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IMAGES OF THE PROPHETS IN T.S. ELIOT'S EARLY POETRY

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There are characters in T.S. Eliot early works, who have the gift of foresight. That gift concerns mostly their own future. But if to consider the versatility and high degree of generalization of Eliot's poetic images, the warnings to the whole humanity can be seen in these self-predictions.

Introduction. Prophecies in Eliot's poetry and drama are more often mentioned in such works as "The Waste Land", "The Hollow People", "Ash Wednesday". But these prophetic elements originate in the earlier works, where we can find the images of prophets and precursors.

Task formulation. The early works of Eliot are less versatile and there is a predominance of the private, hence the main features of prophecy and the prophets are that they look inside themselves, and their predictions are about their own fate. Thus, studying Eliot's early poems may help to find the source of his later images of prophets.

Methods of research. The most striking images of the prophets are in such works as "Love Song J. Alfred Prufrock", "The Love Song of St. Sebastian", "Death of Saint Narcissus". Text analysis of each may help to get closer to understanding Eliot's idea of a prophet and prophecy.

The first poem is also the title one in the book "Prufrock and Other Observations", the other two works are included in the "Inventions of the March Hare". This poetry collection was published only after Eliot's death.

In the poem "Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" the main character is a prophet, who "tries on" the images of the famous biblical and literary characters. For example, in the text of the poem there is an allusion to John the Baptist:

Though I have seen my head (grown slightly bald) brought in upon a platter,
 I am no prophet – and here's no great matter; [1, c. 133].

Further Eliot develops the image of a forerunner in which Prufrock shares visions about his own destiny:

I've seen the moment of my greatness flicker,
 I have seen the eternal Footman hold my coat, and snicker ... [1, c. 133].

Besides Prufrock compares himself to Lazarus, which becomes prophetic, because the lack of recognition is one of the main features of a prophet's image in poetry. Prophets in literature are often associated with loneliness, persecution and ridicule. In Prufrock's case it is a life in vain. Prophecies are based on observations, cyclical time, the immutable course of events, repetitive actions, the traditional society in which Prufrock lives:

For I have known them all already, known them all:
 Have known the evenings, mornings, afternoons,
 I have measured out my life with coffee spoons;
 I know the voices dying with a dying fall
 Beneath the music from a farther room.
 So how should I presume? [1, c. 131]

Misunderstanding by the society is also represented in the poem. It is quite ironic and sarcastic, but not tragic as in classical literature. Prufrock himself understands he is ridiculous, that is why he never speaks his mind. He is afraid to be laughed at:

Would it have been worth while
 If one, settling a pillow or throwing off a shawl,
 And turning toward the window, should say:
 «That is not it at all,
 That is not what I meant, at all ». [1, c. 133].

Thus, Prufrock's predictions are not mysterious gifts from God, but derived from daily observations. We can understand that from the title of the poetry collection "Prufrock and Other Observations".

Several different images of the prophets are represented in the works "The Love Song of St. Sebastian" and "Death of Saint Narcissus", as in these poems it is more than mysticism.

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"The Love Song of St. Sebastian" combines eroticism and death:

Then you would take me in
Because I was hideous in your sight
You would take me in without shame
Because I should be dead
And when the morning came
Between your breasts should lie my head. »[3, c. 141]

This prediction is changed to just the opposite one in the following stanza:

You would love me because I should have strangled you
And because of my infamy;
And I should love you the more because I mangled you
And because you were no longer beautiful
To anyone but me. [3, c. 142]

Modal verbs "should" and "would" are often used to emphasize the prophetic tone of the narrative. That adds uncertainty, which creates the image of the mystical prophet.

In the poem "Death of Saint Narcissus" that image is more versatile. The cyclic nature of time represented by a number of rebirths of the main character. His prophecies of the future are based on the memories about his past lives:

First he was sure that he had been a tree,
Twisting its branches among each other
And tangling its roots among each other. [3, c. 211]

Metamorphosis continues further: Narcissus becomes a more complex creature who, one way or another, is doomed to death:

Then he knew that he had been a fish
With slippery white belly held tight in his own fingers,
Writhing in his own clutch, his ancient beauty
Caught fast in the pink tips of his new beauty. [3, c. 211]

So he comes to the realization that all living things are doomed to death. It is the future of every creature, he takes it and get killed once again:

So he became a dancer to God,
Because his flesh was in love with the burning arrows
He danced on the hot sand
Until the arrows came.
As he embraced them his white skin surrendered itself to the redness of blood,
and satisfied him. [3, c. 213]

Conclusion. Thus, we can conclude that in Eliot's early works present the images of the prophets, but their predictions are focused on themselves and do not belong to the future of civilization. At the same time by creating a universal character, generalized members of society, contemporary to Eliot self-predictions become universal.

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