

التجدد الروحي في قصائد مختارة للشاعرت.اس. اليوت

Spiritual Regeneration in Selected Poems of T.S.
Eliot

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المخلص

يتناول هذا البحث وصف التجدد الروحي في قصائد مختارة للشاعر ت.اس. اليوت، وهذه القصائد: جيرونشن، مارينا، واربعاء الرماد. ويعنى اليوت كثيرا في هذه القصائد بالانحطاط الروحي للإنسان الجديد الذي قوضت الحرب العالمية معتقداته وأفكاره. وتهدف هذه الدراسة إلى بيان كيفية اعتقاد بأن القيم الروحية تمثل حلا جذريا وعلاجاً ناجحاً للفرد والمجتمع على حد سواء. فالحضارة الجديدة مثقلة بالأمراض الروحية، ولا بد لها من استرداد ايمانها بالعالم الذي بات حافلا بالشك من أجل انقاذ الإنسان.

Abstract

This research examines the articulation of spiritual regeneration in selected poems by T.S. Eliot, namely "Gerontion", "Marina", and "Ash Wednesday." Eliot expresses his serious concern over the intellectual decay of modern man, as seen by the destructive effects of his views and the advent of World War I on abstract ideas. The paper investigates how Eliot believes spiritual values represent the radical solution and cure-all for the individual and society. Modern civilisation is heavily laden with spiritual diseases, which must rediscover faith in this doubt and the disbelief-filling world to ensure human salvation.



1.Introduction

In his early poetry, T.S. Eliot was much concerned with the spiritual void that marked the world after the First World War, a world which is chaotic, deteriorating, and meaningless. He presents this dark picture of the modern world in connection to his own crises, for he suffered greatly because of the mental disturbance of his second wife, Vivien. The public and private juxtaposition show itself in "Prufrock and Other Observations." Gerontion, for example, is an exemplar of Eliot's gloomy and mysterious world, which is represented in a series of images of sterility and fertility.

C. Day Lewis(1948), in his *Poetic Image*, states that an image is a picture made out of "images" and "that a poem may itself be an image composed from a multiplicity of words" (cited in Abrams 150). These images stimulate readers' senses and feelings, thus describing the world observed in a rather vivid poetic manner. These visuals are not representations of concepts, but rather of human experience. Their evolution across the poems illustrates the battle for crystallisation of a personality, which Carl Jung called "the individuation process" (Foster 585).

2.1.Spiritual Regeneration in "Gerontion"

The Greek word 'Gerontion' means "little old man," and this is a quote from Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure*, particularly from the Duke's speech to Claudio. The poem starts with the speaker who laments the weight of his blindness:

"Here I am, an old man in a dry month,
Being read to by a boy, waiting for rain.
I was neither at the hot gates
Nor fought in the warm rain
Nor knee deep in the salt marsh, heaving a cutlass,
Bitten by flies, fought.
My house is a decayed house, (LL. 1-7)."

The image of sterility works itself clearly in the above-quoted speech. The use of drought-rain symbolism is of great significance in displaying the world of sterility and fertility observed by Gerontion. No doubt, dryness 'in a dry month' stands for spiritual and emotional sterility and aridity. In contrast, water or rain represents the rebirth of the spirit of fertility (Scofield 102) which is lacking in Gerontion's microcosm.

"Gerontion" is a poem that demonstrates a new trend to Eliot in which he "takes public issues and reformulates them as a cultural crisis experienced in a personal manner"(Chinitz 150). The line "My house is a decayed house" affirms the fusion of the private and the public. His house (world) is an indivisible part of the bigger house (Europe). Gerontion's sense of identity crisis and decayed mind is "a metaphor for the mind of



Europe, a collapsing mind with which Eliot had little sympathy" (Chinitz, 2009). Gerontion's Knowledge of what happens around him, Harvey Gross states, "is a total awareness of the decline of European civilisation, and an obsession, debilitating belief in that decline " (300).

Years-stricken Gerontion seems confused by his inability to say a word. Darkness brings change. The Romantics' famous symbol 'spring' comes in connection with Christ, which reflects the narrator's vision of spiritual rebirth (Harding 201), 'In the juvenescence of the year / Come Christ, the tiger.'

Eliot's cinematic collage takes the reader to observe some characters of unknown race and lineage who are "vacant shuttles ":

"In depraved May, dogwood and chestnut, flowering judas,
To be eaten, to be divided, to be drunk
Among whispers; by Mr. Silvero
With caressing hands, at Limoges
Who walked all night in the next room;
By Hakagawa, bowing among the Titians;
By Madame de Tornquist, in the darkroom
Shifting the candles; Fräulein von Kulp
Who turned in the hall, one hand on the door. (LL. 21-29) "

Whatever these figures experience in the empty rituals they perform, they are caught in, like Gerontion, a phantasmal knowledge (Cooper 57). The spiritual emptiness is symptomatic of these characters and of Gerontion, who is divested of any sense of spirituality. In a word, he is spiritually sterile, " An old man in draughty house/ Under a windy Knob."

Interestingly enough, Eliot's historicisation of Gerontion must be stressed here. He firmly believes that history "offers a more durable form of Knowledge, but it is too cunning ...' and full of deception" (Cooper 57). Man's significance is determined by the context of the past, and he is completely immersed in the homogeneous chaos of the present. Consequently, Eliot's present is always the worst possible moment. Eliot imparts historical comprehension to Gerontion's hypnotic phrases:

"History has many cunning passages, contrived corridors
And issues deceives with whispering ambitions,
Guides us by vanities. Think now
She gives when our attention is distracted
And what she gives, gives with such supple confusions
That the giving famishes the craving. Gives too late
What's not believed in, or is still believed,
In memory only, reconsidered passion. (L.L. 35-42)."



On a Closer examination, these undoubtedly strong perceptions of the falsity of history confirm Eliot's refusal of history, which is feminised, as it were, as a playful woman. This historical perspective turns things upside down paradoxically: "Unnatural vices which Are fathered by heroism./ Virtues Are forced upon us by our impudent crimes"(LL. 45-47).

Closely related to this reversal of concepts is Eliot's allusion to the English poet William Blake's poem "The Tiger":

"The tiger springs in the new year. Us he devours. Think at last
We have not reached conclusion, when I
Stiffen in a rented house. Think at last
I have not made this show purposelessly
And it is not by any concitation
Of the backward devils (LL. 49-54) "

These lines are strongly "reminiscent of Blake's category of 'the Devouring' " used in "The Marriage in Heaven and Hell", where it is put "dialectical interplay with the prolific. Eliot is drawn to Blake's fascination with opposites to indicate his diagnosis of spiritual sickness and his concern for wishful spiritual revival" (Harding 201).

Being the spokesman for Eliot's voice, Gerontion's emotional disturbance and depravity lend themselves quite conspicuously to the general grievances which invaded the whole world. He is associated with decay and dirtiness, remembers the lost beauty and experiences the absence of passion (Laity & Gish 124):

"To lose beauty in terror, terror in inquisition.
I have lost my passion: why should I need to keep it
Since what is kept must be adulterated?
I have lost my sight, smell, hearing, taste and touch:
How should I use it for your closer contact? (L.L. 57-61) "

Gerontion's inability to perceive what runs around him emphasises the agonising cultural and personal crisis he is experiencing. His senses cause him much disintegration, thus leading him to the 'wilderness of mirrors, which implies self-deception, hallucinations, and depravity (Cooper 57).

When Gerontion compares himself to a spider and a weevil, he has reached the depths of self-degradation and humility. The comparison brings to mind Ted Hughes's poem "November," in which a modern man reaches his lowest point of self-abasement and absurdity. The physique of a few characters (De Baihache, Fresec, and Mrs. Cammel) is 'turned to energy, and space's frigid winds wipe out their essence. The corrupt society has made Gerontion seek unreasonable power to destroy a fading civilisation'(Gross 302). Even though he is isolated and is 'living in



turbulent ages, and the Trades / To Sleepy corner drives an old man', he has a glimpse of hope flickering in his troubled and sick soul. Gross rightly argues that "Gerontion's spiritual decline does not necessarily mean the end of history. Even his destruction in the storm of historical force is seen as a cure for slim hope" (302). The marks of the death of old civilisation may be the rebirth of a new age. Such a binary opposition (despair /hope) is a prominent hallmark in T.S. Eliot's poetry which can be better seen in his great symphony, so to speak, *The Waste Land* (1922).

Eliot's last sentences, which are mere fragmentations with no clear syntactic structure, no doubt underscore the absence of order, besides the painful confusion of the, lived present. This disorganisation of grammar is reminiscent of T. S. Eliot's diction that it is permissible to do any kind of violence to language if such violence serves a particular purpose. In "Gerontion", this linguistic deviation from the norm indicates his lack of personal integration, which stands for a universal crisis in the first place.

Gerontion may be seen as Eliot, who suffers from spiritual and emotional sterility, "Thoughts of a dry brain in a dry season"(L.76). Everything in this world is sterile. Morality, time, history and the city anticipate sterility in its totality. Eliot is more concerned with diagnosing modern civilisation's ills rather than prescribing these shortcomings.

2.2. The Sense of Regeneration in "Marina"

T.S. Eliot's *Ariel Poems* usher in a radical change in his career as a poet because they betray a religious and spiritual development which culminates in *The Four Quartets*. As gathered in his *Collected Poems*, Eliot's four *Ariel poems* are a sequence. A singular one at that, marking the same spiritual commentary that he would attempt to execute at virtually the same time in those units of poetry that would eventually become "Ash-Wednesday" (Murphy 304).

Eliot brings the recognition scene from *Pericles* to the attention of his readers in the poem "Marina." Hercules, enraged by Juno, has just awoken in Seneca's *Hercules Furens* and has no idea where he is (The Latin translates, "What place this, what region, what quarter of the world?"). Once he comes to his senses, he will learn the horrible truth that he slaughtered his children in the throes of his madness. For the reader as aware of the significance of the allusion to Seneca as of the allusion to Shakespeare's *Pericles*, the contrast is startling and undoubtedly intended: One hero awakens from madness to discover all his children lost, another to discover a lost child restored. Presumably, Eliot is exploiting the residual recollection of Hercules' painful loss to emphasise how much more amazingly joyous Pericles' miraculous reunion is in the grand scheme of things; in the Eliot poem, Pericles opens his monologue with a virtual translation of the epigraph.



Simply put, a person is far more likely to lose a beloved than to regain one. As Eliot's Pericles continues his monologue, Eliot plays on the same idea as Shakespeare had in the original recognition scene, allowing dreams, reality, and nightmares to merge (Murphy 302). Cox and Dyson argue that in this poem, Eliot attempts "to create a series of images that mime Pericles's state of mind and thereby reflect his own experience of illumination" (76).

Eliot seems to be quite preoccupied with the ethereal, holy, and spiritual in "Marina" which comes to light in 1930; in spite of its association with the *Ariel Poems*, this poem stands on its own. A soul seeker has no worries, because he is not looking for anything material. The insanity that ensues in Eliot's mind after Pericles loses touch with his daughter Marina and begins to believe that she and her mother, Thaisa, are dead, is inspired by Shakespeare's *Pericles*. Eliot takes into account the recognition scene, dramatised by Shakespeare in his play, *Pericles* (V, 1). Eliot "renders the intensity of the joy Pericles must have felt in suddenly recognising that his lost daughter Marina is alive" (Maleki et al., 50). The character of Marina is of prime importance. "She is the dream-symbol of something newly born..."; she is an example of spiritual rebirth.

"Marina" starts with Pericles describing his heart-rending sadness at losing his daughter amid the whirling and open sea, "What seas, what shores, what grey rocks and what islands /What water lapping the bow" (LL.2-3). Conventionally held, the sea can simultaneously be a life nourisher and destroyer. Similarly, the sea is associated both with death and rebirth, and therefore its iconography has similar connotations (rebirth of spirituality in the poem). Pericles feels that the cruel sea which once took his daughter might be a good sea by restoring her to his arms. Eliot's use of this story has something to do with the loss of spiritual life versus spiritual rebirth or rediscovery.

The idea of spiritual death, death in life, lends itself to those types of men captivated by certain pleasures that make them sinful. Eliot enumerates them by putting them into the mouth of Pericles in the following lines:

"Those who sharpen the tooth of the dog, meaning

Death

Those who glitter with the glory of the hummingbird, meaning

Death

Those who sit in the sty of contentment, meaning

Death

Those who suffer the ecstasy of the animals, meaning

Death

Are become insubstantial, reduced by a wind,

A breath of pine, and the wood song fog

By this grace dissolved in place." (LL.7-17)



Specifically mentioned, these men are the warmongers, the vain, the self-deceived, and the lustful (Cox and Dyson 77). The organisation of these words in the poem affirms that these activities represent death. The word 'grace' is essential. "The Grace of God comes to Pericles, not as an abstract concept, but dissolved in a particular place" [*By this grace dissolved in place*], known here through the discovery of his child" (Cox and Dyson 77).

Eliot's unimpeachable realisation that the mundane life must be denied for the other life finds clear expression in the lines "Resign my life for this life, my speech for that unspoken, / The awakened, lips parted, the hope, the new *ships*." (L.L. 28-29). One can see in these lines: "[...]the reality of God's kindness to man: surrender to His will means no loss but rather an unutterable gain since in Him the most petite and most transient beauty or goodness find their true significance and reality [...]" (Lucy 145)

The words '*the new ships*' are symptomatic of the spiritual rebirth that dominates Eliot's entity and show hope for a better life than the living one. Foster argues that the ship is a significant symbol for it indicates "renewed life and hope, but hope no longer for something personally desired by the poet, but for the value beyond desire, even beyond his comprehension..." (Foster 583).

On the whole, Eliot's "Marina" contains at its nucleus a well-founded fact that man furnishes him/herself with the spiritual replica, ultimately leading to salvation.

"What is more important is to know that even modern man, though shackled with the secular panaceas promised by the mechanised 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 feels that death is a mere delusion" (Maleki, et al. 50)

Eliot holds tight to the fact that religion is the *only* solution and cure-all for the individual and society. The modern civilisation is heavily laden with spiritual diseases, which must rediscover faith in this doubt and the disbelief-filling world to ensure salvation.

2.3. Representing Spiritual Regeneration in "Ash Wednesday"

In his *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture*, Eliot states that if the spiritual organisation of Europe dies, it seems pretty impossible to organise the idea of Europe (Eliot 119). Eliot's statement holds for the post-war period, which witnessed a spiritual crisis that swept the world directly after the First World War. This spiritual crisis finds clear expression in Eliot's early poems. Poems like "The Waste Land, The Hollow Men" and Ash Wednesday often portray "personae who realise the spiritual impotence of their environment but are powerless to act, a matter that



creates upon their longing to unite the physical and spiritual realms"(Manganaro 85). However, in such a hopeless and absurd world, Eliot shows glimmers of hope penetrating the veil of spiritual emptiness. This matter creates a sense of spiritual regeneration in Eliot's early poetry.

"Ash Wednesday" is a case in point. The poem "describes stages of despair, self-abnegation, moral recovery, resurgent faith, the need of grace, and renewal of will toward both world and God"(Williamson 184). The title of "Ash Wednesday is significant for it has much to do with the idea of spiritual regeneration, which is much needed for the modern man. Ash Wednesday is regarded as the first day, which is forty days of penance and fasting to celebrate the forty days spent by Christ in the wilderness, overcoming the temptation of Satan(Southam, 1987, p.129). This day is lionised in the Church when" the priest marks the foreheads of the laity with ashes in the form of a cross, saying these words: 'Remember, O man, that is thou art dust, and unto dust the thou shalt return"(Southam 129). This religious ceremony reminds man of the well-founded fact that however long he lives, death is the ultimate end. So, he must arm himself with spiritual faith that conduces to self-redemption.

The speaker in the first part of "Ash Wednesday" represents an exemplar of the world of the modern man who suffers a total spiritual vacuum, for the opening lines vividly present this man divested of any sign of hope :

"Because I do not hope to turn again
Because I do not hope
Because I do not hope to turn
Desiring this man's gift and that man's scape
I no longer strive to strive towards such things." (LL. 1-5).

Without hope, man is up to lead a raging inferno-like life and consequently is spiritually devastated by his temporary physical concerns. Although the speaker does not hope to turn to God, leaving the world behind (Williamson 168), he attempts to seek a solution for his spiritual impasse, "Because I hope to turn again/ Consequently I rejoice, construct something/ Upon which to rejoice." Primarily via the vehicle of prayer, that unbreakable chain of spirituality and mystical contact with God, can this sensation of joy make its presence known: " pray to have mercy upon us / And I pray that I may forget/ These matters that with myself I too much discuss/ Too much explain." Hence, prayer is viewed as a spiritual fortification of the self to face life's agonies and setbacks, a personal humility in the presence of God's greatness(Tate 132).

The figure of the lady in part II is better understood in the context of the spiritual development of the whole poem. The initial lines anticipate Elijah (1 Kings 19). He, threatened with death by Jezebel, sat under a juniper tree and prayed that he might die as an outlet for his



trouble(Williamson 173). The speaker's bones feel pretty happy after their dryness, chirping:

"Because of the goodness of this Lady
And because of her loveliness, and because
She honours the Virgin in meditation,
We shine with brightness" (LL. 52- 55).

This Lady is an ideal embodiment of love and faith, lacking in today's world. She is the "single Rose" which may image the ultimate flower and be the interpreter of the Earthly Paradise to man" (Williamson 174). The speaker is spiritually moved when he sees death as the destructive force of the self and its lust, but a kind of salvation from them, and the love this death of bones shows is "the cause and form of triumph over self" (Williamson 175).

The visual imagery of the ladder in part III is closely related to the idea of spiritual transcendence. The spiritual journey of *The Dark Night of the Soul* works out through the speaker's association of ideas. The speaker sees " the same shape twisted on the banister / Under the vapour in the fetid (unpleasant) air/ struggling with the devil of the stair who wears/ The deceitful face of hope and despair." This part shows the influence of Dante on Eliot because it was first published under the title of 'Som de L'Escala," which means "the Summit of stairway", taken from the famous speech of Arnaut Daniel(Purgatorio. 26; 146),(Williamson 175). Ascending the stairway points out the stages of despair and hope. The shape, "Damp, jagged, like an old man's mouth drivelling beyond repair," has a strong will to continue climbing, facing all the obstructions that come his way. The end of this part comes up with 'the reminder that is a strength beyond that individual alone. It is a fragment of the liturgy of the Mass, at the moment before the falling of the Sacrament, which defeats the 'distraction' and focuses the effort on further ascent"(Drew, 110). Murphy argues that through the resistance to life's temptations:

"The soul can run the risk of denying that creation is a spiritual gift of God and a place in which the soul can come to know God through his creation(58) "

Time, love, redemption, and faith are vividly presented in part IV in a way that generates the possibility of spiritual sublimation in man's life. In this part, Eliot heavily uses the final cantos of the Purgatorio, where Dante meets Beatrice, his beloved on earth, now a figure of divine beauty, reminding him of his sins(Southam 132). The language of flowers and colours is of much concern to understand the whole part. The Lady is vividly described in terms of this language. She is closely connected with "the subtle -metamorphosis she undergoes in the poet's memory and consciousness, and the dream-like way the scenes melt into one another



and finally fade away among the thousand whispers from the yew " (Drew 110). Everything in this part is interrelated with other parts, giving the impression that the movement and rhythm are indispensable. The 'silent sister' is associated with the speaker's pain because he has shown redemption. He, through the conquest of hope and despair", has passed through growing. faith to a vision of [SPIRITUAL] regeneration " (Williamson 180).

Part V is devoted to discussing the presence and revelation of the divine word in the present world(Williamson 180). Commitment to religious duties and teaching is vital in leading a high level of religiosity. Eliot wonders whether this word is rightly abided by or not:

"Where shall the word be found, where will the word
Resound? Not here, there is not enough, silence
Not on the sea or on the islands, not
On the mainland, in the desert for those who walk in darkness the rain land,
For those who walk in darkness. (L.L. 165-170). "

It stands to reason that man can redeem himself and eliminate the darkness of the soul by turning to God and sticking to His Word. Although there is a whirling doubt, "About the centre of the Silent Word, faith in its existence is never in doubt, for it is" within the world and for the world" (Drew 117).

The final part of "Ash Wednesday" starts with the repetition of having no hope, which first emerges in part I. The notion of penitence lends itself to the words "Bless me father", 'Bless me, for I have sinned' are "the opening of the penitent to the priest in the Roman Catholic form of confession"(Southam 134). The speaker oscillates between different streams of life. Even so, he has a glimmer of hope "Evan among these rocks,/ our peace in His will." Drew maintains that the poet among these 'rocks' is far from Paradise, and his prayer is still for patience and humility"(Drew 117). The individual must incline toward the moral and spiritual, moving away from his 'lower nature ' (Sigg 9).

3. Conclusion

All in all, T.S.Eliot in his early poetic writings appears much concerned with the idea of spiritual regeneration in a world devoid of any moral meaning and negatively affected by the ills of modern civilisation. Because of the dominance of crisis of belief, especially the spiritual crisis. The teachings of religion are pretty ignored or misunderstood, a matter that results in spiritual vacuity or emptiness. In such an empty world, there must be spiritual renewal, and the modern man "must achieve a spiritual detachment from all things, whether sensual or spiritual and a leaning on pure faith alone"(Drew102-3). Quite transparently, the articulation of spiritual rebirth and regeneration reflects Eliot's interest in the



significance of spirituality as an outlet for man's problems and deficiencies in the modern age.

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