4.1

Biblical and Philosophical Interpretations at a glance

Eliot wrote, “My reputation in London is built upon one small volume of verse, and is kept up by printing two or three more poems in a year. The only thing that matters is that these should be perfect in their kind, so that each should be an event.” Whenever Eliot selected themes of a secular nature, he treated them with mingled satire and ridicule; such are the themes of the volumes of poems entitled *Prufrock and the other Observations*. Eliot deplored the lack of urgency about man’s spiritual problems. Professor Williamson also found and felt that Eliot’s first volume expressed his reactions against the neo- humanist of America. All these show Eliot’s secular attitude towards life. And thus they indicate a leaning towards Christianity, the beliefs of the Holy Bible, sin and suffering, renunciation and salvation, contrition, original sin, it’s expiation, temptation and resurrection etc.

The second volume entitled *Ara Vos Prece* in 1920 contains decidedly Christian poems. *The Hippopotamus* 1977 was not to ridicule the Christianity but to present its absence in Christian churches. Eliot’s *Sunday Morning* indicates degeneration i.e. the watering down of Christian theology on an account of its Christian association with the Greek logos doctrine, which was an attempt to find a basis for the doctrine of incarnation. *Gerontion* is no doubt a Christian poetry being the refusal of humanity as it’s theme as given in the Old Testament. Thus, all these themes are well enough to conclude that Eliot had accepted Christianity long before *The Wasteland* came into existence in 1922. Eliot had always been working with ink and papers to make people
realize their duties towards their religion and to have faith in God and to obey the rules to attain salvation as teaches the Holy Bible too. To understand the influence of Christianity and the Holy Bible on Eliot’s poetry, it becomes necessary to know Existentialism.

“Existentialism” is a new name for an ancient method where the Upanishads and Buddhism insisted on the knowledge of self”-Atmanam Viddhi. Emanuel Mourner traces its origin to Socrates. Existentialism is a Christian branch of philosophical movement. St. Augustine, Blaise, Pascal and Soren Kierkegaard found it. The first element, which is common between the thoughts of Eliot and Christian existentialism, is a tragic sense of life. The Christian material is at the basis of the poem. Since, human nature is liable to the temptations of the world and flesh, giving way to these temptations means a denial of the spirit, disobedience of God and consequently it results in suffering and degeneration just as Eliot always tried to appeal to his readers in the same manner as a priest tries to educate young children of Christian congregation through catechism classes in the churches. Christians do offer a prayer in regular liturgical services stating that Our father in heaven, holy be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven , give us this day our daily bread forgive us for our sins as we forgive those who sin against us , do not lead us into temptation but deliver us from evil. Amen. Hence, we can say that the above concept is a derivation from catholic Sunday mass liturgy as well as the daily prayer recited by the followers of Christianity and the Bible readers. Further, in the myth of King Fisher, Eliot shows that regeneration is possible through penance and
sufferings and this is the very basis of the confession ceremony in Christianity. All these facts and the story of Grail Legend and the king Fisher are derived from the Holy Bible and these are the beliefs of Christianity. All these can be associated to the story of Adam and Eve where Eve was tempted towards the apple, she disobeyed the God, ate the fruit gave it to Adam too and thus her temptation brought sin to the world and lead to suffering. This is similar to the theme and the sin and sufferings of *The Wasteland*. Allusions from the Bible are reflected in the story of daughters of Thames also. It even works further on the Christian rule of confession where the sinner goes to the priest and tells him his sins and apologizes for it, the priest in turn gives him some penance and asks the God to forgive him. Similarly, the Easter Sunday indicates the rising of Jesus after his death on the Good Friday. This concept is the concept of fertility myth in *The Waste Land*. Eliot’s wasteland is a Biblical wasteland; it is similar to the evil land of Emmaus mentioned in the Ecclesiastes and Ezekiel given in the Old Testament. It is also mentioned in Hindu philosophy that regeneration takes place after rain. Rain here means the washing out of the sins.

Eliot first published his poems in periodicals or in small books or pamphlets, and then collected them in books as an individual author. His first collection was *Prufrock and Other Observations* in 1917. He published more poems in *Ara Vos Prec* (London) and *Poems in 1920* in New York. These had the same poems in a different order except that “Ode” in the British edition was replaced with “Hysteria” in the American edition. In 1925, he collected *The Waste Land* and the poems in *Prufrock* and *Poems* into one volume and added *The Hollow Men* to form *Poems: 1909–1925*. 
then onwards he updated this work as *Collected Poems. Old Possum’s Book of Practical Cats* written in 1939 is a collection of light verse; *Poems Written in Early Youth* that got published in 1967 posthumously. Eliot never intended to get published *Inventions of the March Hare: Poems 1909–1917*, so it appeared posthumously in 1997. However, In 1922, he published his masterpiece *The Waste land*. In 1925, came *The Hollow man*. In 1927, he composed a religious poem *The Journey of the Magi* co-memorating his religious conversion. In 1930, he published his Ariel poems and *Ash Wednesday* and *Four Quartets*.

Eliot’s poetry revolves around two main themes—(a) The Theme of Redemption and possibility of Spiritual Rebirth and (b) His concept on Time. Eliot believed “Nothing material is subject to absolute obliteration. Everything gets transformed under the influence of Time. As in Ash Wednesday, he mentions—“Re redeem the Time, Redeem The unread vision in the higher dream”. In *Elder Statesman*, he writes—“It is worthwhile dying, to find out what life is”. In *Brunt Norton*, Patanjali is reflected—”Time present and time past, Are both perhaps present in time future? And time future contained in time past; If all time is eternally present All time is unredeemable.

In *East Cooker*, we see, the only wisdom we can hope to acquire is the wisdom of humility, humility is endless. This may be called an echo of the Bhakti Philosophy in the Sam Veda— “O Learned persons, worship God with humble homage, strengthen Him internally with contemplation and concentration, showing derivation from Devi Chanting. ‘And what you do not know is the only thing you know And what you own is what you do not own And where you are is where you are not. ‘This is the humility
of ignorance and extreme self sacrifice which lead us to mix with the Almighty’ said J.J.Syne. The Hindi shloka goes like this- **Yassyamatam tashya matam, matam yassya na Veda sw Abidyatam bijanatam bigyat mabijanatam**”. ¹ To whomsoever it is not known, to him it is known: to whomsoever it is known, he does not know. It is not understood by those who understand it: it is understood by those who do not understand it”.

In *Little Giddings*, Eliot wrote— “What we call the beginning is often the end, And to make an end, it is to make a beginning The end is where we start from.” Similarly, in *East Coker* he wrote—”For us there is only the trying the rest is not our business”. **“Yatassya hi Dhrubo Mritue Dhruva Janma mritashya cha.”**² He wrote again— “In my end is my beginning”. Moreover, in *The Dry Salvage*, he continued—

‘You shall not think ‘the past is finished’ or ‘the future is before us.’ And do not think of the fruit of action Fare forward. The only hope, or else despair Lies in the choice of pyre or pyre. To be redeemed from fire to fire. Impact of Patanjali is seen here in Eliot’s writing .Prof. J. J. Sweeny says that these unified sensibility of thought and feelings are directly associated with The Gita and Isha Upanishad. In *Gerontion*, he wrote—‘I have lost my passion, why should I need to keep it. Since what is kept must be adulterated, I have lost my sight, smile, hearing, taste and touch: How should I use them for your closer contact? In *Hollow man*—‘this is the dead land this is Cactus land. Here the stone images Are raised, here they receive The supplication of a dead man’s head Under the twinkle of a fading star’. Moreover, in *A song for Simons*—I am tired with my own life and the lives of those after me, I am dying in my own death
and the death of those after me Let the servant depart Having seen thy salvation. The lines are direct echo of, *BRIHADARANYAKA UPANISADA*—*where we find the Sloka: DATTA, DAYADHVAM, DAM.YATA SHANTI, SHANTI SHANTHI.*

Devaguru Prajapati invited God, Man and Demon using the word DA three times. The First DA-Dayamata meaning ‘Steady’, the second DA-DATTYA meaning giver and third DA-Dayadhayam meaning kind in his *HOME JAGYA* and then uttered the term SHANTI for three times to pacify them at the completion of the *JAGYA*. These SHANTI, SHANTI, SHANTI are the ending words of all the Upanishads. The very term is rooted in the Vedas and it is the summary of all the Upanishads. Though According to Elizabeth Brue these SHANTI, SHANTI, SHANTI are just formal ending words having no sense of peace it pacifies all sorts of anguish, anxiety, hesitation, doubt of our mind and makes us calm and quiet.” Calm of mind, all passions spent”. The correct utterances of these terms gives calmness of mind filled with enormous strength. In addition, this calmness mixed with strength gives a serene pleasure. It is a spiritual encouragement. It is rather misinterpreted by most of the European critics because of their lack of knowledge of the Upanishads. The term Shantih is the European equivalent of the word Amen that means let the will of the Lord take place on you.

In European concept, Time is Linear and as such, it has a beginning and an end. Therefore, *TIME is not infinite. Indian concept TIME says that it is Circular or Cyclical. It is contemplated as temporary Time Symbol of Death and Decay and Eternal Time, which means Mahakal, is a symbol of Salvation of the Soul. Burnt*
Norton, East Cooker, Dry Salvage and Little Giddings all these poems contain a relation between Temporary Time with that of Eternal Time. Following Indian Concept Eliot mentioned ‘The Still Point’ in Brunt Norton, which is the PARAM BRAHMA in the Upanishads. In Veda, this still point is termed as STAMBHA or the COSMIC PILLER. In Atharva Veda, The PURAN, and in the MAHABHARATA, it is called FIXED POINT –the DHRUVA or PARAM BRAHMA. ‘Time is no healer: the patient is no longer here’ or ‘The time of death is everywhere’. By sentences like these, Eliot meant the eternal march of Time and soul’s creation or death at every moment. This is what the message of liturgical Ash Wednesday too, which says that nobody knows when is your time so prepare for the divine union. Buddhist philosophy, too, does not admit any eternal soul. There is some resemblances between Greek Philosopher Heracletus and the Buddhist Monk’s sayings to this context: “You cannot step twice into the same river, for other and yet other waters are ever flowing on”, and “That which we regard as our own age is something which is constantly being formed a new in the succession of events which constitute our existence. As far as the concept of Time is concerned, it can be said that Patanjali influenced Eliot.

Eliot believed that Time is ever flowing. It cannot be divided. It has no parts. Our life flows through the continual march of time. Like Patanjali, Eliot also believed that the only way to free oneself from the clutches of Time i.e to attain Salvation, one should take recourse in meditation, penance and Yoga. Here he combined the Christian Lenten and Indian philosophy together in the Four Quartets.
Besides this the symbolism of the waste land, garden, water, city, stairs, etc., as Eliot expresses the themes of time, death-rebirth, levels of love and attitude toward women, perversion of sex, the quest motif on psychological, metaphysical, and aesthetic levels. Dante’s four levels—Eliot’s use of geographic place, allegorical, moral, and anagogic—are interesting to trace throughout Eliot is developing code. Eliot significantly handles the relations between geographic place and vision, between the personal, individual talent and the strong sense of tradition. His relation to romanticism, his significance in the development of modernism, his role as an expatriate effecting a “reconciliation with America” in *The Dry Salvages* are all important considerations. His techniques of juxtaposition, aggregation of images, symbolism, the use of multiple literary allusions, the influence of Dante are all worth attention, as is his use of “free verse” and many various poetic forms. Note also the musicality of his verse, his use of verbal repetition as well as clusters of images and symbols. **However, all of his poetic works fall under the influence of catholic liturgy. Be it the prayer part or be it the sermons or the gospels of the New Testament. Therefore, there is a good collection of references from the holy Bible and the daily liturgy of the mass services in catholic churches. The poetries those have the liturgical, biblical and the Indian philosophical allusions are discussed in this chapter.**

In 1915, Ezra Pound being the editor of poetry magazine recommended to the magazine’s founder Harriet Monroe to publish “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock”. Although the character Prufrock was a middle-aged man, he was well
portrayed by Eliot. He wrote it when he was only 22. Its famous opening verse that compared the evening sky to “a patient etherized upon a table,” was considered shocking and offensive, at a time when Georgian Poetry was hailed for its derivations of the 19th century Romantic Poets. The poem follows the conscious experience of a man, Prufrock relayed in the “stream of consciousness” form characteristic of the Modernists as he lamented his physical and intellectual inertia, the lost opportunities in his life and lack of spiritual progress, with the recurrent theme of carnal love unattained. Here again as usual a man inclined towards sinful thought lacks spiritualism and Eliot raises the need of raising the spirits of the sick so that they can reconcile with God. The locations described can be interpreted either as actual physical experiences, mental recollections, or even as symbolic images from the subconscious mind. Like we see in the refrain “In the room the women come and go.” The poem’s structure was heavily influenced by Eliot’s extensive reading of Italian Dante Alighieri, and refers to a number of literary works, including Hamlet and of the French Symbolists. All was an effort to show the sick spirituality and preach man to work his salvation. In October 1922, Eliot published The Waste Land in The Criterion. Eliot dedicated it to il miglior fabbro, meaning” the better blacksmith.” He refers to Ezra Pound’s significant hand in editing and reshaping the poem from a longer Eliot manuscript to the shortened version that appears in publication.

It was composed during a period of personal difficulty for Eliot—his marriage was failing, and both he and Vivien were suffering from nervous disorders. The poem is often read as a representation of the disillusionment of the post-war generation. The
poem is known for its obscure nature—waving between satire and prophecy; its abrupt changes of speaker, location, and time. Despite this, it has become a touchstone of modern literature, a poetic counterpart to a novel published in the same year, James Joyce’s *Ulysses*. Among its best-known phrases are “April is the cruellest month”, “I will show you fear in a handful of dust”; and “Shantih Shantih Shantih,” the Sanskrit word that ends the poem. It contains the Grail legend from Bible, Vegetative and fertility myth from Hindu philosophy and many more references from Christianity and Hinduism. The complete poem seems to be a prophesy when read in reference to the Bible and Bhagwad. *The Hollow Men* came in 1925. According Edmund Wilson, it marked “the nadir of the phase of despair and desolation given such effective expression in *The Waste Land*.” Similar to other work, its themes are overlapping and fragmentary: post-war Europe under the Treaty of Versailles. It shows the difficulty of hope and religious conversion; and Eliot’s failed marriage.

*Ash Wednesday* was written after his 1927 conversion to Anglicanism. Published in 1930, it deals with the struggle that ensues when one who has lacked faith acquires it. Sometimes referred to as Eliot’s “conversion poem,” it is richly but ambiguously allusive, and deals with the aspiration to move from spiritual barrenness to hope for human salvation, inspired by Dante’s *Purgatorio*. The style is different from the poetry that predates his conversion. This poem contains The liturgical prayers and the readings and the gospel of the Lenten Ash Wednesday, epistles of Joel and Mathew that teaches all to repent for their sins through sacrifice, fast, penance and prayer so that they can realize that their body is mere ash and into ash it shall return. Eliot
regarded *Four Quartets* as his masterpiece; it brought him Nobel Prize in Literature. It consists of four long poems, each first published separately: *Burnt Norton* (1936), *East Coker* (1940), *The Dry Salvages* (1941) and *Little Gidding* (1942). Each has five sections. Although they resist easy characterization, each begins with a rumination on the geographical location of its title, and each meditates on the nature of time in some important respect—theological, historical, physical—and its relation to the human condition. Each poem is associated with one of the four classical elements: air, earth, water, and fire influenced by Hindu philosophy.

*Burnt Norton* asks what it means to consider things that might have been. We see the realities are present together, invisible to us. *East Coker* continues the examination of time and meaning, focusing in a famous passage on the nature of language and poetry. Out of darkness, Eliot offers a solution: “I said to my soul, be still, and wait without hope. Derivation from Gita that shows how Krishna motivated not to hope for fruit but just work with sincerity. *The Dry Salvages* treats the element of water, via images of river and sea. It strives to contain opposites: “... the past and future/Are conquered, and reconciled” according to Hindu philosophy. *Little Gidding* (the element of fire) is the most anthologized of the Quartets. Eliot’s experiences as an air raid warden in The Blitz power the poem, and he imagines meeting Dante during the German bombing. The beginning of the Quartets “Houses .../Are removed, destroyed” had become a violent everyday experience; this creates an animation, where for the first time he talks of Love as the driving force behind all experience. From this background, the Quartets end with an affirmation of Julian of Norwich: “all
shall be well and/All manner of thing shall be well”. The *Four Quartets* cannot be understood without reference to Christian thought, traditions, and history.

Eliot draws upon the theology, art, symbolism and language of such figures as Dante, and mystics St. John of the Cross and Julian of Norwich. The “deeper communion” sought in *East Coker*, the “hints and whispers of children, the sickness that must grow worse in order to find healing,” and the exploration which inevitably leads us home all point to the pilgrim’s path along the road of sanctification.

### 4.2

*The WasteLand, the Bible and the Gita*

Another of his famous and oft-quoted works, *The Waste Land* 1922 deals with dark and haunting themes of individual consciousness and spiritual desolation against the decline of civilization. Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* comes to mind as Eliot innovatively rejects traditional Romantic ideals through allusion and symbolism. From the first line “*April is the cruellest month.*”* to the last* “Shantih shantih shantih,* we can perceive the dramatic scope and evolution of Eliot’s own life in the Biblical, cultural, historical, and literary references. *The Waste Land* first appeared in October 1922, in the *Criterion*, a periodical founded and edited by Eliot. In November of the same year, it was published in the *Dial*, an American publication. Later it was published as a book with notes added, and it has appeared in numerous anthologies. *The Waste Land* is an allusive and complex poem. As such, it is subject to a variety of interpretations, and no two critics agree completely on its meaning. It may be
analyzed at three levels: the person, the society, and the human race. The personal interpretation seeks to reveal Eliot’s feelings and intentions in writing the poem. At the society level, a critic looks for the meaning of the poem in relation to the society for which it was written. Finally, the human level extends the societal level to include all human societies - past, present, and future. Since the human level is an extension of the societal level, the basic themes are the same for both. The main theme is “modern life as a waste land.” Eliot supports the theme by showing what was wrong with society in the early twentieth century. These shortcomings include lack of faith, lack of communication, fear of life and death, corruption of the life-water symbol, and corruption of sex. There are two kinds of people in the modern wasteland, according to Eliot. These are seen in the crowd that flows over London Bridge (62-65). He states, “I had not thought death had undone so many.” This is a reference to Dante’s description of the people in Limbo. They were the dead who were neither bad nor good, just secularized. This is one category of people in the waste land. The other is given by another reference to Dante: “Sighs, short and infrequent, were exhaled.” This is descriptive of people in the first level of hell, those who were born before Christ. They have no knowledge of salvation and cannot be saved (according to Dante. The reference shows that there are also people in the twentieth century who have no faith. Eliot illustrates the lack of faith at several points. In lines 301-302, one of the Thames daughters states, “I can connect / Nothing with nothing.” Because she has no faith, there are no connections and no meaning in her life. There are several references in the poem to “hooded hordes walking in a ring.” Madame Sosostris sees
them, and the protagonist meets them as he journeys to the Perilous Chapel. The hooded hordes are hooded because they cannot see the hooded figure, the “third that always walks beside you,” who represents Christ.[CB 26] They are walking in a ring, with no sense of purpose or direction, because they have no faith.[GW 149] Another indication of the people’s lack of faith is the story of the merchant. Traditionally, the merchants carried the secrets of the vegetation cult - the mythology which forms the basis of the poem - to all the countries they visited. However, the merchant Eliot describes does not do this. Instead of inviting the protagonist to a meeting that will introduce him to life-giving secrets, the merchant asks him to a weekend of homosexual debauchery that can only bring death. [CB 21] In addition, Madame Sosostris is prohibited from seeing what the merchant carries on his back. She, likes the others in her world, cannot know about the secrets of life.[PW 97] The world has lost its faith. The people in The Wasteland also have problems with communication. This is first illustrated in the Hyacinth girl scene. She indicates that she is unable to speak, and therefore cannot communicate with the protagonist. ⁷ Similarly, the lady of situations says “Speak to me. Why do you never speak? Speak.” She feels the need to communicate but does not know how.⁸ The response to the command “Dayadhvam” (sympathize) also shows that the people cannot communicate. They are all sitting in their prisons, thinking of the keys that will release them, yet never getting out. Their pride and selfishness keep them from understanding each other.⁹ Finally, the encounter between the typist and the young man reinforces the problem of selfishness. Neither the typist nor her visitor is interested in the other. They just want
to please themselves. Because of this focus on self, there is no communication between them. [CB 22]

The opening lines of the poem describe the feelings of the protagonist as spring arrives. Instead of being joyful, he is disturbed. The new beginnings around him make him afraid, because he does not want a new beginning in his own life. He is afraid to live life (CB). However, he is also afraid of death. The statement “I will show you fear in a handful of dust” refers to fear of death, or fear of becoming just a handful of dust.[DAT 36] Another example of fear of life is in the planting of the corpse described in lines. The protagonist asks if the corpse has sprouted. He seems to be afraid of what might happen if it does.[GW 134] However, the horror of rats’ alley illustrates the fear of death again. Although the inhabitants of the wasteland do not want to fully live, they are too afraid to die. A traditional symbol of life is water, since human life is believed to have come from the water through the evolution of fish. Many religions, including the vegetation cults, held water as sacred and life giving. Unfortunately, the people in the wasteland have lost this ancient belief, according to Eliot. They have corrupted the life symbol and made it into something to be feared instead of revered. For example, the Phoenician sailor dies by drowning. Water certainly does not represent life to him! The clairvoyant Madame Sosostris advises the protagonist, “Fear death by water.” Since he does not have faith as illustrated above, water means death to him. He cannot live in it (GW). He also states “By the waters of Leman I sat down and wept...”. Leman means “lust.” The protagonist indicates here that the prevalence of unbridled lust has disturbed him.
Water has been corrupted - it now represents the death that results from the lack of self-control. It no longer stands for life (GW). Another instance of this is Eliot’s quote from an Australian song, “O the moon shone bright on Mrs. Porter / and on her daughter / they wash their feet in soda water”. In the legends of the Fisher King a foot washing ceremony preceded the restoration of the king. These lines tell us that ordinary water can no longer be used in foot washing - its symbolism has been lost.[CB 20]

An important theme is corruption of sex—Eliot stresses this by giving many examples. The first is found in the description of the lady of situations. A “sylvan scene” is displayed above her mantel. The scene depicts “the change of Philomel,” who was raped by King Tereus, husband of her sister Procne. Eliot states in line 102, “And still she cried, and still the world pursues.” The change of Philomela took place many centuries ago, yet it is still happening today.[GW 142] A second illustration of corrupted sex is in the pub scene. Albert “wants a good time” and he does not care who he hurts to get it. He is not concerned about the possibility of his wife dying in childbirth. Her friend, who is speaking, does not care either. The feelings of the society are that lust should be satisfied no matter what the consequences may be [CB 18] this theme is seen once more in the meeting of the typist and the young man. The typist is “bored and tired.” The young man is “flushed and decided.” Eliot states, “His vanity requires no response, / and makes a welcome of indifference.” He is not interested in exciting or pleasing her; he is only interested in his own satisfaction. "Love" in modern society is not really love - it is merely the fulfillment of instinctive
desires. It is practical, boring, and meaningless.[FM 61] These three scenes are lengthy, but Eliot also shows the corruption of love in short references. For example, lines 196-198 state “But at my back from time to time I hear / The sound of horns and motors, which shall bring / Sweeney to Mrs. Porter in the spring.” The first line is a reference to Marvell’s “To His Coy Mistress.” The other two lines refers to Day’s “Parliament of Bees”—“A noise of horns and hunting, which shall bring / Actaeon to Diana in the spring.” The references appear in Eliot’s notes. The contrasts of “hunting” with “motors” as well as “Actaeon and Diana” with “Sweeney and Mrs. Porter” illustrate the significant changes in the pursuit of love. Love was once treasured, but it is now reduced to sex for pleasure and not much else. In addition, Eliot contrasts the love of Elizabeth and Leicester with lovers of the present day represented by the Thames daughters. The love of the past was enduring and real, while the love of the modern world is transitory and phony. [CB 23] Eliot is very discouraged about the society he has described as a wasteland, but he does offer hope and a means of recovery. In Part V “What the Thunder Said,” the three interpretations of DA – Datta- give, Dayadhvam -sympathize and Damayata- control - are the keys to new life for the wasteland. They are the antithesis of modern problems. If people learn to give, sex will gain new meaning as an expression of emotion and it will no longer be corrupted. If they sympathize with each other, they will be able to communicate their true feelings and listen to those of others. Finally, if they develop self-control, their faith will return and they will no longer fear life or death. Most critics have confined themselves to the societal/human interpretation of Eliot’s work,
since Eliot had warned them away from trying to determine his true purpose in writing his poetry. However, one theory has been put forward concerning his personal background and the meaning of the poem. The world may never be certain exactly what Eliot had in mind when he wrote his most famous poem. However, we can determine the meaning of the poem to the “Lost Generation” and to all generations, as expressed in the themes I have described.

4.3

Journey of the Magi and the Advent Season

In Christian tradition, the Magi is referred to the Three Wise Men, Three Kings, or Kings from the East, or a group of distinguished foreigners who are said to have visited Jesus after his birth, bearing gifts of gold, myrrh and frankincense. They are regular figures in traditional accounts of the nativity and in celebrations of Christmas. Thus, representing the Advent Liturgy and the message of the birth of Jesus Christ.

In the Gospel of Matthew there is a mention of the Magi in the Bible, it states that they came “from the east” to worship the Christ, “born King of the Jews”. “Yahudion Ka Raja” as called in India. Although the account does not tell how many they were, the three gifts led to a widespread assumption that they were three as well. Their identification as kings in later Christian writings is linked to Old Testament prophesies of Isaiah, which describe the Messiah being worshipped by the kings. The Protestant Reformation challenged this interpretation but the Catholics do believe in this until date and use the story as a section of the Christmas liturgy. The
story goes like this- In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, asking, “Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? For we observed his star at its rising, and have come to pay him homage.” On listening to this, Herod got frightened and called all the priests and scribes to enquire about the place of the birth of Jesus. They told him, ‘In Bethlehem of Judea from there shall come a ruler who is to shepherd my people Israel.’ Then Herod called for the wise men and learned from them the exact time when the star had appeared. He told them to go to Bethlehem, saying, “Go and search diligently for the child; and when you have found him, bring me word so that I may also go and pay him homage.” After hearing the king, they left for Bethlehem. Moreover, there, ahead of them, went the star that they had seen at its rising, showing them the way, until it stopped over the place where the child was i.e. the baby Jesus was. When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy. On entering, they saw the child with Mary his mother; and they knelt down and paid him homage in the crip. Then, opening their treasure chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. They were warned in a dream not to return to Herod as he will harm the child, as he did not want anyone else to rule his kingdom, so, fearing his evil thoughts the three kings left for their own country through another path. This whole story is an important and unavoidable part of the Christmas liturgy. The visit of the Magi is commemorated in most Western Christian churches by the observance of Epiphany on 6, January. Whereas the Eastern Orthodox celebrates the visit of the Magi on 25, December as is done in India too. It was reinterpreted that these Magi
were the three kings. By AD 500, everybody adopted the prevalent tradition that the three were kings, and this continued until the Protestant Reformation. Although the Qur’an omits Matthew’s episode of the Magi, which was well known in Arabia. The Muslim encyclopaedist al-Tabar, writing in the 9th century, gives the familiar symbolism of the gifts of the Magi. Al-Tabari gave his source for the information to be the later 7th century writer Wahb ibn Munabbih. Some religious traditions take a critical view of the Magi. Holidays celebrating the arrival of the Magi traditionally recognize a distinction between the date of their arrival and the date of Jesus’ birth. Western Christianity celebrates the Magi on the day of Epiphany, January 6, twelfth day of Christmas, particularly in the Spanish-speaking parts of the world. In these Spanish-speaking areas, the three kings receive wish letters from children and magically bring them gifts on the night before Epiphany. In Spain, each one of the Magi is supposed to represent one different continent, Europe (Melchior), Asia (Caspar) and Africa (Balthasar). According to the tradition, the Magi come from the Orient on their camels to visit the houses of all the children; much like Santa Claus with his reindeer, they visit everyone in one night. Hence completely full of fun and fervor of the advent of Jesus that is the Christmas. Eliot’s work once again found colored in the liturgy and the Bible.

Journey of the magi is based upon a biblical story told in Mathew, chap2, verses 1-12. magi is the plural from the classical word magus a wise men from the east travel to Bethlehem to behold the baby Jesus, that the three wise men from the east were kings is Speaker in the poem is one of the magi or wise men remembering his
journey in old age the initial five lines are a quotation from a sermon preached by Bishop Lancelot Andrews on Christmas day 1622. These lines build up a dispassionate rendering of the journey of the magi with the birth of the Christ, bad weather during the dead of the winter and a difficult long journey continue with repeated later. In the poem the camels refused to move on being injured. The magi sometimes regretted undertaking such a difficult journey. They left their warm homes for a freezing zone.

The pleasure of their palaces was replaced by trials and problems. The camel men also revolted in want of facilities for pleasure and comfort. Hostle towns, dirty village, and costly inns made a hard time of it. passing thought doubt and anguish the magi also thought of it as there fully Ok the last verse is describing how the Three Kings are agonized by the Birth of Jesus because they have made this long, arduous journey to see the son of God, but come to the realization that they won’t ever live long enough to be enlightened by Jesus. The first stanza tells of them traveling. They are full of doubts and regret, and do not seem to know what they are looking for. The trip is not a comfortable one.

The second stanza tells of their arrival in Bethlehem. The two lines starting with ‘Six hands....’ are a foreshadowing of Christ’s betrayal and crucifixion. Notice that he does not rejoice, but says it was ‘satisfactory.’ In the third stanza, he says that he would do it all again, but that the birth of Christ led not only to Christ’s death, but the death of the older religions.
4.4

*Ash Wednesday* and the Lenten

T.S. Eliot’s poems have deep religious and philosophical meaning. This poem shows the three stages of sacrament of penance, which are contrition, confession, and satisfaction. When a Christian has sinned, he should feel guilty, confess to god, and then is satisfied. However, Eliot does not show it in this order, he shows the guilt to their sinful life of women and alcohol, then he shows satisfaction with a change of tone, and then confession. After he converted to Catholic Christianity in 1927, he found no enlightenment. In journey of the magi, he is saying that the soul can never rest in satisfaction; whilst human you are continually confessing sins and feeling guilt. It is only with death one will feel satisfaction and see enlightenment. It could be said that Eliot did not feel satisfied straight away on his spiritual journey, and he believed he would have to continually endeavor for satisfaction until death. So is his preaching to his readers. Ash Wednesday contains the message of death—the body will finally turn into ash.

The first day of the forty days’ lent season follow Ash Wednesday. It starts with fasting, sacrifice and repentance. During the forty days, the Christians sacrifice many things to punish themselves in the name of the lord Jesus and go through the process of purgation apologizing for their mistakes and sins. They try to go through the same pain and suffering as the Jesus had faced and suffered during the reign of the kings Pontius and Pilate, so states the Bible too. The holy lent ends up with the three days of continuous prayers where the liturgy states the entire suffering of Jesus and asks
the congregation to renounce the worldly pleasures and look towards God and work towards salvation. In the beginning of the lent, in the first prayer service, the priest reminds the people that “man you are dust and unto dust you shall return” –Eliot uses this liturgy in his Ash Wednesday. The last three days of the lent are the Maundy Thursday, the Good Friday and the Easter Sunday showing the resurrection as Eliot sermons throughout his poetry ask people to arise from their sins. Thus, we can say Eliot’s whole of this poem contains the message of the lent season. The poem shows poet’s attraction towards the worldly things and his realization that he will not turn to it after his death. In 1099, Pope Urban II called the first day of Lent Feria quarta cinerum or Ash Wednesday. During the early centuries of the Church only persons who had committed grave sins received ashes and were asked to do public penance, which usually lasted until Holy Thursday when they were reconciled to the Church through confession and the reception of Holy Communion. The custom was to separate the penitents from the rest of the community during the forty days of Lent. Ashes were a sign of this separation. It applied to poor and rich alike. These three days, beginning with the Sunday before Ash Wednesday is collectively known as “Shrovetide.” The Sunday before Ash Wednesday has been called Hall Sunday, meaning hallowed or holy Sunday, and Carling Sunday from the European custom of eating parched peas fried in butter on this day. The Monday before Ash Wednesday has been called Hall Monday, Callop Monday, named for a food eaten that day, and Blue Monday, named because on this Monday the penitence of Lent is approaching, thus causing some to have feelings of depression, symbolized by the color blue.
However, others have called the day *Merry Monday*, because for some, it is a day to party before Lent. Tuesday has been called *Hall Night, Shrove Tuesday, Pancake Day* and *Mardi Gras*. Ash Wednesday, in the Western Christian calendar, is the first day of Lent and occurs forty-six days (forty days not counting Sundays) before Easter. It is a moveable fast, falling on a different date each year as it is dependent on the date of Easter. It can occur as early as February 4 (5th of February on leap years) or as late as March 10. Ash Wednesday derives its name from the practice of placing ashes on the foreheads of adherents as a sign of repentance. The ashes used are typically gathered after the Palm Crosses from the previous year's Palm Sunday are burned. In the liturgical practice of some churches, the ashes are mixed with the Oil of the Catechumens (one of the sacred oils used to anoint those about to be baptized), though some churches use ordinary oil. This paste is used by the minister who presides at the service to make the sign of the cross, first upon his or her own forehead and then on those of congregants.

**Ritual**

At Masses on Ash Wednesday ashes are imposed on the foreheads of the faithful or on the tonsure spots, in the case of some clergy. The priest, minister, or in some cases officiating layperson, marks the forehead of each participant with black ashes as a mark of a cross, which the worshipper traditionally retains until it wears off. The act echoes the ancient near. Eastern tradition of throwing ashes over one's head to signify repentance before God as shown in the Bible. The priest or minister says one of the following while applying the ashes:
Remember, O man that you are dust, and unto dust you shall return. Turn away from sin and be faithful to the Gospel. Repent, and hear the good news.

**Biblical significance**

Ash Wednesday is a day of repentance and it marks the beginning of Lent. Ashes were used in ancient times, according to the Bible, to express mourning. Dusting oneself with ashes was the penitent's way of expressing sorrow for sins and faults. It marks the start of a forty days period, which is an allusion to the separation of Jesus in the desert to fast and pray. During this time, he was tempted. While not specifically instituted in the Bible text, the 40-day period of repentance is also analogous to the 40 days during which Moses repented and fasted in response to the making of the Golden calf. Ash Wednesday is a moveable fast, occurring 46 days before Easter.

Besides Roman Catholic denomination almost all denominations of Christianity mark Ash Wednesday by holding a Mass. This message is a central idea of Eliot’s Ash Wednesday where he tells men to realize death and ask for God’s mercy purifying their souls from sin and evil. Here the Lenten Ash Wednesday gets reflected in Eliot’s Ash Wednesday. It is the tone of Eliot’s Ash Wednesday where the speaker reflects his inner struggle and rejoices in following the discipline, sacrifice and repentance of the Lenten season for redeeming himself.

T.S. Eliot’s *Ash Wednesday* and *Four Quartets* are confessional poetry in a double manner—first is in the form of interpersonal communication before God, and
second is the confession made to the reader. It is thus as the relationship between the sinner and the counselor. *Ash Wednesday* constitutes a Lenten preparation in which understanding is sought by means of an articulation of failure, loss and repentance. *Four Quartets* uses a similar confessional technique, evoking ‘peak’ moments both primal scene and the site of mourning out of which religious philosophies evolve. It is suggested that the poems resemble a confidential ‘talking cure’. This is similar to the ceremony of doing confession of ones sins in front of the priest where the priests suggest to pray to get forgiveness from God. This is highly Biblical as well as liturgical. As the liturgy says, “Lord I am not worthy to receive you but only say a word and I shall be healed”. In the same way Eliot writes:

Lord I am not worthy

Lord I am not worthy

But speak a word only

This prayer is done before receiving the holy sacrament, the Holy Communion during the masses. It can be seen in the Liturgy given in the Chapter II of this thesis. This is similar to that of the Prasad in Hinduism, which then reflects the completion of the prayer ceremony, which can only be received after the confession ceremony done in front of the priest and completing the penance done as per the priests suggestion. Eliot includes a lot more prayers in his *Ash Wednesday* showing purgation of the lent. *Ash Wednesday* is the chronicle of this conversion, told in beautiful Christian allegories and metaphors. It portrays the
struggle Eliot faced in converting. “It is a poem about the difficulty of religious belief, about the difficulty of renouncing the temporal world; the poem is Christian at its core. The allusions in it are from prayer liturgy, great pieces of classical Christian literature, and the Bible. The poem’s title points the reader in the appropriate direction. Caroline Philips notes that, “as the title suggests, Ash Wednesday is essentially a meditation associated with the prayer and penitence appropriate to the beginning of Lent: a coming to terms with one’s unworthiness.” Ash Wednesday is the first day of Lent, a period of penance and reparations for sins. It culminates with Holy Week, containing Holy Thursday, Good Friday, and Holy Saturday, ending with Easter Sunday, the day celebrating Christ’s resurrection. The title Ash Wednesday calls these feasts to mind, the suffering of Lent that leads to death and eventually salvation. Salvation can only come about through suffering. This theme is frequent throughout Western Literature, and does properly set up the poem. The poem opens with the following lines:

Because I do not hope to turn again
Because I do not hope
Because I do not hope to turn

Eliot perfected the art of lifting lines from other sources and placing them within his own poems. Ash Wednesday is no different. The opening lines have references from two sources: the first is a short poem by Guido Cavalcanti, a friend of Dante, which contains the line “Perch’io non spero di tornar gia mai,” translated into the opening line of Ash Wednesday and the other allusion here is more Christian, since
the Cavalcanti reference is to a poem of despair. The Epistle read at Anglican service from the Book of Common Prayer for Ash Wednesday is from Joel. It reads, “Turn ye even to me, said the Lord, with all your heart.” The speaker in the poem, who represents Eliot himself, is responding to God’s call to turn to him in the negative. He does not want to enter into the sufferings of Lent. Therefore, he does not hope to turn to God. He turned his back on the Lord. He has despaired. He asks why the Lord should try to save him:

Why should the aged eagle stretch its wings? It has a biblical reference to Exodus 19:4: “I bare you on eagles’ wings, and brought you unto myself.” The speaker moves to enlist various negative comments:

Because I do not hope to know
The infirm glory of the positive hour
Because I do not think
Because I know I shall not know
The one veritable transitory power
Because I cannot drink

There, where trees flower, and springs flow, for there is nothing again (AW I 9-15). This litany of negatives “develops the idea of religious emptiness, of moving into the world of the Void, with a certain gloomy satisfaction.” Because of the speakers apathetic view of existence he has ignored everything that is important, including that Power who keeps him in existence, that is, God. He does not hope to know the “infirm glory of the positive hour,” that is, his death. The speaker reaches
into a discussion that is peculiar, and has been covered by many critics, but is not in particular Christian in subject. It shows the speaker has some understanding of the world. Time is time, and place is place. The speaker proclaims, “I rejoice that things are as they are and,” (AW I 20) and what? The speaker again slips back into despair:

I renounce the blessed face
And renounce the voice
Because I cannot hope to turn again
Consequently I rejoice, having to construct something
Upon which to rejoice (AW I 21-25)

The speaker had joy, had understanding, but he rejected it, renouncing the voice and the “blessed face,” admitting that the only thing he had to rejoice about was something he himself created. The blessed face and voice could recall St. Paul’s when he heard the voice of the Lord, but did not see His face. The speaker, like Paul, is being pushed in the direction of conversion. God is on his side. Another possibility is that the “blessed face” is a woman’s, the Lady that appears later in the poem. If this is so, argues Craig Raine, “she cannot be the Virgin.” This debate will be taken up later. Either way the speaker is hopeless in own mind; he cannot hope. “Under these circumstances Eliot almost wills himself to be positive, ‘having to construct something / upon which to rejoice,’ and the succeeding prayer to God for mercy is, at least in part, that construct which will provide him with a framework for rejoicing.”

The speaker moves on to a prayer for mercy, praying, “That I may forget,” forget what has made him turn away from God, that which has made him hopeless. “Only
thus can the serenity of faith emerge and the poet move on from ‘what is done, not to be done again.”

This passage calls to mind Psalm 130, where it states, “If thou, LORD, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand.” (AW 130)

Following this pleading for God’s mercy, the speaker invokes another religious character, the Blessed Mother. The ending line of the stanza is the last line in the Hail Mary:

Pray for us, now and at the hour of our death. (AW I 39)

This is liturgical. It states the inability to turn again towards the world proclaiming the declaration of the Ash Wednesday liturgy, according to the Holy Bible. T.S. Eliot ends up the first part of the poetry asking mother Mary, mother of Jesus to have mercy on him so does the congregation too during all of the Christian liturgical services in all the masses.

The invocation of Mary is a central aspect of the Catholic Church, one forbidden by the Church of England. Not only is the speaker becoming Christian, he is becoming Catholic, or at least Anglo-Catholic like Eliot. The image that opens the second stanza is a Lady with three white leopards. The leopards have eaten the speaker. They could represent the 3 beasts that Dante encounters at the start of the Inferno as mentioned above, Raine does not hold that the Lady in this scene and Mary are the same person, for “She honours the Virgin in meditation,” (AW II 10) and since Mary could not honor herself in meditation, she cannot be this Lady. So who is
this Lady? She bears striking resemblance to Dante’s Beatrice or even Lady Fortune in Boethius’ *Consolation of Philosophy*, or other such noble ladies from past literature. Philips offers an all-encompassing answer: “This figure is not only the Virgin Mary, appealed to at the end of the first poem, but also the chivalrous ideal of medieval romance and Dante’s Beatrice.” All three possibilities add to understanding the poem as Christian. If the Lady is the Virgin Mary, the Christian symbolism is clear enough. If the Lady is Beatrice or Lady Philosophy, the symbolism is still there. Both Beatrice and Lady Philosophy are from the literary world of Catholic creators, Beatrice to a lesser degree since she was a real person. Whichever of the three the Lady is, she is obviously a Christian symbol. She is garbed in white, the symbol of purity, innocence, and holiness, the color of the garment the saved in the Book of Revelation wear. White is.

After the line with the Lady, another image appears, this one more blatantly Biblical in nature. God speaks to the bones of the narrator and commands them back to life: And God said, “Shall these bones live? Shall these Bones live?” (AW II 5-7)

This references Ezekiel 37:3, the vision of Ezekiel where God brings the valley of dried bones back to life. The New Testament, the biblical allusion is seen here. The bones in response cry praise to the woman, for her piety, purity, and wisdom. The woman contemplates, resembling again Lady Philosophy in *The Consolation of Philosophy*. The bones are purified, shining white like the woman’s gown, because of the woman, who has allowed the leopards to eat all the organs of the bones, which
represented the evil that was inside them. There is no life in the bones now, and only God can and will give it back. After this image, there is the song of the bones. It is a prayer, resembling countless invocations of Mary and the saints. It seems that the bones invoke Lady as we do Mary. This illusion then is of Our Lady. Again the theme of a litany appears, as different names of the Lady are listed:

Rose of memory / Rose of forgetfulness” (AW II 28-29) Philips presents a beautiful analysis of this passage:

The last line in the stanza states, “This is the land. We have our inheritance” (AW II 54) this is an allusion to the Jews in the Old Testament and their struggle for the land promised to Abraham by God.

The next stanza has the speaker on his way to conversion. He is at the point where he has decided to follow the Lady to the Lord. It is a stairway, resembling Jacob’s stairway dream leading towards heaven. It involves climbing, as Dante had to climb Mt. Purgatory in the Purgatorio. There is, however, another image. As the speaker reaches the top of the three stairs, he utters a prayer to God:

Lord, I am not worthy
Lord, I am not worthy
but speak the word only (AW III23-25)

These are the prayers before one receives communion in the Mass: “Lord, I am not worthy to receive you under my roof, but only say the word and my soul shall be healed.” Or it can also be prayed as “Lord I am not worthy to receive you but only say a word and I shall be healed”. This is a pure liturgical
derivation. (Refer to the Liturgy given in Chapter 1). The stairs could be stairs leading up to the altar of sacrifice. Once the speaker has reached the top, he prays for worthiness to stand before the Lord. He knows he is not worthy and that in the end God’s mercy will determine if He heals him. The speaker has converted. He is now a Christian.

The fourth stanza opens with more lines referencing the Lady:

Who walked between the violet and the violet
Who walked between
The various ranks of varied green
Going in white and blue, in Mary’s color (AW I 4)

The reference of the Lady as Mary again comes up. She is wearing her colors, white and blue, through violet. Returning to the Lenten imagery, Violet, the color of penance, is the color of vestments worn by clergy during Mass throughout Lent. Philips notes another analogy: “the open-endedness of ‘Who walked between the violet and the violet,’ suggests the constancy of the concept of the Lady moving steadily through the poem; now in the foreground, now unseen, but with her presence always felt’. The Lady is there and not there, showing a sort of divine power. Suddenly the poem describes in beautiful images the place where the woman is walking. It is an amazing garden, reminding one of the top of Mt. Purgatory in the Purgatorio. It is like Eden, Paradise.

The stanza ends with a line from the Hail Holy Queen, another Marian prayer: “And after this our exile.” (AW IV 29) The implication is clear enough. After our
exile here on earth, that is (to use a Catholic phrase), our earthly pilgrimage called life, we will reach this Eden, this Paradise, but only if we turn to God. The prayer is invoking Mary to pray for us, that we may be worthy, as the last stanza begged. By stressing the word “our,” not “mine,” the speaker “reiterates the association of his life with that of all humanity.” This spiritual journey is not just for the speaker but for the entire human race.

This leads into one of the most explicitly Christian passages of the poem, where the emphasis is on the Word, that is, the Word made Flesh, Christ. It is a reference to the beginning of St. John’s Gospel, where the Christ is called the Word of God. Dal–Yong Kim notes, “Eliot’s poetry attempts to bind human words to the Word or Christian Logos through repeated soul-searching.” Ash Wednesday is the prime example of this attempt. Throughout the passage are scattered references to Christ. The poem reads:

Still is the unspoken word, the Word unheard,
The Word without a word, the Word within
The world and for the world;
And the light shone in darkness and
Against the Word the unstilled world still whirled
About the centre of the silent Word. (AW V 4-9)

This section reflects many of the statements concerning the Word in John’s Gospel. There is even a reference to Isaiah 9:6 in the line “and the light shone in darkness.” “In the absolute authority and power of the Lord, the penitent-poet finds
‘strength beyond hope and despair,’ after resisting puritanically all distraction, indecision, and temptation.” Another Christological reference is found in the repetition of the line “O my people, what have I done unto thee” twice in the stanza, which concludes with a fragment of the line. The Catholic immediately recognizes the phrase as part of the Reproaches for Good Friday service, where Jesus asks the people of Israel why they have betrayed him, despite Him doing such great things for them. The Reproaches themselves come from the Prophetic book of Micah in the Old Testament: “O my people, what have I done to you? / In what have I wearied you? Answer me!” In Micah as well as in the Reproaches, God is admonishing sinners. The place this phrase plays in Ash Wednesday is similar. The speaker poet has fallen after his conversion, committed some kind of sin, etc, and needs to be forgiven.

There is also another woman allusion. Will the veiled sister pray for

Those who walk in darkness, who chose thee and oppose thee,

Those who are torn on the horn between season and season, time and time,

between

Hour and hour, word and word, power and power, those who wait

In darkness? Will the veiled sister pray

For children at the gate

Who will not go away and cannot pray:

Pray for those who chose and oppose (AW V 20-27)

After stating the phrase of admonishing, the poet speaks on the woman again:

“Will the veiled sister between the slender / Yew trees pray for those who offend her”
(AW V 29-30) this veiled sister is most likely another illusion to Mary, praying for the souls who have fallen away from the Word. “As she embodies both human and divine it is she who is best able to act as an intermediary for those torn between the worlds of flesh and spirit. We trust in Mary for her intercession, for she speaks to her divine son. The next analogy the poem provides is that of a desert with a garden in it, a clear reference to Eden: “The desert in the garden the garden in the desert / Of drouth, spitting from the mouth the withered apple-seed.” (AW V 34-35) Mary, the new Eve, spits out of her mouth the apple seed from the Garden of Eden. Moody provides an interesting insight: “According to Christian legend, it was from the seed of the fruit plucked from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil that grew the tree upon which Christ was crucified. That is the one tree which can make ‘the garden in the desert.’” Therefore, from one seed the Tree of Life is born, just as one act of turning can lead to conversion.

This leads to the last stanza, which opens with a converse of the poem’s opening lines:

Although I do not hope to turn again
Although I do not hope
Although I do not hope to turn (AW VI 1-3)

This change from “Because” to “Although” signifies the completed conversion. The speaker knows what he was attached to before, this life, is only temporary, and that he cannot hope in that temporary. He still fears leaving his comfort, but that does not mean he will not. “At the end of his poem, although he is equally without hope,
he turns again; he is unable to renounce the temporal world – although he knows the temporal world to be an illusion.” He has a better grasp now of picking himself up when he falls in his new Christian life. There is an illusion to the sacrament of Penance with a small line “Bless me father” (AW VI 7) cutting to his confession.

There is also one last litany to the Lady: “Blessed sister, holy mother, spirit of the fountain, spirit of the garden.” (AW VI 25) Again, it closely resembles a litany to Mary. At the end of the litany there is another reference, showing that it is not just Mary the poet is invoking: Sister, mother And spirit of the river, spirit of the sea, Suffer me not to be separated and let my cry come unto Thee (AW VI 32-35). The first references are again to Mary, but the last two are towards Christ. “Suffer me not to be separated” is part of the Anima Christi. The line reads “Suffer me not to be separated from thee.” If Eliot had included the entire line, it would have completed the couplet, of “And spirit of the river, spirit of the sea, / Suffer me not to be separated.” However, he wanted to extend the prayer a little bit. The rhyme for “sea” is still “Thee,” but it is preceded by, “and let my cry come unto.” This extension of the prayer, of which this section is an example, invokes one last plead to God to hear the prayer of the writer. It is the culmination of a spiritual poem, ending in a prayer.

It is quite plain to see that T. S. Eliot wrote Ash Wednesday as specifically a Christian poem, not simply a religious meditation. The images in the text are not just generally religious but Anglo-Catholic specifically incorporating the liturgy and the readings of the Lenten Ash Wednesday. Critics who clump Ash Wednesday into the category of Eliot poems that are critiques of modern society miss the point of the
poem. There is more behind the words than just social commentary. Eliot would not accept anything less

4.5

*Four Quartets* and Christian-Hindu Beliefs

*Four Quartets* is a set of four poems written by T. S. Eliot. It was published individually over a six-year period. The first poem, *Burnt Norton*, was written and published with a collection of his early works following the production of Eliot’s play, *Murder in the Cathedral*. After a few years, Eliot composed the other three poems, and *East Coker, The Dry Salvages, and Little Gidding* were written during World War II and the air-raids on Great Britain. They were first published as a series in Great Britain in 1944 towards the end of Eliot’s poetic career.

The central focus of the *Four Quartets* is man’s relationship with time, the universe, and the divine. Time is depicted as a binding force that prevents humanity from transcending the boundaries of the material world and hinders them from finding redemption. The overall message of the series is that only through realizing Christ’s sacrifice for humanity is an individual capable of being saved. In describing his understanding of the divine with the poems, Eliot blends Christian theology with allusions to Western literature, Eastern texts including the *Bhagavad-Gita*, and the works of Dante. Although many critics find the *Four Quartets* to be Eliot’s great last work, some of Eliot’s contemporary critics, including George Orwell, were dissatisfied with Eliot’s overt religiosity. Later critics disagreed with Orwell’s
claimed about the poems and argued instead that the religious themes made the poem stronger. Overall, reviews of the poem within Great Britain were favorable while reviews in the United States were split between those who liked Eliot’s later style and others who felt he abandoned positive aspects of his earlier poetry. Each poem has five sections. The later poems connect to the earlier sections with “Little Gidding” synthesizing the themes of the earlier poems within its sections. Within Eliot’s own poetry, the five sections connect to *The Waste Land*. This allowed Eliot to structure his larger poems, which he had difficulty with. According to C.K. Stead, the structure is based on

1. The movement of time, in which brief moments of eternity are caught.
2. Worldly experience, leading on to dissatisfaction.
3. Purgation in the world, divesting the soul of the love of created things.
4. A lyric prayer or an affirmation for the need of Intercession.
5. The problems of attaining artistic wholeness, which becomes analogue for, and merge into, the problems of achieving spiritual health.

These points can be applied to the structure of *The Waste Land*, though there is not necessarily a fulfillment of these but merely a longing or discussion of them.[BB 165]

**Burnt Norton:** The concept and origin of “Burnt Norton” is connected to Eliot’s play *Murder in the Cathedral*, and was intended to be socially useful. The poem discusses the idea of time and the concept that only the present moment really
matters, because the past cannot be changed and the future is unknown. There is an emphasis on order within the universe and a need to believe in the Logos. The poem ends with an argument that God is the only one truly able to exist outside of time and knows of all time and place, but man is still capable of redemption.  

**East Coker:** Eliot started writing “East Coker” in 1939, and modeled the poem after “Burnt Norton” as a way to focus his thoughts. The poem served as a sort of opposite to the popular idea that *The Waste Land* served as an expression of disillusionment after World War I, though Eliot never accepted this interpretation. The poem focuses on life, death, and continuity between the two. Humans are seen as disorderly and science is viewed as unable to save humanity from its flaws. Instead, science and reason lead humanity to warfare, and humanity needs to become humble in order to escape the cycle of destruction. To be saved, people must recognize Christ as their savior as well as their need for redemption. [PA 254-255] [RK 250-252]

**The Dry Salvages:** Eliot began writing *The Dry Salvages* at the end of 1940 during air raids on London, and managed to finish the poem quickly. The poem included many personal images connecting to Eliot’s childhood, and emphasized the image of water and sailing as a metaphor for humanity. According to the poem, there is a connection to all of humanity within each man. If we just accept drifting upon the sea, then we will end up broken upon rocks. We are restrained by time, but the Annunciation gave humanity hope that it will be able to escape. This hope is not part
of the present. What we must do is understand the patterns found within the past in order to see that there is meaning to be found. This meaning allows one to experience eternity through moments of revelation. (RK 254-255)

**Little Gidding:** *Little Gidding* was started after “The Dry Salvages” but was delayed because of Eliot’s declining health and his dissatisfaction with early drafts of the poem. Eliot was unable to finish the poem in September 1942. [PA 263-266] Like the three previous poems of the *Four Quartets*, the central theme is time and humanity’s place within it. Each generation is seemingly united and the poem describes a unification within Western civilization. When discussing World War II, the poem states that humanity is given a choice between the bombing of London or the Holy Spirit. God’s love allows mankind to redeem themselves and escape the living hell through purgation by fire. The end of the poem describes how Eliot has attempted to try and help the world as a poet, and he parallels his work in language with working on the soul or working on society. [RK 260-263]

**Themes**

Eliot believed that even if a poem can mean different things to each reader, the “absolute” meaning of the poem needs to be discovered. The central meaning of the *Four Quartets* is to connect to European literary tradition in addition to its Christian themes. It also seeks to unite with English literature along with European literature to form a unity, especially in Eliot’s creation of a “familiar compound ghost” who is
supposed to connect to those like Stéphane Mallarmé, Edgar Allan Poe, Jonathan Swift, and William Butler Yeats. [PA 271]

**Time**

Time is viewed as unredeemable and problematic, whereas eternity is beautiful and true. Living under time’s influence is a problem. Within *Burnt Norton* section 3, people trapped in time are similar to those stuck in between life and death in *Inferno* Canto 3. [BB 166-167] When Eliot deals with the past in *The Dry Salvages*, he emphasizes its importance in order to combat the influence of evolution as encouraging people to forget the past and care only about the present and the future. The present is capable of always reminding one of the past. These moments also rely on the idea of Krishna in the *Bhagavad-Gīṭa* that death can come at any moment, and that the divine which is more important than considering the future. ¹⁶

William F. Lynch, believed that salvation happens within time and not outside of it, explained what Eliot was attempting to do in the *Four Quartets* when he wrote: “it is hard to say no to the impression, if I may use a mixture of my own symbols and his, that the Christian imagination is finally limited to the element of fire, to the day of Pentecost, to the descent of the Holy Ghost upon the disciples. The revelation of eternity and time is of an intersection ... It seems not unseemly to suppose that Eliot’s imagination and is this not a theology? is alive with points of intersection and of descent.”[BB 168] He continued with a focus on how time operated within the poem: “He seems to place our faith, our hope, and our love, not in the flux of time but in the
points of time. I am sure his mind is interested in the line and time of Christ, whose Spirit is his total flux. But I am not so sure about his imagination. Is it or is it not an imagination, which is saved from time’s nausea or terror by points of intersection? ... There seems little doubt that Eliot is attracted above all by the image and the goal of immobility, and that in everything he seeks for approximations to this goal in the human order.” Lynch went on to point out that this understanding of time includes Asian influences (BB 168-169).

Throughout the poems, the end becomes the beginning and things constantly repeat.\(^1\) This use of circular time is similar to the way Dante uses time in his *Divine Comedy* – *Little Gidding* ends with a rose garden image that is the same as the garden beginning “Burnt Norton”. The repetition of time affects memory and how one can travel through their own past in order to find permanency and the divine. Memory within the poem is similar to how St. Augustine discussed it, in that memory allows one to understand words and life. The only way to discover eternity is through memory, understanding the past, and transcending beyond time. Likewise, in the Augustinian view that Eliot shares, timeless words are connected to Christ as the Logos and how Christ calls upon mankind to join him in salvation.\(^2\) To give a sense of what Eliot is doing in terms of Christian imagery and his understanding of the universe, critics tend to compare Eliot to Yeats. Yeats believed that we live in a cyclical type of world, saying, “If it be true that God is a circle whose centre is everywhere, the saint goes to the centre, the poet and the artist to the ring where everything comes round again (DM 150). Eliot believed that such a system is stuck
within time. Eliot was influenced by Yeast’s reading of Dante. This appears in Eliot’s “Ash-Wednesday” by changing Yeast’s “desire for absolution” away from a humanistic approach (DM 150-152). When Eliot wrote about personal topics, he tended to use Dante as a reference point. He also relied on Dante’s imagery: the idea of the “refining fire” in the Four Quartets and in The Waste Land comes from Purgatorio and the celestial rose and fire imagery of Paradiso makes its way into the series.[BB 171-173] If “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock”, “Gerontion”, The Waste Land, and “The Hollow Men” are Eliot’s Inferno, Ash-Wednesday seems to be Purgatorio, and the Four Quartets seems to be Paradiso. The Four Quartets abandons time, as per Dante’s conception of the Empyrean, and allows opposites to co-exist together. As such, people are able to experience God directly as long as they know that they cannot fully understand or comprehend him. Eliot tries to create a new system, according to Denis Donoghue, in which he is able to describe a Christianity which not restricted by previous views that have fallen out of favor in modern society or contradicted by science. Eliot reasoned that he is not supposed to preach a theological system as a poet, but expose the reader to the ideas of religion. As Eliot stated in 1947: “if we learn to read poetry properly, the poet never persuades us to believe anything” and “What we learn from Dante, or the Bhagavad-Gita, or any other religious poetry is what it feels like to believe that religion.”[RK 241-243]

According to Russell Kirk, “Nor is it possible to appreciate Eliot-whether or not one agrees with him-if one comes to Four Quartets with ideological blinders. Ideology, it must be remembered, is the attempt to supplant religious dogmas by
political and scientist dogmas. If one’s first premise is that religion must be a snare and a delusion, for instance, then it follows that Eliot becomes an enemy to be assaulted, rather than a pilgrim whose journal one may admire—even if one does not believe in the goal of that quest.” (RK 244)

Eliot’s poetry is filled with religious images beyond those common to Christianity: the *Four Quartets* brings in Hindu stories with a particular emphasis on the *Bhagavad-Gita* of the *Mahabharata*. [PINION 226-227] Eliot went so far as to mark where he alludes to Hindu stories in his editions of the *Mahabharata* by including a page added which compared battle scenes with “The Dry Salvages”. [LG 85]

Many critics emphasized the importance of the religious themes. Vincent Bucklet stated that the *Four Quartets* “presuppose certain values as necessary for their very structure as poems yet devote that structure to questioning their meaning and relevance. The whole work is, in fact, the most authentic example I know in modern poetry of a satisfying religio-poetic meditation. We sense throughout it is not merely a building-up of an intricate poetic form on the foundation of experiences already over and done with, but a constant energy, an ever-present activity, of thinking and feeling.” [RK 240-241] In his analysis of approaches regarding apocalypse and religious in British poetry, M H Abrams claimed, “Even after a quarter-century, T. S. Eliot’s *Four Quartets* has not lost its status as a strikingly ‘modern’ poem; its evolving meditations, however, merely play complex variations upon the design and motifs of Romantic representation of the poet’s educational progress.” [RK 19] Late 20th century and early 21st century critics continued the religious emphasis. Craig Raine
pointed out: “Undeniably, *Four Quartets* has its faults—for instance, the elementary tautology of ‘anxious worried women’ in section I of *The Dry Salvages*. But the passages documenting in undeniable detail ‘the moment in and out of time’ are the most successful attempts at the mystical in poetry since Wordsworth’s spots of time in *The Prelude*—themselves a refiguration of the mystical.”  

John Cooper, in regard to the poem’s place within the historical context of World War II, described the aspects of the series appeal: “*Four Quartets* spoke about the spirit in the midst of this new crisis and, not surprisingly, there were many readers who would not only allow the poem to carry them with it, but who also hungered for it.”  

Account is taken of how Eliot’s use of cyclical images, and the language he uses to create them, impacts on the reader’s perception of the division and unity between the physical and spiritual dimensions of human existence. What has been thus far propounded, however, one could argue, is a reader’s selected and specific response, superimposed on the text. The argument puts language rather than, for example, religion, as the central critical theme of *East Coker*. He integrates lines from Spenser’s *Epithalamion* into *East Coker*: “In my beginning is my end.

The fluent confidence of the free verse suggests Eliot’s conviction that from the point of birth begins the death span of individual life. Eliot is very conscious of the life and death cycle being interdependent on each other, which causes him to unite linguistic opposites in his work, e.g. ‘beginning/ end,’ ‘rise/ fall,’ ‘destroyed/ restored.’ Eliot introduces human existence into this dichotomy with the double meaning he invests in the word ‘houses’. People build the material house and like
them, it perishes with age. Similarly, the historical, biblical and family house such as the House of David or House of Tudor also rises and falls on the peaks and troughs of fate and another house, family or monarch replaces fortune until it. The House of Windsor for example replaced the House of Hanover. Despite the trauma of destruction and regeneration suggested by ‘old timber to the new fires.’ With the pangs of human birth and death, Eliot is celebrating rather than lamenting the single transient contribution to the cyclical nature of existence. The essence of the poem lies therefore in its solid sense of, and understanding of, the unity of the pattern, not in the surface textual allusions. The allusions are there to fulfil this functional purpose within the structure of the poem, and are not a lofty or esoteric end in itself or herself, or a puzzle for readers to solve. People live and die and language changes and evolves with the life/death cycle of humanity. Eliot reflects this cycle via the change and diversity in language and this makes the receptive reader aware of change in language that can be construed as paralleling changes in the existential states of living and dying. This dual reflection also demonstrates to the reader that if life is limited so is the language through which it is perceived. Thus whilst words and literature can progress through reinvention, and individual people die whilst the human species evolves, one must remember that death is necessarily part of the living process of ‘eating and drinking, dung and death.’ These are the characteristics of the imperfect life cycle that humankind has had to endure since the fall from Eden, and language is the equally manifest but corrupted medium through which life is perceived and expressed. Eliot illustrates his parallel between the restrictions of life and limitations
of language in *Burnt Norton*: “Words move, music moves; Only in time; but that which is only living, Can only die. Words, after speech, reach, Into the silence”. (FQ 17) Eliot’s use of ‘only’ reinforces the notion of the single, insignificant acts of birth and death in the sweep of the relentless but repetitive panorama of existence; ‘that which is only living/ Can only die’. Thus life fades into death and words fade into silence. Life’s natural processes, like the language used to express them are part of the ‘dung/death,’ ‘eating/drinking,’ ‘end/beginning,’ cycle. In *Burnt Norton* Eliot reminds the reader of the pertinacious and dynamic yet frail nature of language:

> And all is always now. Words strain
> Crack and sometimes break, under the burden
> Under the tension, slip, slide, perish,
> Decay with imprecision, will not stay in place,
> Will not stay still. (FQ 17)

Eliot, words decay and thus form and meaning changes, but the signifier words remain, corpse-like, there to be resurrected in their original signified forms as in the Spenserian lines in *East Coker*. Living and dead words coexist and stimulate each other within the scope of the poetics. Indeed within the limits of language degeneration and decomposition are part of the cycle of linguistic evolution as they flame into the phoenix of the new and become reinvented when a decayed past and questing present collide to conceive a vibrant future composed out of the husk of language and its spent words. The birth of the new and unfamiliar creates what Iser calls the ‘identification processes. Like Eliot, the reader identifies the familiarity of
the past, but this is not at once the familiar ground on which we are all able to experience the new. It is identifying the unity of familiar if diverse linguistic and literary components from which Eliot creates the unfamiliar, and from which he fashions the new from the old. Therefore, the reader shares the identification process with Eliot as he takes old but identifiable material to construct that which is new, unfamiliar but immediately identifiable to those readers who have analyzed the construction process, and in Iser’s reader-response terminology, ‘realised’ the text along with Eliot. In the second of the *Four Quartets*, we have further echoes of earlier writers. One very precise image, which openly focuses on Eliot’s concern for unifying disparate, but familiar elements, is borrowed from Stevenson’s *Requiem*:

The houses are all gone under the sea

The dancers are all gone under the hill, (FQ 24)

Correspondingly, if, as stated in *Burnt Norton*:

Time present and time past

are both perhaps present in time future (FQ 130)

Then motion, image and expression exist and cease simultaneously in the act of the dance. The dance is made of time, image and motion components, and the parallel with life is when the physical elements wear out and bodily life finishes. Similarly, when the moving image is over the dance ceases and the single dance, like the single life is of brief duration. However if the dancing is carried on by the living then the continuity is extended. Thus, the dance of life and the language of life are both limited, but are changed and recharged by new generations of people, poets and
dancers. The cycle although imperfect will be perpetuated. Indeed life and art in order to evolve and survive must be able to change. Eliot was a confirmed and conservative member of the high Anglican Church. He saw life as a blessing and a burden. In Eliot’s view, we can now only accept the weight of existence and the burden of loss it carries. In the third section darkness and light, stasis and dancing are juxtaposed until we have the poignant memory of Eden with the loss and gain of its memory:

   The laughter in the garden, echoed ecstasy

   Not lost, but requiring, pointing to the agony

   Of death and birth. (FQ 25)

   Eliot is reflecting that life in its eternal spiral is forever tainted with lost innocence, and with death as its punishment, which is the everlasting shadow on the human condition. This death is very well seen in the leading characters of his drama too. The joy of Eden is a fragile echo of wholeness, but the agony of the birth and death process is the ultimate brutal points on life’s cyclical pattern. They are made yet more painful when compared so closely with the laughter and ecstasy of what might have been. In the fourth section, Eliot suddenly changes verse form as he moves form predominantly blank verse to a controlled alternate line-rhyming scheme. He examines the religious issues of human responsibility resulting from ‘Adam’s curse’. Humankind’s existence, for Eliot is founded on the ultimate paradox. After the fall from paradise, we are reborn in the death of Christ and the promise of the resurrection to the former state of grace. This prompts Eliot to illustrate the cyclical nature of illness and cure by a further fusion of opposites melded towards spiritual redemption:
Our only health is our disease (FQ 25). The disease is required to bring the soiled cycle of existence back to its former healthful and blissful beginning and to remind the reader of our and Adam’s curse: And to be restored our sickness must grow worse (FQ 25). Eliot returns to a slightly hesitant blank verse in the fifth section as he considers his personal feelings about poetry, language and life. He is still concerned with the circular pattern, with the bonding of opposites, but feels that the man-made mess of which he is a wasted part corrupts God-given life. Eliot feels that words, as the tools of the poet, are inadequate to express the enormity of this tragedy. One can optimize their use and master them as a technical medium, but this does not avoid their limitations. Nor does it allow mere literary achievement to compensate for the failure of the poet to understand or express the experience of his wasted years to the profound depth in which he feels it:

So here I am in the middle way, having had twenty years -

Twenty years largely wasted, the years of l’entre deux guerres

Trying to learn to use words and every attempt

a wholly new start, and a different kind of failure.

Because one has only learned to get the better of words” (FQ 25).

It appears that the discussion of the ‘mess of imprecision’ and sense of failure in the final section is the reflection of middle-aged maturity rather than maudlin or self-indulgent pessimism. Perhaps Eliot’s Christianity prompts him to finish on a strong note of hope. Eliot reasons that: Old men ought to be explorers (FQ 17). This reflection will then transform the desolation of what we see as death into a positive
perspective within the cycle of mortality in which dying is just another part of living imparted by Christ, the joy of resurrection and the sacred cycle. The Easter message is the one, which is included here. In my end is my beginning. (FQ 27). In conclusion, it appears that, for Eliot, once death is accepted as part of the messy legacy of humanity, the cycle of human existence can be perceived as a process of birth, death and triumphant regeneration. This view is based on his belief in enduring Christian principles and the spiritual and physical evolution of humanity towards a greater good. Throughout *East Coker*, Eliot is struggling with the apparent contradictions of the human condition. He tries to define it by the human cycle of birth/death, food/dung, renewal/decay. The cyclic time notion of Indian Philosophy. He uses a variety of linguistic devices to reflect these extremities, and includes classical quotes, popular references, archaic language and Biblical allusion creating Christian imagery.
Chapter IV

References


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10. Marks


