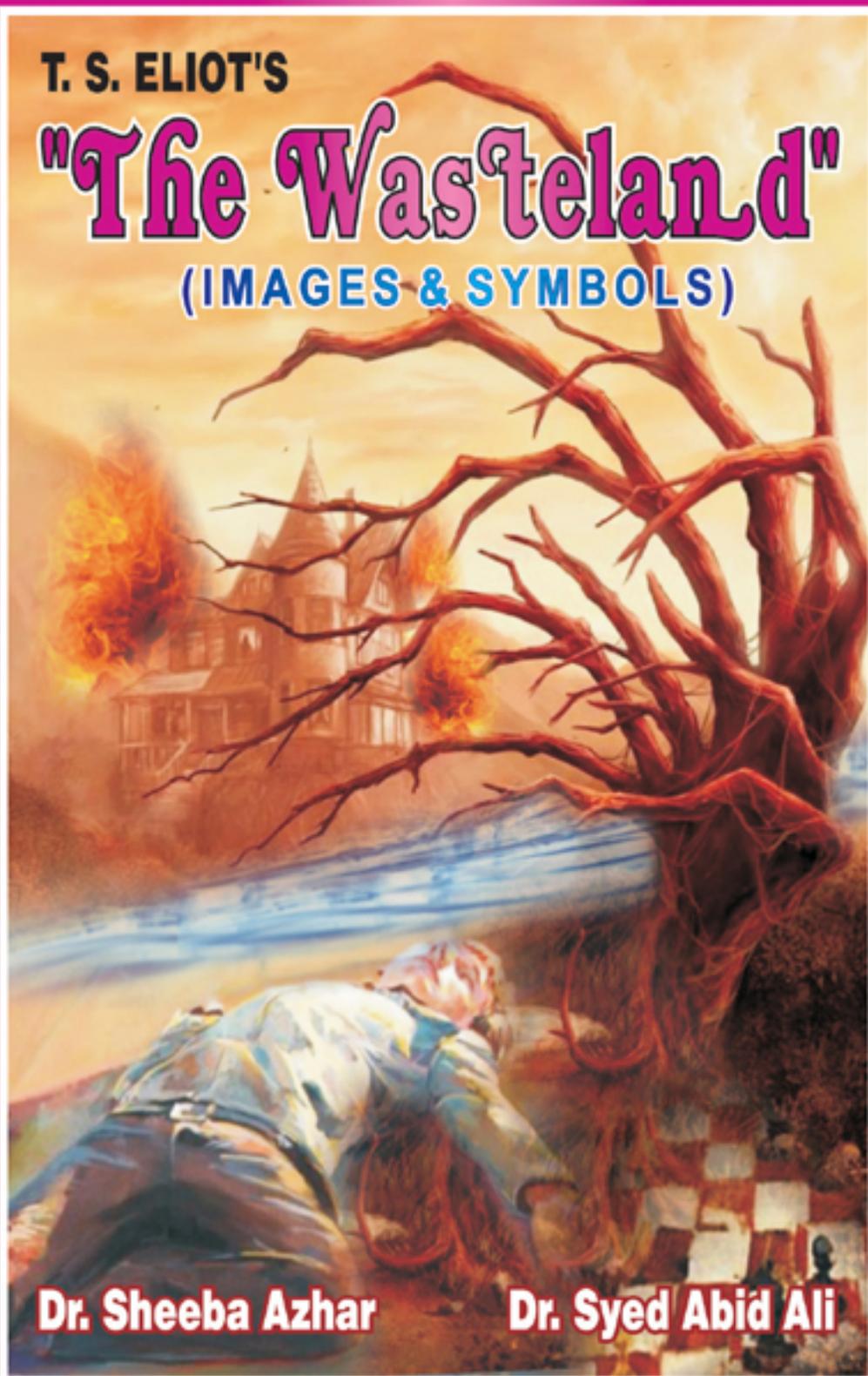


T. S. ELIOT'S

"The Wasteland"

(IMAGES & SYMBOLS)



Dr. Sheeba Azhar

Dr. Syed Abid Ali

***T.S. Eliot's
'The Wasteland'
(Images And Symbols)***

Dr. Sheeba Azhar Dr. Syed Abid Ali

***Astt. Professor,
Department of English
College of Applied Medical Sciences
Hafr-Al-Batin,
University of Dammam
Kingdom of Saudia Arabia***



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Telefax : +91 755 4030921

Email : manish@indrapublishing.com

pramod@indrapublishing.com

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Author : Dr. Sheeba Azhar/Dr. Syed Abid Ali

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*Dedicated
To Our
Son Atif & Daughter Haadiya*

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Preface

Largely the genius of T.S. Eliot shaped Twentieth century English literature. His towering personality illuminates the major genres of English literature. No study of the early twentieth century British Canonical literature is possible without encountering the icon. T.S. Eliot Poet, Critic, Dramatist. Writers of all literatures down the ages have always employed images and symbols. However, movements like imagism and symbolism gave an entirely new focus to images and symbols. Archetypal criticism was a parallel emergence. In an age torn by the anxiety of two world wars, and dissatisfied with scientific and materialistic concept of man, the archetypal approach sought to restore to man the entire humanity. The present book offers an in-depth study of the major archetypes and how they are interwoven in the imagery and symbolism in the poetry of T.S. Eliot. The complexities of the modern age and their expression in Eliot's Poetry cannot be understood without archetypes, myths and legends. This domain had not been explored so far. Hence, this book presents a systematic structuring and evaluation of archetypal imagery and symbolism in Eliot's *The Wasteland*. Along with these selected literary comments of the writers about the poem is also included. It is hoped that readers will find the book to be of considerable interest and use.

Dreaming is a natural process of mind, but there should be a motive, an ideal and a source behind one's dream. With purposive intention and little definitive aims, we have also undergone such an inspiratory dream. The same is true with this book. In accomplishing this work with proper shape, we dare to put our gratitude and deepest thanks to all those who helped us in the passage of our work.

Dr. Sheeba Azhar

Dr. Syed Abid Ali

CHAPTER – 1

MILIEU AND FORMATIVE INFLUENCES

Every writer is the product of his or her time and the society he or she inherits from her birth. No writer is able to distance himself in a work of art so completely as to eliminate all traces of his own private dreams, ideals and anxieties. To quote Mario Praz, “If the merging of a work of art into the general history of culture results in losing sight of the individual artist, it is impossible... to think of the latter without recurring to the former.”¹

“A writer depends on accumulated sensation of the first twenty Years”² Man is the product of the environment and more so a writer, who is much more sensitive to his surroundings. There is a constant hammering of different philosopher, viewpoint, motivations and happenings on his mind. To have a clear picture of various forces on T.S. Eliot, it is essential to have a close look into the early formative on years of his life. For some writers, the family is merely something from which to escape, but for Eliot, it was a formative influence, T.S. Eliot acknowledges it later...

“No man escapes form the culture which it(family) influences and it became for him a model for both the private and public relationships, which he feels obliged to establish”.³

The impressions and influences of his early life have much to say in the future make up of his mind and personality. He is in many ways, a typical product of “New England Puritanism or in its decadence”⁴, His work is no less than a “living and evolving organism”⁵ Springing always from an obsession with his early memories and experiences. All his works-creative and critical tend to establish one growing impression the search of the reality of “human situation”⁶ and the need for significance”⁷ circumstanced as he was. Eliot is zealous with the quest for true “meaning” or “meaningless” hidden under the exterior aspect of things. Consequently, he is always interested in the exploration of “spiritual recovery and integration”.

It will interest the reader to learn something about the family from which the poet descended; more especially as genius must derive much of its form, if not its force, from the environment in which it has been nurtured. T.S. Eliot’s first American ancestor was Andrew Eliot, who left East Coker in Somerset in about 1670 to settle in Massachusetts, and founded a distinguished Boston family. In 1834 the Reverend William Greenleaf Eliot, a recent graduate at the Harvard Divinity School moved to St. Louis, where he became a leading citizen. He established the first Unitarian Church and founded Washington University; in addition to a life of active public service, he wrote extensively on ethical and philosophical questions. William Greenleaf Eliot’s second son, Henry Ware Eliot, graduated from Washington University in 1863 and went into business in St. Louis. He married Charlotte Stearns, who came from another celebrated New England family: Thomas Stearns Eliot, their seventh and youngest child, was born on September 26, 1888. His father was president of an important business concern. His mother was a woman of keen intellectual interests. He thus inherited a rich intellectual and moral treasure from his ancestors. Their distinguished scholarship, outstanding commercial enterprise and puritan earnestness deeply touched the mental propensities of the preconscious child in his teen age. “ I was brought up to be very

much aware of him: so much so, that as a child I thought of him as still the head of the family- a ruler for whom in absentia my grandmother stood as vicegerent."

"The Boston mind" once so cheerful, now being full of the "sense of last things"⁸ was also imparted to his developing intellect. The "exhausting literary tradition",⁹ "the dissolving religious catholicity"¹⁰: and the "decaying Jewry and Christian science"¹¹ left an indomitable impact on the mind of young Eliot. Eliot is indeed indebted to his mother for his intellectual and poetic development.

His influence never left him and indeed, she made sure that it did not. Her ambition and care for his youngest son were all the most assiduous because they sprang from her own sense of failure"

His universal spirit is really a fuller and more developed form of his mother. Even after becoming an Anglo Catholic in 1927, he never hesitated to turn to other religion, whenever a poetic need arose. Nothing narrowed his outlook. His Unitarian background and his choice of courses as Harvard provided with him a basic liberal attitude. Eliot's literary development is closely related to his family environment and the prevailing pulls and pressure of New England traditions.

LITERARY INFLUENCES

T. S. Eliot was considerably influenced by a number of writers-European and Oriental, and by a variety of movements in the world of poetry. In 1917 Eliot wrote, "A writer's art must be racial- which means in plain words, that it must be based on the accumulated sensations of the first twenty years." One needs to bear these words in mind in discussing Eliot's American origin, however much he may have seemed in later years to transform himself into an Englishman. What we know of his childhood reveals the source of certain insistent images in his poetry. Next to the family house in St. Louis was a school called Mary Institute,

founded by Eliot's grandfather, his sisters attended it, and he preserved a vivid memory of it. From the garden, he could hear the children playing in the yard, and after school, he would play in the empty schoolyard himself and occasionally even venture into school. Here we have a source in Eliot's early experience for the laughter of hidden children that recurs in his poetry. In Helen Gardner's words, "this intensely moving symbol of the laughter and excited business of children heard playing was not only a symbol of happiness that the childless Eliot was never to know, but a memory of a childish loneliness, hearing the 'others' playing and laughing, and longing to be one of them." The youngest child of a large family could well experience such loneliness.

In 1897, Eliot's father built a summer home for his family by the sea at Gloucester, Massachusetts. Eliot spent many of his summer vacations here. Hence, memories of the sea pervade his poetry:

From the wide window towards the granite shore
The white sails still fly seaward, seaward flying
Unbroken wings.

He became expert at sailing:

The boat responded
Gaily, to the hand expert with sail and oar.

Moreover, there were other seaside memories of a more particular and curious kind. Eliot wrote about this in his dissertation on F.H. Bradley: "The sea-anemone which accepts or rejects a proffered morsel is thereby relating an idea to the sea – anemone's world." Twenty years later Eliot returned to this image in talking about the possible sources of poems:

There might be the experience of a child of ten, a small boy peering through sea-water in a rock pool, and finding a sea

anemone for the first time: the simple experience (not so simple, for an exceptional child, as it looks) might lie dormant in his mind for twenty years, and re-appear transformed in some verse context charged with great imaginative pressure.

St. Louis itself, with its fogs and “the sunsets and the dooryards and the sprinkled streets” is the setting of “Prufrock”. In his fifties Eliot revived in “The Dry Salvages” his early memories of the Mississippi, ‘a strong brown god-sullen, untamed and intractable.’ As far as the birthplace of Eliot is concerned he regarded his birthplace with affection: “I think I was fortunate to have been born here, rather than in Boston, or New York, or London.”

Eliot received his early education at Smith Academy, to which he has paid appropriate tribute; it provided a good grounding in what he regarded as the essentials: “Latin and Greek, together with Greek and Roman history, English and American history, elementary mathematics, French and German. Also English! I am happy to remember that in those days English composition was still called Rhetoric!” As a small boy, he had a taste for such vigorous and extroverted poetry as “Horatius”, “The Burial of Sir John Moore,” “Bannockburn,” Tennyson’s “Revenge,” and some of the border ballads. At about the age of fourteen he picked up a copy of FitzGerald’s Omar Khayyam, which affected him like a sudden conversion, making the world appear painted with “bright, delicious and painful colours.” Eliot recalls writing “some very gloomy quatrains in the form of Rubaiyat”

He then went on and took “the usual adolescent course with Byron, Shelley, Keats, Rossetti, and Swinburne.” He wrote a poem “A Lyric”, written as an exercise in the manner of Ben Jonson. His mother, herself a minor poet who took her writing with some seriousness, said that she thought this poem was better

than anything she had written herself: I knew what her verse meant to her. We did not discuss the matter further.

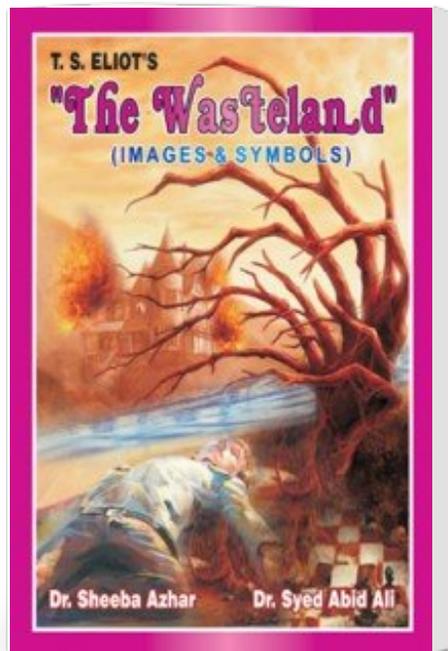
Eliot entered Harvard in 1906, its president C.W.Eliot was a vigorous exponent of the American concept of democratic education and had introduced the elective system of taking courses. George Santayana's popular "History of Modern Philosophy" course led to the four years of intense philosophical study that Eliot pursued as a graduate student between 1911 and 1915.

Apart from parental and social influences, which were both religious and literary, Eliot had the good fortune of learning at the hands of great teachers like Irwin Babbitt and George Santayana. They created in him a taste for comparative literature. From Babbitt, Eliot first conceived the importance of "Classicism" and "Tradition". Yet Eliot was never a wholehearted disciple of Babbitt, who admired his pupil's criticism but not his poetry. Eliot's dual reputation, as a "revolutionary" in poetry and a "tradionalist" in criticism, involved him in some paradoxical situations.

At the same time that Eliot was absorbing the importance of the classical virtues from Babbitt, his own poetry was exhibiting quite other qualities. Between 1907-1909 he contributed a few poems to the *Harvard Advocate*. They exhibit a marked preoccupation with flower imagery. The dominant influences on these early poems are Tennyson and Swinburne. Eliot also read with respectful interest, as did other young men at Harvard at that time, the English poets of the eighteen-nineties, such as John Davidson, Earnest Dowson, and Arthur Symons. However, they hardly represented a living tradition to an ambitious young American writer, of the need to make a language for him, and who so far had found no one to help him.

In December 1908, Eliot discovered in the library of the Harvard Union, Arthur Symons's *The Symbolist Movement* in literature, an important work of criticism, first published in 1899.

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Author : **Dr. Sheeba Azhar**

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