

PRUFROCK      AND      OTHER  
OBSERVATIONS (1917)

## CHAPTER II

### PRUFROCK AND OTHER OBSERVATIONS (1917)

The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock is the major poem in 1917 volume. Prufrock, the central character of the poem, is a representative of the modern man. His intellectual nature distrusts emotions on one hand and disbelieves spiritual conceptions on the other. As a result, thought and feelings have no harmony and life has become distorted. The imagery in the poem is suggestive of Prufrock's state of mind in terms of the boredom of modern life. It is mainly related to the details of monotonous daily routine and the modern man's desire for an imaginary escape. Ezra Pound says, "It is a portrait of failure, or of a character which fails, and it would be false art to make it end on a note of triumph . . . a portrait satire on futility can't end by turning quintessence of futility. Mr. Prufrock, into a reformed character breathing out fire and ozone."<sup>1</sup> In accordance with its complex theme, the poem shows a rare combination of commonplace and esoteric imagery.

The poem begins with the evening spread out against the sky like an 'etherised patient.' This comparison between two far-fetched objects is far from poetical. In fact, the

imagery makes one remember a remark by F.R. Leavis, where he says, "The nature of Eliot's imagery is such that the canons of the poetical are forgotten, the poet assumes the right to make use of any materials that seem to him significant."<sup>2</sup> Moreover, the term 'etherised' is very significant as it suggests a patient on the borderline of life and death. Prufrock the living is as good as Prufrock the dead. The 'patient etherised' indeed extinguishes the sky and leaves behind only a thought of illness and paralysed faculties. The metaphor of etherisation explains a desire of inactivity as well as an enforced release from pain. Audrey Cahill says, "The clinical overtones suggest the state of partially controlled dread associated with the operating theatre. The self exposure that Prufrock plans, but never executes, assumes for him the proportions of a major operation in which he is to be cut and examined and hurt."<sup>3</sup> Stephen Spender terms this imagery as 'symptomatic', as it appears at the very beginning of the poem and therefore, it is suggestive of Prufrock's mood. The sky and the table do not signify any single evening and any single patient, but they have a universal character.

With the fog-cat image that follows, we have another reflection of Prufrock's mental state, the desire which ends in inertia. If the cat image suggests sex, it also suggests a desire for inactivity. It is an unconscious

disguise for Prufrock himself. The smoke and the fog are images from nature in its most sinister aspects. The evening fog, a yellowish, fluffy piece of fog, is compared with a cat having a muzzle.' As the metaphor develops, the fog-idea is almost displaced by animal associations. Prufrock conceives of nature in terms of a cat licking the dirty drain water, allowing chimney-soot to settle on its body and finally falling asleep. When the fog is presented as a cat free from human tensions, Prufrock envies it. Later on, the fog seems to have penetrated the solon itself, for Prufrock finds it stretched on the 'floor,' here, beside you and me.' Joseph Margolis says, "the fog is a kind of hallucination present only to the divided soul of Prufrock. It is a kind of Grail, ambiguously characterised as corrupting but actually providing the occasion and the test of spiritual regeneration."<sup>4</sup> The images of the fog-cat as well as that of the 'evening and the etherised patient' are esoteric images in the sense that they have a complexity of meaning and feeling as well as they give a perspective of 'double vision.'

The 'image of eyes' fixing one in a formulated phrase, is the most violent image in the 1917 volume of poems. Elizabeth Schneider says, "Though violent, it is wrapped in so much decorum that its force escapes the casual reader. Yet Prufrock is speaking of himself and what he describes is the object loss of control of bodily functions in the extremity

of agony and terror. He is like the specimen insect impaled to be stared at in its death agony as it ejects its insides at both ends."<sup>5</sup> The image intensifies the conflict within him. Only less violent is the other image of exposure and split consciousness that of seeing one's own nervous system projected 'in patterns on a screen'.

The image of Prufrock as a 'pair of ragged claws' scuttling across the floors of silent seas is the grotesque central image of the poem. It embodies Prufrock's recognition of what he essentially is. Elizabeth Schneider says, "Prufrock is a subhuman Crustacean, doubly dehumanised by the synecdoche of claws, even beyond its identity as crab or lobster, and moving a cold solitary being in armoured solitude on the sea-floor."<sup>6</sup> The image reflects Prufrock's desire of retreating into his own shell. It also implies the duality of Prufrock's nature.

The image of the 'coffee-spoons' telescopes two complete ideas. One is that of partaking of life in tiny sips instead of delighting in its full flow and volume. The other is that of wasting it away little by little in the intellectual society symbolized by parties. Measuring something as grand as life with something as insignificant as coffee-spoons suggests that for Prufrock, life is insignificant and meaningless.

The 'imagery of urban disillusion' has a strong autobiographical tone. The society projected in *Prufrock* is inevitably a Boston society and the half-deserted streets, one-night cheap hotels, the sawdust restaurants, are an indispensable part of the Boston slums. Lyndall Gordon remarks, "Eliot lived during his most formative years in the city of Boston. It was a society as he himself called it, 'quite uncivilized, but refined beyond the point of civilization!'"<sup>7</sup> Eliot personified himself as *Prufrock*, who took on its rigid manners, its loss of vigour, its estrangement from so many areas of life and its painful self-consciousness.

Eliot treats the time imagery in his own distinct way. He completely disregards the ordinary division of time. This concept can be referred back to the influence of F.H. Bradley's philosophy on Eliot. While explaining Bradley's concept of 'Immediate Experience,' Eliot says, "Immediate Experience is a timeless unity. An object which is wholly real is independent of time."<sup>8</sup> In *Prufrock*, he systematically confuses the temporal and the eternal disciplines. Secondly, *Prufrock* finds comfort in time because time postpones actions. The stanza in which the word 'time' reverberates effectively communicates the heightening of the emotional tension. The words have lost their connection with the active world, in fact, they have lost everything except the desire of escape.

The 'heroic imagery' deals with heroes in every field of life. In Prufrock, Eliot uses it in terms of literary allusions with <sup>the</sup> purpose of bringing out the contrast of values. The heroic figure of Michelangelo practised the noble renaissance values. The women talking about Michelangelo degenerate his great art as a subject of mere gossip. Helen Gardner remarks, "One must talk of something and Michelangelo is a cultural topic. The absurdity of discussing his giant art in high-pitched feminine voices drifting through a drawing-room, adds mere extra irony to the underlying sense of triviality."<sup>9</sup> Michelangelo represents world of splendour and energy which the women are trying vainly to escape into from the pointless routine of their social life. In another allusion, Prufrock compares himself with John the Baptist. The death that John the Baptist died was a sacrificial death, a way to salvation. For Prufrock, death is a way of escape from the boredom of life. The image also suggests that modern man's life, represented by Prufrock, is devoid of any spiritual meaning.

The allusion to Lazarus compares Prufrock with the follower of Christ who was raised from the dead by the Lord God himself. Prufrock's world is likewise the world of the living dead, but Prufrock has no hope that God will raise him from this world. Hugh Kenner remarks, "Prufrock

is an insufficient Lazarus."<sup>10</sup> The allusion to Hamlet is ambiguous because as Ezra Pound thinks, Hamlet does not fit into the pattern of literary allusion. Like Hamlet, Prufrock is indecisive, hesitant, divided against his own self. But Prufrock shuns any moral consideration with which Hamlet was obsessed.

The imagery of the 'Stairway' is <sup>a</sup> significant in the poem from <sup>the</sup> allegorical as well as literal point of view. Eliot was very much influenced in his early stages of writing by Dante. So the stairway is the escalating or winding mountain of Dante's purgatory having a difficult climbing movement, each turning of the stair presenting a distinct stage of spiritual struggle. The literal reference to the stairway involves a troubled encounter between a man and a woman. Here the stairway has the quality of awareness. Prufrock, after climbing the stairs, turns back and thinks of descending. Prufrock's hesitancy reflects the spiritual struggle in his mind as well as his expression of doubt regarding successful communication.

The 'sartorial imagery' serves the purpose of irony and self mockery in the poem. Prufrock's firmly mounting collar and the assertion of his 'simple pin' ironically brings out the infirmity of Prufrock's nature in dealing with the 'overwhelming question.' Hugh Kenner says, "To say that Prufrock is contemplating a young blade's gesture



or alternatively an old man's, rolling up his trousers because he either hasn't learnt to care for dignity or has outgrown its claims, is to substitute for the poetic effect a formula that is incapable of touching the theme. The image evokes nothing but a feeling of pathos."<sup>11</sup>

The image of the 'lonely men in shirt-sleeves leaning out of the windows', is an objective observation. Audrey Cahill remarks, "It is only a glimpse of the sympathetic vision that Prufrock would be capable of, if less absorbed with inner conflict. By itself, the image suggests loneliness, frustration and despair. Since a window is for looking out, the men are longing for something, perhaps a way of escape from this world."<sup>12</sup> Ezra says, "Eliot's men in shirt sleeves and his society ladies are not a local manifestation; they are the stuff of our modern world, and true of more countries than one."<sup>13</sup>

The imagery of the different parts of the body conveys Eliot's own impression of the industrial civilization as one of 'broken fragments and systems'. His own way of expressing these impressions was by depersonalising character by talking about bodily members; especially eyes, arms, feet and fingers. These are purely sense-impressions with little reference to the object or person of which they are a part.

The image of the 'eyes' was to become a dominant image in Eliot's later poetry. In Prufrock, the eyes are cruel, amused, imposing identity and lacking compassion. The 'arms' that Prufrock has known are 'braceleted white and bare.' They signify the arms of the rich, self-conscious ladies. They are contrasted with the 'thin arms and legs' of Prufrock. Joseph Margolis says, "He (Prufrock) emphasises his acquaintance so to speak, with their organs of communication. Yet we know there never has been a satisfactory communication between them. There is a strong impression of distance, disdain, possible conflict that invades each of the arguments."<sup>14</sup>

The imagery of smell exhibits in the poem the sense of infinite weariness of life. Helen Gardner says, "Taste and Smell are the most immediate of our senses and the least translatable into intellectual terms by the conscious mind. They are also at the mercy of the external world, for we can avert our eyes, stop our ears and refrain from touching more easily than we can escape a smell which is haunting and pervasive."<sup>15</sup> In the poem, the perfume from a dress is a female smell creating fleeting erotic sensations. It also suggests sexual problems. The problem is not lack of libido, but inhibition, distrust of women and a certain physical queasiness.



The sea-imagery in Prufrock seems to spring from Eliot's own boyhood experiences off the New England coast. The imagery which appears in the very beginning with 'Oyster-Shells', reemerges at the end of the poem. Prufrock's desired escape, from this world is through the sea. It is the imagery of his suppressed self and assumes a lyrical character with the erotic imagery of the sea-mermaids. The hair of waves recall the light brown hair on the lady's arms. Northrop Frye says, "The sea of mermaids is the sea of Prufrock's imagination and it is opposed to the sea of ordinary experience."<sup>16</sup> The white hair of the waves, the white and black water and the red and brown seaweed add a colourful touch to the image.

Legendary mermaids sing to the ~~heroic~~, the manly. Prufrock is sure that they will never sing to him. The longing which Prufrock can never directly express reaches its greatest intensity in the vivid image of the mermaids riding away from him. Audrey Cahill says, "It is clearly no accident that these lines, conforming as they do in their evocativeness and musicality to the traditional idea of the 'intrinsically poetic', are in marked contrast to the idiom of the rest of the poem. It suggests the gap between Prufrock's desire and the world of real people in which he moves."<sup>17</sup> The mermaids are clearly a more satisfactory object for Prufrock's emotion than any of the women he meets. J. Grever Smith says, "By indulging in day-dreams, he has allowed his ideal conception of women

(the sea-girls at the end) to dominate his transactions with reality. He has neither used human love nor rejected it but has cultivated an illusory notion of it which has paralysed his will and kept him from turning desire into action."<sup>18</sup>

The mermaids play two roles for Prufrock. From representing the richness of an experience unattainable to him, they have become deceivers who have lured Prufrock away from the world to which he belongs, so that he is no longer at home in it. Here the chambers of the sea symbolize a state of regression, which is the refuge of Prufrock's sensitive insecurity. When human voices recall him to consciousness, he 'drowns' in reality. But the submarine or the underground existence is not the answer to the 'overwhelming question' and Prufrock doesn't undergo true death by drowning. J. Grover Smith remarks, "Prufrock's situation is an extreme form of a very common one: the failure of the imagination to reach beyond itself and establish contact with other centres of consciousness."<sup>19</sup>

After Prufrock, the Portrait of a Lady seems to be the only another poem similar in form and theme. But it has a social malice which makes it more objective in attitude and more conversational in tone. Both the poems unfold the fragmentary consciousness of a male character.

Yet Prufrock is more radical. Bernard Bergonzi says, " If the Portrait is like a painting though stylized, is basically representational, Prufrock is like a cubist version of the similar subject."<sup>20</sup> The lady in the Portrait is a 'type' figure, a spinster, clutching desperately at the young man, making claims upon him through flattery and assumed intimacy. She has nothing purposeful to do except giving tea-parties and trying to establish friendships which in fact, are meaningless.

The imagery in the poem is of a purely temporal nature. Here it parts away with the violent and highly imaginative expressions of Prufrock. The lady seems to be too much of this world and doesn't express any desire of escape. Under a sophisticated surface, Eliot develops a conflict of feelings which weaves its sensuous imagery into patterns of changing mood and significance.

The imagery of music forms the background of the poem. The conversation between the lady and the young man begins from the concert of Chopin with 'attenuated tones of violins' mingled with remote cornets. After the concert, the musical imagery develops the lady's approach and the youth's response to it. The lady's babbling about the meaningless friendships strikes a false note in the young man's mind. The dull tom-tom in his brain by the boring talk is aptly supported by the cracked cornets. The shift from Chopin's piano preludes to cornets and violins contributes to the diffusion

of awareness. Graham Martin remarks, "Music played by violins is lyrical and romantic while music played by cornets is military and heroic. A broken violin and a cracked cornet is sad. Both suggest lost potentialities of emotional fulfillment and the subsequent sense of sterility and defeat."<sup>21</sup>

The harmony of music in the Portrait is frustrating. The visitor hears music forced upon him which he doesn't want to hear and within it, he detects notes of real anguish. It has from the beginning a symbolic significance which is sustained throughout the poem. The musical imagery does not divorce itself from the realistic background. The speaker's boredom is intimately connected with the street piano which is mechanical and tired and reiterates some worn-out common song. This tiring and unpleasant quality which Eliot stresses so much in his poem, has a reference to the devaluation of music in the modern world. Constant Lambert's 'Music Ho!' gives this succinct summary of the situation. "We board our buses to the strains of Beethoven and drink our beer to the accompaniment of Bach . . . classical music is vulgarized and diffused through every highway and by way . . . the principle objections to music provided by the now almost universal loudspeakers are its monotony and unsuitability . . ."<sup>22</sup> The music in the Portrait has a dying fall. It is the perpetuation of the discomfort and sense of guilt of the young man. In Prufrock, the voices are dying with a

'dying fall'. The connection between the voices and the music brings out their common feature. They are both meaningless and boring and lack vitality.

Cyclical imagery tries to identify human life with different aspects of cyclical movement in nature. Northrop Frye says, "Winter, death or old age, night, ruins and the old age have ready-made associations with each other and so have spring, youth or birth, dawn, the city and rain or fountains."<sup>23</sup> Eliot's fondness for cyclical imagery meets us everywhere. The opening lines of The Waste Land start with April and pass through the coming of summer to winter, the Portrait has a sequence of four encounters carefully dated December, April, August and October.

This identification of nature with human life has an underlying interpretation of heaven and hell for Eliot. They are the paradisaical and demonic realities forming a mixture of good:evil in human life. Heaven can be represented by images such as the garden, the perpetual spring and the eternal youth, whereas the desert, the sea, the prison, the tomb are associated with Hell. So it can be concluded that Eliot's Cyclical imagery has a spiritual undertone.

The Portrait begins with the smoke and fog of a December afternoon. Hugh Kenner remarks, "The month, with the association of smoke and fog, suggests winter. This

together with Juliet's tomb, the candles and the imminent conversation forms precisely one psychic totality experienced all together as a co-existing mass,\*<sup>24</sup> It is the atmosphere of Hell with its coldness and lack of emotional warmth. With the April Sunsets, the lady remembers her buried life and Paris in the spring. The Sunsets suggest the lady's old age. The 'buried life' has a significant reference to the 'tomb'. Contrasted to the April Sunsets and the old age is the Spring, or the bygone youth of the lady. The October Night brings a sensation of being ill-at-ease. It suggests the end of the year as well as the end of the day drawing near. This further predicates the cause of young man's being ill-at-ease. It is also suggestive of the end of relationship between the lady and the young man.

Flower imagery in the Portrait appeals to the senses and is used with a pattern of changing mood and significance. The lilac is a symbol of life. The lilacs are in bloom. Life is significant and encephalic and full of meaning. But as the lady twists the lilac stalks in her hand, she is unable to appreciate it. Life is as delicate and short-lived as the lilacs but it will be inevitably twisted in the hands of people like Prufrock, the lady and the young man. With reference to the hyacinth flower, there is a shift from the spiritual to the sensuous.



The young man suggests a vagueness of identity, as if he represents all and is represented by any of those like him who escape from the reality of their own conscience into the unreality of other people's lives. Audrey Cahill says, "Yet the smell of the hyacinths is strongly evocative and like the lilies suggests the life and vitality which he has lost and which by his callousness he has crushed in another."<sup>25</sup> Both the flowers symbolize a misty, romantic dream of the fulfilment of a shared life.

The animal imagery assumes its significance in the fog-cat image in Prufrock. Prufrock identifies himself with the dull, gloomy gestures of the cat and wants to fall asleep like her to get rid of the 'overwhelming question.' The spiritual undertones of the imagery are clear in the Portrait when we refer to Eliot's remarks on Baudelaire. Eliot says, "He (Baudelaire) had perceived that what distinguishes the relations of man and woman from the copulation of beasts is the knowledge of Good and Evil . . . without this perception, human beings are spiritually indistinguishable from each other and from animals."<sup>26</sup> According to Eliot, this imagery has its origin in a "dim recognition of the direction of bestitude."<sup>27</sup> Spiritual indifference in modern man has made them as good as animals and so they want to wear deliberate disguises of animals. The fearful reality of the devaluation of the

modern man to the level of animals is what the animal imagery exposes. The young man in the Portrait wants to wear the disguises of a dancing bear, a crying parrot and a chattering ape. While mounting the stairs, he feels that he has mounted on his hands and knees. It also suggests an animal gesture. Bernard Bergonzi says, "The narrator seems reduced even in his own estimation, to a state of subhuman absurdity."<sup>28</sup> According to Elizabeth Schneider, the animal image is Eliot's best perception of feeling; a half-agonized, guilt-tinged embarrassment, the discomfort of being called upon to be human when one is not quite human.

The stair imagery takes an opposite direction in the Portrait to that of Prufrock. Prufrock thinks that it is time to turn back and descend the the stair. He knows that he is a failure in love. The young man in the Portrait mounts the stairs. There is a sense of guilt in his mind as he knows that he has failed her, because he is mounting the stairs to say good-bye to the lady forever. The function of the stairs here is simply to give the protagonist occasion for self-absement as he approaches her door.

In "Preludes," we come across a new facet of imagery which Eliot himself call as "clear, visual imagery." He says, "Such images are given much more intensity by having a meaning - we do not need to know what the meaning is, but in our awareness

of the image we must be aware that the meaning is there too."<sup>29</sup> When Eliot wrote the "Preludes", he was reading Bergson's Matter and Memory, where Bergson defines an image as indifferently definable as a perception or the perceived thing itself. In a perception, subject and object merge. The perceiver, when he comes in contact with the material world, absorbs images into his consciousness where they remain as memories. The "Preludes" are nothing but perceptions. They have an emotional selection which heightens not what is seen but how it is seen. To the perceiver, the objective becomes intensely subjective, an image reflecting a mind.

The first and the second preludes are written in close succession. They not only complement each other but together lead into an epistemological concept entertained in the third and the fourth prelude. All the four preludes agree in imagery. The winter evening is associated with smells of steaks and the morning comes to consciousness with a hang-over, one might almost say, of stale beer smells and coffee fumes. These sense-impressions are so disembodied that they can be mentioned in the plural. They are gloomy and nostalgic as compared to the sensuous smells of Prufrock and Portrait.

The line, "The burnt-out ends of smoky days", compares a dark evening with a cigarette-end burnt out.

Night is the burnt out end of the day which smouldered a 'smoky day' and never burst out into a living flame. The line suggests a useless end to a useless day. It evokes a feeling of despondency. Nature is rhythmical in itself but it is unable to evoke the vital life-force in the modern man. For Prufrock, the evening is like an etherised patient, conscious but conscious of nothing, for the young man in the Portrait, the afternoon is grey and smoky, the evening yellow and rose. Thus nature evokes nothing but a feeling of disgust.

The imagery of city-streets is an indivisible part of the modern metropolis. Eliot presents these images in their sordid aspects. The city-streets in Prufrock are half-deserted and lead to one-night cheap hotels. In "Preludes", the streets are sawdust trampled and blackened. J. Grover Smith says, "The soul of the personified street constitutes short square fingers, newspapers and eyes, the hidden reality it masks is itself neither soul nor 'conscience', but a kind of register upon which the images have impinged as upon a tabula rasa."<sup>30</sup> The soul of the street is the soul of man constantly trampled by his worldly concerns. It has lost its purity and it is constituted with the thousand sordid images of this world.

The imagery of the different parts of the body, besides presenting the fragmentary world, reveals Eliot's disinterestedness in men and women as unique and complex characters with diverse and estimable interests and talents.

They are all part of the world of 'things'. In Prufrock, the eyes and the arms stand for some vague characters. In "Preludes", the hands that are raising dingy shades, the palms of the solid hands clasping yellow soles of feet, the muddy feet that press to the coffee-stands have no individuality as such. They only give the impression of fatigue and boredom. They are infinitely suffering things and Eliot does not think of them as worthy of pity. Though we know that the eyes and the arms in Prufrock are those of the rich ladies as well as the feet and the hands are those of the common men it doesn't make any difference for Eliot. Both suffer equally in the modern world.

The final image describing the ancient women gathering fuel in vacant lots picks up thematically from the first scene, i.e. the image of newspapers from vacant lots. The image points out in turn, the meaninglessness of the universe revolving round itself in epicyclic paths without destination. J. Grover Smith says, "We cannot deride the ancient women. If perhaps, in one moment, they seem ludicrous, in the next, they are distressed with the bleak future as their lots are 'vacant.'"<sup>31</sup>

Eliot contrasts the ancient golden age with the tragic meanness of modern life.

"Rhapsody on a Windy Night" records immediate experience of the real world. The speaker in the poem soliloquises in response to visual images. His consciousness corresponds to that of the woman in the "Preludes", who watches flickering images on the ceiling. Time imagery forms a clock-time structure or as Bergson would say a "Spatial structure", divided by the hours announced at the beginning of the strophes--twelve O' clock, half-past one and so on. For the observer, past and present co-exist. Both worlds present equally abhorrent, equally useless images of life. The time imagery in Prufrock co-ordinates with the time-imagery of the "Rhapsody". In Prufrock, Eliot disagrees with the division of time in definite compartments such as present, past and future. The structure of "Rhapsody" is spatial more particularly because the times are synchronised with the speaker's pauses at street lamps. The spatial time is non-existent. When new images emerge, the old ones pass into memory and unite with memories already there to make up subjective time.

Imagery of the sea in Prufrock is a means of imagined escape from the triviality of metropolitan culture. In "Rhapsody", the sea-imagery is rather abstract. The dissolving floors of memory suggest that memory is a sea. The sea of memory flows continuously irrespective of the divisions of time. The contents of memory is the world a

person carries about with him. There are two recurrent motifs behind the bizarre images. The first is irrationality symbolized by images such as the madmen shaking the dead geranium, the lapping tongue of the cat devouring rancid butter, the automatic gesture of a child, the vacancy behind the child's eye and the moon's loss of memory. The second motif is decay or inanition, symbolized by images such as the dead geranium, the mechanical toy, the paper rose and the rusty spring. Each image in this structure is precise and its connotations clearly fixed. It is the object of the poem to define the specific associations which it has for the observer. The images are a crowd of 'twisted things'. A twisted branch, a broken spring, are all rusty, useless, lifeless objects. The association of these objects as juxtaposed with those of the objects from the immediately perceived world, experienced in the image of the torn, stained dress of the woman, whose eye is also twisted.

The sartorial imagery in Prufrock is at one place mock-heroic and at other evokes a feeling of pathos. But in "Rhapsody", the sartorial images have nothing pathetic or ironic about it. It has a matter-of-factness of a naked fearful reality. The torn and stained dress of the woman suggests her disinterested boring routine. The dress also contrasts with the rich skirts of the women in Prufrock

that trail along the floor. The image of the eye reappears in the poem. From the cruel, dominating eyes of Prufrock to the crooked twisting eye of the woman and also to the dispassionate eye of the child in "Rhapsody", the image of the eye symbolizes one thing: the loss of any feeling of joy and sorrow. All the characters are nothing but morons. In association with these images, the image of the moon, a conventional symbol of beauty and happiness is also twisted. The moon winks a feeble eye. Eliot wants to suggest that in the modern world the moon is lifeless like the modern man. Charles Williams says, "It (Rhapsody) is a moonlit poem - but a modern moonlit poem, with all that those words connote. It would be unfair to say that what those words connote is Hell, but not entirely unfair."<sup>32</sup>

The quick action image of the cat lapping up rancid butter lying in the gutter, creates a sense of nausea. The image is contrasted with the automatic grabbing action of the child. The cat image in Prufrock brings out its lethargic nature, here its action suggests filthiness. The clutching of the stick by an old barnacled crab is one more image signifying the meaninglessness of the past. The image blends the past and the present and thus makes the present more sordid.



The different smells with which the narrator is obsessed are nauseating, numbing and undesirable. Female smells in shuttered rooms, cigarette smells and cocktail smells in the corridors are all nocturnal smells. In Prufrock, the perfume from a lady's dress makes him digress. In "Preludes", we come across evening smells of steaks and morning stale smells of beer. Whatever the time, the smells bring nothing but disgust. When "Preludes" and "Rhapsody" are studied together, one notices some similarities. J. Grover Smith says, "The "Preludes" and the "Rhapsody" each articulated a 'sick' version of life. He (Eliot) provided in the case of Prufrock, for example, two ways for the reader to view the sordid aspects of life which it presented. In "Rhapsody", the same sick version is made comprehensive by being illuminated from the past as well as being contemplated in the present. What perturbed him was the helplessness of sensitivity and idealism against matter-of-factness."<sup>33</sup>

"Morning at the Window" adheres strictly to Pound's pattern of the imagistic poem having two sorts of metaphors merging into one another. Pound calls them conceptual and perceptual metaphors. The epithets qualify the perceiver's vision as well as their object. The first stanza is a conceptual image of the damp souls of

housemaids engaged in their daily monotonous routine of washing the breakfast plates. The trampled edges of the street have a reference to the sawdust trampled street and the soul of the street trampled by insistent feet in "Preludes". The souls of the housemaids and those of the street are likened because both are sufferers.

The brown waves of fog tossing up twisted faces is a perceptual image. The waves of fog remind the yellow fog in Prufrock. The twisted faces seem to have an association with twisted things in "Rhapsody". The muddy skirts relate themselves to the torn and stained dress of the woman in "preludes". The passer-by with muddy skirts resemble the housemaids with damp souls. These recurring associations of images constitute the poet's soul and he cannot evade them.

The "Boston Evening Transcript" is cousin Harriet's favourite newspaper. D.E.S.Maxwell says, "When Eliot is not looking at the world with a moralist's concern, he is inclined to adopt an attitude of ironical observation, which is basically a means of escape. It is in this manner that he describes a Boston evening."<sup>34</sup> The word 'evening' suddenly makes us aware of the etherised patient in Prufrock. Here the faint quickening of the evening awakens the appetites of life. This short-lived period is a restless one and brings with it an imprecise restlessness. In Prufrock, the evening is gloomy. Whereas in this poem, it has a sensuous quality.

The stair imagery recurs in this poem. The narrator, after mounting the stair, turns wearily. Everywhere the mounting and descending of stair reflects its automatic, boring and undesired nature. Leonard Unger says, "The soul is 'ascending and descending continually,' experiencing exaltation and humiliation until it has acquired perfect habits and this ascending and descending will cease, since the soul will have attained to God and become united with him."<sup>35</sup> The simile of the readers of "The Boston Evening Transcript" compared to a field of ripe corn swaying in the wind aptly reflects the pleasure that the reading of newspapers gives its readers. Lastly, there is cousin Harriet to whom the young Eliot delivers the Boston Evening Transcript, her substitute for life.

"Aunt Helen" and "Cousin Nancy" are the poet's recollection of his impressions of the Boston society with which he was in personal touch through his uncle Christopher Rhodes Eliot. Aunt Helen was a rich spinster. She lived in a small house near a fashionable square. The aunt was cared for not by 'four servants' but by 'servants to the number of four'. There is a wry exaggeration in the details. The imagery in the rest of the poem can be aptly termed as 'imagery of indifference'. It illustrates the unaffected routine of the household after the death of its mistress. To the servants like the undertaker and the footman, the

fact that their mistress is dead, is immaterial. Instead of wiping tears for the sad fact, the undertaker ironically 'wipes his feet'. The footman, who uptil now was very careful regarding his affair with the second housemaid is seen boldly sitting upon the dining table, holding the housemaid on his knees. The death of the lady has made him carefree.

This imagery of indifference further relates itself to animals and a-material objects like the clock. The dogs are handsomely provided for. The Dresden clock is obviously unaware of the sad fact of death and goes on ticking. The irony is in the fact that shortly afterwards the death of Aunt Helen, the parrot died too. It is suggested that a bird is better than human beings. This fact of the parrot's death balances all the other images of indifference and thus intensifies the effect. The whole poem is, as it were, the poet's commentary on the concept of death. The undertaker and the footman are the representatives of the modern man for whom death is a meaningless end of a meaningless life. The world must go on. Heaven is silent over Aunt Helen's death because it knows that this death has no possibility of rebirth. Aunt Helen represents the modern man's life of utter loneliness and his loss of communication. The poem, though outwardly a simple character|sketch, is a sad presentation of the modern malady.

"Cousin Nancy" is much lighter in tone. The imagery of rebellion about which Prufrock thinks, is given a pleasing expression by Miss Nancy Ellicott who is a modern cowboy. Her riding across the hills and breaking them suggests an outburst of suppressed energy. This is exactly opposite of the feminine delicacy and gentility which her aunts possess. It was a self-expression that was rather violent and arid. According to Lyndall Gordon, "It was not a passionate Puritan rebellion but a thinner kind, involving arid acts of will, smoking, drinking, riding the New England hills until she 'broke' them."<sup>36</sup> Northrop Frye remarks, "The self-expression that springs from pride is more egocentric, but less individual, for the only self that can get expressed in this way is one just like everyone else. 'Cousin Nancy' smokes and dances and impresses her aunts as modern, fulfills "Waldo" Emerson's doctrine of self-reliance and Matthew Arnold's individualised culture, but what she does is still only fashionable conformity."<sup>37</sup>

"Mr. Apollinax" is concerned with the impact on the ultra-refined society of Professor and Mrs. Channing Cheetah, of someone possessing vitality, a quality lacking in Eliot's other characters. This vitality is illustrated significantly in Apollinax's laughter. The laughter is hilarious, carefree and self-confident. Further, it is

described in terms of the sea-imagery. The significance given generally to the water symbol is elucidated by its being associated with fertility in the person of Mr. Apollinax. The laughter is submarine and profound. It has depth and intensity. The sea-imagery associates Apollinax with the 'worried bodies of drowned men' and intensifies by contrast the vivacity of Apollinax's laughter. Moreover, the tea-cups among which Mr. Apollinax's laughter tinkled is a small sea in itself. Eliot's recurrent use of the sea as an image expresses his attraction for the sea. He uses the image for concrete things as well as for abstract concepts.

The poem "Hysteria" points out that laughter can give the face a beautiful expression. Eliot uses the imagery of the different parts of the body to show the beautiful expression of the face while laughing. In earlier poems, the imagery of eyes, arms, hands and feet was used in its disgusting aspects. In "Hysteria", Eliot mentions the lady's teeth, the throat and the unseen muscles. The details of every sense-organ taking part in the act of laughter are subtle. The words, 'accidental stars' and 'squad-drill' are words related to the army. The lady's teeth, like the stars are worth exhibition. The throat is beautifully described in terms of a dark

cavern. The lady is so delicate that the short gasps like the ripples of water bruise the unseen muscles of her throat. As compared to the laughter of Mr. Apollinax, the lady's laughter is delicate and attractive in a feminine way. Mr. Apollinax's laughter is vital in a masculine way. It has a robustness.

The next lines of "Hysteria" bring us back to the sordid reality of life from the dreamy, poetic laughter of the lady. The laughter is nothing but an attempt to attract the young man and the lady has nothing to distinguish herself from the lady in the Portrait. In fact, she forms a nearness to the woman with a 'crooked eye' in "Rhapsody". When the connotations are clear, the laughter is as disgusting as the imagery of parts of the body in earlier poems. The trembling hands of the waiter suggest his old age. The rusty green iron table gives a flashback of a broken spring in a factory yard which is rusty. The table also suggests the place, it may be one of the cheap hotels in Prufrock. The waiter's incomplete speech, the laughter of the lady and her gestures are all fragments of life.

The conversation in the next poem, "Conversation Galante" is vague, pointless and so boring. The image of the moon co-relates with the moon in "Rhapsody".

The speaker thinks of the moon as an old battered lantern. The way it lights is a way of distress. ~~The~~ In fact, the conversation takes place in a sentimental situation, beneath the moon. But the moon has nothing pleasant to contribute to it by its presence. Its face is ugly with a small-pox and it has a wicked smile on its face. The nocturne in the next stanza leads us back to the old nocturnal smells in "Rhapsody". The word is used in this poem in relation to the imagery of music. The speaker's remark that music is used to give mental shape to the modern man's vacuity is quite relevant to the music imagery in Portrait.

The girl in "La Figlia Che Piange", the last poem of the 1917 volume, stands on the highest pavement of the stair. In every case, the stairs have a literal reference. In addition to the stairs, there is always a person present in a position relating to the stairs. In all the passages, the stairs serve as a setting for arrivals and departures. Prufrock is contemplating a possible crisis of decision, whether to turn back and descend the stair. In "La Figlia", it is of course a man who has departed, leaving the girl to stand and grieve at the top of the stair. Each passage involves a troubled encounter between a man and a woman. This is emphatically so in Portrait and "La Figlia". In



"Boston Evening Transcript", the relation between the speaker and his cousin Harriet is troubled only by ironic implication.

The flower imagery which begins with the Portrait, ends with "La Figlia". The flowers in the Portrait are specialized as the lilacs and the hyacinth. In "La Figlia", they are flowers clasped in the arms of the girl. They are the images of joy and happiness. F.O. Matthiessen comments, "He (Eliot) recognises a vision of idealised loneliness attendant upon the first adolescent awakening of sex to be a fundamental human experience. It is the loss of such loveliness in the failure of actual sexual experience to measure upto it that constitutes the emotional undercurrent of his flower imagery and creates its peculiar tone of mingled frustration and longing."<sup>38</sup> In sharp contrast to these flowers, there is the 'paper-rose' in "Rhapsody" that smells of dust and eau de cologne. As the young man has deserted the girl, the flowers will be flung to the floor in despair.

The imagery of the parts of the body recurs in this poem. There is a feeling of grief in the girl's eyes. Her arms are full of flowers, a sign of natural beauty as contrasted to the braceleted, white arms of

the ladies in Prufrock. The shake of the hand lacks warmth of love. The young man in "La Figlia" may be the same man in the Portrait. He wears a mask of his smile. The insistent talk of the lady in the Portrait bores him, but he just goes on smiling to remain self-possessed. The smile of the young man in "La Figlia" is simple and faithless. The desertion of the girl by the young man is like the separation of body and soul in a figure. The vision of beauty and pain which the image presents is symbolised by mingled longing and frustration. The autumn weather in the last stanza leads us to Eliot's favourite cyclical imagery. It signifies the sad parting of the lovers.

The imagery in Eliot's unpublished poems is worth considering. Most of these poems were written during the period of 1909-11. According to Lyndall Gordon, they were all unpublishable because they fumbled with very strong feelings whose direction was not quite clear to the author. The year 1910 was the beginning of a religious ferment and a rebellion against the lifeless customs in the world. In the unpublished poems, these two tendencies moved side by side.

The poems "A Lyric" and "Song" run on parallel lines as they speak about the timeless moment. When

this concept of time is abolished, all the big and small things in the world are equal. In "A Lyric", the image of the Sun who is immortal is contrasted with the short-lived people in this world as well as with the small butterfly who lives for a day. In the second stanza, the flower imagery strikes a gloomy note as the poet talks about withered flowers. For Eliot, blooming and withering flowers are the images of love. The lover seems to be sure that though new flowers are plucked, they will pine away and he hopes for a few days of divine love. Eliot said, "To satisfy love was to spoil it forever."<sup>39</sup> In "Song", he disagrees with the concept of the timelessness of the moment and says, " For time is time, and runs away/Though sages disagree".<sup>40</sup>

In another poem named "Song" again, Eliot presents a beautiful landscape. The breeze is personified by having gentle fingers. They can be contrasted with short square fingers stuffing pipes, in "Preludes". Though the nature is beautiful in itself with the leaves on the tree, the gentle breeze and the bloomed flowers on the hedgerow, the young man notices that even before love's dawn, the roses in the woman's wreath are faded and the leaves are already brown. There are flowers everywhere in " Before Morning",

and the fragrance of decay interweaves with the fragrance of gloom.

"Circe's Palace" portrays a woman who manages to humble a man in a different way. Circe cultivates deadly flowers very different from the delicate flowers Eliot had previously imagined. Her flowers are fanged and red. They are hideous with their streak and stain. They have sprung from dead man's limbs. The panthers in the deep forest below and the sluggish python on the stairs give the palace as well as Circe, a sinister appearance.

"On a Portrait" describes the woman as a baffling and alien creature. She is contrasted with the ever-hurrying traffic on the road as she is devoid of any movement and is frozen in an image. She does not inherit the beauty of a carved goddess of stone but stands as a melancholy figure. The image of the dark eyes connotes mystery. She has exotic secrets to hide but no new ideas. The 'patient curious eye' of the parrot tries to understand the secrets of the woman. It makes us remember another parrot from "Aunt Helen" who died immediately after her mistress's death. The portrait makes us remember one of the major poems from the 1917 volume, Portrait of a Lady. There is not much similarity between the two poems. "On a Portrait" is the poet's mere impression of a painting whereas Portrait of a Lady is far advanced

and mature in that it deals with the real-life sketch of a modern lady and in it, Eliot deals with the modern dilemma of meaningless relationships with which he was so much occupied.

The flower imagery reappears in the next poem "Song". In the first stanza, a beautiful romantic scene is presented with the moonflower opening to the sea and the mist crawling in from the sea. The whiteness of the white bird and the snowy owl is carried on further in the next stanza as the beloved holds flowers whiter than the white mist. The whiteness everywhere stands for the loss of colourful vitality. So the lover asks his beloved for some colourful brighter tropic flowers.

"Nocturne", the name of the next poem refers to the nocturnal smells in "Preludes" and the 'exquisite nocturne' in "Conversation Galante". The word, as it means night time, is related to the moon. "Nocturne", which relates the episode of the modern Romeo and Juliet sitting beneath a bored but courteous moon. It reminds one of the moon in "Rhapsody", where it has a feeble eye, it smiles into corners and its face is marked with a washed-out smallpox. Though bored, the moon is courteous. Just as the conversation between the lady and the young man fails, so also the conversation between Romeo and

Juliet fails, striking a worldly note. The second stanza marks the absolute loss of feeling of the modern man. The act of stabbing is thought of in a casual, unemotional way. The 'frenzied eye' of the lover talks about his insanity. The last line of the poem is an ironic comment on the sad end of all lovers.

"Spleen" talks about the tedious habit of Sunday Church-going. In this poem, Eliot experimented with the image of a middle-aged gentleman which he later on perfected in the persona of J. Alfred Prufrock. The bonnets and the silk-hats refer to the sophisticated, aristocratic and self-conscious class who attend the Sunday Church service. The outward elegance of clothes makes the poet lose his mental self-possession. The last stanza sketches the persona of Prufrock, with the grey and bald head, hat and gloves in hand, and attentive of the tie and suit, waiting impatiently on the doorstep of the Absolute.

The last poem, "The Death of Saint Narcissus", is a martyr's tale. The saint is an arresting personality who was to become a shadowy and diffused figure in The Waste Land. The desert idea emerges for the first time in 1914, in the figure of Saint Narcissus who is oppressed by a multitude of faces and goes to the desert

to become a dancer to God. In the first stanza, the poet calls his readers to him so that he will show them the Saint's bloody coat and limbs. As the shadow is an image of solitude, the mood of the solitary man under his rock was the vantage point from where Eliot reflected on the modern civilization. The shadow of Saint Narcissus was different from the shadow of other men because he was an aspiring saint. The sea-imagery is used here as a contrast to the desert. The high cliffs, the winds and the meadows were worldly places, where Narcissus felt stifled and aloof. The pointed corners of his eyes and the pointed tips of his fingers are suggestive of his extraordinary genuine religious feelings.

Narcissus leaves the city because men's ways interfere with self expression. The city evokes images of hell and sin, and the faces, convulsive thighs and knees are the images of the weak bodies of men too much engrossed in the material world. They are also in sharp contrast with the pointed corners of eyes and pointed tips of fingers of Narcissus. He takes pleasure in thinking about himself as a tree entangled in its own branches, or as a slippery fish writhing in its own clutch or a young girl caught in the wood by a drunken old man. Lyndall Gordon comments that Narcissus has no moral impulse, only a masochistic one. He wants to reform

himself, to be more than himself, but instead of self-enhancement, there is at the end, the shock of self-loss. At the end, he finds himself burntout, abandoned on the hot sand. His beauty is gone, his clothes are bloody and there is the taste of death in his mouth.

To sum up, the 1917 volume of poems shows a great variety and complexity of imagistic patterns. Eliot seems to avoid any attempt of intensifying the singularity of an imagistic pattern. On the other hand, the strength and charm of his imagistic patterns lies in collapsing images placed in a contrastive context. The urban imagery seems to be dominant in the volume but it is countered by a skilful display of the imagery of nature. The mode of collapsing and juxtaposing is found in the tension between the animal imagery and the human imagery, the sea imagery and the imagery of desert, sartorial images and the images suggesting the disintegrated psyche, images of the parts of the body and the images implying the spiritual quest of the mind. There seems to be a rare combination of the physical and the beatific. The stair imagery implies both the way up and the way down. The concrete presented through the visual imagery has its match in the esoteric imagery signifying the abstract. The imagery of the eye implying the visual also suggests the



spiritual vision. Even the time imagery shows a juxtaposition of the temporal and the eternal.

The unpublished poems echo the instincts behind Eliot's imagistic patterns. They demonstrate an interesting combination of the conceptual and the perceptual images. The recurrence of sea-imagery, flower imagery and city imagery show their connection with the major poems in the 1917 volume. In the unpublished poems, Eliot recorded the private habits of mind and his fears and solitary impulses. These impulses lead him to a spiritual position. Though in the 1917 volume of poems, the religious tone is conspicuously absent, the earlier poems make it evident that they are the base on which Eliot's religious beliefs and mature motives stand firmly. For instance, in the "Death of Saint Narcissus", Eliot came out with the idea of a martyr, emphasising the martyr's abandonment of the ways of other men. Thus the imagistic patterns in these unpublished poems show significant traces of the growing tension between the secular and the religious world in Eliot's poetry.