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The Horrors of a Disconnected Existence: Frustration, Despair and Alienation in the Poetry of T. S. Eliot

Oscar Chenyi Labang

ABSTRACT

The expression of modern existence as a disconnected entity with shocking and distressful consequences is reflected in the writings of many modernist writers, but it seems to take centre stage in the poetry of T. S. Eliot. The decline of values and the multifarious problems of the twentieth century have caused modern man to create parentheses that detach them from each other, from society, from nature and even from themselves. This paper examines the horrifying consequences of life in a chaotic and disconnected universe on human existence from the perspectives of frustration, despair, and alienation. From a Structuralist theoretical standpoint, the paper analyses the poetry of Eliot with the aim of showing that the poet explores and employs rhetorical tropes and linguistic codes that present individuals whose lives have been torn apart as a result of political, economic, social and religious crises. Social limitations and individual inadequacies have pushed modern man into hopeless individualistic worlds that are not connected to those of others around them, and the consequences of this are devastating.

KEY WORDS: disconnected existence, frustration, despair, alienation, Eliot

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Oscar Chenyi Labang, Lecturer, Department of English and Literatures of English Expression, E. N. S. Maroua, University of Maroua, Cameroon.
E-mail: osky_lit@yahoo.ca

存在之崩析瓦解的恐怖：艾略特詩歌中之挫敗、絕望與隔離

Oscar Chenyi Labang[*]

摘　要

以現代性的存在做為一個崩析瓦解之本質，其中亦不乏那令人畏懼苦惱的後續結果，此現象反映於許多現代性作家的寫作，而此似乎是艾略特詩歌裡的主要軸心。價值的式微與二十世紀本身的多重問題促使現代人去創造那些抽離自我分隔他者的括號，人們從彼此、社會、自然中隔離，甚者即至與自我分隔。以結構主義理論的立場論述，此論文的分析目的在於展現詩人艾略特探索挪用辭藻的轉義以及語言學符碼來呈顯那些撕碎生活的個體，而撕碎的個體即始作俑於一連串政治、財經、社會、宗教危機的惡果。社會的箝制以及個體的不適把現代人推至那沒有一絲希望曙光的個體世界，而個體之間卻沒有任何的相關連繫，而其結局不免是充滿毀壞性的。

關鍵詞：存在之崩析瓦解、挫敗、絕望、隔離、艾略特

[*] Oscar Chenyi Labang，西非喀麥隆共和國北部瑪諾亞大學講師。
E-mail: osky_lit@yahoo.ca

The expression of modern existence as a disconnected entity with shocking and distressful consequences is reflected in the writings of many modernist writers, but it seems to take centre stage in the poetry of T.S. Eliot. The decline of values and the multifarious problems of the twentieth century have caused modern man to create parentheses that detach them from each other, from society, from nature and even from themselves. This paper examines the horrifying consequences of life in a chaotic and disconnected universe on human existence from the perspectives of frustration, despair, and alienation. From a Structuralist theoretical standpoint, the paper analyses the poetry of Eliot with the aim of showing that the poet explores and employs rhetorical tropes and linguistic codes that present individuals whose lives have been torn apart as a result of political, economic, social and religious crises. Social limitations and individual inadequacies have pushed modern man into hopeless individualistic worlds that are not connected to those of others around them, and the consequences are devastating.

The extensive theorization about Structuralism has necessitated different and complex ways of using this approach to analyze works. In this paper, there is increasing inclination towards the structuralist viewpoints of Jonathan Culler. Like formalist critics, Culler believes that the close reading of a text is essential to unraveling the different layers of meaning. In Structuralist Poetics, he points out that oppositional terms are "pertinent to larger thematic structures which encompass other antitheses presented in the text" (Culler 226). Culler therefore suggests that binaries are capable of generating thematic significance that is relevant to the whole text. Yet, he sustains the argument that a text derives its meaning from its use of extrinsic linguistic codes, in which case the text is not autotelic. Culler states that "[a] genre, one might say, is a conventional function of language, a particular relation to the world which serves as norm or expectation to guide the reader in his encounter with the text" (Culler 159). He goes ahead to define the expectations that should "guide the reader in his encounter with the [poetic] text" by stipulating four conventions that should guide the approach to poetry. These are the convention of significance, which states that a poem should express "a significant attitude to some problems concerning man and/or his relationship to his universe" (Culler 115); the convention of metaphorical coherence, which states that meaning is revealed both at the literal and the metaphoric levels; the convention of poetic tradition, which allows readers to

assume allusions used in other poetry and equate them to other poetic figures; and the convention of thematic unity, which permits the reader to consider meaning as a product of all the parts that make up the poem.

According to Culler, the literary experience is much more than a process of linguistic code-breaking. Culler writes in his essay "Structuralism and Literature" that "[t]he sense of a poem's completeness is a function of the totality of the interpretive process, the result of the way we have been taught to read poems" (Culler 291). Culler advocates the blend of a social and semiotic structure in literature and suggests two ways of understanding the linguistic methods underlying structuralism. In the first method, Culler is concerned with the use of language as a transparent glass that enables the reader to understand the meaning behind a text. Thus, of the many possible methods of structuralist analyses, two are particularly relevant to this paper. These are: firstly, the study of the construction of meaning through rhetorical tropes and repetitions, and secondly, the interpretation of texts as symbols of the codes and conventions of the culture from which they emanate. The analyses attempt to construct meaning by analyzing the rhetorical tropes to show that the poems are expressions of the post-war culture of detachments, which has brought searing consequences (horror) on the individuals. The paper starts from the assumption of disconnectedness and moves toward the trajectory of uncovering the different forms of 'horror' expressed by the linguistic code and rhetorical tropes that the poet uses. Without an emphatic concentration on linguistic signs and their oppositional binaries, and without an absolutist extrinsic focus, this paper examines the literariness of Eliot's poetry in terms of its reflection on/of the predicament and precariousness of life in a civilization characterized by a general sense of impassiveness and disconnectedness.

In a cross section of Eliot's poetry, frustration is caused by the inability to fulfil the burning aspiration for love and genuine friendship. The characters live in a world which seems loveless and bare. Martin Scorefield is of the opinion that the idea of frustration resulting from pain in repressed sexuality is a trait that the poet apparently saw in his own life (Scorfield 126). In the same light, Oscar Chenyi Labang argues that much of the poet's life was characterised by frustration and despair, and art became a means of escaping some of the bitter realities of life (Labang 92). Eliot's literary maturation grew together with increasing family crises and disappointment. The death of his father in January 1919 generated in him a convulsion of guilt, especially as he

had hoped that he would have time to mend the bad feelings that his marriage and emigration had caused his father. Tony Sharpe holds that when Eliot's father died, it was always a source of regret to Eliot that his father died thinking of him as a failure (Sharpe 15). At the same time, Vivien's emotional and physical health deteriorated, and the financial and emotional strain of her condition took its toll. These crises and the atmosphere of uncertainty that hung over Europe left the poet much in a state of frustration and despair, and this attitude is reflected in the personas in much of his poetry.

In "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" almost all the characters witness one form of frustration. The central figure in the poem, Profruck and the subject of his contemplation, the women, are frustrated. The poem is an expression of Prufrock's state of mind as he acknowledges his failure and disconnection from life. Prufrock is a typical representation of the modern individual who has chosen to disconnect himself from other facets of life and is experiencing different forms of horror as a result. This results from his inability to satisfy his love desire towards the high-class lady. Prufrock's frustration is expressed in the image of the insect pinned on the wall:

> The eyes that fix you in a formulated frame
> And when I am formulated, sprawling on a pin,
> When I am pinned and wriggling on the wall
> Then how should I begin
> To spit out all the butt-ends of my days and ways?
> And how should I presume? (Eliot 15)

There is a play with pronounce gives the experience a sense of generalization and particularity at the same time. The use of the second person singular pronoun "you" suggests that the fixation caused by the eyes has effects on the "you" that the speaker addresses from the beginning of the poem when he says "Let us go then you and I." This "you," like the one at the beginning of the poem, remains a question of debate among critics as to whether it refers to the reader or Prufrock's ego. The position of this "you" is constantly being undercut by the "I" that follows it. Whether Prufrock is suggesting that the fixating eyes of the ladies frustrate the reader or Prufrock's ego, the generalization suggested by the "you" is limited or particularized by a repetitive use of "I". The experience, therefore, remains that of Prufrock and not that of twentieth century humanity which many critics say he symbolizes.

To accept that Prufrock symbolizes twentieth century humanity and that his experience is that of mankind in general in the postwar era will give a synergistic effect to frustration. In which case the idea will create conditions in which the total effect of frustration is greater than the sum of the individual effects. The fixation which he fears and which paralyzes his power to enhance his wish is born from his individual limitations; limitations which critics like Lyndal Gordon have found in Eliot himself. The most personal and tragic disappointment of Prufrock is revealed in the last section of the poem:

> I grow old . . . I grow old . . .
> I shall wear the bottoms of my trousers rolled.
> Shall I part my hair behind? Do I dare to eat a peach?
> I shall wear white flannel trousers, and walk upon the beach.
> I have heard the mermaids singing, each to each
> I do not think that they will sing to me. (Eliot 17)

The repetition of "I grow old" shows his regret for rapid aging. Also, the use of the personal pronoun "I" eight times in six lines makes the speaker's regret and tragedy more complete as it shows his full understanding and acknowledgement of his situation. Prufrock is not alone in this frustrating failure to live out his desires. This shift from singular to plural, as mentioned above, universalises the whole notion of frustration to involve not necessarily everyone but those who for particular reasons (age, sex, size, race and class) disconnect themselves from societal structure.

Even the ladies in the poem are frustrated. Theirs result from the inability to find the ideal man whom they yearn for. Like Prufrock, the ladies lead a disconnected life caused by the high vision of an idealised romantic male. The image of this ideal man is expressed in the symbol of Michelangelo, one of the world's greatest artists. Their frustration is underscored by the repetitive talk and the monotonous act of coming and going, which suggests restlessness in the face of frustration. The frustration of these ladies is however not as severe as that of the ladies in "Portrait of a Lady" and "Game of Chess". The ladies in these poems suffer a similar intensity of frustration caused by pain of repressed libidinal urges. Both ladies in their magnificent sitting rooms are disappointed because their sexual inclination, which is the object of such a brilliant set up, has not been satisfied.

The lady in "Portrait of a Lady" is unable to lure the "self-possessed"

young man into a love deal because her self-dramatization and exotic room is disconnected from the simple world of the man. After professing much love and calling on the youth to understand her, the lady realises that she has little or nothing to offer him. Although they love each other, there is an oppositional force that disconnects and keeps them frustrated. The lady desires love, and the young man makes multiple visits to profess his love for the lady, yet class or social status permanently disconnects them. He is young and vulnerable while she is "about to reach her journey's end." Upon realisation, the lady decides to engage in a monotonous and senseless act of serving tea, "I shall sit here serving tea to friends." To her, solace and comfort can be derived from this act of charity towards friends.

Similarly, the exquisite furnishings surrounding the lady in the first section of "A Game of Chess", while she waits for her lover's love pronouncements, are symbols of values of disconnection and frustration. She is frustrated, overly emotional, oddly sinister and surrounded by strange perfumes and smoking candles. Her frustration is caused by her lover's failure to speak, a condition induced somewhat by the condition in which they find themselves. Like Prufrock, the lover only thinks but never tells the lady what he is thinking of. Unlike the lady in "The Portrait of a Lady" who escapes through the act of serving tea, the lady in this case represses her romantic desires until they develop into the severe frustration and neurosis expressed in "My nerves are bad to-night. Yes, bad. Stay with me". The intensity of her frustration is further expressed in what Jonathan Culler calls the convention of poetic tradition. The allusions to other ladies in literature who were frustrated by love allow readers to equate the lady in the poem to other poetic figures and to draw corresponding conclusions. By associating the lady with Dido and Cleopatra, two women who committed suicide out of frustrated love, the poet is suggesting that the lady's neurosis is likely to stretch to such extremes. In the same light, Eliot uses Wagner's song of unrequited love in "The Burial of the Dead" to push across the idea of frustration:

> Frisch weht der Wind
> Der Heimat zu
> Mein Iriskh Kind,
> Wo weilest du? (Eliot 64)

This song which translates "Fresh winds blow to my homeland, my Irish

child, where are you waiting" is used to show further disappointment in love. By including the reference to this flagship of sexual obsession and unrealised love, Eliot gives a glimpse of his own personal mental crisis.

Another poem in which the frustration of twentieth century humanity is expressed amidst the glimpse of Eliot's own life is "Gerontion". Gerontion's frustration, unlike that of Prufrock and other early personae, does not fully result from sexual failure. However, there is a fusion of history and the decadence of religion within glimpses of sexual disappointment. Critics like Lyndal Gordon have been quick to point to the relationship that exists between Eliot and Gerontion:

> Gerontion's distinction derives partially from Eliot's own peculiar circumstances: he was a lodger in an alien place, he failed to fight the battles of his generation, he had not subscribed to its out dated values of romantic heroism, physical courage and sentimental nostalgia. The poems are private statement . . . yet at the same time a public exhortation, an attempt to alert a blighted society. (Gordon 102)

A central element in this quotation is the idea of "private statement". It supports our argument that the horrors which the individuals in the poem experience are those of the poet as an individual or those of people who have chosen one form of disconnection in life. Eliot induces Gerontion's frustration by locating him outside community life, in a decayed house in a dingy city after the Great War. The fact that Gerontion is cut off from the community means that his disconnection is not of his making. Like Prufrock, he regrets the fact that he is aging. The tone of a pathetic complainant is captured in the lines: "Here I am an old man in a dry month", and "I am an old man / A dull head among windy spaces." This is made more profound by the fact that he is in a dry month and "is being read to by a boy." The act of the boy serves more like a mockery to the old man who is neither old nor young but is dreaming of both. The boy who reads to Gerontion is symbolic of the reader or critic who seeks to understand why the old man has detached himself from society and what the consequences of this detachment are.

Gerontion makes the reader/critic boy to understand that history is partly the cause of his misery and frustration:

> History has many cunning passages, contrived corridors
> And issues, deceives with whispering ambitions,
> Guides us by vanities . . . . (Eliot 36)

Life to Gerontion is a futile venture in the many and cunning corridors of time. Guided by vanities of sexual pleasure, humanity blunders down these passages into frustration. History is interestingly linked to a woman:

> 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 if still believed . . . . (Eliot 40)

This portrays the contribution of sexual failure to the speaker's frustration. The range of expressions with sexual connotations such as "caressing hands" and "reconsidered passion" intensifies this. In the face of decay, misery, horror, and frustration, Gerontion cries out:

> 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 . . . .
> (Eliot 59)

This cry is an expression of the depth of his frustration. The profundity of this is communicated in the speaker's needlessness to preserve a passion that will be contaminated. This is made even more intense by the fact that Eliot employs the five senses in one instance alongside lost passions to express the gruesome frustration of the persona. In this state of unfathomable frustration, Gerontion wonders:

> In a wilderness of mirrors. What will the spider do,
> Suspend its operations, will the evil
> Delay . . .
> Beyond the circuit of the shuddering Bear
> In fractured atoms. (Eliot 69)

Here, Gerontion is wondering, questioning what can be done about the

horror of morality. He wonders how humanity can atone for its frustrating present, its stupid past and its unforgivable history. Unable to soothe the pains of real life, the characters became hopeless.

Another agonizing consequence of a disconnected existence conveyed in the poetry of Eliot is despair. In the book *A Search for God in Time and Memory*, John Dunne is in the opinion that "[t]he modern man . . . finds his hell and purgatory on earth in the form of despair" (Dunne 261). Eliot reveals the sense of the modern man's despair in "The Hollow Men." The poem is sometimes considered the depths of Eliot's despair. It reveals the state of mind and the spirit produced by some deeply felt disaster at the moment when the shock is most severe. Despair, the feeling of sheer unreality and of one's paralysed ability to help the self, is wonderfully conveyed. Faced with such circumstances, men appear to be nothing more than stuffed dummies. The materialistic world is felt to be only "death's dream kingdom." Such kingdoms have no redeeming vision of beauty as the reflection of sunlight on a broken column and the swinging of a tree in the wind have been left behind by the soul fallen into the pit of despair.

The note of despair with which the poem begins has a more profound expression in part IV. The eyes are symbols of spiritual reality that the hollow men dare not look at. The hollow men are therefore symbolic representations of those individuals who have disconnected themselves from the reality of a transcendental reality. The eyes are no longer present:

> The eyes are not here
> There are no eyes here
> In this valley of dying stars
> In this hollow valley
> This broken jaw of our lost kingdoms. (Eliot 91)

Here again the symbol of a fading star announced earlier has degenerated to a dying star. It symbolises a sense of deepening despair. In this state, the hollow men merely group together on the bank of the valley of death and avoid speeches. Their only hope now is for the appearance of the eyes: "the beauty of love expressed in multifoliate rose."

Furthermore, hopelessness and helplessness are communicated through a combination of futility and horror as life is reduced to the act of going "round the mulberry bush." In this futility, there are glimpses of a vision,

which again are immediately interrupted by the shadow. The hollow men experience "ideas" and "reality," "conception" and "creation," and "existence" and "essence." The experience of the hollow men is communicated in oppositional terms which suggest the struggle to grasp the essence of life. But, between them and the actual fulfilment "falls the shadow". The shadow becomes a symbol of the sluggishness, self-indulgence and indifference of the stuffed men. These men know that there is hope: that God exist and reigns, but their attempt to affirm that "for thine is the kingdom" is thwarted by a complaint that "life is very long". At the end, these men lack the courage and spiritual energy to complete the affirmation. They end up with fragments or "for thine is / life is / for thine is the" and see the world end "not with a bang but with a whimper." Their inability to pray suggests that they cannot communicate with God since they are not connected to God and they cannot face the vision of transcendental reality expressed in the images of the stars and the eyes. The absence of this connection makes them hollow and leaves them vulnerable to anguish, hopelessness and helplessness.

Like the other early poems, "Rhapsody on a Windy Night," conveys the idea of depression and desolation at the sordid memories that humanity has created for itself, and on the inability to make meaningful order out of them. By representing and juxtaposing images from both the past and the present, Eliot articulates the permanence of man's existentialist despair. The images of memory and the moon are used to express despair. In the first stanza, one finds "whispering lunar incarnations" dissolving the floors of memory. At twelve o'clock, memory is shaken and by one-thirty in the morning, it "throws up hard and dry / A crowd of twisted things." At the end of the poem, memory, which is said to have the key to lead man out of despair, fails. The progression of time and the intervention of transcendental elements like the moon do not provide ample avenues for human memory to comprehend its woes. The speaker therefore, feels compelled to return to the banal routines of daily life. As the poem progresses, the image of the moon is tainted and by "half past" it has lost the memory. Now disabled and enfeebled it can no more illuminate the world, a symbol of the growing sense of destitution.

Furthermore, the experience of despair is conveyed through a note of uncertainty, which surfaces in The Waste Land. The poem's tone changes from a pessimistic to an optimistic one and ends with uncertainty. The reader cannot say with certitude whether the journey across the wasteland has been vain, or

whether he has been shown something profound and inspiring at the end. At the end of the poem, "Shantih," "the peace which passeth understanding" could be a basis for hope, but before arriving at this the reader has gone through an experience that is bleak, fragmented and gruesomely despairing.

Most of Eliot's personae tend to become wanderers and exiles seeking adventure or acceptance. The speaker in "Preludes" considers the night as a moment of adventure through the sordid streets of the city. The first two "Preludes" stress the smell and grime of the street scene in the evening and morning. The last two focus on the onward suffering of a man and a woman. They imagine their lives of squalor and boring routines during which:

> One thinks of all the hands
> That are raising dingy shades
> In a thousand furnished rooms. (Eliot 23)

In the poem, images are used to express the squalid, weary and boring repetitions that characterise life in modern cities. The frequency of images of taste and smell, such as "smells of chestnuts," "female smells" and "cocktail smells in bars," as well as images of stale sameness, are used to display the horror and boredom of wearisome repetitiveness.

The sense of boredom cuts across most of Eliot's early as well as other later poems. In "Portrait of a Lady" the man's desire to wander into the town, commenting on events, correcting his watch, drinking beer, smoking cigarettes and reading a newspaper are caused by the boredom that forms part of his world with the lady. The man's boredom is compounded by the lady's monotonous music. In *The Waste Land*, the recurrent acts of baseless sexuality result from the speaker's sense of boredom. Grover Smith in *T. S. Eliot's Poetry and Plays: A Study in Sources and Meaning* notes that "for people who must be continually excited and amused if they are not to be overwhelmed by boredom, sex is merely escape and when it palls it converts marriage into tedious bondage" (Smith 79).

Pessimism resulting from the destruction of the Great War is also the subject of some of Eliot's poems. Eliot, however, does not dedicate much attention like some of his contemporaries to the subject of war. In "Gerontion," the mention is made of Gerontion's failure to participate in the war. "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" (Eliot 40). A more explicit

discussion on the despairing consequence of war is evident in the second of *The Four Quartets*. Apart from being the most Christian-oriented quartet, it is also the one that addresses the war most directly, particularly in its pessimism and vision of destruction. This is expressed in the fourth quartet "East Coker:"

> The wounded surgeon plies the steel
> That questions the distempered part;
> Beneath the bleeding hands we feel
> The sharp compassion of the healer's art
> Resolving the enigma of her fever chart. (Eliot 201)

This portion and its following lines describe a hospital scene with a "wounded surgeon" and a "dying nurse". Here, patients are not healed but are led through painful illness to death and a tenuous salvation. There is a metaphoric kinship between the earth and a hospital. The poet communicates a war scene in which one finds dripping blood, which is the only drink, and bloody flesh, which is the only food, available to those at the frontline of battlefield. The hospital imagery lays emphasis on human malignity. This, obviously, reveals the raging wars that brewed while Eliot was writing.

This pessimistic meditation over human lives "l'entre deux guerres" is immediately followed by Eliot's reflection of the failure of poetry:

> So here I am, in the middle way, having had twenty years -
> Twenty years largely wasted, the years of l'entre deux guerres
> Trying to learn to use words, and every attempt
> Is a wholly new start, and a different kind of failure
> Because one has only learnt to get the better of words
> For the thing one no longer has to say, or the way in which
> One is no longer disposed to say it. And so each venture
> Is a new beginning, a raid on the inarticulate
> With shabby equipment always deteriorating
> In the general mess of imprecision of feeling,
> Undisciplined squads of emotion. And what there is to conquer.
> (Eliot 202-3)

Eliot suggests that words (poetry) do not only fail to signify completely, but they also falsify. This is the core of the poet's pessimistic vision. The

beautiful lyrics which open the second section are erased by the harsh assessment of poetry as confusing and despairing. "East Coker", thus, offers a despairing picture of humanity and poetry. Even the idea of Christianity in the poem is coloured by despair. The crucifixion of Christ is thought of as bringing a rebirth, but in actual fact, the rebirth is only a terrifying stay at a hospital staffed by corpses.

Frustration, despair and negativity form the paroxysm of reality that make up experiences of the real world. Faced with these horrible realities, the individual in modern society struggles to release himself by resorting to various forms of escapism. The flight from the worries of real life is thus a characteristic of twentieth century humanity. Even the daring search for new forms of expression that characterises the twentieth century has been considered by many critics as a quest by writers for a means of escape from their own disillusionment. John Nkemngong Nkengasong, for instance, states in *W. B. Yeats and T. S. Eliot: Myth and the Poetics of Modernism* that:

> Poetic ingenuity which became a hallmark of the twentieth century literature did not emerge out of the sheer necessity to create the new literary tradition called "modernism". It was dictated by the gruesome circumstances in their lives. Poetry therefore became . . . a means of escape from the banalities of the real world, a means of sublimating their psychotic state, and a weapon with which they search for reality. (Nkengasong 124)

This mode of escape through the sublimation of psychotic state by means of writing is evident in "Portrait of a Lady". In this poem, the young man contemplates the death of the lady and his consequent isolation and considers writing as a possible means of escape.

> Well! and what if she should die some afternoon,
> Afternoon grey and smoky, evening yellow and rose;
> Should die and leave me sitting pen in hand
> With the smoke coming down above the housetops;
> Doubtful, for a while
> Not knowing what to feel or if I understand. (Eliot 22)

The young man's intention of visiting the lady is to create a relationship

and bring an end to his isolated life. Yet he is caught in a web of existential complexity based on the ironic turn that his struggle to escape from isolation ends in a profound reflection on isolation and further escape. He demonstrates his suffering as a mortal by contemplating on whether one can gain utter freedom through death. The death of the lady is thus suggestive of the fact that he has to continue in an isolated frame of life. Writing would, therefore, become a means of escape and entertainment in the face of isolation. Writing, as some psychoanalysts like Terry Eagleton suggests, becomes a social outlet for carefully sublimated thought of frustration.

Writing as a form of escapism is almost the last option for the young man. Before thinking of it, he has been involved in other forms of escapism spread in the various parts of the poem. In part one he desires to escape through the use of drugs or stimulants.

> Let us take the air, in a tobacco trance,
> Admire the moments,
> Discuss the late events,
> Correct our watches by the public clocks.
> Then sit for half an hour and drink our bocks. (Eliot 19)

The "tobacco trance" (smoking) and drinking to the young man are means of alleviating the pain of real life. He wants to escape from the atmosphere of the drawing room by going out to smoke or to walk about admiring places and discussing events or better still drinking beer. In part two, escapism is expressed through the physical act of going:

> I take my hat: how can I make a cowardly amends
> For what she has said to me?
> You will see me any morning in the park
> Reading the comics and the sporting page. (Eliot 20)

The expression "I take my hat" suggests the act of departure. To the young man, instead of coming to the lady's room, he prefers to go to the park to read newspapers in the open air. He is morally uneasy, ashamed of having led the lady on to confide in him. However, he does not know how to make amends. Ironically, his quest to break out of the individualistic sphere of existence to connect with the lady ends in further disconnection and alienation.

In other poems this desire for freedom from the unpleasantness of real life is expressed in different forms. In "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," it is sought through fantasy or daydreaming. Prufrock wishes for the freedom of sea animals: "I should have been a pair of ragged claws / Scuttling across the floor of the silent seas" (Eliot 15). This desire to escape from the noisy industrial centre to the silence of the sea is an attempt by the speaker to fulfil his desire and soothe the pain of reality. The image of the crab's "pair of ragged claws" suggests Prufrock's wish to scuttle away rather than endure the turmoil of human society. Prufrock's daydreaming is projected more forcefully at the end of the poem when he says:

> We have lingered in the chambers of the sea
> By sea-girls wreathed with seaweed red and brown
> Till, human voices wake us, and we drown. (Eliot 17)

Here the speaker demonstrates the freedom of his imagination contrasted with the despairing drowning to the reality of human voices. The sound of voices disturbs his solitary ruminations, and the images of lover and prophet die away. By indulging in daydreams, he allows his ideal conception of woman expressed in "sea-girls" to dominate his transaction with reality. He has neither used human love nor rejected it but has cultivated an illusory notion of it. This is what has paralysed his will and kept him from turning desire into action.

This last stanza of the poem is, in the opinion of Morris Weitz, difficult and is often misinterpreted. To him, a more plausible interpretation can be offered through the "concept of immanence". In this line of thought, Weitz interprets the stanza thus:

> We etherised patients, who live in our limbo-like trance of doing nothing, have been near the source of salvation: we will remain there till we cease our state of mere physical existence of "death-in-life, and attain our spiritual rebirth, our "life in death." (Weitz 177)

This interpretation highlights two salient issues: Prufrock's dream state and paralysis or inactiveness, and the possibility of salvation within ordinary experience. This can be attained only if man stops daydreaming and reaches

out of it.

In "The Hollow Men," escapism takes the form of disguise. The speaker in part II confesses the difficulty and impossibility of confronting the eyes whether in dreams or in the dream kingdom of the other world: "Eyes I dare not meet in dreams / In death's dream kingdom (Eliot 89). Symbolic counterparts of the eyes, conveyed in sunlight, trees and voices in the wind, are what he encounters in his imagination. The idea of escapism through disguise is vividly projected in these lines:

> Let me be no nearer
> In death's dream kingdom
> Let me also wear
> Such deliberate disguises
> Rat's coat, crowskin crossed staves
> In the field
> Behaving as the wind behaves
> No nearer. (Eliot 90)

The speaker does not want to go close to "death's dream kingdom". Rather he desires to think of himself only as a scarecrow. Through this scarecrow symbol, he shrinks from life in a "deliberate disguise". The symbol designates both the ineptitude and spiritual weakness of the speaker as he cannot contemplate the reproach of "that final meeting / In the twilight kingdom" where he would encounter the eyes.

In the last three poems of *The Waste Land*, escapism takes a positive form. These poems deal with a gradual escape from the contamination of physical waste and the sexual lust that characterise the first two poems and the first scenes of the third. "The Fire Sermon" is a poem on the fire of instincts and passions like anger, lust, and materialism. The instincts of purposeless sex, like the rape of Philomel by King Tereus, and images of decay that make up the scenes of the poem, suddenly give way to a strong yearning to escape from these. Aware of the decay, the speaker like St. Augustine cries out to God to free him "O Lord Thou pluckest me out / O Lord Thou pluckest" (Eliot 70).

The desire to escape from the worldly passion of commercialism takes the form of death in "Death by Water." Death by water is at once symbolic, especially for its significance in Christian theology. It thus becomes a kind of cleansing or purification rite for Phlebas, the Phoenician business agent. For

its part, "What the Thunder Said" takes on a religious theme in the first two scenes. The first part deals with people who have experienced "the frosty silence in the gardens / After the agony in stony places / the shouting and the crying" (Eliot 76). They have experienced life in the wasteland which is composed of "rock and no water" and have witnessed that "He who was living is now dead" and "we who were living are now dying." The allusion of the journey to Emmaus and the group of hypnotised human beings groping up the mountain with the hope of finding water are suggestive of the escape from the wasteland in search of a redeeming source. The search for water at last is fruitful. Black clouds gather and the spark of thunder in a flash of lighting is followed by the rain that "Drip drop drip drop drop drop." The onomatopoeia in this line is suggestive of drops of rain on the dry and stony wasteland. Having found water, the speaker settles down and fishes while singing that "London Bridge is falling down." Eliot then barrows from the Hindu Upanishad and Sanskrit, words of benediction, with which he ends *The Waste Land*.

Twentieth century humanity found itself in a world of anarchy, barbarism and inane banalities and as a result, frustration, desperation and escapism became common features of life. These features, however, were experienced in varying degrees by individuals. As the analysis shows, individuals who, out of personal inadequacies or social limitations, disconnected themselves from other facets of society fell into the abyss of more profound horrors. Seemingly, the only option left was to withdraw from life. The personae in most of the poems desire to escape from the chaotic wasteland to an inner visionary experience. Yet, in these individualistic visionary states they confront deepening horror; they confront an inner world of nightmare, a combination of what Ronald Bush calls "city and psyche, the horror and the boredom of the everyday world" (Bush 78). The feeling of uncertainty, insecurity, boredom and decay plunged mankind into deep despair but left people who detached themselves from God or nature or society with a more severe sense of the crises. This possibly is why Eliot, in his later poetry, thinks that the best possible way of salvaging the crises of civilization is to reconnect to God, society, and nature, themes that find recurrence in his later poems.

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