:

Because I do not hope to know again  
 The infirm glory of the positive hour  
 Because I do not think  
 Because I know I shall not know  
 The one veritable transitory power  
 Because I cannot drink  
 There, where trees flower, and springs flow, for  
 there is nothing again (Eliot, p. 89).

The poet's argument is that he has no intention of pinning any kind of hope in the transient worldly glory, for it has already lost all attraction for him. His is a firm decision in this regard. This has come about because of the change in the sensibility of the poet. Consequently, the poet wants to emphasize that his decision to give up attachment to the mundane glory is part of an inescapable law of modern man's life. This idea is highly justified with those who are rejected by the modern world of economics and politics yet they love to cling to the last leaves of their materialistic mundane. However, as one matures one's view of life changes gradually. For a person who has attained maturity, there is no attraction for a place where 'trees, flower and 'springs flow'. It is in terms of this maturity that the poet accepts the natural order of time and place. Remembrance of things-beautiful, sonorous or of memorable nature-in the past has to be renounced, for an impression of the past just cannot hold good in the present.

Because I know that time is always time  
 And place is always the only place  
 And what is actual is actual only for one time  
 And only for one place  
 I rejoice that things are as they are and  
 I renounce the blessed face  
 And renounce the voice  
 Because I cannot hope to turn again  
 Consequently I rejoice, having to construct something  
 Upon which to rejoice (Eliot, p. 89).

The most important point that Eliot underlines here is that in the soul's journey towards God the first step is renunciation, after which one should divest oneself of all the attractions of the past. Thereby can one free oneself from the stranglehold of the past, making one's quest

much easier.

The first poem of *Ash Wednesday* is centered mainly on man's freedom from worldly attachments and material advancement which accompanies it. In the second poem, Eliot takes into account the factor of 'lust', which is a permanent stumbling-block in man's spiritual ascent right from the time of Plato to the very 2011. There is no straight path to spirituality. It is beset with problems arising out of the interplay of opposites. The lust that is associated with the male's attraction for woman is countered by the purity of love vouchsafed to man when he is able to train his emotions in such a manner that he sees the face of the Virgin Mary in every woman, which becomes an object of lust-when man does not regenerate himself.

The 'three white leopards' who devour the human remains under the tree in the desert also have their literary connections. As Traversi comments, "they recall the beasts, which were also three in number, who met Dante at the outset of his journey in the 'dark forest' in the middle point, which was also a turning point of his life" (2000, pp. 64-65). Further, the leopards are considered as symbols of sinfulness in medieval and Renaissance iconography, and modern man's thirst for lust. Their being white implies that they too have a positive role to fulfill. Whereas Dante found the beasts impeding his ascent to purgatory, Eliot, on the other hand, "has made these white leopards consume the inner organs of the speaker, and used them to purge his brutish lust and regain his spiritual health" (qtd. In Manganiello, 2000, pp. 82-4). Before one can get access to divine beatitude, one has to purify oneself internally. Then alone is man vouchsafed to God's Grace.

Reference to 'dry bones' in the poem is explainable in terms of Ezekiel-37 (Old Testament) wherein the dead regain life and the bodies rise again. The bones had already run dry because of the three white leopards; and then the 'imagined' speaker felt that he was listening to God's voice in Ezekiel's valley:

And God said  
 Shall bones live? shall these  
 bones live  
 .....  
 Let the whiteness of bones atone to forgetfulness  
 There is no life in them. As I am forgotten  
 And would be forgotten, so I would forget  
 Thus devoted, concentrated in purpose (Eliot, p. 91).

The act of forgetfulness is explainable with reference to Dante's Eden (Purg. XVIII, 121-32), wherein "the river Lethe obliterates the memory of sin, and through Eunoe, the memory of good deeds is restored" (qtd. In Manganiello p. 72). In this way, the seeker after spirituality is restored to higher life. The last seven lines: 'Under a juniper tree the boned sang, scattered and shining /... This is land. We have our inheritance convey the idea that Eliot visualizes the transformation of the

entire community. It implies, as Manganiello suggests “the idea of a Pauline rite de passage from the condition of the old self buried in sin to the birth of the new self in grace”. (Ibid p.73) Love is the miraculous alchemy to enliven the deadened existence. In terms of the broader ambience of the power of religion, one can visualize the possibility of racial regeneration from a passage in St. Augustine. It has an illuminating closeness to the belief of T.S. Eliot in raising modern man from the present position.

Adam means . . . ‘whole earth’, according to Greek. His name consists of four letters: A. D. A and M. . . . Anatole is the east, Dysis is the west, Arctis is the north and Mesembria is the south...Thus, Adam is spread all over the earth. Once he was in a single place, then he fell, was split into fragments and filled the earth. But the mercy of God collected the pieces everywhere, melted them in the fire of love and fused together again what had been broken (Balthasar, 1999, p. 30).

Thus, one finds in poem II: *Ash Wednesday*, Eliot’s visualization of modern man and his race through the corporeal purification helped by the three leopards and through the invisible influence of the silent lady who honors the Virgin Mary in meditation; and then by the supreme Mercy of God the dry bones get revived to embark upon a higher and more spiritual and Platonist human order. Lust has to be superseded by pure love between man and woman; in this background Eliot echoes the Goethean notion: ‘the eternal feminine draws us upward’.<sup>4</sup> A host of difficulties of the modern civilization spring from the lust-dominated male-female relationship and this can be the cause of the European people finding more intimacy with animals than their opposite sex. Eliot aims at the spiritualization of human life through the spirit of the ‘eternal feminine’. It means that carnality must be sublimated among modern man to herald the spiritualization of actual life.

Poem III of *Ash Wednesday* is concerned with Eliot’s view of the attendant difficulties that a seeker of a higher existence has to face. Eliot’s thinking is in line with that of Dante (Purgatorio, IX and XVII), St. Bonaventura and St. John of the cross. The IVth poem of *Ash Wednesday* expresses Eliot’s thinking on a higher type of dreaming. Eliot thought very highly of the role of a poet, who is considered the maker of images that are elevated and divine. In the Clark Lectures, Eliot defined this as a chief characteristic of genuine ‘metaphysical’ poetry of all ages: ‘it elevates sense for a moment to regions attainable only by abstract thought, or on the other hand clothes the abstract, for a moment, with all the painful delight of flesh’.<sup>5</sup> With a vision of the Silent Lady, equivalent to Dante’s Beatrice, Eliot puts into words the inarticulate feelings from the region of ‘his dream’ which has been referred to by the poet in his essay on ‘Dante’.(Eliot,

1987, p.243) The Silent Lady has a liberating influence on him. Her contribution is acknowledged in gratitude:

Here are the years that walk between bearing  
Away the fiddles and flutes, restoring  
One who moves in the time between sleep and waking, wearing  
While light folded, sheathed about her, folded.  
The new years walk, restoring  
Through a bright cloud of tears, the years, restoring  
With a new verse the ancient thyme. Redeem  
The unread vision in the higher dream  
While jewelled unicorns draw by the gilded hearse.  
The silent sister veiled in white and blue  
Between the yews, behind the garden god,  
Whose flute is breathless, bent her head and signed but  
spoke no word  
But the fountain sprang up and the bird sand down  
Redeem the time, redeem the dream  
The token of the word unheard, unspoken  
Till the wind shake a thousand whispers from the yew  
And after this our exile (Eliot, p.94).

The poet feels that it is during the imaginative afflatus of a ‘high dream’, that one can redeem time and begin life afresh. Heavenly experience is vouchsafed to the modern man in a state of deep vision, and after this vision, one is exiled to this mundane and banal world. The poem V of *Ash Wednesday* is concerned with the poet’s invocation of intercession of the Veiled Sister for those modern man who linger in darkness unable to reach ‘the centre of the silent World’. The ascent towards Divine Illumination is difficult indeed. In terms of poem VI *Ash Wednesday*, the poet is fully conscious that although he does not ever hope to turn again to the past, already rejected, nevertheless there is a lurking tension in him. In order to overcome this tension of the mind ‘between dying and birth’, he invokes the image of the ‘silent sister’:

Blessed sister, holy mother, spirit of the fountain,  
spirit of the garden  
suffer us not to kick ourselves with falsehood  
Teach us to care and not to care (Eliot, p.98).

So that one may attain the unattainable Peace, which is ‘in His will’ (Eliot, p.91). The last line: ‘And let my cry come unto Thee’ endorses his earlier prayer not to be separated from the Holy Grace made possible by the sublime influence of the Blessed Sister.

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## 2. A SONG FOR SERMON

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This is a poem with an ostensibly Christian theme. In composing this poem, Eliot worked upon the Biblical incidents, referred to in Luke-II, 25-35 and turned them to good account by deriving a vibrant human meaning out of them. Simeon was an old and devout Jew. At one stage, the Holy Ghost had revealed to him that he would not die

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<sup>4</sup>Goethe, the German poet at the end of Faust puts it: das Ewig-Weibliche zieht uns hinan (Ger.) - The eternal feminine draws us upward.

<sup>5</sup>T. S. Eliot, The Clark Lectures I, p. 14, were delivered at Trinity College in 1926.

until he had seen Jesus. In terms of this revelation, he is guided to the temple where the new-born Jesus has been brought by Joseph and Mary for circumcision. Simeon's destiny is fulfilled; and then he says:

"Lord, now lettest thou thy servant departs in peace, according to thy word. For mine eyes have seen thy salvation, which, thou has prepared before the face of all people"<sup>6</sup>.

Even as he prayerfully says so, the law-abiding, pious Simeon could foresee the pale cast of disturbing events on the horizon; and in terms of this prophetic insight, he told Mary, the Infant's mother, "Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel; and for a sign which shall be spoken against"<sup>7</sup> Eliot has given a poetic expression to the tense feelings of the pious Simeon, who is old and is waiting only for death;

My life is light, waiting for the death wind,  
Like a feather on the back of my hand.  
Dust in sunlight and memory in corners  
Wait for the wind that chills towards the dead land (1987, p. 195).

Disturbed and dejected by his foresight of the disturbing events looming on the horizon, Simeon gets sensitively concerned with the safety of his progeny. This is a tragic sense befitting a human being who has an inkling of his sorrowful end. Eliot has given a human interpretation for his feelings:

Who shall remember my house?  
Where shall live my Children's Children  
When the time of sorrow is come?  
They will take to the goat's path,  
and the fox's home,  
Fleeing from the foreign faces  
and the foreign swords (1987, p.195).

In this agonized frame of mind, he supplicates to the Infant Saviour to grant him the felling of peace. The lines being excerpted here are important from the standpoint of style too. Simeon knows about the persecution of Christ who is the incarnation of the Divine Word; he attunes his mind in prayerful meditation towards the Infant Saviour. It is a mode of 'transhumanisation' of one's felling)<sup>8</sup>. Eliot observes:

Before the time of cords and scourges and lamentation  
Grant us thy peace.  
Before the stations of the mountain of desolation,  
Before the Certain hour of maternal sorrow,  
Now at this birth season of decease,  
Let the Infant, the still unspeaking and unspoken Word,  
Grant Israel's consolation

To one who has eighty years and no to-morrow (1987, p. 105).

In a mystified frame of mind, Simeon invokes the invisible power of 'the still unspeaking and unspoken word', but all that he knows is that he cannot avail the full benefit of Christ's Incarnation, for he is still part of the Old Dispensation; and would die before long. The next stanza makes clear Simeon's visualization of the disturbing events, as also his own incapacity for saintly ascent:

According to thy word,  
They shall praise Thee and suffer in every generation  
With glory and derision,  
Light upon light, mounting the saint's stair,  
Not for me the martyrdom, the ecstasy of thought and prayer,  
Not for me the ultimate vision (1987, p. 105).

Simon becomes a witness to the Birth of Christ by virtue of his pious and good conduct throughout his long life. He hails the Infant Saviour and Eliot has made him a human and historic figure through the rich texture of his verse, as it is borne out in this extract. As he foresees the disturbing pace of things, which would mean glory for the Christians as also derision from their opponents accompanied by violence, he is equally afflicted by the lurking feeling that he would not be able to experience the saintly martyrdom, for he would die very soon.

In a 'Song for Simeon', Eliot also alludes to the pang of dissatisfaction that lingers in the mind of a good and pious man like Simeon when he is not able to live through the saintly venture. History of religion bears witness to the fact that only a handful of individuals are vouchsafed by the Divine Grace to acquire the status of saint. Simeon dies a tired man for, barred as he was by fate, he just could not embark upon saintly ascent. From the standpoint of the human soul's progress, his life remained unfulfilled. He was tired because he could not redeem himself adequately. In the same token, the modern man's sense of fatigue comes when he for one reason or another - either fated or willed-stops midway. This was the case with the Magi as also with Simeon. Adhesion to the old, in a man of quest, is indicative of how deeply the modern man's mind is rooted in thoroughgoing secularism and the materialism which accompanies it. It takes time for the modern man to triumph over the pull of the material advancements of the world. One has to pass through the cunning corridors of darkness before getting across to what Peers suggested as "the Divine Light of the Perfect union of the Love of God" (1953, p. 10-11).

<sup>6</sup>St. Luke, The New Testament, (King James Version).

<sup>7</sup>Ibid.

<sup>8</sup>Eliot for his part contemplates the Child's inarticulateness in A Song of Simeon and then his own inarticulateness in Four Quartets. Eliot reinforces this view of language in The Elder Statesman (p. 583, The Complete Poems and Plays of T.S. Eliot) when he has Charles tell his future bride, 'I love you to the limits of Manganiello', T.S. Eliot and Dante (London, Macmillan, 1989), p. 189. - It implies the transhumanisation of expression.

### 3. Animula

Animula is a poem in which Eliot gives a modern interpretation to what Dante, in *Purgatorio XVI*, has touched upon-man's quest for realizing the divine potentialities of his soul. Eliot calls Dante's theory of the soul "the philosophy of Aristotle strained through the schools" (1951, p. 169). In Aristotelian tradition, love is 'appetitive'. It moves towards any object or person in the order of creation. Since the human soul takes its origin from God, it ultimately comes back to him. It is mentioned in *Ecclesiastes* (12: 7): 'The Spirit shall return into God who gave it'.

Dante has elaborated on this theme in the *Convivio*; and as he looks at it, the human soul characteristically carries within itself the attraction for joy; for 'joy' is a constitutive element of the Soul's relationship with God. However, in the context of actual, worldly living, man is also attracted by lesser kinds of joys, to speak in qualitative terms, as Singleton says:

And so we see little children intensely longing for an apple and then going on further, longing for a little bird, and then, further on longing for fine clothes, and then a horn, and then a mistress and then wealth, but not much then much, and then enormous (1973, p.361).

T.S. Eliot has made an interesting adaption of the Dantean viewpoint. It is more 'intellectual' than that of Dante, simply because the twentieth century modern man is much more complicated and complex than the thirteenth century in which Dante lived. Now, man is basically shuttlecocked between diverse sets of forces.

In *Animula*, Eliot takes into account the two facets of human life: one is from birth to early infancy. At this stage, he is essentially a creature of God; two, as he grows, he becomes a creature of temporality, rather a different being from the one he lived from birth to infancy; and this is a typical tendency possessed by the modern man. He is beset with different sets of problems and options in the second stage. Eliot has described trenchantly the early phase of human childhood in the first few lines of this poem; it is the time when the human is,

Moving between the legs of tables and of chairs,  
Rising or falling, grasping at knees and toys,  
Advancing boldly, sudden to take alarm  
Recreating to the corner of arm and knee,  
Eager to be reassured, taking pleasure  
In the fragrant brilliance of the Christian tree (1987, p. 107).

Then, as he grows in age, he develops time-consciousness and moral awareness. Consequently, he is burdened with moral options, which is really unnerving for a man who is not developed religiously. Unable to steer clear of the theoretical meshes arising out of the imperatives of 'is and seems', he gets dilapidated intellectually; and then, to shore up his unfledged ego, he takes shelter 'Behind the Encyclopedia Britannica'.

Man with some modicum of education is drawn to the Encyclopedia; but such an acquirement of knowledge does not strengthen his life-bases. Informatively, he lives on the periphery of surface awareness. True wisdom alludes to such a person. Eliot's keen awareness of the plight of modern man whose soul remains uncreative is demonstrated in the lines excerpted below:

The heavy burden of the growing soul  
Perplexes and offends more, day by day;  
Week by week, offends and perplexes more  
And may and may not, desire and control,  
The pain of living and the drug of dreams  
Curl up the small soul in the window seat  
Behind the Encyclopedia Britannica.  
Issues from the hand of time the simple soul  
Irresolute and selfish, misshapen, lame,  
Unable to fare forward or retreat,  
Fearing the warm reality, the offered good  
Denying the importunity of the blood,  
Shadow of its own shadow, Specks in its own gloom,  
Leaving disordered papers in a dusty room;  
Living first in the silence after the viaticum (1987, p. 108).

This is how the modern man is trapped in the labyrinth of unproductivity and barrenness in his soul. However, in the very last lines Eliot is indicative of the possible way and undone the arabesque in terms the Christian religiosity. The silence after the viaticum prepares the distracted soul to think deeply of something vaster. It is with this awareness that Eliot makes a formidable case for praying to others, who in the context of the modern complexities of life have become victims of violence, as Eliot remarks:

Pray for Guiterriez, avid of speed and power,  
For Boudin, blown to pieces,  
For this one who made a great fortune,  
And that one who went his own way,  
Pray for Floret, by the boarhound  
Slain between the yew trees,  
Pray for us now and at the hour of our birth (1987, p. 108).

In the last but one line, Eliot makes a reference to the yew tree, which is traditionally associated with both death and immortality. Apparently, it underscores the importance of prayer. It has a universal significance. Prayer leavens up modern man's sensibility and necessarily, it is the symbolic way for man to knit himself to his fellow-man, whether one dies a natural death or is murdered. Even as prayer is spiritually necessary for the afflicted and the dead, it is also much needed for the living to cover the entire life-span of man from birth onwards. Prayer is a factor in the spiritual regeneration of man, which none can deny. Its importance heightens in the context of modern times when man is getting confused and fragmented. It brings in the forefront the idea of the human soul to confused humanity. As Eliot put it later, in order to affirm "the individuality of each human being one must, in fact, believe in the soul," (1939, p. 89).

#### 4. Marina

This poem by Eliot was published in 1930; though it is classed with *Ariel Poems*, the preceding ones being *Journey of the Magi*, *A Song for Simeon* and *Animula*, it is quite different from the three cited here. There is no such thing as tension associated with one who is in search of one's soul. In this poem, which is derived from Shakespeare's play *Pericles*,<sup>9</sup> Eliot, through the use of choice images, has expressed in tumbling disarray the amazingly distraught mental condition of Pericles who is separated from his daughter, Marina; and he is resigned to the fact that she is dead as also her mother Thaisa. Eliot takes into account the recognition scene, dramatized by Shakespeare in his play, *Pericles* (V, 1). In a fulsome manner, Eliot renders the intensity of the joy Pericles must have felt in suddenly recognizing that his lost daughter Marina is alive.

For somebody feeling the pinch of emotive intensity, the ordinary spheres of activities are death-like and carry hardly any significance. The extract-

Those who sharpen the tooth of the dog,  
Those who glitter with the glory of the humming bird,  
Those who sit in the sty of contentment,  
Those who suffer the ecstasy of the animals, (1987, p. 109).

is objectively pregnant with the idea of loss and decay. In the same way, Pericles' mind is in a state of heightened commotion owing to the sorrow he feels on the loss of his daughter, Marina. The epigraph to this poem, taken from *Hercules Furens*, has been set to show the fury of the agitated mind of Pericles. The meaning of the epigraph is that Hercules, having unknowingly killed his children in a fit of madness, returns to sanity and then realizes the enormity of his crime. The common factor between Pericles and Hercules is the extremely abnormal condition of their mind-while Pericles is restored to life by grasping imaginatively the 'presence' of his lost and dead daughter, Hercules lands in a death of his own making.

The agitated mind of Pericles is articulating the Inarticulate. The comment of Eliot on John Marston's play *Sophonisha*: "we perceive a pattern behind the pattern into which the characters deliberately involve themselves; the kind of pattern which we perceive in our own lives only at rare moments of inattention and detachment, drowsing in sunlight" (1951, p. 232), is quite relevant in regard to the feeling of Pericles expressed refrainfully in the following extract:

Bowsprit cracked with ice and pain cracked with heat  
I made this, I have forgotten  
And remember.  
The rigging weak and canvas rotten  
Between one June and another September (1987, p.109).

Through the highly charged emotion in which Pericles recalls his past in the presence of the 'unbelievable' Marina constitutes a transforming experience. Here, Eliot underlies the mystery of generation which links love and language, the barely conscious, transcendent motive power that engenders human and artistic offspring. As a consequence of his spiritual rebirth, Pericles accepts what Gerontion rejects: to resign his speech for that unspoken, for the word that is life. In the words of Peers, "it is, as in St. John of the Cross, a word known in silence, in a stillness of waiting" (1953: 675). And in the same token Wilson Knight believes that:

Eliot succeeds in imparting imaginative intensity to the pent-up emotion of Pericles whereby he gets a 'mystic prehension' of Marina; and in the context 'that immortality is a matter of quality and value rather than something which can be measured by time' (1929, p. 21).

One can get access to the mystery of the unspoken Word. This is the poetic way to enter the realm of the Spirit. How far it is possible for every human being to experience the truth of Pericles is comparatively a moot point; but what is more important is to know that even modern man, though shackled with the secular panaceas promised by the mechanized production of wellbeing can still cross the frontiers of time when the emotive intensity of love is pure and unalloyed, as was the case with Pericles. Then, the barrier of death collapses and one gets a feeling that death is a mere delusion.

#### 5. Choruses from 'The Rock'

Initially, *Choruses from 'The Rock'* were written for a pageant play to be performed in aid of a fund to build and endow forty five new churches in the rapidly growing suburbs of the north of the Thames. The main shaft of Eliot's argument is "Our citizenship is in Heaven. . . ." that is the model and type of your citizenship upon earth" (1987, p.147). In the same sweep, he points out that, men of eminence talk of 'right relations of men', and not of 'relations of men to God'. As Eliot looked at it, the need of the hour was the establishing of a visible relationship between man and God; without which the humanistic concern for developing right relations among men would not be of much avail. Man's state would not improve. Moreover, without the establishing of a right relationship with God, all the ingenuity of the contemporary generation on working for newer types of relationships between men and men and between men and women would, at best, be a form of apology for structuring human reality on a shaky foundation. Eliot is on record to say that if carnality

<sup>9</sup>Pericles, Prince of Tyre (1608-9)- A play, Acts III-V, of which are considered to be by Shakespeare; Acts I-II are attributed to another writer. Pericles is separated from Marina (daughter) and Thaisa (wife) and then believes them to be dead. At the end of the play, it is shown that he recovers them both, and the recovery restores him to happiness and health. One can compare it with King Lear and Cordelia scene (IV, vii)-

among men and women remains unleavened without the spark of spirituality or elevated feelings of love, it is tantamount to a form of beastly copulation.

From his study of Indian, Zoroastrian and Buddhist philosophy on the one hand and the Christian mysticism on the other, Eliot became convinced that without some form of mental asceticism, one's view of spirituality would always remain crude and lambasted, the testimony of which is seen in the shambles of modern man's spirituality and its materialistic tendencies (Maleki and Farahian 2009, p.48). Essentially, *Choruses from 'The Rock'* are poetic pieces of deep reflections on the weak-kneed approach of modern man towards religion. According to Eliot, consciously contrived discipline and painstaking labor alone entitles man to move towards the grace of Divinity; mere mechanical observance of ceremonies is a blasphemy against the true spirit of religion. It is in this background that one can appreciate the truth of Eliot's observation: 'Our citizenship is in Heaven', which implies that one should always be watchful of the Divine presence in the midst of one's multifarious temporal affairs. Eliot puts into perspective man's responsibility in being a man of religion:

I say to you: Make perfect your will  
I say: take no thought of the harvest,  
But only of proper sowing (1987, p.148).

It constitutes the summum bonum of practically all religions: Christianity, Islam, Zoroastrian, Hinduism and Buddhism. In this context, the lines below show that Eliot sought spiritual understanding in realistic terms:

The world turns and the world changes,  
But one thing does not change.  
In all of my years, one thing does not change.  
However you disguise it, this thing does not change  
The perpetual struggle of Good and Evil (1987, p.148).

The true church is built by the good man; and unless the validity of this insight is vigilantly sought after, one cannot escape the octopian march of the desert even if one lives in a metropolitan city. In the second chorus, the poet reminds his readers to work for the community of honest labor; so that one can love one's neighbor; for no amount of foreign doles would help any community of men and women in order that they avoid, Eliot observes "frittered lives and squalid deaths, embittered scorn in honey-less hives"(1987, p.151). (This judgment of Eliot has a great relevance to the developing countries in Africa and Asia). Sound economy as also true religion is built through the honest labor of devoted men and women who always remember God.

Eliot takes a satirical note of the world-wide expansion of English: "The British race assured of a mission/ Performed it, but left much at home unsure"(1987, p.152). In this background, the poet reminds the English people to note: "The Church must be forever building, for it is forever decaying within and attacked from without"

(Ibid). The work on the building of true church must go on irrespective of the passing phases of prosperity or adversity. Mechanical gadgets only contribute towards comforts and a false sense of complacency. A direct encounter with the basic reality is stressed so as to build a religious community of men and women who are honest enough not to delude themselves in subterfuges. When Eliot says: "Life you may evade, but Death you shall not. You shall not deny the stranger" (1987, p.156), he implies clearly that life without the cognizance of death is incomplete, and that one cannot silence the silent conscience. True spirituality is born when modern man is wide-awakened and is not insensitive to the silent cogitations getting unexpressed and unheeded at the core of his heart.

If there is no humility, Eliot further says, and purity of heart among the community of modern men, there cannot be any scope for building a true home, or for that matter in building a real city(1987, p.158). The lines: "Men have left God not for other gods, they say, but for no god: and this has never happened before/ . . . . / in an age which advances progressively backwards"(1987, p.161). The seventh chorus of the poem constitutes a scathing indictment of modern man's culture and defines how the true spirit of religion escapes man. The lines:

The Soul of Man must quicken to creation;  
And seek not to count the future waves of time;  
But be ye satisfied that you have light  
Enough to take your step and find your foothold (164, 166).

convey a deep spiritual sense. Thus, in the *Choruses from 'The Rock'*, one can grasp Eliot's approach towards the building of a True church of God in the modern man's conditions of life.

## CONCLUSION

T.S. Eliot steps in with his poetry in the confused and perplexed turmoil of the modern age. Even from the 'prufrock' days, Eliot was woefully conscious that something was lacking in the modern man's ethos. As a man of sensibility, he understood fairly well that the days of the orthodox religions were well past. In the existing malaise, he diagnosed correctly man's degenerate condition, which could be improved by persuading him to imbibe values – spiritual and secular both which have stood the test of time. He also took into account the peculiar psychic responses and reactions arising there from, of modern man, both in the East and the Western world. If one cares to reflect over the ideology-content of his poetry from *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock* (1917), passing through the terrain of *The Waste Land* (1920) to *The Hollow Men* (1925), one would realize that all of them are expressive of the poet's disenchantment with the profile of things in the modern man's world. It is true that Eliot has touched upon ideas and reflections



to find a way out of modern man's predicament, as for example in *The Waste Land*, especially in the third and the fifth sections of the poem. Nonetheless it constitutes a criticism of the modern malaise rendered from the standpoint of a commentator looking at the human condition objectively. It has religious elements too. But, it is only from his 'Ariel Poems' like *Ash Wednesday*, *A Song for Simeon*, *Animula*, *Mariana* and *Choruses from 'The Rock'* that Eliot gets distinctly involved in reflecting over the attendant difficulties and predicament that man faces on his arabesque way to ascend spiritually; and then to find spiritual integration in a world given to chaos and confusion.

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