

Epiphany in T.S. Eliot's Early Poetry

Abstract

In this paper I propose to study the moments of vision or Epiphany, as expressed in the poetry of T.S.Eliot. The poetry of Eliot while expressing the sordid and seamy side of life, the pain and agony of the contemporary world, also expresses at the same time the revelations of the Divine, the hidden and the unknown, even to the neurotic characters of his poems. This paper traverses the entire gamut of ideas related to Epiphany and traces it in the early poetry of Eliot. In the early phase the questers are failed visionaries. The Epiphany is made but meaning is missed. the objective of the paper is to underline the ultimate purpose of human life and the meaninglessness of modern life without faith. It also endeavours to highlight the Romantic legacy in Eliot. This paper uses the analytical approach.

Keywords: Epiphany, Moment of Revelations, Visionaries, Epicenes, Failed Visionaries

Introduction

The word "epiphany" made its first appearance in the Greek literature for expressing the sudden appearance of a god or a goddess, also for some miraculous event, a divine intrusion - whether good or evil in human affairs. In the Christian era the word "Epiphany" was associated with St. Mathew's account of the astrologers who visited the Christ Child. J.A. Cuddon in *A Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory*, defines the word Epiphany as a 'Greek manifestation'. He Says.

The term primarily denotes the festival which commemorates the manifestation of Christ to the Gentiles in the persons of the Magi. The feast is observed on January 6th 'Twelfth Night', the festival of the 'Three Kings' More generally, the term denotes a manifestation of God's presence in the world..." (p-277-278)

This added a new dimension to the original Greek tradition. The new thing in the gospels was that the epiphany to the Wise Men was taken as an event which could happen only once in the history of time i.e. the manifestation of one God in human flesh. Further more this appearance differed in that it came not to a single person or to a few or a nation but to all races of the earth, represented traditionally in Kaspar, Melchior, and Balthazar, the three astrologer "kings."

Seldom do our literary uses of the word "epiphany" depend on exact inter-textuality with this tradition. In fact, writers, following James Joyce, revert to more primitive Greek meaning an often occurring event, bringing to one or a few persons a sudden "divine" experience of wholeness, harmony and radiance (even if the inspiring event is shattering at first). If this event and its efficacy are to be known to "all the world", in modern literary usage, the person(s) receiving this revelation whether as writer or character, must convey it in a work of art.

A number of recent critics, including Northrop Frye and Meyer Abrams, have focused on the reappearance in the last two centuries of the word "epiphany" in its Greek meaning - a theophany or miraculous manifestation of certain individuals, now to writers or their characters. M. H. Abrams says:

Epiphany -means" a manifestation", and by Christian thinkers was used to signify a manifestation of God's presence in the world. In an early draft of *A Portrait of the Artist as a young Man*, entitled *Stephen Hero* (published posthumously in 1944), James Joyce adopted the term to secular experience to signify a sense of sudden radiance

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and revelation while observing a commonplace object.... "Epiphany" has become the standard term for the description, frequent in modern poetry and fiction, of sudden flare into revelation of an ordinary object or scene. Joyce, however, merely substituted this word for what earlier secular authors had called "the moment....." (*Glossary*, p 56-57).

Most recently Ashton Nichols (1987) has thoroughly investigated the literary uses of the word and concept in *The Poetics of Epiphany: Nineteenth Century Origins of the Modern Literary Movement*. Following Abrams, Nichols believes that the literary concept of epiphany occurs for the first time in the 18th century beginnings of Romanticism - in Gray and Blake, for instance, but above all in Wordsworth's *Preface to Lyrical Ballads*. The actual word "epiphany" Abrams believed, was used in its secular sense for the first time by Ralph Waldo Emerson in his journal as 1838. Quite truly it was James Joyce who first made current our 20th century uses of the word. Richard Ellmann writes in his book *James Joyce*.

The epiphany did not mean for Joyce the manifestation of godhead, the showing forth of Christ to the Magi, although that is a useful metaphor for what he had in mind. The epiphany [for Joyce] was the sudden "revelation of wholeness of a thing," the moment in which "the soul of the commonest object.... seems to use radiant." The artist, he felt, was charged with such revelations, and must look for them not among gods but among men, in casual, unostentatious, even unpleasant moments. He might find "a sudden spiritual manifestation" either "in the vulgarity of speech or of gestures or in a memorable phase of the mind itself." Sometimes the epiphanies are "eucharistic" another term arrogantly borrowed by Joyce from Christianity and invested with secular meaning. (p 87).

Like the "objective correlative" or "inshape" or "the destructive element", the term epiphany is useful, centering our sensibility while displaying them. Not only a respectable word, however, epiphany fits *Dubliners* and as many have pointed out, offers another hypothesis, this time about method. Most of us owe the word less to the Church, of course, than to Dedalus himself, who employs it in *Ulysses* and expounds it in *Stephen Hero*.

Stephen prefers epiphany to symbol because the radiance of epiphany is ecclesiastical, that of symbol more secular now-a-days and Stephen, though far from innocent of literary tradition, is centered in the church and country he rejected. The feast of the Epiphany, which occurs on January 6, celebrates the arrival of three kings at a manger, where, though they saw nothing more than a baby, saw something more. This Baby, now apprehended and showing forth, is the radiant body. It is from this that Stephen gets his way of looking at the unconsiderable but revelatory objects of Dublin. Of the thing, made potent by insight, by wholeness, and by harmonious relation of parts, he continues: "We recognize that it is that thing which it is. The soul of. . .

the object achieves its epiphany." (Joyce, (p 210-211, p213).

Epiphany has thus become, a literary term, for the description of the sudden flare into revelation of an ordinary object or scene. The Romantics have called a similar experience "the moment". Many Romantic writers testified to a deeply significant experience in which an instant of consciousness, or else an ordinary object or event, suddenly blazes into revelation, the unsustainable moment seems to arrest what is passing, and is often described as an intersection of eternity with time. In this instance also Augustine's *Confessions* provide the theological prototype.

In other words "there is charged Moment and also a momentarily charged object, and unlocalized irradiation of consciousness and an incandescent item of , sense perception..." (Abrams, 1971, P387).

Wordsworth is primarily a poet of the revelation and luminous Moment of the "gentle shock of mild surprise", of "flashes, as it were," of "objects recognis'd/ In flashes," of outer "gleams like the flashing of a shield," as well as of "attendent gleams / of soul illumination." (*Prelude*, vol-VI, VII, V, I, VI). In some few instances the revelation occurs when the visible scene, present or recollected, is entirely obliterated. In *Tintern Abbey*, "we are laid asleep / In body," in order with another eye to "see into the life of things". At other times an external scene evokes a sense of revelation which is ascribed to the accompanying state of mind. In a literal exposition of such an experience in *The Prelude* (when "on the roof/of an itinerant vehicle.") the naive country boy for the first time crosses the "threshold" into London, (and so in adult experience), he suddenly experiences the thrush of the divine into time.

But most common instances are those in which Wordsworth has his eye fixed on the object without "being mastered" by it, and the object suddenly blazes into revelation. Wordsworth applied the term "spots of time" to such moments but goes onto say "such moments.... are scattered everywhere" in his life (XI 274-5) and they are celebrated everywhere in his poems. This typical Wordsworthian "as if" quietly absorbs the world beyond time and place into the world of the apprehended here- and now.

Emerson introduced a term for the Moment of revelation in the trivial fact which to the modern ear is portentous. "The aroused intellect," he says when it confronts "facts, dull, strange, despised things", finds "that a fact is an Epiphany of God." (Emerson, P-90)

The Romantic Moment in which, as Frank Kermode in his *The sense of an Ending* (London, 1967) puts it, chronos suddenly becomes kairos, has had an enduring and multiform literary life. The illuminated phenomenal object, if transparent to a significance beyond itself, reappears as the symbol of the symbolists, but if opaque, as the image of the Imagists; in both cases, however, the Romantic object is usually cut off from its context in the ordinary world and in common experience and assigned an isolated existence in the self-limited and self-sufficing work of art. Northrop Frye in his *Anatomy of Criticism*, says of the symbol from the anagogic perspective-

Anagogically, then the symbol is a monad, all symbols being united in a single infinite and eternal verbal symbol which is, as *dianoia*, the *Logos*, and as *mythos*, total creative act. It is this conception which Joyce expresses, in terms of subject –matter, as "epiphany", and Hopkins in terms of form, as "inscape". (Frye, p121)

What Frye is implying here is the presence of the infinite and eternal being in the form of a visual symbol. This is the deliberate recapturing of something no longer possessed like the "flash which gleams and is gone" on the recapturing of the "moment". And the Moment of consciousness, the abrupt illumination in an arrest of time, has become a familiar component in modern fiction, where it sometimes functions, like Wordsworth's "spots of time", as a principle of literary organization, by signaling the essential discoveries or precipitating the narrative resolution.

There is a marked similarity or at least a recognizably familiar traits in Proust's, also in Henry James's act of imagination which "converts the very pulse of the air into revelations", in Joseph Conrad's "moments of visions" that reveals "all the truth of life", in Virginia Woolf's "moments of vision", "the little daily miracles, illuminations, matches struck unexpectedly in the dark" in William Faulkner's "instant of sublimation...a flash, a glare." (James, p31-32; Conrad, pXII; Woolf, p243; Faulkner, p351).

It was James Joyce, who gave "the highest palms" to Wordsworth, by transferring the theological term into a naturalistic aesthetic, affixed to the "Moment" its standard name - Epiphany. Joyce in *Stephen Hero*, analyses the "moments" of epiphany, referring to Aquinas but his descriptions have a strong leanage in the Romantics especially Wordsworth. An epiphany, Joyce notes, may appear in "a trivial incident", at the instant when the "spiritual eye" adjusts "to an exact focus."

By an epiphany [Stephen] meant a spiritual manifestation, whether in the vulgarity of speech or of gestures or in a memorable phase of the mind itself. He believed that it was for a man of letters to record these epiphanies with extreme care seeing that they themselves are the most delicate and evanescent of moment... For a long time I couldn't... The object achieves its epiphany. (Joyces, p211-1)

The sudden revelations from the ordinary and trivial experiences in a "moment" is also expressed in the poetry of T. S. Eliot. The two poets throughout their poetic and prose works express such experiences. From the citations of Ellmann quoted earlier in this chapter we can definitely say that Eliot learned not only the mythical method but also other things from James Joyce. Eliot must have already found (even before reading Joyce) the unsavory epiphany in Baudelaire, who certainly must have taught Eliot that revelations of the "sordid and disgusting" can be a proper subject for lyric poetry. Eliot could have also learned from Mallarme and the French symbolists as also from Joyce, the way to present these "moments" of illuminations either "badly" [as the pub scene in *The Waste Land*

"HURRY UP PLEASE IT'S TIME"] or by encipherment as in the mystifying horror under the red rock. It is important to note that even before his conversion to Christianity in 1927 Eliot understood the early Biblical sense of "epiphany" (even though the Biblical instances are used in the early poems as myths not dogmas but he could see the cosmic nature of the events, affecting all races which was the essential point of the Epiphany in St. Mathew's Gospel:

Son of Man,

You cannot say, or guess, for you know only,
A heap of broken images, where the sun
beats And the dead tree gives no shelter,
the cricket no relief, And the dry stone no sound
of water (Come in under the shadow of this
red rock) And I will show you...

I will show you fear in a handful of dust.

Eliot has seen something horrible and has to express that. In a moment the revelation was made and the moment has its epiphany. This time it was a hideous revelation and is conveyed in the voice of an Old Testament prophet, from God to all races remembering the fall of Jerusalem, Athens, Alexandria, Vienna, London. In the opinion of many critics Eliot's concept of mystical moment as a communal experience, was there much before the literal, conversion to Christianity in 1927. Certain other critics have read his poetry as less onto - theological, less logocentric. As Eliot said in 'The Metaphysical Poets' of 1921, a poet must go a good deal deeper than "the heart" to be a good poet. "One must look into the cerebral cortex, the nervous system, and the digestive tracts."

Most of the researchers, while discussing Eliot's epiphanies, lay emphasis on Eliot's later poems completely omitting the early poems including *The Waste Land*. Even Ashton Nichols turns straight to *Four Quartets* and concludes –

In the twentieth century, T.S. Eliot's later poems strive to continue Hopkins's return to the literary epiphany in a theological framework. Unlike Hopkins, however, Eliot in *Four Quartets* is also able to find the "privileged moment" not only a source of theophanic revelation but a symbol of divinity itself. (Nichols, p190)

T. S. Eliot is the only modern poet or at least more than any other who expresses the relation between time and timelessness (as in the *Four Quartets*) but that is limited to the human experience of divinity not a knowledge of God. Of course a few direct reference to God by name are seen here and there as in *The Rock*, Poems 1920 etc, but these do not tell us anything about God. The emphasis on the individual human consciousness is nowhere decentred. 'Personality' of a certain shade or an exaggeration of it was targeted by him yet Eliot never departed from the view that the "Absolute" is known and understood only and only through single human consciousness. In the 1940 essay on W. B. Yeats, Eliot removed the doubts and misconceptions of the critics of his "impersonality theory" of poetry. In the Yeats essay, he clearly says that the most powerful poetry is that which expresses some "personal experience" and it is this which leads to the expression of a "general truth".

Another way of understanding and defining Eliot's epiphanal moments would be by associating them with Pound's concept of the Image. Pound defines Image as "a complete emotional and intellectual complex in an instant of time." (Eliot,p4). In fact if we go through Eliot's critical works, we can say that he was always concerned with the complete union of emotion and intellect. If we follow the development of his poetry we will find that his epiphanal moments are indeed images of great psychological complexity of the shade which Pound gives to his word "complex". And here lies the difference between Eliot's revelatory instances and Wordsworth's "spots of time", or Joyce's "epiphanies" or Virginia Woolf's "moments of being."

As a writer, Eliot initially begins by rejecting Christian revelation. Many critics like Stephen Spender, Maxwell, Rajnath etc. have this view about Eliot's poetry. Spender and Maxwell are of the opinion that Eliot's early poetry draws on anthropology while later poetry concentrates on Christian tradition. But the question which arises, is the role of anthropology and Christianity same i.e. are their treatments same? Rajnath in *T.S. Eliot's Theory of Poetry* says:

I find convincing Berganzi's argument that the theme of *The Waste Land* is to be found not in the anthropological structure as such but in what the structure is used for... The myths used in the poems have the same role to play as symbols, metaphors and similes, in other words they are poetical devices... (Rajnath)

The rejection of Christian revelations can clearly be seen in the poems 1920 : in *Gerontion* for instance where Christ is imagined as a devouring tiger. 'The Hippopotamus' and 'Mr. Eliot's Sunday Morning Service' ridicule the Christian community mercilessly. But Eliot like Pound and some others believed that some sort of transforming revelation was missing from modern life and this lack had to be supplied from the artists' moments of illumination. To Pound, E. M. Forster and Eliot primitive myths were survivals of real revelations, lacking which the modern life was a travesty of true living. Eliot believed (at least for many years) as it appears from his works, that no such integrating revelations as appeared to the Greeks and Hindus could ever be recovered. The Christian World then appeared to him only a neurotic confusion of spiritual and sexual energies which has been elaborated and deeply depicted by Eliot in his pathological "saints" poems. "The love song" of St. Sebastian, who dies in an erotic embrace with the woman he strangles, and 'The Death of Saint Narcissus,' who (like Hesse's Siddhartha) undergoes three Buddhist incarnations into a tree, a fish, and then a young girl, but then achieves liberation under a grey rock in a ghastly, auto-erotic, self-immolation. These poems like 'Gerontion' and *The Waste Land* can be read as real but despairing epiphanies revealing the death of a religious consciousness. It is another matter that Eliot's essays were pleading for continuity of a literary tradition which includes "religious feeling" in poetry.

The early poems of Eliot i.e. the poems written before 1927 (his conversion to Christianity), showed psychic isolation from a unified and

"community culture" They all represent an isolated voyeur, peering into darkness and seeing some horror that could be specified by sexual inadequacies or vacuities. Beginning from 'The Love Song Of J. Alfred Prufrock' till *The Waste Land* we can see dramatization of such an isolated psyche in the protagonists of the poems and their epiphanies.

Prufrock even while he likens himself to "a patient etherised" i.e. being in half-conscious state, neither living nor dead, in spite of all his travels is led to "an overwhelming question." But beware of asking, "what is it?" He does not have the courage to face the question or whatever he has seen is so horrible that he shuns away from it. The "question is so perturbing for him that it appears to Prufrock that it would "Disturb the Universe?" or the outward calmness like the peace which one experiences just before the outbreak of a storm. Even though he gathers courage enough to express what he has "known" still would it be worthwhile –

To roll it towards some overwhelming question,

To say: "I am Lazarus," come back from the dead,

Come back to tell you all, I shall tell you all"—

...

The protagonist has definitely had his epiphanal moment and has seen some horror-

I have seen them riding seaward on the waves.

Combing the white hair of the waves blown back

When the wind blows the water white and black.

... Tell the human voices wake us and we drown.

The horrible experience and the inability to express it can also be seen in his trying to avoid facing the women "who come and go talking of Michelangelo," but for whom he is yearning all the time and still is caught in –

"There will be time, there will be time"

In Prufrock's avoidance to express his vision, there clearly reflects a fear of embarrassment before others. The other reason may be to emphasize the social element in the poem at the expense of the prophetic, as decades of commentaries confirm. Prufrock senses that his paranoid and increasingly frenzied revelation must appear to the maskers to be the ravings of a lunatic, not the raging of a prophet. In his "fantasies", Prufrock recognizes that truth-to-self, the fundamental self of prophesy, entails the death of the social self, the masker. Having prepared himself through the agony - "I have wept and fasted, wept and prayed" - he knows that his refusal to disturb the universe is decisive for his life: the prophet who has experienced the epiphanal moment, who sees but is silent destroys himself. By remaining a silent voice, Prufrock sees what he "should have been," a pair of ragged claws in a "silent" word.

Even 'Gerontion' expresses something similar. The myth in 'Gerontion' is Christian Christ's birth symbolizes beginning of a new era but 'Gerontion' sees Christ as a tiger (definitely not the Blakean tiger, an embodiment of creative fire and

light) but he is unable to attain any fulfilling meaning and vitality from it as was 'Prufrock' from his epiphanies. Gerontion does see, experiences epiphanal moments but it is one which does not lead to any change. In fact the whole struggle itself seems to be futile. The whole vision is distanced, suspended out of time, projected from a "dull head among windy spaces", framing a picture of complete psychic isolation and failure.

The dilemma of Gerontion the old man with "a dull head" and the circumstances in which he is presented is "carried alive into the heart by passion." The poet's imagination is filled with "ghosts" with suggestions, associations and memories charged by strange imagery and powerful rhythms. The whole vision / epiphany is "thoughts of a dry brain in a dry season." Gerontion is passive and inert, waiting for rain. Abruptly he is pulled out of his inertia into gusts of dramatic challenge and tries to seek self-understanding. His apologia moves back and forth from historical revelation to cynical or impassioned analysis to embittered disgust to declamatory warning. From reverie it passes to direct rhetorical approach: "Think now think now ..." and with a tormented desire to convince himself and his hearers of what is plainly untrue, he proclaims :

Think at last

We have not reached conclusions when I
stiffen in a rented house. Think at last.

I have not made this show purposelessly...

The visual images and physical details of the opening paragraph reveal his condition and the reasons for it.

In an abrupt, startling transition we pass from this symbolic description to obscure condensed intensity of suggestion. With the demand of the Pharisees - to Christ: "We would see a sign," we are shown the direction of thought. The sign was given but the modern world has taken the revelation, the epiphany with doubt and questioning. Bishop Lancelot Andrews has described the mystery of the Word made flesh Word here means logos meaning God. 'Word within a word' means Incarnation or the union of man and God first appearing in the form of a speechless infant Christ. But the word was swaddled with darkness leading to the conclusion that the mystery was not understood by man.

In the juvenescence of the year

Came Christ the tiger

In depraved May, dogwood and chestnut,
flowering judas,

To be eaten, to be divided, to be drunk

Among whispers;

Man is unable to understand the meaning of Incarnation nor that of Blake's tiger. This again leads Gerontion to see figures of his own deprivation abruptly changing the rhythm

After such knowledge what forgiveness. Man seeks knowledge but when it comes his "attention is distracted" and the "giving famishes the craving". From this depraved vision / epiphany appetites and impotencies bursts the realization that the tiger is eternally present but the isolated Gerontion is incapable of accepting the truth.

The tiger springs in the new year. Us he devours.

These and "thousands small deliberations.... Excite the membrane when the sense is cooled." It is towards the end that Gerontion charged with the vision / epiphany erupts in an imaginative overflow –

What will the spider do Suspends its
operations, will the weevil Delay? De
Bailhache, Fresca, Mrs. Cammel, whirled
Beyond the circuit of the shuddering Bear In
Fractured atoms. Gull against the wind, in
the windy straits.

Of Belle Isle, or running on the Horn.

White feathers in the show,...

But Gerontion is unable to hold on to the rich vision and is claimed by the Gulfs. The only Tenants of the house" in Gerontion are "Thoughts of a dry brain in a dry season" Gerontion ends where it began. The epiphany makes no difference. He has had chance epiphany but one which does not change him as he is in a spiritually and physically depraved condition. Eliot has shown that Pound's "complete emotional and intellectual complex in an instant of time," can be conveyed through images of absolute isolation, emptiness and inanition.

These epicenes, empty epiphanies appear central, as I. A. Richards observes, in *The Waste Land*, where sexual horror is one key to a larger void, affecting whole city and beyond them whole civilizations. The only thing that could save the questing knight or sailor would be a new religion on which to found new cities or civilizations - Jerusalem, Athens, Alexandria, Vienna, London. The poet refuses to ask for just another cycle of civilization or rebirth, after he has like Derrida, deconstructed the existing one. He asks only for peace that passeth all understanding –

Shantih, Shantih, Shantih.

The quester again was unable to respond to the epiphany and the message given by the Thunder: Datta, Dayadhvam, Damyata. The quester was unable to give fruitfully he has not been able to sympathize, nor control his human relationships. All things have failed him and has failed them. All his epiphanies have brought him near to absolute defeat and a longing for liberation from the cycle of rebirths—

I sat upon the shore Fishing, with the arid
plain behind me Shall I at least set my lands
in order? London Bridge is falling down
falling down falling down These
fragments I have shared against my ruins
Why then Ile fit you.

E.M. Forster said after reading *The Waste Land*, "Eliot is difficult because he has seen something terrible and (underestimating the general decency of his audience) has declined to say so plainly". Eliot responded to Forster in a letter of 1929, saying that Forster was right about *The Waste Land* and of course Eliot made such declarations publicly also later on.

Anne Bolgan (1973) has noted that the "something terrible" that Eliot has seen while writing *The Waste Land*, was already structuring his "emotional and intellectual complexes" before he reached England and married. After such knowledge what forgiveness indeed?

The original epigraph from Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* also sheds light on the poem as a "supreme

moment" of knowledge or in other words the poem is epiphanic and revealing. The process of reliving "every detail of desire, temptation and surrender" shapes the poem, as we know it, creating the most radically presentational of Eliot's psychic monologues. This reliving is so intense that after the opening meditation on April, the details flood back as events, submerging the self in the rush of memories and voices. The self becomes a spectator to its experiences, watching its "details" from the outside; it is the way Tiresias experiences things. Eliot has called Tiresias, a "mere spectator" in his notes thereby implying that the experiences are expressed in the poem are that of the protagonists/ the "characters" in different scenes. The seer differs in several ways from these characters who are "actors": they do things, but he watches.

Indeed, everything in the poem is displayed in a double - visioned world: there is first the ordinary vision of daily life, a two-dimensional flat vision of surfaces and of unreality, that is typified by the Unreal City of "characters" walking round in a ring of quotidian and bound forever on the turning Wheel; there is also the prophets' vision, a larger view of reality that reaches beyond appearance and time. Compared with these "characters" and their vision, Tiresias is a "personage" that is, one of rank, presence, and power whose vision is the norm for judging the meaning of "the rest" in that he sees the "third", dimension that "walks always beside" the poem's events, the "that" or meaning (But who is that on the other side of you") on the other side of the world.

'The Burial of the Dead' mixes particular memories and desires to account for the loss of innocence and the desires for release from the world of appearances as the seeker "lives his life again" in the manner of Conrad epigraph. These voices of confusion and loss remind the seeker that he is in a wasted world, and he wonders in the images of the generic Biblical prophet what can possibly grow from such "rubbish". But these images release new voices of specific prophets who remind him that ancient instances of chaos proved to be the ground of prophecy. Indeed the first voice he hears is that of the call itself, the voice of the Lord to the "Son of Man", Ezekiel by the waters of Babylon (evoking Eliot at Margate and by the waters of Lemman). The epithet "son of Man", so implies the ability of man to overcome human limits through god. What is required of the prophet is to hear the word and bear witness? Thus, *The Waste Land* is indeed prophetic poetry.

The images that follow develop this call to prophesy in the context of a wasted land - a landscape of barrenness and desiccation, of deadness and dryness, where the stone gives "no sound of water": it is a landscape which the seeker will recall in the intense final stages of his quest. The signs that invite the prophets witness symbolically duplicate for Eliot the conditions of contemporary Europe. In spite of these signs, the protagonist distrusts his call. The seeker senses that he must find his own call in the "heap of broken images" that constitute his epiphanal experience and that of his culture. But will the "stony rubbish" give meaning to the epiphany? The skeptic voice, suggests that by a

contemporary "son of man", is incompetent: he "cannot say or guess", for his "images" are "broken", a jumble, a -heap" Yet their "broken" character may carry meaning. Perhaps this waste world will reveal "something different". Yet the promised epiphany seems bleak:

"I will show you fear in a handful of dust"

Epiphany comes again in the "Hyacinth garden" scene, enclosed within the voices of Wagner's opera *Tristan and Isolde!* The scene reinforces the promise and frustration pattern developed in the April, Hofgarten, and Marie episodes that precede the ambiguous first call to prophesy.

You gave me hyacinth first a year ago;

"They called me the hyacinth girl" 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 know nothing, Looking into the heart of light, the silence.

It is important to recognize that this epiphanal experience to the protagonist suggest that sexual love inevitably leads to destruction. In effect, Eliot turns the ancient fertility rites upside down into images of sterility; for the fertility they ensure confirms the initiates' bondage to the Great Wheel of nature's cycle without leading to a higher life. The Hyacinth garden has been read as an ecstatic visionary experience of love, it is in fact the archetype of ambiguity in the poem. The lover is associated with fertility but the protagonist experiences a paralysis of mind and body that leaves him "neither / Living nor dead". He cannot speak; his eyes fail; he is arrested before some fundamental truth that overwhelms.

In the last section of 'The Burial of the Dead' Eliot enlarges his vision, by assimilating the city of daily life to Dante's visionary city of Dis and Baudelaire's Paris; he transforms his literal city into visionary city, the "unreal city" that is contemporary hell. Through this vision, the protagonist sees his world through new eyes.

In 'The Game of Chess' the incantatory chanting of 'Hurry up Please its time' is a reminder of the finality of the game of life. The time of judgment, "its time" cannot be stayed; he sees that it is time to seek transformation, not in the outer world but in the inner world of attitude and intention. Its importance to the protagonist is indicated by the uppercase letters that turn the innkeeper's last call, "HURRY UP PLEASE ITS TIME", into the last Trump, a reminder of the finality of the game of life. Hence, he turns to the inner world, the only world that matters.

In Part IV, 'Death by Water', the protagonist - seeker, sees a death different from the deathly lives of the figures of the preceding parts of the poem that prepares one for entrance into a state free from cycles of repetition. In Part V, he accepts that his savior figure is "dead" and that the seer himself is dying into a new life "with a little patience", the patience required to practice the disciplines that confirm detachment and that bring release.

In Part V, 'What the Thunder Said', the protagonist's journey reaches its climax. Overborne by repeated instances of the emptiness of life and by the overwhelming presence of death, he now experiences his final trial - a crisis of belief in the very

validity of his vision and the possibility of deliverance. He identifies with the despair of Christ's disciples after Good Friday, whose equivalent in the contemporary world is the emptiness that comes from a lack of faith in transcendence: "god", who was living", is now "dead" In spite of the example of Phlebas or perhaps because of its ambiguity, the protagonist, overwhelmed by sense that death ends all, and that living is simply "dying / With a little patience." This recognition plunges him into despair, imaged as a journey over a wasted, drought - ridden landscape that witnesses the collapse of the cities of this world, and all the wealth and materiality that they symbolize, and recapitulates, simultaneously, the Grail quester's journey to Chapel Perilous and the prophet's quest in the desert. Like the protagonist, the landscape is in extremis, its bones of rock mirroring his own extremity. As inner and outer landscape interact, the overwhelming presence of rock generates a desire so fierce that simply the idea of "the sound of water" urges it into being - "Drip, drop drip drop drop drop" - until he acknowledges the deception. Here is the final temptation of the quest, that of the prophet urging his own vision into existence, seeing "the third" but counting "only you and I together." The experience developed in this first part of Part V, which precedes and releases the voice of the Thunder and its messages, collates three motifs - the journey to Emmaus, the approach to the Chapel Perilous, and the contemporary collapse of Europe.

If the opening allusion to Christ's agony and crucifixion suggests the uncertainty and despair between Good Friday and Easter Sunday, the allusion to Emmaus and the events of Easter Sunday evening further specified that this uncertainty refers to the believe in a personal God.

This realization leads immediately to the question "who is the third who walks always beside you?" The protagonist's eyes may be "held" and released later, or they may be deluded; but he cannot now identify the recurrent third who walks always "beside" his other or, in a significant shift when the question is repeated, "on the other side" of his other. But all this vision or epiphanies of agony leads only to frustration as the seeker is not able to derive any meaning from it. It leads to

Falling towers
Jerusalem, Athens, Alexandria
Vienna, London
Unreal.

But surely the seeker has experienced the epiphanal moment, the third one walking beside him. The Divine has communicated to the world. But the seeker was incapable of giving, sympathizing and controlling. All he has is the "arid plain behind" him. One cannot feel in the formal "Shantih" ending - a surrender and a possibility of rebirth is still without substance. The seeker did experience the epiphany but was unable to understand it hence ends his quest with desperate call for - "shantih, shantih, shantih".

Not until *The Waste Land* was published could Eliot know how, or if, the command "come here... and I will show you fear in a handful of dust," would ricochet into the hidden memories of his readers, who hadn't like him been struck by Victor Hugo's epiphanies in *Les Contemplations*, or

Conrad's just opposite, convivial image at the end of "Youth" when Marlow sees "the spark of life in the handful of dust." *The Waste Land's* reception was his only proof that there was some common experience which binded the wastelanders - the isolation was suffered not only by Eliot but many like him.

The next poem 'The Hollow Men' presented the real state of mind, his thoughts and feelings, projected as a "sightless" man not wanting to be seen yet longs for eyes to "reappear / As the perpetual star / Multifoliate rose." The epiphany even in this poem is a feared event like in *The Waste Land*. But the concept of it has undergone change - a change from "I" to "we" leading to the community experience as expressed in the *Four Quartets* and his plays especially *The Cocktail Party*. From 1925 onwards, the seekers in different poems, belong to a community of similar people, beginning with the "stuffed", "hollow" and "empty" men of 'The Hollow Men'. This poem leads the seeker to the garden in 'Ash Wednesday', where all love ends leading to "the unread vision in the higher dream". In the Ariel poems Eliot experiences Dante's vision and epiphanies.

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