

## **Religious Crisis and the Spiritual Journey in T.S. Eliot's "The Waste Land"**

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### **Abstract**

In T.S. Eliot's "The Waste Land", there is a quest for psychological and spiritual unity, which is vindicated in the poem's pattern of a spiritual journey. Reading the poem as such provides the reader with a tie that binds its fragments, albeit being said to be formless. As the paper evinces, the ultimate panacea to the shell-shock's problems is believed to hinge on religion. Such a remedy makes possible the unity of the modern man's fragmented self. In an age marked by spiritual sterility and sexual promiscuity, religion is the fructifying power that can restore fertility to the spiritual aridity of modern civilization. Despite his theory of impersonality, the poem is also about Eliot's religious questioning and questing.

**Key Words:** *Waste Land, spiritual Journey, religious crisis*

المُلخَص بالعربية :

في "الأرض اليباب" لت.س. إليوت، هناك تنقيب عن وحدة نفسية وروحية، و التي تتجلى في قصيدة تأخذ شكل رحلة روحية. إن قراءة القصيدة على هذا النحو يمكن القارئ من ربط أشتات قصيدة قيل أنه لا وحدة و لا شكل لها. كما توضحه القصيدة، فإن علاج الصدمة النفسية يكمن في الدين، الذي يوحد النفس الرميم لإنسان العصر الحديث. في عصر يطغى عليه الفراغ الروحي و الإباحة الجنسية، فإن الدين أصبح القوة التي تعيد الحياة للحضارة الحديثة العقيمة. رغم نظرية اللاذاتية، فإن القصيدة تتمحور أيضا حول الشك و التنقيب الروحي لت.س. إليوت.

## **1-Introduction**

With the advent of the modern age, the spiritual life of the West withers and the individual experiences the death of the spirit. He becomes stripped of spiritual values. The absence of religion renders the modern world a waste land, cursed by its creator, full of dispirited and lifeless beings. In the midst of such a waste land, the core of the individual erodes with personal suffering and decadence. Desire, in the modern times, becomes the engine which directs the individual's life.

Sexual promiscuity makes the modern man sink into a spiritual desert; hence, he becomes in a constant search for a spiritual home. He finds in religion the only means which can restore his psychological equilibrium. Thus, T.S. Eliot's "The Waste Land", which depicts emotional carnality and spiritual sterility, is a spiritual peregrination in search for purgation and salvation. In fact, the formlessness of the poem is concomitant with the individual's fragmented psychological make-up. So, reading the poem as a spiritual pilgrimage gives the poem a unified structure despite the fact that it is always read by critics as a hotchpotch of disconnected ideas.

## **2-Desire and the Religious Crisis**

If the Cartesian axiom is "I think therefore I am", the Freudian one is "I feel therefore I am"; that is, what makes the essence of man for Freud is desire. Characters in "The Waste Land" have carnal desires, and crave hearts. This can be best elucidated in the speaker's confession: "What have we given?/My friend, blood shaking my heart  
The awful daring of a moment's surrender/Which an age of prudence  
can never retract/By this, and this only, we have existed"<sup>1</sup>. The lines imply that emotions and desire are at the core of the individual. Bu

excessive and morbid desire has ruined the individual's life in the modern age.

Indeed, a coterie of critics reads the poem as a representation of the twentieth-century degradation of values and break down of morality. The critic Coote, for instance, states that the poem is "a profound and a very moving picture of modern man's spiritual plight"<sup>2</sup> The poem's opening line signals the centrality of desire and senses to human beings' misery and suffering. The speaker's view of "April [...] the cruelest month", suggests that the ignited senses are dangerous when they are awake because they stir desire and lust.

Thus, they are better when left dormant and hidden away. As Morrison contends, "April is "the cruelest month" [...] precisely because it awakens "savage" or archaic desires."<sup>3</sup> In the poem's first section, "The Burial of the Dead", the inability to control desire is similar to the thrill and risk of a sleigh-ride. When the individual follows his emotions and feelings blindly, his mind loses control; thus, these drives pull him compulsively into disaster. In the same vein, the "crowds of people, walking round in a ring" suggests the quality of the wastelanders, who wander aimlessly in pursuit of pleasure, comfort and excitement. Their life is empty, meaningless and devoid of any spiritual guidance.

The prophetic figure in "The Burial of the Dead" warns the wastelanders against the spiritual devastation and the coming of false prophets, which he describes as broken images: "What are the roots that clutch, what branches grow/Out of this stony rubbish? Son of man,/You cannot say, or guess, for you know only/A heap of broken images,

where the son beats,/And the dead tree gives no shelter, the cricket no relief,/And the dry stone no sound of water" (1:19-24).

Though there is no answer to the question, it is obvious that no roots can survive in the desert; that is, life without faith is death in life. These lines are an allusion to the Bible, where God addresses Ezekiel by Son of Man and chose him as his messenger to Israel, which became a waste land because of the Israelites' wickedness, as He says: "And he said unto me, Son of Man, stand upon thy feet and I will speak unto thee. And the spirit entered into me when he spake unto me, and set me upon my feet, that I heard him that spake unto me."<sup>4</sup>

The "broken images" are the idols that the Israelites erected to false gods. They connote the breakdown of morality. The "dead tree", in "The Burial of the Dead", is the antithesis of the Tree of Life. It is also symbolic of the spiritual values that have been demolished because of modern materialism, which diverts the individual from moral and religious obligations.

Because they are spiritually dead, salvation is fearful for the wastelanders. The speaker's warning to "show you fear in a handful of dust" (1:30) evokes the burial service in the Book of Common Prayer, which says that man is made of dust and shall return to dust after death. The failure of the speaker to comprehend the spiritual enlightenment is entailed in the following line: "Looking into the heart of light, the silence" (1:41). Light, here, evokes Christ or spiritual knowledge. The word "heart" has a spiritual connotation. It might be read as allusion to "The Sacred Heart of Christ".

The quester in "The Burial of the Dead" seeks spiritual enlightenment in the wrong place. He is drawn to the slick superstition of a fortune-teller with "a wicked pack of cards." He is the same person,

in "The Fire Sermon", who "was fishing in the dull canal/On a winter evening round behind the gashouse" (3:189-90). The disillusioned fisherman follows the wrong path to obtain spiritual enlightenment because it is unwise to fish in a polluted river and in a winter evening. Instead of looking for guidance in the Bible, modern man looks for spiritual enlightenment in the cards of fortune tellers, like Madame Sosostris. In the modern age, prophet means 'profit'. Sosostris is a professional fortune-teller, who is paid for her wisdom. Thus, the French name "clairvoyante" is the best expression to describe her because "seer" is another name for prophet. Madame Sosostris' warning to "fear death by water" reveals the horror of death, which is at the core of the poem. But it also points out that Sosostris is a non-believer who, does not even believe in a hereafter.

This absence of belief keeps the inhabitants of "The Waste Land" constantly plagued by a sense of insecurity. Madame Sosostris cannot offer any resolution to the pilgrim's problems because she is also a wastelander. This is evident in her failure to see the blank card, which represents the Hanged Man. As she confesses: "I do not find/ The Hanged Man" (1:54-5). The lines indicate her spiritual emptiness and shortsighted vision, which is reinforced by the poet's ironic description of her as "Madame Sosostris, famous clairvoyante./Had a bad cold" (1:43-4). Though God exists, the self is unable to grasp or reach Him.

Hence, the modern man is enclosed in his own sphere, alienated even from his Creator, and lives in the prison of the absence of God. In "Gerontion", which was a part of the original version of the poem, the speaker says: "After such knowledge, what forgiveness? Think now."<sup>5</sup> Knowledge here might be man's realization of his spiritual emptiness and of the 'horror' within him.

The one-eyed merchant in Sosostris' Tarot card symbolizes the one-dimensional vision of the capitalist, who throws religion aside. He is the antithesis of Tiresias, who is blind physically, yet he is gifted with spiritual enlightenment. Unlike Tiresias, the wastelanders are physically sighted but spiritually blind. Hence, they are dead in life. This idea is further emphasized by "The corpse you planted last year in your garden" (1:71)

This line suggests that the speaker has long been spiritually dead because the corpse connotes a body devoid of soul, a dead spirit which awaits revival. The line recalls the speaker in "So through the evening", who makes a similar confession of spiritual death as follows: "It seems that I have been a long time dead/Do not report me to the established world."<sup>6</sup>

The spiritual plight in the modern waste land is concomitant with the age's conditions. In modern philosophy, knowledge can be obtained only through experience, that is, sensual experience becomes the solid ground on which the house of knowledge is built. The hysterical woman in "A Game of Chess" might be referring to such empirical knowledge: "Do /You know nothing? do you see nothing?"(2:121-22). Knowledge for the wastelanders is devoid of any spiritual substance.

The spiritual crisis is also due to industry, which has a hand in the religious crisis and the forsaking of Christ. The following line is a metonymy for modern civilization's expansion of knowledge: "I read, much of the night, and go south in winter" (1:18). It follows that the conditions of the twentieth century stimulated these secular ideas. The latter derive mainly from the atheism of Darwin, Nietzsche and Marx.

The 'Dog', in "The Burial of the Dead", stands for science, which picks the spiritual side of the individual.

In this regard, Brooker and Bentley write: "The dog 'that is friend to men' suggests a modern god substitute which seemed to be a friend but which has become in numerous senses a destroyer. Eliot is here concerned with a rampantly reductive scientism (including that practiced by Frazer) that demythologizes myth by digging up the buried god or hero and revealing its nature"<sup>7</sup>Modern science has waged a war against the beliefs and spiritual values that have, for centuries, given sense to the lives of people.

This cleavage results in 'the death of God'.The religious crisis started when God was executed and science became the new religion of Europe.Modernists believe that science could sweep away all human problems and misery and elevate the individual above the world. Thus, they view religion as irrational or a sort of madness. With the absence of religion, man becomes an autonomous and self-sufficient being, who needs to look no further than himself in explaining the meaning of life. Agnostic thought prevails, and it is believed that man is free only if he owes his existence to himself. Hence, atheism is taken as a means of escape.

The Western World's spiritual decadence is also evinced in the passage of Marie. The latter's anxiety and her insistence that she is not Russian is possibly a reaction to the communist system, which is based on the exclusion of God. Russia evokes the triumph of secularism in the modern age and the decay of faith. Matter, solely, cannot define the human nature; it is the spiritual side, which makes the individual tick. Indeed, all secular panaceas and psychological therapies cannot offer

him solace and relief from maladies of the soul. Religion is the only crutch, and without it, life is worthless. Thus, the ruin and decadence in the modern waste land is attributed to the spiritual sterility, which modernity brings about.

Eliot uses strong symbolic images in the description of spiritual devastation. The metaphor of water, for example, plays a major part in the poem. According to Wilson, “[A]s Gerontion in his dry rented house thinks wistfully of the young men who fought in the rain, as Prufrock longs to ride green waves and linger in the chambers of the sea, as Mr. Apollinax is imagined drawing strength from the deep sea-caves of coral islands, so in this new poem Mr Eliot identifies water with all freedom and illumination of the soul.”<sup>8</sup>

In “The Burial of the Dead”, the images of dryness and sterility are symbolic of the dryness of the spirit. The “dry stone” with “no sound of water” (1:24) evokes the spiritual and moral sterility of the individual in the twentieth century. Unlike in biblical times, when Moses could procure water from rocks using his "divining" rod and thus bring relief to the thirsty Israelites wandering the desert, the modern wastelander finds no water among the rock. The hope of drawing water from the red rock is also a metaphor for drawing substance from matter. But this is denied for the inhabitants of the modern waste land.

In “The Burial of the Dead”, the “dead sound on the final stroke of nine”(1:68) evokes the ninth hour of Jesus’ crucifixion. The line does not merely represent the Church as a decaying crumbling house, but also evokes the decadence of faith and the dwindling of life. Contemporary London becomes an Unreal City, a hellish place where people cross the church in their way to work, but they do not stop and consider such a holy place, which symbolizes grace and salvation.



In addition to its religious symbolism, the red rock reminds the wastelanders of the void of their spirits. As Rosenthal puts it: "The rock's shelter holds another terror, however: that of our recognition of our soul's peril and of the sacrifices needed for self-purification. 'I will show you fear in a handful of dust'.<sup>9</sup> Hence, the following line might be read as a direct invitation for the wastelanders to enter the kingdom of God: "(Come in under the shadow of this red rock), /And I will show you something different from either.)" (1:26-7).

The dead tree, in "The Burial of the Dead", symbolizes the absence of faith. According to Campbell, "The Christ story involves a sublimation of what originally was a very solid vegetal image. Jesus is on Holy Rood, the tree, and he is himself the fruit of the tree. Jesus is the fruit of eternal life, which was on the second forbidden tree in the Garden of Eden."<sup>10</sup> In the "Christian Cult", spring signals the coming of Christ, resurrection, and regeneration. But in "The Waste Land", the speaker's description of April as the cruelest month implies the spiritual death of the wastelanders.

The title of the second section, A Game of Chess, is symbolic of the wicked play with emotions and sexual desire. The reference to Cleopatra is very significant. It indicates the destructive effects of excessive desire. In the case of the famous lovers, Antony and Cleopatra, it wiped out a whole empire. This failure to control desire is the central cause of modern civilization's discontent. In "A Game of Chess", the wastelanders are afraid of salvation like the speaker who says: "If it rains, a closed car at four"(2:36).

So, in "The Waste Land", water is found in contexts where it is not needed or recognized as a means of salvation, and it is absent when it is needed. Death by water which is symbolic of the soul's rebirth is frightening for the wastelanders, as Madame Sosostris warns her client: "Fear death by water" (1:55). The line is the poem's extreme denial of

the spiritual life. According to Brooker and Bentley, "Death, in his sources, particularly in Frazer, Weston, and the Bible, is the prerequisite for life, and in all three, death by water is a central ritual in physical and spiritual rebirth. In all three, death is an end which is a beginning" (Brooker and Bentley 160).

In "The Fire Sermon", desire stands as one of the prominent concerns. Sweeny and the lascivious Mrs. Porter, for instance, respond only to the rhythms of their hormones; they stand completely outside the grace of any ritual. In the same section, the image of the fisherman "fishing in a dull canal/On a winter evening behind the gashouse" (3:190) is the best objective correlative for sexual incest. In this context, Weirick writes:

*To fish in [the] Biblical sense is to seek salvation and eternal life. But here in The Waste Land the spiritual meaning has been lost. Indeed, the meanings are different on every level. The fisher king is now seeking his catch not in a clean, vital, exhilarating medium, but in an industrially-polluted canal. Finally, these lines suggest illicit sexual activity of the most impersonal and unrewarding kind"<sup>11</sup>*

In another instance, "Thames-daughters" lose their virginity and human dignity because of sexual desire. Such desire cannot procure the individual satisfaction or pleasure. Tiresias confesses that he witnesses the same story repeated in millions of lives; he witnesses that man's undisciplined desire leads, inevitably, to his failure to possess anything that satisfies his cravings.

The title, The Fire Sermon, is reminiscent of Buddha's sermon, which presents man burning in the fire of lust, desire, and greed. According to Buddha, man feels complete only by his detachment from

lust. His teachings claim to free man from all the selfish desires and to make him happy and satisfied. The only way out of the waste land is to free oneself from the blinding power of desire; according to the teachings of Buddha:

All things are on fire, forms are on fire, eye-consciousness is on fire, the impressions received by the eye is likewise on fire. And with what are these things on fire? With the fire of lust, anger and illusion, with these they are on fire, and so were the other senses and so was the mind. Wherefore the wise man conceives disgust for the things of the senses, he removes from his heart the cause of suffering.”<sup>12</sup>

Buddhism's promises to offer man palpable solutions to his misery and to free him from lust that inflicts upon him made Eliot most probably encumbered with Buddhist feelings at the time when he was writing "The Waste Land". Eliot's biographer Ackroyd maintains that:

Eliot's attraction to Buddhism was not simply a philosophical one. Nirvana is extinction-the annihilation of desire, the freedom from attachments-and there was, as can be seen in his poetry, an over-riding desire in the young Eliot to be free [...] the Eastern religion had more romantic affiliations for someone who wished to break free of the familial bonds which otherwise held him<sup>13</sup>

Freedom can be achieved only when lust and desire are overcome. As Weirick contends, "The Waste Land is full of different manifestations of lust, and Eliot illustrates how the inhabitants are enslaved. Freedom will come only when lust has been

overcome”(Weirick 49),and the only way to do so is by turning to God. Marie voices this view as follows: “In the mountains, there you feel free”(1:17). Freedom that Marie is longing for is probably the freedom from desire.

In Christianity, the mountain is the symbol of spiritual enlightenment: “In the western tradition, they are often the homes of gods, being near to heaven and dangerous to mortals [...] In the Bible, mountains are the sites of revelation both natural and supernatural. Christ gives a “Sermon on the Mount” [...] Christ’s temptation in the wilderness takes place “on an exceeding high mountain.”<sup>14</sup>The bestowal of the Ten Commandments is also said to have taken place at the foot of the Holy Mountain. Hence, Marie is the mouthpiece of Eliot, who has a deep yearning for purification.

In “The Fire Sermon”, water which is a means of salvation becomes polluted: “The river bears no empty bottles, sandwich papers,/Silk handkerchiefs, cardboard boxes, cigarette ends/Or other testimony of summer nights. The nymphs are departed.”(3:177-79) The polluted river, which becomes a place of prostitution is the best objective correlative for the polluted soul. Water in “The Waste Land” becomes literal; it is no more symbolic. In “Death by Water”, drowning does not lead to any transformation or tergiversation because Phlebas lived a material life. He is the alter ego of Mr. Eugenides, which is emphasized by the use of the pun: currants/ current. In other words, he lives a very rich and materially prosperous life.

The Phoenicians believe that by drowning the god, fertility of the land will be restored. But in the waste land of the twentieth-century, death by water is frightening. It is like the case of Phlebas, fruitless. In

the case of Mrs. Porter and her daughter, water loses its symbolism; it becomes merely an H<sub>2</sub>O. The act of cleansing their feet in the soda water is ironic because water purifies and cleans the soul. It is a means of baptism.

In addition to the symbolism of water, the fish is an ancient symbol of fertility. It is also a symbol of faith in Christianity. According to Weirick, "The fish in this Biblical sense is to seek after salvation and eternal life" (Weirick 57) However, in the modern waste land, the fish is no longer symbolic of spirituality, because the wastelander is "fishing in the dull canal/On a winter evening round behind the gashouse"(3:188-89) This fisher is unlikely to catch any fish, because it is unwise to fish in a winter evening and in a canal, which is dull, dirty, and polluted due to the industrial revolution. The protagonist, in "The Fire Sermon", seems to be at the edge of collapse because he has little hope of receiving any religious illumination.

In "What the Thunder Said", the thunder's three commands: "Give, sympathize, control" suggest that passion is a human quality that should be given but at the same time, it should be controlled by means of faith. However, this does not apply in the context of the modern waste land. In Ecclesiastes 12, God says: "And when shall they be afraid of that which is high, and fears shall be in the way, and the almond tree shall flourish, and the grasshopper shall be a burden, and desire shall fail because man goeth to his long home, and the mourners go about the streets."<sup>15</sup>

So, desire should be temperate; otherwise it will turn into vice. Moreover, a weak management of the instincts or a permanent failure to gain gratification give rise to neurosis. In this context, Bush writes: "Little wonder that in the waste land, 'the awful daring of a moment's [sexual] surrender' generates feelings of 'a broken Coriolanus'"<sup>16</sup>. Eliot is a staunch believer that desire is an agent of destruction that is

threatening to man's existence. He talked about his experience with sexual desire and religion but confessed that it is religion that brought him a durable satisfaction<sup>17</sup>. The poem might be read as a recapitulation of these two experiences.

The poem's title alludes to Weston's From Ritual to Romance. According to Weston, the wound of the Fisher King is caused by passion. The legend relates sterility with sexual sin. In one of the versions of the Grail, some maidens lived in the secret hills with golden cups to offer hospitality to the passer by. One day, one of these maidens was outraged by this king who, along with his knights, stole the golden cups. According to Weston, these maidens were raped by the chieftain.

As a result, the priestesses of the vegetation cults were outraged and the land became waste and sterile (Coote 102), and in his discussion of the Holy Grail legend, Brooks writes: "the court of the rich Fisher King was withdrawn from the knowledge of men when certain of the maidens who frequented the shrine were raped and had their golden cups taken from them. The curse on the land follows from this act."<sup>18</sup> The story recalls the Oedipus myth where plague descended on Thebes and its inhabitants due to the incestuous marriage of Oedipus with his mother, although he does so mistakenly.

The title of the poem, the waste land, is symbolic of man's withdrawal from God. The poem might be read as Eliot's spiritual autobiography, which bears flagrant similarities to that of St. Augustine for whom Eliot read in his early years. After his conversion, Augustine confesses: "But I deserted you, my God. In my youth I wandered away too far from your sustaining hand, and created of myself a barren waste."<sup>19</sup> Thus, life without God is a stony rubbish, a desert that gives

no rebirth and no regeneration. Like Carthage, at the time of St. Augustine, Europe in the twenties was a picture of moral waste land.

Wilson asserts that:

*Mr Eliot uses The Waste Land as the concrete image of a spiritual drought. His poem takes place half in the real world-the world of contemporary London, and half in a haunted wilderness-the waste land of the medieval legend; but the Waste Land is only the hero's arid soul and the intolerable world about. The water which he longs for in the twilit desert is to quench the thirst which torments him in the London dusk ("The Poetry of Drought" 141).*

The quote suggests that the poem reflects not only the modern man's but also Eliot's state of mind and his spiritual collapse. Before his conversion to Anglo-Catholicism Eliot experienced a long process of spiritual torment and struggle, which culminates in "The Waste Land".

### **3-The Spiritual Pilgrimage**

Eliot's pursuit of philosophy destabilizes and shook his religious certainty. But he finally found in religion the only panacea to his psychological problems and his dualistic thinking. Before being Catholic, Eliot experienced with different beliefs and reached the fact that life without faith is a waste land. Eliot became more convinced that religion might deliver a centre of solace and equipoise that he was deeply in need of. As Brooker contends: "One by one, like an inventory examiner, he rejected Bergsonianism, humanism, aestheticism, and

other early twentieth-century "- isms"; and in the light of Christianity, he rejected them all as inadequate"<sup>20</sup> Hence, Eliot's religious doubts end by his conversion to the Anglican Church. Eliot embraced a Christian worldview even before writing "The Waste Land".

His moments of illness were necessary for him to reflect on himself and to concentrate on his self- definition. His experience with the breakdown, fragmentation and self-division was a preliminary step to create himself anew. Indeed, Eliot's conversion to Catholicism began much earlier than 1927. It started the time when he was writing "The Waste Land".

"The Waste Land" can be seen as a journey in search for the self/faith. The speaker's search for spiritual truth begins in "The Burial of the Dead". The view of religion as an alternative to living in the waste land, is implied in the speaker's invitation: "The Burial of the Dead": "come in under the shadow of this red rock, /And I will show you something different from either" (1:26-7). In the Bible, the rock usually symbolizes God or the spiritual power.

For Eliot, neither Fascism nor Communism is an adequate alternative; life in both systems is hell. Both of them are viewed as modern Satan. Eliot found his long searched for ease and internal order in Christianity; this is what landed him later in the Anglican Church. In the previous lines, the shadow refers to a moral problem. Discussing the shadow symbolism, De Laszlo maintains that: "The shadow is a moral problem that challenges the whole ego personality, for no one can become conscious of the shadow without considerable moral effort. To become conscious of it involves recognizing the dark aspects of personality as present and real."<sup>21</sup> So, the speaker, in "The Burial of the Dead", becomes aware of his spiritual death and emptiness; he, like Conrad, seems to cry in whisper: "the horror! The horror!".

The shadow in the first section might be the terrible knowledge



of the spiritual emptiness, which pushed him to start a pilgrimage towards the city of God. The speaker's cry: "HURRY UP PLEASE IT'S TIME" is an English dialect for the last call at the bar, but it is also an invitation for salvation, redemption and purification. The line implies that life is very short and one should seize the opportunity and follow the right path.

The "shadow at morning striding behind you/Or your shadow at evening rising to meet you" (1:28-9) suggests a speaker, who is going towards the east undertaking a spiritual journey. Facing the east symbolizes man's search for spiritual wisdom. This nameless wastelander, the speaker of the previous lines, is a pilgrim poised at the extremity of a dry season, waiting for rain, which is a symbol of grace and fertility. The journey towards the city of God was not easy; this is symbolized by the cruelty of the seasons and the sluggish response of nature.

In the poem, the sporadic and sordid sexual desire culminates in "The Fire Sermon"; but the section concludes by the quester's painful awakening to his sins and his recognition of the necessity for purification and redemption. Purification comes in "Death by Water", which is followed by "What the Thunder Said". Convinced that the solution to his problems is ascetic and spiritual, Eliot offers glimpses of hope by referring to Augustine, Buddha, and Christianity. Augustine and Buddha are the examples par excellence of this option of the spiritual path.

Religious emotions and remorse for a sexual wrong are deeply felt in Eliot's allusion to St. Augustine. In his Confessions, Augustine confesses that his sexual drives are unable to procure him pleasure and

heal his spiritual emptiness. Self-fulfillment and happiness, he comes to realize, can be attainable through union with God. Coote notices that "The presence of St. Augustine and hence of a deep-seated sexual unhappiness in a civilization collapsing through the lack of spiritual resources, enriches *The Waste Land* considerably. The inclusion of St. Augustine at the climax of *The Fire Sermon* may be felt through the whole poem" (Coote 129). The scenes of promiscuity at Margate and on Margate sands are followed by the allusion to S.T. Augustine. In her commentary on the lines, Gordon suggests the following interpretation:

Again sexual guilt precedes religious fervor. The penitent confesses, in the manner of Augustine, to his idle lusts, and his sense of sin propels him smoothly into the burning routine. There is no concern for the abused London women, only for his own purification" The speaker's guilt is evidenced in the following line: "He wept. He promised "a new start (Gordon 98).

Similarly, Eliot's reference to Buddhism is very significant because it is a psychological religion, which rescues the sufferer from the turmoil and sorrow of life into the so-called state of Nirvana, where the individual is released from desire. Eliot's merging of the eastern and western religions is a symbolic marriage of the fragments of religion that might bring back God whose image is distorted and rendered to "a heap of broken images".

The pilgrim, who traverses a waste land in quest for grace, reaches the spiritual truth in "What the Thunder Said". In her comment on the final part of the section, Gordon writes: "I am sure that before Eliot could have written this section he must himself have had some 'sign'. He said that religious poetry is so difficult to write because it demands actual experience, those moments of clarification and

crystallization which come but seldom" (Gordon 114). So, Eliot, who has a thirst fever for faith and order succeeds, at last, in making peace with himself. This is evident in the poem's ending with a Christian benediction: "The Peace which passeth all understanding."

Indeed, in the poem, we might discern many traces of spiritual enlightenment. "What the Thunder Said", for instance, opens with the Savior's death in order to secure the cultural and spiritual life of his people. As the speaker says: "He who was living is now dead/We who were living are now dying/ With a little patience" (5:328-30). This death is followed by rebirth; it is the figure or the shadow that is always "walking beside you" (5:362).

The shadow, which evokes spiritual rebirth, alludes to a story in the Bible, that of the stranger on the road to Emmaus who turns out to be Jesus Christ. Archetypally, Christ represents the wholeness and unity of the self. As Laszlo explains, "Christ exemplifies the archetype of the self. He represents the totality of a divine or heavenly kind, a glorified man, a son of God [...] unspotted by sin" (De Laszlo 36). So, the wastelander reached his quest for deeper internal union by being a potential candidate for religious life.

The theme of death winds throughout the poem. In Christianity, crucifixion and sacrifice are pre-requisites for spiritual rebirth. Hence, Sybil's longing for death in the epigraph followed by the pilgrim's longing for the revival of the buried corpse, in "The Burial of the Dead", suggest the poet's eagerness for spiritual illumination. In "The Journey of the Magi", Eliot reiterates the same idea as follows: "I had seen birth and death,/But had thought they were different; this birth was/Hard and bitter agony for us, like Death, our death./We returned to our places, these Kingdoms, /But no longer at ease here, in the old dispensation, /With an alien people clutching their gods./I should be glad of another

death.”<sup>22</sup> In these lines, death is seen as the first step for the renewal of life and purpose.

According to Schwartz-Salant, “death is an interim stage to be followed by a new life. No new life can arise, say the alchemists, without the death of the old. They liken the art to the work of the sower, who buries the grain in the earth: only to awaken to new life.”<sup>23</sup> So, acceptance of death in the poem implies the poet’s, or the wastelanders’, beginning of a new life under the guidance of the Christian Gospel.

The death instinct, which is an opposing drive to life instinct, propels the organism to go back to its first state of wholeness. But in contrast to Freud’s death, which is literal and corporeal, Jung’s Thanatos is a psychological state or reality. According to the Jungian critic Welman, death implies a return to the original state of wholeness or unity: “Thanatos is oriented on the one hand towards a “return” of the ego to its primal origins and on the other hand towards a transcendent union of opposites.”<sup>24</sup> So, death implies a movement towards reintegration, or the restoration of the lost unity. It is directed towards wholeness and fusion. According to Welman, “Experiences involving the collapse or the transcendence of personal boundaries are captured by the imagination as images of death. In these terms, death and dying are metaphors through which is lived and awakening of symbolic life and a deepening of personal identity and of one’s experience of the world”(Welman 135). The Sybil’s wish for death entails a return to the original state of wholeness. The poet’s struggle to escape from his state of dualism partly accounts for his obsession with death in “The Waste Land”.

The last section is rich with symbolism, which evokes Christian faith and the real possibility of redemption. The protagonist’s search for water, for instance, is a quest for personal salvation. This idea is echoed in another poem, “Gerontion”, as follows: “Here I am, an old man in a

dry month, /being read to by a boy, waiting for rain" ("Gerontion" 18). In "What the Thunder Said", the thunder comes with the cleansing rain: "In a flash of lightning Then a damp gust/Bringing water."

The coming of rain, which suggests purification and baptism of humanity, is associated with lightening which is an Indian symbol of enlightenment. In addition to water symbolism, the crowing of the cock represents a moment of revelation. The Cock, whose crow in the Gospel announces Christ's betrayal, sings now to awaken humanity to a new start, to the birth of a new order, and a new meaning of life. The cock announces the coming of dawn, which lifts the weight of suffering from life.

In the same vein, the chapel with the dry bones in the last section symbolizes the house of God. According to Brooker, "In the Church Age. i.e., after Pentecost, the bodies of Christians constitute the house of God." (*Mastery and Escape* 97) Interestingly, the walk towards Emmaus in "What the Thunder Said" is mixed with the approaching of the chapel perilous. The latter, according to Weston, signifies initiation into the mysteries of physical and spiritual union. If in the medieval legends success of the quest meant restoring the fertility of the waste land and the reproductive powers of its King, who was rendered impotent, in Eliot's "The Waste Land", the success of the quest is purely psychological and spiritual. By mentioning Tiresias, in the last section, Eliot gives a slice of hope or an omen that there will be a way out of the waste land because in the *Odyssey*, it is Tiresias, who helps Odysseus to find his way home.

The most significant part of the section is the passage of the thunder commands. The words of the thunder confer on the poem's protagonist a divine call. In this regard, The critic Miller maintains that the stanzas of the thunder commandments "suggest a spiritual

transformation of the hero, as though he has given alms, found compassion, and leaned self control.”<sup>25</sup>The thunder preaches three disciplines that must be followed: give, sympathise, control. The thunder’s first command “give” proffers a way to step out of one’s self-selfishness, self-centeredness and separateness from others. Commenting on this virtue, Patea states that: “The ethical Hinduism of the Upanishads conceives life as a form of “being”, not of “having” [...] Human value is not a function of “I am what I have” but of “I am what I give.”<sup>26</sup>The second virtue preached by the thunder is ‘sympathise’; it invites the wastelanders to be compassionate. This virtue is at the heart of the Christian religion. In this regard, Campbell writes:

Son of God came down into this world to be crucified to awaken our hearts to compassion, and thus to turn our minds from the gross concerns of raw life in the world to the specifically human values of self-giving in shared suffering. In that sense the wounded king, the maimed king of the Grail legend, is a counterpart of the Christ. He is there to evoke compassion and thus bring a dead wasteland to life (Campbell 94)

The thunder’s third command is “control”. It means controlling one’s excessive desire; thus, achieving a kind of harmony between the intellectual and the emotional sides. In this respect, Fulweiler writes: “After commanding a self-giving surrender and sympathy, the thunder announces the third saving virtue, control. The image Eliot uses is one of organic unity: human cooperation with the wind, the archetypal image of spirit, a union of heart and skillful hands:”<sup>27</sup>So, collision of feeling and intellect, of subject and object, is what enables the

individual to overcome dualism that results in an utter sense of emptiness and nihilism.

One way of proclaiming purification and salvation is by abandoning the world and seeking solitude and loneliness. The protagonist's loneliness, by the end of the poem, is the quality of a mystic, who has reached spiritual awareness. As Unger points out, "Isolation and alienation from the world become a stage in the discipline of religious purgation, an ideal to be further followed."<sup>28</sup> The speaker becomes like Buddha, who went into solitude and then sat beneath the bo tree, the tree of immortal knowledge, where he received an illumination that has enlightened all of Asia for twenty-five hundred years.

Jesus also went into the desert for forty days; and it was out of that desert that he came with his message. Thus, to achieve a sense of oneness with oneself, one needs some solitude. This is the case of Eliot in "The Waste Land". Very much like Unger, Gordon contends that the lonely pilgrim, who "sat upon the shore/Fishing, with the arid plain behind me" (5:23-4), is the poet, who has traversed a psychological waste land via religious fervor. According to Gordon,

*Early in the history of the manuscript, in 1915, there appears an interesting personality, a would-be saint, who was to become shadowy and diffuse in the long, more impersonal Waste Land. Eliot named the character After Narcissus, Bishop of Jerusalem [...] In The Waste Land the Narcissus figure reappears as the prophet in the desert in "The Burial of the Dead", as the penitent who is 'burning burning' at the end of 'The Fire Sermon', and as the solitary pilgrim in "What the Thunder Said", who abandons civilization and its history in search of a new life (Gordon 91).*

The ending line of the poem evinces the poet's movement toward a transcendental experience. It is plausible to say that the experience of the self in "The Waste Land" resembles F.H. Bradley's movement from 'relational experience' to 'transcendental experience'. While "The Burial of the Dead" represents a moment of relational experience, which is the state of fragmentation and disunity, "What the Thunder Said" represents a moment of transcendent experience where there is a movement towards self-reintegration and unity.

Religion transforms the shell-shock poet from a sick person into league with God. Hence, religion might be the centre towards which all fragments should point in order to recover the lost unity. In this regard, Ackroyd writes: "the attachment to something outside oneself can create a sense of the self as whole again, united in the act of worship. He wanted an object for his intense feelings which was not human, in order to heal a personality which threatened to shatter apart" (Ackroyd 161). The narrator's line: "I can connect nothing with nothing" followed by the allusion to Augustine's confessions suggests that religion is the only way of rebinding fragments and achieving unity.

Religion is the only cure and the only means of achieving peace and harmony within. It is the sole way to regain the lost and vanished unity. According to Brooker and Bentley, "The very word "religion" comes from roots meaning rebinding, retying, transcending brokenness and regaining a primal condition of harmony. Although the twentieth-century waste land is a place of intense awareness of disunity, it is only a recent version of a constantly recurring condition. Eliot's nostalgia is for a community that he knows has not existed in history" (Brooker and Bentley 211).

To refuge from the distress of modern life and from his psychological breakdown, Eliot was converted to Christianity. He finds



in religion the only thing that ascribes meaning to one's existence. William James defends the role of religion as follows: "Happiness! Happiness! Religion is only one of the ways in which men gain that gift. Easily, permanently, and successfully, it often transforms the most intolerable misery into the profoundest and most enduring happiness."<sup>29</sup>

James's view is echoed by Schumaker, who contends that religion has a curative power for mental health. As he puts it, religion reduces "anxiety by providing cognitive structures [...] that help to impose order on a chaotic world; offer existential grounding in the form of meaning, purpose, and hope which, in turn, generates an emotional well-being [...] foster social cohesion and a sense of community; afford members a social identity, and sense of belongingness."<sup>30</sup>

At the end of the poem, the pilgrim seems to have reached a state of consolation and peace because it is the stage where he reaches religious awareness and illumination. Sexual passion cannot lead to a sense of self-fulfillment. It is only by surrendering oneself to faith that one can live moments of happiness and merriness.

Some of Eliot's critics have noticed that his sexual and spiritual malaises are inextricably related. Eliot finds in religion an important means to escape his own domestic horrors and perverse sexuality. The frightful discovery of his wife's insanity and his marital woes pushes him further towards surrendering himself to the divine. Defending this view, MacDiarmid asserts that:

we tend to view Eliot's conversion as a cowardly attempt to suppress the catalysts of his obsessive-compulsive disorders, his "sexual attacks", which we can interpret as anxiety about his sexuality and subjectivity. This means that we diagnose Eliot's impulse to religious witness or Christian

mysticism as a symptom of pathology, and remember that hysteria is defined as a "conversion disorder". Religious feeling, confronted with the skepticism of the twentieth-century, becomes egotistical delusion.<sup>31</sup>

According to this view, Eliot's conversion is similar to the Marxist formula of religion as the "opiate of the people" and the psychoanalysts' description of religion as "substitute-gratification". Vivien's moral insanity and her neurotic problems are essential to Eliot's long purgatorial journey, which ends in the peace that is found in Christianity. By embracing the ascetic way of the Catholic mystics, Eliot does not only feel redeemed from sex, but more importantly, he becomes capable of escaping Vivien at least morally.

According to MacDiarmid, the bulk of current critical and popular readings of Eliot attribute his conversion to his gynophobia and his hatred of domesticity. Specifically, critics and biographers such as Peter Ackroyd and Tom Matthews read Eliot's *Ash Wednesday* as abandonment of Vivien and his atonement for that 'sin'. Secondly, they view his alliance with the Church of England as an official repudiation of the embarrassingly mercantile flavors of his St. Louis roots, the humanist influence of his grandfather, Andrew Greenleaf Eliot, and his mother's overbearing intellectual and social ambitions (MacDiarmid 86-7).

So, Eliot's confirmation to the Church, which is rooted in his early years, signals a disavowal of his grandfather's Unitarianism. Eliot's resistance to the Puritan family code of behavior marks his spiritual departure from his family. His conversion also serves to separate him physically and spiritually from his hysterical wife. It gives

him a sense of freedom and provides him with a way to cut Vivien out of his life. A Freud point out that religion is a defense mechanism that vouchsafes the individual's protection against neurotic illness. As he puts it,

*Biologically speaking, religiousness is to be traced to the small human child's long-drawn-out helplessness and need for help; and when at a later date he perceives how truly forlorn and weak he is when confronted with great forces of life, he feels his condition as did in childhood, and attempts to deny his own despondency by a regressive revival of the forces which protected his infancy<sup>32</sup>*

Eliot's departure from his family towards Britain brings about a deep sense of loss, alienation and spiritual fall. The poet was discontented with his Puritan family, which observed standards of conduct strictly. But, far from his parents, Eliot sensed the fragility of his existence. To compensate for the loss of his parents, he sought unity with God as an alternative father. In this regard, Freud maintains that: "Psycho-analysis has made us familiar with the intimate connection between the father-complex and belief in God; it has shown us that a personal God is, psychologically, nothing other than an exalted father, and it brings us evidence every day of how young people lose their religious beliefs as soon as their father's authority breaks down" (Leonardo Da Vinci 73) Thus, Eliot's religious needs are rooted in his early Unitarian upbringing. His conversion is prompted by a deep longing for his parents or at least to revive or restore his memories and ideas of them.

### **Conclusion :**

The quest of a psychological unity is located at the center of the poet's interest. The movement from "The Burial of the Dead" to "What the Thunder Said" follows the pattern of a spiritual journey, hence, suggesting the possibility of inward salvation. The psychological and spiritual desert of "The Waste Land" ends by embracing the possibility of a new life. At a time ruled by the language of science, secularism and sexual freedom, religion enables the modern man to reach a transcendental experience and achieve inward peace and coherence. Instead of seeking solace in carnal and morbid desires, religion is the force which can alleviate the individual's pains and tessellate his divided self into a harmonious whole. Eliot finds in religion a protective shield against his trauma. Interestingly, the journeying motif is the most important structural device Eliot uses to write his poem. By viewing the poem as a quest for spiritual illumination and psychological unity, the reader can sense its forward progress.

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