

Transcultural Creative Expression and the Idea of “Felix Culpa” in Select Works of T.S. Eliot

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Introduction:

The concept of “Felix Culpa” or 'happy fault' refers to the idea that the fall of humanity, as depicted in the Christian tradition, ultimately leads to the greater good. This concept has been explored in *The wasteland* and other works of T.S. Eliot who often incorporated themes of modernity disillusionment redemption and human culture condition into his writings. In Eliot’s work the idea of transcultural expression is closely tied to the concept of Felix culpa as the fall of humanity allows for the mixing and intermingling of cultures and ideas leading to a greater understanding and appreciation of diversity. In *The wasteland* Eliot draws on wide range of cultural and literary sources including classical mythology, the Bible, Shakespeare and contemporary popular culture. The opening lines of the poem refer to the myth of the ‘Fisher king’ a figure from Arthurian legend who is associated with fertility and renewal. Eliot also makes references to Hindu deities and concepts in some of his works for example in his poem “The Hollow Men” Eliot makes reference to the Hindu deity Shiva who is associated with destruction and renewal. In his passage the “hollow men” are described as being like 'shape without form, and shade without colour' which may be a reference to the Hindu concept of Maya, the illusion of the material world that is believed to obscure the true nature of reality. Eliot also refers to Hindu deities and concepts in other works such as his poem ‘Ash Wednesday’ in which he alludes to the concept of moksha or spiritual liberation and his play ‘Murder in the Cathedral’ which incorporates themes and ideas of Hindu philosophy though the play is set in church and Christian tradition. Eliot’s use of transcultural references and allusions in his work shows interconnectedness of human experience and the universal themes that underpin all cultures.

The title transcultural creative expression and felix culpa refers to the examination of how well-known poet and literary critic T.S. Eliot employed the "felix culpa" literary device in his works. Felix culpa, which translates from Latin as "happy fault," expresses the idea that sinning or making a mistake can ultimately result in something good or helpful. The essay examines Eliot's usage of this idea and how it connects to the subject of transcultural artistic expression in his poems. T.S. Eliot's motivations for including cross-cultural analogies in his poetry are likely complex and may have been affected by a range of elements, including his upbringing and education, the social and political atmosphere of the time, and his personal aesthetic and literary aspirations. Eliot was a highly educated individual who had a passionate interest in literature, philosophy, and culture. His poetry draws on his in-depth knowledge of numerous cultures and traditions. He also lived during a period of colonialism, globalization, and the fallout from World War I

significantly impacted how the world was changing. Eliot's poetry expresses this alienation and confusion. These developments caused a sense of disintegration and dislocation in society. He also had a strong interest in myth, folklore, and religious practices from various civilizations, which he exploited to give his poetry a feeling of universality. He believed that by incorporating these allusions into his work, he would be able to examine well-known themes and concepts in fresh and original ways. He also intended to communicate that all cultures, customs, and faiths can live and work harmoniously together.

In *The Waste Land*, Eliot explores the theme of spiritual and cultural decay in the aftermath of World War I. Through a series of fragmented voices and allusions to myth and religion, Eliot suggests that the human condition is one of sin and despair but also one of redemption. The idea of 'Felix culpa' is present in the poem's portrayal of the fall of man and the possibility of redemption through suffering.

In T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*, the idea of 'Felix culpa' is present in the poem's portrayal of the fall of man and the possibility of redemption through suffering. The poem is set in the aftermath of World War I, a time of great spiritual and cultural decay, and it explores the theme of human despair and the search for redemption.

The poem is divided into five sections, each presenting a different perspective on the theme of the fall of man and the possibility of redemption. The first section, "The Burial of the Dead," introduces the theme of death and decay and the idea that the human condition is one of sin and despair.

The second section, "A Game of Chess," presents a vision of a society in which people are trapped in a cycle of sin and despair.

The third section, "The Fire Sermon," presents a vision of a society in which people are consumed by their desires and unable to find redemption.

The fourth section, "*Death by Water*," presents a vision of a society in which people are drowning in a sea of despair and unable to find redemption.

The fifth section, "*What the Thunder Said*," presents a vision of a society where people suffer from the consequences of their sins and need redemption.

On deep investigation of ancient Indian texts, we find a similar idea from Bhadaranyaka Upnishad

असतो मा सद्गमय ।

तमसो मा ज्योतिर्गमय ।

मृत्योर्मा अमृतं गमय ।

अमृतम् सर्वपापेभ्यो मोक्षयिष्यसि ॥

Translation: "From ignorance, lead me to truth; from darkness, lead me to light; from death, lead me to immortality. May I be liberated from all sin and attain peace."

In the Hindu scripture the Manusmriti:

प्रपन्नमन्दतमसुखम् ।

जीवन्मृत्युः कृतमहम् ।

नास्ति पुण्यमसि मुक्तिः ।

पापेभ्यः परमापथम् ॥

Translation: "I have created this cycle of birth and death, full of sorrow and devoid of happiness. There is no path to liberation for those who are burdened with sin."

Throughout the poem, Eliot uses a range of literary and cultural references, including the Bible, Greek mythology, and the Hindu Upanishads, to create a sense of universality in his portrayal of the fall of man and the possibility of redemption. The idea of 'felix culpa' is present in the poem as a way of expressing the human condition and the possibility of redemption through suffering.

In "The Waste Land," the idea of 'felix culpa' can be seen as Eliot's way of suggesting that the fall of man was necessary for the redemption of humanity. The poem presents a vision of a society in which people are trapped in a cycle of sin and despair, but also suggests that redemption is possible through suffering. This idea of 'felix culpa' is closely tied to the poem's theme of spiritual and cultural decay, and it relates to the idea that redemption can be found in the most unlikely of places.

The concept of 'felix culpa' is also explained in Bhagwad Geeta verse 2.13 it states

"अविनाशि तु न च निनाशि क्षयं क्षयकृत्क समाविष्टः ।

अपरं परमात्मनि यथा सर्वं सम्पद्यते नरः ॥"

Translation: "For the soul, there is neither birth nor death at any time. He has not come into being, does not come into being, and will not come into being. He is unborn, eternal, ever-existing and primeval. He is not slain when the body is slain."

This verse is spoken by Lord Krishna in the *Bhagavad Gita*, and it suggests that the soul is eternal and unchanging, and that the cycle of birth and death is necessary for the soul's journey towards redemption. It also implies that the fall of man is not something to be feared, as it is a necessary step in the journey towards ultimate redemption.

This shloka is one of the many examples of the Hindu belief in the cyclical nature of existence, and the idea that the fall of man is necessary for redemption is an important concept in Hinduism. Through this verse, Lord Krishna is teaching the concept of 'Atma' (soul) which is eternal, unborn, and never dies, only the body dies and the soul takes on another form.

Eliot's work is characterized by its rich intertextuality and allusions to a variety of cultural and literary traditions. This transcultural approach to creative expression is evident in his use of myth, religion, and literature from different cultures. In "The Waste Land," for example, Eliot draws on a wide range of literary and cultural references, including the Bible, Greek mythology, and the Hindu Upanishads. In "Four Quartets," he draws on the Christian tradition and references to the Bhagavad Gita.

The idea of 'Felix culpa' in some works of T.S. Eliot is closely tied to his transcultural approach to creative expression. By drawing on various cultural and literary traditions, Eliot creates a sense of universality. The idea of 'Felix culpa' is present in his work to express the human condition and the possibility of redemption through suffering, a theme in many different cultures and traditions.

In "Four Quartets," Eliot explores the theme of time and the human desire for transcendence. The idea of 'Felix culpa' is present in the poem's portrayal of the human desire for redemption and the possibility of transcendence through suffering. Eliot uses imagery and symbolism to convey the theme of time and the human desire for transcendence. For example, the rose garden's recurring image represents life's fleeting nature and the idea that beauty and perfection are fleeting and temporary. The image of the dry riverbed represents the idea that the past is dry and barren but necessary for growth and spiritual development. Hence the the very idea of "Felix Culpa" is evident in this work as well.

Eliot's references to Buddhism is highlighted by many critics mainly in 'Fire Sermon' in the collection of poem *The Waste Land*. In this section, Eliot references the Buddhist "Fire Sermon," which is a teaching delivered by the Buddha that warns against the dangers of lust, desire, and the thirst for sensual pleasure. The Buddha says that these desires are like a fire that burns and consumes the individual, leading to suffering. In Eliot's poem, the "Fire Sermon" section is a fragmented and fragmented depiction of sexual desire and its destructive effects on the modern individual. Through the use of vivid imagery and allusions, Eliot portrays a world consumed by lust and desire, where people are reduced to mere objects of gratification for one another. He suggests that this state of affairs is leading to a spiritual and cultural waste land, a world devoid of meaning and purpose. Eliot presents a world that is in a state of spiritual and cultural decay, much like the fall from grace in the Garden of Eden. Yet, like the *felix culpa*, he suggests that this decay is necessary for a new era of spiritual renewal to emerge. The poem can be seen as a meditation on the idea that a crisis or a fall from grace can serve as a catalyst for spiritual awakening and growth. Through its portrayal of a fragmented and disillusioned world, the poem invites the reader to contemplate the possibility of redemption and spiritual renewal in a world that seems devoid of meaning and purpose after the first World war.

Popular buddhist text *Dhammapada* explains similar idea, so it could be possible that Eliot might have derived the concept from here.

Manopubbaṅgamā dhammā, mano seṭṭhā manomayā; Manasā ce paduṭṭhena, bhāsati vā karoti vā, Tato naṃ dukkhamanveti, cakkam'va vahato padaṃ."

Buddhist text in pali suggesting idea of *Felix culpa*.

The following verse from the Buddhist scripture *Dhammapada* expresses a similar idea:

"All that we are is the result of what we have thought: it is founded on our thoughts, it is made up of our thoughts. If a man speaks or acts with an evil thought, pain follows him, as the wheel follows the foot of the ox that draws the carriage." - Dhammapada 1.1-2 This verse suggests that actions and thoughts have consequences but also that they shape our experiences and create opportunities for growth and transformation.

This paper has demonstrated how the idea of 'Felix Culpa' is present in selected works of T.S. Eliot and how it relates to the theme of transcultural creative expression. Through a close analysis of Eliot's poetry,



it has been shown that the idea of 'felix culpa' is present in his work as a way of expressing the human condition and the possibility of redemption through suffering. Eliot's transcultural approach to creative expression is evident in his use of myth, religion, and literature from different cultures, which creates a sense of universality in his work.

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