

The Waste Land: Eliot's Expiatory Pilgrimage from Church to Pagoda

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Abstract

Eliot's poem *The Waste Land* is a pilgrimage in quest of an answer to the problem of desire—universal as well as personal—especially deviant sexuality, immoral behavior and their consequences. The traditional tags on the poem such as “a poem about Europe” and a poem about the “disillusionment of a generation” serve only to blinker the reader against its universal and spiritual dimensions. From the epigraph to the very concluding line of the poem, through numerous references and allusions to literary masterpieces and religious texts ranging over history, Eliot addresses the question of desire—craving-- in view of the essentials of Christianity, Hinduism and Buddhism. Thrashing out the problem in the light of St. Augustine's *Confessions* on burning and Buddha's *Fire Sermon* on its remedy, Eliot preaches *Datta*, *Dayadhvam* and *Damyata* as the key virtues for the attainment of *Shantih* or “the peace that passeth understanding.” Thus the poem becomes a pilgrimage of Eliot across the spiritual landscape of the world.

Keywords: expiatory pilgrimage, desire, homoeroticism, confession, Christianity, Hinduism, Buddhism, Buddha's Fire Sermon

1. Introduction

The Waste Land has traditionally been labelled as “a poem about Europe” (Jean-Michel Rabate 221), a poem that presents the “disillusionment of a generation” (Kenner, 1949, p. 421), a poem that expresses the “despair and spiritual bankruptcy of the years after World War I” (Bloom, 1999, p. 40), a metaphor of the “cultural infirmity of Europe after the Great War” (Ross, 1984, p. 134) and the like. However, this paper points out the inadequacy of such views and illustrates how the poem, while being the poet's meditation on the tragic consequences of craving --personal as well as universal--particularly deviant sexuality and sexual excesses, explores the possibilities of salvation. From the very beginning to the end of the poem, Eliot draws examples of craving, mainly sexual offences and immoral behavior of people from multiplicity of sources and from different times and places in human history, and using symbolic images, references and allusions. And Eliot concludes the poem by inviting the attention of the reader to the wisdom of Eastern religions, particularly Buddhism, as a possible way to salvation.

2. The Moral Landscape of the Poem

The poem addresses the question of moral degradation in a universal context including the personal life of the poet himself and makes a spiritual quest for possibilities of salvation. It nowhere specifies that it is about any particular place or time; rather, it only shows the reader images of low life from different phases in human history. Having failed to find the cause of suffering and an answer to it in Christianity, the faith in which Eliot himself was born and brought up, he looks for it in Eastern religions such as Hinduism and Buddhism, and finds therein an answer. But when the Eastern religions find craving—all forms of craving—as the cause of suffering, in the poem Eliot restricts its scope mainly to deviant or misdirected sexuality.

3. Universality of the Theme: The Fallen World

From the epigraph to the very concluding line of the poem, through numerous references and allusions to masterpieces ranging over diverse times, Eliot attempts to give his reader glimpses of human predicament, which is the natural consequence of craving, especially deviant sexuality and immoral excesses of people of all places and times, with a view to finding an answer to them. The poem gives us the picture of a world, which has lost its cultural and social vitality and has been reduced to a heap of fragments. And hence, as Allyson Booth notes, “*The Waste Land* is not about the Great War.... The war is more insistent than background but too nebulous to qualify as foreground. It is everywhere and nowhere” (Booth, 2015, p. 16).

It is true that with its dry, barren and lifeless images, the poem gives us an “evocation of post-war London” (Svarny, 1989, p.160) and an image of London characterized by a sense of “guilt, shock” and “incomprehension” of a “traumatized society” (Svarny, 1989, p. 163). But the poem as a whole is an evocation of the entire world irrespective of any particular place or historical events. Brooker's observation that “in order to collaborate with the poet in the making of a poem, readers must be willing to close the book and dwell awhile with Ezekiel and Dante” rightly acknowledges the universal and philosophical dimensions of the poem (Brooker, 1994, p. 191). And it is also obvious

that it is in the obscure allusions and references of the poem its universality resides, and this virtue of universality is a product of the life that Eliot spent “entranced by the objects of literary history” (Lehman, 2008, p. 67). Smidt observes: “*The Waste Land*, furthermore, is not only a reflection on European society but also “a comment on the universe” (Smidt, 1961, p. 122).

4. The poem as Eliot’s Confession

Eliot’s preoccupation with themes of sexuality—numerous instances of immoral and deviant sex including marital infidelity, drawn from literary as well as social history—evokes events in his own personal life.

According to Patrick Query, Eliot’s attitude toward sexuality was shaped by his Unitarian parents: they gave the boy a view of sex as something “sinful, dirty, and dangerous,” and made him “equate sex with sin, punishment, and injury” (Query, 2009, p. 350). His father gave him the impression that “castration of his children would be preferable to their falling prey to sexual temptation” (Query, 2009, p. 350). Throughout *The Waste Land*, one can find a “sexual tension.”

Colleen Lamos in her essay refers to *Painted Shadow*, the biography of Vivien, Eliot’s wife, written by Carole Seymour-Jones in which she is referring to Eliot’s homoerotic experience. Lamos writes: “...she [Carole Seymour-Jones] examines the erotic triangle between Eliot, his wife, and Bertrand Russell, arguing that “there was an element of homosexuality by proxy in the way in which Eliot offered Vivien to Russell” (qtd. in Lamos, 2004, p. 27). Critics have also pointed out Eliot’s failure to have normal relations with the two great females he loved. And evidently, as Query points out, “Vivien was the most crucial relationship of his life in terms of his development as a man and a poet” (Query, 2009, p. 359). But he failed to have normal relations with her. Of course, there was real affection between Eliot and Emily Hale whom he married in his last years. But according to Query, “Hale’s significance to Eliot was more as an ideal figure than as a potential sexual partner” (Query, 2009, p. 359).

Lamos points out that Carole Seymour-Jones in her book is also referring to Eliot’s relationship with numerous young men and his “obsessive interest in sodomy.” On the basis of such details, Lamos confirms “Eliot’s homoeroticism and his homophobia” (Lamos, 2004, p. 270). However, as Lamos points out, Eliot, while being instinctively homosexual, considered same-sex love as “fatal” and “ruinous” (Lamos, 2004, p. 38). Hence, it is quite natural that Eliot treats the subject in *The Waste Land* with great emphasis. And one might also presume that Eliot’s decision to turn to Buddhism might have been the outcome of his struggle to escape from the Christian concept that holds homosexuality a sin.

Critics have also referred to the homoerotic affection Eliot had towards Verdenal, the French student with whom he shared room in Paris, from 1919 to 1911 (Query, 2009, p. 358). John Peter’s article, “A New Interpretation of *The Waste Land*” (1952), is relevant in this context. And in his 1969 “postscript” to the essay, Peter made his view explicit by stating that “one can hardly avoid the conclusion that in his youth [Eliot] had a close romantic attachment to another young man, and that this far from uncommon type of friendship was rudely cut short when the other was drowned,” adding that the young man was likely Jean Verdenal, Eliot’s intimate friend during his years in Paris, who was killed in World War I (Peter, 1969, p. 166). For those who share this view, Eliot’s poem with the theme “Death by Water” is an elegy on the death of Verdenal. And John Peter was of the view that all our attempts “to tease out the allusions and cross-references in the published interpretations [of *The Waste Land*] have rendered it rather less accessible than it already is” (Peter, 1969, p. 140).

For the above reasons, Query concludes: “It is thus little surprise to find Eliot approaching sexuality in his early poems in tones ranging from timid to terrified, and to find ascetic self-denial holding more than abstract appeal as a relief from sexual tension” (Query, 2009, p. 350). And in this connection Query quotes from Carole Seymour-Jones: “Sex lies at the heart of much of Eliot’s poetry, becoming his personal synonym for sin. Sex attracts and repels, its urgency creating in the poet the same engulfing horror that he feels he, like Kurtz, deserves for breaking moral rules” (qtd. in Query, 2009, pp. 350-351). Hence, evidently, for Eliot, sex was something unnatural and immoral. Query notes: “If any single statement can encapsulate the treatment of sexuality in Eliot’s work, it would have to be that, for all the various trajectories from which he approached the subject, nowhere in his writing does he present sex as something untroubled, natural, life-affirming, and pleasurable” (Query, 2009, p. 351). According to Query, for Eliot, “‘April is the cruellest month’ because of its propensity for breeding” (Query, 2009, p. 353).

The sexual affair Bertrand Russell had with Vivian, Eliot’s wife, must have influenced his attitude towards the female sex. As Anthony Cuda notes, “it exacerbated [in Eliot] the disgust and revulsion toward sex and the spirit of savage, biting satire that together pervade the poems composed during this period” (Cuda, 2009, p. 6). The information regarding Eliot’s impotency and inclination towards male sex points to the fact that Eliot was aware of the affair that was going on between his wife and Russell. Cuda points out that Vivian loved Eliot and cared for him when he was ill. His letter of 1918, which he wrote to his mother said: “... we were going to pieces and just being patched up from time to time” (qtd. in Cuda, 2009, p. 7). And it was for this reason that one of his friends who read the manuscript of the poem called it “Tom’s autobiography” (qtd. in Cuda, 2009, p. 7) This view is also strengthened by Eliot’s running away from his first love and separation from his first wife. Eliot at this stage found refuge in being away from his wife and in “reflection, prayer and atonement...He found himself torn between the simple, shared happiness he desired and the chastened, rarefied ideals he associated with the spiritual life” (Cuda, 2009, p. 10).

The words of T. S. Matthew, a contemporary of Eliot who knew him closely for many years are much relevant in this context. In his view, “Eliot’s suppressed desire was not for his fellow man but for his wife;” and quoting from Bertrand Russell he says “Eliot was ashamed of his marriage” (qtd. in Kirk, 2008, p. 365).

On the above ground, it can be presumed that Tiresias, Eliot's omniscient narrator in *The Waste Land*, is Eliot himself, and it is Eliot himself who through the eyes of Tiresias witnesses the scenes of sterile sex with his own sense of sexual frustration and failure and at the same time with an acute sense of religious remorse over such sinful thoughts. The words of MacDiarmid also emphasize this aspect. In his view, "...the poet's sexual phobias result in the disintegration of not only the modern cultural apparatus, including social, political and gender roles, but of the very landscape. In this amorphous and amoral state, the androgynous Tiresias represents the poet's world-weary and sexually distressed consciousness" (MacDiarmid, 2003, p. xii). Patrick Query observes that one can also find in the poem ambiguity regarding gender (Query, 2009, p. 353). The male figure is either a hermaphrodite or one who doesn't give sexual satisfaction to his partner. Obviously in the character of Tiresias one would be tempted to find Eliot himself. The following lines from Section three of *The Waste Land* presents a scene of emotional as well as physical dysfunction:

"My nerves are bad to-night. Yes, bad. Stay with me.
 "Speak to me. Why do you never speak? Speak." (WL 111-12)
 "My feet are at Moorgate, and my heart
 Under my feet. After the event
 He wept. He promised 'a new start. '" (WL 296-98)

This is obviously, as Patrick Quirk puts it, "the inadequacies of sexual passion [and] the failure of human compassion" (Quirk, 2009, p. 355). It is in this connection that Quirk writes: "Corruption, indifference, disappointment, violence, and again bodies as mere collections of parts: this is the sexual palette of *The Waste Land*. The vacuity of human desire is unrelieved even by the rather more hopeful homoerotically charged episodes in the poem" (Quirk, 2009, p. 355). In Quirk's view, Eliot considered "earthly desire as a lower species of desire for the divine," and it was this thought that had been in his mind that made him convert to Anglicanism in 1927. And after conversion Eliot also took a vow of celibacy.

Michael Coyle's article "Fishing, with the arid plain behind me: Difficulty, Deferral, and Form in *The Waste Land*" refers to the confusion regarding the identity of Eliot's narrator/character Tiresias. For Coyle, Tiresias in Eliot's poem "represents a confusion of binary oppositions;" "... he has lived as both man and woman, as both sighted and blind, in both this world and the next – where he continues to function as a seer, with command of time past, present, and future. Furthermore, in Sophocles's Theban trilogy, it is he who sees the cause of the city's suffering" (Coyle, 2009, p. 160). Here one can easily presume that it is Eliot himself who appears as the narratorial figure in the guise of Tiresias and witnesses acts of immorality/sin man has been committing across history. And relating this to his own sinful state he is exploring possibilities of its expiation.

By referring to St. Augustine's *Confessions*, in line 307 of *The Waste Land*—"To Carthage then I came"—Eliot is making his own confession; presumably, Eliot had in mind the following words of St. Augustine:

TO CARTHAGE I came, where there sang all around me in my ears a cauldron of unholy loves. I loved not yet, yet I loved to love, and out of a deep-seated want, I hated myself for wanting not. I sought what I might love, in love with loving, and safety I hated, and a way without snares. For within me was a famine of that inward food, Thyself, my God; yet, through that famine I was not hungered; but was without all longing for incorruptible sustenance, not because filled therewith, but the more empty, the more I loathed it. For this cause my soul was sickly and full of sores, it miserably cast itself forth, desiring to be scraped by the touch of objects of sense. Yet if these had not a soul, they would not be objects of love. To love then, and to be beloved, was sweet to me; but more, when I obtained to enjoy the person I loved. I defiled, therefore, the spring of friendship with the filth of concupiscence, and I beclouded its brightness with the hell of lustfulness; and thus foul and unseemly, I would fain, through exceeding vanity, be fine and courtly. Book 3: 3.1.1 (Augustine, 1999)

5. The theme of Desire as a Detriment

The Waste Land, from its epigraph onwards, deals with the theme of craving and its consequences. Paradoxically, the Cumean Sybil's desire to die is the consequence of her desire to live: the desire to attain immortality. She bargains with Apollo and offers him her virginity in exchange of his gift of immortality; but in spite of her prophetic powers she forgets to ask for eternal youth, and thus falls victim to her own craving. And ironically, later, in old age, when she is craving for death she is unable even to pray to the very same god to reverse her craving for immortality. And it is similar instances of the consequences of such desires that we find throughout the poem. Thus the whole poem becomes a single metaphor of a spiritual quest for an answer to the problem of craving.

Christina Hauck points out that the title of the third section of the poem "The Fire Sermon," is drawn directly from Henry Clarke Warren's translation of the '*Addita - Pariyaya Sutta*,' the third of the Buddha's recorded discourses, which recapitulates the lessons of the first discourse (on the Four Noble Truths) and the second (on non-self). She writes: "In the '*Addita-Pariyaya Sutta*' Buddha addresses his first mass audience, a group of 1,000 fire-worshipping ascetics" (Hauck, 2009, p.45). Here Buddha shows the ascetics that the entire universe is on fire. The metaphor "fire" stands for the source of suffering. According to Buddha, craving means not simply sexual craving, it refers to everything that we see and feel, irrespective of whether it is pleasant or unpleasant; it stands for everything that is perceived by ear, nose, tongue, body and mind. Here lust does not mean just sexual passion, it includes all sorts of craving. Buddha's sermon is urging his disciples to deliver themselves from the "spell of whatever appears before their senses and whatever arises in their mind as a result of sense perception" (Hauck, 2009, p. 46). Whereas, Eliot in his

poem focuses his attention mainly on sexual craving, drawing instances from history as well as mythology, one after another.

In Buddha's words, "without directly knowing and fully understanding the all, without developing dispassion toward it and abandoning it, one is incapable of destroying suffering" (qtd. in Knickelbine, 2012). Eliot's metaphors illustrate this problem and then point to a possible solution, which again he finds in Buddha's teachings. As Buddha was addressing the human condition in general, it is to be presumed that Eliot was referring to the question in general too, not in reference to Europe alone.

According to Binh Anson of the Buddhist society of Australia, Buddhism is a way to end all suffering by avoiding "the two extremes of sensual indulgence and self-mortification." This way consists of "diligent cultivation of Virtue, Meditation and Wisdom," which is explained in the Noble Eightfold Path of Buddhism. "Right Understanding and Thought are the manifestation of Buddha-Wisdom which ends all suffering, transforms the personality and produces unshakeable serenity and tireless compassion" (Binh, 2011). This path, among the avoidance of vices such as killing, stealing, lying and stupefaction of the mind using alcohol or drugs, includes sexual misconduct and adultery as well.

6. References and Allusions: the Theme of Desire

The references and allusions in *The Waste Land*—nearly all—and Eliot's notes on them address the theme of craving, particularly deviant sexuality and its consequences. The string of references and allusions to diverse sources that Eliot uses from the epigraph to the concluding lines of the poem invites the attention of the reader to numerous instances of gross, craving-related inequities in lives, their consequences and a possible spiritual remedy. And this is how *The Waste Land* becomes a pilgrimage of Eliot across the spiritual landscapes of Christianity, Hinduism and Buddhism.

6.1 Epigraph and the Cumean Sibyl

The Waste Land begins with the following epigraph: a quotation from *Satyricon*, a work of fiction by the Latin writer Petronius, which is believed to have been written in the 1st century A.D:

"For with my own eyes I saw the Sibyl hanging in a bottle, and when the young boys asked her, 'Sibyl, what do you want?', she replied, 'I want to die'.

As has already been pointed out earlier, the Sibyl is a victim of her own craving.

6.2 "The Burial of the Dead"

In this section, Eliot's first note, on line 20, is an allusion to the Book of *Ezekiel* (2:1)of the 5th Century BC; it alludes to the prophesy of the destruction of Israel by God as a punishment for idolatry, an expression of their craving for shortcut gains. As dictated by God, Ezekiel writes: "Alas for all the evil abominations of the house of Israel! For they shall fall by the sword, by the famine, and by the pestilence . . . So will I stretch out my hand upon them, and make the land desolate" (6:11, 14). The second note, on line 23, which refers to *Ecclesiastes*, has a similar theme; it refers to the following verse of *Ecclesiastes*: "Also when they shall 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" (12:5). Here we find a philosophical contemplation on the meaning of life with the conclusion, "desire shall fail" in the end. Eliot's next note, on line 31, which takes the reader to Richard Wagner's opera on the *Tristram and Isolde* story of the 12th century A.D (I: 5-8), is again about the tragic consequences of desire-- adulterous love between the Cornish Knight and the Irish princess. The next note, on line 42--" *Öd' und leer das*, which means "Desolate and empty the sea"--refers to the same story of adulterous love.

The note on line 46 is a little detailed, still vague. Here Eliot admits: "I am not familiar with the exact constitution of the Tarot pack of cards, from which I have obviously departed to suit my own convenience." However, he says that it is associated with the Hanged God of Frazer. Eliot also associates it with the "figure in the passage of the disciples to Emmaus;" then he refers to the Phoenician sailor and the theme of death by water. Following this, he mentions the Man with Three Staves associating him with the Fisher King. These references, in spite the confusion they leave, evoke the spiritual theme of the poem: the hanged man in the tarot scheme, one who is a willing victim, is someone who has chosen the path of sacrifice to accomplish a higher goal. Here, the parallel to the mission of Jesus Christ is evident. And it is in this context that Eliot presents the sad destiny of man. The evocation of the mission of Jesus Christ points to the possibility of redemption for those whose destiny is death by water. And the theme of the Man with Three Staves, and the reference to Fisher King also suggest the possibility of a rebirth.

The allusion to Baudelaire's *Les Fleurs de Mal* of 1957, in line 60, is a strong criticism of the heavily industrialized 19th century French modernity, which brings only "boredom"-- consequence of man's craving for profit. The allusion to Dante's *Divine Comedy* of the 13th century (*Inferno* III 55-57) in line 63 and 64 refers to the "miserable people," "those who have lost the good of the intellect" (III 17-18). Dante presents these people as "...those/who lived without grace and without praise" (III 35-36). The reference in line 64 to *Inferno* IV: 25-29, describes the scenes from the "melancholy valley" of people who justified their sins and are unrepentant. The next allusion in line 74 is to the dirge in Webster's *White Devil*; it points to the corrupt political and moral state of England of the 16th century, particularly the corruption of the royal court. The play exposes the reality of people and the way they depict themselves as good "white" or pure.

The concluding note on the section "The Burial of the Dead," on line 76, is significant. The expression "You! Hypocrite lecteur!--mon semblable,-mon frère!" is from Baudelaire's poem "To the Reader," which is translated as "Hypocrite reader, my likeness, my brother!" "To the Reader" is the preface to Baudelaire's scandalous volume of poems, *Les Fleurs du mal* or *The Flowers of Evil*. It became scandalous due its sex and lesbian content. Also, it deals

with the corrupt, oppressed and the melancholic state of the society. In this respect, it shows much correspondence to *The Waste Land*. The following observation points to the relevance of Eliot's reference to Baudelaire in *The Waste Land*:

According to Baudelaire, our sins are not really caused by Satan but rather the result of boredom, which we are all guilty of. "To the Reader" refers to the "folly, error, sin, and parsimony" of humans, and shows how such vices deteriorate their spirit. We confess and ask for forgiveness, yet happily repeat the same mistakes. "To the Reader" states: "Each day one step forward towards hell..." This is in clear parallel to the idea that Eliot is trying to convey in *'The Waste Land.'*" (Wikipedia)

6.3 "A Game of Chess"

In this section, the note on line 77 is in reference to Cleopatra's toilet; it evokes the life of a decadent, lustful woman from the 1st century B.C. who was known for her open sexuality, and is immortalized as a "whore" by Shakespeare. The next note, on line 92-- "laquearia"-- sends us to the night in Virgil's *Aeneid*, when Dido, queen of Carthage, falls in love with the Trojan hero Aeneas. The story of Aeneas's passionate love affair with the widowed Dido, even though it involved no adultery, leads to a tragic end. Here Eliot shows how craving—passion—leads to misery. Line 98 alludes to the sylvan scene in Milton's *Paradise Lost* in which Milton describes Satan thinking of seducing Adam and Eve into the desire of eating the fruit of the forbidden tree. Here the poet shows how craving leads to man's spiritual death and loss of the bliss of Heaven, by tracing the theme to the very origin of the species.

Lines 99, 100 and 115 are direct references to the story of Philomel in Ovid's *Metamorphosis* (supposed to be completed around A.D 8), which is a supreme example of the consequence of lust. In Book VI of *Metamorphosis*, Ovid renders the crime of Tereus and its consequences. After raping Philomel, his wife Procne's younger sister who was entrusted to his care by her father with the prayer to treat her as if he were her father, he rapes her in the forest and then mutilates her tongue. And in retaliation to this crime his wife Procne kills her son born to Tereus, boils him and serves as a meal to Tereus. Eliot's next note, on line 118, invites the attention of the reader to another play by Webster, *The Devil's Law Case*, a story that speaks about the dishonest ways and misdirected passions of the people of the time. Eliot's last note in this section--on line 138--is on the allusion to Middleton's play *Women Beware of Women*; here, again, the theme is illegitimate relationships and its consequences.

6.4 "The Fire Sermon"

Eliot's note on line 176 is on the allusion to Spenser's nuptial song "Prothalamion" of the 16th century. The poem begins with a pleasant note, but proceeds to images of pollution and devastation. Spenser in "Prothalamion" describes the river Thames with two beautiful women and a group of nymphs with baskets collecting flowers for the brides; he also describes two swans at the Thames relating them to Jove and Lida of the myth in which the wife of King Tyndareus of Sparta is seduced by Zeus in the guise of a swan. It is after indirectly evoking this theme of seduction that Eliot proceeds to themes such as fishing in the dull canal (line 189), the theme of prostitution involving Mrs. Porter and her daughter (lines 200-201) and again to the theme of the rape of Philomel by Tereus in lines 203-206.

Eliot's line 196, "But at the back from time to time I hear," alludes to the following lines in John Day's *Parliament of Fowls*: "A noise of horns and hunting, which shall bring/ Acteon to Diana in the spring, /where all shall see her naked skin..." Here the reference is to a tragic story: In the refrain from the *Parliament of Fowls*, when Actaeon presents himself at the cave's entrance where Diana is taking her bath, Diana gets angry and dashes water into Actaeon face and curses him. The curse turns him into a stag; as a result Acteon loses his speech and appearance; and without recognizing him, dogs and his friends hunt him down. The dogs tear his body apart.

The note on line 197 refers to Marvell's poem "To his Coy Mistress," supposed to be written in the early 1650s, which describes a man's sexual advances to a woman. The poem describes how he would spend centuries admiring each part of her body. It also laments the shortness of human life and the meaninglessness of desire. The opening lines of the poem, "Had we but world enough, and time/ This coyness, Lady, were no crime," seems to ironically suggest the meaninglessness of life, which is nothing but desires and that ultimately ends in "graves," "marble vaults" and "worms." Line 202, "Et, O ces voix d'enfants, chantant dans la coupole!" (And O! those children's voices, singing in the dome!), the quotation from Paul Verlaine's poem "Parcifal" of 1886, is by theme something similar to Marvell's "To his Coy Mistress." Like Marvell, Verlaine is celebrating the "sweet desire" of "a virgin boy," who stoops "to adore their swelling breasts, to love their gentle babble." And the allusion in line 253, "When lovely woman stoops to folly and..." which is taken from *The Vicar of the Wakefield* of Goldsmith (Ch. xxiv), alludes to the seduction of Olivia by Squire Thornhill. Goldsmith's novels suggest that the guilt of such a woman can be washed away only by death. In line 257, Eliot is quoting from *The Tempest*. The quote, "This music crept by me upon the waters," suggests the theme of death by water. This line corresponds to the line ... "Pearls were...his eyes". As John Peter comments in his article, "A New Interpretation of *The Waste Land*" (1952), both these lines evoke the death of Verdinal for whom Eliot himself had homoerotic affections.

Line 265 reference to *Gotterdammerung* is also pointing to a story of deception in love from Wagner's music drama of the 19th century. *Gotterdammerung*, which is originally based on Norse mythology, tells the story of Hagen's plot against Siegfried for winning him the love for Gertrude by separating him from Brunhilde whom he really loved, by giving him a magic potion to drink. Here also the end is tragic. Eliot's reference to Elizabeth and Leicester in line 279 alludes to Elizabeth I's love life, her relationships with figures such as Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester; Robert

Devereux, Earl of Essex; and the Duke of Anjou, and her allegedly “filthy lust” that had “defiled her body and the country.”

According to Eliot, line 293 refers to *Purgatorio*, V. 133: “Ricorditi di me, che son la Pia; / “Siena mi fe’, disfecemi Maremma.” Here the reference is to the chilling story of the murder of La Pia in 1295 by the orders of her husband Paganello de’ Pannocchieschi. As some say, she was dropped from a castle window so that after her death her husband would be able to marry his neighbor, a widowed countess. Notes to lines 307, 308 and 309 return to Augustine’s *Confessions* and Buddha’s *Fire Sermon*. The lines “To Carthage then I came/ Burning burning burning/ O Lord Thou pluckest me out/ O Lord Thou pluckest/,” presents the agonized cry of the poet who finds it hard to overcome his inner struggle. The repeated use of the word “burning” equates his own sins to that of St. Augustine, and the expression, “Oh Lord Though pluckest” shows his continued reliance on his Christian faith to overcome the crisis.

6.5 “Death by Water”

Even though this section is an adaptation of Eliot’s own poem in French, “Dans le Restaurant” of 1916-17, Eliot has not left any note on it. The poem written in 31 lines with a restaurant as its setting presents the words of a greasy waiter to his customer about a passionate moment in his life with a little girl when he was just seven. This man says, “I experienced a moment of power and delirium.” Then he said that passionate experience was interrupted by a big dog. The poem then abruptly leaves this subject, changes the voice, and concludes with the following lines that speak about Phlebas the Phoenician:

Phlebas the Phoenician, fifteen days drowned,
Forgot the cry of seagulls and the Cornish swell,
Profit and loss and the freight of tin:
The undertow carried him far away,
Passing the stages of his previous life.
Imagine it. Like this. A dismal destiny. (qtd. in Raine, 2006. p.181)

Even though there is no direct connection between these lines and the earlier narration of the passionate moment in the life of the greasy waiter, presumably there is some link between the theme of passion and death. And it is the same theme that Eliot has brought in to *The Waste Land*. The lines, “Forgot the cry of gulls, and the deep sea swell/ And profit and loss” (313-14) and “He passed the stages of his age and youth/ Entering the whirlpool” (317-18) evoke the same idea, which Eliot wanted to evoke by referring to *Ecclesiastes* in line 23, “... desire shall fail: because man goeth to his long home” (*Ecclesiastes* 12: 5).

6.6 “What the Thunder Said”

Eliot’s note on line 357, reference to the Water dripping song, “Drip drop drip drop drop drop drop,” ironically evokes not any song, but only a waterless state, which threatens even the possibility of man’s existence, and the note on line 360 is about an Antarctic expedition, which refers to an almost hopeless condition of a party of explorers who are “at the extremity of their strength” and hence have constant delusions. Obviously, here Eliot is referring to a similar extremity of his own condition, and this would remind the reader of his expression “Oh Lord Though pluckest me out,” in line 309.

The note on line 401, reference to *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* (5,1.A) and its message “Datta, dayadhvam, damyata” (give, sympathise, control), takes much relevance as it comes at the extremity of the poet’s own despair, when he feels skeptical about the faith he had followed till this moment. It is at this extremity that he hears the sound of the thunder: the promises of the Eastern religions.

The note on line 407 refers to the irresistible force of lust which people are subjected to; here Eliot quotes from Webster’s *The White Devil*, V, vi: “...they’ll remarry Ere the worm pierce your winding-sheet, ere the spider Make a thin curtain for your epitaphs.” Note on line 411 refers to *Inferno*, XXXIII, 46: “and below I heard the outlet of the horrible/ tower locked up: whereat I looked into the/ faces of my sons, without uttering a word.” Here Dante is referring to the hungry scene of children waiting for food. When the time for food comes, they hear only the sound of the door shutting. And then there is an unending wait. Indirectly, here Eliot is evoking the locked up existence of his own as well as that of others where each one has to wait for a beam of light when the door that is shut is open. And it is in this context that Eliot uses the Sanskrit word *Dayadhvam* which means sympathize. Here Eliot is also relating the theme of the ‘closed door’ and the ‘prison’ to his own sinful state which remains undisclosed, or which he is incapable of revealing to the world. And so he is using the medium of poetry to evoke the same.

Note on line 424, according to Eliot, refers to Weston’s Chapter on the Fisher King. Critics have generally associated it with the theme of the relation that was held “to exist between the ruler and his land” and the “identification of the King with Divine principle of Life and Fertility (Weston, 2011, p. 115). But the lines, “I sat upon the shore/Fishing with the arid plain behind me/Shall I at least set my lands on order” (V: 424-426), of Eliot obviously have far more significance than this in the general scope of the poem. In the Chrétien and Wolfram version of the story, Weston writes, “The wound of the King was a punishment for sin, he had conceived a passion for a Pagan princess” (Weston, 2011, p. 115). Here also, as in most of the other references and allusions, Eliot is suggesting the theme of sexual transgression.

Western observes that “In the Māhāyana scriptures Buddha is referred to as the Fisherman who draws fish from the ocean of Samsara to the light of Salvation” (Weston, 2011, p. 119). The significance of Eliot’s reference to Weston may be summarized as follows: it represents Eliot’s own craving for saving himself and the world from the clutches of moral

corruption; the desire to save and to be saved show the reciprocity of the relationship between God and man; he points out the interconnectedness of Christian, Hindu and Buddhist faiths; it expresses his desire to attain ultimate knowledge like Buddha or to become a Buddha himself, and as one who wants to save himself rather than being the savior.

Eliot's note on line 427 refers to *Purgatorio* XXVI 145-48, in which Dante is referring to the sufferings of the poet Arnaut Daniel, which is the punishment for his lusts. The line, "*Poi s'ascose nel foco che gli affina*" means "Then hid him in the fire that purifies them." The note on line 428 refers to *V. Pervigilium Veneris*, which is attributed to Tibaritanus of the fourth century; this Latin poem in ten stanzas celebrates spring and Venus the Roman goddess of love, on the eve of the festival honouring her. Here the word "swallow" refers to Procne, who was the wife and victim of Tereus. The song of the swallow is not a pleasant one, still it sings intensifying the sorrow of Philomel, Procne's sister; and the poet compares her tragic plight to his own emotional state. The note on line 429 refers to Gerard de Nerval's sonnet "El Desdichado," which has as its theme an inconsolable sense of loss of love due to fate. The note on line 431 refers to Kyd's *Spanish Tragedy*, the words of the bereaved father Hieronimo who wants to avenge the murder of his son. Hieronimo's expression "To fit" means "to punish." In the play, after avenging the death of his son, Hieronimo bites out his tongue to silence himself. Obviously, here Eliot is bringing in a comparison between Hieronimo and Philomel.

The last note of Eliot, on line 433, on the Sanskrit expression "*Shantih*" underscores the philosophical theme of *The Waste Land*. It gives an impression that the entire poem is a *mantra*--a sacred chant. Eliot's explanation to this Sanskrit *mantra* "*shantih*" as "The peace which passeth understanding," brings about a superimposition of the message of the Hindu--Buddhist religious tradition with that of the Christian New Testament. Obviously, here Eliot is referring to St. Paul's letter to Philippians--"And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding shall keep your heart and minds through Jesus Christ" (Philippians 4: 7)--a passage familiar to many Christians as a formula used to conclude a church service.

7. Is *The Waste Land* Christian, Hindu or Buddhist?

A reader of the last section of *The Waste Land*, especially one who reads from line 396-- "...while the black clouds/Gathered far distant, over Himavant"-- would raise questions like: Is Eliot renouncing Christianity and relying on Hinduism and Buddhism? It is true that Eliot studied both Hinduism and Buddhism and even thought of becoming a Buddhist, and was aware of the basic tenets of Buddhism and their benefits for a person who is torn between the forces of sensuality and spiritualism. The river *Ganga* no doubt represents Hinduism, and *Himavant* both Hinduism and Buddhism. Eliot, in the poem, has given great emphasis on both these religions. As Christiana Hauck observes, "T. S. Eliot invites us at crucial junctures to read his poetry and plays in relationship to two great Indic religions, Hinduism and Buddhism. It seems that Hinduism was the more obvious influence.... But Buddhism seems to have held a deeper attraction: according to Stephen Spender, Eliot, at the time he was writing *The Waste Land*, considered becoming a Buddhist" (Hauck, 2009, p.40).

When the poem attaches much significance to Hinduism and Buddhism, is Christianity beyond its scope? Answer to this question may be found in Jessie L. Weston's reference to the Fisher King. Weston points out that according to Christian line of interpretation the word Fisher applies to the title "Fisher of Men," which Christ attributed to his disciples. Also, Weston points out that "Fish is a Life symbol of immemorial antiquity" (Weston, 2011, p. 117) Weston goes on to refer to the significance of the theme in Hindu and Buddhist religions as well. Weston writes: "In Indian cosmogony Manu finds a little fish in the water in which he would wash his hands; it asks, and receives, his protection, asserting that when grown to full size it will save Manu from the universal deluge. This is *Jhasa*, the greatest of all fish" (Weston, 2011, p. 119). Then fish is the first *Avathar* of Lord Vishnu. And then it is believed that "The Fish *Avatar* was afterwards transferred to Buddha" (Weston, 2011, p. 119). And then Western observes that "In the *Mahāyana* scriptures Buddha is referred to as the Fisherman who draws fish from the ocean of *Samsara* to the light of Salvation." (Weston, 2011, p. 119). Hence, it is evident that Eliot's concept of spirituality does not apply to any particular religion; rather, it is a shared value system of all religions.

Why did Eliot the Unitarian who later became an Anglican then desire to be a Buddhist? Did he find in Buddhism anything which he couldn't find in his own religion? Here, the answer is an affirmative one. Buddhism believes in *karma* and that no God interferes in its working. According to the Buddhist faith, the individual himself is responsible for his actions and their outcomes. Buddhism holds that no God has the power to save, and that even the Buddha does not have this power. Each person has to take up the responsibility of his future and it is dangerous to transfer this responsibility to someone else. And then, according to Buddhism, "the illusion of a soul is said by the Buddha to be the root cause of all human suffering" (Binh, 2011). This concept might have been the reason for Eliot who is a Christian to get attracted to Buddhism, for when Christianity preaches the salvation of the soul through Christ, for Buddhism, the concept of soul is an illusion. Thus, the main teaching of Buddhism is about the reality of human suffering and that each person is responsible for saving himself from this suffering.

8. Buddhism and *The Waste Land*

In the article, "The Theory of Karma," Ven. Mahasi Sayadaw refers to the interest Eliot had in the three religious traditions--Christianity, Hinduism and Buddhism. As graduate student at Harvard, he studied both Sanskrit and Pali and read Hindu and Buddhist texts. According to Mahasi Sayadaw, these studies "left [Eliot] in a state of enlightened mystification," as he struggled to "erase from [his] mind all the categories and kinds of distinction common to European philosophy from the time of the Greeks" (Sayadaw, 2016).

It is true that for the anthropological background of *The Waste Land* Eliot relies on James Frazer's *The Golden Bough*, but for its spiritual landscape he relies on the Eastern religious values. While holding on to the Christian concept of morality, he extends it to the value system of Hinduism and Buddhism, which preaches the virtues of Datta, Dayadhvam and Damyata. While getting gravitated to this concept of salvation, he makes Ganga and Himavanta the spiritual landscape of the poem. By symbolically equating his own fallen nature and that of the entire world with the theme of draught, he refers to Indra, the god of the thunderbolt who brings rain—salvation—to the entire world by uttering DA DA DA. In this respect, there is significant difference between the Christian concept of sin and its expiation and that of *The Waste Land*. When in Christianity Satan is responsible for the fall and the sinful nature of man, and Christ alone is the savior, in Eliot it is man's craving that is responsible for his sinful nature, and it is his own responsibility to free himself from craving and achieve salvation.

Eliot claims in his note on line 308 that “the Buddha's Fire Sermon . . . corresponds in importance to the Sermon on the Mount.” Here the similarity Eliot finds between Christianity and Buddhism is that both Jesus and Buddha are showing the way to salvation. However, when Jesus says He Himself is the way, Buddha tells his disciples that “Self is savior of self.” According to Buddha, each person has to liberate himself, and for that one has to have “the profound experience of the Four Seals of Experience.” The Four Seals of Experience of Buddhism are: 1. **All compounded things are impermanent.** 2. **All emotions are painful.** 3. **All phenomena are empty.** 4. **Nirvana is beyond extremes.** **When Christianity preaches the virtue of love and places it above everything else,** Buddhism says all emotions are painful; it does not mean only negative emotions like sorrow or anger or jealousy, it also includes emotions which we consider noble such as love, affection, kindness and the like because as they imply duality, in the end they all end up as sources of pain. When we say *nirvana* is beyond extreme, it means that it is the final goal that one can achieve by eliminating all attachments and thereby avoiding rebirth. This is the state of Buddhahood or enlightenment. However, in Christianity, what Christ saves is the soul; what he saves it from is eternal burning in the Hell. Whereas in Buddhism, what is liberated is the self; what it is liberated from is its belief in itself. Hence one must agree with the opinion of Christina Hauck that “Eliot less successfully yokes Buddhism to Christianity in *The Waste Land*” (Huck, 2009, p.45).

The term “nirvana” is used in Hinduism, Jainism Buddhism and Sikhism. It refers to the profound peace of mind that is acquired with *moksha* that is liberation from *samsara*. In the Buddhist context *nirvana* also refers to ending of physical existence. In the Buddhist tradition, *nirvana* also means the extinguishing of the fires. It refers to the fires of attachment or ignorance. When the fires are extinguished sufferings or rebirths come to an end. This is the state of attainment of complete peace. This state of peace is attained only through the elimination of craving or all forms of desire. Literally, the word *nirvana* means blowing out or putting out or extinguishing a lamp or fire. Eliot has exploited these themes to a great extent in his poem. He equates it with St. Augustine's confessions and the use of the word burning. This burning is caused by the fire of attachment or carnal pleasures or craving for things. He concludes the poem with the word *Shantihi*, which means “the peace which passeth understanding,” an expression which, in a wider sense, is often used synonymously with the Buddhist-Hindu-Jain-Sikh concept of *nirvana*.

9. Conclusion

The Waste Land is a quest that Eliot undertook across the spiritual landscape of the world seeking an answer to the problem of craving and its consequences. Reminiscing Dante's trip through the Purgatory, Eliot takes his readers on a tour across the literary and spiritual history of the world pointing to them instances after instances of human predicament including that of his own, which is the direct consequence of craving, especially deviant sexuality and immoral behavior. By referring to St. Augustine's confessions, Eliot is making a confession of such transgressions of the entire world. Having failed to find its remedy in Christianity, the faith in which he was born and brought up, he turns to the Eastern religions, particularly Hinduism and Buddhism. Relying on the basic tenets of the Hindu faith and Buddha's concept of burning that applies to every experience, Eliot preaches Datta, Dayadhvam and Damyata, the key virtues for the attainment of *Shantihi* or “the peace that passeth understanding.” Thus the poem becomes a pilgrimage of Eliot across the spiritual landscape of the world.

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