

## INTRODUCTION

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION.

The present study aims at analysing and interpreting the imagistic patterns in Eliot's early poetry. The discussion is limited to the two early collections of Eliot's poems : Prufrock and other observations (1917) and Poems (1920). The Waste Land which could be said to belong to Eliot's early poetry is not included in the present study, for it naturally remains outside the scope of the aims and purposes implied in the analytical framework of the dissertation. In the same way, because of the structural and symbolic complexities of The Waste Land, its imagistic patterns have been thoroughly explored by eminent Eliot critics. Comparatively a study of the imagistic patterns in Eliot's early poetry is still rewarding because there is enough scope for demonstrating the interrelationships between the imagistic patterns. The criticism of Eliot's early poetry seems to deal more thoroughly with major poems like Prufrock, Portrait and Gerontion. But the present study lays equal emphasis on the minor poems. It has particularly demonstrated the complex relationship between the imagistic

patterns in the major and the minor poems. Its peculiarity also lies in an elaborate discussion of the imagistic patterns in Eliot's unpublished poems.

For convenience of the framework of the argument, a poem is treated as a unit. So the analysis of an individual poem aims at showing the interrelations among the various patterns of images in the poem. At the same time, the contexts of recurring images are interpreted at appropriate points in the argument. The interrelations between the imagistic patterns in the first collection of poems (1917) and those in the second collection (1920) are specifically demonstrated. Thus the phenomenon of imagistic patterns in Eliot's early poetry is treated as a whole. The discussion of the imagistic patterns is always related to the various dimensions of the theme.

The present study owes a great deal to the efforts of eminent Eliot critics like Hugh Kenner, Helen Gardner, Williamson, Lindall Gordon and others in analysing and interpreting the imagistic patterns in Eliot's early poetry. According to Hugh Kenner, the imagery in Eliot's poetry was influenced by various sources. Some of them were : the French Symbolist poets (Laforgue and others), later Elizabethan dramatists and the philosophy of F.H. Bradley. The nature of Eliot's imagery was to appropriate anything that came near.

That the imagistic pattern in Eliot's early poetry assimilated all these forces was the first proof of the genius of Eliot. Eliot discovered from Laforgue the potentialities of self parody which was given a form through the sartorial imagery. The later Elizabethan dramatists provided a mood for introspection which resulted in psychological imagery allowing the character to be dominated and circumscribed by his own image of himself. The influence of F.H. Bradley's philosophy resulted in the fragmentary nature of Eliot's imagery where the images do not stand in explicable analogy to one another, but they are essentially disjoined and are experienced as one psychic totality.

Helen Gardner states that the imagery in Eliot's early poetry emerged from what Eliot had described himself as "an intense and narrow taste determined by personal needs."<sup>1</sup> This early taste led him to the later Elizabethan dramatists as well as the French symbolists. These influences imposed certain limitations on the imagery of the earlier poems. Gardner finds the images of taste and smell remarkably frequent in the early poetry and thinks that they are quite natural to a poet whose subject is something "beneath both beauty and ugliness".<sup>2</sup> Besides, there is a rare combination of the city imagery and the

nature imagery in Eliot's early poetry. Eliot describes the sordid aspects of the modern metropolis in terms of nature in its sinister aspects.

George Williamson comes out with very interesting revelations regarding Eliot's imagery in early poetry. He thinks that the imagery is associated with feelings and not with thoughts. A particular kind of imagery becomes the expression of a particular kind of feeling not only in the same poem but in different poems (e.g. The imagery of the Stairway). On the contrary, the same imagery may create contrasting feelings in different poems (e.g. the Sea imagery). The pattern that the different images (with their contrasting connotations) make for us is worth studying.

Lyndall Gordon attributes the source of Eliot's imagery to his own life. She attempts to elicit the autobiographical element in his poetry. Eliot wrote, "There is a transfusion of the personality or, in a deeper sense, the life of the author into the character."<sup>3</sup> This may further be explained by the fact that the religious imagery in Eliot's unpublished poems is the result of an influence of his mother, herself a religious poet. The sea-imagery which forms the background of

so many poems of Eliot, has an invariable stamp of the New England coast where Eliot spent his boyhood. The imagery of smell which Eliot uses so vividly in his early poetry can be aptly referred to the influence of his father who had an acute sense of smell. The city imagery is the expression of the imprint of the life in cities like Boston and Paris which he experienced as a young student in his formative years.

Elaborate commentaries by eminent Eliot critics are of great help in analysing and interpreting the imagistic patterns in Eliot's poetry. But equally valuable are Eliot's own comments on his own practice of imagery. In his critical writings, Eliot seems to be consistently preoccupied with the concept of image. For instance, in the essay "Tradition and Individual Talent" (1919) Eliot says that tradition involves the historical sense. This historical sense is a sense of the timeless as well as of the temporal and of the timeless and of the temporal together. Eliot's concept of the historical sense can be aptly interpreted in his use of time imagery in poems such as "Prufrock" and "Rhapsody". In the essay on Dante, (1929) Eliot talks about Dante's power of expressing his content with a force of compression. This force of compression is the peculiarity of an image. The image tells us many things in a few words. Some images

have a greater power of compression than the others. The image of the evening at the beginning of Prufrock can be cited as an example. In this context, Eliot compares Dante with Shakespeare and points out that Shakespeare's images are complicated than Dante. Dante's poetry shows that more and more rarefied and remote states of beatitude can be the material for great poetry. According to Eliot, his use of animal imagery has its origin in a dim recognition of the direction of beatitude as it has a spiritual undertone.

In his essay, "The Metaphysical Poets", Eliot points out that the peculiarity of the Metaphysical poets was that they produced most successful and characteristic effects by sudden contrast of associations. This is known as the telescoping of images. In this essay, he talks about the source of imagery when he says that the poet's mind is constantly amalgamating disparate experiences in a new whole. Eliot says, "The ordinary man's experience is chaotic, irregular, fragmentary. The latter falls in love, or reads Spinoza and these two experiences have nothing to do with each other, or with the noise of the typewriter or the smell of cooking; in the mind of the poet, these experiences are always forming new wholes."<sup>4</sup>

In the essay, "Andrew Marvell", (1921) Eliot talks about a succession of concentrated images in

Marvell's poem, each magnifying the original fancy. They are concentrated in the sense they intensify the total effect of the poem. The image of Marvell is more comprehensive and penetrates greater depths than Horace. A comprehensive image should be wide enough to cover all the other images. It may form the background of the poem. Eliot also points out the distinction between imagination and fancy with the help of the image by saying that the fancy develops unintentionally ridiculous images. These images are sometimes over developed and distracting.

In the essay, "The Music of Poetry", (1942) Eliot explains that recurring imagery leads to the total effect. Eliot does not use his recurring imagery with a singularity of meaning but it has different meanings in different contexts. In the essay "Milton I" (1936) Eliot complains that Milton's imagery is general and not particularised like Shakespeare. In "Milton II", he points out that Milton is at his best in the imagery suggestive of vast size, limitless space, abysmal death and light and darkness. These are all spiritual concepts. Milton excelled in such kind of imagery. He also lacked visual imagery.

In the essay, "Johnson as Critic and Poet", (1944) Eliot says that the modern poet is comparatively careless



about diction and metre. What is characteristic of his art is new and striking images. These images are specific and individual and create interest. In the essay, "Rudyard Kipling", (1941) Eliot talks about a poet's maturity. As a poet grows older, he turns to new subject matter, or he may treat the same material in a different way. These changes may be reflected in a change of imagery or form or rhythm.

To define the context of Eliot's imagery it is necessary to take into consideration the opinions of T.E.Hulme and Ezra Pound. T.E.Hulme, the founder father of the Imagist movement, thought that a new and original way of saying things was necessary, if poetry was to be accurate. This can be found in a new kind of imagery : fresh, unusual metaphors and analogies. He said "Plain speech is essentially inaccurate. It is only by new metaphors, that is by fancy, that it can be made precise".<sup>5</sup> This precise analogy was otherwise known as the Image. Ezra Pound lays stress on the instantaneity of the 'Image'. His one image poem, "In a Station of the Metro", reveals the method which he himself calls as "form of superposition", that is to say, it is "one idea set on top of another". This method of setting down two equally detailed images

in a metaphorical linkage is used occasionally in Eliot's verse. According to Pound's dictum, Imagism does not use images as ornaments. The image is itself the speech. The image is the word beyond formulated language. The clarity, precision and concreteness that Pound and his fellow Imagists strove after caused them frequently to describe sense-impressions and details with little reference to the object or person of which they were a part. Eliot's early poetry quite independently has this quality. So far as the nature of poetry is concerned, Eliot is on common grounds with the Imagists. But it is in his definition of the nature of poetic activity and the material out of which poetry is made that he differs from the Imagists. Like Hulme, Eliot believed that a poet should perceive reality more vividly and accurately than ordinary men. He said, "I may say that the great poet should not only perceive and distinguish more clearly than other men the colours & sounds within the range of ordinary men and be able to make men see and hear more at each end than they could ever see without his help."<sup>6</sup>

Eliot, like Hulme, emphasizes that the writer should only present his observations to the reader, for he like them is a limited finite being. He says, "... the explorer beyond the frontiers of ordinary consciousness will only be able to return and report to his fellow-citizens,

if he has all the time a firm grasp upon the realities with which they are already acquainted."<sup>7</sup> Further, the Imagists emphasized the physical nature of poetic thought and demanded of the poet the primitive situation where thought became the experience of seeing the analogy between two objects. Eliot finds this realized in Donne and the Metaphysicals, along with the later Elizabethan dramatists.

The Imagist's effort to present the analogy results in the Image, but Eliot chooses to describe it in other terms. He speaks of the "clear visual images"<sup>8</sup> of Donne, "Verbal equivalents for states of mind and feeling"<sup>9</sup> in his essay "Metaphysical Poets", and "objective equivalents of feelings"<sup>10</sup> in the famous essay "Hamlet". Eliot says, "The only way of expressing emotion in the form of art is by finding an 'objective correlative'. In other words, a set of objects, a chain of events which shall be the formula of that particular emotion, such that when external facts, which must terminate in sensory experience are given, the emotion is immediately evoked."<sup>11</sup>

This is in effect exactly what Hulme demanded from the Image a form of direct communication. It is interesting to compare the way in which both Eliot and

the Imagists realize the Image or "the objective equivalent of feeling" in an impersonal form. Pound used the behaviour of particles of metal in the presence of a magnet as an image by which to describe the process whereby material was shaped in the poet's mind to become art. Eliot saw the same process and considered the action that takes place when Oxygen and Sulphur dioxide meet in the presence of a catalyst and results in the formation of sulphurous acid. The analogous reaction which takes place in the mind of the poet forms the objective correlative, for the poet himself is detached from his materials and only acts like the catalyst in bringing them together.

Each part of the complex structure of the early poems is an image. It is in itself an Imagist poem, a fragment. Each image which makes up the complete poem is clear, sharp, accurate and visible. A complex view of the world cannot be expressed by a fragment. What Eliot maintains is that a series of such fragments can, and so he makes elaborate construction of his images. What Eliot did was to construct on the image, to connect it with symbol and myth and relate it to other images. For the Imagist, the Image was a unit, and this unit was a poem. For Eliot this fragment became the unit of poetry, the point from which he began the difficult task of constructing the complex assemblages which are his poems. Eliot was preoccupied in his early years with imagistic pattern,

a wholeness of construction and a structure made out of emotions. The symbolist movement played an important role in the construction of this structure because the symbolists emphasized the importance of structure in their verse. This attempt to build a poetic structure out of fragments, Yvor Winters calls a "Qualitative Progression",<sup>12</sup> where the poet abandons a rational structure altogether and moves in a dislocated stream of consciousness type progression from image to image with little or no connection between them. The meeting point of Imagism and Symbolism is that the symbolists desired to bring their symbols within the range of analogy. It is the co-existence of the image and the symbol in Eliot's poetry which explains the imagistic pattern in his poems and it is out of the pattern which he makes of the two that he creates a new symbolic language of concrete, ~~visually~~ <sup>visually</sup> precise images.

As Eliot's use of an image shows the influence of T.E.Hulme's and Pound's ideas about imagism, it has an imperishable stamp of Baudelaire's practice of using an image. Eliot and Baudelaire were interpreters of their own age. Baudelaire's art represented an awareness of man's situation in the modern world. Both of them were the poets of the modern era and so, the principle

characteristic of the modern age, for them, was disorder in every domain of life. In his formative years, Eliot looked at Baudelaire as an inventor of a way of feeling a way of understanding disorder. He was especially for Eliot, the believer in moral values. Baudelaire's greatness was largely due to his awareness of the problem of good and evil. Eliot appreciated Baudelaire's capacity to elevate poetic imagery to a great degree of intensity. In Baudelaire's aesthetics, the slightest object may be magnified by the poet. He thought that there is poetry and beauty in the most trivial aspects of modern life. According to Eliot, Baudelaire's poetry shows "more sordid aspects of the modern metropolis", and "the possibility of fusion between the sordidly realistic and the phantasmagoric, the possibility of the juxtaposition of the matter-of-fact and the fantastic."<sup>13</sup>

Along with Baudelaire, Eliot was also influenced by Dante's use of images. He talks about Dante's universal mastery in the use of images. He says, " . . . proceeding through the Inferno, on a first reading, we get a succession of phantasmagoric but clear images, of images which are coherent in that each reinforces the last . . . "<sup>14</sup> Apart from these influences, Eliot has his own way of using an image. He justifies his presentation of the

world as a sordid reality. Eliot's aim was "to write poetry which should be essentially poetry, with nothing poetic about it."<sup>15</sup> Eliot also wanted that poetry should make us aware of "the deeper, unnamed feelings which, from the substratum of our being to which we rarely penetrate, for our lives are mostly a constant evasion of ourselves and an evasion of the visible and sensible world".<sup>16</sup>

Eliot points out the unfathomable mystery surrounding the source of imagery. He says, "Only a part of an author's imagery comes from his reading. It comes from the whole of his sensitive life since early childhood. Why, for all of us, out of all that we have heard, seen, felt in a lifetime, do certain images recur, charged with emotion, rather than others? . . . Six ruffians seen through an open window, playing cards at night, at a small French railway junction where there was a water-mill. Such memories may have a symbolic value, but of what we cannot say, for they come to represent the depths of feeling into which we can't peer".<sup>17</sup>

The sequence of images which leads to the recreation of thought into feeling is not inconsistent as it apparently seems to be. As Eliot says, "The reader

has to allow the images to fall into the memory successively without questioning the reasonableness of each at the moment, so that the total effect is produced. Such a selection of images has nothing chaotic about it. There is a logic of imagination as well as a logic of concepts . . . "18

Thus, Eliot's practice of using an image shows the influence of imagism to a limited extent. Eliot also seems to share Hulme's and Pound's concept of image. Eliot's own concept of image developed in his acknowledgement of the influence of Bandelsire and Lefergue, Dante and the Metaphysical poets on his poetry. In his comments on the imagery of these poets, Eliot implies his preferences. And the imagery in Eliot's early poetry shows a harmonious blending of all these varied influences. Like Shakespeare, Eliot has an uncanny trick of making a creative use of the borrowed material. The strength and flavours of Eliot's imagery lies in a typical juxtaposition of the concrete and the abstract, the physical and the spiritual, the visual and the auditory, the beautiful and the ugly. The discussion in the following chapters is a modest attempt to explore the complexities of this juxtaposition found in the imagistic patterns in Eliot's early poetry.