

# **Depiction of Modern Civilization in Yeats, Williams, Pound and Elliot**



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# **Depiction of Modern Civilization in Yeats, Williams, Pound and Elliot**

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### **Abstract**

Modernism is a remarkable shift from the traditional forms of writing in English literature. William Butler Yeats (1865-1939), William Carlos Williams (1883-1963), Ezra Pound (1885-1972) and Thomas Stearns Eliot (1888-1965) are some of important poets in modern period. Moreover, World War I has important role in shattering traditional beliefs. As a result, values, conventions and life style have changed. Moreover, scientific innovation has important role to bring social changes. Many modern writers have been influenced by the crisis of early twentieth century society. Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to focus on how a few major modern poets have responded to modern civilization.

## Introduction

Modernism is an important movement, which started from the last quarter of the nineteenth century. It is a dramatic shift from the traditional form of writing. According to Barry, modernism is an “earthquake in the arts which brought down much of the structure of pre-twentieth-century practice in music, painting, literature, and architecture.” (81) The center of the earthquake was in Vienna but it influenced other European countries including England. Even now its shock-waves can be felt somewhere around the world. Modernism is a remarkable change in social values, culture and literature:

The specific features signified by “modernism” (or by the adjectives **modernist**) vary with the user, but many critics agree that it involves a deliberate and radical break with some of the traditional bases not only of Western art, but of Western culture in general. (Abrams 167)

Due to scientific research, the last decade of the nineteenth century experienced “a running controversy as to whether the basic material of the universe behaved like waves or particles; a controversy for which there was no direct observation.” (Bell 11) Beside the technological innovations, the catastrophe of World War I is often blamed for this dramatic shift. World War I has played an important role in shattering traditional beliefs.

In the field of literature, many changes have taken place. Modern writers are more interested to portray the post-war society in their writings. As traditional beliefs have been shattered by the catastrophe of the World War I, many forbidden subjects have been introduced in the field of art. People have preferred realism instead of romanticism and morality tales.

In modern poetry, one of the important aspects is the use of classical myth in portraying post-war society. Myth, legend and folklore are not same. Legend is a fable based on normal human being rather than supernatural being. The protagonist is a normal human being in a legend. For example, the story of Joan of Arc is a legend. Usually a legend has historical background. On the other hand, folklore is a fable based on supernatural incidents. But the supernatural beings are not gods and goddesses. For example, some stories of Lilith are folklore. If the story is about gods and goddesses then it is termed religions. For example, the story of the Greek god Zeus had religious value in ancient time. According to Abrams, "a mythology is a religion in which we no longer believe." (171) But legend, folklore and mythology has important role in controlling social behavior:

Most myths are related to social **rituals**-set forms and procedures in sacred ceremonies-but anthropologists disagree as to whether rituals generated myths or myths generated rituals. (Abrams 170)

This dissertation will focus on the depiction of modern civilization in modern poetry. The first chapter of this paper will briefly discuss the concept of modernism. The chapter will focus on the consequence of World War I on traditional society, the rise of modernism and some important aspects of modern literature. The second chapter will briefly discuss how modern poetry has responded to the early 20<sup>th</sup> century world. The chapter will focus on the representation of society in modern poetry, some important features in modern poetry and the importance of mythological elements in modern poetry. The third chapter will focus on the poetry of William Butler Yeats (1865-1939), William Carlos Williams (1893-1963), Ezra Pound (1895-1972) and Thomas Stearns Eliot (1898-1965). This chapter

will examine how Yeats, Williams, Pound and Eliot have responded to modern civilization such as mechanization, urbanization, industrialization and secularization in their poetry.

## **Chapter 1**

### **World War I, Modernism and Modern Literature**

Modernism is the era, which Harold Rosenberg describes as “the tradition of the new.” (Childs 1) Modernism evolves due to technological changes in the last quarter of nineteenth century. Due to innovations, the society changes rapidly. Moreover, World War I has important effect on traditional society. The social changes made the world very different from traditional society.

#### **Effect of World War I on Traditional Society**

Victorian society was a moralizing society. The society was collectivist rather than individualistic. Women stayed at home rather than working outside the home. Respectability was a strong force in the Victorian era. People had a narrowed mindset in matters of sexuality. Moreover, society was very much class-based. As a result, morality became an important element in Victorian literature.

In contrast to Victorian literature, modern literature was much artistic and realistic. In the modern era, society changed rapidly. Women came outside the home and joined the workforce. They also got suffrage (Women got suffrage in 1918 in England and in 1920 in America). Due to the industrial revolution and urbanization, the labor force increased. Poor people crowded the overcrowded slums of the big cities. They were considered as a “lower order of humanity, and treated as such, valued only as the vast pool of surplus labour on which the social as well as the economy system depended.” (Bullock 61) The international economy expanded rapidly during 1870 to 1913 compared to former decades. Society

started to sympathize with androgyny and homosexuality. People started to emphasize on the individual interest. Society started to accept unconventional people, who had been rejected in Victorian society:

The wanderer, the loner, the exile, the restless and rootless and homeless individual were no longer the rejects of self-confident society but rather those who, because they stood outside, were uniquely placed in an age when subjectivity was truth to speak with vision and authority. Perceptibly in the nineties and even more markedly in the early years of the new century, the custody of life's integrities began to pass from society to individual - to an individual who necessarily commanded some unique perception of the things of life, who embodied some secret essence which alone gave the world its legitimization. (McFarlane 82)

The basic of family life started to weaken through the practice of individualism. Young people started to concentrate on their own personal interests neglecting prevalent social values. As a consequence, social values started to change. Due to scientific research, people started to lose their faith in their traditional values of love, fidelity and religion. Moreover, many scientific theories opposed many prevalent traditional values. The final attack on their beliefs was the tremendous violence of World War I. People observed for the first time bombing from airplanes. Violence of the war was no longer limited to only fighters but reached to the doors of common people. The tremendous human misery and suffering brought by the war shattered the traditional values:

The Great War which tore Europe apart between 1914 and 1918 was so shattering in its impact, so far-reaching in its consequences, that it is profoundly difficult to recapture what proceeded it - difficult to avoid exaggerating the sense of the conflict

in the pre-war years, difficult not to see them building up into a general crisis of European society in which a crash, a resolution by force, was inevitable and felt to be inevitable. (Bullock 58)

The war affected society severely. It took a lot from human being but returned almost nothing. As a result, modern man was growing up cut off from their culture and tradition. They were known as the 'lost generation' as Earnest Hemingway portrays them in *The Sun also Rises* (1926). Many modern writers describe the modern world as the apocalyptic time. W. B Yeats, who observed both the Victorian era and the modern era, portrayed the anarchy of modern time in his poem "The Second Coming":

Turning and turning in the widening gyre  
The falcon cannot hear the falconer;  
Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;  
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,  
The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere  
The ceremony of innocence drowned;  
The best lack all conviction, while the worst  
Are full of passionate intensity.

(The Second Coming)

The poem describes the nature of modern era and the death of traditional values. For Yeats, traditional values are more important than the modern values. Culture and traditional values of the society have been destroyed in modern times. It is often said that apocalypse has already arrived in the modern era:

It (Dada or Surrealism) is the art consequent of Heisenberg's 'Uncertainty Principal', of the destruction of civilization and reason in the First World War, of the world changed and reinterpreted by Marx, Freud and Darwin, of capitalism and constant industrial acceleration, of existential exposure to meaninglessness of absurdity. (Bradbury and McFarlane 27)

The war changed human culture completely. Many people had to migrate from one country to another. People growing up during the war period (1914-1919) lost their cultural values. As a result, social values started to degrade rapidly.

### **Rise of Modernism**

The word 'Modernity' was first used by Charles Baudelaire (1821-1867) in the essay named 'The Painter of Modern Life' in the mid nineteenth century. He describes "modernity as the fashionable, fleeting and contingent in art, in opposition to the eternal and immutable." (Childs 14) Modern life is described as the effect of urbanization and technological advancement on human life:

In relation to Modernism, modernity is considered to describe a way of living and of experiencing life which has arisen with the changes wrought by industrialisation, urbanisation and secularisation; its characteristics are disintegration and reformation, fragmentation and rapid change, emphatically and insecurity. It involves certain new understandings of time and space: speed, mobility, communication, travel, dynamism, chaos and cultural revolution. (Childs 14-15)

Beside the technological innovation, modernism also includes the effect of World War I on human society. Technology has become a curse since World War I for common citizens of

many countries as Pound has portrayed in "The Return." Observing the sudden violence of the war, young people matured suddenly. Therefore, modern art becomes different from traditional forms of art. Instead of writing romanticism (Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*) and morality tale (Bronte's *Jane Eyre*), people start to focus on real life (Lawrence's *Sons and Lovers*). Many innocent people have suffered due to urbanization and innovations:

Indeed Modernism would seem to be the point at which the idea of the radical and innovating arts, the experimental, technical, aesthetic ideal that had been growing forward from Romanticism, reaches formal crisis - in which myth, structure and organization in a traditional sense collapse, and not only for formal reasons.  
(Bradbury and McFarlane 26)

Technology has reached the common person's house. The lifestyle of everyone has changed rapidly. Along with changing society, art and literature also starts to change. People become more prone to come up with new ideas. The past is often neglected. Tradition has lost its control on the human soul. People started to believe, only what science allowed them to believe:

Modernity, in normal usage, is something that progresses in company with and at the speed of the years, like the bow-wave of a ship; last year's modern is not this year's.  
(Bradbury and McFarlane 22)

Modern people often deny conventions of former times. The impact of scientific revolution is not limited within the field of science. It starts to influence every fiber of human life. Many of the scientific theories ran counter to traditional beliefs. As a result, people started to move away from social conventions:

The term 'Modernism' can hardly be taken in the former sense; for in any working definition of it we shall have to see in it a quality of abstraction and highly conscious artifice, taking us behind familiar reality, breaking away from familiar functions of language and conventions of form. (Bradbury and McFarlane 24)

Modernism includes everything that breaks the ground rules of the Victorian era. People start to think outside the boundary. Therefore, the movement of modernism becomes a turning point in English Literature.

### **Some important aspects of Modern Literature**

Modernist writers therefore struggled, in Ezra Pound's brief phrase, to 'make it new', to modify if not overturn existing modes of representation, partly by pushing them towards the abstract or the introspective, and to express the new sensibilities of their time: in a compressed, condensed, complex literature of the city, of industry and technology, war, machinery and speed, mass markets and communication, of internationalism, the New Woman, the aesthete, the nihilist and the flâneur. (Childs 3-4)

The quote above summarizes the nature of modern writing. Literature has changed very rapidly with changing society of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. People start to ignore the old form of writing. As a result, the new form of writing replaces conventional form of writing. Many writers have experimented with language, theme and character. Modern writers has observed the society from new perspectives, such as a feminist perspective (Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own*), psychological perspective (D.H. Lawrence's *Sons and*

*Lovers*), and post-colonial perspective (Gorge Orwell's *Burmese Days*). As a result, new culture, new values, new attitudes are included in the field of literature:

The cultural situation, most markedly perhaps in Germany, was revolutionary. The assault on the old guard in literature – and the new became the old with a speed which to some was astounding – was no mere stylistic swing but a vociferous demand for fundamental change: new attitudes, new areas of exploration, new values. (McFarlane 78)

Before W.B. Yeats, there were two influential writers, who were the “Romantic-turned Modernist.” (Childs 94) One of them is Thomas Hardy (1840-1928), who influenced modern poetry. Another one is Rudyard Kipling (1865-1928), who was one of the popular fiction writers. These two writers were “independent minded” (Childs 94) and “highly individualistic” (Childs 94), which are important features in modern writers. Features of modern literature include directness and use of simple or everyday language. The shift of language is often termed as ‘linguistic turn’. The language of literature forms the feature of modern civilization instead of describing it. Modern writers use less archaic words in their writings. Sometimes, they lack words to portray modern life:

The Modernist crisis of language is thus located not in impotence of the creative individual or a literary style within a language which is assumed to be living and potentiated, but in the ‘de-potentiated ‘ of an entire language as such. (Sheppard 329)

The modern era changes the form of language. It has become less complex than it used to be in the past. In prose, use of everyday English can be observed in Hardy's *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* (1891) or Lawrence's *Sons and Lovers* (1913). Moreover, stream of consciousness can be found in Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922) and Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925).

In poetry, William Carlos Williams has used everyday language in his "This is Just to Say". He provides his readers only an image without any personal comment on it. According to Bell,

Furthermore, by the early teens of the century there had occurred what has come to be known as the linguistic "turn": rather than describing or reflecting world, language was now seen to form it. (16)

He uses free verse in his poetry instead of iambic pentameter. In drama, the prose style replaces the poetic style. For example, the Norwegian dramatist Henrik Ibsen (1828-1906) uses prose style in his *A Doll's House* (1879). Only T.S. Eliot continues to use poetic style in his drama. He uses poetic style in his religious drama, *Murder in the Cathedral* (1935). Modern writings are usually open-ended. Readers are free to come up with their own conclusions.

The effect of the violence of World War I is very evident in modern literature. The innocence of young people is taken away by catastrophe of World War I. As a result, young people started to ignore morality. Therefore, romanticism and morality become subjects to myth or utopian ideas:

Individual vision may falter or fail; communal acquiescence in natural value may prove utopian; the validating environment may be denied or destroyed. The risks are amply documented within Romanticism itself, and become still more evident later in the nineteenth century, as the writer's world seems increasingly alien: physically, socially, intellectually, it offers little continuity or consolation. (Crasnow 369)

Technological innovation in the late nineteenth century and unfair means violate many rules described in religious scriptures and prevalent moral values. The violations of religious conventions may have inspired modern writers to break conventions in writing:

(Where the English poets of the later war years learnt increasingly to handle the trench situation in terms and with a tone appropriate to that situation, German poets of the later war years tended to turn away from war and social upheaval in order to provide an unreal humanitarian, utopian or apocalyptic gloss on those realities.

(Sheppard 388)

Modern literature is different from the traditional literature. It dares to experiment outside the periphery. As a result, modern literature breaks down all the barriers.

Modernism is a dramatic shift in European society. The shift starts with technological innovation. Moreover, World War I has played an important role in bringing social changes. These social changes have given birth to modernism. Modern literature has been influenced by these social changes.

## **Chapter 2**

### **The Early 20<sup>th</sup> Century World and Modern Poetry**

Imagism, symbolism, free verse are some of the important movements in modern poetry. Moreover, the use of classical myth and the effect of World War I are important aspects of modern poetry. Modern poetry has been influenced by the social changes of early twentieth century.

#### **Representation of Early 20<sup>th</sup> Century Society in Modern Poetry**

In modern poetry, one of the significant features is representation of social changes due to technological innovations and violence of World War I. Modern man is not traditionalist. They often oppose old values and old customs. They are much more interested in material comfort rather than spiritual comfort. As a result, material success becomes the only goal of the modern man although it may be achieved in illicit ways. Many poets of the modern era have portrayed these aspects of modern man in their poetry:

The world in which modern poetry grew up was the world of high bourgeois culture, the heir of all the ages, and possessed of the technical resources to become fully aware of its inheritance. (Hough 316)

Not only do social values change but also the style of writing changes. People prefer to read realistic forms of writing. They love to read everyday language instead of elevated language. Romanticisms and morals are ignored in the modern era. Modern man also ignores folklore and religious myths. Modern poetry is influenced by these changing social values:

*Hugh Selwyn Mauberley* (written by Ezra Pound) is at times a moving elegy for the world of artistic and social possibility that the war seemed to obliterate; Pound looks back with a delicate combination of affection and irony at earlier vanguard movements in arts ... nothing their inadequacies but excoriating the culture that rejected their energies. (Longenbach 117-118)

Eliot's *The Waste Land* is the best example of portrayal of modern society. *The Waste Land* portrays that modern people are more associated with material profit.

Modern poetry also includes realism but artistic presentation of human life. Romanticism is often denied in modern poetry. Modern poetry only deals with the reality of human life, rather than the imagination. There may be imagination but it is connected with the reality of human psychology, sufferings, happiness or emotions. For example, Pound has used romanticisms in "The River-Merchant's Wife: A Letter". But the poem describes the effect of urbanization and industrialization on village life. According to Childs,

Romanticism was rejected as metaphysical, indulgent, sentimental, mannered and overemotional, and its view of reality as inherently mysterious, while life for the new poets was to be glimpsed in definite visual flashes or images. (98)

Modern poetry shifts from the conventional form of writing. Modern poetry often observes the effect of World War I on every sphere of society including the field of literature. It often uses metaphysical elements, which is comparable to those John Donne (1572-1631) used in sixteenth century (His poems also contain irregular rhymes and meters).

The role of power is not new in the modern era. Many former writers could see that political power is strong enough to abolish traditional values and religious beliefs. Political

leaders are often able to manipulate religion and social culture. In modern era, World War I becomes a strong force to abolish the traditional beliefs, creating the 'lost generation':

A comparison with Wordsworth is inevitable, for modern poetry's response to the First World War plays out a drama that was enacted by romantic poetry's response to the French Revolution. As the utopian dreams inspired by the Revolution were demolished by the Reign of Terror, Wordsworth (like many of his contemporaries) lost faith in the power of political action to effect social change; the result was (as M. H. Abrams and Jerome McGann have demonstrated in different ways) that poets looked to poetry to carry the burden of spiritual and cultural enlightenment. (Longenbach 109)

Modern poets often have the tendency to use myths in their poetry. For example, Yeats has borrowed elements from the Greek myth in "Leda and the Swan" in order to portray power relationship. Modern people do not believe in their religion and traditional values. They consider that romanticisms and morals are utopian ideas that cannot be achieved in reality. Therefore, they often ignore their traditional beliefs and focus on material profits. According to Hough,

Classical culture has lost its unique authority; there is no ecumenical religion; the psychologists and anthropologists have revealed systems of symbolism anterior to the accepted cultural structures. (316)

Modern writers often try to relate the disaster of modern times with the disasters of former times. Sometimes, they suggest that modern people should not forget their past because it is not easy to ignore their past:

Where Eliot's long historical perspective creates a powerful sense of the inescapable presence of the traditions embodied in the mind of Europe, against which the present is evaluated, Crane's (American Poet, Hart Crane: 1899-1932) wilful mythologizing presses what of the past can be made to work into the service of an eclectic imagination that celebrates the untrammelled future. (Hyde 345)

Modern poetry often portrays the features of modern life. It often observes the effect of World War I on human mind, crisis in human relationship and crisis in religious beliefs and traditional beliefs.

### **Some Important Features of Modern Poetry**

Symbolism is an important feature of modern poetry. A Symbol is an object or event that signifies something beyond its literal meaning. For example, Yeats has used historical place Byzantium as a symbol for an ideal land in his "Byzantium" and "Sailing to Byzantium". According to Abrams, the decades after World War I are the notable era of symbolism:

In discussing literature, however, the term "symbol" is applied only to a word or phrase that signifies an object or event which in its turn signifies something, or has a range of reference beyond itself. ... Often they (poets) do so by exploiting widely shared associations between an object or event or action and a particular concept; for example, the general association of a peacock with pride and of an eagle with heroic endeavor, or the rising sun with birth and the setting sun with death, or climbing with effort or progress and descent with surrender and failure. (Abrams 311)

Symbols and allegory are not the same. Allegory provides an image with a concept while symbol is only an object without any concept. Allegory is narrative and very specific. For example, the encounter of Satan with his daughter, Sin and son, Death in Milton's *Paradise Lost* (Book II: 746-814) suggests an incestuous relationship between Satan, Sin and Death. According to Yeats a symbol "is indeed the only possible expression of some invisible essence, a transparent lamp about a spiritual flame; while allegory is one of many possible representation of an embodied thing, or familiar principle, and belong to fancy and not to imagination: the one is revelation, the other an amusement." (Stauffer 229) He defines a symbol as "unified meaningful, complex, untranslatable, inexhaustibly suggestive, moral, self-creating, slow-growing, centrally important, and revelatory" (Stauffer 231).

On the other hand, imagism is another important movement that flourished in England and America between 1912 and 1917. It is a revolt run by Ezra Pound against poetic theory of T.E Hulme. Three principals are set by imagist Ezra Pound, Hilda Doolittle and Richard Arlington. Firstly, object in the poem has to be treated directly. There will be no additional information about the object. Secondly, poets have to use only necessary words in writing poetry. Poets cannot give their own opinion in words. Thirdly the poem has to have a musical rhythm. But musical rhythm may not be in the sequence of a metronome. Images are mainly connected with its literal meaning. Different readers can come up with different interpretations from an image. According to Pound, imagism is a 'sort of poetry where painting or sculpture seems as if it were "just coming over into speech." ' (Zach 234) He also adds that an image "presents an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time." (Zach 234) According to Scott,

The precious image is one that is both outrageous and tactful, that shows that the imagination flies highest not when it liberates itself from convention but when it discovers that convention is liberating. Rare rhyme, of which the Symbolists were very fond, is perhaps the most convincing demonstration of this truth, for in rare rhyme, convention condones a combination of words that flaunt conventionality. (211)

Ezra Pound has differentiated an image from a symbol. He says that an image “transforms itself, or darts into a thing inward and subjective” (Hakutani 48) while a symbol has “a fixed value, like numbers in arithmetic, like 1, 2, and 7. The imagiste’s images have a variable significance, like the signs *a*, *b*, and *x* in algebra.” (Hakutani 48) For example, in the poem “In the Station of a Metro”, Pound has used the image of “petals” for “faces” of some beautiful ladies in a station of a metro. Readers can make their own interpretation from this image.

Another aspect of modern poetry is free verse. Free verse is open form verse, organized in irregular metrical form. According to Abrams, “free verse...has irregular line lengths, and either lacks rhyme or else uses it only sporadically.” (Abrams 105) Free verse was an unconventional form of writing in modern poetry:

The German, with the longest and most celebrated tradition in free rhythms, stretching back to Klopstock (German Poet, Friedrich Gottlieb Klopstock: 1750-1803), kept out of the turn of the century controversy by and large, and when they did come forward to dabble in poetic, it was to tell the rest of Europe that free verse was ‘old hat’, ... (Scott 359)

Modern poetry often has irregular lines but has a musical rhythm. For Example:

April is the cruellest month, breeding  
 Lilacs out of the dead land, mixing  
 Memory and desire, stirring  
 Dull roots with spring rain.

(The Waste Land)

The first line has ten syllables but the second the line has nine syllables. And the third line has eight syllables and the fourth line has five syllables. The words “breeding”, “mixing” and “stirring” provide a musical rhythm in the poem.

### **Importance of Mythological Elements in Modern Poetry**

Modern writers feel that myth has an important role in controlling human behavior. Degradation of social values starts as soon as the modern era starts. Myth has important roles to play in controlling human behavior. It can limit the ethical degradation of human behavior through its moral. Moreover, modern writers have used classical myth in their writing because they want to understand the shift from the romantic era to modern era:

Modernist writers were almost obsessively concerned with history in a double sense: they were concerned both about what was happening in their world and with the nature of historical understanding as such. The mythopoeic basis of history has several very different aspects, but it importantly includes an underlying recognition of the projective nature of all historical meaning. (Bell 14-15)

Modern writers start to emphasize on old myth in portraying post-war situation. For example, Yeats has used Sphinx in his “The Second Coming.” Eliot has used Teiresias in

his *The Waste Land*. Myth has relation with human spirit. It includes every aspect of human culture such as death of old values or birth of new values. According to Bell,

Myth could be many things, including nostalgia for a lost unity, a fascistic regression, or a literary structure, but its most important meaning was as an emblem of the human world as self-created. (14)

Myth is highly moral and it helps to predict past, present and future of a nation. Tradition is an important aspect for every nation. T.S. Eliot says in his essay "Tradition and Individual Talent" that a writer must know his tradition in order to write. Although, myth is highly imaginative and uncertain but it has influence on people:

Myth is highly ambivalent, therefore, in its relation to history: it may be a way of acting purposefully *within* history or a way of transcending, which is to say withdrawing *from*, it. Meanwhile the capacity of transcendence, is not necessarily negative: it may rather be a condition of properly living in history: a secular equivalent of T. S. Eliot's more religious thought, "teach us to care and not to care." (Bell 15)

Whether, People believe it or not, myth has spiritual influence on human nature. But modern people started to ignore myth. As a result, they lack control over themselves. Modern civilization is turned into a barren land due to its materialistic practices. In *The Waste Land*, Eliot portrays the fruitless human sexuality of the modern land:

T. S. Eliot's grail legend in *The Waste Land* affirms a fertility which is largely belied by the sexual disgust in the poem itself, and Eliot's use of myth proved to be rather a placeholder for the religious faith which he was subsequently to adopt. (Bell 15)

Tradition is something that cannot be taken away from human soul completely. Although modern people tend to ignore tradition but they still talk about it. The difference is that they give their own judgment and dismiss mythology. However, they cannot separate themselves from their traditional beliefs:

Tradition for Eliot, was not what he called "orthodoxy", a rule to be followed, but a largely unconscious inheritance being continually modified within the self. (Bell 15-16)

Many modern writers observed myth and its relation to primitive states of human mind and modern civilization. Myth describes the primitive tendency of human beings, which ends with morality. On the other hand, the modern era has a tendency to make logical study of myths and ridicule them. As a result, myth loses its original value to modern people:

In many ways the universalism, and the valorizing, of the "primitive mind" in these decades had a progressive, critical force against the home culture and the relatively of worldviews was an enabling condition for this. It made it possible for the primitive to acquire such a value of radical difference. In this way, the scientific study of myth throughout nineteenth century eventually produced a reflector in which the scientific observer could see the scientific viewpoint itself as only one form of life, a lived worldview, a myth. (Bell 21)

For modern people, myth is irrelevant and dead. The new judgment of myth is not able to restore the old traditional values. Moreover, it is leading people towards moral degradation, creating a new form of society.

Modern poetry breaks the rules of conventional forms of writing. Modern poets have responded to modern civilization. They have depicted the nature of modern society in their

poetry. Modern poetry takes the responsibility of restoring traditional beliefs. Moreover, the movements of symbolism, imagism and free verse differentiate modern poetry from traditional poetry

## **Chapter 3**

### **Depiction of Modern Civilization in Modern Poetry**

William Butler Yeats (1865-1939), William Carlos Williams (1883-1963), Ezra Pound (1885-1972) and Thomas Stearns Eliot (1888-1965) are four important poets in the modern period. They have depicted modern civilization in their poetry.

#### **Depiction of Civilization in Yeats**

William Butler Yeats portrays the nature of modern civilization in his poetry. Through mythological elements and historical events, Yeats portrays the importance of tradition in human life:

The assumption of presence in the peasant world is related to the idea that rural people are closer to nature than their urban neighbors and the writer's job is to recover their original plenitude. Thus the literature becomes an act of mythic recovery. (Hirsch 882)

Modern people think that mythology has nothing to do with modern society. It does not bring material comfort. As a result, Yeats has uses mythological elements in his poetry in order to restore myth. But, he creates his own style:

Yeats would remake his style over and over again throughout his career, but his pristine syntax, fulfilling the formal demands of the poem effortlessly, would remain constant. (Longenbach 105)

He has used old mythology but has given a new meaning and a modern aspect so that it can be used in describing the modern times. His attempt to use classical elements in modern poetry is meant to resurrect old myths and blend them with history.

In the poem "The Man and the Echo" the speaker tries to gain spirituality. He prays to God to purify his soul. But he is unable to communicate with God because he does not know where to seek God. He goes to pray in Knocknarea in County Sligo. According to Heaney, "this rock face does not issue any message from the gods." (Heaney 96) As a result, the speaker finds nothing but the echo of his own words:

The echo marks the limits of the mind's operations even as it calls the mind forth to its utmost exertions, and the strenuousness of this dialectic issues in a poem that is as shadowed by death as Larkin's (English poet, Philip Larkin: 1922-1985) "Aubade," but is far more vital and undaunted. "The Man and the Echo" tries to make sense of historical existence within a bloodstained natural world and an indifferent universe. (Heaney 96)

The speaker goes to revive his religious and historical sense in his old age. But he does not have any guide to show his way to purification. But he is still searching for his answer. But the speaker finds a hint from the echo. Echo says "(l)ie down and die", suggesting that there is no possibility of purification. The next echo suggests that his time of purification is lost "(i)nto the night". According to Heaney, in his old age Yeats was searching for historical events in Ireland.

In the poem "The Second Coming", Yeats portrays the post-war situation. He has used mythological elements in the poem. The title reminds the reader of the return of Jesus

Christ at the time of anarchy. The title of the poem suggests that modern time is apocalyptic time. But Yeats has not suggested the title for Jesus Christ:

If we hold rigidly to the notion that only the poet's full mental experience can give the adequate symbol for the idea the title suggests, then we must not call up some conventional painting of Christ in a glory. No; we must pronounce the words "The Second Coming!" and follow precisely Yeats's own experience when he writes: I began to imagine, as always at my left side just out of the range of the sight, a brazen winged beast that I associated with laughing, ecstatic destruction. (Stauffer 229)

He has suggested the title for a cycle of history. Yeats borrows the figure of the Sphinx from the Theban play, Sophocles's *Oedipus Rex*. The sphinx stands for destruction. The poem depicts the anarchy of modern civilization. The poem suggests the destruction of the former world as the consequence of the World War I.

Yeats uses historical elements in his two poems "Sailing to Byzantium" and "Byzantium". At the very beginning of the poem "Sailing to Byzantium", the speaker says that it "is no country for old men." The country has become the realm of young people. The tradition is becoming dead. Therefore, the speaker is going to the country of dead people, who are more important than the living people. According to Jeffares,

He is old, and, besides being worried over his future career as a poet, is probably envious of the fervour of human lovers. With his revision comes his desire for some degree of secrecy, and his wish to crystallize his thought on a more general plane.  
(46)

The statement above is a comment on the original draft of "Sailing to Byzantium" which was preserved by Mrs. Yeats. According to Stauffer, Yeats has used "water imagery for

youth and life” (Stauffer240) and “fire, stone, and metal imagery for age and intellect and art, seeing himself standing in the great church of Sancta Sophia in Constantinople, with its mosaic saint on the walls” (Stauffer240):

O sages standing in God’s holy fire  
 As in the gold mosaic of a wall,  
 Come from the holy fire, perne in a gyre,  
 And be the singing-masters of my soul.

(Sailing to Byzantium)

In the post-war society, the poet feels alienated. Therefore, he wishes to sail to the country of dead people, Byzantium. Therefore, he chooses the historical place Byzantium as an ideal land:

Yeats, in fact, selected material from his general impression of historical Byzantium which was most concerned with his own situation. The marble stair, the jetty and the Cathedral were not essential; they added nothing to the poet’s account of his problem; as symbols they were more suited to the less directly subjective ‘Byzantium’. (Jeffares 47-48)

The speaker considers the new generation as a “dying generation” who have forgotten their past. For the speaker, dead people in Byzantium are more important than the living people. He wishes to live in the “holy city of Byzantium” to achieve eternity. He wishes to turn himself into a “golden bough to sing”. The bird imagery reminds the reader of Keats’s “Ode to a Nightingale”, where the speaker goes into his reverie through the song of nightingale.

The poem “Byzantium” refers to the city of Byzantium. Now the speaker has reached the city of Byzantium. He will achieve his eternity here. According to Jeffares, Yeats has collected most of his information about Byzantium from *The Age of Justinian and Theodora* by W. G. Holmes. At the beginning of the poem “Byzantium”, Yeats has given us a description of Byzantium through “great cathedral gong”. The description of Byzantium city aims to restore the tradition of the Byzantium that modern people has forgotten. Later in the poem he talks about the dead people from Byzantium, who are more important than the living people. According to Yeats, modern people are living a dead life with a dead soul:

I call it death-in-life and life-in-death.

(Byzantium)

However, modern people are living a dead life, killing their souls. But people of Byzantium are dead but still alive. The bird and the tree are used as the symbols of eternity that are not free from the disadvantages of the natural bird. Natural bird and tree can decay and die gradually. Therefore, the speaker wishes to turn the bird in “golden handiwork” and the tree into “golden bough”. Moreover, the songs of the bird and the fruit of the tree are something that can achieve eternity. In the same way, a human being’s creativity can give him eternity. Unfortunately, modern people are more interested in material comfort.

In the poem “Under Ben Bulbin” Yeats uses Irish folklore. The poem starts with “supernatural framework” (Hirschberg 399). In the first section the speaker gives the setting:

Swear by What the sages spoke

Round the Mareotic Lake

That the Witch of Atlas knew,  
Spoke and set the cocks a-crow.

Swear by those horsemen, by those women  
Complexion and form prove superhuman,  
The pale, long-visaged company  
That air in immortality  
Completeness of their passions won;  
Now they ride the wintry dawn  
Where Ben Bulbin sets the scene.

Here's the gist of what they mean.

(Under Ben Bulbin)

The setting is mythological. Moreover, the speaker is again trying to gain his historical interest. According to Hirschberg,

By drawing an equivalence between the Mareotic Lake and the spectrally-visited Irish countryside surrounding Ben Bulbin, Yeats not only transforms Ben Bulbin into an appropriate site for the quest to attain spiritual wisdom, but also stresses the extraordinary importance of the Mareotic Lake as an ancient symbol that he equated with the unconscious mind, in 'The Philosophy of Shelley's Poetry' (1903).  
(Hirschberg 400)

Again, Yeats is emphasizing that the dead are more important than the living people are. He refers to the Irish heroes who have lived by their soul rather than for physical objects. As a

result, they have gained immortality through Irish folklore. But modern people have forgotten the folklore because they emphasize on material comfort:

The volume of stories, *The Celtic Twilight* (1893), which Yeats wrote after wandering through Drumcliff in Sligo County in search of local folk legends includes a delightful tale 'Drumcliff and Rosses' which contains an anecdote that leaps over the decades, as Yeats tells how 'northward in Ben Bulbin, famous for hawks, the white square door wings open at sundown, and those wild unchristian riders rush forth upon the fields...'. (Hirschberg 400)

Section two of the poem deals with the "man's place in the continuum of life, death and rebirth, is contained in the supernatural framework explored in section I" (Hirschberg 400-401). The section deals with physical and spiritual aspects of human beings. According to Hirschberg,

The distinction Yeats draws between 'race' and 'soul' provides the basis for his exploration of the difference between man's individual mind and the collective 'human mind' (Hirschberg 401).

Although Irish heroes are dead, living people remember them. Section three deals with "Yeats's examinations of how man can bring himself, through passionate involvement, into contact with eternal *daimonic* self" (Hirschberg 401). Section IV deals with "the power of art to shape history" (Hirschberg 399):

Poet and sculptor, do the work,  
Nor let the modish painter shirk  
What his great forefathers did,  
Bring the soul of man to God,

Make him fill the cradled right.

(Under Ben Bulbin)

In section V, the speaker returns to the landscape of Ireland in order to revive “the ancient archetypes of the Irish race.” (Hirschberg 403) The poem asks for revival of Irish folklore, which is the soul of Ireland.

Yeats uses the Greek myth in “Leda and the Swan” in order to portray Irish colonization. According to Childs, “‘Leda and the Swan’ has been seen as an admiration for and celebration of power” (Childs 196) in the past. Leda is raped by the Greek god Zeus in a form of a swan. The poem suggests that a pre-colonized society is compared with a maiden waiting to be ravished. The poem suggests Irish colonization by England:

The sonnet seems to explore the interaction of feminist and postcolonial power structures, and yet the politics advanced by the poem remain ambivalent due to its violence and its open-ended, conclusion. ... He (William Johnsen) insinuates that the poem can be read as an allegory for anti-colonization, although he does not pursue this reading in his essay. ... Through the character Leda, one can interpret, Yeats negotiating his political investments in Western civilization as an Irish colonial subject symbolically raped by England. ... In retelling the Greek myth of Zeus’s rape of Leda as a formative metaphor in the construction of western civilization, an idea Yeats repeats in *A Vision* (1925), he illustrates how gender asymmetry is inherent to the order of western civilization. (Neigh 146-147)

The poem has reference of the post-war situation of Irish society. Ireland is colonized by England. Here, the Greek god Zeus becomes symbol of the colonizer. It also suggests that England is a powerful country that is strong enough to colonize Ireland. On the other hand,

Leda, a human being becomes the symbol for Ireland. The illustration suggests that Ireland lacks the ability to resist being colonized as Leda lacks ability to prevent being violated:

In other words, Yeats questions the limits of poetic thinking to transform and resist the violence of material reality. By emphasizing the brutal violence of the rape, he deviates from the tradition of idealizing Leda and Zeus's union. In general in the poetry, Yeats looks for ways to resist England's colonizing of Ireland, but he is acutely aware that his language is simultaneously an agent of his oppression, as well as a mode of resistance. Leda's lack of clear resistance to the swan's rape illustrates the impossibility of resistance without complicity. (Neigh 153)

Not only does the colonization of Ireland occur, but also the national identity of Ireland is destroyed. The poem also suggests that after being violated by Zeus, Leda is not the same. In the same way, Ireland is not the same as it used to be:

For Yeats, the drop forms a moment to imagine other modes of being before he hits the ground and must take on the fiction of his national Irish identity to fight colonialism. The drop is where new collective occurs between identification and identity, between desiring the other and falling away from that other, as a separate being. The drop becomes a way to imagine the excess produced by the process of identification that does not "fit" into one's identity. (Neigh 153)

Neigh also says that Yeats raises questions about the ethics of self and other in the relationship between Leda and Zeus: "Zeus is both colonizer and patriarch, while Leda is both feminine other and colonized." (Neigh 155)

Yeats has portrayed the post-war situation in his poetry. British colonization has destroyed national identity of Ireland. In short, Irish culture has become dead. People of

Ireland are also living spiritually dead life. He uses elements from the Irish folklore to remind people that they have forgotten their cultural identity. Yeats has shown that the old are not dead but they are more important than living people are. Moreover, through Irish folklore, history and tradition, Yeats has portrayed a distinction between Irish culture and European culture:

Yet any rigid distinction between Ireland and Europe is of course itself an imposition of nationalist categories on the full complexity of economic, social, political and cultural relations. (McCormack 5)

The distinctions signify that they are killing their own identity and taking other's identity. As a result, Ireland is becoming dead. Yeats is urging the new generation to remember their history while undergoing modernization.

### **Depiction of Civilization in Williams**

William Carlos Williams portrays the nature of modern civilization in his poetry. His poetry has unique features. Although, his poetry does not borrow so many classical elements but Williams has created his own style of writing:

His best poems have a life and movement of their own; rhythm is largely responsible for what formal unity is achieved. (Morgan 679)

The language of his poetry forms the features of modern civilization, which is a 'linguistic turn' in modern era. He has also used free verse in his poetry. He borrows elements from his surroundings for creating images for his poetry:

His idiom comes from many sources, from speech and reading, both of various kinds; the blend, which is his own invention, is generous and even exotic. (Lowell 534)

But through these simple images, Williams portrays the nature of modern society. He does not provide any additional information or personal comments on his image. His poems are open ended. Readers are asked to think critically and are free to come up with their own conclusions:

But whatever his technique, Williams's poetry always carries a sense of something chaotic eagerly organized, the graceless made graceful, the difficult made "joyful."(Myers 465-466)

Moreover, his poetry is example of modern form of writing. His poetry provides us with important features of modern civilization.

Williams observes the growth of modern civilization through "The Red Wheelbarrow". The poem gives an image of a wheelbarrow in a country life:

so much depends  
upon

a red wheel  
barrow

glazed with rain  
water

beside the white  
chickens.

(The Red Wheelbarrow)

There is no punctuation mark in the poem. Therefore, the poem is like a portrait on a canvas. Agricultural activity is depended on a wheelbarrow. It is an important element in fieldwork. But, the most important part of a wheelbarrow is its wheel. The poem focuses on a red wheelbarrow in the village area. But its importance is no longer limited to agricultural activity. It is often said that world civilization starts with the invention of wheel. It has made life easier. Technological equipment requires at least one wheel to function. Although the common image of a wheel is in village, surrounded by “white chickens” and “glazed with rain water” but it has important role in modern life and growth of civilization.

Williams uses language and image from everyday life in his “This is Just to Say”. The use everyday language and incidents are not only one of the important aspects of modern poetry but also are unique characteristic of Williams:

I have eaten  
the plums  
that were in  
the icebox  
  
and which  
you were probably  
saving  
for breakfast  
  
Forgive me  
they were delicious

so sweet  
and so cold

(This is Just to Say)

The speaker admits that he has eaten the plums and apologizes to the addressee for eating plums. But, he does not seem guilty for what he has done. The poem gives the image of a very simple incident. The poem does not have any comment from the poet on the given image. Readers are free to come up with their own conclusions from this image. Williams have not said that whether the addressee forgives the speaker or not. Moreover, the poem does not have any punctuation mark. Therefore, it is not a written statement but a spoken statement, which is a very unconventional form of writing.

In the poem "The Great Figure" Williams portrays another aspect of city life and a feature of modern poetry. The poem describes the dependence of modern man on growing technology. The poem describes a fire accident but with a moving image:

Among the rain  
and lights  
I saw the figure 5  
in gold  
on a red  
fire truck  
moving  
tense  
unheeded  
to gong clangs

siren howls  
and wheels rumbling  
through the dark city

(The Great Figure)

City life is depended on the growing technological innovation. The fire truck is going to extinguish fire. People are being dependent on technology to cope with fire accidents. The poem also portrays another aspect of modern poetry describing moving objects. As a result, poet has not used any punctuation mark in the poem. The speaker is giving an image of whatever he has observed. The image of the fire truck with its rumbling wheels also reminds us the poem "The Red Wheelbarrow" and the importance of wheel in growing civilization. The truck is also depended on its four wheels.

In the poem "Tract" Williams again uses spoken language in order to ridicule modern burial. He starts the poem with process of burial but ridicules the material aspects of the funeral:

Knock the glass out!  
My god--glass, my townspeople!  
For what purpose? Is it for the dead  
to look out or for us to see  
how well he is housed or to see  
the flowers or the lack of them--  
or what?

(Tract)

Williams describes the artificiality of the city people within very simple language and image. Even the human burial has become the matter of boast for modern people. Modern people are cut off from their religion. Religion has only become a ritual for their lives. They are far away from the spiritual aspects of human burial. The speaker is urging town people to regain their spiritual beliefs in order to regain their spirituality:

Let there be no glass--  
and no upholstery, phew!  
and no little brass rollers  
and small easy wheels on the bottom--  
my townspeople what are you thinking of?

(Tract)

The poem describes the artificiality of modern life. People are so interested in material comfort that they have lost the religious aspect of human death and human burial.

Williams uses classical elements in his "Raleigh Was Right". The poem is a response to Sir Walter Raleigh's (1552-1618) "An Answer to Marlowe", which is also a response to Christopher Marlowe's (1564-1593) "The Passionate Shepherd to his Love". The poem focuses on the peace of modern land and peace of former land. The process of urbanization and industrialization has taken away the peace from modern land:

We cannot go into the country  
for the country will bring us no peace  
What can the small violets tell us  
that grow on fury stems in  
the long grass among lance shaped leaves?

(Raleigh Was Right)

Usually the image of country life gives us an idea of peaceful life. But the speaker does not find any peace in country life:

...long ago!  
 long ago! when country people  
 would plow and sow  
 with flowering minds and pockets at ease-  
 if ever these were true.

(Raleigh Was Right)

Observing the current anarchy, the speaker expresses his doubt that “if ever these were true” that people lived peacefully in the past as described in classical literature. The poem focuses on the process of urbanization in country life and impact of World War I on conventional society, which are important aspects of modern poetry. The poem suggests people are unable to find any peace in modern land.

Williams has portrayed the effect of mechanization, urbanization, and industrialization on modern life in his poetry. His poetry is a shift from the traditional form of writing. He gives the ‘broken image’ of city life. His poetry has responded to the modern civilization.

### **Depiction of Civilization in Pound**

Ezra Pound uses images in his poems, which is another important feature of modern poetry. Like Williams, his poetry gives only an image but no additional information:

Pound did employ a nonliterary concept in order to clarify his poetic theory when he came to supply a definition of the image, and the discipline of thought from which that concept came betrays the creative origin and affective function of this kind of poetic figure: “an ‘image’ is that which presents an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time. I use the term ‘complex’ rather than in the technical sense employed by the newer psychologists, such as (Bernard) Hart, though we might not agree absolutely in our application.” (Skaff 196)

His poetry also portrays the different aspects of city life. Like other modern writers, his poems are written in free verse. The style of his writing is also different from conventional forms of writing. Like Williams, he also uses the simple words within a musical rhythm. But his poems may not have metronome. He only gives a portrait of an object like a painting in a canvas:

As Pound explained in his essay, the image is not static, rational idea: “it is a radiant node or cluster; it is what I can, and must perforce, call a VORTEX, from which, and into which, and through which, ideas are constantly rushing. ... A year later Pound defined the form of an image by stating that the image “may be a sketch, a vignette, a criticism, an epigram and anything else you like. (Hakutani 47)

Through his images, he is able make a new ideas about modern land. Different readers can make different meanings of his poems. According to Jackson, Pound’s poems are a significant movement in modern era:

The tie with Pound’s poetic thought here is this: poetry too is a means of facilitating the “movement” of certain energies in nature; it must never be broken off from its

concrete, living sources, for then it gets to be “yatter about” experience rather than experience itself. (Jackson 1000)

His given images encourage readers to think critically about images and to comment their own. He portrays artificiality of modern life and effect of World War I on modern society in his poetry.

In the poem, “The Girl” Pound uses tree as metaphor for a girl. He has given a nature-image into a human being. A human being is being transformed into a tree. The speaker of the poem is thinking herself as a tree:

The tree has entered my hands,  
The sap has ascended my arm,  
The tree has grown in my breast-  
Downward,  
The branches grow out of me, like arms.

(The Girl)

The image suggests that a girl is being transformed into a tree. The poem has no additional information except the image of her transformation. According to Skaff, the speaker’s surroundings and childhood imaginations are unified in the poem. The girl is thinking herself a girl and a tree at the same time. The poem may suggest man’s relation with natural world. City life is cut off from natural environment due to mechanization, industrialization and urbanization. The speaker wants to live in natural world.

In the poem “In a Station of the Metro”, Pound only gives the image of a station in a metro:

The apparition of these faces in the crowd;

Petals on a wet, black bough.

(In a Station of the Metro)

For the speaker, a few beautiful ladies standing in a station of a metro are similar to petals, which are on a wet “black bough.” The poet gives the image of trees among these ladies. The poem may suggest that number of women is increasing in the workforce. Due to industrialization and urbanization women participation in the workforce increases. As a result, women are seen at the station of the metro along with men.

In the poem “Portrait D’une Femme”, Pound is satirizing a lady, who patronizes art. But she does not understand art. As a result, she participates in false celebration:

Your mind and you are our Sargasso Sea,  
 London has swept about you this score years  
 And bright ships left you this or that in fee:  
 Ideas, old gossip, and oddments of all things,  
 Strange spars of knowledge and dimmed wares of price.

(Portrait D’une Femme)

The image of Sargasso Sea suggests that the addressee’s mind has no flow. The speaker is not interested in art. She patronizes art to get material comfort. The image of London may suggest that the addressee is not popular among common people. People know the addressee because she is making herself known. She is famous for “(i)deas, old gossip and oddments”. The poem also suggests the artificiality of the city people. People want to be famous for getting material comfort.

In the poem “A River Merchant’s Wife: A Letter”, Pound uses images in order to portray the memories of a girl. The poem portrays the effect of urbanization on village life:

While my hair was still cut straight across my forehead

I played about the front gate, pulling flowers.

You came by on bamboo stilts, playing horse,

You walked about my seat, playing with blue plums.

(The River Merchant's Wife: A Letter)

The images of haircut, "pulling flowers", "bamboo stilts" portray the speaker's childhood memories. The poem tells the whole story of two lovers' first meeting. But the whole letter describes the speaker's love for her husband, who is away from home on purpose of business. The poem may suggest another aspect of modern life. Modern man is often busy to earn money. As a result, he has to stay away from his home. The poem suggests the individualism of modern life due to its material profit. The poem may also portray the effect of industrialization in village life. Due to industrialization and urbanization many people have migrated to city leaving their pastoral lives.

In the poem, 'The Return' Pound has portrayed the violence of World War I. In World War I, people observed bombing from air plane for the first time:

Gods of the winged shoe!

With them the silver hounds,

sniffing the trace of the air!

(The Return)

The lines portray the image of bombing from the air plane. The poem does not have the word 'air-plane'. But the image of "winged shoe" and "silver hounds" give the suggestion of bombing from airplane. The poem also portrays the tremendous violence of World War I:

Haie! Haie!

There were the swift to harry;

These the keen-scented

These were the souls of blood.

(The Return)

The catastrophe of World War I has severe effect on society. Many common people and innocent citizens have suffered due to the violence World War I. The catastrophe of World War I has taken away the innocence from minds of young people. The poem may suggest misuse of technology and its consequence in modern civilization.

Pound has portrayed the image of the modern life in his poetry. His poetry can be interpreted in different ways. His poems describe the effect of World War I on traditional society. His poetry also observes the different aspects of modern life such as individualism and urbanization.

### **Depiction of Civilization in Eliot**

Thomas Stearns Eliot portrays the crisis of human relationship in the modern world in his poetry. Eliot uses many classical elements in his poetry, which is one of the major features in modern poetry. According to Harmon,

The fact may be that a poet is part of the normative magical and religious organization of a primitive society and that his functions—to entertain, memorialize, decorate, conjure, and educate—become increasingly unimportant as civilization grows and branches. (802)

However, the style of his poetry is different from the classical form of writing. He uses images in his poetry but he is not an imagist. His poetry gives features of modern civilization.

Eliot's "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" focuses on city life. According to Harmon, Prufrock characterizes a modern man living in some European or American society. According to Oser, the poem "records his altered social and emotional responses to his native surroundings as well as an accompanying shift from moral to aesthetic concerns." (193) The epigraph of the poem is about Guido da Montefeltro. Montefeltro was condemned to the eighth circle of Hell for giving false counsel to Pope Boniface VIII. According to Schneider,

The *Love Song* is more than a retreat from love, however; it is the portrait of a man in Hell, though until this truth is clearly realized, the hell appears to be merely the trivial one of the self-conscious individual in a sterile society. Prufrock does not analyze himself, we are not led into peripheral guessing in Freudian or other terms about what may be wrong with him: and we simply come to know directly *what it feels like* to be Prufrock. (1104)

The epigraph indicates that Prufrock compares city life with the life in hell. The poem has allusion from the classical literature, historical events and myth, in order to portray the post-war society:

The social images are lightly ironic, but these extreme ones are not: they form a pattern of which the two main components are objective correlatives for a self-divided state and a state of paralysis or stagnation. (Schneider 1104)

Laurence Perrine<sup>1</sup> and Johan Schimanski<sup>2</sup> identify some references in the poem. The phrase “time for all the works and days of hands” refers to the long poem by the Greek poet Hesiod. The poem is about agricultural life. Eliot compares the city life with the agricultural life. Usually, city life gives us a colorful and luxurious image. But very few country people realize that the city life may be as dull as country life. The poem also has the reference from Shakespeare’s play *Twelfth Night*:

I know the voices dying with a dying fall

(The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock)

City people are cut-off from their nature. As a result, they are living a dead life. The poem also refers to Oscar Wilde’s play *Salome*. The speaker compares himself with John the Baptist:

Though I have seen my head (grown slightly bald) brought in upon a platter,

I am no prophet--and here’s no great matter;

(The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock)

But Prufrock is not a prophet or reformer. He only represents a modern man, who silently observes the crisis of modern times. But he wants a reformation that ends the crisis. Later, Eliot has taken the element from Marvell’s “To his Coy Mistress”:

To have squeezed the universe into a ball

(The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock)

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<sup>1</sup> Perrine, Laurence. *Literature: Structure, Sound, and Sense*, 1st edition, Harcourt, Brace & World, 1956. p. 798.

<sup>2</sup> Schimanski, Johan. *Annotasjoner til T. S. Eliot, "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock"*. February 07, 2010  
<http://www.hum.ujt.no/a/schimanski/littres/pruann.htm>

The line indicates that the modern people are not inquisitive as renaissance people were. They do not want to explore but want it explored. The poem also has biblical element:

...“I am Lazarus, come from the dead,  
Come back to tell you all, I shall tell you all”--

(The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock)

Use of Jesus Christ from the dead shows that modern time is apocalyptic time. The poem has elements from Shakespeare’s most famous play, *Hamlet*. The speaker does not think that he is prince Hamlet or his advisor. He compares himself with the Fool, which is another important character type in Shakespeare’s plays. A Fool tells highly moral words, but people take them as a form of entertainment. The phrase “(f)ull of high sentence” reminds us Clerk in “General Prologue” from Chaucer’s *The Canterbury Tales*. The stanza is a reference to the political condition of the modern world, where people are full of “high sentence” but fail to bring any reformation.

The poem “The Love Songs of J. Alfred Prufrock” portrays the crisis of modern civilization. According to Childs, the poem also is an example of “crisis of discourse” (101) in modern poetry. He also says that Prufrock has failed to find right words to express his “intense feelings of inadequacy.” (101)

*Ash Wednesday* is another dramatic monologue about struggles for the resurrection of religious beliefs. The speaker is willing to self-purify. He wants to be devoted to god but finds no possibility:

In *Ash-Wednesday* the writer struggles to bring his own life, which he feels has now passed its zenith, into some connection with the value, the reborn god, the “Word

within a word, unable to speak a word,” which he has seen as a vision but to which he has no relation. (Foster 580)

The poem starts with the speaker's old age. He does not hope to resurrect his beliefs in god but he wishes to purify himself. In the first part, he does not find any possibility of resurrecting his belief in god. But at the time of his death, he realizes that he needs a lot of blessings in order to go to heaven as he lived a sinful life. But he cannot get his life back in order to repent. According to Schneider,

The later poems are intimate and personal as none of Eliot's earlier poetry is *Ash Wednesday*, is even confessional; and through others, in spite of expressly named dramatic personae, the poet's personal voice is heard and clearly meant to be heard. (1109)

In the second part, he refers to his youth, which is lost. His description of the garden scene is physical rather than spiritual. Human being can make an impression on others through his inner quality. According to Schneider,

The directly physical legs, liver, skull, the “three white leopards,” the bones, the address to the mysterious “Lady,” all have an extraordinary brightness but also a visionary quality, the remoteness of which is not due merely to the fact that they are symbolic. (1110)

In the third part of the poem, the speaker is going through a medieval tower symbolizing the different stages of life. He lived a life full of doubts about god. As a result, he only remembers “deceitful face of hope and despair” in his “first turning”. On his “second turning” he finds “no more faces and the stairs were dark”. According to Schneider,

Visually the scene is the stair of a dark medieval tower up which the climber toils, at each turn leaving part of himself, or his former self, behind still “struggling with the devil of the stairs who wears/ The deceitful face of hope and of despair”-perhaps specifically the “demon of doubt,” which in the essay on Pascal (p.114) Eliot described as “inseparable from the spirit of belief.” (1111)

Finally, he finds nothing but a “slotted window” in order to find hope. The speaker admits that he is not worthy of regaining his lost beliefs. He can only take the name of god but nothing else. In the fourth part of the poem, the speaker returns to the garden described in the second part. The speaker again goes back to his youth and tries to recall some moment of his past. But he finds his dead soul. According to Schneider,

So the effect of this, the last “scene” in the poem, is a remarkable combination of the inner and the outer world, processional yet experienced. The poem does not end in beatitude, however, and this sense does not suggest that the end is won: it repents the hortatory “redeem the time” and “redeem the dream”; the “word” is not yet quite “the Word,” it is not yet quite heard or spoken, and so the soul is still in exile, but with hope, for he has had his moment in the garden. (1112)

The next section starts with the Gospel of St. John and Lancelot Andrews. Modern people are not aware of the true meanings of the religious beliefs. As a result, modern people have doubts about god in their mind. According to Schneider,

Its substance, however, is essential to the poem: it is an assertion of the truth of Christ as the Word, an assertion that this is *the* Reality even if one has not brought oneself to acknowledge it fully. (1112)

In the final section, although the speaker does not find any hope for resurrections of his beliefs, he asks for it:

Its spirit—"spirit of the river", the Mississippi of his childhood, "spirit of the sea"—even becomes part of the new life at the end of the poem as he invokes the "blessed sister" and "holy mother." It *is* a new life, yet the substance of his prayer is what it was at the beginning: "Teach us to care and not to care... Our peace in His will," preceded by a significant plea of sincerity. (Schneider 1113)

The speaker wants his own purification but finds it is impossible. In his old age, his mind has lost true beliefs about god and he fails to gain it.

*Ash Wednesday* focuses on the loss of religious beliefs in modern people. Although the speaker admits that throughout his life, he has doubts about god but at the end of the day he has to return to god. But he realizes that he does not know about god and he has lost hope to acknowledge him.

Eliot's *The Waste Land* focuses on the crisis of human relationship in modern land. The four chapters of the poem, "THE BURIAL OF THE DEAD", "A GAME OF CHESS", "THE FIRE SERMON" and "DEATH BY WATER" refer to the four elements black bile (earth), air (phlegm), red bile (fire), and water (blood), respectively. It was traditionally believed that human being is made of these four elements. Moreover, Eliot has used a lot of myths in the poem:

Using mythology and pre- to early modern culture, from the Fisher King and the Holy Grail through to Dante and Shakespeare, Eliot creates a form in the poem which aims both to master the content and to patch together all the many scraps of experience contained in the five parts. (Childs 183)

The epigraph is from a myth based work named *Satyricon*. The myth is about a woman, a Sibyl, who grows but never dies. The epigraph is dedicated to the culture of a society, which changes over time but never dies.

The title "THE BURIAL OF THE DEAD" "develops the theme of the attractiveness of death" (Brooks 187). The speaker describes the modern waste land as "stony rubbish" where "dead tree gives no shelter". Madame Sosostris is not interested in the true meaning of the tarot card. She is only interested in earning money, which she earns through false reading of Tarot cards:

But the symbols of the Tarot pack are still unchanged. The various characters are still inscribed on the cards, and she is reading in reality, though she does not know it, the fortune of the protagonist. She finds that his card is that of the drowned Phoenician Sailor, so she warns him against death by water, -not realizing any more than do the other inhabitants of the modern waste land that the way into life may be by death itself. (Brooks 189)

The "Unreal City" refers to the city from Baudelaire's "The Seven Old Men". According to Brooks, the phrase may indicate fusion of dream and reality in modern life. The image of the planting corpse in the garden and Mylae, the First Punic War refers to the massacre of World War I. In the World War I, not only have people died but also their beliefs and tradition have been shattered.

The chapter "THE GAME OF CHESS" deals with human relationship in modern times. Chess game is considered a game of sexes portraying power relationship. The title also refers to one of the four elements, air. It is believed that intelligence comes from air.

The section deals with two women. The first woman is compared to Cleopatra from Shakespeare's play *Antony and Cleopatra*:

The Chair she sat in, like a burnished throne,

(The Waste Land)

"The change of Philomel, by the barbarous king" refers to Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. Eliot has related Philomel with the woman in the "burnished throne". It indicates that there is something disappointing about this woman. According to Brooks,

If it is a commentary on how the waste land became waste, it also repeats the theme of the death which is the door to life-the theme of the dying god. The raped woman becomes transformed through suffering into the nightingale; through the violation comes the "inviolable voice." (Brooks 193)

The relationship between Lil and her husband Albert portrays another aspect of human relationship. Lil's friend advises her to make herself look good in order to give "good time" to Albert. The relationship between Lil and her husband Albert is not deep. This can be a commentary on the modern marriage system. Although, people get married and have children, they do so as rituals.

The next section "THE FIRE SERMON" deals with lust of human being. The section refers to one of the elements, fire. The physical love becomes a matter of physical impulse or sinful pleasure. Eliot starts with nature imagery but gives a vision of polluted and barren nature. The image of river does not give any reproductive or fruitful impaction but polluted image. The relationship between the speaker and Mr. Eugenides is fruitless. The relationship between the typist and the clerk also portrays the human lust rather than love. The couple are not interested in family but an individual life. Moreover, Tiresias plays

an important role in the poem. He knows the past, present and future. He has the experience of being man and woman. As a result, he can understand modern man and woman and can relate the past, present and future:

But in the note on Tiresias, who appears in line 218 of the poem, Eliot implies that the poem is at the same time an exposition of the state of mind of an individual: "Just as the one-eyed merchant, seller of currants, melts into the Phoenician Sailor, and the latter is not only wholly distinct from Ferdinand Prince of Naples, so all the women are one woman, two sexes meets in Teiresias." (Foster 569)

The reference to the relationship between Elizabeth and Leicester also portrays a fruitless relationship. Elizabeth did not get married because she did not want to share her power with an other. It also portrays human lust for power. The last section of this chapter portrays sexual violation, which is another aspect of human lust.

The section "DEATH BY WATER" symbolizes the resurrection of the powers of nature. In the first line of the section, Eliot portrays the sacrifice of the fertility god. But in the next stanza he gives a hint of the reincarnation of the fertility god. According to Brooks,

Some specific connections can be made, however. The drowned Phoenician Sailor recalls the drowned god of the fertility cults. Miss Weston tells that each year at Alexandria an effigy of the head of the god was thrown into the water as a symbol of the death of the powers of nature, and that this head was carried by the current to Byblos where it was taken out of the water and exhibited as a symbol of the reborn god. (200)

The modern world is waste land where “crops do not grow, and the animals cannot reproduce.” (Brooks 185) Modern man has to sacrifice the fertility god so that it can reincarnate in order to revive productivity.

Eliot tries to give probable solutions to end the crisis of the modern world in “WHAT THE THUNDER SAID.” In the first section, he finds no hope of resurrection. He refers to the death of Jesus Christ. Then, he tells about the problem of the modern life. Human soul is suffering everyday but body is surviving. But survival is not the main motif of life. People, who had lived a short life but had been able make an impression on another, are still living. However, modern man will be dead with the death of their body. They will not be remembered after their life. To end the crisis of the modern land the speaker gives three solutions from *Sanskrit*: *Datta* (give), *Dayadhvam* (sympathy), and *Damyata* (control). These three solutions deal with the spiritual aspect, which modern people are missing. These three solutions are able to bring peace on modern land.

Eliot depicts the role of time in modern land in his *Four Quartets*. The poem depicts that the modern people cannot be detached from their past. In his *Four Quartets* he finds some hope of resurrection. According to Melaney, the poem demonstrates “how public events are hard to separate from the history of literature.” (151) Eliot has borrowed the epigraph from ancient cosmology:

Eliot employs ancient cosmology as a framing device and uses two fragments from Heraclitus as the poem’s epigraph. (Melaney 153)

The Epigraph underscores the distinction between the people who accept that the order of universe is common to all and the people who deny it.

*Four Quartets* is an autobiographical journey. The first poem is "Burnt Norton", which deals with "the visionary sequence that initiates the entire cycle." (Melaney 153) The setting of the poem is a seventeenth century manor. The poem focuses on the role of time on individual. Eliot emphasizes on the present time because past is dead and cannot be changed and future is unknown and unborn. The poem "Burnt Norton" is "largely an attempt to demonstrate how the isolated self is prey to the dangers of subjectivism, since the past *as past* provides no firm basis for present action." (Melaney 154) Moreover, according to Weitz, the rose garden has great significance:

Eliot has used this image in much of his poetry and there is cogent conflicting opinion about its meaning. Whatever the general meaning may be, if there is one, at least here it seems to function in a double sense, as an actual place—a rose garden; and as a symbol of those temporal experiences which reveal poignantly the imminent character of the ultimate real. (56-57)

The rose garden stands for the experiences, which are now abandoned by the speaker.

However, now the speaker wishes to remind us again of them:

What is not granted by Eliot here is that snatched-at potential...envisioned ten years later in the drained pool in part I of *Burnt Norton*, where echoes in the memory are suddenly seen reflected... (Mathews 36-37)

His inability to be isolated from the past give us an idea that past cannot be separated from human being.

In the next poem "Easter Coker", the speaker goes back to his past where he has grown up. According to Melaney, the poem honors the village of that name in Somerset.

Eliot's family lived in this village before migrating to New England. The poem deals with the historical reality:

In "East Coker," ... we shift from the relation between the temporal and the Eternal to an emphasis upon the active and passive ways of salvation of St. John of the Cross, the sixteenth-century Spanish mystic. But there is implicit throughout the recognition of the reality of both the temporal and the Eternal. (Weitz 60)

The poem shows that tradition cannot be taken away from modern people. The poem depicts the strong relations between human beings and tradition. The speaker refers to the country-dance in his native village:

The ancestor's dialogue with Augustine is part of a qualified recommendation of dance as a controlled expression of the humane virtues. The poet reverses this acceptance, not only in associating the dancers themselves with an impermanent nature, but also in questioning the possibility of grounding that dance seems to offer as an artistic discipline. (Malaney 155)

The next poem "The Dry Salvages" deals with the religion in historical sense. Modern people do not believe in religion firmly although they say so. The poem has symbolic elements:

The symbolic aspect of "The Dry Salvages" points to the possibility of otherworldly transcendence, but it also indirectly indicates how religion is to be realized as, in some sense, 'historical.' (Malaney 157)

The title of the poem refers to Cape Ann, Massachusetts, marking the place that Eliot knew as a boy. According to Weitz,

In "The Dry Salvages," Eliot follows his family ancestry from England to America- to New England, the Mississippi and St. Louise, where he was born. (61)

The speaker's recollections of his birthplace and his past signify his inability to separate himself from the past.

The last poem of *Four Quartets*, "Little Gidding" portrays the difference between self and others. The poem also suggests the civil conflict that cannot be easily resolved because history cannot be taken away from human being. According to Melaney,

This would mean, however, that the pattern of tradition would be difficult to detach from conflicts in interpretation that often constitute experience itself. The reader is encouraged to participate in a movement toward a religious goal, but the movement itself, rather than the imagined end, is the theme of the journey. (159)

It is not important to revive conflict in modern era in order to revive history. We can start anew. The speaker is optimistic about the modern world. Human being can achieve their spirituality if they wish:

"Little Gidding" is the grand recapitulation of the whole of the *Quartets*, so far as time is concerned, although the emphasis is now on the active or positive way of salvation. (Weitz 63)

*Four Quartets* depicts Modern people cannot be separated from time. Past, present and future are interrelated. Past leads to present and present leads to future.

Modern civilization is detached from the former civilizations by the violence of warfare. The use of traditional elements in poetry is an attempt to reunite the classical civilization with the modern civilization. Eliot's poems show that modern world is not

alienated from the former world but modern land is the result of historical event. According to Harmon,

For Eliot, the struggle to reach or rediscover such unification, which is supposed to be common to primitive communities and to each member of such communities, is a problem for the poet as an individual, for the poet as a member of a continuing culture informed by tradition, and for the culture itself as it relates to its member, its history, and its neighbors. (Harmon 803)

Eliot has portrayed the crisis of modern world but his aim is to end of modern crisis.

Yeats, Williams, Pound and Eliot have been responded by modern civilization. Their poems portray the nature of modern society. These four writers have broken the conventional form of writing. But they have not abandoned their tradition, history and culture.

## Conclusion

Modernism is one of the major movements in twentieth century literature. It registers dramatic breakdown of conventions. World War I had great and probably everlasting effect on traditional society. Modernism dares to explore those areas, which was forbidden for conventional society:

Modernist writing 'plunges' the reader into a confusing and difficult mental landscape which cannot be immediately understood but which must be moved through and mapped by the reader in order to understand its limits and meanings. (Childs 4)

For many readers, modernism is difficult to understand. It has violated or is still violating all forms of limitation imposed by Victorian or traditional society. The present crisis brought by the catastrophe of World War I is not reparable:

Crisis is inevitably the central term of art in discussions of this turbulent cultural moment. Overused as it has been, it still glows with justification. ...This century had scarcely grown used to its own name, before it learned the twentieth would be the epoch of crisis, real and manufactured, physical and metaphysical, material and symbolic. (Levenson 4)

However, many modern writers hope for the better. Many writers believed that if we could resurrect the former beliefs then modern land could be saved from the crisis. Unfortunately, after the World War II writers become hopeless because the War has shattered the traditional beliefs permanently.

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