



Research Paper

## From Waste Land to Wonderland: Eliotian Overtones in Ruskin Bond's *Duels with Evil*

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### Abstract

Ruskin Bond is the magus of Mussoorie. Perhaps, that is why, he is pied piper of the Indian Children's Literature in English. In other words, he is a Blake, with hundreds of poems and stories on/about child like innocence. Very much like T. S. Eliot, Ruskin Bond has got over the trauma of being cabined in the evil-bedeveled waste land to sing songs of spiritual resurgence in the wonderland of green dreams, written in green ink, under the trees on the hills and in the valleys in Dehradun and Mussoorie. To do justice to the critical thrust of this research the methodology of (i) "Comparative Criticism", (ii) close intensive study of texts chosen and (iii) CDA (critical discourse analysis) is to be followed. Illustrative material is to be drawn from T. S. Eliot's "The waste Land", "Ariel Poems" and "Ash Wednesday" to ferret out the contours of his "waste land" and "wonder land".

**Keywords:** Children's Literature, Ruskin Bond, Eliotian Overtones, Evil.

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Ruskin Bond is the magus of Mussoorie. Perhaps, that is why, he is pied piper of the Indian Children's Literature in English. In other words, he is a Blake, with hundreds of poems and stories on/about child like innocence. Yet for Bond scholars like Kailash Ahluwalia and R. P. Chaddah, he is also the T. S. Eliot of India, or otherwise, the poet of experience. Hence, Ahluwalia and Chaddah have heard "Blakean overtones of innocence and experience" in Bond literature, especially in "The Room on the Roof". Yet Bondian scholarship suffers from paucity of "secondary material for reference" (Raj, 2016). It is so because in the opinion of Raj, "critical framework for looking at Bond's works have been relatively less and sometimes even absent" (28). It is no wonder, Bond's scholars have been critiquing Bond's literature from a set of norm-grilled perspectives such as "style", "humor", "nature", "imagery", "eco-criticism", "eco-feminism", "bildungsroman", "regionalism" and supernaturalism. Hence, despite their individual merit and devotion, critical works of Bond's scholars like Meena G Khorana (2009), Arpita Sinha (2010), Ashutosh Sharma (2009), G. Fatma (2013), Felix Nayak (1998), Nagendra Prasad (1995), Ifat Ara (2010), Vedant Arya (2016), Madhu D. Singh (2015), Manish D. Bhatt (1991), R. S. Sharma (2000), Vanashree Tripathy (2000), G. Kaur (2017), Chetan Trivedi (2012), Aisha Abbas (2019), Sandeep Sharma (2019), L. Srividya (2016), V. Valarmathi (2016), N. B. Malichakar (2017) and M. J. Benny Joseph Mukarel (2013) have not managed to guide the Bond scholar into uncharted critical "contours" (Singh, 1995, 12). Hence, the topic sentence is that Bond scholarship is in dire need of multi-prong probes.

To do justice to the intended research-in-progress, a demystificatory statement of facts, bare facts, related to the Central thesis is attempted in this section.

Since Bond literature is a "multi- coloured" glass (Guha, 2019) approaches to this multi-foliate corpus of literature should be diverse. In other words, no singleton theory can do justice to Bond literature of this "Visual Writer". To make Bond scholarship more exciting, this literature may be critiqued from unexpected/unimagined perspectives. So Bond scholars like Norah Nivedita Shaw (2008) and Arun Pal (2019) have critiqued it from the perspectives of spousal incompatibility, resulting in severance of the marital bond, causing/breeding acute loneliness/depression/stress (Shaw, 6), "myth" (Shaw, 9), "evil" (Shaw, 11), "flight", "search for identity" (Arun Pal), "happiness" (Bond, *Scenes from Writer's Life*, 114), "a rich and fulfilling life" (V. Arya), "violence", "order", and "anxiety of influence" (Bloom, 1975, 12), hence literary "roots". From among the topic suggested by Shaw, Pal and K. Naseem (2000), "evil" and "spousal incompatibility" are found to be more engaging because these two critical stances link Ruskin Bond with T. S. Eliot. Furthermore, by working on the nexus between Bond and Eliot, it can be proved that like Dickens, Thoreau, Hugh Walpole, William Saroyan, Kalidas, Kabir, R.K. Narayan, R.

N. Tagore, Richard Jefferies and Lao-tzu, some of the acknowledged and recognized exemplars for Ruskin Bond, T. S. Eliot has also exerted some influence on Bond.

In the light of the prolegomenon stated above, it is specified that the principal aim of this paper is to prove that-

- a) Ruskin Bond has been jolted by the evil of spousal incompatibility between his parents to affect his version of "the waste land".
- b) Very much like T. S. Eliot, Ruskin Bond has got over the trauma of being cabined in the evil-bedeveled waste land to sing songs of spiritual resurgence in the wonderland of green dreams, written in green ink, under the trees on the hills and in the valleys in Dehradun and Mussoorie, and
- c) Bond's literature is not adversely affected by the "severe limitation" of "the absence of evil" (Shaw, 11). So, this paper is an exercise of averment of points "a" and "b" and rebuttal of the point "c".

To do justice to the critical thrust of this research the methodology of (i) "Comparative Criticism", (ii) close intensive study of texts chosen and (iii) CDA (critical discourse analysis) is to be followed.

Illustrative material is to be drawn from T. S. Eliot's "The Waste Land", "Ariel Poems" and "Ash Wednesday" to ferret out the contours of his "waste land" and "wonder land".

Illustrative materials shall be drawn from Ruskin Bond's "The Funeral", "Susanna's Seven Husbands", "The Flight of Pigeons", "The Playing Fields of Simla", "A Song for Lost Friends", "The Best of Ruskin Bond", "The Lone Fox Dancing" and "Ganga Descends" to prove apodictically that like both William Blake and T. S. Eliot, R. Bond's Muse has traversed the epistemic distance between "experience" and "innocence", hence between "evil" and "virtue", to move from the waste land to the wonderland of his syncretic imagination.

T. S. Eliot is as much a poet of the darkness of soul, hence evil, as that of both the twilight gloom and celestial light. That is why, if his poetical works up to the "Ariel Poems" (Hugh Kenner, 62) are the continents of darkness, under the total thrall of EVIL, his poetical works after "Ash Wednesday" and up to the "Four Quartets" are epiphanies of enlightenment, hence of virtue. So, to move from one pole to the other pole of Eliot's bipolar poetry is to move from his waste land to his wonderland. That is why, it can be said that his is a schizoid personality, having two selves intertwined.

T. S. Eliot in his formative stage as a poet has been acutely conscious of all sorts of evil. Like Jules Laforgue, Charles Bandelaire, Charles Maurras, and Arthur Symons he has diagnosed evils in city streets, city slums, city rivers and city skies. Among the evils that have shocked him the following are conspicuous: materialism, violence, passion, sexuality, sensuality and pride. So "theodicy" is as much prominent in Eliot's "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" (S. Brooker, 2009, 69) as in "Preludes". The fire in Prufrock indicates Eliot's "awareness of evil" (Brooker, 70). Hence, Scott Freer and Michael Bell in *Religion and Myth in T. S. Eliot's Poetry* (2016) have re-defined Eliot's poems on/about "Damnation"/ "Fallenness" of man (Scott Freer, 77). Similarly, in *Gerontion* (1920) and "The Waste Land" (1922) are basically modern about modern man's vulnerability to evil. Nidhi Tiwari has put the critical arc light on the archetypes, myths and legends, associated with the evil iconographed by T. S. Eliot. In this discursive analysis, Nidhi has defined evil in the archetype of "fatal woman and betrayal" (2001, 41). Really this "fatal woman" has made "man"/ hence Adam, "hollow", "a handful of dust" ("The Waste Land", "The Burial of the Dead") and hence, spiritually/ethically "Dead", so "a heap of broken images", never in the image of God, the Father. She could be "Madame Sesestris", "Belladonna" and SIN, but never a Mary. Hence T. S. Eliot's poetry is about "the relationship between evil and ethics". (Damian Catani, 2013, 260-270). The bottom-line is that while writing "The Waste Land," Eliot has felt "the evil-ness of the fatal woman" (Jain, 1992, 207).

T. S. Eliot has been stung by the "figura" of fatal woman such as Lilith, Medusa, Sin, Pandora, all belonging to the world of foul. In the opinion of Eliot, some of the women in his poetry at least up to the "Waste Land" are in "negative shades" and "evil" because their rabid/vapid materialistic attitude, deceitfulness, tendency to betray and factitiousness. As test cases, women in T. S. Eliot's "Song of J. Alfred Prufrock", "The Portrait of a Lady" and "Waste Land" are usually scrutinized. As one enters Eliot's mature poetical works, images of such fatal women are thinned out and images of virtuous women, in the world of Penelope, Marina, Beatrice, Laura, et al mushroom. No more, one comes across the woman who is a cold seducer, temptress, full of "smoke and fog", not fit for any true lover. That is why, if "Waste Land"/ "Portrait of a Lady" is a sexual tragedy because of fatal women in them, and their immoderate desires begetting moral atrophy and confusion and "hysteria", they are so because the sybils in them are in "a condition of unwanted life". (Williams, 33)

Eliot himself has suffered a lot for the waste lander in the "fatal woman" controlling the being and becoming his wife, Vivienne Haigh Wood. Ruffled and Shaken by this precipitous marriage, Eliot has suffered

inexorably from disillusionment, anxiety and pessimism. He has been further rattled by the menacing brazenness of the Nazism, growing stronger and stronger. He has failed to see/trace any life-giving elixir in Vivienne, who like the lady in the "Portrait of a Lady", has been speaking balderdash without thinking. So, Eliot has been in the paw/jaw of the cruelest marriage. He has lost "the motif of doing a girl" ("The Waste Land"). All these factors have taken him away, both mentally and emotionally, from his wife. So, he has felt the bites of isolation, disorderliness, chaos, anarchy, loss, failure and Tiresias-ness. His personal faith in life and life-giving forces has dried up. He has lost his "power of sowing" and has no hope of harvesting. In other words, his personal faith has been dying. His Anglicanism, his religion has failed to sustain his soul, much shattered by the disenchantment with marriage. So, he has become the voice of the lost, the waste landers (EllienKoczela, 2014). Stung by the snake of "Infidelity" (The Cocktail Party), he has understood how and why "there is nothing to escape from and nothing to escape into" (T. S. Eliot). With this "State of mind" (T. S. Eliot), he has immersed himself in his workshop of poetry to "escape from emotion" and "escape from personality" (T.S. Eliot). So, he has himself clarified, the spousal incompatibility and the resultant severance of marriage with Vivienne Haigh Wood, "gave the state of mind out of which came the 'Waste Land'" (T. S. Eliot). And as a mature poet, he has not imitated any exemplar/model, he has "stolen" ideas from a library of text icons. Hence, the genesis of the "Waste Land" is rooted in the persona/figura of "the female other" isolated and isolating.

Naturally therefore, it is quite logical enough to suggest that to move from Eliot's Waste Land into his wonder land is to search out and to look for all the life-supporting and soul-sustaining "animas" (C.G. Jung). In poems like "Marina", "Journey of the Magi", "Ash Wednesday" and "Four Quartets" in which Eliot has poeticized "the theme of quest for a meaning and spiritual and moral value in a materialistic society" (Shodhganga, 90), "the unifying factor" is the female redeemer of the quester, who is not a "man of impulse but a dreamer" (Henri Bergson, 1913, 198). So "the rose-garden imagery" is made more powerful than the image of the distracting "perfume from dresses". If the fatal woman has been quite repulsive, the idealized woman is quite liberating, liberating man from "the forces of evil, let loose upon the worldlike beasts of prey." (Patricia, M. Adair, 1990, 487). So, the lady redeemer emancipates from "the terrible powers of cruelty and evil in man himself" (Adair, 487). Thus "all degradation is not "unredeemable" (T. S. Eliot, "The Family Reunion" p.82). In a nutshell, Eliot's "Wonderland" is bright, sweetly scented both animated and animating because of the divine presence of the "bright angels" (T. S. Eliot, "The Family Reunion", 157), like Mary who has put Harry "on the path of spiritual regeneration" (Shodhganga, 124). And as Eliot has himself declared Emily Hale has been his "bright angel" redeeming the waste lander in him to be domiciled in the wish wood of the wonderland in the wish space.

Ruskin Bond is not a T.S.Eliot. And he does not require to be so because he has every right to be himself. Yet it is quite logical to suggest that he must have read, enjoyed and understood the works of Eliot. Considering the range and depth of his liberal studies, it is not inappropriate to make this guess. Only can Bond tell the world if he has been an Eliot reader or not. Till such clarification is obtained, it is submitted that he has at least been exposed, however, partially it could be, to Eliot's poetry of the Wastelanders and to that of the Eliotian wonderlanders. Hence, it is quite appropriate to look for the traces of Eliot's impact on Bond's poetics of Wastelanders and Wonderland. Some of the points of commonness which lead the researcher to affect a viable comparative criticism involving Eliot's works and Bond's are:

- spousal incompatibility and its backlash in the form of annulment of marriage,
- iconography of evil,
- quest for redemption and expiation and
- valorization of soul-sustaining support-system in the wonderland, both real and imagined.

Hence, a four-pronged investigation is made and recorded with regard to a comparative study of Eliot's works as well as Bond's.

Eliot has been jolted psychologically and emotionally by the tremors caused by the spousal incompatibility between himself and his wife, Vivienne. Ruskin Bond, at the age of eight, has been soul-shocked by the marital discord between his father Aubrey Alexander Bond and his mother Edith Clarke Bond. The shocking picture of their strained lives is mirrored in their works. The syndromes of iconography of evil are reflected in Bond's 'A Flight of Pigeons', "A Song for Lost Friends", "The Playing Fields of Simla" *et al.* Similarly, the quest for redemption and expiation is noticeable in the works of both Eliot and Bond. The Bondian wonderland is both real and imaginary, as pointed out by A. Pal. Thus, in his wonderland, Bond has been looking for "the colours of life", "a little night music", "a bright new poem" and "The rushing waters of the Ganga".

With reference to the discussion as made above, it is concluded that for Ruskin Bond, T. S. Eliot has been an exemplar. That is why, he has been as much critical of the fatal charm of the fatal woman as T. S. Eliot has been. Jolted by the morbidity of his mother who has left her husband to live with another man, Ruskin Bond

has been shaken. And so, in various kinds of works he has written, he has harped on evil in "LaBelleDameSansMerci". Thus, in his Eliotian wastelands the image of the temptress is as prominent as the fatal women in Eliot's "Song of J. Alfred Prufrock", "A Portrait of a Lady" and "The Waste Land". So, it is averred that evil is not minimalized in Bond's works. With this, the thesis of N Shaw is rebutted. Yet Ruskin Bond is not merely a wastelander. Like Eliot, he has been quite responsive to the melody, beauty, magic and purity of the wonderland, both real and fabled. Hence, Bond, the "maker" of various works, has two selves, not at loggerheads with each other but plenishing and replenishing each other as the yang and yin of his creative self.

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