

T.S. Eliot's Poetry : A Study in Realism

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Abstract. In the context of “poetry” Eliot writes, “But I know that a poem or a passage of a poem, may tend to realize itself first as a particular rhythm before it reaches expression in words, and that this rhythm may bring an idea and the image”. Eliot’s poetry deals with the depth of life and yet is so interesting and delightful. This poetry can also be called “pure poetry” in good sense of term. Eliot’s poetry when read with genuine interest and curiosity has an immediate appeal and attraction for its readers. Eliot does not parade his modern scientific imaginary. Modern and metaphors are uses without any deliberation or artificially as the experiences of the present urban life seem to have saturated his sensibility, and are felt by him quite naturally, just like the odor of rose. One of the reasons of power of attraction in Eliot’s poetry is its realistic character which is presented in exact sound and phraseology. “Morning at the window”, through a short poem of only two stanzas, has its own individuality and immense appeal. Eliot pictures the “morning” of a typical crowded city with numerous hotels and restaurants.

Keywords: Despondency; decay; alienation; dingy; dark; rattling noise; infatuation.

They are rattling breakfast plates in basement kitchens,
and along the trampled edges of the street.
I am aware of the damp souls’ housemaids
sprouting despondently at area gates.
The brown waves of fog toss up to me
twisted faces from the bottom of the street.
And tears from a passer – by with muddy skirts.
An aimless smile that hovers in the air
An vanishes along the level of the roofs.
(Morning at the Window, Lines : 5-13)

“Rattling of breakfast plates in basement kitchens” is a concrete auditory image. Such rattling noise are not infrequent experiences in typical, industrialized, urbanized areas. Even “morning” in such phases brings to us not the scarlet soft rays of the rising sun, or the twitter of the birds on branches, as they are either conspicuous in absence or almost annihilated by city blocks and buildings, domes and theatres, restaurants and café’. Eliot is sensitive not only to external urbanized conditions but

Received : 16th June, 2023; Accepted : 27th June, 2023

also to the sad predicament of the lonely men of our modern age. The modern age is the age of alienation, rootlessness, and there is a general lack of cohesion and unison. Every being is apart from the other being. The poet has felt with intensity the ultra-loneliness of the housemaids who hopelessly long for someone's companionship. They are drowned in despondency. They are wistfully looking to the arrival of possible partner but are ultimately frustrated. "twisted" and "trampled" in the above-mentioned poem point to the sterile and molested situation in which modern human beings are placed. There are good images of the surface details of city life and the modern mechanical industrialized civilization, though Eliot's poetry is much more than mere physical photography. The mechanical, dark dingy, ugly, depraved, depressed aspects of urban living are often presented with vividness and accuracy. If 'morning' in Eliot's poetry begins with the rattling noise of the typical crowded city, "evening" too is not pleasant or romantic like Wordsworth's. Eliot's "evening" is gloomy, despairing like a patient etherized upon the table for operation who hangs hope and hopelessness regarding his survival. Eliot is right, and probably first in realizing that the traditional romantic metaphors, metaphors, smiles, words, phrases and rhythm and images suited to the urban squalor, surroundings and sensibility. Eliot's poetry presents the life of the metropolis where we are to encounter the dull canal instead of springs, fountains and rivers; gutters, sawdust, soot- fallings from the chimneys, paper - roses instead of natural radiant flowers; broken springs in the factory years, one night cheap hotels, stale smell of beer, dingy shades, broken sordid images, metal leaves, rancid butter, coffee stands, and synthetic perfumes. Experience about urban life are described with ironic delicacy, poise and feeling. The poem "The Prelude" provides the context:

The winter evening settles down
With smell of steaks in passage ways.
Six O' clock.
The burnt out ends of smoky days.
And now gusty shower wraps
The grimy scraps
Of withered leaves about your feet
And newspapers from vacant lots;
The showers beat
On broken blind and chimney-pots...
(The Prelude I, Lines 1-10)
The morning comes to consciousness
Of faint stale smell of beer
From the sawdust- trampled street

with all its muddy feet that press
 To early coffee stands....
 On things of all the hand
 That are raising dingy shades
 In a thousand furnished rooms

(The Prelude II, Line : 1-8)

... The sordid images of which your soul was constituted
 (The Prelude III, Line : 4)

And you hear the sparrows in the gutters...
 His soul stretched tight across the skies.
 That fade behind a city block...(The Prelude IV, Lines :1-3)
 Assured of certain certainties,
 The conscience of blackened street
 Impatient to assume the world. (The Prelude IV, Line : 7-9)

The world we live in today is constituted of a thousand sordid images. Why should we blame Eliot for not presenting or portraying a damsel playing on a dulcimer, in the soft rays of the waning moon? Eliot's poetry presents beautifully the dry mechanical picture of modern life. The lady typist reaches her home at tea time and clears her breakfast, lights her stove and lays out food in tins; and out of the window her drying combinations are perilously spread. On the diwan are filled stocking, sleeping, camisoles and stays. The human heart has been aptly compared by Eliot to a waiting throbbing taxi-engine.

Poetry does not become ugly by the presentation of the ugly things of life, a good has a kind of toughness and resilience to face facts; he has not only a beautiful world to deal with, he also looks into the ugly, dark, dreary, uncouth and unpleasant. Eliot is such a poet. And he presents in poetry not only the sordidness of the external world; he peeps into what is much below and finds the bottom of our urban life horribly ugly, crooked, insidious and repulsive. People are polished outwardly but cunning, scheming, selfish, materialistic, inwardly. In Eliot's poetry there is presentation of not only the surface sordidness in act phrases and picturesequeness. Eliot has the vision, intuition, sensitiveness and imagination to feel and record the inner, depraved soul and mind of man of the modern industrialized world. That's why Eliot say in a poem that streets flow like a tedious argument and are of insidious intent. He does not miss to find the definite false note the capricious monotone, carefully caught regrets and corners of eyes to sting like a crooked pin. Depravity and degradation have reached such a degree that "even a natural, joyous action like laughter has become diplomatic, unnatural, submarine and profound in a deceitful sense" (Eliot, 47).

Eliot very poetically and suggestively brings out the difference between the rich older values and the new brittle ones. He does not state such ideas like a sociologist, or a reformer or historian, there was once vitality, fullness, richness, sincerity, genuine unbound passion, a devotion and forthright emotion love in the true sense of the term between a man and a woman or between any two lovers. They were Antony's and Cleopatra's; now they have petrified, dwindled or sunk to the level of Sweeney's. At present almost, all of our attitudes and activities are usually guided or motivated by our mercenary, selfish, unimaginative, soulless, lustful ends. Brokenness, deceitfulness, emptiness, meaninglessness, alienation and ugliness are chief hallmarks of modern man and civilization, "spring", immediately giving the impression and association of bloom of flowers and association of bloom of flowers, freshness and vitality, comes down to be broken metal threads in the factory yard:

A broken spring in a factory yard,
Rust that clings to the form that
The strength has left
Hard and curled and ready to snap.
Eliot rightly says that modern men are hollow men:
(Rhapsody on a windy Night, Lines : 30-32)
We are the hollow men
We are the stuffed men
Learning together filled with straw. Alas!
Our dried voices when
We whisper together
Are quiet and meaningless
As wind in dry grass
Or rat's feet over broken glass
In our dry cellar
Shape without form, shade without color
Paralyzed force, gesture without motion.... (The Hollow
Men, Lines :1-10)

Now there is almost no love, or there are no lovers. Here is only "lust and even without the fire of passion or physical vitality. It is dry, automatic and mechanical; it is almost a routine affair" (Preface to *Anabasis*, Lines: 77-78). Deep feeling and emotion, and the capacity to sacrifice and suffer for the other have the decayed, shrunk and got impoverished Romeos and Juliet though sentimental were, Afterall, the embodiments of deep emotional love and a passion powerful enough to buffet any storm of life. Eliot's poem, "Sweeney Erect" and "Sweeney among the Nightingale" adequately illustrated this fact or feature of the human society at present. If we come to the theme of love it is, intense, dealt with more realistically

than in traditional romantic poetry take "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock": in realism, in psychological recording of minds, in nicety and nuance, complexity and tension this poem has decidedly an edge over romantic love poems. In a typical Romantic love poem, the lovers are presented as passionate to the point of dying for each other. They are supposed to be a paragon of beauty and devotion. And in many cases the passions and emotions, the degree of sincerity and devotion and sacrifice depicted and portrayed are not untrue or fictitious – but this only face to the, larger reality and experience of our emotional life. J. Alfred Prufrock has outgrown his youth, and in his middle age. He has developed love or infatuation for certain girls. He labors under tension, doubts and complexes and certainties as he is not sure that his love or fascination had aroused any similar or concomitant emotion in them. While picturing them Eliot's poetry acquires a great deal of lyricism and aesthetic beauty.

.... Time to turn back and descend the stair,
 with a bald spot in the middle of my hair–
 (The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock, Lines : 39-40)
 My morning coat, my collar mounting
 Firmly to the chin,
 My neck tie rich and modest, but asserted by a simple pin–
 (They will say "but how his arm and legs are thin!")
 Do I dare
 Disturb the universe in a minute there is time
 For decision and revision which a minute will reverse.
 (Lines : 42-47)

In order to be more agreeable to the ladies of his love he wears a fine coat and rich neck tie. It at all he reaches them as he says, he does not know how to begin or draw their attention for arousing their pity and a concern for him. J. Alfred Prufrock states the suffering of his loneliness. "The love song of J. Alfred. Prufrock presents" the inner mental conflict, the hesitancy, the agony and complexity arising out of the discrepancy between the "age and the status or economic position" of the lovers in an intellectual, aristocratic society. Hence, the present love poems song is of the most modern kind.

Eliot is right in saying that readers should be able to understand and enjoy poetry. The making of verse is an art, and it is not wholly the result of continuous inspiration and constant elevation. "The best poetry is what we want; the best poetry will be found to have a power of forming, sustaining and delighting us, as nothing else can. A dearer, deeper sense of the best in poetry, and of the strength and joy to be drawn from it is the

most precious benefit which we can gather from poetical collection such as the present... yes; constantly, in reading poetry, a sense for the best, the really excellent, and of the strength and joy to be drawn from it, should be in our minds and should govern our estimate of what we read.

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