

Palacký University

Faculty of Arts

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Analýza teologických a filozofických aspektů básně
Ash-Wednesday od T. S. Eliota

**The Analysis of Theological and Philosophical
Aspects of T. S. Eliot's Ash-Wednesday**

Bachelor Thesis

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English Philology

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DECLARATION OF AUTHORSHIP

I declare that I have prepared the submitted thesis independently, under the supervision of a supervisor and using the literature and sources listed in the bibliography included in this thesis.

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1. Introduction

This thesis discusses Thomas Stearns Eliot, a major author of the 20th century. He was a poet, playwright, essayist, etc., one of the most significant figures of the modernist movement of that era¹. His works have been analysed in great detail, and the study of his art, along with its connection to the circumstances of his life and the views that influenced him, have been the subject of many scholarly studies.

One of highly influential changes in Eliot's personal life, influencing his literary production, was his acceptance of the Anglo-Catholic religion. For Eliot, the time of the late nineteen twenties and early thirties was a period of 'determin[ing] the consequences of his conversion in many areas of thought',² focusing on the relationship between literature and faith.³ He discerned the effect of his newfound religion regarding the making of poetry, the reading of it, what does the 'Christian imagination'⁴ look like, how the poet's Christianity influences his work, etc. After his conversion, he 'test[ed] and revisit[ed]'⁵ these questions⁶ and made great efforts to bring his faith and his art into conformity. Awareness of how significant both the conversion and its alignment with his professional life and work were for Eliot demonstrates the importance that should be attached to the study of his post-conversion literary output in the light of this spiritual profundity.

Regarding Eliot as a crucial figure within the 20th century literature means it is essential to gain in-depth understanding of his works and their meaning tied to the author's personal experiencing, values, and opinions. While there has been a great amount of research done on T. S. Eliot as a modernist, poet, or on his personal life (Gordon, 1999; Worthen, 2009; Sharpe, 1991), little has been focused specifically on his conversion to Anglo-Catholicism and the effect of this turn on his literary output. In order to fully understand Eliot as an author and his significance in the modernist

¹ Tony Sharpe, *T. S. Eliot, A Literary Life*, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1991), 123.

² Thomas Stearns Eliot, *The literary criticism of T.S. Eliot*, (London, Athlone Press, 1977), 66.

³ Eliot, *The Literary Criticism of T.S. Eliot*, 66–67.

⁴ Eliot, *The Literary Criticism of T.S. Eliot*, 66–67.

⁵ Eliot, *The Literary Criticism of T.S. Eliot*, 66–67.

⁶ Eliot, *The Literary Criticism of T.S. Eliot*, 66–67.

movement, it is important to analyse all that had an effect on him and therefore his work, especially the extraordinary turn for the time, such as his conversion.

The question of Eliot's conversion has been widely debated in the field of modernist literature, with scholars such as Bush⁷ and Worthen⁸ looking at his post-conversion literature predominantly technically and analytically. However, these perspectives have not adequately addressed the issue of Eliot's major religious turn within his works regarding their theological and philosophical aspects. My paper addresses this issue of the poet's religious transformation with special attention to the theology and philosophy of his 1930 poem *Ash-Wednesday*. Specifically, I will be looking at the poem's Marian theology and biblical and liturgical symbolism, in order to show the poem's, and therefore poet's, profound connection to the Anglo-Catholic faith. I will discuss Eliot's contemporary philosophy and juxtapose it against his college and young-adult life philosophy. I argue that the Marian, liturgical, biblical and specific philosophical elements of *Ash-Wednesday* point at a great turn and proof a deeply religious poetry. By closely examining the theological and philosophical aspects of *Ash-Wednesday*, this project sheds new light on the rarely acknowledged issue of T. S. Eliot's conversion within his literary output.

In order to define the major turn in Eliot's life after the early 1930s and the great effect it had on his literary output; an in-depth analysis of his post-conversion poem *Ash-Wednesday* is used in this thesis, as it might be considered the 'most inward-looking poem'⁹ of his, with his faith presented most 'unambiguously'.¹⁰ This analysis will be introduced by establishing the period and the era of the modernist movement, the poet, his work, and the occurrence of his conversion in a socio-cultural context will be elucidated, highlighting the importance of recognising his conversion in his personal life as well as in his literary work within this literary movement, and suggesting the turn that the study of this author should take along with his personal and literary conversion.

⁷ Ronald Bush. *T.S. Eliot, a Study in Character and Style*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), 133.

⁸ John Worthen, *T. S. Eliot*, (London: Haus Publishing, 2009), 155.

⁹ Sharpe, *T. S. Eliot, A Literary Life*, 124.

¹⁰ Sharpe, *T. S. Eliot, A Literary Life*, 124.

Another section will be dedicated to analysis of Eliot's works, examining a narrow focus that highlights only the immediate meaning of the poem that the analysis might acquire, the lack of a turn in the analysis of his literary output post-conversion, the inclination towards modernist criteria, the emotional and psychological analysis of his poetry, or the separation of his works from him as a poet, now an Anglican. By gaining insights into how Eliot's work was analysed, it is possible to note how his work was perceived and understood and whether this perception was to change after his conversion to Anglicanism.

The examination of the philosophy of Unitarianism, scepticism, Eastern thought, and mysticism, which influenced his personal philosophical perceptions prior to his conversion to the Christian faith in the next section, helps to better understand the meaning and depth of his conversion as well as the earlier influences on his works.

Through the Marian features and the fundamental turn in the poet's view of feminine, the profundity of his conversion can be more clearly discerned. Other features of the poem such as the use of Anglo-Catholic prayers, biblical verses and parables, and liturgical phrases emphasise the deep spirituality of both the poem and its poet and indicate the significance of his conversion within his literary production. The analysis of the symbolism of the poem tied to biblical and religious references reflects the personal experience of the poem's speaker and the author. A better and deeper understanding of the meaning and significance of the poem through its artistic figures of speech illuminates the author's mind and experience, and thus the piety imprinted in the verses. These crucial features of Ash-Wednesday will be the subject of the following sections of my work exploring the spirituality of T. S. Eliot through the poem Ash-Wednesday.

The study of the concept of sin and its mapping in the poem connects it with the author's personal experience and perception of sin. It shows how important and fundamental Eliot believed sin and the associated eternity of man was to a deeply religious life, and through the speaker's journey, reflected in the poem, the author's beliefs about this Anglo-Catholic dogma and the associated teachings of his church can be inferred.

The last section will examine the philosophical perceptions hidden in the poem. Through the speaker's experiences in each section, through his perceptions and behaviour, it is possible to look into the patterns of the various philosophies associated with the author of the poem, and thus to deduce his personal experience of the mystical and the religious.

Through the means of the poem, examining the change in Eliot's perception of femininity, and the occurrence of the Marian, through the biblical as well as dogmatic elements, the religious imagery, and Eliot's philosophies, etc., the profundity of this poem is more clearly recognised in terms of its value in demonstrating Eliot's deep personal spirituality and its imprint on his work. As a member of the modernist movement, his literary production is often considered to be extremely challenging as to its literary value, therefore the emphasis is frequently placed on trying to achieve a clear understanding of his work as an addition to modernism. After his conversion, however, his poetry might take on a different sphere of meaning with the insertion of his religious perception of the metaphysical. It is therefore worth examining whether his works, here in particular the poem *Ash-Wednesday*, were created on a deeply religious basis and whether this is a noteworthy alteration within literary works of T. S. Eliot and analyse it on the basis of the modernist movement, of which he is considered a key figure.

2. Eliot and His Work

This section of my work will introduce Eliot as a member of the modernist literary movement. By introducing the period of time and modernism, the poet, his work, and the occurrence of his conversion within a socio-cultural context will be clarified and so point to the importance of recognising his conversion in his personal life as well as in his literary production within this literary movement and indicate the turn the study of this author should undergo together with his personal and literary conversion.

Shortly before the First World War, a new movement came to the fore in the English literature, determined to do away with the outmoded forms, values and concepts of the so-called Victorian era and to establish a new aesthetic law.¹¹ The modernist movement in literature spread primarily in early 1900s all the way to the interwar period coinciding with other major changes in the industry, society, culture, philosophy, etc.¹² It represented an alteration in the literary sphere and comprised definite features strongly in opposition with the traditional past literary movements.¹³ Innovating and experimenting with language within literary works, addressing contemporary issues and topics,¹⁴ separated modernists from the former writers and brought unprecedented freedom in contrast with the Victorian conservatism or the sentimental romanticism. Concerned with the consciousness and inner self, reader is often faced with the experiences of exile and alienation through the characters. Prose and poetry sought to represent reality and together with the rest of the society embrace Freudian psychology, Einstein's relativity, or Nietzschean view of religion. Modernists profess Nietzsche's 'God is dead',¹⁵ adopting it as a part of their creed. That is why the conversion of T. S. Eliot is striking.

¹¹ Thomas Stearns Eliot, *Eseje. 1965,1969*, (Bratislava: Slovenský spisovateľ, 1972), 205.

¹² Gerald Graff, 'Literary Modernism: The Ambiguous Legacy of Progress.' *Social Research* 41, no. 1 (1974): 107.

¹³ Sergejevna Kulikovová, *I. Filozofia a umenie modernizmu*, (Bratislava: Pallas, 1976), 6.

¹⁴ Eliot, *Eseje. 1965,1969*, 208.

¹⁵ Gilles Deleuze, *Nietzsche and philosophy*, (New York, Columbia University Press, 2006), 152.

In the midst of a time and a movement refusing religion,¹⁶ searching for new beliefs, there is another revolt to be witnessed. As poets and writers seek to deny convention and tradition, Eliot, despite his long-standing commitment to modernism, aligns himself with the Anglican Church. Given the improbability of such an act within the modernist movement, it has been widely commented upon and examined by academics and literary figures past and present. ‘Pound was to dismiss the step as an “irrelevant” solution to the problems of the age, and one of the strongest responses was that of Virginia Woolf; ... She clearly regarded it as a retrogressive step, quite irreconcilable with the Modernist thrust Eliot had seemed to represent...’¹⁷ Eliot, model example of modernism, paradoxically detested the modern world¹⁸ and despite the significance of his modernist literary output, he turns to tradition and religion.

From this point on, Eliot’s entire literary output is to be divided into pre- and post-conversion literature, both studied in great depth in terms of technicality and literary analysis. Eliot’s writing did not begin to lack in terms of fundamental modernist features, yet his later poetry acquired a new realm of meaning with the adoption of a new philosophy and devotion to a newfound religion. At the core, Eliot did not cease to be Eliot in terms of the complexity and scholarly expertise required for intensive research into his experimental modernist poetry, but gained a new perspective through the spiritual weight of his newly created literary art.

Given the changes in Eliot’s life, his forthcoming literature had to be analysed in the light of these changes. Many academics and literary figures tried to look and consider his conversion to Christianity in their analyses, but they seemed to lack in terms of the theological and philosophical depth his literary works acquired after his conversion. As before, the analysis of each of his published works was thorough, however it always seemed superficial as to the religious profundity hidden behind the ordinary density of his poetry. Much of his work was compared with his early major works, such as *The Waste Land*, *The Hollow Men*, and others,¹⁹ which acted as a basis for the study of anything new that Eliot produced, therefore majority of his

¹⁶ Lyndall Gordon, *T. S. Eliot, an Imperfect life*, (New York: Norton, 1999), 227.

¹⁷ Sharpe, *T. S. Eliot, A Literary Life*, 116.

¹⁸ Sharpe, *T. S. Eliot, A Literary Life*, 72.

¹⁹ Barry Spurr, *Anglo-Catholicism and the ‘Religious Turn’ in Eliot’s Poetry*, *Religion & Literature* 44, no. 1 (2012): 137

work was juxtaposed and tied to or explained in terms of his former poetry which gratified the modernist world and seemed to occupy a prominent position in it.

Some academics emphasised Eliot's usage of reference to other great writers, as Dante or Lafforgue, because his poetry was always heavily influenced by and filled with references to major literary works and required a general literary knowledge.²⁰ There was plenitude of difficult connections that required an extensive knowledge of history and literature that rightly overwhelmed and took over many academics studying his works. Eliot held the opinion that if poetry demanded knowledge from the reader, they must be prepared to respond to the demand.²¹ Together with the literary and socio-cultural knowledge his work required, smaller elements within his poetry, such as the basic figures of speech, also required a great deal of knowledge and in-depth study of all of his verse, along with its historical and socio-cultural context.²²

But what is noticeable, is that to this heaviness of data, new layers of conception and perception of his inner being, and outer experience were unfolded. It seems crucial to view everything that Eliot produced and offered to the reading public through the lens of deep faith, philosophical change, and profound theological knowledge. What is not so often seen is an equally thorough examination of his poetry regarding the doctrines concerning theology, biblical studies, devotions, and other aspects arising from the dedicated and intellectually rigorous faith Eliot confessed. There ought to be an equally substantial turn in the study of T. S. Eliot, as there was in his personal life, but this kind of alteration is not clearly recognisable. After the depression, desperation, and feelings of loneliness, attempting to make sense of the world and human psyche in his early poetry, Eliot added and supplied his work with striving to rediscover fundamental human core as reflected in his Christian faith that constituted the inner 'struggle to rise above the littleness of self'²³ toward the joining of one's soul with the divine.²⁴ His search for the truth, for reconciliation

²⁰ B. C. Southam, *A Student's Guide to the Selected Poems of T.S. Eliot*, (London, Faber and Faber, 1977), 16.

²¹ Southam, *A Student's Guide to the Selected Poems of T.S. Eliot*, 16.

²² Southam, *A Student's Guide to the Selected Poems of T.S. Eliot*, 16.

²³ Sharpe, *T. S. Eliot, A Literary Life*, 115.

²⁴ Sharpe, *T. S. Eliot, A Literary Life*, 115.

was reflected in his new poetry abiding in liturgical symbolism, prayers, wishes and hopes, desiring life and peace, dreaming of childhood scenery where true freedom was made known to him. Therefore, it seems to be inevitable to emerge from the perspective of previous research-oriented analysis of Eliot into deep understanding of religious mind within the disarray of modernist changes and revolt.

In conclusion the placement of Eliot as a member of modernism and by clarifying the characteristics of this movement it is easier to understand his literary output, the significance of the turn it underwent after his conversion and the importance of adjusting the analysis of his work post-conversion. This change within modernism, together with the clarification of the complexity of the study of Eliot's work indicate that regarding theology and philosophy the study of his literary production might be insufficient. Therefore, it is important to look at the ways in which Eliot's works were analysed and understand the need for the theological and philosophical perspective.

3. Ways of Analysing Eliot's Works

In this section the ways of analysing T. S. Eliot's works will be shown. By mentioning the narrow focus bringing forward merely the immediate meaning of a poem, the lack of a post-conversion turn in the analysis of his literary output, inclining to the modernist criteria, the emotional, psychological analysis of his poetry, or the separation of his poetry from him as a poet, an Anglican, the impact Eliot's conversion has and should have on not only his works, but also their analysis is shown. By gaining insights into how Eliot's work was analysed, it is possible to note how his work was perceived and understood, and whether this perception should have change after his conversion to Anglicanism.

Previous analytical works and perspectives on Eliot's post-conversion production seem not to sufficiently address the issue of the poet's major religious turn within his literary works in terms of their theology and philosophy. In his literary art, theology was viewed primarily via analysis of individual verses and their isolated theology, tied to prayers, biblical verses, or liturgical quotations from which the meaning of the particular verse of a poem was inferred.²⁵ Eliot defined poetry as 'excellent words in excellent arrangement and excellent metre',²⁶ his verse was, therefore, constructed perfectly, with a great precision and emphasis on deciding for concrete words, or phrases, as well as the allegories and meaning they contained. And so, the individual verses should not be read in isolation, but in their entirety, with connection to the rest of his poems, and works. For example, while biblical parables were referenced, they were often not analysed in depth or looked at in terms of their theological significance within Eliot's personal faith. They were often regarded only in their immediate significance, only in the reference to their immediate surroundings, therefore devoid of the extensive impact on the poem, or other works.²⁷

Eliot's poetry remained to be examined through modernist criteria, simply as poetry of a renowned modernist author and after his conversion this examination did not undergo any sort of substantial change that would result in an alternative view on

²⁵ Bush, *T.S. Eliot, a Study in Character and Style*, 136.

²⁶ Eliot, *Eseje. 1965, 1969*, 207.

²⁷ Bush, *T.S. Eliot, a Study in Character and Style*, 141.

the analysis of his post-conversion works.²⁸ Engaging in the analysis of religious or biblical elements within his poetry, academics seemed to be lacking a viewpoint that would take into consideration the full meaning of a particular poem in the light of the fact that its author was a man of faith, a poet devoted to the ancient Anglo-Catholic tradition in the deepest sense. Eliot's references to ascetism, sin, and the Virgin Mary were incessantly treated as if his biographical details were completely unknown, interpreting sexual images, physical passions, or worldly desires, right next to a pious intercession to the Mother of God or confession-like statements.²⁹

Another manner in which Eliot's poetry, following the year 1930, was studied was through emotions or psychology.³⁰ Sections of his poems were perceived as emotional effusions, not as religious experiences. Living out of momentarily excitements or disillusionments and inserting them into his poetry as if crucial milestones of his inner being and together with psychological analysis of mystical and profound experiences substituted religion.³¹ What was a resolute state of being, a determined religious experiencing and thinking was perceived as transient emotional derangement, formed merely for the sake of an artistic declaration of psychological deliberation within a particular poem. But it was insufficient to 'psychoanalyse away'³² Eliot's conversion as 'surrender to phantasy'³³ and perceived it this way in his post-conversion output as well.

Eliot's turn from the transient to the eternal, from the secular world to the otherworldly was along with the depths and ambiguousness of his powerfully modernist poetry misleading when connected to the changes of his conversion. Whether he was referring to his profound inner mystical moments of enlightenment or leading the reader into experimental maze of allegories, was oftentimes obscure and therefore deceptive in terms of in-depth analysis. To integrate these two new aspects of his production represented a challenge regarding proper analysis, as his

²⁸ Sharpe, *T. S. Eliot, A Literary Life*, 118.

²⁹ Bush, *T.S. Eliot, a Study in Character and Style*, 144.

³⁰ Dennis Brown, 'T. S. Eliot's "Ash-Wednesday" and "Four Quartets" Poetic Confession as Psychotherapy.' *Literature and Theology* 17, no. 1 (2003): 1. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23925774>.

³¹ Sharpe, *T. S. Eliot, A Literary Life*, 131.

³² Brown, 'T. S. Eliot's "Ash-Wednesday" and "Four Quartets"': 5.

³³ Brown, 'T. S. Eliot's "Ash-Wednesday" and "Four Quartets"': 5.

former poetry cannot be contrasted with the later in the same fashion since the intentions and aims behind their creation were transformed from the foundation.

Although liturgical and religious notions of Eliot's Anglo-Catholic faith were acknowledged within the analysis of his individual poems, they were oftentimes considered in separation. Religion is hardly separable from the believer. Therefore, everything Eliot created post-conversion should be viewed in terms of his person, an Anglican. His beliefs, just as before, were separable from him, the poet, only with great difficulty. Every religious instance recognised within a work should be understood in terms of effect it had on Eliot and analysed in the light of this connection. It does not seem sufficient enough to recognise a particular verse or a phrase with connection to its biblical or religious counterpart and label it vaguely as an allusion. Much of Eliot's post-conversion poetry was understood as separate from the person of Eliot. It appears to be written only for its sake, to exist, not to have a meaning within a mind or a heart or even a soul of their producer.³⁴

Introducing the ways in which Eliot's work was often analysed, what it was aimed at, when examining his work even in connection to his personal life, indicates the heaviness of data and the insufficiencies when taking his conversion into account within the analysis. As a key figure of modernism and literature Eliot and his work should be viewed in regard to his personal life as well, in order to recognise the influences and values effecting his work. By pointing out the way of the pre-conversion analysis and indicating the deep spirituality hidden in his works post-conversion, the need for a substantial turn can be recognised in these analyses. Therefore, the next section will be dedicated to the journey of this religious turn and the philosophies shaping it and leading towards it.

³⁴ Robert B. Kaplan, *T.S. Eliot's Major Poems and Plays*, (Cliffs Notes, 1965), 131.

4. Overview of Eliot's Philosophy

This section about Eliot's philosophy leading towards his conversion presents the Unitarianism, scepticism, eastern thought, and mysticism effecting his personal philosophical perceptions prior to his conversion leading to his Christian faith. Through understanding the background of his philosophy, the significance and the depth of his conversion can be better understood, and the previous influences help to better interpret his works.

Eliot's theology and philosophy prior to his conversion was tightly connected to his unitarian upbringing and his university years pursuing philosophy. His childhood spent in self-control and discipline within a well-known Unitarian family, formed his primal convictions about religion.³⁵ Eliot recalled how in their household his parents did not differentiate between the notions of 'good'³⁶ and 'evil'³⁷ to guide a child but of 'what was "done" and "not done"'.³⁸ This alludes an experience of a family not managed by compassion and loving teaching but instead by celebrating self-restraint and service to the society. Therefore, for him religion represented dominance of rational thought and produced the association with cold relationships and an environment ruled by self-denial. A closeness to a deity³⁹ or decision making governed by a loving relationship were even more than foreign to him as a young adult. 'The intellectual and puritanical rationalism'⁴⁰ he was to accept as a child of his parents, were readily rejected in the following years.

His university years at Harvard or later on at Sorbonne in Paris were marked by mysticism, scepticism and eastern philosophy. While at Harvard, Eliot went through a mystical experience himself and so began to explore and study academic research on the topic.⁴¹ These moments of deep spiritual awakening may have uncovered a realm of religion experienced, not just lived out as in his childhood era

³⁵ Worthen, *T. S. Eliot*, 11.

³⁶ Worthen, *T. S. Eliot*, 11.

³⁷ Worthen, *T. S. Eliot*, 11.

³⁸ Worthen, *T. S. Eliot*, 11.

³⁹ Gordon, *T. S. Eliot, an Imperfect life*, 20.

⁴⁰ Gordon, *T. S. Eliot, an Imperfect life*, 20.

⁴¹ William Skaff, *The Philosophy of T.S. Eliot*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1986), 22.

when the core of his spirituality was to be discipline and self-surrender within a church ‘devoid’⁴² of any religious mystery.⁴³ The search for the mystical Absolute occupied his mind and he began to associate this Absolute with God. In time, he came to perceive it as detached from the men, their experiencing or their everyday. This Absolute was to be ‘a state of unity and comprehensiveness toward which the universe tended, and which did not at all resemble the Appearances of our world, [...] reconcil[ing] and transform[ing] in its harmony.’⁴⁴ Because of this otherness of the Absolute, the oneness and peace emerging from the unity and wholeness of the universe, Eliot inclined to the spirituality of mysticism. It seemed to be an advancement in his path towards future conversion, when from regulations and insensitivity he encountered an existence, although distant, nevertheless realistic or imaginable and by his personal mysticism recognizable.⁴⁵

Eliot, after being an unitarian, a sceptic, supported by the idea that despite the possibility of a vague and remote existence of an Absolute, a God, it seemed to be untouchable, unattainable, and therefore unknowable in fullness. And so, Eliot retained in his fog of all-doubting scepticism, accepting the impossibility of knowing or approaching the remote Absolute.⁴⁶ This was a season of great solitude for him, when his ‘own visions and signs’⁴⁷ disappeared.⁴⁸ Nevertheless, Eliot’s scepticism together with the eastern philosophy laid a foundation for his later conversion. Eastern soteriology and its spirituality interested him for a period of time and were again a move within his personal spirituality.⁴⁹ The eastern, often Buddhist, teachings of unearthly harmony and silence within oneself, the ideologies of the notions beyond life, etc. all contributed to the expansion of Eliot’s mysticism.⁵⁰ The difference between Eliot’s numb Unitarianism and the profound spirituality of east when

⁴² Sharpe, *T. S. Eliot, A Literary Life*, 14

⁴³ Sharpe, *T. S. Eliot, A Literary Life*, 14..

⁴⁴ Skaff, *The Philosophy of T.S. Eliot*, 39–40.

⁴⁵ Skaff, *The Philosophy of T.S. Eliot*, 39–40.

⁴⁶ Skaff, *The Philosophy of T.S. Eliot*, 39.

⁴⁷ Gordon, *T. S. Eliot, an Imperfect life*, 112.

⁴⁸ Gordon, *T. S. Eliot, an Imperfect life*, 112.

⁴⁹ Jeffrey M. Perl and Andrew P. Tuck, *The Hidden Advantage of Tradition: On the Significance of T. S. Eliot’s Indic Studies*. *Philosophy East and West* 35, no. 2 (1985): 120.

⁵⁰ Perl and Tuck, *The Hidden Advantage of Tradition: On the Significance of T. S. Eliot’s Indic Studies*: 119.

juxtaposed show a great difference and deep dissimilarity regarding his philosophy. What was based solely on deeds and correctness before, was now, not yet a religion or faith, but a philosophical contemplation of mystical secrecy.

Through the means of scepticism, Eliot entered onto a journey of his conversion. Via the lens of sceptical, doubtful thought, he perceived conversion as ‘simply the removal of any reason for believing anything else, the erasure of a prejudice, the arrival of the scepticism which is the preface to conversion.’⁵¹ Being sceptical, uncertain about everything, opened the door for conversion. Eliot went through the aspects of what is different, or similar in multiple religions. He examined Buddhism, together with the eastern thought, Christianity, and the England-specific Anglican Church within other philosophies. Through ‘the erasure of a prejudice’,⁵² he abandoned the beliefs and dogmas of his past or became non-believer of all the religious knowledge of his mind until his mid-20s. The structure of his own ethical background was not sufficient for Eliot, he longed for ‘more dogmatic theological structure’.⁵³ And so, through ‘radical scepticism’⁵⁴ as to any one philosophical approach his attention and interest in orthodoxy, ‘tradition and convention’⁵⁵ spread.⁵⁶

In the late 1910s, Eliot began to investigate specifically Christianity, together with its teaching and dogmas. His interest in tradition, or English culture added to the intentional research in terms of true spirituality for his inner experience. He declared that ‘orthodox Christianity - must base itself upon a unique fact: that Jesus was born of a virgin: a proposition which is either true or false, its terms having a fixed meaning’,⁵⁷ this quote written in 1917, years before his official admission into the Anglican Church, revealed the knowledge and determination of Eliot’s exploration of

⁵¹ Perl and Tuck, *The Hidden Advantage of Tradition: On the Significance of T. S. Eliot’s Indic Studies*: 119.

⁵² Perl and Tuck, *The Hidden Advantage of Tradition: On the Significance of T. S. Eliot’s Indic Studies*: 119.

⁵³ Gordon, *T. S. Eliot, an Imperfect life*, 213.

⁵⁴ Perl and Tuck, *The Hidden Advantage of Tradition: On the Significance of T. S. Eliot’s Indic Studies*: 124.

⁵⁵ Perl and Tuck, *The Hidden Advantage of Tradition: On the Significance of T. S. Eliot’s Indic Studies*: 124.

⁵⁶ Perl and Tuck, *The Hidden Advantage of Tradition: On the Significance of T. S. Eliot’s Indic Studies*: 124.

⁵⁷ Gordon, *T. S. Eliot, an Imperfect life*, 20.

the spiritual and religious. And as the religion he was part of when growing up refused the notion of incarnation he considered himself not to be brought up in Christianity⁵⁸ and wanted to rediscover it from the core. Now deep in the Christian doctrine, he examined its dogmas and their effect and connection to what he already experienced. Eliot adhered to tradition, to convention, his study of spiritual philosophies led him to orthodoxy, to stringent and ancient practices of a church distinctive for the country he, later on, decided to adopt as his own.⁵⁹ For Eliot the advantage of orthodoxy, as a comprehensible system of tradition, was that ‘it st[ood] apart [...] from the individual’⁶⁰ who proclaimed it, for understanding and assent, even without faith, as well as the diversity and not self-evident agreement of the voices that proclaimed it.⁶¹ Orthodoxy as if set aside to be studied without an acceptance of any religious values or truths. The strictness of his parents’ unitarian upbringing was found in a different church, also strict in its uncompromising orthodoxy, but by radically different means, examined through careful scepticism.

Therefore, it was orthodoxy that did not let itself be shaken by society and its major changes, its adherence to tradition, its stability and tranquillity that drew Eliot to his eventual conversion.⁶² After 1927, when Eliot became Anglican, appropriating especially the Anglo-Catholic branch,⁶³ it seemed to be a result of a thorough research, from Unitarianism through mysticism, and finally via scepticism leading to the faith he accepted for the rest of his life. Eliot’s academic approach to exploring even such a fundamental question as that of religion showed him to be a profound and intellectual figure. Not only his poetry, but also he himself appeared to be extremely challenging and complicated in terms of academic knowledge and wisdom, as well as thorough academic research and study, which he always conducted with great precision and depth.

⁵⁸ Gordon, *T. S. Eliot, an Imperfect Life*, 19.

⁵⁹ Gordon, *T. S. Eliot, an Imperfect Life*, 213.

⁶⁰ Perl and Tuck, *The Hidden Advantage of Tradition: On the Significance of T. S. Eliot’s Indic Studies*: 123–124.

⁶¹ Perl and Tuck, *The Hidden Advantage of Tradition: On the Significance of T. S. Eliot’s Indic Studies*: 123–124.

⁶² Gordon, *T. S. Eliot, an Imperfect Life*, 226.

⁶³ Sharpe, *T. S. Eliot, A Literary Life*, 115.

After joining the new church, Eliot adopted the teachings of his faith and gradually integrated them into his thinking, poetry, essays, etc.⁶⁴ His philosophy became greatly influenced by the messianic and soteriological elements of the Anglican faith. Eliot began to perceive his religious thinking and spirituality within the newfound teaching and connected it to his former philosophical knowledge.⁶⁵ He said: ‘An individual European may not believe that the Christian Faith is true, and yet what he says, and makes, and does, will all spring out of his heritage of Christian culture and depend upon that culture for its meaning.’⁶⁶ Eliot perceived his faith as integrating every aspect of life. According to him, Christianity influenced society and culture over the centuries, not just in the past, which is why he began to see it in his present and noticed how the society around him was influenced at that time. All seemed to be marked by the influences of spiritual philosophy, his own views of philosophy, religion or literature were as well. Religion was seen as a bridge that created a connection between people, whether positive or negative, nevertheless noteworthy, for people only existed in relationships which integrated all other aspects of life. Culture, education, progress, history, etc. were affected by religion around them. This is what Eliot realised and what helped to change his attitudes and philosophy, because everything he thought and studied must be seen in terms of religion, as he realised the influence of the spiritual roots of all his knowledge and learning.⁶⁷

By examining the philosophies Eliot was brought up in or surrounded by or the philosophy he gradually embraced, a clearer image of what preceded his conversion and what his piety based on is shown. Through clarifying the philosophical background, greater understanding of the philosophy and later on spirituality of his literary work is indicated. Therefore, after defining what preceded Eliot’s religious turn, the next section will look into how it is reflected in his later work, namely his 1930 poem, Ash-Wednesday.

⁶⁴ Eliot, *The Literary Criticism of T.S. Eliot*, 66–67.

⁶⁵ Perl and Tuck, *The Hidden Advantage of Tradition: On the Significance of T. S. Eliot’s Indic Studies*, 124.

⁶⁶ Perl and Tuck, *The Hidden Advantage of Tradition: On the Significance of T. S. Eliot’s Indic Studies*, 124.

⁶⁷ Perl and Tuck, *The Hidden Advantage of Tradition: On the Significance of T. S. Eliot’s Indic Studies*, 124.

5. Ash-Wednesday, Marian Theology and Femininity

This section of my thesis will examine one of Eliot's famous post-conversion poems and zoom in on its Marian theology as well as the juxtaposition of the author's pre- and post-conversion perception of femininity through the female figures of his life and the key female figure of the catholic faith. The occurrence of the feminine and the Marian throughout the poem will be explored and examined with regards to the effect on the other verses and the rest of the poem. Through the Marian features and the fundamental turn in the poet's view of woman, the profundity of his conversion can be more clearly discerned.

In order to expound on the poem's, and therefore poet's, profound connection to the Anglo-Catholic faith, it is relevant to analyse it's Marian theology and biblical and liturgical symbolism. Together with Eliot's contemporary philosophy juxtaposed against his college and young-adult life philosophy, the Marian, liturgical, biblical and specific philosophical elements of one of his specific post-conversion literary works, Ash-Wednesday, point at a great turn and prove a deeply religious poetry. Both Eliot's pre- and post-conversion literary output indicated and addressed religious topics. He oftentimes applied allegories in order to express supernatural, nevertheless, after his acceptance of Anglo-Catholicism, all these devices acquired a different value. After this point in his life, all of the spiritual references can be perceived in the context of his faith and thus as personal and intimate.

One such poem is Ash-Wednesday. Published in 1930, it was one of his very first works after his conversion.⁶⁸ The title of the poem 'alludes to the first day of Lent, the period of fasting and penitence that precedes Easter in the Christian calendar.'⁶⁹ Eliot entered on this journey of a believer through the gloomy and weighty subject of 'penitence'⁷⁰ as if the first step he desired to take is to 'renounce'⁷¹ his former life. Composed out of multiple 'separate items',⁷² with a curious

⁶⁸ Gordon, *T. S. Eliot, an Imperfect Life*, 236.

⁶⁹ Sharpe, *T. S. Eliot, A Literary Life*, 122.

⁷⁰ Worthen, *T. S. Eliot*, 154.

⁷¹ Thomas Stearns Eliot. *T.S. Eliot: The Complete Poems and Plays 1909–1950*. San Diego, Harcourt Brace, 1971, 60.

⁷² Sharpe, *T. S. Eliot, A Literary Life*, 89.

dedication 'To My Wife',⁷³ he seemingly put together various distinct elements of his contemporary life into one poem. The dedication to the woman he was separated from, the theme of penitence creating as if a line dividing his former and forthcoming life, represented 'an explanation'⁷⁴ of the decision for conversion, for 'moving on'.⁷⁵ Through discussing and closely analysing this specific poem, the problematics of the analysis of Eliot's poetry into an insufficient depth, regarding his religious experiencing reflected in his work, could be clarified to a certain extent thanks to the importance of the period in his life in which this work was produced, as well as its significance with regard to the theme revealing Eliot's personal stance.

Ash-Wednesday is strongly dedicated to femininity. Eliot confronted his previous and current perceptions of femininity and used the figure of the Virgin Mary, as if to present the new Eliot, transformed after a symbolic rebirth through baptism. The women during Eliot's life were heavily marked, and therefore there is a striking difference between these figures and the former literary female figures of his works, who are contrasted with the subsequent image of the Virgin Mary in a poem representing his contemporary relationship to the female. Eliot was born into a family of seven children. He grew up surrounded by five sisters, all considerably older than him.⁷⁶ His mother was an important figure throughout his whole life, influential in his perception of the spiritual, art, literature, etc. He always looked up to her and her opinions and views, yet 'from the evidence of [his] poetry and criticism [...] the poet had an intensely ambivalent relationship to the maternal'.⁷⁷ She truly portrayed an influential and powerful female figure in his life. Their relationship was described as 'intense'⁷⁸ and loving, nevertheless problematic, affecting his literary work in particular, even after her death.⁷⁹ Besides his mother and sisters, who also became rather close to him during his lifetime, there were two other very significant relationships beyond the familial.

⁷³ Bush. *T.S. Eliot, a Study in Character and Style*. Oxford, 132.

⁷⁴ Worthen, *T. S. Eliot*, 156.

⁷⁵ Worthen, *T. S. Eliot*, 156.

⁷⁶ Worthen, *T. S. Eliot*, 8.

⁷⁷ Elisabeth Däumer. 'Charlotte Stearns Eliot and Ash-Wednesday's Lady of Silences.' *ELH* 65, no. 2 (1998): 479. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/30030188>.

⁷⁸ Däumer. 'Charlotte Stearns Eliot and Ash-Wednesday's Lady of Silences.' 480.

⁷⁹ Däumer. 'Charlotte Stearns Eliot and Ash-Wednesday's Lady of Silences.' 480.

Emily Hale was a woman Eliot was in love with for a considerable amount of time before his marriage and with whom he, later on, re-established the former connection after separating from his first wife, Vivienne.⁸⁰ She renews ‘his capacity to feel’,⁸¹ and the significance of their relationship was perceptible in the inner battle he underwent deciding whether to reunite their separated lives. The second woman was Vivienne Haigh, whom Eliot married less than three months after they met. They were both truly dominant figures in his life. Emily, the young, unattained love he dreamt of and tried to recapture over time but failed to fulfil because of his lingering connection to his wife,⁸² therefore represented a kind of springtime of love in his life, graceful and harmless, pure and dreamy, but never reaching the rays of summer. While Vivien can be seen as a barren, harsh, unrelenting and depressing period in the winter of his life, as Eliot suffered faithfully alongside a mentally ill woman for years.⁸³ Even though she was said to have ‘made [Eliot] as a poet’,⁸⁴ later on she was to be a hindrance to his career and a permanent humiliation in society,⁸⁵ reflecting in Eliot’s mental and internal struggles.

All of these representations of femininity in the poet’s life were, until his conversion, imbuing him with disinclination and ambivalence towards the concept of a woman. *The Waste Land*, for example, ‘filled with broken women betrayed by sex or marriage’,⁸⁶ very well depicted this attitude towards the female. Before, the woman of the poet’s mind was perceived as hysterical and weak, tormented by remorseless fate and sexually perverted, able to deceive and devastate ‘the male speakers’⁸⁷ of his poetry.⁸⁸ Woman was to be raped or contemptuously neglected by her husband, to be an object solely for pleasure or inclined to insanity.⁸⁹ T. Sharpe recognised just these two distinct extremes within *Ash-Wednesday*. ‘A confrontation of waste and

⁸⁰ Gordon, *T. S. Eliot, an Imperfect Life*, 237.

⁸¹ Gordon, *T. S. Eliot, an Imperfect Life*, 255.

⁸² Gordon, *T. S. Eliot, an Imperfect Life*, 82.

⁸³ Sharpe, *T. S. Eliot, A Literary Life*, 48.

⁸⁴ Sharpe, *T. S. Eliot, A Literary Life*, 48.

⁸⁵ Sharpe, *T. S. Eliot, A Literary Life*, 48.

⁸⁶ Gordon, *T. S. Eliot, an Imperfect Life*, 187.

⁸⁷ Däumer. ‘Charlotte Stearns Eliot and *Ash-Wednesday*’s Lady of Silences.’ 479.

⁸⁸ Däumer. ‘Charlotte Stearns Eliot and *Ash-Wednesday*’s Lady of Silences.’ 479.

⁸⁹ Gordon, *T. S. Eliot, an Imperfect Life*, 187–8.

hopelessness that gradually engenders a slow pulse of renewal'.⁹⁰ These could be the two opposing sides regarding Eliot pre- and post-conversion, but also his diverse views of femininity. The renewal, the 'life-giving'⁹¹ force within the poem could be associated with the Virgin. After the 'waste'⁹² and 'hopelessness',⁹³ Ash-Wednesday came with the renewed mind and perception, as prayer and devotion. Throughout the poem, there are multiple instances where the verse becomes the prayer. The penitential prayer crying out for 'the intercession of Mary the Mother',⁹⁴ invokes closeness to the immaculate female figure of the Anglo-Catholicism. The new archetype of femininity is regarded as full of 'goodness'⁹⁵ and 'loveliness',⁹⁶ 'the single Rose / Is now the Garden / Where all loves end',⁹⁷ she is the source of 'all loves',⁹⁸ described with great tenderness and seen as the gateway to heaven. The pure and affectionate descriptions, the allegories and metaphors connected to the heavenly Mother within the poem clearly show the depth of the poet's perception of Mary.

There are two women to be recognised in the poem, 'Mary, the Lady of silences'⁹⁹ and the 'blessed face'¹⁰⁰ of a different character, who is to be 'renounce[d]'.¹⁰¹ In this literary representation, the two opposing views of the female within Eliot's life, the pre- and post-conversion perceptions are compared. One who is deeply admired and represents a source of consolation, the other as something to be given up, to be refused in order to achieve freedom and salvation. Others view the two sides of the female figure as Dante's Beatrice juxtaposed, through the portrayal of 'a juniper-tree',¹⁰² with the biblical character of queen Jezebel, contrasting the good and the 'wicked'.¹⁰³ Turning to the 'Lady of silences'¹⁰⁴ recently after his

⁹⁰ Sharpe, *T. S. Eliot, A Literary Life*, 122.

⁹¹ Eliot, *T.S. Eliot: The Complete Poems and Plays 1909–1950*, 62.

⁹² Sharpe, *T. S. Eliot, A Literary Life*, 122.

⁹³ Sharpe, *T. S. Eliot, A Literary Life*, 122.

⁹⁴ Brown, 'T. S. Eliot's "Ash-Wednesday" and "Four Quartets"': 5.

⁹⁵ Eliot, *T.S. Eliot: The Complete Poems and Plays 1909–1950*, 61.

⁹⁶ Eliot, *T.S. Eliot: The Complete Poems and Plays 1909–1950*, 61.

⁹⁷ Eliot, *T.S. Eliot: The Complete Poems and Plays 1909–1950*, 62.

⁹⁸ Eliot, *T.S. Eliot: The Complete Poems and Plays 1909–1950*, 62.

⁹⁹ Däumer. 'Charlotte Stearns Eliot and Ash-Wednesday's Lady of Silences.' 490.

¹⁰⁰ Eliot, *T.S. Eliot: The Complete Poems and Plays 1909–1950*, 60.

¹⁰¹ Eliot, *T.S. Eliot: The Complete Poems and Plays 1909–1950*, 60.

¹⁰² Eliot, *T.S. Eliot: The Complete Poems and Plays 1909–1950*, 61.

¹⁰³ Däumer. 'Charlotte Stearns Eliot and Ash-Wednesday's Lady of Silences.' 486–7.

conversion, she is as if a representation of the ‘inevitability of change and transformation itself’.¹⁰⁵ She is the journey, the crossing from the former, the old from which he fled, to the new, the oncoming, the refuge and save guide in his religious walk, his spiritual experiencing. The two compared sides point to the transition which Eliot undertook through his conversion, they are the witnesses of his deep religiosity. Via the Marian spirituality of this poem, the profound spirituality of the author’s new-found faith is revealed.

Within Ash-Wednesday, the speaker’s whole being, ‘my legs my heart my liver and that which had been contained / In the hollow round of my skull’,¹⁰⁶ being fed to the ‘three white leopards’,¹⁰⁷ cries out to the ‘Lady’,¹⁰⁸ and desires shelter in her presence. He is in spite of that left alone when the ‘Lady is withdrawn [...] to contemplation’.¹⁰⁹ His ‘bones’,¹¹⁰ break out into litany-like praise of the ‘rose’,¹¹¹ the ‘end of a journey’,¹¹² the ‘life-giving’,¹¹³ force, etc., crying out: ‘Grace to the Mother’,¹¹⁴ in deep devotion and faith. He is then confronted with the temptations of the turning ‘stairs [...] / Struggling with the devil of the stairs’,¹¹⁵ in whom Eliot saw himself,¹¹⁶ or presumably his past self, and in the grim imagery of the ‘fetid air’,¹¹⁷ darkness and the ‘agèd shark’,¹¹⁸ the speaker falls on the ground in a prayer, with a thought of Mary ‘in white and blue, [...] blue of larkspur, blue of Mary’s colour’.¹¹⁹ In part V of the poem meditating on the ‘Word’¹²⁰ of Genesis, he calls for the intercession of the Virgin Mary: ‘Will the veiled sister pray’,¹²¹ yearning for the help

¹⁰⁴ Däumer. ‘Charlotte Stearns Eliot and Ash-Wednesday’s Lady of Silences.’ 491.

¹⁰⁵ Däumer. ‘Charlotte Stearns Eliot and Ash-Wednesday’s Lady of Silences.’ 491.

¹⁰⁶ Eliot, *T.S. Eliot: The Complete Poems and Plays 1909–1950*, 60.

¹⁰⁷ Eliot, *T.S. Eliot: The Complete Poems and Plays 1909–1950*, 60.

¹⁰⁸ Eliot, *T.S. Eliot: The Complete Poems and Plays 1909–1950*, 61.

¹⁰⁹ Eliot, *T.S. Eliot: The Complete Poems and Plays 1909–1950*, 61.

¹¹⁰ Eliot, *T.S. Eliot: The Complete Poems and Plays 1909–1950*, 62.

¹¹¹ Eliot, *T.S. Eliot: The Complete Poems and Plays 1909–1950*, 62.

¹¹² Eliot, *T.S. Eliot: The Complete Poems and Plays 1909–1950*, 62.

¹¹³ Eliot, *T.S. Eliot: The Complete Poems and Plays 1909–1950*, 62.

¹¹⁴ Eliot, *T.S. Eliot: The Complete Poems and Plays 1909–1950*, 62.

¹¹⁵ Eliot, *T.S. Eliot: The Complete Poems and Plays 1909–1950*, 63.

¹¹⁶ Bush, *T.S. Eliot, a Study in Character and Style*, 132.

¹¹⁷ Eliot, *T.S. Eliot: The Complete Poems and Plays 1909–1950*, 63.

¹¹⁸ Eliot, *T.S. Eliot: The Complete Poems and Plays 1909–1950*, 63.

¹¹⁹ Eliot, *T.S. Eliot: The Complete Poems and Plays 1909–1950*, 64.

¹²⁰ Eliot, *T.S. Eliot: The Complete Poems and Plays 1909–1950*, 65.

¹²¹ Eliot, *T.S. Eliot: The Complete Poems and Plays 1909–1950*, 65.

of the one who's the 'garden'¹²² in the 'desert'¹²³ of the world. And as he resolutely refuses the 'apple-seed'¹²⁴ of sin and resolves not to 'turn again'¹²⁵ in the last part, his prayer breaks out into a passionate calling for virtues in order to follow faithfully. So the 'Blessèd sister, holy mother, spirit of the fountain, spirit of the garden'¹²⁶ would 'teach'¹²⁷ him 'even among these rocks'¹²⁸ of the secular world.

Through the whole poem the thread of deep spirituality linked to the Virgin stretches. Each part uncovers not only features of the Marian, but also profound experiencing of the Marian. Eliot's turning and desiring her intercession in the moments of doubts and temptations, the presence of the Virgin in his thinking and discerning, the language he used to describe and honour her, the role and the might he assigned her, all point to his personal perception of this religious figure. He expressed as if an empirical knowledge of the Mother of God, a knowledge originating in his Anglo-Catholic ground. In Ash-Wednesday, she is the gateway to the 'Word',¹²⁹ connection, and union with her is a pathway to the coveted unification with the One.¹³⁰ Mary, as the Mother of God of Catholicism, in whom 'the divine and the human'¹³¹ are being interconnected, as the ultimate female figure in his religion, comes to unveil the new woman in Eliot's perception. And in the new recognition of this spiritual figure and his strong bond following from this piece of his work, the piety of the poet himself floats to the surface.

In this section the occurrence of the Virgin, an inseparable figure of Anglo-Catholicism, throughout the poem is followed, emphasising the author's conviction about this religious character as well as the depth of his spirituality. Another important point is the change in his perception of the feminine through the juxtaposition of the holy figure and his earthly experiences with women. This indicates a fundamental change in his view and points to the conversion. The

¹²² Eliot, *T.S. Eliot: The Complete Poems and Plays 1909–1950*, 66.

¹²³ Eliot, *T.S. Eliot: The Complete Poems and Plays 1909–1950*, 66.

¹²⁴ Eliot, *T.S. Eliot: The Complete Poems and Plays 1909–1950*, 66.

¹²⁵ Eliot, *T.S. Eliot: The Complete Poems and Plays 1909–1950*, 66.

¹²⁶ Eliot, *T.S. Eliot: The Complete Poems and Plays 1909–1950*, 67.

¹²⁷ Eliot, *T.S. Eliot: The Complete Poems and Plays 1909–1950*, 67.

¹²⁸ Eliot, *T.S. Eliot: The Complete Poems and Plays 1909–1950*, 67.

¹²⁹ Kaplan, *T.S. Eliot's Major Poems and Plays*, 57.

¹³⁰ Kaplan, *T.S. Eliot's Major Poems and Plays*, 57.

¹³¹ Kaplan, *T.S. Eliot's Major Poems and Plays*, 57.

individual features of one of Eliot's post-conversion works help to enter into what his perception of religion was like at that time and also clarify the significance it had for the poet. Looking for other religious elements in the next section of Ash-Wednesday aids to make a more solid argument of the significance of T. S. Eliot's conversion.

6. Ash-Wednesday and Religious Elements

In this section the religious elements of the poem will be examined. The application of Anglo-Catholic prayers, the use of biblical verses and parables, and the liturgical phrases within the poem emphasise the deep spirituality of both the poem and its poet. The occurrence of these religious features within the particular parts of the poem and the prayers and stories they refer to add deeper sense and realm of meaning to the poem, they uncover and prove Eliot's spirituality and the importance of his conversion within his literary production.

Another element of Ash-Wednesday contributing to the profundity of Eliot's faith depicted through the poem is its interconnection with the religious practices, such as religious prayers, devotionals or biblical readings and narrations. Eliot's turn is based on true knowledge and reverence towards his newly joined church, the familiarity with the Scriptures proves intentional study and desire for the Tradition,¹³² the religious prayers mirror the time spent in the London churches¹³³ actively participating in the liturgy, so the depth of Eliot's faith can be seen through the poet's active practice of his religion reflected in the poem.

Ash-Wednesday is seen as a confession-like poem.¹³⁴ The speaker abandons the past and experiences the penitence of a convert, he speaks 'Bless me father'¹³⁵ and together with a repenting sinner, the reader adds 'for I have sinned', formulation used in the sacrament of reconciliation in the Catholic Church. He longs to 'renounce'¹³⁶ and does 'not hope to turn again',¹³⁷ essential elements of validity of the sacrament, sorrow for sins and desire to amend. Through the words of confession Eliot as if inferred the intimacy and privacy of the poem what can be perceived as intimacy and privacy of the poet's own inner experiencing and active application of the mentioned religious practice through the words of the poem. Another instance within Ash-Wednesday inspired by the prayers and devotions of Eliot's church is

¹³² Gordon, *T. S. Eliot, an Imperfect Life*, 213.

¹³³ Gordon, *T. S. Eliot, an Imperfect Life*, 211.

¹³⁴ Brown, 'T. S. Eliot's "Ash-Wednesday" and "Four Quartets"': 3.

¹³⁵ Eliot, *T.S. Eliot: The Complete Poems and Plays 1909–1950*, 66.

¹³⁶ Eliot, *T.S. Eliot: The Complete Poems and Plays 1909–1950*, 60.

¹³⁷ Eliot, *T.S. Eliot: The Complete Poems and Plays 1909–1950*, 60.

again tied to the figure of the Virgin. A passage from the prayer for intercession, *Salve Regina* is used. ‘And after this our exile’,¹³⁸ as if to mark this life, our earthly existence, our exile. For as long as Christians are here on earth, they find themselves separated from their heavenly home. Shortly after his conversion, Eliot called out to Mary, ‘after having found the light’,¹³⁹ he desired her intercession, not to forfeit ‘the light’,¹⁴⁰ for the remainder of his earthly existence.¹⁴¹ Eliot also turned to the ‘Lady’,¹⁴² at the end of part I of the poem, ‘Pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death / Pray for us now and at the hour of our death.’¹⁴³ This is the first moment in which Eliot inserted something Marian into the poem. The last verses of the fundamental Catholic prayer, *Hail Mary*, appear as the first cry towards the new Eve in a profoundly Marian poem. After renouncing the secular world throughout the first part, ‘I no longer strive to strive towards such things’,¹⁴⁴ presenting the ‘because’,¹⁴⁵ of his turn, his conversion, the speaker proceeds to pray to the Virgin and leads her into the poem. Eliot employed prayers in order to express his own experiencing of them. Some of his innermost thoughts might have been best expressed through the profound significance of religious prayers. According to Eliot, a poem was a kind of objective pictorial writing expressing reality, not only the reality of private emotional moments, but also the reality of impersonal moments in which the truth of existence speaks.¹⁴⁶ The private emotional moments of his personal spirituality supplied the experiences of the speaker and expressed his universal truth. The reader penetrates Eliot via the speaker’s declarations, which are, in the mentioned examples, deeply tied to the catholic spirituality.

Eliot’s profound knowledge and connection to his new-found faith is in the same way depicted through the biblical verses, through the usage of the ancient biblical stories as allegories, in order to express his own, private experiences with the

¹³⁸ Eliot, *T.S. Eliot: The Complete Poems and Plays 1909–1950*, 64.

¹³⁹ Bush, *T.S. Eliot, a Study in Character and Style*, 149.

¹⁴⁰ Eliot, *T.S. Eliot: The Complete Poems and Plays 1909–1950*, 65.

¹⁴¹ Bush, *T.S. Eliot, a Study in Character and Style*, 149.

¹⁴² Eliot, *T.S. Eliot: The Complete Poems and Plays 1909–1950*, 61.

¹⁴³ Eliot, *T.S. Eliot: The Complete Poems and Plays 1909–1950*, 61.

¹⁴⁴ Eliot, *T.S. Eliot: The Complete Poems and Plays 1909–1950*, 60.

¹⁴⁵ Eliot, *T.S. Eliot: The Complete Poems and Plays 1909–1950*, 60.

¹⁴⁶ Kulikovová, *I. Filozofia a umenie modernizmu*, 211.

Anglo-Catholic spirituality in the words of the writers of the Scriptures. In the II. part of the poem, Eliot himself became the ‘bones’¹⁴⁷ from Ezekiel 37, 1–14. Ezekiel, an Old Testament prophet, is brought into a valley full of bones to prophesy over them, so that they would rise and be filled with the Spirit of God.¹⁴⁸ Eliot applied this narration from the Bible, embedded himself in the ‘dry bones’¹⁴⁹ of the valley so as to be restored and made anew, to be filled with the Spirit and know God. The new Eliot, the ‘bones’¹⁵⁰ filled with Spirit, sought ‘the Word’¹⁵¹ of the ancient biblical book Genesis, ‘The Word within / The world and for the world’.¹⁵² He sought it because ‘the Word became flesh and dwelt among us’,¹⁵³ as in the gospel of John 1, 14, his heart searched for the presence of God, which he, through his Anglo-Catholic faith, believed is in the sacrament of the Eucharist. And so once more he approached the Virgin and asked for her intercession. The poem continues with: ‘And the light shone in darkness and / Against the Word the unstilled world still whirled’,¹⁵⁴ words drawn from the gospel of John (John 1, 5): ‘the lights shines in darkness and the darkness has not overcome it.’¹⁵⁵ Eliot again used the biblical verse to explain, to express what the speaker seeks, to show that he perceives the darkness within himself to be surrendered to the ‘light’,¹⁵⁶ as the poet himself after his conversion, and now the ‘darkness’¹⁵⁷ has no power over him.

The last instance where Eliot expressed the inner state of the speaker through the Scriptures is in the part V, where via the words of the prophet Micah, he seeks a reminder of what God has done for him. He quoted the Scripture: ‘O my people, what have I done unto thee?’¹⁵⁸ after this verse in the Bible, God adverts to the event of

¹⁴⁷ Eliot, *T.S. Eliot: The Complete Poems and Plays 1909–1950*, 61.

¹⁴⁸ The Holy Bible, New International Version, (Colorado Springs, International Bible Society, 1984), 648.

¹⁴⁹ Eliot, *T.S. Eliot: The Complete Poems and Plays 1909–1950*, 61.

¹⁵⁰ The Holy Bible, 648.

¹⁵¹ The Holy Bible, 788.

¹⁵² Eliot, *T.S. Eliot: The Complete Poems and Plays 1909–1950*, 65.

¹⁵³ The Holy Bible, 789.

¹⁵⁴ Eliot, *T.S. Eliot: The Complete Poems and Plays 1909–1950*, 65.

¹⁵⁵ The Holy Bible, 788–789.

¹⁵⁶ The Holy Bible, 788–789.

¹⁵⁷ The Holy Bible, 788–789.

¹⁵⁸ Eliot, *T.S. Eliot: The Complete Poems and Plays 1909–1950*, 65.

the deliverance from Egypt through the person of Moses,¹⁵⁹ and so might Eliot have been recalling his personal experiences guiding him to conversion. In the poem the speaker continues to ask Mary for ‘Those who walk in darkness’,¹⁶⁰ referring back to the gospel of John. Throughout Ash-Wednesday, Eliot employed various biblical verses, whether from the Old or the New Testament proving knowledge of the Bible as well as the profound meaning of the writings to the poet himself. He relied on the familiarity of the reader with the Scriptures in order to get the message, the idea of his inner understanding across. In this manner, it is possible to deduce the depth of his spirituality based on a personal relationship with the stories and figures of the Scriptures. His usage of the biblical verses and devotional prayers elucidates his contact with these tools of Anglo-Catholicism.

Through the occurrence of liturgical symbolism, prayers, wishes and hopes, devotional and biblical elements, the closeness of the author to the teachings and active participation in the practices of his Anglican faith, the profundity of his belief and seriousness of his conviction are indicated. By understanding the meaning of his work into greater depth the understanding of their author comes. The next section deals with the symbolism of the poem, the allegories that point to the greater hiddenness and meaning of this work.

¹⁵⁹ The Holy Bible, 695.

¹⁶⁰ Eliot, *T.S. Eliot: The Complete Poems and Plays 1909–1950*, 65.

7. Ash-Wednesday and Symbolism

This section examining the poem's symbolism shows and ties it to the biblical and religious references. It analyses the poem's artistic linguistic devices and reflects it in the speaker's, and author's personal experience. A better and deeper understanding of the meaning and significance of the poem through its artistic figures of speech sheds light on the author's mind and experience, and hence on the piety imprinted in the verses.

Eliot explained the term allegory as a 'clear visual image'.¹⁶¹ This means it always has a meaning, it does not have to be understood, but the presence of meaning within his literary allegories must be accounted for.¹⁶² Eliot's modernist literary output is filled with allegories, or metaphorical images which are not always definite. Eliot's intention within his poetry was not at all times clear, but he himself pronounced that allegories did have a meaning to be uncovered. In case of Ash-Wednesday analysing Eliot's symbolism within the poem, abundant amount of 'visual images'¹⁶³ come to light, and through analysing their meaning a connection to the spirituality, pointing to his Anglo-Catholic religion, can be exposed.

For example, there is a lot of animal symbolism throughout the poem that relates to the theme of conversion and the speaker's penitential journey. 'The aged eagle'¹⁶⁴ of the I. part is introduced, abandoning 'the vanished power of the usual reign',¹⁶⁵ of the secular, which in the last part through the temptations and prayers to the 'holy mother'¹⁶⁶ regains his strength to 'fly seaward'¹⁶⁷ on the 'unbroken wings',¹⁶⁸ 'a scene [Eliot] always associated with divine intimations'.¹⁶⁹ Following, 'the three white leopards'¹⁷⁰ are introduced, feeding on the speaker as if to cleanse him to the bones so he can be prophesied to among the bones by the prophet Ezekiel

¹⁶¹ Sharpe, *T. S. Eliot, A Literary Life*, 122.

¹⁶² Sharpe, *T. S. Eliot, A Literary Life*, 122.

¹⁶³ Sharpe, *T. S. Eliot, A Literary Life*, 122.

¹⁶⁴ Eliot, *T.S. Eliot: The Complete Poems and Plays 1909–1950*, 60.

¹⁶⁵ Eliot, *T.S. Eliot: The Complete Poems and Plays 1909–1950*, 60.

¹⁶⁶ Eliot, *T.S. Eliot: The Complete Poems and Plays 1909–1950*, 67.

¹⁶⁷ Eliot, *T.S. Eliot: The Complete Poems and Plays 1909–1950*, 66.

¹⁶⁸ Eliot, *T.S. Eliot: The Complete Poems and Plays 1909–1950*, 66.

¹⁶⁹ Gordon, *T. S. Eliot, an Imperfect Life*, 240.

¹⁷⁰ Eliot, *T.S. Eliot: The Complete Poems and Plays 1909–1950*, 61.

in the next stanza. So, the ‘leopards’¹⁷¹ cleansing the speaker serve as if ‘the agents of a purifying [...] change’,¹⁷² not to savage to death, but coming with the ‘Lady’¹⁷³ to aid in the penitential journey of renouncing the worldly, to answer the divine calling.¹⁷⁴ The speaker sets on his journey with the vision of the ‘Garden’,¹⁷⁵ symbolizing the ‘Holy Mother’,¹⁷⁶ the place of residence of the ‘Word unspoken, [...] unheard’,¹⁷⁷ place of renewal and rest.¹⁷⁸ Then the protagonist comes across ‘a juniper-tree’,¹⁷⁹ representing in the Old Testament, the protecting presence of an angel (1 Kings 19, 5), ‘in the quiet of the desert’,¹⁸⁰ desert before the promised land which the poet strived to reach, with the ‘Lady of the silences’¹⁸¹ as the ‘guardian’¹⁸² of the perishing of his old, worldly self.¹⁸³ The usage of the natural symbolism of animals, trees, gardens and deserts, connected to the biblical or serving as associations, sets the speaker in compliance with the creation and through his work, the poet in compliance with the Creator.

Nevertheless, before reaching the paradise of the promised land, the speaker encounters the staircase of temptations and penitence. Gordon appointed this staircase to a double turning required for conversion mentioned by Lancelot Andrewes, a key theological figure in Eliot’s conversion. In one of his sermons, he spoke of the necessity of two turns during one’s conversion, ‘backward to one’s sins’¹⁸⁴ and ‘forward to God’.¹⁸⁵ To attain the spiritual promised land, an individual was to reject ‘worldliness’ and divert their attention toward the heavenly. But the speaker is permanently ‘bedevilled’ in his attempts,¹⁸⁶ by ‘the toothed gullet of an aged

¹⁷¹ Eliot, *T.S. Eliot: The Complete Poems and Plays 1909–1950*, 61.

¹⁷² Sharpe, *T. S. Eliot, A Literary Life*, 122.

¹⁷³ Eliot, *T.S. Eliot: The Complete Poems and Plays 1909–1950*, 61.

¹⁷⁴ Brown, ‘T. S. Eliot’s “Ash-Wednesday” and “Four Quartets”’: 5.

¹⁷⁵ Eliot, *T.S. Eliot: The Complete Poems and Plays 1909–1950*, 62.

¹⁷⁶ Eliot, *T.S. Eliot: The Complete Poems and Plays 1909–1950*, 67.

¹⁷⁷ Eliot, *T.S. Eliot: The Complete Poems and Plays 1909–1950*, 65.

¹⁷⁸ Däumer. ‘Charlotte Stearns Eliot and Ash-Wednesday’s Lady of Silences.’ 490–1.

¹⁷⁹ Eliot, *T.S. Eliot: The Complete Poems and Plays 1909–1950*, 61.

¹⁸⁰ Eliot, *T.S. Eliot: The Complete Poems and Plays 1909–1950*, 63.

¹⁸¹ Eliot, *T.S. Eliot: The Complete Poems and Plays 1909–1950*, 62.

¹⁸² Gordon, *T. S. Eliot, an Imperfect Life*, 236.

¹⁸³ Gordon, *T. S. Eliot, an Imperfect Life*, 236.

¹⁸⁴ Gordon, *T. S. Eliot, an Imperfect Life*, 224.

¹⁸⁵ Gordon, *T. S. Eliot, an Imperfect Life*, 224.

¹⁸⁶ Spurr, *Anglo-Catholicism and the ‘Religious Turn’ in Eliot’s Poetry*, 140.

shark'.¹⁸⁷ And as the trials of the stairs terminate, he experiences a 'vision'¹⁸⁸ with 'jewelled unicorns, [...] birds [and ...] yew',¹⁸⁹ representing eternity with the 'Word',¹⁹⁰ itself in it. For Eliot, the 'Word'¹⁹¹ was not the Bible, the texts, and teachings, but the 'experience of the Word'.¹⁹² The dissection of 'the Word without a word'¹⁹³ in this section, could be presumably understood by the attempt to comprehend the notion of 'the Word'¹⁹⁴ via the modification of similarly sounding words (e.g. 'word [...] world [...] whirled').¹⁹⁵ Eliot played with the sound as if to discover their meaning this way. Like a child learning a language where the formation of meaning is achieved by 'slow mastery'¹⁹⁶ of small sound changes as in the case of 'word',¹⁹⁷ and 'world',¹⁹⁸ with the minor difference of the addition of the letter l.¹⁹⁹ Small modifications and changes in the text could therefore also symbolise something. Gradual, sceptical examination of individual elements or parts of phrases and their meanings could eventually lead to full understanding of for example religion or in this case 'the Word'.²⁰⁰ So, to experience 'the Word'²⁰¹ is to lose the 'world',²⁰² through the means of small but significant change. And the journey to attaining this experience is to be the Virgin Mary, 'because she has access to The Word.'²⁰³

Eliot's usage of symbols not only adhered to his typically modernist practices of wordplay, literary allegories and metaphorical phrases containing deeper meaning than at first apparent. These symbols referring to an inner individuality also compelled the reader not solely to supplement the construction of a dense

¹⁸⁷ Eliot, *T.S. Eliot: The Complete Poems and Plays 1909–1950*, 63.

¹⁸⁸ Eliot, *T.S. Eliot: The Complete Poems and Plays 1909–1950*, 64.

¹⁸⁹ Eliot, *T.S. Eliot: The Complete Poems and Plays 1909–1950*, 64.

¹⁹⁰ Eliot, *T.S. Eliot: The Complete Poems and Plays 1909–1950*, 65.

¹⁹¹ Eliot, *T.S. Eliot: The Complete Poems and Plays 1909–1950*, 65.

¹⁹² Gordon, *T. S. Eliot, an Imperfect life*, 369.

¹⁹³ Eliot, *T.S. Eliot: The Complete Poems and Plays 1909–1950*, 65.

¹⁹⁴ Eliot, *T.S. Eliot: The Complete Poems and Plays 1909–1950*, 65.

¹⁹⁵ Eliot, *T.S. Eliot: The Complete Poems and Plays 1909–1950*, 65.

¹⁹⁶ Brown, 'T. S. Eliot's "Ash-Wednesday" and "Four Quartets"': 7.

¹⁹⁷ Eliot, *T.S. Eliot: The Complete Poems and Plays 1909–1950*, 65.

¹⁹⁸ Eliot, *T.S. Eliot: The Complete Poems and Plays 1909–1950*, 65.

¹⁹⁹ Brown, 'T. S. Eliot's "Ash-Wednesday" and "Four Quartets"': 7.

²⁰⁰ Eliot, *T.S. Eliot: The Complete Poems and Plays 1909–1950*, 65.

²⁰¹ Eliot, *T.S. Eliot: The Complete Poems and Plays 1909–1950*, 65.

²⁰² Eliot, *T.S. Eliot: The Complete Poems and Plays 1909–1950*, 65.

²⁰³ Kaplan, *T.S. Eliot's Major Poems and Plays*, 57.

‘argument’,²⁰⁴ but to find resolution, meaning and ‘conclusion in the culminating prayer’.²⁰⁵ Their application was to connect these notions to the religious and so, bring the reader to collision with the spiritual, deep within the essence of these symbols.

By understanding the profound and more hidden meaning of many of the allegories through recognising the biblical parables, religious symbols, and mysticism of the poem introduces the greater depth of the authors knowledge and perception of the tradition and dogmatism of his Anglo-Catholic faith. Through understanding of the poem into depth via its features, allegories and references, further discussed in the next section, the author faith is indicated and so the severity of his conversion with impact on his personal life is shown and through research also on his literary production.

²⁰⁴ Brown, ‘T. S. Eliot’s “Ash-Wednesday” and “Four Quartets”’: 5.

²⁰⁵ Brown, ‘T. S. Eliot’s ‘Ash-Wednesday’ and ‘Four Quartets’: 5.

8. Ash-Wednesday and the Notion of Sin

This section deals with the notion of sin and through mapping it within the poem Ash-Wednesday it ties it to the author's personal experience and perception of sin. It shows how important and fundamental Eliot believed sin and man's associated eternity was to a deeply religious life, and through the speaker's journey, which is reflected in the poem, it is possible to infer the author's beliefs about this Anglo-Catholic dogma and the associated teachings of his church.

In the time before his conversion, Eliot searched in the philosophies and teachings of various creeds and spiritualities for multiple reasons. One of these reasons is unfolded as a pattern throughout the poem Ash-Wednesday. In the period of his life when Eliot experienced great suffering, the hardships of his marriage, physical and mental exhaustion from his post in the bank due to financial difficulties, as well as his personal mental problems resulting in depression,²⁰⁶ he encountered 'a resolution for his feelings about emptiness of life'²⁰⁷ caused by these afflictions, in Christianity and its teaching about the 'afterlife'²⁰⁸ and the path to it, a teaching that his former Unitarian church had lost.²⁰⁹ He realised the inevitability of punishment for the committed sins in order to attain the promised eternity in the afterlife, entangled with the conscious purification and actions of penitence as it is taught by the Church.²¹⁰ The notion of sin and the eternal reward were considerably new to Eliot as during his upbringing, he only came across the Puritanical 'what is and is not done'.²¹¹ He realised the fundamental distinction between Puritanism and Catholicism was the distinction between believing in sin or simply believing that certain things were to be done.²¹² Therefore, Eliot began to intentionally emphasise the significance

²⁰⁶ Sharpe, *T. S. Eliot, A Literary Life*, 121–122.

²⁰⁷ Sharpe, *T. S. Eliot, A Literary Life*, 123.

²⁰⁸ Sharpe, *T. S. Eliot, A Literary Life*, 123.

²⁰⁹ Sharpe, *T. S. Eliot, A Literary Life*, 14.

²¹⁰ Gordon, *T. S. Eliot, an Imperfect Life*, 178.

²¹¹ Gordon, *T. S. Eliot, an Imperfect Life*, 213.

²¹² Gordon, *T. S. Eliot, an Imperfect Life*, 213.

of sin. He became convicted that as people ceased to believe in ‘Original sin’²¹³ so do “‘real” people who undergo moral struggle’²¹⁴ cease to exist.²¹⁵

The teaching about the human sin was as crucial for Eliot as for the Anglo-Catholic Church. He perceived the realisation of the notion of sin as ‘a New Life’,²¹⁶ and this personal significance is mirrored in his post-conversion poem. The theme of penitence would not be present without the deep realisation of the speaker’s innermost faults and sins, separating him from the desired ‘Word’.²¹⁷ Right in the first part of the poem, the speaker asks for ‘mercy’²¹⁸ and turns to the Virgin via the words of the prayer Hail Mary. He hopes in fear: ‘May the judgement not be too heavy upon us’,²¹⁹ as he goes on to combat the temptations of the ‘turning stairs’²²⁰ of part III. His thoughts as if the ‘stops and steps of the mind / over the third stair’²²¹ assault the fighting spirit, ‘Fading, fading; strength beyond hope and despair / Climbing the third stair’²²² and weary, he utters in complete devotion and humbleness ‘Lord, I am not worthy’.²²³ These moral struggles which the speaker undergoes throughout this part of the poem could be seen as reflections of Eliot’s own personal experience. He perceived himself as a grave sinner. In one of his plays, *The Family Union*, Eliot created a character struggling with ‘moral problems like his own’,²²⁴ equally in *Ash-Wednesday* he could have been the speaker struggling up the ‘stairs’²²⁵ attempting to reach the peak, the peak of freedom in forgiveness, the liberation of the Christian ‘afterlife’.²²⁶ The speaker of the poem seems to be very much aware of the ‘eternal dolour’²²⁷ as opposed to the heavenly reward and realises

²¹³ Gordon, *T. S. Eliot, an Imperfect Life*, 253.

²¹⁴ Gordon, *T. S. Eliot, an Imperfect Life*, 253.

²¹⁵ Gordon, *T. S. Eliot, an Imperfect Life*, 253.

²¹⁶ Gordon, *T. S. Eliot, an Imperfect Life*, 242.

²¹⁷ Eliot, *T.S. Eliot: The Complete Poems and Plays 1909–1950*, 65.

²¹⁸ Eliot, *T.S. Eliot: The Complete Poems and Plays 1909–1950*, 61.

²¹⁹ Eliot, *T.S. Eliot: The Complete Poems and Plays 1909–1950*, 61.

²²⁰ Eliot, *T.S. Eliot: The Complete Poems and Plays 1909–1950*, 63.

²²¹ Eliot, *T.S. Eliot: The Complete Poems and Plays 1909–1950*, 63.

²²² Eliot, *T.S. Eliot: The Complete Poems and Plays 1909–1950*, 63.

²²³ Eliot, *T.S. Eliot: The Complete Poems and Plays 1909–1950*, 63.

²²⁴ Gordon, *T. S. Eliot, an Imperfect Life*, 330.

²²⁵ Eliot, *T.S. Eliot: The Complete Poems and Plays 1909–1950*, 63.

²²⁶ Gordon, *T. S. Eliot, an Imperfect Life*, 4.

²²⁷ Eliot, *T.S. Eliot: The Complete Poems and Plays 1909–1950*, 64.

there is 'No place of grace for those who avoid the face'.²²⁸ Eliot's childhood with the incessant sense of no forgiveness, and the necessity of excellence expected of each child, predisposed him to the scrupulosity towards the dogmatic perception of sin held by the Anglican Church, which he still viewed with the utmost sternness and rigour a few years later as a grown man.²²⁹

Then the protagonist turns to prayer, he speaks for 'Those who walk in darkness'²³⁰ and 'oppose',²³¹ for those who, similarly to himself, are 'terrified and cannot surrender'.²³² 'Spitting'²³³ out the 'apple-seed'²³⁴ of the original sin, he gives up the life-like 'dreamcrossed twilight between birth and dying'²³⁵ and sets off 'seaward'²³⁶ towards the promised land, 'the granite shore'²³⁷ of New England, the promised land of Eliot's childhood.²³⁸ The fear of damnation, adamant rejection of sin, his view of the society in great decline, his orthodoxy and vision of the promised land, all coming from the severity of his upbringing,²³⁹ point towards the poet's serious perception of sin and its role among the human beings. This doctrinaire approach of the author is well reflected in the speaker's inner battle with the temptations and his serious view of the state of his soul as well as the devotion to the 'Lady'²⁴⁰ suggesting the awareness of the weakness and insufficiency of his ability to combat sin. And so, this approach could point at the religious conviction of Eliot and his perception of the teaching of his faith via the battle underwent by the speaker of Ash-Wednesday. Both his poetry and his life came together to form one 'design',²⁴¹ that was for Eliot the desire to reach salvation.²⁴²

²²⁸ Eliot, *T.S. Eliot: The Complete Poems and Plays 1909–1950*, 65.

²²⁹ Worthen, *T. S. Eliot*, 14.

²³⁰ Eliot, *T.S. Eliot: The Complete Poems and Plays 1909–1950*, 65.

²³¹ Eliot, *T.S. Eliot: The Complete Poems and Plays 1909–1950*, 65.

²³² Eliot, *T.S. Eliot: The Complete Poems and Plays 1909–1950*, 65–66.

²³³ Eliot, *T.S. Eliot: The Complete Poems and Plays 1909–1950*, 66.

²³⁴ Eliot, *T.S. Eliot: The Complete Poems and Plays 1909–1950*, 66.

²³⁵ Eliot, *T.S. Eliot: The Complete Poems and Plays 1909–1950*, 66.

²³⁶ Eliot, *T.S. Eliot: The Complete Poems and Plays 1909–1950*, 66.

²³⁷ Eliot, *T.S. Eliot: The Complete Poems and Plays 1909–1950*, 66.

²³⁸ Eliot, *T.S. Eliot: The Complete Poems and Plays 1909–1950*, 66.

²³⁹ Gordon, *T. S. Eliot, an Imperfect Life*, 226.

²⁴⁰ Eliot, *T.S. Eliot: The Complete Poems and Plays 1909–1950*, 61.

²⁴¹ Gordon, *T. S. Eliot, an Imperfect Life*, 4.

²⁴² Gordon, *T. S. Eliot, an Imperfect Life*, 4.

By recognising the presence of the notion of sin throughout the poem, the understanding of the poet perception of this concept is clarified. The speaker's walk through the stages of sorrow, penitence and reconciliation shows author's experiencing and his devotion to the teaching of his Church. Through the understanding of Eliot's view of the dogmas of his faith and his dedication to them the depth of his spirituality can be recognised and also thanks to their presence in his work their significance is shown and the importance of his conversion for his literary work as well. Therefore, through the work of this author, his religion and the journey of his conversion are being clarified. Another concept to be examined through the poem is the philosophical perceptions imbedded into the speaker of Ash-Wednesday.

9. Ash-Wednesday and Philosophy

The last section examining Eliot's Ash-Wednesday deals with the philosophies hidden in the poem. Through the experiences of the speaker in the individual parts, through his perceptions and behaviour, it is possible to notice the patterns of concrete philosophies tied to the poem's author and so deduce his personal experiencing of the theories of the mystical and the religious.

There are signs of several intermingled philosophical ideologies throughout the poem. Eliot journeyed through the philosophies known to him and set the speaker of Ash-Wednesday amid the diverse fundamentals of cognition, reality and being. The speaker reflects, in various instances of the poem, a sceptical mind. He perceives the 'actual'²⁴³ as being 'actual only for one time',²⁴⁴ what is known is fleeting, it is known for only a 'time'.²⁴⁵ He calls on the 'veiled sister'²⁴⁶ to pray for those 'who walk in darkness'²⁴⁷ of ignorance, who as an all-questioning sceptic 'chose thee'²⁴⁸ but at the same time 'oppose thee'.²⁴⁹ The speaker seems to be coming out of a place of doubt, similarly as Eliot who perceived scepticism as 'the preface to conversion',²⁵⁰ as a necessary element to opt for a new religion. He found doubt 'inevitable'²⁵¹ in order to truly discern 'the problem of faith'.²⁵² The speaker proclaims: 'though I do not wish to wish these things',²⁵³ as if not having a choice after discerning his devotion to faith and religion, after questioning and searching, he comes to succumb to the carefully examined spirituality.

Contrary to scepticism, in several instances of the poem the source of the protagonist's believing seems to be coming from a place of empirical proof. The

²⁴³ Eliot, *T.S. Eliot: The Complete Poems and Plays 1909–1950*, 60.

²⁴⁴ Eliot, *T.S. Eliot: The Complete Poems and Plays 1909–1950*, 60.

²⁴⁵ Eliot, *T.S. Eliot: The Complete Poems and Plays 1909–1950*, 60.

²⁴⁶ Eliot, *T.S. Eliot: The Complete Poems and Plays 1909–1950*, 65.

²⁴⁷ Eliot, *T.S. Eliot: The Complete Poems and Plays 1909–1950*, 65.

²⁴⁸ Eliot, *T.S. Eliot: The Complete Poems and Plays 1909–1950*, 65.

²⁴⁹ Eliot, *T.S. Eliot: The Complete Poems and Plays 1909–1950*, 65.

²⁵⁰ Perl and Tuck, *The Hidden Advantage of Tradition: On the Significance of T. S. Eliot's Indic Studies*: 119.

²⁵¹ Gordon, *T. S. Eliot, an Imperfect Life*, 112.

²⁵² Gordon, *T. S. Eliot, an Imperfect Life*, 112.

²⁵³ Eliot, *T.S. Eliot: The The Complete Poems and Plays 1909–1950*, 66.

speaker talks of drinking, seeing various colours, smelling ‘fetid air’,²⁵⁴ or hearing the ‘music of the flute’,²⁵⁵ however much of religious belief derives from faith, from believing, not solely knowledge and truths of the church, its tradition and scriptural mastery. Nevertheless, multiple aspects of Ash-Wednesday interpret empirical experiencing as crucial for the advancement of the speaker’s faith. The conversion is preceded with strict scepticism but after the turn the protagonist’s experiencing pushes him forward. ‘The lost sea smell, [...] the cry of quail [and] the blind eye creates [...] And smell renews the salt savour of the sandy earth’,²⁵⁶ he is experiencing the life around, he is living and so believing and perceiving the ‘Word’,²⁵⁷ and ‘the Lady’,²⁵⁸ via the Creator and the created ever deeper. Eliot thought the world to be ‘the sum of the parts of which it is composed’,²⁵⁹ for him this was important because the ‘western philosophy’,²⁶⁰ was separating the real world from the experiencing,²⁶¹ he viewed the world to be constituted of both the experiences and the abstract, the invisible. He sought to unite these two as two sides of the same coin.

Contrary to empiricism, close to Eliot’s mystical experience of his university years, is the idealism within the poem. So much of the work is about praying, ‘pray to God to have mercy upon us’,²⁶² or hoping, ‘Because I do not hope to turn again’,²⁶³ or even wishing, ‘to wish these things’,²⁶⁴ perceptions of the mind rather than the material of the outer experiences. He used elements of idealism and presented in the poem aspects related to this metaphysical view that were directed towards the inner experiences of the author, and therefore of him as a religious being. ‘The unread vision in the higher dream / While jewelled unicorns draw by the gilded hearse’,²⁶⁵ as

²⁵⁴ Eliot, *T.S. Eliot: The Complete Poems and Plays 1909–1950*, 63.

²⁵⁵ Eliot, *T.S. Eliot: The Complete Poems and Plays 1909–1950*, 63.

²⁵⁶ Eliot, *T.S. Eliot: The Complete Poems and Plays 1909–1950*, 66.

²⁵⁷ Eliot, *T.S. Eliot: The Complete Poems and Plays 1909–1950*, 65.

²⁵⁸ Eliot, *T.S. Eliot: The Complete Poems and Plays 1909–1950*, 62.

²⁵⁹ Perl and Tuck, *The Hidden Advantage of Tradition: On the Significance of T. S. Eliot’s Indic Studies*, 117.

²⁶⁰ Perl and Tuck, *The Hidden Advantage of Tradition: On the Significance of T. S. Eliot’s Indic Studies*, 117.

²⁶¹ Perl and Tuck, *The Hidden Advantage of Tradition: On the Significance of T. S. Eliot’s Indic Studies*, 117.

²⁶² Eliot, *T.S. Eliot: The Complete Poems and Plays 1909–1950*, 61.

²⁶³ Eliot, *T.S. Eliot: The Complete Poems and Plays 1909–1950*, 61.

²⁶⁴ Eliot, *T.S. Eliot: The Complete Poems and Plays 1909–1950*, 66.

²⁶⁵ Eliot, *T.S. Eliot: The Complete Poems and Plays 1909–1950*, 64.

the spiritual elements of experience point to the metaphysical view of the reality set in the mind rather than the corporeal reality of experiencing the world empirically.

Together with the philosophy of his childhood Unitarianism and puritanical rationalism, Eliot presented within *Ash-Wednesday* number of other different philosophical views that all accompanied him throughout the years. Via the poem, the distinctions of his former philosophical perceptions and the post-conversion perceptions ascend to the surface. The Unitarian strictness of his upbringing is in conflict with the delicate relationships with the ‘Lady’²⁶⁶ whose ‘loveliness’²⁶⁷ is keenly emphasised and with the merciful God, the ‘Word’.²⁶⁸ His rational and sceptical stance is juxtaposed to the immaterial idealism and empiricism drawing from the experience. In the poem, the representation of ‘a rational as well as emotional dimension’,²⁶⁹ brings clarity to both the speaker and Eliot in search of the Absolute of the author’s early years, a search now reaching its purpose in the cognition of the holy ‘Word’²⁷⁰ of *Ash-Wednesday*.

By recognising and understanding the speaker’s philosophical perceptions and conceptions, the author’s are recognised as well. The philosophical opinions and understandings reflected in the poem indicate the values Eliot adhered to within his spiritual life. Through the features of *Ash-Wednesday* the spirituality of Eliot is brought forward, and it is possible to recognise the importance of his conversion through his literary production. By clarifying Eliot’s personal philosophy and recognising it in his work, through the recognition of the various ways of examining his literary production and finally via the analysis of a particular poem and its religious features, the conclusion of this work can be drawn.

²⁶⁶ Eliot, *T.S. Eliot: The Complete Poems and Plays 1909–1950*, 62.

²⁶⁷ Eliot, *T.S. Eliot: The Complete Poems and Plays 1909–1950*, 62.

²⁶⁸ Eliot, *T.S. Eliot: The Complete Poems and Plays 1909–1950*, 65.

²⁶⁹ Skaff, *The Philosophy of T.S. Eliot*, 43.

²⁷⁰ Eliot, *T.S. Eliot: The Complete Poems and Plays 1909–1950*, 65.

10. Conclusion

This section will conclude my work and present the main findings in relation to the research questions. It will summarise the information of the former sections and discuss their contribution.

The question of Eliot's conversion has been widely debated in the modernist movement, with scholars taking an almost exclusively technical and analytical view of his post-conversion literature. The aim of this study was to show that these perspectives have not sufficiently addressed the issue of Eliot's conversion within his works in terms of their theology and philosophy. My paper addressed the question of the poet's religious transformation, with particular reference to the theological and philosophical aspects of his 1930 poem *Ash Wednesday*. The results suggest that looking at the poem's Marian theology, biblical and liturgical symbolism, as well as Eliot's philosophy, reveals a deep relationship of the poem, and therefore the poet, to the Anglo-Catholic faith. The Marian, liturgical, biblical and specific philosophical elements of *Ash-Wednesday* point at a great turn and show a deeply religious poetry. The results of this project show that the issue of T. S. Eliot's conversion is tangible within his literary output and should be regarded with greater attention to its theology and philosophy as the deep convictions of its author.

Through the analysis of this particular poem regarding its specific theological and philosophical aspects, the depth of Eliot's conversion is shown. By mentioning the previous analysis of T. S. Eliot's post-conversion, a deficiency concerning the author's fundamental theological turn is suggested. Looking at the gradual journey of the poet's philosophical perceptions later on mirrored in the last section by examining the philosophical movements within the poem itself, shows the change and clarifies the understanding of how Eliot aimed towards his Christian faith in his former philosophical study. The following sections concentrate on individual aspects of the mentioned poem that point at the depth and significance of Eliot's conversion. By juxtaposing the perception of the femininity and the notion of the Virgin as a key figure in *Ash-Wednesday*, as well as in Anglo-Catholicism, the theoretical turn in the author's perception is clarified in his pre- and post-conversion works. Other features

such as the symbolism referring to the Scriptures or the church tradition as well as the biblical, devotional, or liturgical elements pointing to the acceptance of the Anglo-Catholic heritage, show the deep knowledge and embracing of the spirituality and dogmas of Eliot's religion. All these findings point at the change Eliot as an exemplary modernist must have undergone in his conversion. Equally important is the turn in his literary production that is seen to be abiding in religious elements and allegories hiding deeper spiritual perception. Nevertheless, when studying Eliot's work in the research of other academics the significance of his conversion is not very distinct within the analysis of his life or work, this study indicates the fundamental change in the author's life and his work that should be reflected in these analyses.

Nevertheless, this study was done on a limited number of samples and limited amount of data because of the restraint amount of time for research, therefore the findings might be biased however the sample of the particular poem from Eliot's work together with the sources are sufficient for the deduction of the conclusion.

Via the analysis of a particular work of T. S. Eliot, noticing its features, and realising the juxtaposition regarding his former and later philosophical and personal views, Eliot's spirituality and more importantly its profound impact on his literary output is indicated. In analysing Eliot's art, there should be a difference between examining his pre- and post-conversion works because his artistic production can be viewed as undergoing a change of the same intensity as its author. Eliot as an author should not be separated from his works. Therefore, his conversion within his poetry has to be inevitably regarded in the truly profound impact it had on Eliot and through this great influence the examination of his work has to change from the foundation as the foundation of its author was transformed as well, from grim, lonely allegories of depression and exile to metaphysical awakening to a new life that is guarded by hope and mysticism.

Abstract

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Aspects of T. S. Eliot's Ash-Wednesday
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modernism, etc.

Based on an in-depth analysis of the poem Ash-Wednesday by T. S. Eliot and through examining its theological, biblical and philosophical features, together with the poem's symbolism and references, the perception of the author's conversion into the Anglo-Catholic Church by the literary world and its effect regarding his artistic production as well as its impact on his subsequent literary output, juxtaposed to the former, pre-conversion works, are examined, pointing at the great influence of his conversion on the author, his poetry and other subsequent literary output.

Resumé

T. S. Eliot byl významnou osobností světové literatury. Jeho díla měla velký vliv a literární svět ho stále vnímá jako velké jméno umění minulého století. Hnutí, za jehož součást je považován, se vyznačovalo velkými změnami v umění i ve veřejných a společenských strukturách. Modernismus se obrací dovnitř a personalizuje literaturu, přičemž náboženství vylučuje jako zastaralé a pro vnitřní prožitek moderního člověka nepodstatné. Eliotovo dílo tedy nabývá nového významu s jeho konverzí k anglo-katolické víře, což je významný obrat neobvyklý pro autora modernistického hnutí. Přesto je tento zásadní obrat málokdy dostatečně důkladně zohledněn při analýze jeho díla, které vzniklo po jeho konverzi.

V prvních částech se tato práce věnuje objasnění směru, do kterého je Eliot jako autor zařazen, a z toho vyplývající analýze jeho literárních děl. Představením doby a modernistického hnutí byla jasněji představena osoba básníka, jeho dílo a výskyt jeho konverze v sociokulturním kontextu a zdůrazněn význam rozpoznání jeho konverze v osobním životě i v literární tvorbě v rámci tohoto literárního hnutí. Byl také naznačen zlom, kterým by muselo projít studium tohoto autora spolu s jeho osobní a literární konverzí. Pochopení závažnosti takového rozhodnutí a prostředí, z něhož básník vychází, je důležité pro jasnější a hlubší pojetí teologických a filozofických rysů a prvků níže rozebírané básně.

Dále byly uvedeny různé způsoby analýzy Eliotova díla a nejčastější názory, podle kterých se o jeho díle diskutuje. Uvedením úzkého zaměření, které často zdůrazňuje pouze bezprostřední význam básně, nedostatečný obrat v analýze Eliotova literárního díla po jeho konverzi, lpění na modernistických kritériích, emocionální, psychologické analýze nebo oddělení jeho poezie od něj jako básníka, v té době již anglikána, byl zdůrazněn vliv Eliotovy konverze nejen na jeho dílo, ale i na jeho analýzu. Tato sekce poukázala na potřebu změny v rámci zkoumání Eliotova díla po jeho konverzi a zdůraznila nedostatečnou hloubku tohoto zkoumání před a po autorově přijetí náboženství.

Po diskusi o sociokulturním kontextu tohoto básníka a způsobech analýzy jeho díla, které jsou důležité pro pochopení významu jeho konverze pro jeho tvorbu,

byly představeny filozofické směry, kterými byl autor obklopen nebo které později přijal. Představením těchto směrů a ideologií, které autor zkoumal, byla přiblížena cesta jeho přijetí anglikanismu, a díky tomu bylo možné jasněji pochopit vnímání spirituality a mystiky, které autor později přijímá, a způsoby, jakými tak činí. Po přijetí svátostí křtu a biřmování se Eliot v roce 1927 stává členem nové církve. Po této události získává jeho dílo novou smyslovou hloubku, která je přiblížena v následujících kapitolách.

V další části své práce se zabývám jednou ze slavných Eliotových básní po konverzi, *Ash-Wednesday* (Popeleční středa), a rozebírám její mariánskou teologii, jakož i srovnání autorova vnímání ženství před a po konverzi prostřednictvím ženských postav v jeho životě a integrální ženské postavy katolické víry, která je v této básni rovněž klíčovou postavou. Výskyt ženskosti a mariánství v celé básni byl zkoumán s ohledem na jeho vliv na ostatní strofy a zbytek básně. Prostřednictvím mariánských prvků básně a zásadního obratu v básníkově pohledu na ženu lze jasněji rozeznat hloubku jeho obrácení. Prostřednictvím využití postavy Panny Marie v básni i jejího působení a toho, jak ji vnímá protagonista díla, je možné rozpoznat Eliotův vztah k této postavě, a tedy i jeho religiozitu, která se odráží v hluboké spiritualitě básně a jejích myšlenkách.

Následující části práce se zabývají dalšími náboženskými prvky. Použití anglo-katolických modliteb, vložení biblických veršů a podobenství a liturgické fráze v díle zdůrazňují hlubokou spiritualitu básně i jejího básníka. Výskyt těchto náboženských prvků v různých částech tohoto díla, modlitby a příběhy, na něž odkazují, poukazují na hlubší smysl a význam básně a odhalují a dokazují Eliotovu spiritualitu a význam jeho obrácení v rámci jeho literárního díla. Dalším prvkem naznačujícím hlubokou spiritualitu *Ash-Wednesday* (Popeleční středa) je její symbolika naznačující a spojující ji s biblickými a náboženskými odkazy. Přítomností liturgické symboliky, modliteb, zbožných a biblických prvků, které naznačují autorovu blízkost k učení a aktivní účast na praktikování jeho anglikánské víry, byla zdůrazněna hloubka jeho víry a vážnost jeho přesvědčení. Hlubším pochopením významu jeho děl dochází k pochopení jejich autora. Lepší a hlubší pochopení

významu této básně prostřednictvím uměleckých řečových figur osvětluje zkušenost a vnímání autora, a tedy i zbožnost, která je ve verších vtisknuta.

Následující část se zabýval pojmem hříchu a prostřednictvím jeho zmapování v básni Ash-Wednesday (Popeleční středa) jej propojil s autorovou osobní zkušeností a vnímáním hříchu. Ukázala, jak důležitý a zásadní je podle Eliota hřích a s ním spojená věčnost člověka pro hluboce náboženský život, a prostřednictvím cesty hlavního hrdiny, jak se odráží v básni, lze vyvodit autorovy názory na toto anglo-katolické dogma a s ním spojené učení jeho církve. Díky tomu můžeme usuzovat vážnost, s jakou Eliot bral učení své nově objevené církve, a vážnost, s jakou bral svou víru, což lze tedy spojit s hlubokou religiozitou jeho díla. Podobně i poslední oddíl zkoumající Eliotovu Ash-Wednesday (Popeleční středa) se zabýval básnickovým hlubokým náboženským prožitkem. Prostřednictvím filozofických prvků skrytých v básni, prostřednictvím prožitků mluvčího v jednotlivých oddílech, jeho vnímání a chování, je možné nahlédnout zákonitosti jednotlivých filozofií, které se k autorovi básně váží, a odvodit tak jeho osobní prožitek mystiky a náboženství.

Analýza Eliotovy básně Ash-Wednesday (Popeleční středa) a jejích mnoha prvků pomáhá osvětlit hlubokou zbožnost básně i básníka a změny, které způsobila v jeho díle. Mariánské aspekty básně, její symbolika odkazující k Bibli či církevní tradici, stejně jako biblické, modlitební či liturgické prvky nebo autorova filozofie, která se v básni odráží, vytvářejí představu o Eliotově vnitřním vnímání náboženství a váze vlivu na jeho poezii. Rozbor tohoto díla ukazuje Eliotovu spiritualitu a zejména její hluboký vliv na jeho literární tvorbu. Proto je třeba ve světle těchto zjištění posuzovat i jeho další dílo. Mezi analýzou Eliotových děl před konverzí a po ní by měl být rozdíl, neboť jeho umělecká tvorba prochází změnou stejné intenzity jako autor sám. Eliota jako autora nelze oddělit od jeho děl. Jeho konverzi je proto nevyhnutelně třeba považovat za skutečně hluboký obrat se stejně hlubokým dopadem na jeho dílo, které je třeba vnímat jako zásadně změněné v důsledku zásadní proměny myšlení a prožívání samotného autora.

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