

# **The 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 brings together its fragments, albeit being said to be formless. As the paper shows, the ultimate panacea to the psychotic'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. Therefore, religion emerges as the fructifying power that can restore fertility to the spiritual aridity of modern civilization. Despite his theory of impersonality, the poem also addresses Eliot's religious questioning and quest.

**Key words:** Organic unity, spiritual crisis, spiritual journey, The Waste Land, T.S. Eliot,

## **Introduction**

With the advent of the modern age, the spiritual life of the West has withered and the individual has experienced the death of the spirit, to the extent that s/he has become stripped of spiritual values. Besides, the absence of religion renders the modern world a waste land, cursed by its creator, and 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. In the absence of religion, in the modern times, desire 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. The latter is found in religion which is the only means that can restore the modern man's psychological equilibrium. Thus, 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 fragmented psychological make-up of the individual. So, reading it as a spiritual pilgrimage gives the poem a unified structure despite the fact that it is read by critics as a kaleidoscopic piece of disconnected ideas.

## Desire and the Religious Crisis

If the Cartesian axiom is “I think therefore I am”, then Freudian one is “I feel therefore I am”. In other words, what makes the essence of man for Sigmund Freud is desire, as is evident in the poem. Characters in “The Waste Land” have carnal desires and crave hearts. This is evident 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”(Eliot, 1968, p.42). The lines imply that emotions and desires are at the core of the individual, but the wastelanders cannot control their fleshy instincts. Thus, the sensual triumphs over the spiritual. Sexuality, in *The Waste Land*, becomes a matter of illicit relationships and stultifying sentimentalism. In fact, excessive and morbid desires have ruined life in the modern age.

Indeed, a number of critics read the poem as a representation of the twentieth-century degradation of values and the breakdown of morality. The critic Coote, (1985) for instance, states that the poem is “a profound and a very moving picture of modern man’s spiritual plight”( p.31). This is shown in the poem’s opening line that signals the centrality of desires and senses to the misery and suffering of human beings. The speaker’s view of “April [as] the cruelest month”(1968, p.31) 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. As Morrison (1996) contends, “April is ‘the cruelest month’ [...] because it awakens “savage” or archaic [sexual] desires”( p.100). 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 people allow emotions and feelings to blindly guide them, their minds lose control and are compulsively driven into disaster. In the same vein, the image of “crowds of people, walking round in a ring” suggests that wastelanders wander aimlessly in pursuit of pleasure, comfort and excitement because their lives are empty, meaningless and devoid of any spiritual guidance. The spiritual crisis, which results from the valorization of the sensual over the spiritual, has left the modern individual with a despairing, pessimistic, and morbid mood.

Furthermore, 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”(Eliot, 1968, p.27). Although there is no answer to the question, it is obvious that no roots can survive in the desert; that is, life without faith is a form of death in life. These lines allude to the Bible, where God, addressing Ezekiel by Son of Man, chooses him as His messenger to Israel

which becomes a waste land because of the Israelites' wickedness. 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"(qtd in Weirick, 1971, p.16). These "broken images" can be seen as the idols that the Israelites have erected in worship of false gods, thereby signaling the breakdown of morality. Also, the "dead tree" in "The Burial of the Dead" is the antithesis of the Tree of Life, in the sense that it symbolizes the spiritual values that have been demolished because of modern materialism which diverts the individual from moral and religious obligations. In the same vein, wastelanders' spiritual death is evident in their fear of salvation. The speaker's warning to "show you fear in a handful of dust" (Eliot, 1968, p.28) evokes the image of the burial service in the Book of Common Prayer, which says that man is made of dust and shall return to dust after death. Besides, the failure of the speaker to comprehend the spiritual enlightenment is entailed in the following line: "Looking into the heart of light, the silence" (Eliot, 1968, p.28). Light here refers to Christ or spiritual knowledge and the word "heart" has a spiritual connotation that might be read as an allusion to "The Sacred Heart of Christ." Thus, the previous line suggests the spiritual blindness of the inhabitants of the modern waste land. For example, the quester in "The Burial of the Dead" seeks spiritual enlightenment in the wrong place. He is drawn to the superstition of a fortune-teller with "a wicked pack of cards."(Eliot, 1968, p.28). He is the same person who appears in "The Fire Sermon", "fishing in the dull canal/On a winter evening round behind the gashouse" (Eliot, 1968, p.189-90). The disillusioned fisherman follows the wrong path to obtain spiritual enlightenment because it is not wise to fish in a polluted river in a winter evening. Instead of looking for guidance in the Bible, the modern man looks for spiritual enlightenment in the cards of fortune tellers, such as Madame Sosostris. One can read the word 'prophet' as 'profit' in the modern age. This means that 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. However, it also points out that Sosostris is a non-believer who does not even believe in a hereafter. This absence of faith keeps the inhabitants of "The Waste Land" constantly plagued by a sense of insecurity, especially as Madame Sosostris is herself a wastelander who cannot offer any resolution to the pilgrim's problems.. 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" (Eliot, 1968, p.28-29). These lines show her spiritual emptiness and shortsighted vision, which are reinforced by the poet's ironic description of her as "Madame Sosostris, famous clairvoyante./Had a bad cold" (Eliot, 1968, p.28 ). Although God exists, the human self is unable to grasp or reach Him.

Hence, the modern man is seen as a lonely entity or being that is enclosed in its own sphere and alienated even from the Creator.

In “Gerontion”, which is a part of the original version of the poem, the speaker says: “After such knowledge, what forgiveness? Think now” (Eliot, 1968, p.19). Knowledge here might refer to man’s realization of his spiritual emptiness and the ‘horror’ within him. The one-eyed merchant in Sosostris’ Tarot card symbolizes the one-dimensional vision of the capitalist who throws religion aside. In my point of view, the merchant is the antithesis of Tiresias, the prophet in Greek mythology, who, despite being blind physically, is gifted with spiritual enlightenment. As a result, the wastelanders, unlike Tiresias, are physically sighted but spiritually blind and impotent: they are dead in life. This idea is further emphasized by “That corpse you planted last year in your garden” (Eliot, 1968, p.29), suggesting that the speaker has long been spiritually dead and that the corpse connotes a body devoid of soul and a dead spirit which awaits revival. The line thus 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”(Eliot, 1971, p.12). In light of the above mentioned points, it is possible to argue that 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?”(Eliot, 1968, p.31). Eliot was very much influenced by F. H. Bradley, and his Ph.D. thesis was titled Knowledge and Experience in the Philosophy of F. H. Bradley (1964). Knowledge for the wastelanders is devoid of any spiritual Substance. Furthermore, the spiritual crisis is attributed to industry which partakes in the religious crisis and the abandonment of Christ. The following line is a metonymy for the expansion of knowledge in the modern civilization: “I read, much of the night, and go south in winter” (Eliot, 1968, p.27). It follows that the conditions of the twentieth century stimulate these secular ideas which derive mainly from the atheism of Darwin, Nietzsche and Marx. For example, the ‘Dog’, in “The Burial of the Dead”, stands for science which deprives the individual of the spiritual side. As Brooker and Bentley (1990) 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”(p.36).

In other words, modern science has waged a war against the beliefs and spiritual values that have given sense to the lives of people for centuries, thereby resulting in 'the death of God'. Obviously, the religious crisis started when God was executed and science became the new religion of Europe. As Modernists believe, science could sweep away all human problems and misery and elevate the individual above the world. This is why they view religion as irrational or a sort of madness. According to McGrath (2004, p.220), "the reemergence of atheism as a serious intellectual option dates from the dawn of modernity: Atheism is the religion of the autonomous and rational human being who believes that reason is able to uncover and express the deepest truths of the universe." With the absence of religion, man becomes an autonomous and self-sufficient being, who needs to look no further than himself to explain the meaning of life. Consequently, agnostic thought prevails, as man is free only if he owes his existence to himself. Hence, atheism is seen as a means of escape.

The spiritual decadence of the Western world is also represented in the passage about Marie from "The Burial of the Dead." Her anxiety and insistence on not being Russian are possibly a reaction to the communist system which is based on the exclusion of God. That is, Russia evokes the triumph of secularism in the modern age and the decay of faith, where matter solely cannot define the human nature. Rather, it is the spiritual side which makes us human. Indeed, all secular and psychological therapies cannot offer man solace and relief from the maladies of the soul. Yet, religion is the only recuperative power without which life becomes worthless. Thus, the ruin and decadence in the modern waste land are attributed to the spiritual sterility brought about by modernity.

These arguments justify why 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" (2001, p.142). The absence of water, in *The Waste Land*, suggests the absence of faith and salvation.

Also, the images of dryness and sterility in "The Burial of the Dead" symbolize the dryness of the spirit. The image of the "dry stone" with "no sound of water" (Eliot, 1968, p.27) evokes a sense of spiritual and moral sterility in the twentieth century. For example, in biblical times Moses could procure water from rocks using his "divining" rod in order to help the thirsty Israelites wandering the desert. By contrast, the wastelander in the modern times finds no water among the

rock. This hope of drawing water from the red rock is a metaphor for drawing substance from matter; however, this is denied for the inhabitants of the modern waste land. Another similar image is the “dead sound on the final stroke of nine”(Eliot, 1968, p.29) that evokes the ninth hour of Jesus’ crucifixion. This image or line not only represents Church as a decaying crumbling house but also evokes the decadence of faith and the dwindling of life. As such, contemporary London becomes an unreal city; a hellish place where people cross the church in their way to work; nonetheless, they overlook such a holy place which often symbolizes grace and salvation.

In addition to its religious symbolism, the red rock reminds the wastelanders of the void of their spirits. As Rosenthal (1960) 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’” (p.91).The red rock is symbolic of religion or faith. Hence, the following line might be read as a direct invitation (by Eliot) 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)” (Eliot, 1968, p.27). In addition, 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” (1991, p.88). The dead tree might be seen as the antithesis of the Tree of Life. The demise of the tree is suggestive of the spiritual crisis. In the Christian cult, spring signals the coming of Christ, resurrection, and regeneration; however, in “The Waste Land”, the speaker’s description of April as the cruelest month implies the spiritual death of the wastelanders, as argued before.

The title of the second section, A Game of Chess, is also symbolic of the wicked play with emotions and sexual desires. Eliot’s reference to Cleopatra is very significant because it indicates the destructive effects of excessive desire. In the case of the famous lovers, Antony and Cleopatra, their inability to control their sexual desires has wiped out a whole empire. This failure to control desire is considered the central reason behind the discontent and degeneration of modern civilization (Nordau, 1895).In “A Game of Chess”, the wastelanders are afraid of salvation, as is the speaker who says: “If it rains, a closed car at four”(Eliot, 1968, p.32 ).This line suggests that water in the poem exists in a state of contradiction; that is, it is found in contexts where it is not recognized as a means of survival and salvation but is absent when it is needed. As Brooker and Bentley (1990) comment, “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” (160). Death by water here can be symbolic of the soul’s rebirth which is frightening for the wastelanders and hence of the poem’s

extreme denial of the spiritual life. As Madame Sosostris says, warning her client: “Fear death by water” (Eliot, 1968, p.29).

Desire also stands as one of the prominent concern in the poem. In “The Fire Sermon”, Sweeney 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” (Eliot, 1968, p.34) is the best objective correlative for sexual incest. In this context, Weirick (1971) 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”(p.57).

Fishing in the dull canal suggests the search for self-fulfillment not in religion but in sexuality. In another instance, “Thames-daughters” lose their virginity and dignity because of their sexual desire which they cannot control. Such a desire cannot procure an individual’s satisfaction or pleasure. This tells why Tiresias confesses that he has witnessed the same story taking place in millions of lives; a story about how a man’s undisciplined desire leads to his failure to possess anything that satisfies his cravings.

This explains why 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 if he is detached from lust, and this detachment liberates him from all the selfish desires in order to make him happy and satisfied. According to Buddha (qtd in Coote, 1985),

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” ( Coote, 1985, p.120).

So, the only way out of the waste land is to free oneself from the blinding power of desire. Buddhism promises to offer man palpable solutions to his misery and to free him from lust that inflicts upon him. This could explain why Eliot has been encumbered with Buddhist feelings at the time of writing the poem. Eliot’s biographer Ackroyd (1984) 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 overriding 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 (p.47).

Freedom can be achieved only when lust and desire are overcome. As Weirick (1971) 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" (p. 49). Given that the only way to do so is by turning to God, Marie voices this view as follows: "In the mountains, there you feel free" (Eliot, 1968, p.27). Here, the freedom that Marie is longing for is probably the freedom from desire. In Christianity, the mountain often stands as the symbol of spiritual enlightenment. According to Ferber (1999), mountains in "the western tradition, [...]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' [...]and] Christ's temptation in the wilderness takes place "on an exceeding high mountain"(129).This quote denotes the fact that the quester in *The Waste Land* seeks spiritual transcendence. This makes Marie the mouthpiece of Eliot who has a deep yearning for purification.

However, water which is a means of salvation in "The Fire Sermon" 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" (Eliot, 1968, p.34).This image of the polluted river, which turns into a place of prostitution, symbolizes the polluted soul. Water in the poem can thus be read as literal; it is no more symbolic. In "Death by Water", drowning does not lead to any transformation or because Phlebas has lived a material life. He is the alter ego of Mr. Eugenides, as is emphasized by the use of the pun: currants/current. In other words, Phlebas lives in materially prosperous life conditions, and this is why 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, a fruitless one. In the case of Mrs. Porter and her daughter, water loses its symbolism in the sense that it becomes merely an H<sub>2</sub>O. This makes the act of cleansing their feet in the soda water ironic, given that water purifies and cleans the soul; i.e. it is a means of baptism.

Similar to the symbolic images of water, the fish is considered an ancient symbol of fertility as well as a symbol of faith in Christianity. According to Weirick (1971), "The fish in this Biblical sense is to seek after salvation and eternal life" (p.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”(Eliot, 1968, p.34 ). That is, the fisher is unlikely to catch any fish because it is not wise to fish in a winter evening and in a dull, dirty canal polluted (literally and figuratively) by the industrial revolution. Thus, the protagonist, in “The Fire Sermon”, seems to be at the edge of collapse because he has little hope of receiving any religious illumination.

It is worthy to note also that the three commands of thunder, which the section “What the Thunder Said” identifies as “Give, sympathise, control”, suggest that passion is a human quality that should be expressed or given while simultaneously 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”(qtd in Brooks, 1966, p.140).This shows that desire should be temperate; otherwise it will turn into vice.

Moreover, a weak management of the instincts or a permanent failure to gain gratification could give rise to neurosis. As Bush (1984) writes, “Little wander that in the waste land, ‘the awful daring of a moment’s [sexual] surrender’ generates feelings of ‘a broken Coriolanus’”(57).That is, for Eliot, desire is an agent of destruction that is threatening to man’s existence. He talks about his experience with sexual desire and religion but confesses that it is religion which has brought him a durable satisfaction (Gordon, 1977, p.72). As such, the poem might be read as a recapitulation of these two experiences.

On the one hand, the poem’s title alludes to Weston’s *From Ritual to Romance* (2011) in the sense that both view the barren waste land as a result of moral degradation. According to Weston, the wound of the Fisher King, according to the legend, is caused by passion, and this tells why the legend relates sterility with sexual sin. As mentioned in one of the versions of the Grail, some maidens lived in the secret hills and had golden cups to offer hospitality to the passers- by. One day, one of these maidens was outraged by this king who, along with his knights, stole the golden cups. These maidens were raped by the chieftain, an incident that fueled the rage of the priestesses of the vegetation cults, and this explained why the land became waste and sterile (Coote, 1985, p. 102). In his discussion of the Holy Grail legend, Brooks (1966) 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”(p.138).For me, the story recalls the Oedipus myth that narrated the story of the plague inflicted

upon Thebes and its inhabitants because of the incestuous marriage of Oedipus with his mother, although he was unaware of his sin (Edmunds, 2006). On the other hand, 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”(qtd in Coote, 1985, p.43). Thus, life without God is sterile and aimless; it is a long journey that has no direction and no hope of self-discovery and revival. Like Carthage, at the time of St. Augustine, Europe in the twenties was seen as a picture of moral waste land. Wilson (2001) asserts that:

Mr Eliot uses The Waste Land as the concrete image of a spiritual drouth. 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 (p. 141).

The poem thus reflects not only the modern man’s (mental) state of existence but also Eliot’s state of mind and spiritual collapse. Before his conversion to Anglo-Catholicism, Eliot experienced a long process of spiritual torment and struggle which culminated in “The Waste Land”. This could tell why Eliot wrote this suggestive poem as not only a literary piece but also a timeless journey in which readers today can see reflections of their lives.

### **The Spiritual Pilgrimage**

Although Eliot’s pursuit of philosophy destabilized or shook his religious certainty, he finally found in religion the only panacea to his psychological problems and dualistic thinking. Prior to converting into Catholicism, Eliot experienced different beliefs that made him realize that life without faith was a waste land. It made him attentive to the fact that religion might deliver a centre of solace and equipoise that he really needed. As Brooker (1944) 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”(p.123). Therefore, Eliot’s religious doubts end by his conversion to the Anglican Church, where he embraced a Christian worldview even before writing “The Waste Land”. His moments of illness were necessary for him as a means to reflect on himself and to concentrate on his

self-definition. His experience of breakdown, fragmentation and self-division was a preliminary step that would empower him to create himself anew.

Indeed, Eliot's conversion to Catholicism began much earlier than 1927, that is, it started during the time of writing "The Waste Land". This poem can be seen as a journey in search for one's self and faith. The speaker's search for spiritual truth begins in "The Burial of the Dead". This 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" (Eliot, 1968, p.27). In the Bible, the rock usually symbolizes God or spiritual power; however, this is not the case in the modern state. For Eliot, neither Fascism nor Communism is an adequate alternative because both of them are viewed as images of a modern Satan. This is why Eliot has found his long-searched for internal tranquility in Christianity and later in the Anglican Church. In the previous quote, the shadow might refer to a moral problem. Discussing the shadow symbolism, De Laszlo (1958) 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"(p.7). In other words, awareness of one's wickedness is a moment of spiritual awakening, and it is essential for the progress of the soul. So, the speaker, in "The Burial of the Dead", becomes aware of his spiritual death and emptiness; similar to Kurtz in Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, he seems to cry in whisper: "the horror! The horror!" Thus, the shadow in the first section might stand for the terrible knowledge of spiritual emptiness which pushed him (the speaker) to start a pilgrimage towards the city of God. The speaker's cry "HURRY UP PLEASE IT'S TIME"(Eliot, 1968, p.33) is an English dialect for the last call at the bar, but in the poem, it might be read as an invitation for salvation, redemption and purification. This line implies that life is short and that one should seize the opportunity in order to follow the right path. Furthermore, the lines "shadow at morning striding behind you/Or your shadow at evening rising to meet you" (Eliot, 1968, p.28) suggest the presence of a speaker, who is going towards the East to undertake a spiritual journey. Facing the East symbolizes man's search for spiritual wisdom. The nameless wastelander (the speaker of the previous lines), is a pilgrim poised at the extremity of a dry season, waiting for rain which is considered a symbol of grace and fertility. Thus the journey towards the city of God is not an easy one, especially as this is symbolized by the cruelty of the seasons and the sluggish response of nature.

From a similar perspective, the sporadic and sordid sexual desire culminates in "The Fire Sermon"; however, 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” followed by “What the Thunder Said”. Convinced that the solution to his problems is ascetic and spiritual, Eliot offers a glimpse of hope by referring to Augustine, Buddha, and Christianity. Augustine and Buddha best exemplify the followers of the spiritual path. Religious emotion and remorse for a sexual sin are deeply felt in the way Eliot alludes to St. Augustine. In his *Confessions*, Augustine confesses that his sexual drives are unable to grant him pleasure or heal his spiritual emptiness. Self-fulfillment and happiness, he thus comes to realize, can be attainable through union with God. As Coote (1985) notices, “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” (p.129). In the poem, the scenes of sexual promiscuity at Margate and on Margate sands are followed by the allusion to S.T. Augustine. For Eliot, religion is the only means of purging the individual from excessive sexual desire that ruins one’s soul. In her commentary on these lines, Gordon (1977) 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 (p. 98).

Following Gordon’s line of thought, one might say that the poem is a spiritual peregrination which is geared towards deflection from the sensual world. Since sexual desire distracts man from the spiritual path, the quester has transcended the flesh.

Similarly, Eliot’s reference to Buddhism is significant because it is considered a psychological religion which rescues the sufferers from the turmoil and sorrow of life and elevates them into the so-called state of Nirvana, where the individual is released from desire. The merging of Eastern and Western religions (Buddhism and Christianity) becomes a symbolic act of marriage that unifies the fragments of religion to bring back God whose image is distorted and turned into “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”. Commenting on the final part of the section, Gordon (1977) 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” (p. 114). In other words, Eliot, who strives for faith and order succeeds, at last, in making peace with himself. This is evident in the

way the poem ends with a Christian benediction: “The Peace which passeth all understanding”(Eliot, 1968, p.43).

Indeed, readers of the poem 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” (Eliot, 1968, p.40 ). This death is followed by rebirth; it is the figure or shadow that is always “walking beside you” (Eliot, 1968, p.41). The shadow, which evokes spiritual rebirth, alludes to a Biblical story about the stranger on the road to Emmaus who turns out to be Jesus Christ. Archetypally, Christ represents the wholeness and unity of the human self. As De Laszlo (1958) 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” (p. 36). So, the wastelander reaches his quest for internal union by being a potential candidate for religious life.

This is why 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”(Eliot, 1968, p.66). In these lines, death is seen as the first step toward the renewal of one’s life. According to Schwartz-Salant (2005), “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”(p.170). This suggests that the acceptance of death in the poem implies the poet’s or the wastelanders’ attempt to embark on or begin a new life under the guidance of the Christian Gospel.

From a different perspective, the death instinct, as an opposing drive to life instinct, propels organism to go back to its first state of wholeness and purity. Contrary to Freud’s concept of death, which is literal and corporeal, Karl Jung’s Thanatos, according to Welman, is a psychological state or reality. For Welman (2005), the Jungian concept of death implies a return to the original state of unity: “Thonatos 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” (p.132).This means that death implies a movement towards reintegration and the restoration of the lost unity. As Welman (2005) adds,

“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”(p.135). Therefore, Sybil’s wish for death entails a return to the original state of wholeness, while 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 of the poem is rich in 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 the other poem by Eliot “Gerontion”, as follows: “Here I am, an old man in a dry month, /being read to by a boy, waiting for rain” (Eliot, 1968, p. 18). In “What the Thunder Said”, the thunder comes with the cleansing rain: “In a flash of lightning Then a damp gust/Bringing rain”(Eliot, 1968, p.42). 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 to awaken humanity to a new start, to the birth of a new order and a new meaning of life. Hence, the cock announces the coming of dawn which lifts the weight of darkness and suffering from life.

In the same vein, the chapel with the dry bones in the last section of the poem symbolizes the house of God. According to Brooker (1994), “In the Church Age. i.e., after Pentecost, the bodies of Christians constitute the house of God”(p. 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 (Weston, 2011, p.105). If the success of the quest in the medieval legends signals restoring the fertility of the waste land and the reproductive powers of its King, then the success of the quest in Eliot’s *The Waste Land* is purely psychological and spiritual. By mentioning Tiresias, in the last section, Eliot gives a glimpse 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. What is significant here 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 (2006) 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”(p.136). The thunder preaches three disciplines that must be followed: give, sympathise, control. The thunder’s first command “give” offers a way to step out of one’s selfishness, self-centeredness and isolation. Commenting on this virtue, Patea (2007) 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” (p.109).

The second virtue preached by the thunder is ‘sympathise’; it invites the wastelanders to be compassionate. This virtue is at the heart of Christianity. In this regard, Campbell (1991) 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 (p.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. As Fulweiler (1993) 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”(p.182). This means that the collision of feeling and intellect, of subject and object enables the individual to overcome inner contradiction or 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”(1970, p.19). The speaker becomes like Buddha, who seeks solitude and then sits beneath the bo tree, the tree of immortal knowledge, where he receives an illumination that has enlightened 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 unity with self, one needs some solitude, as is the case of Eliot in “The Waste Land”. In line with Unger, Gordon contends that the lonely pilgrim, who “sat upon the shore/Fishing, with the arid plain behind me” (Eliot, 1968, p.43), is the poet who has traversed a psychological waste land via religious fervor. According to Gordon (1977),

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 (p. 91).

As a result, the ending line of the poem evinces the poet’s movement toward a transcendental experience. It is possible 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. To phrase it differently, religion transforms the poet from a sick person into league with God. Hence, religion might be the centre towards which all fragments should move in order to recover the lost unity. As 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” (1984, p. 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 for rebinding fragments and achieving unity. Religion is the cure and the means for achieving inner peace and harmony. 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” (1990, p. 211). In fact, religion is important for fulfilling the quest for wholeness that is utterly missing in the modern age. Religion helps achieve a sense of unity and psychological integrity.

To seek refuge from the distress of modern life and from psychological breakdown, Eliot converted to Christianity. He finds in religion the only thing that ascribes meaning and value to one’s existence. James (2002) comments on the role of religion, arguing that: “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”(p.139). James’s view is echoed by Schumaker who contends that religion has a curative power for mental health because it 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”(2001, p.107). Therefore, at the end of the poem, the pilgrim seems to have reached a state of consolation



and peace where he moves toward religious awareness and illumination. It is only by surrendering the self to faith that one can live moments of happiness, self-fulfillment and inner peace, where sexual passion no longer exists.

Some of Eliot's critics have argued that his sexual and spiritual malaises are inextricably related. This is attributed to the fact that Eliot finds in religion an important means to escape from his own domestic horrors and perverse sexuality. The frightful discovery of his wife's insanity and marital woes pushes him further towards surrendering himself to the divine. Defending this view, MacDiarmid (2005) 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 (p.88).

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 neurotic problems are essential to Eliot's long purgatorial journey, which ends in peace and unity found in Christianity. By embracing the ascetic way of the Catholic mystics, Eliot not only feels redeemed from sex but also becomes capable of escaping Vivien, at least morally. According to MacDiarmid (2005):

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 (p. 86-7).

So, Eliot's confirmation to the Church, which is rooted in his early years, signals a disavowal of his grandfather's Unitarianism. Also, his resistance to the Puritan family code of behavior marks his spiritual departure from his family. His conversion serves to separate him physically and spiritually from his hysterical wife, in the sense that it gives him a sense of freedom and provides him with a way to cut Vivien out of his life. As Freud (2002) points out, religion is a defense mechanism that vouchsafes the individual's protection against neurotic illness:

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 (Freud, 2002, p.73).

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 was aware of 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" (2002, p. 73). This could explain why 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 restore his memories and ideas of them.

## **Conclusion**

In the modern age, which is marked by the loss of moral values, the sensual triumphs over the spiritual. This results in a psychological disequilibrium and a sense of crisis and decadence. In fact, the wastelanders' spiritual plight emanates from the conditions of the modern times as well as their blind surrender to desire which they think might fill their psychological vacuum. The quest of a psychological unity is located at the centre 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 progress forward.

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