
17.5 MARINA (1930)

17.5.1 Introduction

T.S. Eliot was, as you know, not only a poet but also a critic. He moulded the taste of his age both through his poetry and criticism. Poetry, Eliot said, 'is not the expression of personality, but an escape from personality'—and 'the more perfect the artist, the more completely separate in him will be the man who suffers and the mind which creates'. ('Tradition and the Individual Talent', 1917). Thus Eliot disapproved of criticism that sought to link works of art with their artists' lives. However, at times when we do so, we appreciate Eliot's poetry better.

'Marina' is another poem of the phase of optimism in Eliot's life. Eliot expresses it through the central symbol of Marina, daughter of Pericles in Shakespeare's play. Marina was born at sea and was thought to have been murdered by those in whose charge she had been left. She was miraculously restored to her father when she became a woman.

The narrator in the poem is Pericles and the poem is an example of dramatic monologue like the previous one.

Marina thus is a symbol of life where death had been accepted. She is a symbol of joy in place of the sorrow to which the poet had reconciled himself. Contrary to this spirit is the epigraph from Seneca's *Hercules Furens*. Hercules in a fit of madness, unknowingly, kills his children and after he returns to sanity wishes to see them alive and discovers his loss. Why is the epigraph, in spirit, contrary to the poem? Perhaps because Eliot believed in the dual nature of truth. Truth, in itself was neither good nor bad. You observed this in the last stanza of 'Journey of the Magi'.

Now read 'Marina'.

17.5.2 Text

*Quis hic locus, quae regio,
quae mundi plaga?*

What seas what shores what grey rocks and what islands
What water lapping the bow
And scent of pine and the woodthrush singing through the fog
What images return
O my daughter.

Those who sharpen the tooth of the dog, meaning
Death

Those who glitter with the glory of the hummingbird, meaning
Death

Those who sit in the sty of contentment, meaning
Death

Those who suffer the ecstasy of the animals, meaning
Death

Are become unsubstantial, reduced by a wind,
A breath of pine, and the woodsong fog
By this grace dissolved in place

What is this face, less clear and clearer
The pulse in the arm, less strong and stronger—
Given or lent? more distant than stars and nearer than the
eye

Whispers and small laughter between leaves and hurrying
feet

Under sleep, where all the waters meet.

Bowsprit cracked with ice and paint cracked with heat.

I made this, I have forgotten

And remember.

The rigging weak and the canvas rotten

Between one June and another September,

Made this unknowing, half conscious, unknown, my own.

The **garboard strake** leaks, the seams need **caulking**.

This form, this face, this life

Living to live in a world of time beyond me; let me

Resign my life for this life, my speech for that unspoken,

The awakened, lips parted, the hope, the new ships.

What seas what shores what granite islands towards my
timbers

And **woodthrush** calling through the fog

My daughter.

Glossary :

Bow : (Originally meaning 'shoulder') The forward part of a ship, beginning where the sides curve inward.

Stye : An infection of the skin at the bottom of an eyelash, which makes the eyelid red and swollen.

Bowsprit: A large spar running out from the stem of the vessel.

Garboard : The first range of planks laid upon a ship's bottom, next the keel.

Strake: grease.

Caulk : To fill the seams of, a ship or boat, with Oakum or other substance to prevent leaking.

T.S. Eliot's 'Marina' belongs to the group of poems which have been designated as 'The Ariel Poems' composed during 1927 and 1930. After his conversion to Anglicanism in 1927, Eliot began to write a new kind of poetry which "represented a withdrawal from the outer world and a quest for the inner life under the guidance of Christianity. The present poem, which relates to the theme of paternity, is based on Shakespeare's play 'Pericles, Prince of Tyre'. Marina was the only daughter of Pericles; she was born at sea and was named Marina which means 'of the sea'. Soon Pericles lost her as he was running away from his enemy facing miseries and threats on land and sea. It is in Act V of Shakespeare's play that Pericles realized that the dancer and singer performing before him was none else but his daughter. The dancing girl reminded him of his wife Thaisa, He talked to the girl, and became overjoyed to find that she was his daughter and that her mother had died while giving birth to her. Thus, the play ends in reconciliation. Marina has returned from a shipwreck that was presumed to have taken her life.

Eliot considers Act V of the play to be the most significant one, where reconciliation takes place. When the long lost Marina appears on the deck of the ship before the eyes of Pericles, he is filled with a refreshing sense of wonder and joy. The rediscovery of the daughter suggests his reunion with the lost 'innocence'. This awakens him from a nightmare of doubts and despair. His tone and his words suggest a sense of guilt for having constructed a defective ship, in which his daughter was believed to have lost her life. Marina emerges as the symbol of redemption and not the Christian Savior. She is a symbol of regeneration and re-birth out of death. The incident is so miraculous that it has all the surrealism as well as freshness of a dream and fills the heart of Pericles with ecstasy. A new, rejuvenating realization dawns upon him. In fact, at a deeper level, the poem presents the moment of spiritual reawakening which signifies a phase of transcendence from the limits of worldly life.

The opening two lines in Latin taken from Luscious the Younger Seneca's play, Hercules Furens, form the Epigraph to the poem. These lines express Hercules' sense of dismay and bewilderment when he wakes up from his cursed fit only to realize that he has killed his wife and children. Thus, the epigraph, suggests Hercules' sense of horror at what has happened: "What place is this? What region? What quarter of the world?" In a similar sense, the first stanza of the poem describes the despair and dejection of Pericles with everything in the past, which has bred in his mind the sinister idea about the death of his daughter. Everything reminds him of the death of his wife and daughter. Eliot also utilizes the Epigraph to contrast the tragic awakening of Hercules with the joyful experience of the new life which Marina's reunion with Pericles symbolizes.

In the second stanza, Pericles recalls the injustice and cruelties he has suffered in the mortal world. At the same time, he also reveals his realization as to what various forms of material obsession entail. The image 'dog' is a metaphor of evil. Another image of evil is the 'humming bird feeding on

insects while flying in the sky' shows the cruelties of Pericle's fellow-men who pretend to be sincere but try to stab in the back with a smile. Yet another image is that of a rotten ship built by Pericles and a new ship to be built by Marina. While standing on the sea shore, Pericles gets a vision of divine beauty. Marina becomes a vehicle of grace and a metaphor for the divine mercy. Naturally, her discovery signifies a lease of "renewed life" for the father. She emerges as a symbol of resurrection.

The third and fourth stanza resonate with optimism when, in breath of the pine tree spread all over by the wind, Marina reaches out to the mystery of 'grace dissolved in peace'. The face of Marina appears recognizable to Pericles slowly and gradually. The powerful association of the sea-world with the dream world is sensitively evoked by images and the musical flow of the verse. In Shakespeare's play, Pericles becomes ecstatic and hears the music which is not noticed by others. He believes it to be the music of spheres. In Eliot's poem, the music is that of the 'woodthrush singing through the fog'. The dominant images are the scent of pine, the sound of water at a bow, and of 'whispers' and small laughter." In this way, the happy image of the reclaimed daughter of Pericles is contrasted with the emotional reaction of Hercules containing negative implications.

The poem, written after Eliot's conversion to Christianity, has a deep religious overtone. In the poem, the narrator remembers the storm and the apparent death of his wife, and mourns the loss of his daughter. He views the temporal world as one in which death and decay are inevitable; only God, standing outside time is not subject to the law of decay. While what he wants is to transcend the human world of sorrow and loss in order to experience the ecstasy of the divine world. For that, the best he can do is to renounce the world of power and wealth and follow an ascetic life. This signifies the birth of a new life for him, in particular, his reunion with his daughter, which comes through the divine grace.

Thus, Marina is a poem about spiritual awakening; it suggests a quest for 'innocence' and creativity. The monologue seeks to capture precisely the moment of illumination where the boundaries between the dream and the reality remain blurred. Pericles is not sure which side he belongs to. His experience suggests a phase of transition. As in a dream, he stands on the deck of the vessel approaching the land from whose granite shores come the scent of pine and the song of wood thrush. The images arise out of some recollection of memories as he becomes conscious of his daughter's presence. The images objectify the emotion deep rooted in his mind. They help him transcend the memories of those men associated with the sins of envy, pride, sloth and concupiscence, and with the state of death consequent upon habitual sin. Such men are described in the brief passage, which begins with 'those' and repeats 'Death' at the end of each line. Thus, the old 'self' as well as the old 'ship' which has been battered by the passage of time and the blows of circumstances, and which was not given to any discipline, is now resigned to the child. The experience is so overwhelming that the father remains without the power of speech. This reunion of the old, decayed self with the child, with parted lips and renewed hope for the future, ensures a rejuvenated life for the father. In this way, a new ship will emerge out of the old and rotten one and will sail towards new, firm shores, following the note of the wood thrush through the fog. So, the poem closes on a note of affirmation and ecstasy; the voyager has found a new ship, discovered the right direction and can move forward to a secure anchorage.