The Spirituality of T. S. Elliot

❖

The Waste Land

INTRODUCTION

THE DESERT

The desert is ambiguous; is both bad and good. It is dry, lonely, dangerous, but for religious people it has always had a deep spiritual meaning. Eliot brings out this meaning in *Four Quartets*[1] but pointedly excludes it from *The Waste Land*. The waste land is just that: a lifeless wilderness.[2] It is what redemption is from.

The waste land is, more and more, our own civilization, and the reader should feel a part of the scenery. The poem has a "spectator", Tiresias, and what Tiresias "sees" is us.[3] Eliot himself is a character in *The Waste Land*; he included autobiographical material in earlier drafts of the work: his falling in love and unhappy marriage, his revulsion for the financial "City", his confession of personal flaws, his spiritual uncertainty and yearning for deliverance. Eliot speaks to us in the words of French poet Charles Baudelaire:

> Reader, you hypocrite— my brother, like unto me",[4]

for

> We are the hollow men
> We are the stuffed men
> Leaning together
> Headpiece filled with straw.[5]

Moses, John the Baptist, and Jesus went into the wilderness. The early Christian "desert fathers" abandoned the city, which they thought to be decadent, to seek God by themselves in the wilderness. Eliot's Puritan ancestors came to a "desert land" in America to enter God's kingdom. This is the pattern: getting through the waste land in search of possible deliverance.[6]

THE SIBYL

Eliot introduces *The Waste Land* with an epigraph, in Latin and Greek, from Gaius Petronius, a Roman "novelist" who in his *Satyricon* tells of a mysterious Greek prophetess, the Sibyl of Cumae. According to the Latin author Ovid, the Sibyl asked the god Apollo to give her, in exchange for her virginity, as many years of life as the grains of sand she held in her hand—but she forgot to ask him for eternal youth. Apollo, then rejected by her, granted her no more favors and allowed her to grow old. Now she is a wrinkled old woman, locked in a cage, wishing only to renounce her immortality.

> With mine own eyes I saw the Sibyl hanging in a vessel, and when the boys asked her
>
> Sibyl, what dost thou wish?
>
> she replied
>
> I with to die.[7]

The Sibyl, a decaying prisoner of time hoping only for death, symbolizes the waste land: London between the World Wars, our modern age since the Renaissance, us.

The Sibyl was famous in Christendom because she was thought to have predicted the coming of Christ. The *Dies Irae*, the famous sequence of the mass of the dead, begins:

> The day of wrath, that day,
> will dissolve the world into ash,
> as David witnesses with the Sibyl.[8]

The Waste Land begins as a funeral and ends in a doomsday apocalypse. The source of the prediction is the "Messianic Eclogue" the Roman poet Virgil, written about a half century before birth of Jesus.[9] According to the Greek poet Hesiod, the five ages of man have decreased in value: the first was of gold and the last of iron.[10] The waste land, like the Sybil, will go on coming to an end.

In his notes on *The Waste Land*, Eliot explained how anthropological studies influenced his conception of the poem.[11] Ancient stories about a land wasted and later restored suggest that human beings know they need re-

demption and may expect to find it. In the legend of the holy Grail, redemption comes through a knight like Parsifal, who ventures into the desert in search of the cup that Jesus used at the Last Supper.

In the story of the Fisher King, redemption comes through a nature-god who rises again in the spring from the death of winter. Fishing will be a symbol of seeking the Divine in *The Waste Land*. Eliot was not thinking so much of sitting on a pier with a pole waiting for a bite, but venturing out into a dangerous sea like the brave fishermen Eliot admired as a boy in Glouchester, Massachusetts. Seeking God means going to sea— not once, but again and again.[12] The fish was also an early Christian symbol; the word in Greek ἰχθύς (ichthys) is an acronym of "Jesus Christ, Son of God, Savior".

Mythology suggests that it is natural to hope life will win out over death, but waste land dwellers do not know that the myths may, after all, be true.

DEDICATION TO POUND

The American poet Ezra Pound introduced Eliot to London literary circles and helped him revise *The Waste Land*. The Italian phrase ("the better craftsman") was the tribute that Dante paid the Provençal troubadour Arnaut Daniel.[13] Eliot will mention him at the end of the poem.[14] Dante, who lived in Italy around 1300, was the author of the great medieval epic, *The Divine Comedy*, a "guided tour" of hell, purgatory, and heaven. Eliot will imitate his famous verse form, *terza rima* (interlocking tercets) in *Little Gidding*.

THE BURIAL OF THE DEAD

WL-I: THE BURIAL OF THE DEAD

The first part of the poem begins with death and religion. The title is from the Anglican *Book of Common Prayer*.[15] The hope to live again which fills the beautiful Christian burial service is absent from the waste land.

WL-Ia: The two Aprils (lines 1-18)

The Waste Land begins:

> April is the cruelest month.

Eliot´s April is "cruel", because it contrasts with Chaucer´s April. Renaissance poet Geoffrey Chaucer began his *Canterbury Tales* in this way:

> April with its showers sweet
> The drought of March hath pierced to the root,
> And bathed every vein in such liquid,
> Of which virtue engendered is the flower….

The poem tells the story of a company of pilgrims on their way to Canterbury

> The Holy Blissful Martyr for to seek
> Who them hath helped when that they were sick.

The martyr was St. Thomas à Becket, archbishop of Canterbury who was murdered by King Henry II. Eliot portrayed the events in his drama *Murder in the Cathedral*.

During Chaucer´s April everything was coming alive. Winter had passed, the sky was no longer grey, the earth no longer hard; flowers were opening, birds were singing. The people shared in this joy, the expectation of wellness. April is also the month of Easter, when Jesus lived again.

In the waste land no Easter lilies grow. Rather, roots clutch at the stony soil; the sun beats down on the rocks and there is no water to be heard. In *Murder in the Cathedral* the chorus of the common people speaks these words, as if of the waste land:

> What sign of the spring of the year?
> Only the death of the old: not a stir, not a shoot, not a breath
> Do the days begin to lengthen?
> Longer and darker the day, shorter and colder the night.[16]

Waste land dwellers are not even aware that they are missing something to hope for.

Suddenly the scene changes. A group of elegant tourists are drinking coffee in the *Hofgarten* in Munich, fleeing from a cloudburst over the Starnberger lake, a fashionable nearby resort. The woman's anxious protest contrasts with the conviviality and reveals the cultural insecurity of Europeans displaced between the two world wars:

> I'm not a Russian at all; I'm a real German from Lithuania.

Marie remembers how frightened she was when she was a little girl and her cousin, the archduke, took her sledding. Wealthy Englishmen, too, used to travel to southern Europe to escape the London fog. Eliot himself suffered inhibitions; in discarded versions of this section of *The Waste Land*, he confessed his first shy attempts to launch out into a world of sophistication which ended in disenchantment.

WL-Ib: Lovelessness (19-42)

The scene shifts again, now to a Biblical drought: a wilderness of stone and sun where nothing can take root and grow. Eliot refers to the books of Ezekiel and Ecclesiastes in his note.[17] God addressed the prophet Ezekiel:

> Son of man, stand up on thy feet!
> I am sending thee to the children of Israel,
> to a rebellious nation that has risen up against Me.

But the Israelites did not listen to the prophet, they did not "turn back". Ezekiel was speaking of the northern Hebrew kingdom of Israel, which had been annihilated over a century before by the Assyrians.[18] He was actually addressing the southern kingdom, Juda, when it was under attack by Babylonian invaders, who would destroy the temple of Jerusalem (586 b. C.) and deport the population. Ezekiel himself was in this "Babylonian captivity".[19] The two wayward Hebrew kingdoms, then, just as the waste land, were beyond recall.

The Book of Daniel speaks of another "Son of Man", a mysterious being at the end of time:

> Behold, one like the son of man,
> coming with the clouds of heaven!...
> His dominion is everlasting and shall not pass away.[20]

The early Christians called Jesus the "son of man" in the context of the *eschaton*, the "last thing", "the age to come".[21] The waste land itself is an eschatology, and the apocalyptic imagery will be explicit in the fifth part of the poem.

We have our own personal eschatologies. The "cricket" giving "no relief" recalls Ecclesiastes describing the "evil days" of growing old. The Biblical text has "grasshopper" or "cicada", of which Eliot will speak later.[22] The old person

> rises at the twitter of birds,
> but all the daughters of song are brought low,
> and he fears the heights and terrors along the way.
> The grasshopper is a burden…
> But man goes to his timeless home
> and his mourners wind through the streets

in his funeral procession.[23] Our poor "heap of broken images", our lost traditions, do not avail us any more than the vaguely hopeful "fragments" of poetry that Eliot will scatter at the end of *The Waste Land* to "shore against" our "ruins".[24]

God led Ezekiel around the valley of the dry bones and asked him:

> • Son of man, shall these bones live?

and he answered:

O Lord God, thou knowest.

And after prophesying to the bones as God commanded him,

...suddenly there came a rattling noise,
and the bones came together, bone to bone....
Sinews and flesh came upon them, skin covered them over,...
breath came into them, and they lived.[25]

No breath of life, no "holy spirit", comes into the waste land. Eliot will parody Ezekiel in *Ash Wednesday*; God said:

Prophesy to the wind, to the wind only for only
The wind will listen. And the bones sang chirping
With the burden of the grasshopper.[26]

The shelter of the "red rock" recalls another contrast with Biblical promises. The prophet Isaiah said that the ideal king would shelter his people:

as a hiding place from the wind, a cover from the storm;
as rivers of water in a dry place,
the shade of a great rock in a weary land.[27]

No king will end the drought in the waste land.

The red rock is like a Hebrew altar covered with the blood of sacrifice or like the rock of the church. Both images suggest the redeeming love of God. Ezekiel's warning to the mountains of Israel has come true for the waste land:

Thus says the Lord:
thine altars shall be laid waste;
before thine idols I shall cast down thy slain
and scatter their bones about thine altars.[28]

And from the rock's shadow the poet will show us "something different"; not life brought back, not water to refresh the land, but only "fear". And it will remind us of the "dust" of death, as the priest on Ash Wednesday when he rubs ashes into the forehead of the kneeling penitent:

Remember, oh man, that thou art dust,
and unto dust shalt thou return.[29]

In the morning of life, as we walk ahead facing the rising sun, unconcerned about death, our shadow follows behind us. But our shadow soon overtakes us, and as the evening draws near the setting sun, now behind us, casts our shadow further and further forward until it "meets" us in the night of death. In *The Hollow Men*, which contains material originally intended for *The Waste Land*, Eliot speaks of the rose

Of death's dream kingdom
The hope only
Of empty men,

yet he goes on to say that "the Shadow" (now capitalized, perhaps the Holy Spirit) intervenes in both divine and human choice:

For Thine is
Life is
For Thine is the
For Thine is the Kingdom.[30]

But it is not the course of life that we are being shown from under the shadow of the rock, but death.

In an earlier poem, Eliot wrote of a would-be saint, a "dancer to God", who

could not live men's ways....
So he came out to live under the rock

in the wilderness.[31] This "desert father" has forsaken the city of the damned and taken refuge under a rock in the desert. From this vantage point he would witness the destruction to be visited upon his civilization. But, just as later characters in *The Waste Land* —the "burning" penitent, the traveler to Emmaus, the questing knight—[32] his spiritual plans will fall apart.

Lovelessness is a prominent feature of the waste land, and Eliot comes back to the theme in a series of vignettes in which he invites us to see, from under the rock, how the chance to love is lost. In Richard Wagner's opera *Tristan and Isolde*, the heroine Isolde, as she is sailing away from Ireland, hears a sailor singing about his lost lover:

Fresh blows
The wind homeward;
Where art thou,
My Irish child?

Isolde's lover Tristan lies wounded in Brittany, and only she has the healing power to save him. Tristan anxiously asks a shepherd if he sees her ship coming near, but he can only reply:

Waste and empty the sea.

Then Tristan dies and Isolde commits suicide.

In the second vignette, the Hyacinth maiden —the flower is a symbol of sex, love, life—, comes to her friend offering love. But he cannot return her love, he cannot even speak for he knows nothing.[33] But his ignorance is not the unknowing which is the result of the purification of knowledge, described in the English spiritual classic, *The Cloud of Unknowing*, which Eliot will quote in *Four Quartets*.[34] His "silence" is not the "silent music" of St. John of the Cross he quotes in Dry Salvages. [35] Nor is the emptiness of the sea whence Tristan hopes for deliverance the selflessness which, the saint explains, comes in the night of the spirit.[36]

At the time of his graduation from Harvard, Eliot had an intense experience of silence which anticipated his quiet vision "out of heart of light" in the rose-garden, which he will describe in *Burnt Norton*.[37] But the vision in the hyacinth garden is not the vision in the rose-garden. In the waste land, the man hears nothing—literally; he looks into "the heart of light" without seeing it. He seems rather to see a heart of darkness, the title of the novel of Joseph Conrad *The Heart of Darkness*. Eliot once chose, and later rejected, a passage from Conrad's work as an epigraph to *The Waste Land*; he said he thought the passage was "somewhat elucidative" of the poem.[38] The narrator is speaking of the death, deep in the African jungle, of Mr. Kurtz, the mad European ivory trader:

He cried in a whisper at some image, as some vision
—he cried out twice, a cry that was no more than a breath—
The horror! the horror!

Eliot did use another quotation from Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* as the epigraph of *The Hollow Men*. Mr. Kurtz, called "hollow at the core" in the novel, dwells in the waste land:

This is the dead land
This is cactus land,

where prayer breaks apart and the world ends

Not with a bang but a whimper.

The epigraph is the announcement by the native servant:

Mistah Kurtz— he dead.

WL-Ic: On the cards (43-59)

The "famous" fortune-teller Madame Sosostris, thought to be "the wisest woman in Europe", is not unlike spiritual guides today who distort and commercialize ancient lore. Eliot in a note explains his own reading of the tarot cards which she uses in her business. She is a "clairvoyant" like the "spectator" Tiresias,[39] but what she "sees" in the cards is a jumble of waste land characters —merging into one another, many to reappear later in the poem.

The Phoenician sailor is the "one-eyed merchant" Mr. Eugenides.[40] The "blank card he carries", which Mme Sosostris is "forbidden to see", symbolizes what is "different" from ordinary waste-land experience, from what we saw from under the rock: the uncanny. An example is the mystery religions which the Sailor's ancestors, Phoenician merchants, spread throughout the Mediterranean from their own cities; Eliot mentions Carthage in North Africa and Smyrna in Asia Minor. But in the waste land the vulgar and immoral Mr. Eugenides exports "currants", not mystery.[41]

The sailor is one with the drowned Phlebas[42] mentioned in the fourth section of the poem, whose eyes now "are pearls". The expression is from Shakespeare's play *The Tempest*. Ariel, the "airy spirit", sings these words to the Prince, who believes mistakenly that his father the King has drowned:

Full fathom five thy father lies;
Of his bones are coral made;
Those are pearls that were his eyes:
Nothing of him that doth fade,
But doth suffer a sea change
Into something rich and strange;
Sea nymphs hourly ring his knell.

The sea only changes the king as he fades at death; something lasts: his bones have become hard coral, his eyes are now everlasting jewels.[43] Water, then, is ambiguous: it brought death to Phlebas,[44] and it can also bring change in Christian baptism. In the waste land nothing changes in this way.

Belladonna ("lovely lady") is at one level Mary, mother of Jesus, in Leonardo da Vinci's painting "Madonna of the Rocks". The rocks may stand for the church, for its stability —and, in the waste land, for its faithlessness.[45] Eliot had caricatured the "True Church" on earth,

> Wrapt in the old miasmal mist,

and contrasted it unfavorably with a hippopotamus.[46] Belladonna is also the "lady of situations", like the upper-class woman in the next section.[47] And for more ambiguity, belladonna is both eye make-up and a poison.

Eliot takes the man with three staves in the Tarot cards to be the Fisher King, symbol of redemption. The "wheel" is an image used in Buddhism and, like the "ring" a few lines later, it symbolizes the predictability of life in the waste land. In the next section Eliot will comment more on the "crowds of people" that we are.

But there is one card that Madame Sosostris does not turn over: the Hanged Man. In his note, Eliot interprets this figure as the hanged god whose resurrection revives the land.[48] It is also the "hooded figure", the resurrected Jesus disguised as the mysterious stranger who joined the two "unbelieving" disciples on their way to Emmaus after the crucifixion; the encounter will appear later in the fifth part of the poem.[49] In the waste land nothing follows death.

Mme Sosostris also "sees" the crowds of us walking in circles. Just as the other "seers" in the poem, she does not look beyond our day-to-day waste land. On the other hand, the anxiety she feels about the "horoscope" that she is preparing for Mrs. Equitone seems to forebode an unpleasant future. In *Four Quartets* Eliot will deride horoscopes, "pastimes and drugs, and features of the press".[50]

WL-Id: The decent into hell (60-76)

The "unreal City"[51] is Dante's Florence, Baudelaire's Paris, Eliot's London, our own city. It is the city that Christian hermits and monks abandoned to seek another reality in the desert. It is the city of man that St. Augustine opposed to the city of God, the *civitas Dei*. Eliot felt that when he began work-

ing in London he was "sojourning among the termites" and in his notes he quotes Baudelaire's *Les sept vieillards*, "the seven old men":

> swarming city, city full of dreams,
> where the specter accosts the passerby in broad daylight![52]

In a special sense, the "City" is London's financial district, which Eliot associates with Dante's *Inferno*. The "crowd" funneling across London Bridge into their workplaces is "dead". In footnotes on the next two lines, Eliot quotes Dante describing the march of the dead into hell:

> a train of people
> so long, I had never thought
> death had undone so many.[53]

"Crowds of people" are standing in a long line awaiting their turn to enter hell, and from them came

> no lament, only sighs,
> setting the everlasting air aquiver.[54]

The impression is that the waste land eschatology is not heaven but hell, its dénoument is death. The "dead sound" of the church bell's final stroke at nine marks the time when the commuters begin work. But it also recalls the death of Jesus:

> It was the third hour and they crucified him.[55]

The crucifixion scene will return.[56]

Stetson is a businessman. His name suggests the high-quality hat businessmen wore at the time. The cry "Stetson!" recalls Dante's surprise encounter in hell with an author of Florence whom he admired —Eliot will describe it in *Four Quartets*—:

> "*You* here, *Ser* Brunetto?"[57]

Wars are fought over money. Stetson was at Mylae, where the Romans won a naval victory over the Carthaginians during the Punic wars, motivated by commercial interest.

The strange reference to a "corpse" recalls the funeral dole in the play *The White Devil* by John Webster, where this advice is given:

> But keep the wolf far thence, that's foe to men,
> For with his nails he'll dig them up again…
> the friendless bodies of unburied men.[58]

Such is the only "resurrection" hoped for in the waste land.

The last line of this section,

> Hypocrite reader, my brother, like unto me!

is from the preface "to the reader" from Baudelaire's *The Flowers of Evil*, where the poet calls people stupid, sinful and evil, but worst of all, bored. We are all standing in line, patiently waiting to enter hell.

A GAME OF CHESS

WL-II: A GAME OF CHESS

Two dialogues from both ends of the waste land's social scale will show what the breakdown of marriage and family brings: indifference, pain, madness. Maybe it is all a game anyway, as the title suggests. The waste land today has gone far along this path.

WL-IIa: High-class marriage (77-138)

A wealthy woman sits in her boudoir brushing her hair amid the sparkles and smells of her dressing table. Allusions in the text, as Eliot remarks in his note, link her to royalty: Cleopatra, queen of Egypt, Marc Antony's lover in Shakespeare's play *Antony and Cleopatra*:

> The barge she sat in, like a burnish'd throne,
> Burn'd on the water…,[59]

and Dido, queen of Carthage, lover of Aeneas, hero of Virgil's Latin epic poem *The Aeneid*. Both queens were betrayed: Cleopatra by Antony and Dido by Aeneas.

In the painting above the fireplace the woman contemplates the figure of Philomel, the princess raped by her brother-in-law, Tereus, who then cut out her tongue and imprisoned her to keep her quiet. According to the myth, the gods later turned her into a nightingale, perhaps because of its grieving song. Philomel will return at the end of the poem in the guise of a swallow.[60]

Eliot will also quote St. Augustine on the "unholy loves" that met him when he came to Carthage.[61] But the waste land sees no horror in forced sex, and the Philomel myth is just another dirty story to get a laugh. The title of this section recalls a play by Thomas Middleton, *Women Beware Wom-*

en, where the moves of the seduction of a woman match her mother-in-law´s moves in a game of chess.

The fine lady sitting on her royal "throne" gazes —in the painting as if through a window —at Philomel, no longer mute but as a nightingale filling the a "sylvan scene" with her pure song. But the scene is out of reach for the woman, for thus Satan once looked upon Eden, the paradise in which he knew could have no part. Eliot is thinking of a passage in John Milton's Paradise Lost where the devil

> ... to the border comes
> Of Eden, where delicious Paradise...
> ... crowns the champaign head
> Of steep wilderness, whose hairy sides...
> Access denied; and overhead up grew...
> A sylvan scene.[62]

Neither Satan nor the woman can cross the border to enter the garden; they must remain in the waste land —paradise in reverse— where the nightingale´s song goes unheard.

The lady is as ambiguous as Belladonna. Some of the props evoke an exotic brothel: the cupidons, coquettishly hiding and peeking, perfumes, low lights. Others —seven-branched candelabrum, candles, incense, vials, stained glass— belong in a sumptuous temple or church. But they all blend together into the bizarre imaginings of her diseased mind. Even her sophistication is vulgar and as "elegant and intelligent" as the "Shakespearian Rag", popular around 1912.

The woman now clamors for communication and demands to know what her husband is thinking. He does not say so, but he is thinking of rats and bones, death,[63] just as the dried voices of hollow men, whispering together,

> Are quiet and meaningless
> As wind in dry grass
> Or as rats' feet over broken glass
> In our dry cellar.[64]

The woman hears a "noise", the "wind". But in the waste land, it is "nothing". It is not the wind that heralded the coming of the Holy Spirit to Jesus's disciples at Pentecost, when

> all at once from the sky came a noise like a rush of strong wind.[65]

Nor will God's "Breath from the four winds" come to the waste land, as it came to Israel in Ezekiel's vision of the dry bones:

> The breath came into them, and they lived, and they stood up,
> a very great host.[66]

Eliot will use wind to symbolize the sanctifying work of the Holy Ghost, in *Four Quartets*, especially in *Little Gidding*.

The woman expects her husband to see something, perhaps something unusual, with moral implications. In Shakespeare's play Hamlet asked his mother "Do you see nothing there?" when she failed to see the ghost of her first husband, his father —murdered by the king whom she then married.[67] The woman's husband cannot speak, any more than the Hyacinth girl's friend, and like him he "knew nothing".[68] He remembers only the drowned sailor, the "pearls that were his eyes" (quoted again from *The Tempest*),[69] but nothing else. His wife wants to know what "that noise" is, "the wind", and she keeps asking whether he knows, sees, remembers "nothing".

Again the images of Christian mysticism are inverted, subverted: silence, unknowing, emptiness, nothing. St. John of the Cross said we come to know God only in dark of night, and that

> to come to know all, wish not to know
> anything of anything.

Eliot will paraphrase this passage in *Four Quartets*.[70] He will also quote *The Cloud of Unknowing*, whose author pictures God's love drawing the soul into a dark cloud in order to become forgetful of whatever is not God's "naked" being.

This caution in thinking and speaking of the Divine has been called "apophatic" or "negative theology".[71] The prophet Isaiah is often quoted speaking of a God who "hides" in the temple.[72] The theology of "the hidden God" was developed by the Greek theologians St. Gregory of Nyssa and Dionysius the Areopagite, author of the seminal *Mystical Theology*.[73] In this tradition, the person who wishes to mature in holiness must be willing constantly to reexamine his own religious experience —intellectual, moral, emotional— and must not take as final his own attitude toward the Divine nor to the behavior it may affect. "Detachment" is important in Buddhism

and in philosophical stoicism, as well as in Christian spirituality: owning nothing before God. Jesus said:

> ...unless the wheat falls to the earth and dies, it remains alone.[74]

Detachment, then, applies even to one´s "interior life"; this will be an important theme in *Four Quartets*, especially in regard to Julian of Norwich.[75]

But in the waste land, when the woman judges her husband to be "dead" and "empty", she is not thinking of apophatic theology; she is rather feeling Baudelaire's *ennui*: "what shall we ever do?" —have a outing, a game of chess? And in the meantime we await "the knock upon the door" when death comes a-calling.

WL-IIb: Low-class marriage (139-172)

The scene shifts to a pub at closing time. May is telling a couple about a conversation she had with her friend Lil. May had given her fair warning: she should fix herself up if she wanted to hold on to her husband Albert who was finishing four years of army service. Why, Lil didn't even use the money Albert gave her to buy herself a nice set of false teeth. Lil explained that her abortion after five children was the cause of her poor health. May asked her: "What you get married for if you don't want children?" In the waste land marriage is not marked by commitment, justice and fruitfulness, but lust, betrayal and death.

And all the while time is running out: "HURRY UP!" repeats the proprietor, "IT'S TIME" to close. As the women finally leave, he sends them off with the words of Ophelia, Hamlet's betrothed, who, doubting his love, went mad and drowned herself:

> Good night, ladies. Good night, sweet ladies. Good night, good night.[76]

In the waste land even this tragedy is banal: when we hear "good night, ladies" we cannot help humming "merrily we roll along".

THE FIRE SERMON

WL-III: THE FIRE SERMON

Waste-land sex outside of wedlock fares no better than in it. As Eliot explains in a note, this section culminates in the Buddha's Fire Sermon and the *Confessions* of St. Augustine, where the "two representatives of eastern and western asceticism" warn about the flames of lust. "Asceticism" is an ancient Christian metaphor taken from the world of sports and means "training". It was used of the sacrifice of the martyrs and of the discipline of anyone seriously seeking God. Asceticism is essentially joined to mysticism.

WL-IIIa: Love on the River (173-206)

The scene is the river Thames after the summer vacation. Eliot contrasts the relations between the sexes in poetry and in the waste land. For the poet Edmund Spenser, the Thames is blessed by the nymphs, mythological maidens dwelling in wood and water; he repeats the refrain:

> Sweet Thanes, run softly, till I end my song.[77]

In the waste land the nymphs have fled the river. The filth and clutter should make us weep, as the exiled Hebrews in the psalm who refused to perform their folksongs for the Babylonians who had deported them:

> By the waters of Babylon we sat and wept.[78]

The Prince in Shakespeare´s *The Tempest* was also "sitting on a bank/ Weeping" during the time he thought his father had drowned.[79] Instead of "Babylon", Eliot says "Leman", another name for Lake Geneva in Switzerland where he finished writing *The Waste Land*. But the word, which also means "mistress", suggests lust.

The poet Andrew Marvel, in his *To His Coy Mistress*, had to seize the moment because he kept hearing at his back

> time's winged chariot hurrying near.

In the waste land, sex by the riverside is not poetic. The only sound the lovers hear is the roar of traffic. All they feel at their back is the blast of cold air, not the holy wind of Ezekiel that brought the community back to life. Their "white bodies naked" writhe on the wet bank like the slimy bellies of rats amid broken bottles and cigarette butts or —when mating in some attic— amid bones to the scamper of rats. The relationships of the hollow men seem to end at the Acheron, river of the underworld:

> In this last of meeting places
> We grope together
> And avoid speech
> Gathered on this beach of the tumid river.[80]

The raunchy Australian ballad on "Mrs. Porter and her daughter" does not reflect the beauty of intimacy.

This sordidness contrasts with the nobility of the holy Grail legend. In Wagner's opera *Parsifal*, the knight Parsifal must be purified in a ritual washing of the feet before he can enter the castle where the Grail is housed. Eliot quotes in French the last line of "Parsifal", the sonnet by poet Paul Verlaine; Parsifal, the knight who, after overcoming temptations to lust,

> ...worships, glory and symbol,
> the vessel pure where real blood shown,
> — and, oh these children's voices singing in the dome.

The blood of Jesus in the chalice has no effect in the waste land.

"Twit... jug" is the song of Philomel changed into a nightingale; they contrast with her screams as she is beings ravished by her brother-in-law the King.[81] His name in Greek, "Tereu", in the vocative case, ends the section; it is as if his victim were making a final, vain, appeal: "No!"

WL-IIIb: Down to business (207-214)

We now have a closeup of a merchant in the "unreal City".[82] Mr. Eugenides, the Phoenician Sailor,[83] is no longer a devotee of the mystery religions, as

were his ancestors from Smyrna. His French is "demotic" —simplified or vulgar—, but the word connotes a late form of the ancient Egyptian language. Egypt was an important religious center —for Christianity as well as for the mystery religions— but Mr. Eugenides does not speak this kind of demotic Egyptian.

In first-century there was a Christian community in Smyrna, an important commercial center. It was one of the seven cities addressed in the book of Revelation. The angel of Smyrna advises its citizens:

> Be faithful till death, and I shall give thee the crown of life.[84]

Mr. Eugenides is no longer faithful; now he has another way of life: getting rich exporting "currants" (Eliot will play on this word when speaking of his death),[85] hobnobbing with the jet-set, weekending at high-class hotels (perversion is implied).

WL-IIIc: What Tiresias sees (215-256)

Tiresias is a legendary prophet of the city of Grecian Thebes who was accredited great wisdom and clairvoyance. In his note, Eliot quotes the Latin poet Ovid describing the two "sex-change operations" of Tiresias, a sort of classical "trans". All the men in *The Waste Land*, Eliot explains, blend into one man and all the women into one women, everybody, man and woman, merge with Tiresias: "unisex". In other words, the critique of the waste land targets the human being as such.

Eliot says in a note that Tiresias "sees the substance of the poem" (the Sibyl and Mme Sosostris are also "seers".) What he/she sees, "foretells", "foresuffers", is the copulation of a typist and a clerk of a real estate agency, but more inclusively, he/she sees all the usual goings-on in the waste land. The fact that Tiresias can "see" even though he/she is blind shows that the waste land is so predictable that to know all that is happening —or has happened or will happen—, he/she does not even need to look at it. It's all the same. Waste-land time collapses into an instant, into a tedious sameness.

Mr. Eugenides was the management side of business; now we shall see labor, just as we saw both high and low-class marriage. Two working people, a typist and a flunky, go home in the evening. But their homecoming is not as in the poem *Hespere* where the poetess Sappho prays:

> Evening Star, bringing back
> what light-bearing dawn has scattered wide:
> thou bringest back the sheep, the goat, back,
> the child to its mother,

or, as Eliot explains in his note, the "fisherman who returns at nightfall". Nor is it the homecoming in Robert Louis Stevenson's poem (and epitaph), when at the "violet" hour

> Home is the sailor, home from the sea
> And the hunter home from the hill,[86]

to find warmth and security— and to find peace after death.

The woman and her "expected" pimply boyfriend, as cocky about his mindless job as a nouveau-riche tycoon about his wealth, meet in her cluttered apartment, with her clothes strewn about, her underwear drying on the windowsill. After supper he "assaults" her, even though she is tired from typing all day and then has made dinner with the help of a can opener. Her indifference and passivity seem to excite him. After his orgasm he "gropes his way" out into the darkness, "the stairs unlit..".— the three dots seem to say his life will always be the same.

The "lovely woman" in Oliver Goldsmith's novel *The Vicar of Wakefield*, returning to the place where she was seduced and betrayed, sings that only death can cover her dishonor and shame. And Philomel, after being raped, sings, as a nightingale, a song of purity. But the secretary is "glad it's over", puts on a record and forgets her recent coitus.

WL-IIId: The City (257-265)

Eliot now compares Ariel's song from *The Tempest*, "the music…upon the waters",[87] with the pleasant "clatter and chatter" of a group of fishermen in a London pub near the church of Magnus Martyr. The song promises well for the Prince, who will be redeemed by love. There is something "inexplicable" in the beauty of the church which was built for fishermen long ago and contrasts with the squalor and ugliness of its surroundings today.[88] The scene evokes another society from another time, when work and play were different.

The phrase "O City city" —a particular city, capitalized, or all of them— recalls the lament over the fall of Jerusalem in the book of *Lamentations*, or Jesus's words:

Jerusalem, Jerusalem,
who killed the prophets and stoned those sent to thee...
Behold thy house is left to thee become a desert.[89]

Ten years later Eliot will comment on the fate of the

...timekept City;
Where My Word is unspoken,
In the land of lobelias and tennis flannels
The rabbit shall burrow and the thorn revisit,
The nettle shall flourish on the gravel courts,
And the wind shall say: "Here were decent godless people:
Their only monument the asphalt road
And a thousand lost golf balls".[90]

WL-IIIe: Loss of the gold (266-306)

Eliot tells us in his note that these lines contain the songs sung in turn by the three "Thames-daughters". He contrasts them with the Rhine-daughters from Wagner's opera, *Götterdämmerung* (*The Twilight of the Gods*), who grieved their seduction —like Goldsmith's lovely woman— and mourned the darkness of the river, which had lost the gold that once shone in its depths.

Night lies on the deep;
Once she was bright,
When still Rhine-gold
Gleamed in her depth;
Gold, pure, noble,
How thou shonest,
Lofty star of the deep!
Weialala leia,
Wallala leialala.

Once the Thames, too, contained gold, but now her daughters can sing only of the filth and lust that has replaced it.

Greenwich, the London district lying on the river opposite the peninsula called the Isle of Dogs, was the birthplace of Queen Elizabeth. Her affair with the Earl of Leicester on a river barge that Eliot described in the second song also turned out to be childless —just as the romance of Dido with Aeneas, Cleopatra with Antony, Ophelia with Hamlet and the secretary with her boyfriend.

The three Thames-daughters blend with Queen Elizabeth, Mrs. Porter (or her daughter), and with the woman "undone". Eliot is referring to La Pia de' Tolomei, whom Dante met in his tour of Purgatory. She was born in Siena and died in Maremma— thrown by her husband from a window in his castle, apparently so that he could marry another woman. She speaks these pathetic words to Dante:

> For pity's sake, when thou returnest to the world
> And have rested from thy long journey,...
> Remember me who am La Pia;
> Siena made me, Maremma unmade me:
> This he alone knows who, wedding me,
> placed his gem upon my finger.[91]

Actually, all women are included —in a working-class neighborhood (Highbury Park) or in the slums (Mooregate) of London, or at the seaside (Margate)— with the same old story, all deceived by lust: "my heart under my feet". For the secretary, unlike the lovely woman, there is nothing to "resent". Not only is there no oneness, no understanding, no love, since we can "connect/ Nothing with nothing", but "we expect/ Nothing"— not the *nothing* of St. John of the Cross, complement of the *everything*. The meaningless "la la" at the end seals the irony of the entire section.

WL-IIIf: Burning (307-311)

Now comes a turning point in the poem. Eliot introduces religious tradition here explicitly, both Christian and Hindu, which before was notable for being absent or inverted. Specifically, he records what they have to say about lust. He says in his note that bringing in the ascetics St. Augustine and the Buddha,

> the culmination of this part of the poem is not an accident.

Siddhartha Gautama, the Buddha ("the Enlightened One"), was an Indian spiritual guide who lived about five hundred years before Christ. St. Augustine was the bishop of the Christian diocese of Hippo, near the city of Carthage in North Africa, about four hundred years after Christ. He was the greatest "Father" of the western church. Both men underwent a conversion that significantly changed their lives. Augustine understood this experience as an *aversio-conversio*: a "turning" away from a sensual life (repentance) to-

ward a new life of prayer and virtue. Dante, who was an important source in Eliot's poetry, also underwent a conversion that changed his life —it happened when at the age of nine he saw Beatrice for the first time.[92]

The line about Carthage is from St. Augustine's account of his conversion in his famous autobiography, the *Confessions*:

> To Carthage I came,
> and all about me seethed a crucible of unholy loves.[93]

The wanton life he led in the city was bringing him to despair. Carthage, by the way, is an important thread in *The Waste Land*: it was a Phoenician colony,[94] it fought wars with Rome over economic interests,[95] and it was the city of Dido, who threw herself on a funeral pyre after she was forsaken by her lover, Aeneas.[96]

Later, while teaching rhetoric in Milan, Augustine felt increasingly called to receive baptism, but he resisted. He tells us that one day, feeling paralyzed by his uncertainties, he went off by himself to think. He cried out in prayer:

> How long, how long?
> Tomorrow, tomorrow?
> Why not now?
> Why not end my dishonor at this very moment?

Then he heard a child singing in a nearby house

> Take, read!

He took the words to be a sign, since he had never heard the song. He opened the copy of St. Paul's epistles he had with him and read:

> not in carousing and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and jealousy; but put on the Lord Jesus Christ and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof.[97]

He then entered fully into the ethical and intellectual world of church.

As a wealthy young man the Buddha lived a sheltered life amid luxury and sensuous pleasure. When he became aware of the human suffering around him, he was moved to seek solitude in a forest.[98] After a period of self-renunciation, meditation, and struggle with temptation, he achieved

enlightenment. He then spent over forty years preaching his message of liberation to others.[99]

"Burning" is the subject of the Buddha's *Fire Sermon*, which Eliot in his note compares in significance to the Sermon on the Mount. The Buddha says to the priests who followed him:

> Everything is on fire.
> And what are all these things on fire?

The eye and the ear are on fire with the impressions they produce, said the Buddha, the tongue also, the mind and its ideas. The fire is passion, infatuation, hatred —birth and death, grief, despair. The Buddha is warning his priests against any harmful emotional upset: involvements, obsessions, and vicious behavior.

But for Augustine, too, the conversion event is not the end but a beginning. He confessed that years after his *aversio* from lust, the "seductions of the eyes" still threatened to ensnare his feet. He could resist them only through God's mercy, he said, quoting a psalm:

> My eyes are turned ever toward the Lord,
> for He will pluck my feet from the snare,[100]

and he goes on to pray:

> Thou pluckest them out over and over, for they are caught;
> Thou dost cease not to pluck them out,
> but again and again I entangle myself in snares laid about me.[101]

Lust is not the only burning. Things of beauty "catch" him, says Augustine, when he loses sight of the beauty of God that they contain:

> mercilessly I am caught, but mercifully,
> Oh Lord, Thou pluckest me out
> Oh Lord Thou pluckest.[102]

Eliot quotes these last two phrases.

"Plucking" is used in other Biblical contexts. The prophet Amos warned the Israelites against immorality:

> I brought great upheaval upon thee, as I did to Sodom and Gomorra;
> thou wast as a firebrand plucked from the burning;
> yet thou camest not back to me, says the Lord.[103]

The prophet Zechariah promoted the rebuilding of the temple for the Hebrews who had been repatriated from exile in Babylonia. He described his vision of the high priest, "clad in filthy garments" (symbolizing mourning and repentance) as:

> a brand plucked out of the fire;[104]

he was then reclothed in "rich robes" and his "guilt taken away".

Fire, like water, destroys and cures. At the end of *The Waste Land* Eliot will speak of the possibility of purification and it will be a major theme in *Four Quartets*.[105] But here the third section of *The Waste Land* leaves us with the 'burning".

DEATH BY WATER

WL-IV: DEATH BY WATER (312-321)

Phlebas the Phoenician falls in with the "drowned Phoenician sailor" and Mr. Eugenides.[106] His fires were at last put out by the seawater in which he drowned. The businessman no longer worries about his credits and debits. The "currant" merchant does not feel the "current" as it swirls about his corpse, nor does he hear the seabirds' cry. And he was once alive as we are now. Phlebas does not rise again after three days, for his body has been rising and falling in the sea for two weeks. The viewpoint of the waste land is like the Prince's in *The Tempest*, who was wrong thinking his father was dead, or like that of Jesus's disciples on their way to Emmaus, who were wrong thinking Jesus had not returned to life. Eliot will introduce these disciples in the next section.[107]

Water, like fire, destroys and purifies; in the waste land it only drowns. "Gentile or Jew" is a quotation from St. Paul, when he was speaking of being baptized (the word means "plunged into water"):

> all baptized into a single body,
> Jew or Gentile, bond or free,
> all given to drink of the one Spirit.[108]

In *Four Quartets* a prayer will be offered for those who "ended their voyage... in the dark throat" of the sea.[109]

This fourth section of *The Waste Land* is nearly a translation of the last part of "Dans le Restaurant", a poem Eliot wrote in French. There, Phlebas merges with the waiter who is portrayed in the first part of the poem —a dirty old man both in both attire and mind:

> The wreck of a waiter with naught to do
> But scratch his fingers and lean over my shoulder...
> The stains on his vest now number thirty-eight...
> You, you dirty old man, at that age....

WHAT THE THUNDER SAID

WL-V: WHAT THE THUNDER SAID

Eliot considered "What the Thunder Said" the most important part of *The Waste Land*, and he thought "the twenty-nine lines of the water-dripping song… were *good*".[110] He was able to finish it seemingly after receiving a "sign" while recovering from an illness in 1921. He said that a passage like this, on which the author makes no progress for months or years,

> may suddenly take shape and word, and in this state long passages may be produced which require little or no touch.[111]

WL-Va: Jesus in the tomb (322-330)

The scene is the Passion of Jesus, "who was living is now dead":[112] His "agony" in the garden of Gethsemane, His betrayal by Judas ("torchlight red on sweaty faces") and denial by Peter, His condemnation and humiliation ("prison and palace", "shouting and crying"). Later in the poem the "thunder" will speak, sounding over the "distant mountain" of the Himalayas, heralding the "spring" of new life, but here it marks the death of Jesus.[113]

The Gospels bear witness to the life and death of Jesus from a point in time after the resurrection. But waste-land time is different: its perspective is *after* Jesus died but *before* He rose again; in the waste land one dies but one does not rise again. Death accompanies us; while we are alive, we are dying "with a little patience". The waste land thus reverses St. Paul's conviction that we embody not only the suffering and dying of Jesus, but above all His rising again:

> ever bearing in our body the dying of Jesus,
> that His life may also be shown in our body.[114]

WL-Vb: Desert without theophany (331-346)

The children of Israel, camped in the Sinai Desert without water and said to Moses:

> Give us water to drink.

Moses answered:

> Why doest thou quarrel with me? Wherefor do ye tempt the Lord?

and he cried out to God:

> What shall I do with this people? A little more and they will stone me!

God replied:

> Go on before the people... take thy rod in thy hand; …
> I shall stand before thee there on the rock in Horeb [Sinai];
> and thou shallt strike the rockand water will come forth from it
> that the people may drink.

Moses did so and called the place "The Tempting" (*Massah*) and "The Quarrelling" (*Meriba*) because

> the people quarreled there and tempted the Lord saying
> "Is the Lord among us or not?"[115]

In the waste land the Lord is not among us. Its mountains are stumps of rotten teeth; there is no Mount Sinai, where God could speak to us. Its wells are empty; no Moses comes to break open the rock to give us to drink. In the Bible, wandering in the wilderness is the "honeymoon" of God with Israel, his Bride, whom he has just "wed", freed from bondage. But the waste land there may be no theophany.

We cannot go into the waste land to get free to search for God, as did the Desert Fathers. We do not build hermitages to find solitude, because we cannot get away from the surly creatures, sitting in their hovels, sneering at what they do not understand, with their "red" faces. Instead of a holy "silence" and "solitude" there is thunder; yet the thunder brings no rain, it is "sterile". Thunder in the past has spoken to man, as Eliot will show pres-

ently,[116] but in the waste land it conveys no word beyond itself. The rock of Peter, the church, has a Word, but it, too, is lost on the waste land.

WL-Vc: Drought (347-359)

St. Paul said of the rock struck by the rod of Moses:

> the rock is Christ,

and Jesus told the Samaritan woman:

> whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst,
> but the water that I shall give him will become in him
> a fount of water springing up into everlasting life.[117]

If only there were a "pool among the rock"— like the pool in the rose-garden that Eliot will describe in *Burnt Norton*— or a "spring" that St. John of the Cross spoke of:

> Oh, well I know Wellspring,
> pooling, running;
> although by night.[118]

In the waste land we hear not water flowing but the "cicada" which, says Ecclesiastes, burdens the old, and the "singing" of windswept dry grass.[119] We would even welcome the song of the hermit thrush, which merely *sounds* like water dripping. St. John of the Cross said of the night of the senses, when emotions are purified:

> this dryness could often come not from the night, not from the cleansing of the drives of our feelings, but from sin and immaturity, laziness and lukewarmness, from moodiness or bodily ailment.[120]

The dryness of the waste land is not a sign of spiritual progress.

WL-Vd: Emmaus (360-366)

The Emmaus story from St. Luke's Gospel[121] is set in waste-land time: Jesus "who was living is now dead". Two of Jesus's followers were "foolish and slow of heart to believe" the reports that his tomb was empty. Downcast,

they had left Jerusalem for Emmaus, a village not far to the west. As they were walking along discussing what had happened, another traveler joined them, but

> their eyes were bound, so they would not know him.

After reaching Emmaus they were sitting at table when their companion took bread,

> blessed and broke it and gave it to them; then their eyes were opened and they recognized

Jesus. In the waste land skepticism has no end for there is no resurrection.

Eliot included a note about a group of Antarctic explorers "at the extremity of their strength, had the constant delusion that there was one more member than could actually be counted". In the waste land the third wayfarer, the figure "wrapped in a brown mantle, hooded", is a delusion. Christ is not acknowledged even symbolically; the risen God walking among us goes unrecognized.

WL-Ve: Fall of the Cities (367-377)

Eliot now invites us to contemplate the "hooded hordes" as they gallop through the waste land bringing destruction in the "violet air". They are the barbarians who annihilated the capitals of western culture: Judeo-Christian (Jerusalem), Greek (Athens), Hellenistic (Alexandria), Modern (Vienna), our own (London). The havoc they cause is "unreal", surreal.

In his note Eliot quotes Hermann Hesse,[122] who at that time (1920) saw Europe, especially Eastern Europe, staggering toward chaos, taking drunkenness and madness for worship and holiness, singing "hymns" which only make the middle class they target snicker —and saints and prophets weep. *The Waste Land* was written shortly after the First World War and the Russian Revolution: the end of one hope and the beginning of another. Paradoxically, after Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* (1931) and George Orwell's *Nineteen-Eighty-Four* (1949), it is "western civilization" itself that is the target of progress.

Christians and Pagans alike were shocked when the Barbarian Goths sacked Rome in 410: Rome was the eternal City! The two Hebrew kingdoms were destroyed: the southern kingdom of Judah by the Babylonians (586 B.C.)[123] and the northern kingdom of Israel by the Assyrians (722-721

B.C.). Eliot´s phrase, "murmur of maternal lamentation", recalls the words of the prophet Jeremiah on the devastation of Israel:

> A voice was heard in Ramah— lamentation and bitter weeping;
> Rachel weeps for her children, wished not to be consoled,
> because they are no more.[124]

The passage is cited in the Gospel of St. Matthew referring to the massacre of the innocents by King Herod.[125]

WL-Vf: Apocalypse (378-385)

Let the nightmare begin![126] A woman stretches out her long black hair and bows it as if it were a violin. Bats swarm down a wall squeaking and fluttering in the "violet" twilight before the dead of night. Towers hang upside down, tolling a time "reminiscent" of the ninth hour when Christ died,[127] or our own hour, which is fast running out. The macabre symphony swells in time with the bells: the whispers of the fiddle, the whistling of the bats and the whirring of their wings, the wind hissing over the dry grass,[128] howling over the dry cisterns and empty wells.

The prophet Jeremiah cried out again, this time when the Babylonians were destroying Jerusalem and its temple:

> Be stunned at this, heavens, shudder with great horror! Says the Lord:
> for two evils have my people done:
> * they have forsaken me, Spring of living waters,
> * and they have dug themselves cisterns, broken cisterns
> that hold no water.[129]

This is the *turning* in reverse: an *aversio* away from God with a *conversio* toward the waste land.

WL-Vg: The Chapel Perilous (386-395)

Now it is fully night, and the Knight draws near to the Chapel Perilous where the holy Grail is kept. But the shrine stands empty, its broken door banging in the wind, amid the blowing grass and open graves of the churchyard. The scene becomes superimposed on the events surrounding the Crucifixion,[130] with its traditional symbols of "the day of the Lord", doomsday, the denouement of history. When Jesus yielded up His breath:

> darkness came over the whole land.... And behold:
> the temple veil was torn asunder, the earth quaked,
> rocks split, graves opened.[131]

We see scattered the "dry bones" of Ezekiel's lost civilization; they will never be joined together to stand up again as a community renewed.

The rooster crows on the weathercock as it crowed when Peter at the house of the high priest swore that he was no follower of Jesus:

> at once a cock crowed.
> And the Lord turned and looked at Peter, and Peter
> remembered the word of the Lord:
> "Before the cock crows thou shalt deny me thrice".
> Then Peter went out and wept bitterly.[132]

The desolation, the danger, tempts the Knight to deny his quest of the Grail. But the lightning comes, then a breeze bringing rain. Will he respond?

WL-Vh: Vox Dominii (396-423)

Now the scene shifts to India, the river Ganges. The people —all of nature— silently await the rain promised by the "black clouds" over the snowcapped Himalayas. Storm clouds are a traditional symbol of theophany, and it will reappear in *Four Quartets*.[133] The "black cloud" was "where God was" when Moses encountered Him on Mount Sinai;

> Clouds and darkness are about Him,
> justice and judgment the base of His throne.[134]

In a note Eliot refers to a fable recounted in the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad from the holy writings of India.[135] The gods, human beings, and the demons asked Prajâpati, god of creation and wisdom, to speak. The trio represents all intelligent life and recalls St. Paul's *Carmen Christi*: at the name of Jesus

> every knee should bow: in heaven, on earth, and under the earth.[136]

Prajâpati answered in the voice of thunder: "DA". In a Hebrew psalm God discloses His presence in a great storm; his voice is the thunder:

> The voice of the Lord comes over the waters,
> the God of glory thunders;
> the Lord, above vast waters.[137]

Gods, men, and demons interpreted "DA" as the first syllable of three commands given in Sanskrit, the ancient language of the Upanishads: "give, sympathize, control".

1) *Datta*: give!

After we die, by what shall we have "existed"? Not by the résumé we have handed out, the "estate" we are bequeathing, the home we leave empty. Surely we will go on existing at least in the memory of others? Not so fast; Eliot quotes the poet Webster, who tells us that even your spouse will

> ...remarry
> Ere the worm pierce your winding-sheet, ere the spider
> Make a thin curtain for your epitaphs.

"Prudence", staying on the safe side, blocks "the awful daring of a moment's surrender" —what "we have existed by". It is a "moment" of yielding that redefines, like Eliot´s experience in the rose-garden.[138] In *The Rock* Eliot will associate the "moment" to the incarnation:

> A moment in time but time was made through that moment...[139]

It is analogous to the "hardly, barely prayable/ Prayer of the one Annunciation", "the hint" in *Dry Salvages*: "be it done to me".[140]

2) *Dayadhvam*: sympathize!

Eliot quotes Dante's *Inferno* in his note on the "key" turning in the door.[141] Count Ugolino had betrayed his political party, and in revenge his enemies shut him up along with his children and grandchildren in a "horrible tower". When inside, he heard the key turn "once only", since the door was unlocked only after they had all starved to death. At death we will find out that we have been locked in our own "horrible towers".

The Roman leader Coriolanus was a traitor twice over. He left Rome after opposing the distribution of grain to his starving people and went over

to their enemies, the Volces, and led a Volscian army against Rome. Later he betrayed the Volsces, who finally executed him.[142]

Eliot also quotes the American idealist philosopher F. H. Bradley in his notes. Because our feelings and thinking are private property, held Bradley, each of us must live in our own little world. In the waste land, egoism causes us to lose compassion even for those closest to us.

3) *Damyata*: control!

Taming the emotions, said Plato, is like a charioteer driving a pair of wild horses. When the weather is calm it is easy to tack "gaily" against the wind, just as the heart, once invited, would have "gaily" responded. Self-discipline is not a waste-land value,[143] but religious traditions have seen the need to follow a "rule" and to practice "virtue": asceticism comes with mysticism. In *Four Quartets* Eliot will comment repeatedly on our both active and passive relationship to the Divine.[144]

These three Hindu commandments of almsgiving, compassion, and self-control recall the traditional Christian "Gospel counsels", the monastic vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience.[145] Paradoxically, they bind us to set us free:

* poverty: giving away things to get away from their clutches
* obedience: giving way to others to curb willfulness
* chastity: giving up coveting to avoid "burning".

Prajâpati's commandments and the Gospel's counsels go unheeded in the waste land. The knight seeking the holy Grail, it seems, has failed his initiation; he cannot say that he gave of himself, empathized with others, controlled himself. Will the rains fall after the thunder sounds? Another Upanishad, the Chandogya, will form part of the "moment" in the rose garden described in *Burnt Norton*: the lotus flower rises as time stands still.[146]

WL-Vi: Peace (424-434)

"I" have now become the traveler who has passed through the "arid plain" and come to the end, to "the shore". I am "fishing", still seeking deliverance. I take stock. I cannot do away with the chaos of the waste land, but I might "at least set my own lands in order"— as the prophet Isaiah once spoke in God´s name to the ailing King Hezekiah:[147]

> Set thy house in order, for thou shalt die and not live.

The King, weeping bitterly, affirmed his trust in God, and God "saw his tears and added fifteen years to his life".

"I" begin desperately to throw out all sorts of "fragments… to shore against my ruins", scraps that might at least sound like hope.

* "London Bridge" leads across to the fishermen's church of the fishermen, Magnus Martyr.[148] In the well-known children's game the bridge is "falling down". It was built by the Romans in 50 A.D. and has since fallen and been rebuilt several times. Will a bridge some day lead to something other than a financial district?

* The line in Italian is from Dante's *Purgatorio* where the author calls the Provençal troubadour Arnaut Daniel "the better craftsman". Eliot used the quote as as his dedication of *The Waste Land* to Ezra Pound. Dante met Daniel in purgatory, where souls are cleansed by fire before they are able to see God. Daniel was standing among the souls atoning for their life of lust,[149] and after speaking to Dante, he

> hid into the fire which refines them.[150]

"The burning" destroys but it also purifies,[151] and Daniel hopes to see God. In *Four Quartets* Eliot will refer again to "that refining fire" in Dante's purgatory.[152]

* The Latin line is from the anonymous Latin poem, *Pervigilium Veneris* ("The Vigil of Venus"). It was written before 500 AD and was connected with the spring festival of the Venus, goddess of love. Because of its focus on nature common later in medieval Latin poetry, it has been called "the prologue of the Middle Ages". Here Eliot turns again to the rape of Philomel by her sister's husband, King Tereus,[153] quoting from the end of the poem, where Philomel is pictured now not as a nightingale but as a swallow. Philomel,

> the "friend" of Tereus, sings in the shade of a poplar.
> One would think that her melodious voice sang of feelings of love,
> Not that a sister complains of a barbarous husband.

Tomorrow may he love who never has loved,
And who has loved, may he love tomorrow.
She sings, but we are silent; when will my springtime come?
When shall I become like that swallow, that I cease to be silent?...
Tomorrow may he love who never has loved,
And who has loved, may he love tomorrow.[154]

Even after the brutality of Tereus,

O swallow swallow

will there be hope for love?

* The line in French,

the prince of Aquitaine of the ruined tower,

is from the sonnet *El desdichado* (Spanish for "the luckless, unhappy one") by French poet Gérard de Nerval (1854). It is the name of the "black knight" Ivanhoe who, in Sir Walter Scott´s novel, lost both his inheritance and his love. De Nerval has been considered a mystic; from a spiritual mishmash —asked his religion, he replied "all of them"— he said he "felt led back to the true way". He wrote *El desdichado* when confined in a mental institution, and after years of sickness and poverty he hanged himself. The last words speak of pain and faith, purification:

> [I am] happy about the [religious] convictions which I have gained, and [my] sufferings I compare to... a descent into hell.

* In the Elizabethan drama, *The Spanish Tragedy*, by Thomas Kyd, the hero Hieronymo plans to avenge his son's murder by agreeing ("I'll fit you") to write a play in which the murderers are killed. He appears to be insane, but he gets what he wants —just as Gérard de Nerval, and perhaps Arnaut Daniel and the author of the *Pervigilium*— or even Hamlet.

Through these "fragments" or "broken images"[155] —actually throughout the entire poem— Eliot tries to make sense out the clash between expectations and the "ruins".

"Shantih" is the Sanskrit blessing ending each Upanishad. Eliot says in his note that our equivalent is

the peace which passeth all understanding,

a blessing from St. Paul, who also "hoped against hope".[156] In earlier versions of *The Waste Land*, instead of the Sanskrit words, the thunder spoke these words of Jesus:

I am the resurrection and the life.[157]