The Non-Teleological Progression from Hell to Purgatory in the Poetry of T.S. Eliot

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THE NON-TELEOLOGICAL PROGRESSION FROM HELL TO PURGATORY IN THE POETRY OF T. S. ELIOT

by

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A Dissertation Submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of Loyola University of Chicago in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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VITA

The author, Dianne Rose Costanzo, is the daughter of Ruggero Costanzo and Adrian (Quintiliani) Costanzo. She was born February 1, 1954, in Chicago, Illinois, and has an older brother, Michael Costanzo.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

From "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" to the last line in "Little Gidding," T. S. Eliot's spiritual quest is marked by his astonishing resilience. Eliot can, in a single passage, sometimes in a single breath, both accept and reject an image or an idea. This Janus-like vision allows Eliot to look in two directions simultaneously, providing him a superb vantage from which to observe time past, present, and future, as well as doubt and belief. Such an outlook enables Eliot to see life synthetically, neither just one way nor another, but as a composite; it puts his reality on a spectrum that calls attention not to what lies at the extremes but to what rests—at first nervously, then calmly—in between.

Within this state of betweenness Eliot progresses in and through spiritual realms. The epigraph to "Prufrock" is often cited as evidence that the poem takes place in hell, yet it strongly suggests that Prufrock's way of being in hell is very peculiar, much like Dante's—not exactly being in hell but moving through it. Prufrock's journey, however, has no clear goal. This indeterminateness, frequently taking the form of betweenness, a looking two ways
at once or a being two ways at once, remains central to Eliot's canon.

Eliot is an unusual pilgrim because he never journeys forth in search of a particular goal. Nevertheless, over a period of nearly three decades, he succeeds in moving from hell to purgatory; the meeting of these two realms contributes to his paradoxical vision. To move and yet to reach stillness, but not to move in order to reach the stillness as a goal, lies at the core of Eliot's progression. His pilgrimage and growth are non-teleological, non goal-oriented. Such a statement seems at first antithetical to most of the scholarship done on Eliot, for most scholars tend to view Eliot as a poet who, after converting to a dogmatic religion, begins to write "Christian" poetry; and that, for most, means a poetry bent on paradise. Yet, even the plays, which are far more overtly "religious," and also far inferior, are not as traditionally goal-oriented as one might believe.

*Murder in the Cathedral* (1935) certainly is teleological in that supplication to God and to the martyred saints exists. A dramatization of an historic event featuring a single character of religious reknown cannot help but voice spiritual concerns openly and obviously.

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But despite the religious presupposition in *Murder in the Cathedral*, Eliot's Thomas à Becket is someone who apparently struggles to keep himself in the present moment and to be passively active in waiting for his destiny to be revealed. Knowing that the temptation for glory in God's name is the most dangerous treason, Thomas has learned to quit desiring material wealth and social prestige, but now must try to overcome his desire for glory in paradise. He must not volunteer for martyrdom, for that would be the worst lust of all.

What he is trying to achieve is the state of spiritual stillness voiced in "East Coker" (iii):

> I said to my soul be still and wait without hope
> For hope would be hope for the wrong thing; wait
> without love, for love would be love for the wrong thing; there is yet faith
But the faith and the love and the hope are all in the waiting;
Wait without thought, for you are not ready for thought: So the darkness shall be the light, and the stillness the dancing.

Achieving a still point requires one to live in the present without hope of reward, which is hope for the wrong reason. If, after living in the still present, one does progress or does become linked to one's destiny, then it happens because one has forfeited one's own limited vision to an omniscient one. Although Eliot was a Christian, this quest for a non-teleological present in no way precludes other beliefs, for at its center it is not only Christian but also Buddhist.
and Hindu. All three religions influenced Eliot deeply throughout his life.

At the core of Eliot's concern for this manner of being is his notion of time. A brief look at Heidegger's *Being and Time* helps to clarify the logical connection. Heidegger points out that every man exists in a world already created, and somehow rides in a tension between transcending his existence and submitting to it. Within this tension lies the paradox of freedom and time. Heidegger sees two kinds of time: personal and worldly time. From a worldly or public point of view, time may be thought of as "flowing" in a linear way from past to present to future. But "personal time" is not experienced that way. Death is not merely something that happens in the future. It is something that most persons reckon with frequently or perhaps in some sense continually. The past, on the other hand, may be experienced as something ahead of man, beckoning man to live up to it--to his own ideas of what he is or what others have been. Such a tension challenges man to confront his own end, and only after doing so is he free to live in the present. Only one who has ventured into the dark silence of his own nothingness has the ability to shape his life.

Like Heidegger, Eliot realizes that time future
means time finite. To live in the present one must journey into one's own future, reckon with the horror of mortality, and then return to the present with the courage to continue until the end. This kind of living-in-the-present is far different from and much more difficult than the carpe-diem, live-for-today attitude. Embedded in the awareness of time future/time finite is a sense of suffering. Here Eliot and Heidegger diverge. Where Eliot sees suffering, which under certain circumstances can be redemptive, Heidegger sees only "anxiety," which under all circumstances is a way toward "authenticity" but is yet devoid of moral content.

Suffering, to Eliot, means different things at different times, though it remains consistently present. In the early poetry characters move endlessly through the hell of polite and trivialized life. Though many characters never question their existence, several major characters do. Prufrock, for instance, is not simply a middle aged, epicene fool, for his concern for time and his awareness of his life's futility give him a marginal nobility. Yet his spiritual paralysis entraps Prufrock between his correct

This does not mean that Eliot adopted Heidegger's philosophy as his own, but points of intersection do exist. Heidegger was born one year after Eliot and arrived at the University of Marburg one year after Eliot's visit. Though evidence does not exist of any meeting between them, it is clear that somehow they were arriving at the same point from different angles at about the same time. The philosopher turned poet and the philosopher who admired poets have much in common.
assessment of his world and his inability to make a life in it. Prufrock fails to become what Heidegger calls an "authentic" being because, though he faces the dread of his end, he neither forms his conscience nor assumes responsibility for himself. Like Prufrock, all the characters in Eliot's pre-conversion poetry move about but never beyond hell.

The suffering done in the post-conversion poetry is more significant than that endured in the early poetry. What distinguishes those in purgatory from those in hell is the ability to look beyond without, however, lusting for it, but rather welcoming their own purgation, however painful. In the later poetry is a recognition of significant suffering; it is purgatorial. Eliot's conversion is given credit, sometimes blame, for the difference in the poetry's tone, but to base either blame or credit upon a single event is to distort a full vision of the poetry.

Though he believes in a heaven, Eliot never ventures there in his poetry. To reach heaven, Eliot would need to be joyful, something he never is. Always the sufferer, Eliot is perhaps the most perfect purgatorial poet because he investigates the significance of suffering. For him, suffering seems to be based on privation, either permanent or temporary, infernal or purgatorial. Eliot knew both. Considering how far he had to go to attain it, his progression to the purgatorial mount marks a major achievement.
Purgatory implies a sense of betweenness in that it is not the final destination of a pilgrim. It may be located between earth and heaven, as it is for most Christians, or between hell and heaven, as it is for Dante and Eliot. Eliot's stopping his journey in purgatory raises important issues in analyzing his poetry.

Because the poetry affirms a non-teleological belief in progression, attainment of an ultimate goal would make the poetry false to itself. Eliot emphasizes progression, yet he moves in stasis. Though the urban poet encounters the desert and the garden, he travels sequentially but non-linearly through time. Eliot's non-teleological, non-linear progression is much different from an evolutionary or even a conventionally Christian view of man. Instead of projecting into the future, Eliot concerns himself with the ever present attempt man makes to steady his soul. All this suggests a simultaneity of experience that leads to a present sufficient without heaven or hope of heaven, which "would be hope for the wrong thing." There is only faith in the suffering of the moment.

Although Eliot's conversion experience was of utmost importance, it should not be seen out of the context of his life. For all practical purposes, Eliot suffered in one way or another most of his life. After leaving a disastrous marriage of seventeen years, Eliot soon found himself in another relationship of long duration (twelve years)
with John Hayward. Eliot's attraction to caustic, intelligent, and exhausting personalities says more about Eliot than it does about his companions, and though many of the questions it raises must be left to be answered by the definitive biography, some observations may be made.

For one thing, the absence of joy felt even in his childhood days seems to be carried nearly to the end of Eliot's life, replaced only by his second marriage. Not surprisingly, Eliot quit writing around this time. But if one were to look only at Eliot's life up through the completion of *Four Quartets* (1943), one would see the movement from hell to purgatory, his conversion to Anglo-Catholicism occurring in the middle. Yet Eliot's conversion did not really mark a change in his vision, only a change in how he chose to interpret it.

The question remains, then, whether the still point is purgatorial or paradisal. Many critics and scholars, including Robert Sencourt and Stephen Spender, either implicitly or explicitly try to interpret the end of "Little Gidding" as paradisal, but this is a contrived explanation. The images carried throughout the canon, Eliot's personal life, and his philosophical and theological leanings seem to stress his struggle to arrive at the purgatorial mount. True, the later poetry expresses an optimism not found in the early work, but it is still joyless, still aching while waiting without hope. Such constant attention to the
present compels one to wait only with faith. Yet even in
the waiting marvelous sights can appear. Eliot's emphasis
not on the attainment of a goal but on the process itself
makes his movement in place a paradox at the most profound
level. It is the ultimate between, the most significant
place for the still point. After looking at the end, as
Eliot and Heidegger both suggest, it is proper to start at
the beginning.

While the "hermeneutical circle" may appear to
logicians as a "vicious circle," it is the essence and
glory of life, as Heidegger says. No one can escape it,
nor does one need to escape. Eliot saw and lived the same
fundamental truth. In the early poetry the "circle" is
vicious. In the later poetry the circle is still there,
more explicit, more visible, and even more profoundly pain-
ful, but now a kind of glory. No escape nor any desire for
one exists, only an interpretation--a "seeing as"--even a
vision, but a purgatorial vision.
CHAPTER II

THE EARLY POETRY: PRUFROCK AND OTHER OBSERVATIONS

Eliot's journey from hell to purgatory begins with "Prufrock," but six poems, "Morning at the Window," "The Boston Evening Transcript," "Aunt Helen," "Cousin Nancy," "Hysteria," and "Conversation Galante," within Prufrock and Other Observations, do not seem to be integrally linked to any notion of progression, infernal or other; they appear as either remnants of collegiate versifying or as a kind of anomaly within a canon that nowhere else expresses any satisfaction in dealing with trifles trivially. Though these six poems are interesting verse, though they contain the same technique and imagery as the poetry Eliot is known for, they pale next to those poems one usually associates with Eliot. What is missing from these six poems is the reality of suffering Eliot would grapple with and write about for nearly thirty years.

Excluding suffering from the poetry does more than prevent a poet an emotional outlet; it prevents the poet from making connections with the rest of humankind. Suffering, a universal condition, adds a dimension to poetry that makes it understandable to the human heart. Through suffering one may become more compassionate or bitter, but
it leaves the person changed. Some transformation occurs that either strengthens or debilitates a soul. Without suffering, Eliot's poetry is merely the work of an intelligent but supercilious and arrogant young man who sees others, especially the middle class, as undeserving of his concern. Had Eliot not incorporated Laforgian irony and his own suffering into his poetry, the modern reader would have inherited a legacy of clever yet one-dimensional verse, certainly dated and disconnected from the important and perennial issues confronting man.

As these six poems illustrate, no connection exists between Eliot and his characters. Therefore, Eliot's relationship to his characters remains externalized. Their psyches, seen as interesting specimens under a microscope, go unknown to Eliot. Oddly enough, Eliot introduces the use of his narrator as the sensitive male, a technique he will employ in such masterpieces as "Prufrock," "Gerontion," and The Waste Land. In a poem like "Morning at the Window," however, the male narrator sees but does not feel the pain of the world: "I am aware of the deep souls of housemaids/Sprouting despondently at area gates." His awareness is one of cold observation; the "they" and "I" juxtapose with other characters, presenting this "sensitive" male narrator as one who does not belong to the world that superficially pains him.

While not belonging to this world allows the nar-
rator an air of superiority, it disconnects him from interaction with the other characters. Such distancing requires no suffering on the narrator's part nor does it demand any Laforgian irony, an irony built on self-examination and self-deprecation. Without these elements the poetry fails to connect characters to one another, fails to display suffering, fails to show a character's change, and ultimately fails to achieve any kind of progression. Though characters in this poetry may suffer, their pain is held up as an object of ridicule, because of the narrator's disengaged position.

Yet the imagery in "Morning at the Window" does give the reader insights into a painfilled existence. Life in "basement kitchens," sails "along the trampled edges of the street," paint a dismal picture, scenes that will come to life in the beauty and the terror of The Waste Land. How different is the tone in this poem with its "sprouting souls," from that found in The Waste Land. The difference could be found, at least to an incipient degree, in "Prufrock," the first poem in Eliot's tortuous pilgrimage through hell and into purgatory. At this point in Eliot's career, when he was not even writing "his own poetry," the imagery deceives the reader:

The brown waves of fog toss up to me
Twisted faces from the bottom of the street
And tear from a passer-by with muddy skirts
An aimless smile that hovers in the air
And vanishes along the level of the roofs.¹

Expecting some degree of empathy, the reader discovers a narrator unconcerned about the characters' lives, feeling no "aimless" or "twisted" quality in his own life.

Unlike "Prufrock" or "Rhapsody on a Windy Night," "Morning at the Window," though similar in imagery, contains no introspection, nor do the other five poems mentioned earlier. "Aunt Helen," for instance, shows the veneer of genteel life without ever cracking the surface to show the passion and pain present in every human heart—feelings that connect persons to each other. The narrator's introspection can only exist if he connects himself to his world. Whether or not he fights to belong to this world does not matter. What matters is how he, as narrator and character, is conscious of his existence and what kind of pain grows out of such an awareness. Once that awareness is awakened, the narrator takes on closer affiliations with the other characters by showing either his alienation from them, as in the case of "Prufrock," or his connectedness to them, as in Four Quarters.

These six poems written at the beginning of Eliot's career, though not in themselves testimony of Eliot's

spiritual pilgrimage, do show the reader the kind of poetry
Eliot could have continued producing had he remained out-
side his poetic world. Posed with uncandid smirks, this
type of poetry shows an Eliot too conscious of being clever
while unconscious of his characters' (and perhaps his own)
suffering. Because they contain no investigation of suf-
f ering, hence no progression toward the development of con-
sciousness, they contribute little to one's understanding
of the canon, nor can the canon add much to the apprecia-
tion of these poems.

Only after reading the entire canon is one able to
see how the pieces of the pattern fit, how a poem or series
of poems is part of a growing consciousness. Only after
the picture is complete can one study the mystery of the
unfolding moments that push toward the next step. Eliot's
idea of a classic examines this idea:

The maturity of a literature is the reflection of that
of the society in which it is produced.... A mature
literature, therefore, has a history behind it: a his-
tory, that is not merely a chronicle, an accumulation
of manuscripts and writings of this kind and that, but
an ordered though unconscious progress of a language to
realize its own potentialities within its own limita-
tions.

It is to be observed, that a society, and a litera-
ture, like an individual human being, do not neces-
sarily mature equally and concurrently in every aspect.2

Eliot speaks of a language's ordered by unconscious pro-
gression. Though he does not actually refer to an

2 T. S. Eliot, "What is a Classic?" printed in On
individual's poetic canon, it seems that what he says may be applied to his own progress without misinterpreting the spirit of the essay.

Seeing the poems as individual pieces as well as part of the canon requires the use of the "hermeneutical circle" or what a modern scholar ambiguously calls "double vision." ³ Looking in two directions like Janus enables one to see the poems as finished products in themselves and as developments and progressions of a consciousness reaching, always reaching, for a deeper awareness. Once that awareness is aroused, Eliot never returns to the one-dimensional poetry of his collegiate verse. Eliot's long and laborious journey from the various layers of hell to the purgatorial mount is based on an unplanned consciousness slowly awakening.

"The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" (1915)

As soon as Prufrock begins walking through "certain half-deserted streets," he, with the reader, journeys. For a long while, Eliot will remain in hell, but each poem from "Prufrock" to "The Hollow Men" will show a deepening knowledge of the inferno as each poem emphasizes different aspects of the same despair, a despair based on the discrepancy between a growing consciousness and an unfeeling world.

Prufrock initiates the journey through hell as he peregrinates through his world. The first line, "Let us go then you and I," is the first indication of Prufrock's ability to decide on how he will confront his environment. Like Dante and John Bunyan's Christian, Prufrock stumbles onto his journey in the dark: "In the middle of the journey of our life I came to myself in a dark wood where the straight way was lost" and "As I walked through the wilderness of this world, I lighted on a certain place, where was a den; and I laid me down in that place to sleep." All are called to face the dark and to travel to and beyond the limits they had usually set for themselves, with the result that none is to be the same.

What Dante, Christian, and Prufrock share is the dark and middle age. From the dark these pilgrims learn, as they must, to meet their own end and to transform their present by such knowledge. Middle age allows such a vantage point because it enables the pilgrim to look forward to his end and backward to his beginning. While youth and old age can look only one way, failing to give a three dimensional view point, middle age, an important kind of betweenness for Eliot, gives all three spiritual questers a

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special vantage from which they can investigate their worlds. Dante and Christian obviously move up; Prufrock does not.

Unlike the narrator in "Morning at the Window," however, Prufrock wishes to connect himself to his world—a wish which paradoxically disconnects him from all the other characters. For the first time the reader sees an Eliot character suffer. Trapped between an incipient awareness of his similarity to the rest of this world's inhabitants and his profound difference from them, Prufrock is in great pain because he sees what he is but cannot change it. He also sees what he is not—i.e., the mindless people around him—but is unable to become that. Unable to take his awareness and change himself either into someone who is strong enough to disregard his world or into just another mindless character, Prufrock hangs in hell. Once Prufrock attempts to engage his environment, he invites himself to suffering because he shows his vulnerability, his human-ness. While that seems virtuous, it is not enough, and is in Prufrock's case absurd because his suffering has no significance. It means nothing because Prufrock does not know a reason for his pain; he is only numbed by it.

Caught in a vortex of painful awareness and numb consciousness, Prufrock has the potential to change, to grow, but he always retreats from the challenge at the last minute. Like him, the outer world Prufrock inhabits also
shrinks from action, creating a rhythm between Prufrock's observations of his milieu and his inner feelings. Moving from the outer world to his inner self and back to the outer world allows Prufrock to teeter between past and future without ever going through the present. Without a present connected to past and future, Prufrock is stranded between, imprisoned in a sort of time warp. Caught in an endlessly revolving existence between his personal pain and the world's impersonal reaction to him, Prufrock has no real concept of what a present fully lived can be. Because the present carries no significance, time becomes absurd.

Part of the absurdity stems from the repetition and undercutting in the poem. Prufrock's first ten lines introduce time ("Let us go then, you and I, / When the evening is spread out against the sky. . . .") and place ("Let us go through certain half-deserted streets"). Repeating "Let us go" suggests some trouble in Prufrock's getting started on his journey in a predominately feminine world where women continually come and go. The fog, feline and languorous, lingers ominously, its circling around the house representative of the oppressive and entrapping feelings Prufrock experiences. Eliot's use of repetition effectively mirrors the constant circumspection and circumambulation of the poem. This circling effect is a major feature of Eliot's canon. Eventually, it becomes the "turning world" with a "still point," but in "Prufrock" the
center itself is unstill, nor does Prufrock experience the spiral, purgatorial ascent of "Ash Wednesday."

The first part of the poem ends with: "In a minute there is time / For decisions and revisions which a minute will reverse." Within time is the challenge to change, but the challenge must be met. Revising and reversing decisions sidestep the main issue: what does one do to be saved? Like the fog that "curls about the house," Prufrock's constant ruminations avert the challenge to grow, to change, to progress in the kind of circle known to Dante—a circle that starts at the gate of hell and eventually brings the traveller back to "this world" with redemptive knowledge—a journey into death that brings one back to life. Though Prufrock attempts to confront his end by fantasizing about John the Baptist, Lazarus, and even Hamlet—men who did fully question or at least take risks in their lives—he shrinks from the total commitment such risking requires. All he can do is toy with the idea of death; then, choosing to replace the intensity of significant questions with trivial speculations ("I shall wear the bottoms of my trousers rolled"), Prufrock succeeds only in fragmenting his life, disconnecting past, present and future.

Associated with this kind of division in time is Eliot's use of Laforgian irony because it, too, to achieve its effects, shows a character alienated from himself.
Often seen as a victim to time and women, Prufrock is continually trying to engage them, but always fails to win either. Trapped in a world he did not create, Prufrock does hurt from the brutal Laforgian irony to which he is subjected, but the disconnectedness such an undercutting produces is senseless because Prufrock is unable to change his life. Hence, he forever repeats the same injury to himself and forever wonders why he hurts.

Repetition, which in the later poetry becomes a rhythmic celebration of permanence in change, remains in "Prufrock" only a hyper-conscious circling back upon the self. Prufrock's constant concern about himself, especially in part two, shows him questioning his place in the world ("Do I dare / Disturb the universe?"), knowing full well, however, that he will never accomplish anything because he never risks anything except his initial journeying into the world. Though this initial going forth is noteworthy, it is not enough to get Prufrock out of the world. He remains trapped between the world and his ruminations over his past and speculations about the future. By fluctuating between his personal life and the outer world, he is caught between two insufficient choices. When he is unfulfilled by one, he runs to another, only to be dissatisfied and to return to the first. Such vicious circling about shows Prufrock vis à vis his world. To understand one, one must understand the other, forcing one to travel
forever in a hermeneutical circle without hope of an escape.

While Prufrock possesses a higher level of development than the sensitive male who could not suffer in "Morning at the Window," Prufrock remains at the beginning of a growing consciousness gradually but consistently progressing in Eliot's canon. Prufrock suffers because he is different, despite his inability to hold onto his initial vision, from the others who share his world. It is this disconnectedness, which is also a way of being connected, that causes him even a rudimentary experience of pain.

Though partly severed from mainstream hell, Prufrock attempts to make connections, especially by asking questions. "Do I dare / Disturb the universe?" and "How shall I begin?" often interpreted as examples of Prufrock's indecisiveness, are significant questions to ask. At the beginning of the poem Prufrock, in his own understated way, was indeed out to "disturb the universe," and he did so and continues to do so by questioning his existence. Such an action immediately places Prufrock on a precarious tightrope stretched between being different from his world and not being different enough, making him disconnected from yet connected to his fellow inhabitants. Neither totally free from his fallen world nor an integral part of it, Prufrock is trapped between his correct feeling of discomfort with his world and his inability to change his life in
it. By asking questions instead of making declarative statements—or better yet, a decision—Prufrock circles around his predicament, marking time rather than making a significant improvement.

No one knows exactly what Prufrock means by all his questions, but the questions seem to be important because he keeps asking them. Many questions, phrased "what if" or "should I," indicate more than simple future; they also contain an underlying fear of the future. In *A Reader's Guide to T. S. Eliot*, George Williamson mentions that time is linked to Prufrock's indecision and it also offers him an escape, but Williamson gives no specific explanation for his observations. True, Prufrock's "indecision" is connected to time, as all things on earth are, but Prufrock is not offered an escape. And he does not escape because he never really possesses his present. His only grasp on the present is voiced in the first line of the poem where he makes a strong decision to engage himself with the rest of the world. If Prufrock never makes up his mind in the rest of the poem, it is not so much his inability to decide things as much as it is that he has no time in which to deliberate. For all his talk in part one about having time, Prufrock articulates, whether or not he knows it,

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time as either future or past. He has no present; therefore, he has no time.

Very little of the poem's action occurs in the present. The first part of the poem, a survey of his exterior landscape, is voiced in the future and explains that "there will be time." Part two, an inspection of Prufrock's interior, is presented in the present perfect tense; and, in its discussion of the women he has known, it shows Prufrock looking back. This middle-aged man is concerned with the past where he failed to conquer his world and is obsessed with a future that promises the same cruel undercutting he has already experienced, leaving him with a present encroached upon by disappointment in the past and fear of disappointment in the future. Trapped by these overwhelming burdens, Prufrock's present, instead of being a time span where he can make changes, merely becomes a place-holder until the future arrives, bringing with it Prufrock's self-fulfilling prophecy. His looking to the past and toward the future occupies all his time, preventing him from making significant changes. As Eliot insists in his later poetry, one makes a beginning by reaching the end. This circle is one that Prufrock cannot complete, for he never brings his own mortality into the present, there to grapple with it. Death is only—and at the very end of the poem—a metaphor: "we drown."

Prufrock's momentary lapses into fantasy have a
warping effect on time, just as his obsession with past and future does. Unable to face the present, Prufrock circles from himself, to an heroic image--Hamlet or John the Baptist--back to himself, continually evading a confrontation with self. The poem's movements from future tense to prefect to future and from outer world to inner world and back to outer world illustrate Prufrock's circumambulation. Ending at the beach, Prufrock has nowhere to go; he will always stand between sea and land, neither the arid old man in "Gerontion" nor the drowned sailor in The Waste Land. But he has gained something the suave narrators in Eliot's collegiate poetry never possess, for unlike them Prufrock does enter the world in which he observes and suffers because of his attempt at connectedness, which paradoxically emphasizes his disconnectedness.

By the end of the poem Prufrock has journeyed through the first layer of hell, characterized by civility and trivialities. As with "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," the other poems in the early verse from 1909 to 1920 are marked with the same traits. Eliot's non-teleological progression begins in hell where time is absurd because it is fragmented. Here characters like Prufrock and Gerontion suffer from existing between what most people live in and the transcendence of it. These characters in Eliot's gallery of the damaged usually begin with a heightened sensibility and intelligence that make
them stand apart from the rest of their world, yet because they are still a part of the world, they become trapped in a state of betweenness. Their plight is meaningless because they see nothing beyond it; their suffering is fragmented like their world; and because they can never change, they remain in hell.

"Portrait of a Lady" (1915)

Though the title of this poem focuses one's attention on the "lady," the central figure of the poem is the young man, who exists between consciousness and nightmarish trance. This poem shares pronounced similarities with "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" in that it again states in a monologue the difficulties of a sensitive male. Grover Smith sees the young man as incapable of any true sensivity, but the young man, despite his attempt at gigolo behavior, finds himself trapped between velleities and action. At first he might appear like the snickering male narrator in a poem like "Morning at the Window," but this narrator is caught in his own game and suffers for it.

This young man plays the game of convivial parlor invitations that lead to discreet but meaningless indiscretions; his partner, an older woman, has played or has

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seen others play at this before. The familiar story of a young man's initiation into the adult world by an older woman contains two powerful forces: the man, who wants to play for diversion, and the woman, who wants to play to win. What is at stake is the youth's freedom and his humanity.

His gradual loss of humanity is due to the woman, who is associated with music, flowers, and time. Ever present and ever haunting, the woman and those images representing her incite the young man to return, and upon each return he becomes more dehumanized. Like Prufrock, this youth also circumambulates, always moving but never arriving at a new point. His hell is to be imprisoned by his temptress, a static but immortal Circe, capable of turning men into swine. Unfortunately, the young man, unlike Ulysses, goes through his initiation unprotected. This pattern of offense and defense, common in Eliot's early poetry, shows man victimized by women and time, ensnaring him in a prison of semi-consciousness and disconnectedness.

Fragmented and with self-possession "guttered," the man "borrows" animal shapes as a means of escape. But the escape never occurs. He is trapped by her, who, on the one hand, is by association with the world "youthful after all" and, on the other hand, is by association with the musical imagery "successful with a dying fall." She is the more crafty shape-shifter, thwarting him at every turn. She
warns him that youth "smiles at situations which it cannot see," and his tobacco trance deadens his senses; yet he discovers just before the woman's last speech his sad reality that "we are really in the dark."

Repeating the line about the tobacco trance (part three), the narrator illustrates his circumambulation while also showing how far embedded in this hell he really is. When he first mentioned the tobacco trance, it appeared that he would win. By the end of part two, however, the street piano and the smell of hyacinths (also found in The Waste Land) have already begun to entrap him and by the end of part three he has conceded to the success of the music (woman). Even if he can physically leave, he is entrapped, dehumanized, and victimized. The "success" of the music, evident at every point in the poem, always brings him back to live in the "cauchemar" which the woman has adroitly twisted into being. Like Prufrock who feels twisted on a pin, this young man realizes the pain of being only semi-conscious in an antagonistic world and the absurdity of his plight, from which there is no relief.

Part of the world's futility is connected to the cyclic nature of time. Moving from "the smoke and fog of a December afternoon" to "April sunsets" to the October night "returning as before" and finally to another December afternoon "grey and smoky," the imagery in the poem illustrates not only how the young man leaves and returns to the woman
but also how the man's circle of departure and return moves within the larger circle of seasonal time. Within the archetypal pattern of departure and return lies the re-iteration of "some worn out common song / With the smell of hyacinths across the garden / Recalling things that other people have desired"; memory, like time, the world ("garden" "hyacinths"), and the woman, force the man constantly into a cycle devoid of escape. As "The Fire Sermon" points out, memory and desire—a leap into the past and a tug into the future—are illusions. To walk the "cunning passages" of history ("Gerontion") is, at this stage in Eliot's progression, to travel a path of suffering, a hell-branded, self-inflicted pain which is the only mark of relevant existence for these characters. All suffer in the private disconnectedness, which paradoxically connects them, offering a foretaste of what is to come in The Waste Land.

"Preludes" (1915)

Unlike the other poems thus far, "Preludes" seems to be a still shot of the environment instead of a confrontation either between two persons or within one. But some of the familiar juxtapositions remain: night vs. day, unconsciousness vs. consciousness, man vs. woman—all pointing toward the same basic struggle found throughout Eliot's poetry, that is, how to escape the miserable existence Eliot and his characters hopelessly endure.
In the early poetry Eliot's characters, particularly the male narrators, hang between extremes; neither they nor we are sure whether the polite yet impotent Prufrock is better off than the puissant yet barbaric Sweeney. One can see Eliot wavering in futility throughout his canon until he reaches "Ash Wednesday," where "wavering between the profit and loss" asserts a positive significance. For now, however, Eliot's characters are placed in a no-win situation; so, no matter what they choose, they lose because either choice proves insufficient. This either-or attitude in the early poetry prevents the characters' escape from hell; instead, it imprisons them by offering illusory ways out.

Part of hell in this early poetry is found in the images of circularity, curling, and twisting. Here, a woman "curl(s) the paper from her hair," just as the "shower wrap(s) / the grimy scraps / Of withered leaves about your feet." Both the woman and the world ensnarl the man to the point of paralysis.

In part four the man's soul is "stretched tight across the sky," reminiscent of Prufrock and foreshadowing Sweeney. His consciousness lost, this narrator can only stand to be victimized and trampled. Just as the woman curls papers in her hair and as the shower wraps debris around the man's feet, this narrator is pulled across the evening sky, curled around the earth and mastered by it.
His passivity is a major factor in his entrapment. In some ways the narrator allows women, the world, and time to act upon him, yet at times he rebels or apparently rebels—but each insurgence only convinces him of his prison, lowering him still further in hell. Often the narrator reveals traces of Laforgian irony that show him to be an intelligent and suffering soul who realizes the horror of his existence but does not yet realize how to change it:

I am moved by fancies that are curled Around these images, and cling: The notion of some infinitely gentle Infinitely suffering thing.

Wipe your hand across your mouth and laugh: The worlds revolve like ancient women Gathering fuel in vacant lots.9

These two stanzas express two completely different yet simultaneously real responses to the world. The "curling," "clinging," and "revolving" represent a kind of archetypal time, suggesting the eternity of this misery. "Ancient women" and "vacant lots" will appear, as they do here, in poems like The Waste Land, where women and the world symbolize time past and future, further reinforcing Eliot's fear of both; in his postconversion poetry he does not remove the threat these things represent, but does learn how to deal with them as integral parts of life. For now, his only way of proving his existence is to strike out sarcastically, feebly attempting moments of assertion that are

always savagely undercut, as the Sweeney-gesture here is undercut by its own obvious cruelty.

"Rhapsody on a Windy Night" (1915)

One of the primary juxtapositions in this poem is in the division of time. Though the poem is set from midnight to four o'clock in the morning, there exists a suggestion of the morning after. Hence, the characters actually live in the feminine world of the goddess Diana. Eliot's emphasis on the debauching power of evening is subtle but related to his fear and awe of women, further linking women and the world as allies against men. At half-past one, "The street-lamp sputtered, / The street-lamp muttered, / The street-lamp said, 'Regard that woman . . .' / And you see the corner of her eye." Just two hours later at half-past three, "The street-lamp sputtered, / The street-lamp muttered, / The street-lamp hummed: / 'Regard the moon . . .' / She winks a feeble eye." Repeated actions and syntax contribute to the futile sense of circulatory and non-teleological movement so prevalent in the preconversion poetry and so symbolic of man's imprisonment.

By the last stanza the man operates on no power of his own. Memory has brought him to the apartment; the lamps place him within a magic circle and like the light, the bed spreads out before him, waiting to catch him. Not
much different from the crab in "Prufrock," the man hangs on to whatever is put before him. Such animal imagery, already seen in "Prufrock" and "Portrait of a Lady," is repeated and is slowly preparing the reader to meet the likes of Mr. Apollinax and Sweeney, products of a faithless world. Though the narrator waits for day ("sleep, prepare for life"), it is doubtful whether he succeeds. Nearing dawn, the narrator has almost reached safety, the masculine world of the sun-god Apollo. Almost, however, is not enough. With "the last twist of the knife" one senses that the preconversion woman as temptress has claimed another victim.

"La Figlia che Piange" (1916)

In many ways this poem shows how one's desire to imprison another turns on and entraps oneself. That kind of retribution and twisting of fate is found in much of the early poetry, including "Portrait of a Lady" and "Rhapsody on a Windy Night," poems that have as their narrators men who assert themselves only to find their self-possession "guttered."

"La Figlia che Piange" moves in a twisted way from the male narrator's assertion to his final undermining. As in "Prufrock," the verbs are especially important since they indicate the reality of the man's relation to the woman and the world. In the first stanza every verb states
an imperative command, commands that go unobeyed by the
girl. The man would like to have the woman stand almost
statue-like, forever fixed the way he would want to re-
member her; the second stanza places most of the verbs in
the conditional mode, further expressing the man's wishes.
But the third stanza clearly indicates that his hopes go
unfulfilled, She turns away, leaving him with only his
"cogitations." Instead of holding the woman down, it is he
who becomes trapped in "the troubled midnight and noon's
repose." Although the events in "La Figlia che Piange"
differ from those in "Portrait of a Lady," it is always the
woman who wins while the man, who believes he controls the
situation, remains behind only to think about the woman.
"La Figlia che Piange" is not as overtly terrifying as some
of the other poetry in this first volume, but it makes
serious statements concerning the retributive fate of men
and women in a modern, faithless hell.

"La Figlia che Piange" is a poem built from the
imaginative fancy of the male narrator, much like "Pru-
frock" and "Portrait of a Lady." Fancy, an improbable leap
into a possible future, crashes down upon the bland
present, thereby showing how empty the narrator's present
actually is. To complicate the present further is memory,
often seen in Eliot's early poetry as a deceiving harlot of
"simple confusions," a tug back to the past, throwing up "a
crowd of twisted things" that shames the narrator for
having lived a pointless life. Combined, future and past
lock the narrator in a hopeless vacuum, offering him no way
to understand how he arrived at this futility nor any exit
from it. By the end of this first volume he stands in a
hell marked by constant returns to futile relationships,
perpetual revisits to the same mistakes—always "having the
experience, but missing the meaning."

The first volume of poetry contains the initial
layers of hell in Eliot's non-teleological progression from
hell to purgatory. Hell here is usually defined as the
emptiness of polite and diminished life against the back­
drop of a dismal urban landscape. Eliot's progression
throughout his canon concerns itself with the question of
journey—what it means to quest for something. Though
Eliot embarks on a strange pilgrimage in that his is non­
teleological—there being no discernible goal in any of
these constantly moving poems—it is nonetheless the same
kind of journey found in all social, mythological, and re­
ligious literatures, a journey of going forth and return­
ing. Not surprisingly, Eliot employs The Odyssey and re­
lated stories as a backdrop or at least a point of com­
parison to demonstrate how Eliot's own quest, though simi­
lar in initial design, is different in its execution. The
Circean figure in "Portrait of a Lady," for example, illus­
trates the kind of circling within cycles characteristic of
the hero's journey. Unfortunately, the narrator in the
poem is victimized to the point of being unable to complete the typical hero's circle. Unlike Odysseus, who travels to Circe's island, submits to her charms (though he is protected by moly), plunges into the underworld to learn its secret, and finally returns to Circe and transforms her, this narrator is interrupted and forced to travel mutated circles that can never allow him ultimately to break the viciousness of his circle. What he is given instead is bitter memory, the terrible entrapment left to those who fail to fulfill their present--those fragments of humanity like Prufrock, Gerontion, and the Hollow Men.

Obviously, this circling or cyclic progression is imperative to an understanding of Eliot's "still point of the turning world." Although Eliot is still far from reaching "the still point," it should be rememberd that it is the fulcrum throughout Eliot's poetry. Keeping an eye on it will help the reader see the canon as a continuum in which images take on layers of significance according to their place in Eliot's progress toward maturity.
CHAPTER III

THE EARLY POETRY: POEMS 1920

Hell in Eliot's first volume is distinguished by the characters' inability to make connections with others, by their inability to internalize another's pain. Suffering, then, becomes absurd because nothing is ever achieved by it or learned from it. In a word, suffering in Eliot's earliest poetry is viciously circular, certainly non-teleological, and non-redemptive; yet Eliot's poetry continues to exhibit hints of some unique progression, a progression that in order to move forward (ultimately out of hell and into purgatory) often turns in upon itself, taking two steps back before venturing one step forward. Poems 1920, Eliot's second volume, exemplifies such indirect spiritual advancement in that within it is found an increased interest in spiritual matters, pushing Eliot's journey forward, but also a return to a more detached narrator, much like the one found in "Cousin Nancy" and "Morning at the Window." This volume marks a deeper penetration into hell, lighting on a delicate balance that acknowledges the possibility of some kind of belief in God while obstinately refusing to embrace that possibility.

Written between 1917 and 1920, the poems satirize
religion and sexuality, at this point polar extremes in Eliot's life, and center their attention on the deterioration of society.\(^1\) Within this volume are found two distinct though related kinds of poetry: One shows an opposition between extremes which provides no solution, hence traps the narrator "in between"; and the other, while not based on polarities, nevertheless finds the narrator still imprisoned by his inability to move. Both kinds of poetry satirize religion, sexuality, and time, tearing from each any respectibility, importance, or validity it might have had; but Eliot did not take these things lightly. On the contrary, behind the humor lies a deep seriousness not usually associated with Eliot at this time. It is precisely this gravity that makes this volume different from and better than the poems written before "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock." To some degree because these poems, with the exception of "Gerontion," were written from a technical premise—Eliot and Pound wanted to reintroduce rhymed verse into literary circles—they often lack intensity and personal involvement; they seem like clever exercises in rhyme and meter. Yet certainly, despite their flaw, they stand as examples of Eliot's journey from hell to purgatory. In these poems Eliot indeed smirks, but he is grimacing beneath his detached superciliousness.

Most of these poems deal with theological issues more openly than those poems in the first volume. During this time Eliot questioned the areas of faith, guilt, and sin, yet he felt the need to hide behind a mask, hence the use of satire. To quote from Lyndall Gordon's *Eliot's Early Years*:

"For people of intellect I think that doubt is inevitable," Eliot once told an interviewer. "The doubter is a man who takes the problem of his faith seriously." In July 1917 he acknowledged life was poor without religion, but as yet he was unconvinced it was the greatest of all satisfactions and so worth the effort.

This doubt was to follow Eliot throughout his life, but at this time, for his own reasons, he determinedly refused to believe. As a means of taking this problem of his faith seriously without, however, submitting to belief, Eliot in this volume relies heavily upon satire.

But satire does not necessarily resolve the problem. It is, rather, an attack, a ridiculing, and while satire may amuse, its presence shows more seriousness than humor. Due to its more distanced prose, *Poems 1920* is not as successful a work as *Prufrock and Other Observations*. Satire, by its nature, distances narrator from observer, yet these poems should not be easily dismissed as simply inferior to many of the poems preceding them. Although *Poems 1920* shows a detached narrator, even though the distance between

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him and his subject is an expression of pain, confusion, and suffering.

Poems like "the Hippopotamus" and "Mr. Eliot's Sunday Morning Service" pay little attention to pain and suffering, but they do illustrate a dichotomy between the spirit and the flesh. It comes as little surprise that during this time Eliot was reading seventeenth-century poets and playwrights as well as sermon writers, as evidenced by the allusions and epigraphs. In "the Hippopotamus," for instance, Eliot employs the metaphysical coda that whips the reader in another direction from the rest of the poem.

Eliot presents in this poem the same attitudinal choices found in a poem like "Mr. Apollinax," choices, though comic and satiric, that attack organized religion seriously. Juxtaposed to the "True Church" is the absurd and all-too-frail hippopotamus. Eliot, though at odds with the Church, is unable to embrace the world's all-too-fleshy pursuits. Neither the ascetic nor the hedonist, Eliot's fight is staged between the two extremes. The danger is of course in being tricked into having to choose. For now, Eliot presents these extremes, creating constant false dilemmas that make "being between" stifling and hellish. Toward the end of the canon, when Eliot really makes greater connections between the extremes rather than trying to choose one, he will come to understand that being
between is not inferior to having to make a choice. Thus, the affirmations will not be savagely undercut as they are in the preconversion poetry. In its own way, "The Hippopotamus" epitomizes Eliot's struggle with his humanity.

His discomfort with his sexuality is well known. Compounded with his religious questions, it makes Eliot's poetry, not to mention his life, a hell characterized by the overwhelming feeling of being stuck. Unable to choose flesh or spirit, Eliot and his characters remain suspended, anxiety stricken, sometimes paralyzed. For as long as they feel stymied, they stay in hell, continually being victimized because they see no way of taking responsibility for their own lives.

Neither the Church nor the hippopotamus is a satisfying choice. The Church remains stationary: "based in rock," it "need never stir"; "being one with God," it "can sleep and feed at once." As a contrast to this imagery is the peripatetic hippopotamus, who, ironically, rises above this world and reaches heaven where he plays on a "harp of gold." At first glance the poem appears very teleological because the hippopotamus, representative of the flesh, attains the goal of almost every Christian. But of course the poem is absurd, making the idea of heaven laughable and ludicrous, though satirizing conventional Christian teleology. While it does not follow Eliot's usual pattern of circularity and non-teleology, "The Hippopotamus" does
not actually stand antithetically to Eliot's poetic-spiritual mold. This poem and the other two like it in this volume, "Mr. Eliot's Sunday Morning Service" and "A Cooking Egg" take the reader into deadends which, though amusing and apparently harmless, offer no solution to the problem of escaping hell.

A companion piece to "The Hippopotamus," at least in tone and content, "Mr. Eliot's Sunday Morning Service" continues Eliot's attack on the abuses of religion. Both poems contrast the impotent religious with the sensual laity, in this poem, Sweeney. Unlike "The Hippopotamus," however, Sweeney does not achieve any goal, his shifting "from ham to ham" illustrating his tick-tock mentality which makes him incessantly swing from the left to the right of his futility. As usual, much procreative imagery is employed here, but to a Laforgian satiric end; the Word has been emasculated by the likes of "enervate Origen." On a simpler level the churchmen are juxtaposed to the school-boys who think they can buy forgiveness with "piaculative pence." The "wise" churchmen prey upon the fearful adolescents who think salvation can be bought with lunch money. But the more complex contrast occurs between the pious clerics and the irreligious Sweeney, who cannot be bought with money or empty promises. He is the antithesis to
Origen, the castrated priest who sacrificed his body to ensure eternal bliss for his soul. Sweeney recalls the "unoffending feet" shining in the water (he, too, "stirs the water" in a bath), but also reminds the reader of the fleshy hippopotamus. Clearly the earthly figure of the poem, Sweeney symbolizes total simplicity, nothing at all like the "controversial, polymath ... masters of the subtle school."

Though nothing connects the priest with Sweeney, it is precisely this disconnectedness which they share. Like Prufrock, they find themselves living in a world with others whom they do not understand, yet unlike him, they really feel no anguish over their inability to make connections. Sweeney and the priests are actually more akin to the faceless crowds in The Waste Land because they never question their lives; hence their existence is purposeless. On either extreme, they demonstrate two different kinds of assertiveness, both insufficient. The priests, on the one hand, assert the stale morality found in poems like "Cousin Nancy" and "Aunt Helen." Sweeney, on the other hand, represents the kind of person who is free of any ethical prescriptions, one who lives for his own gratification—someone who always gets what he wants, sometimes through unconscious animal cunning as in "Sweeney among the Nightin-
gales." Both sides, though ideologically worlds apart, operate on the same self-serving premise. Whether one gains his ends through religious piety or through sexual satiation does not matter so long as desire is dominant; and while someone like Sweeney never suffers like Prufrock, Gerontion, or the Hollow Men, Sweeney never progresses, either. He is the constant reminder of what can happen if one decides never to enter the pain and ultimately the glory of journeying beyond "hope for the wrong thing."

Consequently, Sweeney is a contented remnant of hell. The reader discovers in "The Fire Sermon" that glutting one's desires, especially in Eliot's hell, elicits only pointless suffering—if not for Sweeney and his like, for almost everyone else.

Despite the detached narrator and lack of suffering, "The Hippopotamus" and "Mr. Eliot's Sunday Morning Service" bring the reader to another level of hell. In Prufrock and Other Observations Eliot assaulted man in society, but in Poems 1920 the abuses of religion are also attacked. Man's search for meaning may take him out of himself, leading him to institutional values either socially ethical or religiously moral. But Eliot demonstrates repeatedly that significance is not to be found in institutions but in man himself. So far in his journey, Eliot has encountered the emptiness of unsatisfying human interactions and the danger of over-codified religions. Bouncing from the secular to
the religious extremes proves a deception; Eliot however, has not yet discovered the middle way, the betweenness of the "still point" which for him is purgatorial but purposeful. This theme of journey from extreme to between is what takes Eliot through hell and finally into the purgatorial world. But for now, he perambulates through the hell of seeing society and religion for the illusions they are, not seeing what he can do to resolve the dilemma.

Related to these two poems is "A Cooking Egg."

Though not set up as an opposition between flesh and spirit, "A Cooking Egg" does move from a discussion of this world to speculation about another world. Like "The Hippopotamus," this poem satirizes heaven, making Eliot's view of it horribly amusing. Despite the poem's apparent teleological movement to paradise, "A Cooking Egg" returns to earth to question lost time and innocence, and in so doing displays a slight sense of the narrator's suffering, something not found in the two poems discussed earlier.

In manner and tone this poem reminds one of "Aunt Helen" and "Cousin Nancy," containing as its main character a woman of genteel means. But this, as usual, is deceiving since the focus is not on the woman but on the male observer-narrator. The "proper" setting established in the poem's first stanza, complete with ancestors peering at Pipit from the mantle, recalls Aunt Helen's stodgy existence. All that, however, is undercut in the following
four stanzas which show the male narrator speculating on a controversial and again absurd "Heaven." For some reason he has lost the world he once shared with Pipit, so in a compensatory gesture the narrator flees the past and enters the future without ever sojourning in the present, much like Prufrock. Similarly, his speculations sound assertive. Compare "I shall wear white flannel trousers, and walk upon the beach" with "I shall not want Honour in heaven / For I shall meet Sir Philip Sidney"; one finds the same silly determinism about the future, based on fantasy:

I shall not want Capital in Heaven
For I shall meet Sir Alfred Mond.
We two shall lie together, lapt
In a five per cent. Exchequer Bond. 4

Conventionally Christian teleology is once again the butt.

Most of Eliot's poetry in this second volume is based on opposition, but there might exist various kinds of opposition. In "The Hippopotamus," "Mr. Eliot's Sunday Morning Service," and "A Cooking Egg," one sees the ludicrous opposition between this world and heaven or between the religious and the laity. Structured on almost one dimensional satire, the extremes from which to choose provide no way out of hell. The sordid world is equally matched by a bizarre heaven, leaving the narrator no choice. Though not typically non-teleological, this poetry

4Eliot, CPP, p. 27.
is nonetheless static, merely reinforcing the entrapment felt in earlier poems.

Another kind of entrapment, aside from that between religion and society, is that between love and death. "Whispers of Immortality," also built on opposition, moves more deeply to the cause of man's dread: death. Divided into two parts, this poem first shows the "truth" of Webster and Donne then examines "modern" society in terms of such knowledge. The metaphysical playwright and poet saw "the skull beneath the skin" and knew "the anguish of the marrow" (this imagery will return in "East Coker" but to a different end); they realized that to transcend life one must not go past it but through it, not ascetically, not sensually, but humanly with both spirit and flesh contributing to one's search for significance.

Yet there can be no metaphysical synthesis of flesh and spirit if only rank sensuality and the escape from it exist. Grishkin, a female version of Sweeney, is unlike the "breastless creatures under ground"; she is well enough endowed to give promise of "pneumatic bliss." Taking the usual position of Eliot's narrators, this narrator, choosing to avoid confronting her, "crawls between dry ribs / To keep our metaphysics warm." With dryness preferred to "feline smell," the narrator succeeds only in misunderstanding what Webster and Donne know. By rejecting life, the narrator affiliates himself with the same obsti-
nate refusal to believe or to live found in "Gerontion" and "The Hollow Men." All prefer aridity to a more comforting existence, remaining "between dry ribs" without the warmth provided by necessary flesh.

Not only does the narrator in this poem forego the comfort of flesh, he fears what it might do to him. In his decision to refuse and ridicule woman, the narrator shows his passivity toward them, further stressing Eliot's belief in woman as temptress and his terror of being trapped by her. Such distrust equates love with death. To avoid death, avoid love—and to avoid love, avoid women. A formula like this might indeed work until one sees the other side of it. If one avoids women and love, one comes face to face with another kind of death more hideous than destruction; one encounters the ultimate death of self, the death of hoarding what should be freely given, as seen in "The Hollow Men." The complete escape from women leads to another prison. Though women at this stage in Eliot's progression symbolize at least part of these men's entrapment, women will always remain a formidable yet one day approachable presence. Here, however, Eliot is caught in a no-win situation, encountering possible annihilation no matter what he chooses.

Another poem presenting a no-win situation is "Burbank with a Baedeker: Bleistein with a Cigar," a poem both satiric and light but also based on a serious examina-
tion of time in this hell. Between the rat Bleistein and the wraith Volupine stands Burbank, a Prufrockean kind of figure trapped between past and present. Clearly, Bleistein and Volupine are the sensual animal and spectre who, like the sibyl in the epigraph to The Waste Land, will live forever in this hell. Although Burbank, too, will remain eternally hell-bound, his existence differs from theirs in that he realizes the horror but sees no way out. In this regard he resembles Prufrock. Burbank "falls," unable to "force the moment to a crisis."

His fall occurs in a fallen world, a world occupied by "lusterless protrusive eye(s)" that stare from "protozoic slime." This imagery along with references to Hercules, Cleopatra's barge, and Time's ruins, suggests an archetypal world where the same mistakes have occurred and will continue to occur. The same suggestion will be a driven force in The Waste Land, where time again takes on a horribly cyclic pattern. This world lies smoldering in the ashes of its lusts, the same lusts burning in "A Game of Chess" and "The Fire Sermon."

Unlike Burbank who falls at the "phthistic hand" of Volupine, Sweeney welcomes his confrontation with women, conquering them in the process. Although seen as an amusing figure, Sweeney, like Mr. Apollinax, is terrifying. Reading the poem purely for its comical surface proves insufficient, for as F. O. Matthiessen points out, Eliot had
wished "Sweeney among the Nightingales" to create a sense of foreboding. While the comic must be present, one must understand that what is funny on the surface may not necessarily be comic at the core. Indeed, most of the poems in this second volume treat reality in those concentric terms: the mask hiding the face, the face masking the skeleton beneath.

Much of the imagery suggests circularity and entrapment: "circles," contracts," and circumscribe." Characters and time swirl in a macabre vortex of humanity, bestiality, present, and past in which the point of intersection between reality and meta-reality is myth--Sweeney's world. Whether or not he knows it, he is reliving the Agamemnon story. With the inclusion of the nightingales the reader is jerked out of the mundane and thrown into the mythical world where wives do kill their husbands and where conspiracies do entrap people in ceremonies of blood. Terror infuses humor when the nightingales sing as they do in The Waste Land without notice.

The struggles of seduction, destruction, and transformation occur throughout Greek mythology, as in the story of Philomel and Tereus, and are relived in modern society:

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The nightingales are singing near
The convent of the Sacred Heart,
And sang within the bloody wood
When Agamemnon cried aloud,
And let their liquid siftings fall
To stain the stiff dishonoured shroud.  

The birds' recycling of body waste offers a silent commentary on the recycling of human error. The ambiguous shifting between present and past tense reinforces the idea that time is cyclic as the Greeks believed, and that the circularity of time condemns man to repeat the same mistakes. This effect is strengthened when Greek mythology (bloody wood, Agamemnon) dovetails with Christian religion (Sacred Heart) to show how both myth and religion tell the tale of a male victim (Orion, Agamemnon, Christ). Sweeney stands next in line and the apotheosis of the hero becomes reduced to the seduction of a lowlife, bestial man. Though past and present retell the same story, the modern version has been cheapened, a structure developed more fully in The Waste Land. Despite the sexual innuendo, little contact between the sexes is made; everyone stands apart, suspicious.

Even the poem's construction mirrors the characters' disconnectedness. Almost like a tableau, practically every stanza switches to a different scene, giving the effect of fade outs and simultaneity of action—much like the construction of "preludes." Because of this technique the

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6 Eliot, CPP, p. 36.
present and past share the same stage, contributing to the
sense of foreboding Eliot had desired to achieve. This
foreboding places characters, especially Sweeney, at a pre-
carious moment between a barroom present and a mythic past.
Sweeney escapes to the next poem, and the ominous nightingales will also reappear. If the myth has not been rerun, there is always time in The Waste Land.

Sweeney's attempt to escape entrapment by assering himself, that is by victimizing others, exhibits flaws. His kind of assertion is seldom seen in Eliot's poetry. Entrapment was an unbearable ordeal for Eliot; being a passive and paralyzed victim proved dissatisfying, but when Eliot attempts to assume an aggressive, dominating mask, completely opposite that of the meek and sensitive male, he discovers that aggressiveness offers no way out either. Reigning in hell rather than serving in heaven provides no compensation, especially to one's humanity.

In "Sweeney Erect" unmanliness is what makes Sweeney terrifying:

(The lengthened shadow of a man
Is history, said Emerson
Who had not seen the silhouette
Of Sweeney straddled in the sun.)

Not only does the "shadow" intimate Sweeney's animal na-
ture, but it also shows time or history warped or at least truncated. The shadow, an important image in The Waste

Land and "The Hollow Men," deceives, casting a misrepresen-
tation, a life, upon the ground that is interpreted and
found to be a trap. Mistaken for reality, the shadow is
but an imitation of Sweeney, who himself is a blemished
simulation of humanity (history). Just as he spread his
knees in the previous poem, Sweeney stands "straddled,"
"erect," defiantly calling attention to his sexuality and
his "aped" humanity. Yet his shaving experiment displays a
trace of effeminism, slightly recalling Prufrock or even
Origen. He and those like him illustrate another kind of
betweenness from that of Prufrock, one based on a Caliban-
esque sensuality portrayed even more damningly in *The Waste
Land*. Though Sweeney is opposed to Prufrock, they both
demonstrate hell. While the latter cannot choose, the for-
mer cannot think. Whether due to paralysis or cretinism,
neither discovers a freeing choice.

The seven poems analyzed thus far share a similar-
ity of form and tone. Written between 1917 and 1919, each
is comprised of quatrains varying from eight to eleven
stanzas, and each employes irony, sarcasm, or humor to mask
the horror of wasted lives and a non-existent present de-
riving from either a too heavy reliance on metaphysics or
a too heavy emphasis on the physical. In either instance
the characters remain stuck between extremes, unable to
progress pointing nowhere, thus non-teleological; and at

this time Eliot sees nothing but horror in his non-teleological vision of reality.

Though these poems are not given much critical acclaim, they are nevertheless part of Eliot's progression from hell to purgatory, and though they do not measure up to important poems like "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" or "Gerontion," they do show a shift in Eliot's attitude—something which usually goes undetected. Within his satire on religion lies a profound seriousness. For now, Satire provides a way of peeking at a problem without having to confront it; while that may suffice for the time, it is insufficient, and Eliot will have to return to the dilemma of his faith and of his suffering always turning and returning to the same situations, often the same imagery, whirling him in a non-teleological cycle that will ultimately free him from hell. Only at the end does he fully understand his beginning.

By the time Eliot reaches "Gerontion," he has exhausted his need for satire, though he still remains caustic. "Gerontion" examines a deeper part of hell, a hell not mocked but felt. His announcement, "I am here, an old man in a dry month," locates him in time and space, adding to the sense of his entrapment. Caught in the arid fields of deliberate apostasy, Gerontion is left helpless, passive, deracinated, and paralyzed. Ironically, his assertive disbelief in any form of salvation or escape from
his self-imposed despair renders him passive, at the mercy of a child and a woman. Originally, this poem was to be the prelude to The Waste Land, but was excluded from it under Pound's advice. Gerontion" stands on its own as a poem about one man in particular, whereas The Waste Land is more a pastiche of many persons, especially couples. Gerontion shares much in common with Tiresias in that both pass through an anesthetized world and, though correct in their perceptions, their disconnectedness from others prevents them from changing anything.

"Gerontion" may be divided into three parts: part one, the first stanza; part two, the following five stanzas, and part three, the last stanza--each examining the old man's disconnectedness from himself and his world. Parts one and three describe Gerontion in terms corresponding to his physical surroundings; part two is a philosophical speculation on Gerontion's dissociation from the rest of the world--the same structure found in "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock." Not a defender of causes, Gerontion lives in a "decayed" house, a remnant of real life. The imagery of decay emphasizes his passivity, resulting not only from his isolation but also from his helplessness against the forces of nature. The goat, coughing overhead, suggests Capricorn, the sea-horse, who rules the sky

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8 Gordon, p. 100.
between December 22 and January 20, "the juvescence of the Year," which includes Christmas. Gerontion places himself in "windy spaces," perhaps meant to represent inspiration, but he is dull, unable to make anything of his condition. He is not at the spiritual point where he could "prophesy to the Wind" ("Ash Wednesday"); instead, Gerontion stands in the middle of desert winds.

His living in a desert is an important move in Eliot's poetry. Shifting from the city to the desert marks another level in Eliot's spiritual journey. Here, his characters will face isolation, temptation, destruction, and finally redemption ("Ash Wednesday") or perish from the horror of such a void ("The Hollow Men"). For now, however, Gerontion continues to scratch out his place, adamantly refusing to move.

Different from those he left behind Gerontion illustrates a betweenness more dramatic than Prufrock's, for Gerontion has forsaken religion without grasping onto any replacement. In part two Religion has become trivialized. The "wish for a sign," reminiscent of the New Testament Pharisees, is profaned by the likes of Mr. Silvero, Hakagawa, Madame de Tornquist, and Fräulein von Kulp. In their own way they have destroyed the god, be it Christian or pagan, this destruction anticipating the thwarted rebirth of the god in The Waste Land. Gerontion has left these characters: "Vacent shuttles / Weave the
wind." Fate, symbolized by the loom, weaves the arid air, and in a sense, fate no longer exists for Gerontion who does nothing with his present. His present places him "in a draughty house / Under a windy knob," encased and buried. He has "given up the ghost," not just the figments of an anesthetized religion but the spirit--his own as well as God's.

It is the past (history) which has robbed Gerontion. To him, history, like a harlot, gives too late or too soon, leaving him between moments. One can get lost in "the cunning passages" and "contrived corridors," yielding oneself to the seductive tauntings of what is proffered "with such supple confusions." Time here jumbles, disorients, entraps. Like Christ "the tiger," history devours its victims (the "giving famishes the craving"), leaving the victim to wander aimlessly. History gives too late: "What is not believed in or if still believed / In memory only, reconsidered passion." And it gives too soon into "weak hands." This "reconsidered passion" makes memory an interloper upon the present, causing Gerontion to replay his past, filling his present up with what amounts to a hollow past, and cheating him out of acting appropriately at the proper moment--all because history, according to Gerontion, never gives at the right time. While blaming history proves a

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9Eliot, CPP, p. 22.
poor excuse for not taking responsibility for oneself, it provides Gerontion his only consolation.

Despite his obstinate position, Gerontion tries to make some sense in asking what amounts to the Prufrockean question ("would it have been worth it after all?") toward the end of part two. Confronted with the possibility of resurrection ("the tiger springs in the new year. Us he devours"), Gerontion expresses some desire to think that all has not been vanity. "Think at last / I have not made this show purposelessly. . . . /" But he immediately tosses away such a notion: "I have lost my passion: why should I need to keep it / Since what is kept must be adulterated? / I have lost my sight, smell, hearing, taste, and touch: / How should I use them for your closer contact?" Even memory, the persistent invader of "reconsidered passion," leaves Gerontion bare in a brittle present. Totally withdrawn into himself, Gerontion slowly begins to "stiffen" spiritually, satisfied to stop searching, to stop rekindling the passion voyagers need to "fare forward."

Without the pilgrim's compulsion to journey, Gerontion remains stuck. Not much different from the insects in part three, Gerontion finds himself in a "wilderness of mirrors," reflecting his own spiritual frangibility. He stands at the end of his cul-de-sac, incapable of living in his present, unable to look toward the future, and powerless even to recall the past. He, too, is
"suspended" like the spider and "delayed" like the weevil. But one wonders whether his suspension is worse than the "whirling of De Bailhache, Fresca and Mrs. Cammel." Both actions suggest a subservience to an outside force, but Gerontion hangs still between religion and some other possibility yet undiscovered, while the others are more passively a slave to some centrifugal motion, aimlessly and forever moving them about like the scraps of paper in "Preludes." Gerontion also moves nowhere but his is a worse plight for he has chosen to disbelieve, despite the evidence he has gathered. His life, "this show," is purposeless because of his deliberate apostasy. The only world he sees beyond his own paralysis is an apocalyptic circle: Christ returning to devour those who earlier devoured him.

Like Gerontion, the "Gull" is caught in the "windy straits," but it succumbs to the outer forces. The total blankness of "white feathers in the snow" corresponds to "an old man driven by the Trades / To a sleepy corner." The winds are not symbolic of inspiration here, but represent the aimlessness of a rootless life. Instead of carrying rain, the winds desensitize Gerontion. Not even a full man, he becomes a "dry brain in a dry season," shrunken and wizened, thereby joining the ranks of those incomplete men like Prufrock, Mr. Apollinax, and Sweeney. But his hell is more profoundly felt than Prufrock's for Gerontion knows
that beyond the profanity of religion lies something mys- 
terious, sacred, and true. But he refuses to see it as anything more than a returning vengeance. His paralysis has led him to the desert where he will remain until he crumbles. Hell and purgatory are really the same place except that purgatory is faithfilled, which makes the same suffering not only bearable but significant. By Gerontion's own doing, he has banished himself to an eternity of in- 
significance.

Eliot's journey in hell begins with Prufrock, sym- 
bigic of the hell of unimportant life. Most of the poetry in Prufrock and Other Observations examines the lives of people dissatisfied with their social interactions, most particularly with those pitting men against women. Men are the victims, women the temptresses who lure men and then devour them. In Poems 1920 Eliot continues to use urban landscape as a backdrop to his poetry about modern man, but in addition he begins to write about religious as well as social alienation. The bulk of this volume attacks the sterile dissociation of sensibility epitomized in the separation of religion from ritual. Humorous at first, the terror nonetheless grows into an obsession Eliot will play and replay throughout his canon.

Gathering layers of meaning, Eliot's themes and images are reworked and revisited so that by the end of his canon an image can mean something different from the
meaning it carried in the early poetry, while keeping the original and intermediate suggestions of that image. Most notably Eliot's use of circular imagery changes from the evocation of aimless entrapment to the invocation of the "still point" in a turning world. The "viciousness" in the circle will have been transformed into the search for and approximation of significance. Such a recycling of imagery and theme supports the idea that Eliot's canon progresses yet remains constantly set on one vision. It is safe to say that Eliot could not have written "Gerontion" without first writing "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" and the others. Gerontion's desert aridity would not be so poignant without our first knowing Prufrock's paralysis, for both are similar though Gerontion's is more terrifying. And yet his is not as frightening as that of the Hollow Men. Eliot's poetic and spiritual mind is growing in both despair and faith, readying itself for a still deeper level in hell: The Waste Land.
After nearly sixty years The Waste Land still offers new readers the beauty of the difficult. Much has been done to elucidate inscrutable echoes, to discover themes; much has been overdone to justify the poem's existence or to force a critic's predilection upon it. Yet, like the Sibyl of Cumae, whose words provide the epigraph to the poem, The Waste Land itself always waits to be approached again. It has not been explained away; it remains a mystery.

Granted immortality but not eternal youth, the sibyl suggests the horror of answered wishes that give what is desired but not what is needed. Forever suspended between life and death, she, along with the other characters in this poem, reiterates the terror of existing purposelessly, of suffering insignificantly. Trapped in the desires of the flesh or in the absurd quest for an asceticism devoid of faith, these characters rummage through "stony rubbish" without ever learning how to ask for the proper things. Rather than "sit still," they aimlessly perambulate, never knowing what to do. In Four Quartets Eliot suggests that man never knows how to ask; that hope is
always "hope for the wrong thing"; that any determined goal-oriented activity is a cheat. But no one in *The Waste Land* knows that except, perhaps, Tiresias. Hence all these people feel is an endless privation.

Divided into five parts, a structure Eliot will repeat in "The Hollow Men" and each of the *Four Quartets*, *The Waste Land* is both fragmentary and progressive. While forcing a plot onto it would violate the poem, it nevertheless moves to its own ending, though that ending has no emotionally satisfying conclusion. 1 Each part, interconnected yet separate, presents scenes filled with hopeless persons engaged in futile endeavors. The anthropological imagery is not new for Eliot; he has used it before, though not to such ends, in his earlier poetry. "Portrait of a Lady" shares much with *The Waste Land*: "the hyacinth garden," "the buried life," and of course the stunted relationships between men and women. Certainly "Gerontion" announces some of *The Waste Land*'s imagery and themes: aridity, desire, sex, and asceticism. If "Gerontion" deliberately refuses to believe in a possible faith, *The Waste Land* goes even further in flirting with then retracting from belief, such motion in itself a circling out and back to no purpose.

Although Pound convinced Eliot not to use the

quotation from "Heart of Darkness" as an epigraph, the "horror" of gratified desire is still strongly felt. "The Burial of the Dead" introduces the central problem of the poem: how to deal with the present. Normally, spring is seen as life-giving and renewing, but here, as in "Geron¬tion," spring is dangerous. Trapped, like Kurtz, between memory and desire, these characters want to remain buried "in forgetful snow." The "cruelty" is in nature's endless cycle of birth, death, and resurrection. Because these inhabitants participate in neither the Greek cyclic view of history nor the linear Christian view of history, the present fails to make any sense. To engage in either historical framework requires faith in and submission to the working out of history's pattern. Preferring to forego life's cycle, and unable to stop Time, these hell dwellers are periodically taunted by its reality and their unrealistic fight against it. Their way of being at the "still point of the turning world" is paralysis in the midst of archetypal rhythms.

Though divided into five sections, each section of The Waste Land has its own subdivisions. After the initial seven lines comes the section about Marie and her cousin, the first encounter with this waste land's personae. Eliot moves abruptly from scene to scene, confusing the reader's linear orientation to the poem, but thus shows the simultaneity of people mirroring each other and their environ-
ment. As the reader moves from scene to scene, it is clear that the same problem recurs throughout the poem. And the dilemma is, of course, that this present of eternal sorrow cannot be escaped; all are trapped in a repetition and a mirroring without understanding and certainly without faith--thus in absurd suffering.

In his review of the poem, Conrad Aiken called it a "brilliant and kaleidoscopic confusion" in which all the episodes mesh into an "important emotional ensemble."² Marie's reminiscence of the past readies the reader for many repetitions of the same themes: deracination and sexual encounters. A hint of madness also exists in this early section with the allusions to Ludwig, "the mad king of Bavaria."³ Indeed, madness runs through the work, the constant return to it, as well as to the other themes, reinforcing the horror of non-linear and non-teleological progression. One is then constantly reminded both of the sibyl's horror, the horror of blind goal-seeking and the attainment of goals, but also of the opposite horror--of goallessness and purposelessness, as exhibited in paralysis and madness. Herein lies the hellish trap that Eliot discovered in The Waste Land.

One of the voices used by the narrator gives a biblical quality to the poem, yet it should warn the reader of the depth to which this poem dives. Eliot dismissed the charge that he had written about the frustrations of his generation. He had captured the archetypal struggle each generation is challenged by; his use of biblical diction not only adds dignity to the poem, but also vividly shows the similarity between ancient and modern times. Littered with stones, the landscape provides nothing of hope—everything lies broken and barren. The "roots that clutch," the "branches" that "grow" cannot be the good seed taking root. Rather, they are the remnants of a past life now present only in its withered remains. "Son of Man," either mankind or Christ, or both, can offer no explanation. Instead of faith, the inhabitants have a "heap of broken images," suggesting a worn out ritualization of bygone religions no longer of service yet still observed.

From neither tree nor stone, symbols of pagan and Christian belief, issues anything life-giving. From this barrenness comes the infamous invitation:

Only
There is shadow under this red rock,
(Come in under the shadow of this red rock),
And I will show you something different from either
Your shadow at morning striding behind you
Or your shadow at evening rising to meet you;
I will show you fear in a handful of dust.4

4Eliot, CPP, p. 38.
At first the shadow may seem like some kind of respite in this dry land, but ultimately it becomes a place of intersection between being and non-being. This short passage connects *The Waste Land* to Sweeney and the Hollow Men in that the "shadow" obstructs the light, distorts reality, and robs life of its three-dimensional nature. Like the prickly pear in "The Hollow Men," the shadow here somehow attracts characters to it, making them forget the necessity of participating in life as cycle, in history as pattern. At the same time the shadow prefigures what is to come while allowing what has already been to linger. Trapped between the future and past is the terrible present of "fear in a handful of dust," the origin and inescapable destiny of man: his mortality, but also his endless life without purpose. Under this spiritual shadow, these characters spend most of their time frantically moving about just so they can remain in place; hence they never progress, never find rest.

The snatch of lines from Wagner's *Tristan and Isolde*, in addition to connecting the previous section about Marie with the current one, further demonstrates the similarity among unfortunate lovers in *The Waste Land*. Eliot's quoting from the opera emphasizes the notion of questing but not finding the boon, even while getting what one sought. To arrive at one's goal, to get what one seeks, as in the case of the sibyl, is a hideous fate.
Marie's rememberance continues, the frequent mention of hyacinths recalling the consort to Apollo, resurrected as a flower. At the sight of her return, Marie's lover states:

I could not
Speak and my eyes failed, I was neither
Living nor dead, and I knew nothing,
Looking into the heart of light, the silence.

Oed' und leer das Meer.5

For Eliot the garden is the place of revelation and sorrow. Obviously, something from the garden dazzles Marie's lover to blind and mute awe. Though looking at light rather than darkness, he, like Kurtz, sees a horror so powerful it paralyzes him. Like the sibyl neither living nor dead, he exists forever between. Like both Kurtz and Tristan, he has the girl he wanted ("The hyacinth girl") but finds only horror. This lover joins the previous men who passively submit themselves to the clutches of cunning women ("Portrait of a Lady") and anticipates those men who think but cannot act ("A Game of Chess," "The Hollow Men").

If memory is deceptive, so is desire. With the introduction of Madame Sosostris comes the desire to see into the future, but just as returning to the past brings nothing, peeking into the future brings nothing. Disconnected from either past or future, the present lies barren. Madame Sosostris uses the Tarot cards, originally meant to forecast the rising tide in Egypt. Now, however, reduced

5Eliot, CPP, p. 38.
to a spiritualist's bag of tricks, these cards are used to calm the stormy souls of individual "believers." This "wisest woman in Europe" impresses her clientele by her ability to read esoterica, but ironically she does not know how true her predictions are. As she displays the cards, an array of different symbols represents the reality of this waste land. The "drowned Phoenician Sailor" will appear in part IV, "Death by Water"; "Belladonna" (beautiful lady) and the "one-eyed merchant" are also part of the tapestry, as is the "Wheel."

The most powerful images in "Burial of the Dead" are related to sight.

(Those are pearls that were his eyes. Look!)
And here is the one-eyed merchant, and this card,
Which is blank, is something he carries on his back,
Which I am forbidden to see. I do not find
The Hanged Man. Fear death by water.
I see crowds of people, walking round in a ring.  

Though able to divine the future, some things even she is not permitted to see. The Hanged Man, long associated with fertility gods, including Christ, is absent. Regeneration never comes to The Waste Land. Instead, the throng of people milling around in a circle fill Madame Sosostris' view. Reminiscent of Dante's hell, this ring of lost souls reinforces the sense of futility. Far from the approach to the still point, this circle of people demonstrates entrapment, for they never escape the Buddhist wheel of life or

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the wheel upon which Ixion forever moves through but never out of hell.

Foretold by Madame Sosostris, a crowd of people does emerge in the winter dawn. The "Unreal City" is made up of this aggregate. In a slave-like shuffle "each man fix[es] his eyes before his feet." They, like the Thames, flow ceaselessly.

One of the more interesting strategies found in this section is Eliot's juxtaposition of motion to stasis. On the one hand is the idea of incessant movement, the crowds constantly flowing above the river; on the other hand is the concept of immobility, the corpse. Yet, paradoxically, it is the people's moving that comes to represent a sense of dead-end entrapment, while it is the corpse that symbolizes some participation in the rhythm of rebirth.

"The Burial of the Dead" ends with the interment of a corpse, but it is questionable as to who is really dead, the inhabitants or the corpse. Throughout this first section, references to death, infertility and sterility recur endlessly. Accompanying the theme of impotence is the imagery of motion and stasis. Time's cyclic nature proves a painful reminder of the entrapment this populace feels in a meaningless present. Pining for memory or desire negates their present; hence they are imprisoned by their ennui and consequently punished for it. In some
respects they echo Prufrock or Gerontion, but their plight is more grievous than either predecessor because they, unlike Prufrock, sense the presence of some mysterious superior force, symbolized by the pagan and Christian imagery, yet cannot make the connection with it. In this they are like Gerontion, but the repetition of the same apathetic apostasy inherent and rampant throughout *The Waste Land* multiplies the poem's terror. Significant suffering makes connections; absurd suffering does not.

Divided into two main sections, "A Game of Chess" investigates the horror of two different relationships gone wrong. Though the first relationship seems to be middle class while the second is lower class, both describe a hollow present and emphasize in their own way the uselessness of time. In addition to this, Eliot again interjects references to mythology and archetypal time. Before reaching the first couple, the reader is shown the room in which the first act is set.

The first segment of this first section prepares the reader to meet the couple, particularly the woman. Moreover, the room makes one recall other women, other rooms found in Eliot's previous poetry. Much of what is in the room contributes to the sense of stasis present in the entire *Waste Land*, and within this set of lines Eliot mingles mythology, ritualization, and sterile sexuality.
Here visual imagery plays an important part because of what is seen, what is averted, and what is distorted.

In the mirror the flames from the "sevenbranched candelabra" are doubled, but the Cupidon, only "peep[s] out" while another hides his eyes behind his wing. This set piece excellently illustrates the kind of debilitating movements that can lead only to entrapment. With a subtle violence the flames fling themselves, foreshadowing the woman, whose "hair / Spread out in fiery points," and who, like Medusa, strikes dumb whoever looks at her.

The woman's perfume, "strange" and "synthetic," contributes to the feeling of impending madness, leaving things "troubled," "confused." All is approaching a discomforting stillness. Trapped in wood and metal, a dolphin, symbol of fertility, is rendered still. But perhaps the room's most significant feature is the depiction of Philomel. Here, as in "Sweeney among the Nightingales," Philomel is a prophet, yet she goes unheard in both poems: "And still she cried, and still the world pursues / "Jug Jug to dirty ears." Philomel is not alone in this room; other "withered stumps of time / . . . Staring forms / Leaned out, leaning, hushing the room enclosed." The claustrophobic terror increases. The woman's husband or

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lover, perhaps the narrator in "The Burial of the Dead," shuffles on the stair, readying himself to enter her mausoleum where she, by her madness, strikes him "savagely still." He is not the pilgrim on the stair in "Ash Wednesday" nor is she the "Lady of silences."

Juxtaposing the woman's words with the man's thoughts, Eliot demonstrates the futility of this couple's relationship. It is questionable as to who is driving the other mad: the woman's rattling is like Philomel's twittering and, like the dry thunder, the man's silence drives her crazy. The two, nevertheless, stay with one another, afraid to leave yet wishing for escape.

Fear is further intensified in the next tête-à-tête:

"What is that noise? The wind under the door.
"What is that noise now? What is the wind doing?"
Nothing again nothing.8

Often in Eliot's poetry the wind suggests inspiration. Here, of course, no one allows its entrance, and its movement is meaningless. Caught in such a useless present, even something as harmless as a wind can cause paranoia.

The man is like Gerontion, "a dull head among windy spaces." Though these characters function as humans, they can exist, like the sibyl, only in a present of eternal duration and of utter insignificance. Typifying this kind

8Eliot, CPP, pp. 40-41.
of death-in-life, the man can only recall a vulgar ragtime tune whose allusion to Shakespeare echoes Lear's "nothing" speech while also hinting at madness.

His madness mirrors that of his wife. Her last series of questions shows her distress about the present and the future. In desperation she threatens to run into the street with her hair down--more half-mad and meaningless motion. Despite her hysteria, the man remains silent and reruns what will happen: "The hot water at ten. / And if it rains, a closed car at four. / And we shall play a game of chess, / pressing lidless eyes and waiting for a knock upon the door." This scene has been played many times, and will be again and again. Nothing changes--nothing can change, for the fear and the desire reduce them to absurd and hopeless re-enactments resembling those of Sisyphus and Tantalus: motion without end, goal, or conclusion.

Without transition Eliot shifts to a lower class scene acting out the same drama. So much has been said about this second part of "A Game of Chess": the sordid setting, the easy talk about abortion, even the obvious reference to infidelity. But one of the organizing principles in this section is the notion of time and the progression of futility.

Perhaps the most outstanding example is the bartender's constant interruption: "HURRY UP PLEASE ITS TIME,"
occurring four times. It is time, of course, to close, but the closing will not be a conclusion, only an end which forebodes another beginning of another scene much like it. Though the bartender's interjection adds a realistic tone to this part of the poem, his message operates on more subtle levels. In this world where meaningless actions are incessantly repeated, the punctuating fatalism of the bartender contributes to these hell dwellers' plight. Not only does the bartender remind his customers of closing time, but in a sense, he foreshadows Tiresias in "The Fire Sermon" and recalls the silent partner in the previous part of this section. All three painfully represent the eye that sees and knows but goes unseen by others who share this world.

Eliot, without exception, places a male in the position of observing, if not commenting, on the poem's action. In the early poetry such an observer would give the reader insight into the almost exclusive victimization of men by women. Here, however, Eliot's scope becomes more universal. Lil's victimization by Albert and her woman friend demonstrates a subtle but noteworthy difference in Eliot's development. Instead of showing only one side of the endless story about the battle between the sexes, Eliot widens his vision to show how each side is battered, and in Tiresias' case how what lies between the extremes suffers
as well. In this hell man, woman, and hermaphrodite suffer pointlessly, endlessly.

Albert and Lil are married to each other, but Albert's conception of time foils Lil's. In many ways *The Waste Land* is a post World War I poem; Albert's absence from home illustrates that. Coming home from the "war to end all wars," Albert feels entitled to "a good time" to compensate in some small measure for time lost in the army. But in this case, attempting to fill the present with more than the present can hold does not make up for lost time; it leads instead, as desire often does in Eliot's poetry, to the wrong goal. It matters little, from Eliot's point of view, whether this desire takes the form of Becket's temptation--lusting after heaven--or Albert's--lusting after his wife or Lil. One makes the present significant by living in the present instead of trying to live for (or in spite of) some other segment of time.

Entrapped in her sibyl existence, Lil lives out her days without the hope of any relief. Victimized by Albert's sense of lost time, Lil is made to feel that she is wrong to question a life measured only by pregnancies. Time in *The Waste Land* is warped. The present is not a risk compounded of past and future. Motion is either random, senseless, and repetitive, as in the "closed car at four" scene--or madly linear, like Albert's or the Sibyl's. Because this poetry expresses such a view, it portrays hell.
Originally, Eliot had entitled this section "In a Cage," a more appropriate yet obvious title. Both parts of this section depict the consequent distortions of time and humanity. In both parts the male is virtually absent, either through silence or by his physical absence, and the woman is in some degree victimized. But so is the man. Their entrapment causes each other more pain, thereby perpetuating the cycle of attack and counterattack. No one escapes, and like the inhabitants of Dante's Inferno, these hell dwellers bite and scratch one another, each blaming the other for their endless misery.

Just as Eliot's canon shows a particular progression, so too does each poem. The _Waste Land_ moves to its climax in the third and longest section, "The Fire Sermon." Almost like a renaissance play, The _Waste Land_ is comprised of five parts. In section one, the scene is set; in section two characters become more numerous and complex. In section three Tiresias, whom Eliot regarded as the focal personage of the poem,\(^9\) appears, and again the reader is given two vignettes of couples lost in wasted relationships. Before reaching those fragments, however, Eliot describes the landscape, a mixture of ancient and modern societies. In some respects Eliot has done this before, but in addition to emphasizing the similarity of mankind throughout

\(^9\)Eliot, CPP, p. 52.
history and in different social classes, "The Fire Sermon" marks another movement in Eliot's journey through hell.

Much of this third section is based on the previous poetry in sections one and two of *The Waste Land* as well as on earlier poetry. Eliot, as he so often does, here recycles much of his imagery. Like the first two sections, "The Fire Sermon" begins by setting the scene. Subtly, Eliot combines biblical and mythological allusions, again driving home the point of man's archetypal nature. Referring to Christian, pagan, and modern societies serves to illustrate man's oneness with his fellow man (frequently forgotten) and to stress the repetition or recurrent nature of human activity.

Apparently, the narrator of the previous two sections continues on his journey. The tone, diction, and imagery are the same, as is the arrangement of this section into three parts. The image of the rat connects "The Fire Sermon" to both "A Game of Chess" and "The Burial of the Dead," reminding the reader of the lover's silent musing in section two and more important reiterating the concept of cyclic time: "White bodies naked on the low damp ground / And bones cast in a little low garret, / Rattled by the rat's foot only, year to year." Again the incessant repetition of actions intensifies the sense of lost time. These bodies in space without any real time dangle in the crack between life and non-life, forever suspended in hell.
Time in *The Waste Land* is continually discussed in two separate ways: one, long-term time, as seen in cycles, years, and the like; and two, immediate time, an ephemera quickly encountered and insignificantly lived through. Both at this point in Eliot's journey depict entrapment or aimless, weary repetition, thus hell. Both kinds of time often blend for a powerful effect:

> 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.
> O the moon shone bright on Mrs. Porter
> And on her daughter
> They wash their feet in soda water
> Et O ces voix d'enfants, chantant dans la coupole!  

Eliot effectively merges mythology and modern civilization. "The sound of horns" might suggest some type of royal welcome, but immediately that is undercut with "and motors." Clearly, this is modern society's version of the archetypal pattern of loss and return. It is the retelling of Persephone's flight from Hades, or Orpheus' search for Eurydice in Hades, with Eliot's lovers remaining in hell.

Sweeney, of course, is a personage long familiar in Eliot's poetry. His presence and the reference to the moon do much to tie together Eliot's poetry thus far. As mentioned in Chapter II, Sweeney belongs to a diverting yet terrifying section of hell. He is the male counterpart to the women who act as victimizers, as symbolized by the

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10 Eliot, CPP, p. 43.
moon. The moon also suggests that it is the female part of the day, contributing to the sense of man's victimization by women and to the impending feeling of lunacy. Mrs. Porter's and her daughter's ablution recalls Christ's washing of the feet as well as other metaphysical cleansings, but here ritual is profaned. Its debasement anticipates the most debauched example of ritualization in Eliot's canon, "The Hollow Men." As "The Fire Sermon" draws to a close, musical imagery takes on greater importance, ending with the recollection of Philomel twittering what she is unable to speak. Whatever song is sung in The Waste Land, the theme is unmistakably and immutably that of sexual abandonment, defilement, and betrayal; the end remains death-dealing with no hope of escape.

The first part of "The Fire Sermon" closes with two mirror pieces: one recalling the rape of Philomel and the other depicting to the narrator Mr. Eugenides' homosexual proposition. These two vignettes, one after the other, remind the reader that their subject matter prepares the way for Tiresias, who by the events of his own life represents an important kind of betweenness, emphasized by his weary memories of endlessly repeated pseudo-actions.

At this point in the poem, the voice of Tiresias becomes the voice of the narrator. Both victim and victimizer, man and woman, Tiresias knows life both ways and hangs between extremes. Part two of "The Fire Sermon"
begins "at the violet hour." From the imagery it is clear that this is the time between day and night, the evening hour that calls people home:

At the violet hour, when the eyes and back
Turn upward from the desk, when the human engine waits
I Tiresias, though blind, throbbing between two lives,
Old man with wrinkled female breasts, can see
At the violet hour, the evening hour that strives
Homeward. . . .

This "violet hour" represents the violence and betrayal of self-serving sex. Tiresias' "throbbing between two lives," being both sexes yet neither, emphasizes the main thrust of "The Fire Sermon": desire and its counterpart, suffering. Though blind, Tiresias "sees" the reality of this evening, for it is the reality of archetypal time itself.

The "sailor home from sea" calls to mind Ulysses' return home and his summoning of Tiresias from the depths of Hades. This imagery connects the theme of the hero's journey and the sojourning in hell. But all the throbbing, waiting, and striving in this scene merely remind the reader of earlier passages where desire bent blindly on its goal leads nowhere. Here is "the shadow at evening rising to meet" hell's inhabitants. The expectation of sex, greater than its realization, traps these hell dwellers in their desire while leaving them to suffer from the absence of any meaning.

Wearily and perfunctorily, the typist and Tiresias await "the expected guest." Time in this Shakespearean
sonnet is measured by fruitless actions. The clerk's hands, encountering no defense, make a welcome of the typist's indifference. He comes to symbolize a blind, loveless groping after a single, simplistic end.

Having gotten what he wants, the clerk immediately "Bestows one final patronizing kiss, / And gropes his way, finding the stairs unlit. . . ." Literally and metaphorically, the clerk remains in the dark. The hands that met no resistance while sexually advancing now find no guidance as the clerk descends from the inevitable dark. Probably the same scene will be replayed continually between this man and woman with the same lack of communication.

Gratified wishes, as in the case of the sibyl, forebode an endless recurrence of aimless activity. The typist herself, unaware of her departed lover, depicts the unconscious psyche of all the personae: "her brain allows one half-formed thought to pass: / 'Well now that's done: and I'm glad it's over." Moving and thinking mechanically, "She smoothes her hair with automatic hand, / And puts a record on the gramaphone." Ironically, the bee-line behavior of the clerk and typist together leads to an aimless conclusion.

Finished with the interior scene, the narration once again continues in the outer world, signaling a close to this second part while providing a transition into the
third and final part of "The Fire Sermon," a revisit to the exterior of The Waste Land.

But a word should be said in explanation of the fishing imagery mentioned twice in this second part. Because they stand on either end of the apartment scene, the two scenes represent some kind of juxtaposition to the typist's encounters:

But at my back in a cold blast I hear
The rattle of the bones, and chuckle spread from ear to ear.
A rat crept softly through the vegetation
Dragging its slimy belly on the bank
While I was fishing in the dull canal . . .

and

"This music crept by me upon the waters"
O City city, I can sometimes hear
Beside a public bar in Lower Thames Street,
The plesant whining of a mandolin
And a clatter and a chatter from within
Where fishman lounge at noon. . . .

Each instance speaks of the potential fertility that fish so universally represent: the barroom music provides the only visible enjoyment in the poem. But the mandolin is only "whining" and merely "pleasant," while the fishmen are only "lounging." The first scene alludes for a second time to Sweeney and consequently to his way of being in hell, i.e., dully with no sensitivity or response to the situation. The men in both scenes feel no need to partici-

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12Eliot, CPP, pp. 42-43, 45.
13Hargrove, p. 77.
pate in the painful process of moving toward hell's exit; paradoxically, they reach a still point—-but the wrong kind. At best, they are another example of hell's neutrals, neither in spiritual anguish nor on the way to spiritual purgation. They have made an opiate of "forgetful snow," burying their souls in hollow actions. In a small way, they foreshadow the Hollow Men.

The reference to Magnus Martyr, though symbolic of the Church's approbation of total submission to God, somehow reminds one of the room in "A Game of Chess." Hargrove suggests that this church, in the colors of Easter (as well as in the Papal colors), provides one of the few symbols of glorious light. But given the sense of progression within the poem and the location of this symbol in the progression, the Church of Magnus Martyr can also be seen, like the fishmen and the public bar, as another way of stopping more-or-less comfortably in hell. It is merely a splendid mirror of the empty chapel in Part Five. Though neither the fishmen nor the Church is simply wrong, to embrace either elicits similar results: senseless suffering is only assuaged, never transformed into significant suffering. Hell is made tolerable.

At the beginning of "The Fire Sermon" no trace of human life existed in the waters; here at its end the river

14Hargrove, p. 77.
"sweats / Oil and tar," remnants of modern society. Now the river jumps with an assortment of activity, and Eliot moves from present to past in these first two stanzas. In the present one sees the polluted waters of industrial society in a poor part of town. Though the second stanza at first glance seems cleaner, it is not, for it suffers from the pollution of lust. Connecting present and past are lust and madness: "Wallala leialala." The peal of bells and white towers, tolling the death of this land, will appear in "What the Thunder Said" where this waste land ends, as it must, in madness.

This section also ends in madness; the three separate accounts of seduction and loss point toward the meaninglessness of these hell dwellers' existence. Connecting "nothing with nothing," one woman illustrates how all people, despite their common lot, are disconnected from one another. Perpetual severence from life leads to madness; these unholy loves, giving no nourishment, are at first an attraction, but one that leads only into a cul-de-sac. The lazy motion down river goes nowhere.

At the center of this poem, and Eliot's pre-conversion poetry, lies desire. In the early poetry the narrators desired some kind of engagement with those around them. For one reason or another the comfort of human interaction was denied or obstructed. Often the comfort these narrators sought was sexual, but not always. In
Gerontion's case, comfort in a faith was obstinately rejected, placing him in a more painful layer of hell than the one Sweeney knew. In *The Waste Land*, especially in "The Fire Sermon," desire calls to mind the Buddha's sermon and Augustine's confessions.

Worldly wants, without any spiritual dimension, leave one unfulfilled and incompletely human, and while that might do for someone like Sweeney, it parches the more typical Eliot narrator-character. Because the narrator is more sensitive than most around him, he suffers by living like them without knowing how to step beyond the finite existence they live; he is forced to hang between the world he knows and something else, which in the pre-conversion poetry is always baffling.

Logically, that something else might be seen as asceticism, the complete retraction from the world. That is, however, the more simplistic solution, one Eliot at first satirizes in "Mr. Eliot's Sunday Morning Service," then examines with more positive interest in *The Waste Land* and "The Hollow Men," but ultimately rejects in his later poetry from "Ash Wednesday" to *Four Quartets*. Such a progressive response clearly demonstrates how Eliot's sense of betweenness changes from one of paralysis to one of preparation. At this point asceticism appears as a viable way out of hell. But that, though appealing, is another deception.
Eliot will discover that mere asceticism, like mere sensuality, fails.

After "The Fire Sermon" little sex exists in the poetry, for Eliot begins turning toward a greater inspection of asceticism. Immediately following the burning madness of the third part is "Death by Water," the beginning of the plot resolution to The Waste Land. But the plot resolution which ends in madness in "What the Thunder Said" should not be taken as Eliot's pointing to hope or some kind of respite in The Waste Land. Eliot's poetry is still in hell, as it will be until the "Ariel Poems." Eliot is moving to another and a deeper layer of hell, a hell more terrible than that depicted here, but related to it.

Phlebas the Phoenician has come and gone throughout The Waste Land. Madame Sosostris' warning to "fear death by water," again recalled in "A Game of Chess," reappears as the main image of this fourth part where the memento mori motif is woven in with the theme of prophecy. The "cry of gulls" goes back to "Gerontion": "Gull against the wind." Like Gerontion, Phlebas forgot the cries and was lost. Like the narrator in "A Game of Chess," Phlebas' bones are picked. But in "Ash Wednesday" these bones, though scattered, will sing. He is in a unique position; here he forgets "the profit and the loss," but in "Ash Wednesday" the narrator will "waver" between them.

Here, Phlebas points to another examination of
suffering and betweenness. By "entering the whirlpool," he passes "the stages of his age and youth." Yet neither "life" nor "youth" emerges. The wheel, like the whirlpool, represents the turning motions characteristic of Eliot's early poetry. In the pre-conversion poetry the turning symbolizes the confusion and torture of hell, while in the later poetry the turning becomes a necessary adjunct to the "still point." Phlebas points only to a certain kind of end, a whirling end, with Phlebas delivering a weary prophesy reminiscent of that delivered by Tiresias in "The Fire Sermon."

If Phlebas has drowned, the narrator can only stand on dry land waiting for some drop to fall in the final section of The Waste Land, "What the Thunder Said."

Throughout the entire poem water has been one of the major symbols, representative of life itself, complete with all of life's vicissitudes. In a way, "What the Thunder Said" returns the reader to the beginning of The Waste Land—for once again the reader is presented a desiccated landscape, a "stony rubbish" and "the dry stone" with no "sound of water" ("The Burial of the Dead"). Like "The Burial of the Dead," "What the Thunder Said" is filled with biblical imagery, charging the images of water and rock with even more powerful significance. But the reality of this section and the entire poem remains in the hell between two worlds: this fragmented and alienating world of lusts and
their disguises and, for the first time in Eliot's canon, a
spiritual world which, however, remains distant and elusive,
for all its thundering, chiding, and weeping.

It must be said that Eliot, whether or not overtly,
has always shown concern for spiritual matters, as is seen
in "Mr. Eliot's Sunday Morning Service" or "A Cooking Egg,"
but like "Gerontion," The Waste Land looks at the possibil­
ity of God seriously. The Waste Land, however, ends not
with an obstinate refusal to believe that which is acknowl­
edged as a possibility, as in "Gerontion," nor with
Gerontion's certainty that vengeance must follow, but
with another instance of a savage Laforgian undercutting
that keeps this land's inhabitants firmly rooted in a hell
more hideous than that found in the earlier poetry because
this hell has been tinted with a faint glimpse of a way out
inaccessible to any of its denizens. Such a vision is so
tortured as to lead to madness.

Following a familiar pattern, "What the Thunder
Said" may be divided into three parts: a commentary on the
external landscape, a more personal exposition, and finally
a return to an external world. At this point in The Waste
Land, the overpowering interest in sex has waned, to be re­
placed by a concern for other things. As the first stanza
intimates, what has happened "in the garden" is finally
showing the results of the initial actions. At first, the
garden of Gethsemane comes to mind with its "frosty silence,"
"agony," and "shouting and crying." But this scene also recalls the archduke's hyacinth garden in "The Burial of the Dead." And like that garden where people are "neither living nor dead," this place shows another kind of betweenness: "He who was living is now dead / We who were living are now dying / With a little patience."

From this death and this dying the poem moves to the description of a desert land, where the pitiful inhabitants are not even given the relief of existential silence: "There is not even silence in the mountains / But dry sterile thunder without rain." What has gone on before in the city has been relocated to this desert—the "red sullen faces" from "mudcracked houses" are the same faces seen in the earlier sections of *The Waste Land*, but now in the desert these hopeless faces come their closest to experiencing some phenomenon different from the ennui and ruination of their type of existence. Everything in this desert land lies parched, a forerunner of "The Hollow Men," yet the narrator here apparently could tolerate this environment "if there were water." His conditions go unfulfilled and undercut because "there is no water."

One of the constant images in Eliot's poetry, water represents many aspects of life. It is syncretic in that the image of water can mean many different things, some of which are contradictory. That is why water may drown or purify; in itself it is so vast as to have no specific
meaning until a context is supplied. In the earlier parts of *The Waste Land* water is seen as the polluted transporter of carnal lusts, but here in "What the Thunder Said" its absence calls attention to the spiritual state of this land's inhabitants. Before and during "The Fire Sermon" water was associated with the lust of the world and in "Death by Water" Phlebas dies in the sea. Now, however, with lust gone the inhabitants, particularly the narrator, somehow feel an absence they do not know how to fill. They experience a new kind of betweenness—different from that of "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," with a character standing between two insufficient choices, but also different from what is to come in *Four Quartets*, where people get stuck between tube stations only to discover that they were in a momentary place of preparation before continuing their journey. In *The Waste Land* the sense of betweenness creates a feeling of loss, and suddenly these hell dwellers must live in a hell stripped of familiar trappings.

In part two of "What the Thunder Said" the narrator is exposed to unfamiliar sights. This "third" person appearing and vanishing goes unidentified, but the echoes of the journey to Emmaus, and more recently the man in mocha brown in "Sweeney among the Nightingales," and most acutely Tiresias, are too overwhelming to be ignored. Whoever this added presence is, it is a pricking invasion from some other reality into this hell. Discovering who it is
exactly or whence it comes is not as important as realizing how its presence affects these inhabitants' hell. With the absence of water is coupled this third person, who brings with him strange sounds and "hooded hordes," and the surrealistic vision of a woman and bats. These events immediately appearing one after another mark another important point in Eliot's progression, for he is arriving at another threshold to a deeper level of hell.

These "hooded hordes" anticipate "The Hollow Men" where "the broken jaw of our lost kingdoms" closely resembles this "dead mountain mouth of carious teeth that cannot spit."

Further, the "violet air," already seen in "The Fire Sermon," will appear again in "Ash Wednesday" but with added significance. But of real importance now is how the world previously known is changing: the "falling towers" and "reminiscent bells" already seen in "The Fire Sermon" are crashing down, remnants of an already fragmented world. Instead of rats rattling dead men's bones, the bats are borne into a hopeless darkness. All the references to "falling towers" and the "empty chapel" recall the imagery of Magnus Martyr in "The Fire Sermon," but here (save the cock crow, a harbinger of betrayal's recognition) is this land of red rock, of a church built on soiled and shifting foundation, of a land filled with its own emptiness--"exhausted wells." Despite the "damp gust bringing rain," this desert receives no relief nor any release from its
previous and constant aching. For it is clear that the rain either fails to come as anticipated by the damp gust or it is over all too quickly before any amelioration can be felt.

What does occur in this second part is a heavy reliance on sound—people listening eagerly for something familiar and soothing, but hearing rather the "maternal lamentation," the "fiddled whisper music," the "grass singing," and most obviously the "cock on the rooftop," speaking of a reality beyond themselves, something related to yet other than what has been experienced before. Perhaps the characters are the same personages as in the early sections of The Waste Land; but now, with lust confronted in "The Fire Sermon" and with Phlebas, the representative scapegoat figure, drowned in the waters of lust in "Death by Water," something is missing; with lust confronted, if not conquered, these characters are still in hell but are distanced from that which put them there and anesthetized them in it. They are still suffering but without the narcotic effect of "forgetful snow" or the "public bar" or pseudo-passion. At this moment they are being pushed to a new dimension, a special kind of betweenness where people are being released from something old while not yet acquiring something new. Some minor poems like "Journey of the Magi" take up this theme again, but at a different point and to a different end.
Such a critical point is a poignant danger zone, extending into an unexplored dark, one of many to which the spiritual pilgrim must submit. Out of an ominous silence the thunder finally speaks three words to challenge or confound the pilgrims: "datta," give; "dayadhvam," sympathize; and "damyata," control. Characters like Sweeney have known control of others, but the two preceding actions cast upon control a new significance, one based on detachment rather than on possession. Confronted with the cost of transit out of hell, it is doubtful that the narrator has at this time enough spiritual currency to travel much farther. Yet he realizes that the past, as he knows it, will provide no answer; his relief cannot be found in "obituaries" or "memories." Memory, whether bare or "draped by the beneficent spider," remains, as it has been found in "Gerontion," an illusion and a seducing trap.

Still seen as three distinct categories, time is something from which one is continually trying to escape, but the jingle of the key painfully "confirms a prison." Memory and this lunar world are throwbacks to the same feelings of almost hypnotically obedient entrapment experienced in "Rhapsody on a Windy Night." The futile past has not been relinquished nor has sympathy released the pilgrim from this hell. But for the first time in Eliot's canon thus far, the overt recognition of sympathizing is seen, connecting the narrator with the other characters—not just
having them share the misery of wasted lives, but actually making the effort to penetrate the other's barriers, to feel the other's pain. Reviving "a broken Coriolanus," if just for a moment, an Eliot narrator for the first time does more than merely observe another in a similar plight (Prufrock noticing the men in shirt sleeves or Tiresias observing the typist) now without mocking, he tries to feel the anguish of a shattered man broken by his greatness as well as his failings.

Though lasting only briefly, this moment's presence here shows a new dimension in the sensibility of the narrator and the direction of the poetry. It is too soon to say that Eliot abandons the detached observer as narrator, for he uses it heavily in *Four Quartets*, but one can say that the poetry is beginning to exhibit traces of a more personally involved narrator. In "The Hollow Men" and later in *Four Quartets* Eliot relies more on the royal we, another technique that allows the narrator to place himself among the characters; here in "What the Thunder Said" Eliot evokes the memory of Coriolanus for the same effect, but once again memory proves too evanescent and sympathy for another becomes attenuated. Despite its brief appearance here, its presence is registered upon the reader's mind, like the nightingale's song, and the growing awareness of the narrator's connectedness to another will progressively deepen, taking him from the impending nadir of hell in
"The Hollow Men" to the purgatorial mount.

For now, however, sympathy has been considered and is quickly replaced by control. As pointed out earlier, water is a major image in The Waste Land as in most of Eliot's poetry; here, the reference to water recalls not just Phlebas the Phoenician but also the three vignettes in "The Fire Sermon" as well as religious and mythological allusions. But the calm of handling a boat upon the water or more powerfully controlling the water that rocks the boat is short lived. Like Peter, who began to walk on the water toward Christ until he relaized how much in control of himself he was, the person to whom the narrator is speaking is replaced by the narrator himself. In both instances "control" is undermined. The final stanza of the entire poem also undermines all the discussion of giving, sympathizing, and controlling, replacing sane behavior with mad and disconnected aimlessness.

The narrator, also like Peter, fishes just as he had done in "The Fire Sermon." Instead of being near the banks of "the dull canal," he is now standing on the sea shore with his former world behind him, as did Prufrock earlier in the canon. This narrator also faces a new kind of betweenness as he turns his back to the previous world and faces the unknown, within which lies the madness out of which flows the truth. At this point madness and truth are too similar to be distinguished. Here they are not two
sides of a coin, but one coin with both sides so superimposed on each other that the coin itself has no sides and is so distorted as to be worthless. Hence, the poem, like the land and its inhabitants, plunges into a confused lunacy often flirted with in poems like "Rhapsody on a Windy Night," "Mr. Apollinax," and "Sweeney among the Nightingales" but never fully achieved until now.

What is achieved is an intensely painful investigation of fragmentation in a land unified by its disjointedness. "Shall I at least set my lands in order" is soon enough answered by "These fragments I have shored against my ruins"; order has been undermined by spiritual disorientation in which persons whirl around like "fractured atoms" ("Gerontion"). Though the personages in The Waste Land have no inheritance, there exists something beyond the mere presence of so many disconnected images: somehow within the madness of this stony rubbish there lies the seeds of significant suffering.

By the end of The Waste Land the reader has seen a deepening of man's futile attempt to live without faith. George Williamson correctly surmises that the poem shows progression.15 Though the ending does not provide any sense of conclusion, it does take the reader to yet another threshold of hell. With the closing words, "Shantih

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shantih shantih" ("the peace which passeth understanding"), the poem is neither peace filled nor even close to it, but it is not the same as the beginning of The Waste Land either. To mention peace, sympathy, and the like suggests that some spiritual transformation has occurred. As already stated, "The Fire Sermon's" confrontation with the problem of desire and lust marks the climax and turning point of the poem. From then on Eliot deals with other concerns, striking sex from the poem's focal point, centering instead on what lies beneath sexual play: a desire for life.

Because the desire for life in its complexity and completeness was severed from sex, sex became an end in itself and provided a momentary pleasure, if that, but certainly allowed no transit out of hell. This revelation given in "The Fire Sermon," though illuminating, apparently means to Eliot what it meant to The Buddha (who preached the original Fire Sermon) that sex is wrong because it stems only from desire, and leads to suffering. So Eliot swings to the opposite extreme--asceticism. The rituals seen in The Waste Land, i.e., Madame Sosostris, Mrs. Porter, Magnus Martyr Church, and the clerk and typist, prepare the way for ritualization in "The Hollow Men" where the circling round the prickly pear, a grotesque ritualization of anti-sexuality and death, becomes the most devastating and final profanity. In an attempt to assuage
suffering, Eliot thus turns to perverted asceticism, such as that in the grotesque desert images of "What the Thunder Said," a move brought to its dissatisfying apex—and Eliot's spiritual nadir—in "The Hollow Men." But the madness at the end of The Waste Land, like the whimper at the end of "The Hollow Men," suggests that Eliot himself had already felt the failure of his new ascetic impulse.

Eliot's turning from one extreme to another illustrates the kind of betweenness and spiritual progression he experienced. Just as he did not reach the height of his interest in sex until The Waste Land, particularly in "A Game of Chess," so he does not reach the height of his interest in asceticism until "The Hollow Men," where mindless renunciation and ritualization is the final and most precarious level in hell. Eliot is still swinging between insufficient extremes. While not providing a conclusion, the ending of "What the Thunder Said" is, however, proper because it is unfinished, introducing with commands from the Upanishads an incipient notion of organized and strict renunciation, before the reader sees the horrifying ramifications of that move in the next and last poem before Eliot's conversion to Anglo-Catholicism: "The Hollow Men."

Eliot's inconclusive conclusion, which only points the way to another kind of hell, not yet fully experienced, is characteristic of his non-linear progression. One hardly knows where The Waste Land is going, for reading it
is very much like going nowhere. Yet, having arrived at the end, one looks about and sees a new, confusing, and disturbing predicament. Movement, though non-teleological, has occurred.
CHAPTER V

"THE HOLLOW MEN" AND THE "ARIEL POEMS"

With the cryptic repetition of "Shantih shantih shantih," Eliot had provided The Waste Land not a conclusion but a momentarily valid yet nonetheless mad summation of events thus far. Not only did he and his narrator (as well as the poem's other characters) travel from the city to the desert fringe, but they had also journeyed from an exploration of sexual excess to an exploration of asceticism. At the core of Eliot's journey, with all its transformations and wavering, lies the need to suffer--significantly, without derision or chagrin. As might be expected, "the peace which passeth understanding" is not, cannot be the last word. Rejecting the lusts of this world, the Hollow Men assume an extreme ascetic pose, one that places them at the most perilous point of betweenness encountered in hell. Their constant turning toward and retracting from death's "other" kingdom fix the Hollow Men between The Waste Land and "Ash Wednesday," at a point where their decision to stop journeying means the end of their world.

"The Hollow Men" is, as Bradbrook points out, the
very center of Eliot's poetry, \(^1\) but it should not be seen
simplistically as the dividing point in his canon, di-
chotomizing it into preconversion and post-conversion
poetry. Eliot's poetry cannot be so easily dissected into
two main camps, as most critics usually do, because Eliot's
canon shows a progression—though non-linear and non-
teleological—based on circularity, return, and revalua-
tion. Though it is true to say that he had composed "re-
ligious" poetry from 1927 on, it is just as true to say
that he had done so all along, as seen most obviously in
poems like "The Hippopotamus" or "A Cooking Egg," and less
obviously but more truly in The Waste Land. His concern
for spiritual realities remains one of the constants in his
work, even though such concern manifests itself differently
throughout his canon.

Despite the frantic turning and insignificant
circling around the "prickly pear," "The Hollow Men" is
actually teleological. In this poem the goal of evading
death's "other" kingdom is reinforced by another goal—that
of remaining in hell—the combination of these making the
poem paradoxically teleological and most pernicious after
all. The ceaseless motion is a way of staying determinedly
in one place. Paralyzed by their desire, the Hollow Men

\(^1\) M. C. Bradbrook, "T. S. Eliot," British Writers
and Their Work, ed. Bonamy Dobree (Lincoln: Univ. of
get what they want. Like Kurtz, the Hollow Men come under the Shadow and are "captured by the incredible which is the very essence of dreams."² Like Kurtz, they live in death.

The similarities between Conrad's and Eliot's works are astounding. Though one might spend more time on such a comparison, one point of intersection must be discussed in order to understand more fully Eliot's poem and its notion of progression: the epigraph, "Mistah Kurtz--he dead." Taken from Conrad's novella, the epigraph is not Eliot's first borrowing from Conrad; the original typescript of The Waste Land also showed an interest in Heart of Darkness.³ Even though Eliot changed The Waste Land's epigraph to accommodate Pound, the presence of Conrad in both poems is but one connection between them, a nexus in which the psychological or spiritual torment of illusion and delusion is keenly felt but not resolved. The epigraph, then, is not as clear as it first might appear because, like the sibyl in The Waste Land, Kurtz had been granted some kind of immortality. Marlow's sense of duty to Kurtz forces Marlow to lie, pulling him into an "immense darkness." By exerting such a pull, Kurtz lives. Had Kurtz


been only insane rather than mad, he could easily have been dismissed; madness, however, bestows a marginal dignity upon its victim, casting upon him a shadowy importance.

As it is with Kurtz, so it is with the Hollow Men. Their voluntary suffering in the desert emphasizes their existence, even though negatively, showing the kind of futile suffering of Eliot's hell. And in some measure, characters like the Hollow Men exist more fully and vividly than the crowd of neutrals muddling in a circle in The Waste Land, for the Hollow Men, like Gerontion, know another way but choose not to meet it. Foregoing any genuine becoming, any participation in the process of human suffering, they statically find a place in the desert where they stand as monuments of their own significance. But because their deliberate position fossilizes the Hollow Men, such magnificence is irreparably undercut--perhaps the most savage example of Laforgian irony in Eliot's entire canon.

In this particular inferno the people stand apart from one another, their world disconnected from death's "other" kingdom, their perception severed from belief. But more than that, "The Hollow Men" turns in upon itself, using contrasting imagery to mark some familiar points in the circle. Though divided into five sections (like The Waste Land and each of the Four Quartets), this poem may be also divided thus: section one paralleling three, two paralleling four, and five as the conclusion. Sections one
and three show how the men and their landscape reflect each other; sections two and four juxtapose the sight found in death's "twilight" kingdom with the spiritual blindness pervasive in hollow land. The last section depicts the near silent apocalypse, the effect of ceasing to journey.

Section one begins immediately by establishing polarities and relying upon syntactic repetition:

We are the hollow men
We are the stuffed men
Leaning together
Headpiece filled with straw. Alas!  

The entire poem sets up extremes. These men simultaneously stand hollow, devoid of any significance, and padded with chaff. Paradoxically, these men are "hollow" specifically because they are "stuffed." Though "leaning together," there is only one "headpiece," another example of polar imagery. In four lines Eliot, through syntactic repetition and lexical substitution, has created the first set of examples that show the Hollow Men's dully repetitive fixity in hollow land.

Like Gerontion, these men are divided into "headpiece," "hands," and "eyes," Eliot's use of synecdoche emphasizing the fragmentation in their milieu. In addition, the physical characteristics of the land resemble that found in "Gerontion" and the last two sections of The Waste Land. Once again the "wind" and "broken glass" reappear to

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4Eliot, CPP, p. 56.
reiterate the lack of inspiration and spiritual brittleness already discussed in "Gerontion." As in all the pre-conversion poetry, suffering is "quiet and meaningless," but that found in this poem is worse because ritual, in an attempt to combat lust, has been severed from belief. Where Gerontion sees religion only as vengeful, the Hollow Men see it as something beautiful but inaccessible.

What they are left with is a barren facsimile of ritual. Everything is arid: "dried voices," "dry grass," "dry cellar," all illustrating the slow atrophy of their world: "Shape without form shade, without color. / Paralyzing force, gesture without motion." Their spiritual vacuity leaves them "without" form, color, or motion. Living in the Shadow between life and death, they stiffen from a two dimensional subsistence which they deliberately refuse to abandon.

Another kingdom exists, but one unapproachable to these men. Others have "crossed with direct eyes," but the Hollow Men purposely remain behind, almost because they want to, almost because they prefer their blindness to sight. Oddly, they ask to be remembered "not as lost / Violent souls, but only / As the hollow men / The stuffed men." Ending this section as it began, the Hollow Men do two things: They acknowledge another realm—even if it,

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5 Eliot, CPP, p. 56.
like theirs, is death—and they tenaciously grasp onto their pseudo-humanity. Accepting the reality of death's "other" kingdom then retracting from it keeps the Hollow Men between physical death and spiritual life. Very similar to the sibyl in The Waste Land, the Hollow Men are to remain in their inferno until the end.

If section one shows how the Hollow Men resemble their milieu, section two shows what they must do in order to remain there. They constantly evade eyesight or anything related to death's "other" kingdom while deliberately doing anything possible to fix themselves in hell, these simultaneously contrary actions confusing the Hollow Men's (and the reader's) perceptions. This section, then, presents a deviation from the pilgrim's journey--there is no climbing the stair as in "Ash Wednesday" or riding the train in the tube station in Four Quartets. But there is speculation about another realm, creating a safety zone between hollow land and death's "other" kingdom, a safety zone allowing the Hollow Men a limited amount of freedom without forcing them to change anything. They remain in hell's most static yet paradoxically most frenetic spot.

Like a rat in a maze, they scurry frantically about without ever escaping.

Even the syntax in this section illustrates a labyrinthine turning in upon itself, almost as an assurance against confronting the other reality:
Eyes I dare not meet in dreams
In death's dream kingdom
These do not appear:
There, the eyes are
Sunlight on a broken column
There, is a tree swinging
And voices singing
More distant and more solemn
Than a fading star.\(^6\)

Because of Eliot's use of punctuation, the involuted syntax, and the ambiguous meaning of the word "there," it is difficult to determine whether death's "dream" kingdom is the same as death's "other" kingdom or if it is the same as hollow land. Such confusion implies that hollow land is not necessarily distant in space from the "other" kingdom, but is widely separated from it in terms of belief. From the imagery one begins to mark distinctions between hollow land and death's "other" kingdom. Hollow land is noted for its aridity and lack of vision; death's "other" kingdom is known by its beautiful life-giving images: sunlight (the cosmic eye), trees, and voices. The juxtaposing landscapes make the syntax less inscrutable. The Hollow Men do not have "direct eyes" (section one) and must therefore avert the glances of others and dodge the brightness of the Sun; their dried voices can only whisper, not sing; and, as section three points out, the environment grows only cacti, not trees. If "in death's dream kingdom / These (eyes, sunlight, trees) do not appear," it seems clear that

\(^6\)Eliot, _CPP_, p. 57.
death's "dream" kingdom is the same as hollow land.

The second stanza of this section goes further to show that hollow land and death's "dream" kingdom are the same: "Let me be no nearer / In death's dream kingdom / Let me also wear / Such deliberate disguises." If death's "dream" kingdom was not hollow land, the scarecrows would need no disguises; the syntactic repetition linking those ideas together would not exist. Further, if death's "dream" kingdom were some other kingdom, Eliot would have written, "Let me be no nearer / To death's dream kingdom." Eliot's use of "in death's dream kingdom" strongly suggests that the Hollow Men are already in a realm of furtive glances, deliberate disguises, and spiritual death. Hollow land is, then, the dream, not the reality--the illusion, not the truth.

Though the second section is confusing, its purpose is clear. At this point in Eliot's canon one can begin to notice where eliot descends more deeply into hell. As the pre-conversion poetry reaches hell's nadir, one can begin to see, although, obliquely, some transit out of hell and into purgatory. What Eliot satirized in Poems 1920 is now viewed longingly in "The Hollow Men" and will be accepted in "Ash Wednesday." All his poetry deals with matters of faith, slowly moving from the rind to the core, from the "whirl of fractured atoms" to the dance at "the still point." For the first time in Eliot's canon, both hell and
purgatory are meshed together, blurring the usual boundaries between them. Actually, they are the same place but a different state of mind, which makes the Hollow Men's frantic motions absurd but the speaker's stillness in "Ash Wednesday" significant and valid. Such stillness can transform the desert into the garden.

The desert could not be any drier than in section three of "The Hollow Men." By returning to the same syntax found in section one, this section stresses the environment's sterility: "This is the dead land / This is cactus land." Demonstrative words like "this" and "here" fix the Hollow Men in the desert, rooting them deeply in a senseless goal that signifies death. If that is not enough, the "fading star" in section two reappears here, adding to the sense of permanent privation. Locked in hopeless ritual, these men make their supplications to the raised "stone images," images that are perceived dimly "under the twinkle of a fading star."

As in section one, the second stanza of section three moves in a limited engagement with death's "other" kingdom. Once more there is a momentary blurring of hollow land and the other kingdom:

Is it like this  
In death's other kingdom  
Walking alone  
At the hour when we are  
Trembling with weakness
Lips that would kiss
Form prayers to broken stone.7

At first, it is unclear whether death's "other" kingdom is comprised of the same mindless actions found in hollow land, but the imagery of "broken stone" suggests that the same stone that was raised in the previous stanza lies shattered under the weight of vacant ritual. The Hollow Men do not pray, they do not know how (prayer does not occur for Eliot until the "Ariel Poems"). Instead, they merely "form prayers," engaging in exhausted and non-renewing rituals.

And as in the first part of section two, the temporary confusion about which kingdom is being discussed proves illusory. The question that attempts to connect the two kingdoms atrophies in mid stanza, leaving the reader deceived. Because of the lack of punctuation, the Hollow Men's rhetorical question is fused into a description of hollow land, and one wonders whether their limited speculation is voiced out of genuine interest in the "other" kingdom or out of dogged determination to remain where they are. If the "other" kingdom should resemble hollow land in effete ritual, then they have no reason to move. If they only "form questions" the same way they "form prayers," then they do not want to find out what differences exist. Either way, the Hollow Men by their vacillating, confirm

7Eliot, CPP, pp. 57-58.
the permanence of this hell. And once more Eliot shows how
hell and purgatory are the same yet different.

Within their actions exists a tension, a polarity
between action and non-action that further demonstrates the
circumambulatory nature of hollow land. On the one hand,
these men do everything possible to avoid confrontation, to
cover their tracks. But on the other hand, they passively
get acted upon, "behaving as the wind behaves." This beha­
vior differs from the "wind's singing" which occurs in
another kingdom, the difference again demonstrating how
something could be the same and yet not the same. The Hol­
low Men's aimlessness is firmly rooted in hollow land.
Instead of journeying, they spend all their energy going
nowhere. Though this makes the poem non-teleological in
one way, by the sheer stopping altogether, the poem be­
comes teleological in another sense. By ceasing to move,
the Hollow Men arrive at the wrong goal but cannot see that.

At the core of section four, as in section two, is
the Hollow Men's spiritual blindness contrasted to the
"other" kingdom's vision. As usual, these scarecrows sur­
vvey their environment and speculate about some other real­
ity, much like Prufrock, but the Hollow Men do not return
to hollow land until section five where the end of the
world, which has subtly been prepared for throughout the
entire poem, occurs. Eliot's syntax restates familiar
ideas:
The eyes are not here
There are no eyes here
In this valley of dying stars
In this hollow valley
This broken jaw of our lost kingdoms

In this last of meeting places. 8

Obviously, vision is missing in hollow land, but it is the persistent use of demonstrative adverbs and pronouns that drives that point home. "Here" and "this" firmly fix the Hollow Men in a shadowy world; further, the negatives "not" and "no" add to the sense of privation. All this, when compounded with the constant reiteration of similar phrases, emphasizes the Hollow Men's paralytic mental and physical state. Rather than investigate ways out of hell, these scarecrows engage in hopeless word games, choosing to revolve in a silly vortex of language.

Not only does Eliot rely on repeated phrases and clauses, he also recycles individual words and uses them to describe different objects. "Hollow" characterizes both man and environment, but a word like "broken" characterizes "glass," "column," "stone," and "jaw," each in the four sections discussed thus far. Such repetition further demonstrates the affinity between man and land, but moreover creates a leitmotif running throughout the poem, connecting each section to another. All the repetition

8 Eliot, CPP, p. 58.
(lexical, syntactic, imagistic) stresses the Hollow Men's deliberate stasis in hell.

This "last of meeting places," hollow and hopeless, becomes, then, the goal of the Hollow Men. Paradoxically, despite the endless venturing forth and returning, the poem becomes teleological, making it the nadir of Eliot's hell. Where most Christians strive for heaven, these Hollow Men settle for hell—not because they believe in it, but because they refuse to think or to journey any more. And because they quit, they suffer absurdly and ultimately fade away.

Yet, once again that "other" kingdom intrudes upon the Hollow Men; its presence gnawing at them, making them suffer even more absurdly. In death's "twilight" kingdom the star now is "perpetual," not fading, the flower now the "Multifoliate rose," not the prickly pear—all this because "the eyes reappear . . . the hope only of empty men." ⁹ This juxtaposition of hollow with empty proves crucial.

The difference between hollow and empty epitomizes the difference between hell and purgatory. Superficially, these words seem synonymous, but while hollowness has already been connected with being stuffed, emptiness is theologically associated with waiting to be filled, this

distinction marking the eternally lost from the temporarily deprived. Further, the empty men hope, and in hoping, see the perpetual star and the multifoliate rose, the most beautiful and peace-giving imagery in Eliot's canon thus far. Such imagery associated with death's "twilight" kingdom is the first harbinger of a purgatorial vision, a vision that is slowly becoming more real yet one that still remains beyond the Hollow Men's grasp.

What the Hollow Men do hold on to is their futile rituals. In section five the Hollow Men experience the last torment of hell: being dissociated from even their speculation about death's "other" kingdom. Existing totally in and for the senseless and interminable pain of the damned, the Hollow Men find themselves at the wrong center, circling about the last vestige of hollow land:

Here we go round the prickly pear
Prickly pear prickly pear
Here we go round the prickly pear
At five o'clock in the morning.10

Section five relies, as did the other sections, on repetition, but added to the lexical and syntactic repetition is what might be called incantatory repetition. The first and last stanzas in this section keep repeating the same phrase then attach an ending statement that gives a sense of tepid finality, such effect mesmerizing and anesthetizing the Hollow Men.

10Eliot, CPP, p. 58.
Blindly they dance around their damnation like children playing at life, oblivious to anything other than their game. Obviously imitating some Maypole fertility dance gone wrong, these hell dwellers are forever locked into replaying scenes that do not work. Just as the fertility imagery in *The Waste Land* emphasized the futility of rank sensuality, so too does pagan ritual in this poem show the hopelessness of sterile asceticism. Either extreme, characterized by the sibyl or Kurtz, points to the same reality: teleological desires elicit death.

In their macabre dance toward death, the Hollow Men do not simply circle about a cactus, but move around their mutation of significant religious experience. The pear, symbolic of the incarnate word in Renaissance paintings and also of feminine procreative power in pagan cultures, has been defiled, made unappealing. It seems that even if some positive spiritual reality were to come down in the middle of hollow land (or if it were to "sprout," using *Waste Land* terminology), it would not survive unless it were warped. Actually, the objects of veneration in death's "other" kingdom ("perpetual star," *Multifoliate rose," "Sunlight") are not terribly different from the prickly pear, except that they are beyond reach and therefore beyond perversion; all, including the prickly pear, are Marian or Christological images and will appear in "Ash Wednesday" and *Four*
Quartets where they are still beyond reach but are not permanently denied.

Just as the prickly pear stands in the middle of hollow land, tearing external ritual from internal belief, the "Shadow" falls between indivisible entities, paralyzing the Hollow Men's ability to respond. These three "between" stanzas show the effect, the exhaustion of teleology. Idea cannot be severed from reality, conception cannot be distinguished from creation, yet the "Shadow" accomplishes the impossible--no wonder "Life is very long." It is, like the Sibyl of Cumae and like Kurtz, a life never ending, but never-ending in misery.

These "between" stanzas are important for many reasons. First, they in themselves are syntactically non-linear. If they were linear, they would read, "The Shadow falls between . . .," but that would not elicit the same effect. Their non-linear structure mimics the circularly hopeless pattern seen throughout the poem. Corresponding to this non-linear element is the idea of return, and the paralysis suffered because of the "Shadow's" invasion returns the reader to section one where the Hollow Men were depicted as "Shape without form, shade without colour, / Paralysed force, gesture without motion." There has been absolutely no progression in the entire poem. Even Proufrock who swings toward heroic images but returns to his own solipsistic misery ventures through his hell. Even The
Waste Land, replete with its scuttled liaisons, shows a movement through hell. But the Hollow Men do not move, except to stay in place. For all their frenetic dancing and limited speculation, they do not budge.

Yet these "between" stanzas are most interesting because they themselves come "in between" the first and last stanzas in this section. More than that, they exemplify a kind of poetry not seen before in Eliot's canon, a poetry dependent upon bald, philosophical statements. Although these stanzas express spiritual bleakness, the same kind of "philosophical" poetry will be employed in Four Quartets, but to a different end. Its presence here, like that of the purgatorial imagery, shows a dissatisfaction with the way things are in hell. For now, however, nothing can be changed; the discomfort grows, increasing the anguish of the Hollow Men who are firmly rooted in their eternal present of endless insignificance.

Antiphons to these stanzas are "For Thine is the Kingdom" (stanzas one and three) and "Life is very long" (stanza two). Almost like a chorus chant, these lines reappear in a stanza of their own, but just when they are put together, they become truncated, illustrating the Shadow's power to divide the indivisible. As these lines point out, the longer one remains in hollow land, the more paralyzed one becomes, trapped forever in a non-teleological circle that oddly becomes a goal in itself. The invitation to
"come in under the shadow of this red rock" has finally been accepted, and as expected, the Hollow Men see "fear in a handful of dust."

The Waste Land's use of biblical imagery and repetition recurs in "The Hollow Men," showing the chasm between positive spirituality and hollow land. No longer at the desert fringe of The Waste Land, these scarecrows stand in the heart of aridity, their own heart of darkness. Typically, the desert is the place of testing, but here it is the place of absurd asceticism, a point from which no one returns. Like Kurtz, the Hollow Men have discovered the "horror," and in so doing permanently sever themselves from the rest of the world.

Having nowhere to go, they, like their world, must end:

This is the way the world ends
This is the way the world ends
This is the way the world ends
Not with a bang but a whimper. 11

Mimicking the structure of the first stanza in this section, this last stanza slowly closes in upon itself until nothing except the dreaded end is left. The descent into hell begun so long ago in "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" has ultimately come face to face with the reality of a faithless existence. The world slowly, silently, and insignificantly atrophies—the final and most demeaning

11 Eliot, CPP, p. 59.
example of Laforgian undercutting in Eliot's entire canon.

Yet this is the proper demise. Section five begins and ends with stanzas that stress the presence of space and time. "Here we go round the prickly pear" and "This is the way the world ends" demonstrate man and milieu's stasis, using the same demonstrative words that section four used to show the "eyes are not here . . . in this valley of dying stars."

Because they have no vision and refuse to move, the Hollow Men are forced to stay until the languid finality dissolves man and milieu into nothingness. Arriving at this point and choosing to remain there, the Hollow Men encounter the most dangerous point between subsistence and obliteration. Like the three "between" stanzas which show how the Shadow paralyzes all it touches, these men fall under the Shadow and in their vain effort just to exist are sentenced to near silent annihilation. They cannot even decide to remain in hell because just as they almost resign themselves to this austere inferno, they discover that they have reached their end. In deciding to stop journeying, they realize that they have arrived, as did Kurtz, at the "horror." Thinking that asceticism would free them from suffering and ambition, the Hollow Men find that escape in itself is a goal—the worst kind of goal. They resemble Thomas à Becket who also fears "doing the right thing for the wrong reason," but unlike Becket, the Hollow Men never
really see correctly, thereby damning themselves. They, like Kurtz, cannot "live rightly"; hence they cannot die.

The language, structure, and sentiment in "The Hollow Men" suggest a world closing in upon itself, an implosion, an introspection so intense that it destroys even hell itself. Yet within the poem is found the tentative step beyond hell and into purgatory. Although many scholars divide Eliot's canon into pre-conversion and post-conversion poetry, nothing that simple or clearly defined adequately explains the poetry. Despite the spiritual debility encountered in the poem, the non-linear stasis contains averted glimpses at death's "other" kingdom, and within those furtive glances lies the possibility for significant, purposeful suffering.

Non-linearity, circularity, and a circumvented brand of teleology contribute to the unsurprising end of the poem. Indeed, the very structure within each section and interlocking each section reflects the senile creeping about found in the imagery. If the reader were to look back into the earliest poetry, even to the minor verse, he could see how far Eliot's poetry has come from "Cousin Nancy" and yet how related "The Hollow Men" is to The Waste Land, "Gerontion," and even "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock." In Eliot's poetry imagery and theme remain consistent, yet the development of that makes the poems different from one another. The hinge to all of Eliot's
poetry is his quest to confront and to be confounded by God. By the time Eliot arrives at the end of "The Hollow Men," he has finally decided to quit retracting from the "other" kingdom and to progress to still another dark.

If "The Hollow Men" shows what happens when one stops journeying, the "Ariel Poems" show how the pilgrim always begins again, often in confusion. Written between 1927 and 1930, these poems were initially Eliot's part in Faber and Faber's Christmas card trade. But they represent more—they show where Eliot begins his journey after the quiet dissolution of his hell. Not surprisingly, "Journey of the Magi," the first of the "Ariel Poems," starts where "The Hollow Men" stopped: in the desert. The world has not changed, no major transformation within the landscape has occurred. What differs, however, is Eliot's attitude—not that it has gone from hopeless to hope-filled, but that one can perceive from here on an added dimension to Eliot's vision—he has put on humility as part of his "rational" progress in acquiring faith.  

In "Journey of the Magi" an old man remembers the "hard time we had of it," recalling the sharp weather, the dead of winter, and the melting snow—images already seen

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13 Gordon, p. 125.
in "Gerontion" and The Waste Land. In this "juvescence of the year," the Magi see how the spirit lies in the midst of temporal concerns: "the silken girls bringing sherbet," "the camel men wanting their liquor and women." Much of what is found in The Waste Land is rediscovered in this recounting of the Nativity, but rather than ignore earth's pleasures, the Wise Men traverse through them:

Then we came to a tavern with vine leaves over the lintel,
Six hands at an open door dicing for pieces of silver,
And feet kicking the empty wine skins.
But there was no information, and so we continued. . . .

Despite the enticements of the world (rather like the "public van" in The Waste Land), the Magi continue on their journey. Unlike the Hollow Men who thought they had "arrived," the Wise Men realize that they must go on, yet in retrospect the spokesman of the three kings wonders what the reality of that special night was and still is for him.

"To have had the experience but missed the meaning" --this king stands in the middle of his confusion unsure of what happened to him: "were we led all that way for Birth or Death? . . . I had seen birth and death. / But had thought they were different." The circular journey of departure and return, seen at its most debilitating in "The Hollow Men," is somehow changed in this poem. Though there is still talk of "kingdoms," this poem discusses the Magi's

14 Eliot, CPP, p. 69.
discomfort in a land of "alien people." Once he has confronted mystery (which will become for Eliot the "word unheard"), everything that was once familiar and acceptable no longer suffices, leaving this Wise Man to wrestle with a guess.

Faith and hope do not come easily for the Magi or for Eliot. The mere fact that Eliot had, by this time, formally converted to Anglo-Catholicism does not mean that either his mental landscape or his poetry had become flaccid or less rigorous. His conversion only means that he openly accepts a tradition which he feels will give him some support, not a complete solution. Eliot is a religious writer only because he speaks about spiritual matters, not because he speaks about those matters "piously." The difference is important, and one he himself addresses throughout Christianity and Culture.

But as for voicing spiritual concerns, Eliot did that as early as Prufrock's fantasy about John the Baptist. The only real change is that from 1927 Eliot confronts matters more directly. He has not ceased to suffer, but for the first time he does not evade suffering; he lives with it and ever so slowly begins to be purged in it. The Wise Man's confusion is the first indication of a different approach to life. Neither existing in life's excesses, like Sweeney, nor subsisting in the absence of all pleasure, like the Hollow Men, nor even remaining neutral, like the
fishermen in "The Fire Sermon," the Magi present a new way, a different kind of betweenness--one that eventually learns to stay in the middle of, not at, extremes. Though Eliot continues to employ circular imagery, he now uses it to convey a sense of moving toward or around the "still point." Becoming gradually more positive, his journey has moved out of hell and is approaching the purgatorial mount; his non-teleological progression begins to assume an added dimension of the mystic's negative way, one rooted in purposeful becoming.

"I could wish for another death," says the Magus. Such a statement appears at first glance to be another one of those velleities familiar to the reader from "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" or "The Hollow Men." The Magus does not fully wish for another death. But this velleity is just barely over the line into purgatory; it represents the Magus' decision to live, however doubtfully, with his pain, his fears, and his loss of direction.

Just as "Journey of the Magi" contains something like "empty wine skins" which can be interpreted as both life imagery and death imagery, "A Song for Simeon" contains an inebriating ambiguity, one that intoxicates and sobers simultaneously. In some ways resembling Gerontion and the Magus, Simeon is waiting for death, incapable or at least unwilling to make the final assent. And like Gerontion, Simeon's welfare is dependent upon a woman and a
child. Standing between Roman law and Jewish prophecy, also standing between life and death, Simeon, this man of "eighty years and no tomorrow," asks for peace. Unlike the Hollow Men who evaded vision, Simeon's life requires that he can see the word unheard. Yet he does not know what to do afterward.

From the account in the gospel of St. Luke and in Eliot's poem, Simeon is an upright though limited man. While someone like Grover Smith might see Simeon as an unregenerate, Simeon is simply tired and old. Though that does not excuse him from the "saints' stair," his faith and fatigue qualify him as a purgatorial inhabitant. The Wise Men had seen the Nativity and were unsure of its significance; Simeon sees the child represented in the Temple and foresees the inevitable sorrow and glory, yet wants neither. "Having seen . . . salvation" is enough for him; but without participating in salvation, Simeon realizes he is missing something. In a way he wants relief from the rigors of the pilgrim's journey, but unlike the Hollow Men, Simeon has not averted his eyes from the promise, even though he does not desire the "ultimate vision."

Simeon represents the believer's initial response to his faith. Wanting belief on his own terms yet realizing the limitations of such desire, Simeon illustrates a

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new kind of betweenness. He has kept faith and fast, and for doing so he wants his reward: to be remembered and to be granted peace. Concerned with getting his due, his bargaining with God is limiting but human, and for this reason Simeon is endearing. Though he is an old man, he acts like a child, wanting everything but willing to give little. Oddly enough, hell dwellers like Prufrock and even the Hollow Men spend more energy moving about their world, perhaps taking even more risks, but they ultimately remain in hell while Simeon does very little except ask for favors (perhaps grace). But therein lies the simple secret: in his near stillness he is making a connection not made before in Eliot's poetry. Simeon engages God in his life; while that does not grant Simeon paradise, it assures him of purgatory, changing privation from permanent to temporary. His limited act of faith is a kind of progress without motion—a mirror image of the Hollow Men's motion without progress. It foreshadows, however dimly, Eliot's non-teleological journey toward and about the "still point" where he will learn to "care and not to care."

If "Journey of the Magi" and "A Song for Simeon" give an account of direct yet confusing encounters with the word unheard, "Animula" is a poem set in modern times where contact with the Godhead is more difficult but no less bewildering. Although expressing a child's painful growth
into the world of "desire and control," this poem's main emphasis is on progression:

Moving between the legs of tables and of chairs,
Rising or falling, grasping at kisses and toys,
Advancing boldly, sudden to take alarm,
Retreating to the corner of arm and knee. . . .16

Life as a child is taken out of its romanticized context, and while it may be disconcerting to realize that one might not always live idly, Eliot presents the challenge he himself has felt: "the heavy burden of a growing soul."

"Pray for us now and at the hour of our birth" is a petition of sorrow and necessity. But it is also an act of faith. Like Simeon, the spokesman in this poem is limited, yet he acknowledges his humanity. Realizing he cannot "fare forward or retreat," he demonstrates the feeling of the newly arrived in purgatory. Still too concerned or guilty about earthly life, he has not yet learned to "sit still" nor has he learned to accept either his humanity as something positive or Divine love as something gratuitous. Though Eliot has far to go to learn these, he is making steady progress. "Animula" shows how far he has come from "The Hollow Men" yet how much further he must travel to reach "Ash Wednesday" and Four Quartets, the apex of Eliot's purgatorial experience.

Written after "Ash Wednesday," the last of the "Ariel Poems," "Marina," is often considered one of Eliot's

16 Eliot, CPP, pp. 70-71.
most beautiful and most joyous poems. But it is imperative at the outset to distinguish Eliot's joy from the usual connotation of the word. For most, joy is seen as un-abating happiness; for Eliot, at his best, it means a re-release from death—these, though somehow connected, are not equal. Although "Marina" seems more lively than "Animula," it is not Eliot's push into paradise, but a reawakening into humanity, albeit a humanity with which Eliot has always had trouble indentifying.

Based on the recognition theme, "Marina" is, however, filled with the excitement of re-entering old familiar moments anew. Almost like the "cavernous waste shore" of "Sweeney Erect" and The Waste Land, the scene is both real and dreamlike, and all the questions about location or placing Marina's face and form re-enact what occurs as one returns to "the pain of living" from "the drug of dreams." Actually, two recognition scenes lie at the center of the poem: Hercules' awakening to discover death and Pericles' reawakening to life.17 Forced with the challenge of re-focusing and reintegrating reality to encompass a new whole, Hercules and Pericles at first have difficulty accepting the truth. Eliot purposely juxtaposes these stories to

show the human condition: man's perennial vacillating between life and death.

To complicate matters further, Eliot consistently interjects double-barreled imagery—life, meaning life or death; death, meaning death or life—tightening the non-teleological circle drawn in his post-conversion poetry. And though Eliot had used this technique throughout his canon, his employing it in the post-conversion poetry adds another and more mysterious dimension. Before, when characters moved between life and death, they oscillated between two extremes, each bringing death; now, characters venture between life and death and between death and life, making the moment of death something one does not stop at but passes through. This added dimension gives Eliot's later poetry a sense of continuation, of journey.

While many critics were quick to see Eliot's post-conversion poetry as easy or palliative, that is not so. As "Marina" points out, there exists no exuberance. The bulk of the poem contains a realization of life's finitude and a tenuous refusal to remain lost in despair. Despite Pericles' reunion with Marina, he is still incomplete. If Eliot is true to Shakespeare's play, then Pericles, after accepting Marina as his daughter, falls back to sleep, only to see a vision in which the goddess Diana tells him where to find his wife, whom he had thought dead. Once again, a woman and a child provide the pilgrim with succor, only in
this poem the woman has yet to be found. Although Pericles is momentarily ecstatic at being rejoined with his daughter, her presence also reminds him of perhaps a greater loss. The cracked and weakened ship must set sail once more, fortified by Marina's return yet in quest of still another reunion.

The driving imagery throughout "Marina" is that of return and venturing out. In a sense it demonstrates the intrusion of the past onto the present and the preparation of the past-made-present for the future. "What images return" is the core of the poem. It is this grappling with history that no longer entraps man but frees him to journey into the future—man, not with Time at his back, as in The Waste Land, but with Time on his side. If Marina can return, so can Thaisa, Pericles' wife, if he will continue making this "unknowing, half-conscious, unknown" his own. As usual, the main character of the poem is not the woman but the man (cf. "Portrait of a Lady"), but unlike the victimizing women in the early poetry, the women in the post-conversion poetry are mediators, positive examples of betweenness from whom pilgrims steady themselves to "fare forward." Marina, then, stands not as total accomplishment but as encouragement to continue journeying.

Eliot's concern throughout his life, but most specifically between 1924 and 1930, is how to deal with
suffering. Coming out of *The Waste Land*, Eliot thought abandoning desire entirely would ease his misery. Mistaken, he discovers that by taking such an extreme position he forsakes life as well. His hopeless plight in "The Hollow Men" has no way of improving, hence the gradual but inevitable disintegration of a disconnected world. Hell is ultimately destroyed when the Hollow Men refuse to move out of it, yet within it is the passageway out of hell and into purgatory. Even though they never cross over to death's "other" kingdom, the Hollow Men's recognition confirms its existence. Instead of being some inaccessible land, purgatory is really the same place as hell, "more distant than stars and nearer than the eye."

What makes hell and purgatory the same yet different is faith. By assenting, even reluctantly, rather than negating, by choosing to continue journeying rather than futilely revolving around the prickly pear, Eliot still circles, but no longer viciously. As the "Ariel Poems" demonstrate, Eliot begins to get his bearings in purgatory, and though the way is neither clear nor easy, it is significant. The confusion about the Nativity, the finite understanding at the Temple, the "heavy burden of a growing soul," and finally the limited rediscovery of that which was thought permanently lost all point to the same calling all spiritual pilgrims hear and must answer: journey.
While Eliot, like Dante and Bunyan, goes through hell and purgatory, Eliot remains in the middle realm, never reaching heaven. Though his is not a joyous vision, it is nevertheless triumphant in that he achieves faith and is willing to purge himself in the refining fire. Reaching heaven as a goal is moot for Eliot since he does not experience permanent joy. But he is given glimpses of it, and as he learns to approach the "still point," he will discover how to care and not to care—in "Ash Wednesday" and *Four Quartets* he will learn to sit still.
"ASH WEDNESDAY"

Throughout "Ash Wednesday" Eliot constantly wavers "between the profit and the loss." Although his poetry has already shown numerous characters caught "between," in "Ash Wednesday" something has changed, for the speaker in this poem knows he is moving, though he moves (or wants to move) in stillness. Such a desire is oddly antithetical to that of the Hollow Men. Where they circled frantically, mindlessly, around hollow land just to stay put, the speaker in "Ash Wednesday" begins to learn how to "sit still" in order to continue journeying. Not only does this active passivity reverse or counter the hell of insignificant suffering, it reestablishes Eliot's non-teleological progression. Where stasis in hell had become a goal in itself, Eliot now replaces that center that cannot hold with pilgrimage, but one that has no goal, no end, unless the end is "suffering" itself, a letting-happen-what-will. Being between for Eliot comes to mean allowing God's will to be done. That is what he grapples with between sections one and six in "Ash Wednesday."

Often this "letting-happen" is cyclic. It is a letting-happen again and again as man continues to learn
and re-learn what he already knows and to experience what has already happened. Part of what makes the suffering painful is the recognition of one's own destiny and intractability, the realization that one must "suffer" the same experience again and again before one breaks through to enlightenment and begins to be purged.

Published in 1930, "Ash Wednesday" is Eliot's first real examination of purgatory and presents a pilgrim's (Eliot's) vacillation between the world he had known and the world in which he now finds himself. The poem, consisting of six sections, is itself a journey between two similar but different statements ("Because," "Although I do not hope to turn again"); everything between sections one and six shows Eliot's venture from and return to his first redemptive experience. Like "The Hollow Men," "Ash Wednesday's" structure illustrates betweenness and non-linear progression, but for reasons already mentioned, this poem's sense of progression is significantly changed, making Eliot's "Ash Wednesday" goal-less yet purposeful. The mindless adherence to ritual found in "The Hollow Men" is gone, replaced by a willful and simultaneous rejection and acceptance of belief.

Things in the beginning of "Ash Wednesday" are not much different from those in "The Hollow Men." Because Ash Wednesday, the first day in Lent, relies on two kinds of turning (away from sin and toward God), it is unclear which
Eliot wishes to avoid. Hoping neither for God nor any contrary, Eliot wants only to stand still. This stillness marks a new kind of betweenness, a "dangerous moment" between perdition and progression.¹ At this point in Eliot's spiritual journey, it is still unclear whether he is actually out of danger, for throughout "Ash Wednesday" he still wavers.

The poem begins without hope, but the lack of hope is a positive turn. In Eliot's Inferno-poems, the characters hope too much and hope for "the wrong thing." Their velleities get in the way, ultimately locking them in hell; their desire for either sexual satiation or ascetic satisfaction are met but in the process lead them toward death. In "Ash Wednesday" Eliot (who becomes the speaker in both this poem and Four Quartets), knowing that hope is a dead-end or even a threat, therefore abandons hope to enter a familiar yet significantly different milieu. Unlike Dante who saw the hopelessness of hell but the hope of purgatory, Eliot sees the opposite. While Eliot's hell is hopeless, it is filled with velleities and desires, great and small. His purgatory is more or less empty of hope, yet this emptiness allows Eliot to discover faith. Because of this, Eliot's purgatory is non-teleological, directed but not toward a goal.

Eliot, therefore, "lets go" of desire:

I no longer stirve to strive towards such things
(Why should the aged eagle stretch its wings?)
Why should I mourn
The vanished hour of the usual reign?\(^2\)

And in stripping desire from himself he begins to rid himself of sensuality. Unlike Prufrock who worried about his appearance and his performance ("to force the moment to its crisis"), the speaker here does not seem concerned with power, whether sexual or temporal; rather, he accepts an impotence that comes with age, an impotence that somehow releases him from the wish to obtain obvious goals.

He frees himself not only from finite sensuality but also from wrong-headed thought. Knowing neither the "infirm glory of the positive hour" nor the "one veritable transitory power," the speaker stands somewhere between what was once felt or known and what is yet to be experienced. For now, as once before, "there is nothing again," signifying that a new cycle is beginning. This new cycle returns to previous states of mind and redeems them from the futility of Eliot's hell. Return, though painful, is the essence of purgation. Though he is starting with "nothing," meaning the insignificance of hell, Eliot is not really starting from scratch. The negation here is similar to that found in The Waste Land but is not totally the same. While negative statements in the Inferno poetry

\(^2\)Eliot, CPP, p. 60.
meant an "end," they have been transformed in faith to suggest an endlessness—a process—but one that teaches Eliot to stand still without feeling entrapped or feeling that his journey has been completed. If the earlier poetry embraced the physical and the cerebral, "Ash Wednesday" rejects both to move to a greater examination of the spiritual. But the poem expresses negation, not just the mystic's negative way, but also one which Eliot had used in his earlier poetry.

This poem begins in the negative and continues thus until the end. In a sense, this pattern has been seen before from "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" to "The Hollow Men" where people or situations were either misunderstood ("That is not what I mean at all") or avoided ("eyes I dare not meet in dreams"). Throughout his canon Eliot had presented characters in hopeless plights moving endlessly toward some immediate desire that would forever trap them. In "Ash Wednesday," however—though it, too, begins without hope—the poem does not voice hopelessness. This speaker does not venture forth only to be inevitably undermined, as does Prufrock, nor does this speaker spend all his time dodging the main issue, as do the Hollow Men. Beginning with a realization that the only way for him to move is paradoxically, the speaker negates desire and hope—a negation that eventually affirms Eliot's faith.
After divesting himself of physical and intellectual desires, Eliot wrestles with time ("contrived corridors" and "cunning passages"); now, he sees

That time is always time
And place is always and only place
And what is actual is actual only for one time
And only for one place. . . .3

After such knowledge, what freedom--no longer trapped by dilettante obligations or proletarian liaisons, the speaker finds time both to "rejoice that things are as they are" and to "renounce the blessed face and renounce the voice."

Much critical effort has been spent in trying to establish what some of the lines and images mean, but for the purpose of tracing Eliot's progression, it is more important to study the pattern of his journey from hell through purgatory.

Section one of "Ash Wednesday" ends with prayers of petition, asking for the strength not to turn back; Eliot's "prayers" show him making connections between himself and God, and subtly demonstrates Eliot's (and mankind's) inherent inclination to fall back into perdition.

Not fully out of danger, the speaker pleads, "Let these words answer / (For what is done, not to be done again) / May the judgement not be too heavy upon us." Tired of futile and hollow actions, the speaker wants to avoid further entrapments, and because these wings do nothing

3Eliot, CPP, p. 60.
except move the air around, he wants to learn something that will assist him in his purgation. In the midst of his growing impotence and the negation of all that went before is the "still point" that, like the garden beyond the window, waits to be entered. Learning to "sit still" can no longer be evaded.

Moving to this point requires a purgatorial (contrite) spirit—one that acknowledges the weakness of the individual pilgrim and the power of intercession. In order to move forward, the penitent must return to the past, not merely to "remember" what had once happened, but to be accountable for it. Mere memory does not suffice, for remembering the past does not free the penitent from bitter experience. It is only when he remembers with the intention to repent for actions that sever him from others that he is redeemed. Going back in time to rectify what is wrong differentiates hellish memory from purgatorial suffering.

Eliot's return to women illustrates this progression. His image of the Prufrockean women who taunt and enslave men has been transformed into women who now act as mediators between God and man. Identifying the Lady does not matter as much as seeing that Eliot now calls upon her for help. By returning to his past and confronting his fear of women, he has discovered that a purgatorial vision is based on com-
munity and interdependence. Though imperfect, it is more healthful and sane and less furtive. Very slowly, Eliot's sense of community enables him to sit still without desire for reward--either from women or from God.

Though there exists a need to become closer to God, nowhere does Eliot express a desire for heaven. For Eliot, it is enough to be free of hell, even if it means to be forever purged in purgatory. This makes Eliot's show purposeful but non-teleological. Because he is methodical and conscientious, Eliot is in no hurry to move out of the refining fire; in his rejoicing over the realization that he can suffer significantly, Eliot becomes the perfect purgatorial poet.

Most Christians would see purgatory as some further obstacle separating them from God, where purgatorial souls gnash their teeth in pain. According to Thomist theology, purgatorial penitents cannot pray for themselves but must wait for their duration and for the prayers of the living. Eliot's purgatory is similar but not the same. Instead of viewing purgatory as predomenately gloomy, Eliot, like Dante, stresses the beauty and nobility of suffering significantly. For Eliot, such suffering suffices, presenting him with a life unknown to him before. While one senses the suffering in Eliot's purgatory, one does not often notice God's absence or presence. This is not "rats' alley /
where the dead men lost their bones" but the desert-garden-
where, scattered and shining, the bones sing.

Their song epitomizes a new kind of betweenness in
which there exists a synthesis of polar images. Rather than
having to choose between insufficient extremes, as in the
early poetry, one rests in the stillness of middle ground:

Lady of silences
Calm and distressed
Torn and most whole
Rose of memory
Rose of forgetfulness
Exhausted and life-giving
Worried reposeful
The single Rose
Is now the Garden
Where all loves end
Terminate torment
Of love unsatisfied
The greater torment
Of love satisfied
End of the endless
Journey to no end
Conclusion of all that
Is inconclusible
Speech without word and
Word of no speech
Grace to the Mother
For the Garden
Where all love ends. 4

This garden is reminiscent of the Hyacinth garden in The
Waste Land, for that earlier garden was also a place "where
all loves end." Yet the Hyacinth garden and the Rose garden
differ in that the former leaves Marie's lover "neither
living nor dead" while the latter leaves Eliot in a cycle
of beginning and ending but ending something that is

4Eliot, CPP, p. 62.
"iconclusible." Though each shows a kind of "wavering," one takes life away; the other restores it. The garden in "Ash Wednesday" is an enigmatic spot where the penitent learns something of significant suffering. Though inexplicable, the experience in this garden is understandable, for it serves as a guide or example of what it means to "care and not to care . . . to sit still." And in that sense, it foreshadows the garden experiences and the abstract discussion of the "still point" in Four Quartets.

Also within this imagery is Eliot's concept of "journey to no end." Unlike the Hollow Men who found their goal in aimlessness, the speaker in "Ash Wednesday" finds no conclusion in conclusion (death). This garden, either Eden or Gethsemane (or both), is where "all love(s) end(s)." The single rose becoming the garden exemplifies the unity in multiplicity found in this moment of beautiful suffering when man forgets and remembers his twofold nature. Both memory and forgetfulness must be present so man may walk between them, recalling in himself what can be saved while dismissing those things that prevent him from journeying. Yet this kind of betweenness containing affirmation and negation is only the vehicle for further journeying. It is not an end in itself.

It would be simplistic to think that negating one's way through purgatory will accomplish anything. The most difficult part of real purgation is learning to quit desiring
the desire not to desire; though it is relatively easy to curb the desire for physical pleasures or even intellectual acuity, it is arduous to use negation without having it become a goal in itself. A true penitent must learn "to care and not to care," to sit still yet move in the journey without wanting to attain a goal. Becket had to understand that he could not "care" about martyrdom and the inevitable glory on earth because of it. His only concern had to be the willingness to let God's will be done to him. Nothing else mattered, but that "the wheel may turn and still / Be forever still." At the core of such faith is the waiting to be filled with God's grace. Often it is too easy to perform the right deed for the wrong reason, as was the case with the Hollow Men who denied what they should have affirmed and who glutted themselves with that which gave no nourishment. Their plight was a hollow not empty existence, leaving them to their futile dance about the prickly pear.

The speaker in "Ash Wednesday," however, reverses their madness. Divesting himself of physical prowess and intellectual puissance, the speaker is now ready to enter his dark night. Section three shows the speaker turning and counter-turning in the darkness that contains hope and despair. His original hope not to turn again is for nought. Here, two stairs are climbed: one ugly, the other beautiful; one immediate, the other distant; both offering their
own distractions. As the speaker makes the first turn of the stair, he himself "turns" to watch the struggling he has just left, and it is unclear whether he is turning away from the devil or turning back to him, the ambiguity sensed in the beginning of section one reappearing here on the stair. It has been suggested that "the same shape" twisting below is part of the speaker himself, either a remnant of some of the sin fallen from him or a remembrance of his struggle. In his confrontation of this struggle this speaker is doing more than simply "remembering" the past. He is redeeming it through his suffering. While Gerontion failed to wrestle with his doubts, this speaker challenges himself to stand between the looking back and moving forward with equal disinterest. If he spends too much time looking back, he will not progress, but if he concerns himself with the push forward, he will ultimately defeat his own purpose and go nowhere. He must learn to wait between "hope" and "despair."

Having looked back, he may now "turn" a second time on the second stair, leaving that particular struggle twisting and turning behind him. As noted throughout Eliot's canon, man and milieu take on each other's attributes. On this second turn the speaker sees neither what is left behind nor what is ahead but only darkness, it, too, depicted as old, helpless, and "beyond repair." Given the option
of moving or staying "in the dark," the speaker pushes out of this despair to encounter hope.

If the "despair" found on the second stair in unappealing, the "home" discovered on the third stair is beguiling. This scene is similar to the Magnus Martyr scene in "The Fire Sermon" where in the middle of hell lies a beautiful but misleading distraction. Like the pleasant whining of the mandolin, the flute in this poem is pleasantly dangerous, inviting the speaker into a sensual world: "slotted window / bellied like the fig's fruit," and "blown hair . . . brown hair over the mouth blown." Though as lovely as the "Lady of silences," this Dionysian figure and accompanying imagery offer the speaker the wrong thing: while the temptation of this third stair bids the speaker to rest, he knows he must continue. Resting in hope would be "hope for the wrong thing," for it would see hope as a goal in itself—and that would mean spiritual death.

Eliot recycles the Prufrockean world of brown hair and "music from a farther room," but does not "turn back and descend the stair." Instead, he fares forward and transcends the temptation, giving this false hope in a distant illusion no chance to become a new despair. Through his new found humility, the speaker realizes he is saved because of his willingness to be emptied of petty desires so as to be filled with "the word." The last three lines of this section are borrowed from a Catholic Mass where they
are spoken immediately before receiving Communion ("Lord, I am not worthy to receive you, but speak the word and I shall be healed"). While obviously noting mankind's fallen state, these lines also show God's plenitude and mercy. God does not forget man even if man does not remember his special relationship with God. But just as God has waited for man to turn from sin, man must wait to be reunited with God. That is the significance of the "word" and or purgatory. While Christianity teaches believers that they will one day be in God's presence, Eliot focusses more on the waiting than on the reunion, more on the purgation than on the parole, thus stressing what lies between hope and despair.

After experiencing the temptations on the stair, the speaker re-encounters the Lady who walks "between the violet and the violet." Sections four through six begin a recycling of what occurred in the first three sections; it is in these sections that the greatest number of references to "between" is found, giving the post-conversion poetry its first full taste of the new kind of betweenness adumbrated but not completely depicted in the "Ariel Poems." It is a preparatory place to be, where the Lady, a recycling of Prufrockean women, exemplifies what it means to "care and not to care" in purgatory. Juxtaposed to the Dionysian figure who invites complacency, the Lady does not offer escape from the world but engagement in the world.
Rather than distract the speaker from his journey, the Lady, acting as his mediator, encourages his progression by showing how to live "between":

Going in white and blue, in Mary's colour,
Talking of trivial things,
In ignorance and knowledge of eternal delour
Who moved among the others as they walked,
Who then made strong the fountains and made fresh the springs.⁵

Imitating Mary, who herself is the Mediatrix between God and man, this lady demonstrates how she, too, can mediate between God and the speaker. Like the Prufrockean women, this Lady talks of trivial things, yet she, unlike her predecessors, acts and does not act in accordance with a higher will. In her simplicity she shows Eliot, as penitent, that man need not put himself in the desert like the Hollow Men to expect some revelation. The proper place for man is with other people: to be "among the others as they walked," "talking of trivial things." Man must belong to a community of sufferers, that is, to a community who lets it be done unto them. It is a lesson man has first learned from Mary and then re Learns from Christ.

The austerity of the Hollow Men is made softer, more livable. Because of the Lady, the dry rocks are made cool and the parched earth tastes the freshness of the springs. Unlike "What the Thunder Said" and "The Hollow Men," examples of futile asceticism, section four of "Ash Wednesday" not only shows how to live "between" hope and despair, but

⁵Eliot, CPP, p. 64.
also sets the stage for *Four Quartets* in which the desert, the garden, and the city coalesce into a unified locus of significant suffering.

In this particular desert-garden one finds a present tense charged with this purgatorial significance: "Here are the years that walk between, bearing / Away the fiddles and the flutes, restoring / One who moves between sleep and waking. . . ." As in "The Hollow Men," time and place are marked by demonstrative adverbs like "here," focussing the reader's attention on the present. These "years between" cleanse themselves of the beautiful deceptions of another life or time so one may journey past entrapments. All this occurs "between sleep and waking"; in "The Hollow Men" "death's dream kingdom" was one of sterility, or hellish dissolution. Here in "Ash Wednesday" the pilgrim has escaped death but has not yet "awakened" into new life. He is between.

Within this new present lies some kind of restoration and reintegration: connection and revaluation. This is far from the vengeance in "Gerontion," where the new year is a tiger springing, or from the cruelty of *The Waste Land* where April breeds lilacs out of the dead land. Replacing vengeance and cruelty is significant suffering: "The new years walk, restoring / Through a bright cloud of tears, the years, restoring / With a new verse the ancient rhyme." Within this section many images of water as a
rejuvenating element are used, counteracting the aridity found in the earlier poetry but also giving new significance to the images of drowning in "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" and The Waste Land. God or his mediatrix and man are connected in the sorrow and in the redemption out of love. "The new verse" and ancient rhyme" are but one example of Eliot's altered perception of memory. No longer seen as a "cunning passage," memory is not something to disable man from "living in the present," but something which makes the present more livable. It is a way of recovering old experience to give it new meaning. Even as early as "Prufrock" and "Portrait of a Lady" one finds Eliot's characters constantly circling back to revisit old scenes, either in memory or by a physical return, trying to redeem themselves or redeem a situation. But Prufrock and the young man in "Portrait" are desperate, hoping wildly to transcend the self they loathe. The tone and temper in "Ash Wednesday" are entirely different; though Eliot is once again symbolically revisiting old scenes and old "situations," a stillness pervades his action. He simply "suffers" those things to happen again. Here is that "eternal patience / To which all must consent that it may be willed / And which all must suffer that they may will it,/ That the pattern may subsist" (Murder in the Cathedral, CPP, p. 182). The Hollow Men disconnected themselves entirely from past and future, trapping themselves in a time
warp of their own making. Here in "Ash Wednesday" the pilgrim learns to take the old and "make it new," thereby "redeeming the time." By putting a new verse to the ancient rhyme, that is, by being accountable for past actions in the present, the penitent restores his time. He is redeemed.

This redemption is asked for as the trappings of the world (the "jeweled unicorns drawing the gilded hearse") are taken away. In Christian art the unicorn is associated with feminine purity, often symbolizing the Annunciation or Incarnation, but here the unicorn is "jeweled," jaded with those things that are followed only by death (hearse). Because "these are the years between," the pilgrim still "wavers" between hope and despair. This still spot is, of course, silent; the "silent sister" stands "between the yews" (Christ's suffering, eternal life) and "behind the garden god," whose flute she has stilled. All this prefigures the "still point" in *Four Quartets* which is the ultimate between, the most significant purgatorial experience.

Yet in this moment one encounters the beauty of Eliot's purgatory:

But the fountain sprang up and the bird sang down
Redeem the time, redeem the dream
The token of the word unheard, unspoken

Till the wind shake a thousand whispers from the yew
And after this our exile. 6

The conclusion to section four depicts a moment "between." As the fountain surges up, the bird's song descends, locking the symbols of baptism and pentecost together, creating a "token of the word unheard, unspoken." But this moment is temporary. Even in "Gerontion" the token of redemption was present, but because Gerontion would neither listen nor "let it be done unto him, he remained in hell. The only "letting-happen" he could imagine was apocalyptic. But the pilgrim in "Ash Wednesday" now encounters "a thousand whispers from the yew," the rustlings that prevent total silence, total union. Fortified and instructed by the silence of the Lady, the pilgrim can now face another dimension of purgatory, symbolized by these whispers, an exile of sorts, where the beauty of the Lady is replaced by the anguish over the "word." Total silence is never achieved in Eliot's canon, for even in "Littel Gidding" part five there are children in the apple tree who are "half-heard" in the stillness, very slight distractions that keep the pilgrim in the refining fire.

Like section three, section five centers on the pain of purgation, counteracting the near peace found in sections two and four. By this time, it should be clear that the pilgrim "wavers" throughout the poem, always in

6 Eliot, CPP, p. 64.
danger of hoping or despairing. Though it may seem odd that the poem moves from one extreme to the other, this circular pattern has been seen before throughout Eliot's earlier poetry (for instance, in Prufrock's vacillation from remembering unsuccessful relationships with women to speculating about the dismal future). To escape suffering Eliot's characters swung from one extreme (sex) to the other (ascenticism), and in so doing suffered absurdly. Here in "Ash Wednesday" Eliot circles from despair to hope, not to escape suffering, but to find the proper point between so he may learn to suffer significantly. As Thomas á Becket states in *Murder in the Cathedral*:

> You know and do not know, what it is to act or suffer.  
> You know and do not know, that acting is suffering,  
> And suffering action. Neither does the actor suffer  
> Nor the patient act. But both are fixed  
> In an eternal action, an eternal patience  
> To which all must consent that it may be willed  
> And which all must suffer that they may will it,  
> That the pattern may subsist, that the wheel may turn and still  
> Be forever still. ⁷

This wavering is an attempt to steady oneself to encounter the "word unheard," the "still point."

Section five may be divided into two parts: the first involving the "word," the second involving those people who comprise part of the "unstilled world." The first stanza paradoxically clarifies the pilgrim's plights whose challenge

it is to find some non-teleological stillness in a confusing world:

If the lost word is lost, if the spent word is spent
If the unheard, unspoken
Word is unspoken, unheard;
Still 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 center of the silent Word.

Within the dizzying play on words lies the ineffable reality of stillness-in-motion and motion-in-stillness, a presence which will remain in Eliot's later poetry. At the center of this idea is the Word, the "infant" who cannot speak yet who embodies everything that words can only approximate, the stillness that sets everything in motion and that stills all commotion. This image is received, of course, from "Gerontion," where it suggested absurdity, depravity, and terror. But here in "Ash Wednesday" the "word without a word" has been the gravitational force that allows all entities to continue orbiting without fear of being lost in the chaos of darkness. As Eliot circles back on his own poetry, his own experience, he redeems it in the whirling words, and the whirling of the world, here put forth.

To reach the "still point" or, perhaps more accurately, to be a part of the particular galaxy that has the

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8 Eliot, CPP, p. 65.
"still point" at its center requires a special kind of silence, one that is filled with the Word. Again, the contrast between the Hollow Men and the penitent in "Ash Wednesday" illustrates the difference. Where the former move frantically to stand still, the latter moves in the stillness. In section five the fear remains that the Word cannot be found because "there is not enough silence." In a sense, the penitent lacks enough faith that the Word will be found; rather than quieting himself, he falls back into desiring the right thing for the wrong reason and because of this he does lose the Word. He has not yet cleansed himself of selfishness. Though the penitent is certainly on his way, he has not arrived at the "still point." His purgation is imperfect.

Though the pilgrim has come so far, he still needs his mediator to progress. When left alone, he concerns himself too much with failing, hence fails. The "rejoicing" he did in part one has taken the pilgrim this far, but now it is time to amend his rejoicing for there is "no time to rejoice for those who walk among noise and deny the voice." What had been rejected earlier must now be accepted because he is ready to reclaim it. All this is part of his reassimilation of the world. If he remains in the desert, he risks becoming like the Hollow Men. His return into the world is imperative, for that is really where he will be tested and further purged. Having learned as
much as he can in this desert-garden, the pilgrim slowly returns to the world in the remaining part of section five and all of section six and will continue his journey throughout Four Quartets.

Unsure that he can go it alone, the penitent calls upon the "veiled sister" to pray for those in darkness. Among those who choose and oppose help, who are "torn on the horn between season and season, time / and time between / Hour and hour, word and word, power and power," he knows he still must "wait in darkness." Even amid frantic anguish, the penitent somehow knows that he must learn to wait. He has come to another point between. Incapable of either going away or praying, the penitent is seemingly stuck. Yet his plight differs from Gerontion's or those in The Waste Land, for this pilgrim has the faith to continue—even if that means waiting in "ignorance and knowledge."

Brought to the point of terror, he cannot fully "surrender" himself to a higher will, his private moments preventing him from flinging himself into the dark without worry. All the critics who denounced "Ash Wednesday" for being a simpering piece of religiosity, have failed to examine the intense humanity within it. Like the "Ariel Poems," "Ash Wednesday" is much sturdier in its confession of weakness than is a poem of brutish strength like "Sweeney

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Erect." The penitent, like Simeon, does not wish "the ultimate vision." Too strong to renounce the Word in a world of unbelievers yet too weak to go any further, this pilgrim represents humanity at large in that he lacks something. In this sense, he illustrates the purgatorial betweenness because he "affirms before the world and denies between the rocks." Though he has acquired faith, it is weak. If this faith is to survive, it must do so without love or hope; it must stand alone and without desire for some reward.

Such a challenge is difficult, but the penitant's consolation is that he is not alone. Because of the Lady, the veiled sister, and certainly the Word itself, the red rocks of The Waste Land have been transformed to blue; the barren earth has been watered by springs and "a bright cloud of tears." Yet despite the alteration in color (from physical to spiritual, from masculine to feminine), suffering still exists. As the change in color suggests, the environment and the situation do not change, but the response to them does. Hell and purgatory are the same place except for faith. The "withered apple-seed," described by many critics as the rejection of Original Sin, might also be interpreted as the reminder of man's human condition: not just his fall from innocence but his call to redemption. If the rocks can be transformed from Adam-red to Mary-blue, then the "withered apple-seed" might also
be seen as something more than a symbol of Adam's sin but also as the seed of rebirth in Christ, the new Adam's salvation. The penitent, like all men, stands between the two Adams, waiting.

Perhaps more important than finding the correct interpretation of the spitting gesture is to notice that here again Eliot is circling back to earlier poems and earlier experiences, redeeming and reclaiming. Prufrock wanted to, but could not, "spit out all the butt ends, and in The Waste Land Eliot finds himself in a "dead mountain mouth of carious teeth that cannot spit." Eliot cannot "forget," as he would like to do in part one, but neither is he trapped in mere painful memory, like Tiresias. He can give the old experience a new meaning, suffering that experience to return and haunt him, but thereby redeeming the experience and himself as Prufrock and Tiresias could not.

Within the waiting certain turns and non-turns occur, often confusing the pilgrim so that the only certainty he has is that of his betweenness and his suffering. "Although" he hopes not to turn, a change from part one's strong

10 Traditionally, the apple is associated with evil, but in Renaissance art the apple, either in Christ's or Mary's hands, is seen as the fruit of salvation. See George Ferguson, Signs and Symbols in Christian Art (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1976), pp. 27-28.
determinism ("Because"), he knows from his trials in purgatory that he cannot be sure of his actions. The switch from "because" to "although" signifies more than Eliot's fidelity to Cavalcanti's "Perch'io non spero di tornar giammai," which can be interpreted either as "because" or "although"; it also marks a movement within Eliot's own non-teleological progression in which he slowly learns what it means to "care and not to care."

Even though the waiting is difficult, even though he is destined to fail because of his humanity, the pilgrim has regained something. Unlike Phlebas, who forgot "the profit and the loss," this penitent lives "between" those extremes and does not drown. Unlike the Hollow Men, who wandered in death's "dream kingdom" in hope of avoiding reality, this penitent stands in "this brief transit where the dreams cross," "between birth and dying." He redeems not only what the Hollow Men forfeited but also what Madame Sosostris warned of in "The Burial of the Dead," all because he is willing to keep his eyes open. Furtive glances and surreptitious encounters have been abandoned in favor of seeing directly and living between birth and death, which is also a way of living between dying and birth, the only two certainties man has.

This knowledge brings the penitent to the shore of

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his experience, as it has Prufrock, Gerontion, and the narrator of The Waste Land, but this is the first pilgrim not to be paralyzed either by futility or faithless madness. Though this penitent knows that he faces the temptation of discussing with himself the seriousness of his position ("[Bless me father] though I do not wish to wish these things"), he is given the promise of "unbroken wings."
The aged eagle has been healed so he may continue journeying:

And the lost heart stiffens and rejoices
In the lost lilac and the lost sea voices
And the weak spirit quickens to rebel
For the golden-rod and the lost sea smell
Quickens to recover
The cry to quail and the whirling plover
And the blind eye creates
The empty forms between the ivory gates
And smell renews the salt savour of the sandy earth.12

Everything is recovered; all that Gerontion lost is found. What the Hollow Men by their asceticism tried desperately to keep form seeing, Eliot can now Let-happen, must now "suffer," but quietly, in faith.

Even the "blind eye," perhaps Tiresias', "creates / The empty forms between the ivory gates." Although most critics interpret this as part of some illusion, it is just as feasible to see this as part of the recovery process, "the hope only of empty men." The imagery of "unbroken wings," restoration, and creation, in addition to that of

12Eliot, CPP, p. 66.
springs, fountains, and gates, is neither totally positive nor negative, making it more purgatorial than anything else. Though the penitent has not been granted "the ultimate vision," he has gotten back his sight, smell, hearing, taste, and touch—his return to earthly life, now fortified with spiritual faith, is neither a gain nor loss, but both. Indeed, it is "the time of tension."

What the penitent has experienced throughout the poem has placed him "between dying and birth," not only reversing the certainties of "birth and dying" just thirteen lines earlier, but also illustrating the significance of Ash Wednesday, the beginning of Lent in which believers are both reminded of their mortality and freed in the promise of eternal life.

In this spot between distraction ("voices shaken from the yew-tree") and personal response ("Let the other yew be shaken and reply"), the penitent again petitions his mediatrix to "teach us to care and not to care / Teach us to sit still." So much has occurred since the first mention of that prayer, yet it has been the first attempt to move in stillness without the desire for reward. The pilgrim prays "not to be separated" though he had to be scattered first before he could be restored, and now that he has been put together he is ready to "fare forward," risking entrance into the same world which tore him apart with sensual and ascetic velleities. His return to the world in Four
Quartets does not signify Eliot's attainment of heaven but the fulfillment of the pilgrim's mission to journey. For Eliot, unlike Dante or John Bunyan, that journey stops in the stillness of purgatory where he will "wait without hope." The spirit of the river, spirit of the sea will be seen again in "The Dry Salvages" where "there is no end, but addition." Now that the penitent has added faith to flesh, he is strong enough to "apprehend the point of intersection": to stand between.
CHAPTER VII

FOUR QUARTETS

Four Quartets, Eliot's last poetic achievement, deals with the same concerns found in the early poetry but on a different level of consciousness; in a sense, the canon itself has been a movement in stillness, a progression in suffering in which the spiritual pilgrim learns "to care and not to care." What the pilgrim has learned from the previous poetry brings him to the purgatorial mount in Four Quartets where he is allowed glimpses of the "still point." While many critics, including Louis Martz, Stephen Spender, and Nancy Hargrove, see Four Quartets as a paradisal experience, the truth is that Eliot, as the poem's narrator-character, still suffers, still struggles between hope and despair, still speaks of journeying—all of which belong to a purgatorial, not paradisal, experience. While heaven connotes attainment, permanent union, Eliot speaks of progressing without goal, without reward. Four Quartets is, then, Eliot's most successful discussion of a significant present based on perfected purgation, a fitting culmination to his poetry that has from the very beginning emphasized a non-linear, often circular, certainly non-teleological pilgrimage to faith.

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Although thirteen years elapsed between the publication of "Ash Wednesday" and Four Quartets, the concerns remain the same: time, suffering, and significance. Taken as a whole, Four Quartets picks up where "Ash Wednesday" left off, stressing the need to live in the present, the need to wait without hope, the need to carry on one's life in faith. Despite its length (double that of The Waste Land), Four Quartets does not "move" as quickly as does most of the pre-conversion poetry; it discusses movement more than it actually ventures into a landscape or frame of mind. This is the kind of poetry Eliot admired of Dante; because it is more abstract, more philosophical, Four Quartets dwells on what it means to move in stillness, and oddly enough, becomes the most "human" poetry in Eliot's canon.

It is a poem about "some infinitely gentle, infinitely suffering thing." Without the satire or the distance of the early poetry, Four Quartets pursues the question of time which had appeared as early as "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," but to a different end. While the early poetry saw time, and people in time, as fixed objects one had to combat, Four Quartets examines the challenge time offers to those who are "caught in a form of limitation / Between unbeing and being." The change in attitude reflects the move from satire to sincerity. Rather than ridicule those who are, by the nature of satire,
disconnected from the character-narrator, this poem focusses on those needs felt by all people, especially the need for significance.

Such an examination begins and ends with a discussion of time. "Burnt Norton," the first quartet, begins the near static introspection of time, suffering, and significance, laying the groundwork for the five-section structure each quartet will employ, seen before in The Waste Land and "The Hollow Men." Published in 1935, "Burnt Norton" was written five years before the other three quartets, which Eliot composed between 1940 and 1942.¹ Yet it contains the same journey into man's mortality as the poems preceding and following it. Here, Eliot, as pilgrim, confronts the elusiveness of time. As discerned from the two epigraphs, both from Heraclitus ("Although there is but one centre, most people live in centers of their own" and "The way up is the way down"), time is seen in its unity and multiplicity. The paramount question for Eliot is still how to hold onto it; that was Prufrock's dilemma. In his attempt to fantasize about the past or to speculate about a dismal future, Prufrock lost his present, hence lost time itself. After discovering that time is not something to capture but something to live in and through, Eliot focusses on the present: "What might have been and what

has been / Point to one end, which is always present." Unlike the Hollow Men whose present is completely severed from past and future, this present relies on what has happened and what will happen in order to "redeem the time."

Going back into the garden, "Burnt Norton" recalls and actually revisits that experience at the beginning of "The Burial of the Dead," where Marie's lover stares into "the heart of light, the silence." It is almost as if Marie and her lover, and the many similar couples in Eliot's earlier poetry, seem to be "the guests" in this section of "Burnt Norton," as reflections in the pool. The memory of The Waste Land experience reminds the reader of the absurd suffering endured earlier, but does not last long. A cloud, perhaps the "bright cloud of tears" in "Ash Wednesday," passes, leaving the pool "empty." Not only do these "guests" suggest the simultaneity of past and present, but in so doing they demonstrate that hell and purgatory are the same place with but one difference: faith. Showing the negative past with a more positive present does not stress the differences as much as it emphasizes the similarities. Eliot's return to previous images gives the reader a fuller appreciation of the poetry's non-linear progression. This moment in the rose-garden cannot last, for "humankind cannot bear very much reality," but there is a stillness, anticipated even in "Gerontion," which comes into sight and lies at the center of the Four Quartets.
That center is, of course, the "still point."

Despite its beauty and significance, it is firmly rooted in human limitation: "Garlic and sapphires in the mud / Clot the bedded axle tree." The first real look at the "still point" does not dazzle but perplexes. Perhaps the "bedded axle tree" is the manger and the cross, as Elizabeth Drew suggests. And certainly Eliot's more explicit discussion of the "still point" does suggest the Incarnation, or, more generally, an experience which is of this world and yet somehow transcendent—without, however, being ultimate.

The "still point" stands in this world though it is not of this world, something one may reach but never grasp:

At the still point of the turning world. Neither flesh nor fleshless; Neither from nor towards; at the still point, there the dance is, But neither arrest nor movement. And do not call it fixity, Where past and future are gathered. Neither movement from not towards, Neither ascent nor decline. Except for the point, the still point, There would be no dance, and there is only the dance. I can only say, there we have been: but I cannot say where, And I cannot say how long, for that is to place it in time.

The dance, as Eliot indicates earlier, includes "the dance along the artery," which is "figured in the drift of stars."

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3 Eliot, CPP, p. 119.
It is a "trilling wire in the blood" that "reconciles forgotten wars." This is the only philosophical examination of the "still point" in *Four Quartets*; other more oblique references to it will follow, yet rather than define it, they will mention the kind of betweenness the "still point" exemplifies.

Yet to understand its effect upon Eliot's poetry is more important than trying to encapsulate the essence of the "still point" in words. Part of its power comes from its ineffable nature—it is something to be experienced rather than discussed, for discussing it robs the "still point" of its power. Many critics see it as a mystical moment of union.  

Certainly, from what can be seen, the "still point" is something which can be spiritually sensed but never permanently attained. Though it may be perfect, man's apperception of it is not, while it may be a release from "action and suffering," man is not freed, though he can continue to purge himself.

What becomes clearer, however, is Eliot's conviction that man is "between" permanent union and permanent loss. In the following passage, it appears at first that the "still point" is an ultimate—the ultimate recovery and reclaiming of the past, a completion and a resolution. But

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the last four lines explicitly reject it as paradisal, and, along with a wealth of other passages in *Four Quartets*, mark it as purgatorial:

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. . . a new world
And the old made explicit, understood
In the completion of its partial ecstasy,
The resolution of its partial horror.
Yet the enchainment of past and future
Woven in the weakness of the changing body,
Protects mankind from heaven and damnation
Which flesh cannot endure.  
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Insofar as anything is ultimate or final here, it is only an ultimate or final process, which may be as good a definition as any of the purgatorial experience. Part of man's limitation stems from his self-consciousness, that is, his lack of true awareness. When a man keeps count of himself on the dance floor, he interrupts his own sense of movement and the dance is broken. But when he knows how to dance, he participates in something in and other than himself ("East Coker"); by examining the parts of reality, man loses touch with reality. This was Prufrock's problem. While his kind of betweenness leads only to frustration and absurdity, the kind of betweenness shown in the post-conversion poetry places the spiritual pilgrim in the middle of an indivisible reality that has no beginning or end, but only the journey.

Though the journey, now made in faith, is charged with significance, it is not joyful. As in "Ash Wednesday,"

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the pilgrim here wavers between "hope and despair." Because the pilgrim is "between," sometimes it is difficult for him to keep his balance. It is too easy to be "distracted from distraction by distraction," leaving him confused. Yet in this darkness, he must "descend lower."

"This is the one way, and the other / Is the same"—for the way up is the way down—both pointing again, as always to the journey. One cannot help but notice the juxtaposed imagery of light and dark, but it is part of the journey; neither light nor dark is good or bad in itself. Both contribute to an increasing awareness of the world in which the pilgrim moves. Shadow and light have been present as early as "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," flinging images upon the screen to be previewed and reviewed in an ever developing pattern of time.

At the center of time is the "pattern" of movement and stasis. In section five of "Burnt Norton" Eliot presents two different yet concomitant views of time—the first a linear time and linear motion; the second, a movement in place, like the dance:

Words move, music moves
Only in time; but that which is only living
Can only die. Words after speech, reach
Into the silence. Only by the form, the pattern,
Can words or music reach
The stillness, as a Chinese jar still
Moves perpetually in its stillness.6

6 Eliot, CPP, p. 121.
The "Chinese jar" seems to have a kind of negative capability, possessing perpetual existence by not moving, while the "heard" music or words, those things in action, eventually die. It is too easy to say that the "Chinese jar" in its stillness is superior to the dynamic sounds of music or speech. Despite man's desire to be "still," he is more like sound--born to die. Yet he is not only like sound, for he, too, knows something of stillness. Though men, like words, "strain, / Crack, and sometimes break, under the burden, / Under the tension, slip, slide, perish, / Decay with imprecision, will not stay in place," man can, in his imperfection, still move to the stillness. Just as there can be a positive stillness ("still point"), there can be positive movement (purgatorial journey):

Not the stillness of the violin, while the note lasts, Not that only, but the co-existence, Or say that the end precedes the beginning, And the end and the beginning were always there Before the beginning and after the end.

In short:

The detail of the pattern is movement, As in the figure of the ten stairs.\(^7\)

The pattern appears to be that holding-together of past and present, of "Prufrock" and "Ash Wednesday." The stairs which Prufrock descended in fear and those which the "Ash Wednesday" penitent climbs in patience both indicate movement which provides the "detail of the pattern." It is the

\(^7\) Eliot, CPP, pp. 121-22.
seeing-all-together that "redeems the time." And this seeing-all-together, achieved through a purgatorial reliving of experience, is the movement which creates the pattern.

Many critics see the "still point" and Eliot's discussion of Love as the goal which Eliot ultimately attains at the end of "Little Gidding." Something is amiss in such an interpretation. It is more true to the poetry (and to Eliot's life) to say that the "still point" and Love are the vehicles to a perfected purgation, for they are what give Eliot as spiritual pilgrim the strength to escape hell. His is a remarkable progression, one that "redeems the time" and returns him back to earth where he learns to live and suffer significantly. Though not heaven, his return to what had been lost in absurdity revives him so he may face the "waste sad time / Stretching before and after" without fear of hope or despair, allowing him to live in and for the present.

"Burnt Norton" is the foundation of the entire *Four Quartets*, the other three augmenting without changing the themes already established in the first quartet. Though written five years after "Burnt Norton," "East Coker" begins where its predecessor ended, talking about time. "Stretching before and after" is the beginning and the end, com-

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plete with the dark and light, life and death imagery characteristic throughout Eliot's poetry. If "Burnt Norton" contained the rose-garden, "East Coker" combines rustic and urban imagery, slowly adding to the complete purgatorial landscape. Like the pilgrim, the landscape undergoes continuous changes: "Old stone to new building, old timber to new fires, / Old fires to ashes, and ashes to the earth / Which is already flesh, fur and faeces, / Bone of man and beast, cornstalk and leaf." Man, though limited in himself, is part of an endless cycle that does not move to a goal but moves nonetheless.

If in "Burnt Norton" the reader had been given a philosophical examination of the "still point," in "East Coker" he sees how it is manifested in the world. The rural dance in section one shows a circular progression much different from the "whirl of fractured atoms" in "Gerontion" or the macabre stroll around the prickly pear in "The Hollow Men." In "East Coker" the dance, associated with fertility and the life cycle's continuation, is both freeing and binding. Though it signifies both physical and cosmic marriage (man and woman, mankind and God), it also depicts man's limitations: "Lifting heavy feet in clumsy shoes, / Earth feet, loam feet ... Feet rising and falling. / Eating and drinking. Dung and death." Standing in a circle, man might draw closer to the "still point" without ever becoming one with it. In many ways this vignette
echoes Sweeney's account of life as "Birth, and copulation, and death. That's all." 9 But Sweeney is clearly in hell. The dancers occupy a different realm—not paradisal certainly, but somewhere between heaven and hell.

Life goes beyond man's daily dying, for "Dawn points, and another day / Prepares for heat and silence." All this occurs in the beginning which really has no end. "East Coker" illustrates the circular progression (and the kind of suffering) the pilgrim endures. Simeon's prayer for peace and release finds an uneasy answer in the second section of this poem:

In the middle, not only in the middle of the way
But all the way, in a dark wood, in a bramble,
On the edge of a grimpen, where is no secure foothold,
And menaced by monsters, fancy lights,
Risking enchantment. Do not let me hear
Of the wisdom of old men, but rather of their folly,
Their fear of fear and frenzy, their fear of possession,
Of belonging to another, or to others, or to God.
The only wisdom we can hope to acquire
Is the wisdom of humility: humility is endless. 10

Here the nature of "the pattern" becomes explicit: "the pattern is new in every moment / And every moment is a new and shocking / Valuation of all we have been."

Section three begins in the dark, similar to that experienced in "Ash Wednesday," in which the penitent is tested to see whether he is between hope and despair. Juxtaposed to the circular dance imagery in section one is

9 Eliot, CPP, p. 80.
the journey imagery of the underground train, both depicting non-teleological progression:

... as, when an underground train in the tube, stops too long between stations
And the conversation rises and slowly fades into silence
And you see behind every face the mental emptiness deepen
Leaving only the growing terror of nothing to think about,
Or, when under ether, the mind is conscious but conscious of nothing--11

The same terror had been felt in "A Game of Chess" when the man never answered his wife, leaving her with "nothing."
In "East Coker," as in "Ash Wednesday," the horror of silence that heretofore meant hell has been transformed to denote waiting, preparation, purgation--the difference between hollowness and emptiness, absurdity and significance.

In Four Quartets waiting is redeemed:

I said to my soul, be still, and wait without hope
For hope would be hope for the wrong thing; wait without love
For love would be love for the wrong thing; there is yet faith
But the faith and the love and the hope are all in the waiting.
Wait without thought, for you are not ready for thought:
So the darkness shall be the light, and the stillness the dancing.12

Waiting without hope places the penitent between "the agony of death and birth." Section three ends with the same philosophical paradoxes found in "Ash Wednesday"

11Eliot, CPP, p. 126.
12Eliot, CPP, pp. 126-27.
and "Burnt Norton." Eliot's "way" is one that uses negation in order to distinguish journey from goal; and associated with goal are such terms as knowledge and ecstasy, which are no part of the way:

To arrive where you are, to get from where you are not, You must go by a way wherein there is no ecstasy. In order to arrive at what you do not know You must go by a way which is the way of ignorance. In order to possess what you do not possess You must go by a way of dispossession. In order to arrive at what you are not You must go through the way in which you are not. 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.13

Eliot's use of statement-counterstatement circles around the main theme of journey rather than arrival, juxtaposing stasis ("to arrive where you are") with movement ("you must go by a way"). Such tension reflects the "still point of the turning world," for the pilgrim must learn to move in the stillness, to "sit still" yet progress.

Purgatorial suffering epitomizes the enigma of non-teleological progression. Section four explicitly discusses suffering in terms of purgation while also laying the foundation for "Little Gidding," section five. As the fever chart rises, the patient falls more deeply into his illness, the way of dispossession and of no ecstasy. His inner fire cleanses him of his disease. Confined to earth ("our hospital"), the penitent must grow more ill to become

13 Eliot, CPP, p. 127.
well, making the fire which burns but does not consume him
the "cure":

The chill ascends from feet to knees,
The fever sings in mental wires.
For to be warmed, then I must freeze
And quake in frigid purgatorial fires
Of which the flame is roses, and the smoke is briars.14

Suffering, then, becomes something that acts upon the patient,
but his passivity differs from that of Prufrock's or Geron-
tion's. Where they are trapped either by the inability or
the refusal to push themselves further, the purgatorial peni-
tent willingly submits himself to something that will strike
him down, but ultimately raise him back up. Because he sub-
mits himself to a non-linear reality, one without a goal,
the penitent finds a significant way of traveling.

His journey is partly connected to the way of the
cross. Christ suffered so man might enjoy eternal life;
Good Friday, the end of Lent, celebrates Christ's death and
looks forward to the resurrection. Man may go part of the
way, he, too, may suffer and believe in a resurrection, yet
he, in his imperfection, is left waiting between Good
Friday and Easter, waiting to be healed by the "wounded
surgeon." The penitent's health depends on something other
than himself alone. It depends to some degree on his con-
nection with God and his fellow man. No longer an Isolé,
the penitent, while still retaining his individuality, has

14Eliot, CPP, p. 128.
become part of a community, and in so doing forfeits some of his self-reliance to gain a strength found only in submission. Paradoxically, he gains in his loss and moves in his stillness. Though not ready to enter paradise, the penitent may still sense its presence while waiting without hope, or journeying in faith alone, around that "still point."

This indeed is "the middle way," beginning with "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock"—twenty years not only between two wars but also between the suffering waged in hell and that practiced in purgatory, each with its own frustration. In this unconventional purgatory, the penitent learns that every attempt is a "new beginning," a cyclic progression "to recover what has been lost / And found and lost again and again . . . But perhaps neither gain nor loss." Eliot might be "repeating" himself by always returning to the same concerns that have been present from the very beginning of the canon. But Eliot is slowly discovering that significance cannot be found in a goal (sex or asceticism) but in the faithful circling about an unknown.

"There is only the trying." Either the despair over losing or the hope in gaining deceives the spiritual pilgrim into a false sense of self-degradation or solipsism, detracting from the journey itself. The pattern of man in time becomes more complicated if one sees that one may live an eternity in a moment and that eternity is but a moment,
blending and blurring times and places into experiences to be travelled through instead of reached. Prufrock was right: "there will be time," but not for his finite velocities. There will always be time for old men to be explorers who see that the "here and there" so clearly distinguished in "The Hollow Men" do not matter. What does matter is not the "intense moment isolated" but man "still and still moving into another intensity for a further union." Man does not move to absolute union but to "a" union, "a deeper communion / Through the dark cold and the empty desolation." This union is not final, as Eliot has explained earlier: "For the pattern is new in every moment." His spiritual journey takes him nowhere but through a continuing search for the cleansing fire. Back to Prufrock's shoreline, back through the dirty waters of The Waste Land, the penitent finds that this end is a new beginning, one that places him in the future while renewing the past.

His return to the shore readies him for yet another journey, for an examination of the river within him as seen in "The Dry Salvages." Here "The spirit of the river, spirit of the sea" from "Ash Wednesday" reappears to show the immanence and transcendence of God. Though "unhonoured, unpropitiated" by modern man, "This strong brown god" waits, keeping his rhythm from "the nursery bedroom" to the cruelty of the April dooryard." Much in this opening section of
the third quartet recycles *Waste Land* imagery: the river as conveyor of commerce which tosses up man's losses and which has many voices. Time and the sea go together, both older and more durable than man, leading him always circularly forward. Within time's endless cycle individual man must face his own end, which is also endless. "There is no end, but addition," always a moving toward something left behind. Herein lies part of the penitent's suffering.

The penitent lives in a mood of "dispossession."

Though he originally might have thought that he had to race to a goal, he has been discovering in "The Ariel Poems," "Ash Wednesday," and *Four Quartets* that to progress he must suffer, to submit himself to the will of God, and while that does not grant him heaven, it does put him on the road to finding significance. Once on his way in purgatory, the penitent must put himself in the place that requires him to feel pain ("Years of living among the breakage . . .")—a place of "no destination" where there is "no end to the voiceless wailing" or "to the withering or withered flowers" or "to the movement of pain that is painless and motionless." It is a place of constant waste and wreckage, littering this sea of time with those things fallen from the penitent's soul as he forever dives into the cleansing fire.

This is not, however, a sequential or evolutionary process in which one sees improvement or even destination.
Like time, "the moments of agony / (Whether, or not, due to misunderstanding, / Having hoped for the wrong things or dreaded the wrong things, is not in question) are likewise permanent." Agony abides and can be more easily seen in the pain of others:

And right action is freedom
From past and future also.
For most of us, this is the aim
Never here to be realised;
Who are only undefeated
Because we have gone on trying;
We, content at the last
If our temporal reversion nourish
(Not too far from the yew-tree)
The life of significant soil.  

Once again, the sense of community is introduced, showing that the individual penitent is connected to others between hope and despair. Although he might see and even empathize with the others in their pain, he cannot understand his own plight as easily. He, like others, "had the experience but missed the meaning, / And approach to the meaning restores the experience / In a different form, beyond any meaning / We can assign to happiness." Hence, the penitent slowly understands that his life is forever circling in upon itself, revisiting the past with a lucidity unknown because of the "currents of actions" hiding the meaning. Because he was too busy doing what amounted to nothing, the penitent now in "doing nothing" (sitting still) finds that he must progress into the past "to redeem the time."

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While this might seem like a "hermeneutical circle" to some, it is the only freeing movement in Eliot's canon, for it gives him a significance, a sense of self not found in the earlier poetry. By going back, Eliot ultimately moves forward; by returning to examine previous experience, Eliot, unlike Prufrock who had no time because he had no present, learns to live in the present. Looking behind "recorded history" with a "half look . . . towards the primitive terror" is the reality which humankind cannot much endure--the source of the longest river with no end or beginning. Yet risking the half-look into the heart of light is something the Hollow Men never do. Eliot, as penitential pilgrim, does take the "half-look," and though not the ultimate vision, it is enough to make him continue his journey, regaining what was lost and losing what is found, forever moving forward by stepping back--forever between.

Given the courage "to fare forward," the penitent can continue to move in stillness, and though time does not heal, the movement forward does bring some relief. Like the train from "East Coker," which stopped but starts again in "The Dry Salvages," the penitent comes to realize that there is not "terminus"; nor is there escape from the past into any future. Once again, the penitent learns to regard past and future with equal disinterest--to stand between hope and despair, action and inaction. To move within suffering,
that is active inaction, enables the penitent to "redeem the time." Yet it is a redemption without goal:

'on whatever sphere of being
The mind of a man may be intent
At the time of death"--that is the one action
(And the time of death is every moment)
Which shall fructify in the lives of others:
And do not think of the fruit of action.
Fare forward.16

Like Krishna's admonition to Arjuna to do only his duty, the penitent here learns to suffer, to let himself participate fully in the present moment of action by learning to "sit still."

As if Krishna's lesson to Arjuna were not enough, Eliot returns to his first mediatrix, Mary, Queen of Heaven. More than prayer, section four of "The Dry Salvages" is another reminder of the need for community, not just among current pilgrims, but among all those who went before or who were left behind—a great difference in tone from that found in The Waste Land and "The Hollow Men." For Eliot, the common truth in Hinduism and Christianity surpasses the perverted ritualistic schemes of Madame Sosostris and her ilk. Mere "pastimes and drugs," sought after particularly in times of distress, these techniques of divination actually subvert everything the penitent has come to believe, for they fragment time while proffering goals of assurance that things will work out. This was the attitude in Eliot's

16Eliot, CPP, p. 134.
hell, and when people hoped for the wrong thing and either got it or did not get it they despaired, slipping further into the Inferno.

Sortilege traps man into "cunning passages" that victimize him into believing that he should escape time and suffering. Faith, seen in Hinduism, Buddhism, or Christianity, says there is no escape from either time or suffering, but a working through both. While not providing an easy way out, faith offers the only significant way through. Man cannot cling to dimensions of past and future, but must act in the present. "The point of intersection" is something given and taken, lost and found and lost again and again. Often it comes "unattended," when one least expects it but is probably most worthy of or ready for it: "Hints followed by guesses"--followed by "prayer, observance, discipline, thought and action." It comes if one has lived in the present, yet it remains temporary, "in time," so that one may continue to move in the present. Rather than hoping for "the unattended moment" or despairing after it leaves, the penitent remains in the present, encouraged to continue moving.

This is "right action"--to be free of past and future: "Because we have gone on trying." Eliot stresses the "trying," the going through suffering and time without being released from them, the "reversion" or recycling back to experiences whose meanings were previously unknown,
thereby "reconciling" past and future by making them present. This is "Incarnation" but also "reincarnation." Unable to understand fully, the penitent is given the gift "half-understood." Not given "the ultimate vision," the penitent must continue to plunge into the refining fire, forever returning to face birth-death-rebirth, that new and shocking evaluation.

"Little Gidding," the last quartet, also discusses stillness and movement as well as endless journey. It has been seen as the final and paradisal vision, but like the other quartets "Little Gidding" recycles images and themes found throughout Eliot's canon, and it does not reinterpret them into some ceaselessly joyous profession; in fact, much of this poem expresses a dark but undaunted striving for purification in fire. Each of the five sections deals with fire imagery in terms of stillness and action, connecting fire and the "still point" into an explicitly purgatorial experience. It fully develops the theme adumbrated in "East Coker": "... I must freeze / And quake in frigid purgatorial fires. ...

As in the previous quartet, the penitent must learn to charge the present moment with significance, to "redeem the time" by facing the end then returning to the present ready to "care and not to care." In "Little Gidding" Eliot shows the slow infolding of time, yet it is different from the implosion experienced in "The Hollow Men," where
the implosion of hell literally meant the end of the world. The infolding in *Four Quartets*, especially in "Little Gidding," signifies continual movement in stillness--certainly not the ultimate vision, but the most perfect, infinite purgatorial moment. This is "zero summer," the blurring union "between pole and tropic," "melting and freezing," "midwinter spring." It is the world's suffering of the "enigma of the fever chart ("East Coker"), again showing how man and milieu respond similarly. This "intersection of the timeless moment" is not the ultimate union, but ultimate suffering which keeps the penitent from "sense and notion."

He has not "arrived" at a final destination:

And what you thought you came for
Is only a shell, a husk of meaning
From which the purpose breaks only when it is fulfilled
If at all. Either you had no purpose
Or the purpose is beyond the end you figured
And is altered in fulfillment.17

Rather, the penitent finds himself in the center of purgatory, the most significant "heart of light" where "the communication / Of the dead is tongued with fire beyond the language of the living." In a world of dispossession, of the familiar falling away, the penitent finds himself in a life-in-death moment. Section two begins with the old world "dying." The "ashes" from burnt roses and flames are really the same image in Eliot's purgatory, both representing

17Eliot, CPP, p. 139.
beauty, suffering, and possible transformation. Even the elements (and "hope and despair") fall away, leaving the penitent in "the uncertain hour."

In this moment "near the ending of interminable night / At the recurrent end of the unending," Eliot comes in contact with "a familiar compound ghost" who is both a composite of "some dead master(s)" and perhaps different facets of Eliot himself. As in "Burnt Norton," Eliot uses a doppelgänger episode to contrast the present with the past, again returning to "The Burial of the Dead" to begin this strange encounter. 18 The recognition scene in section two of "Little Gidding" resembles that found when the narrator faces Stetson, yet it also goes back much further— to the epigraph to "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" in which Guido, convinced that Dante cannot return to the world, speaks. Compare the epigraph and the scene in "The Burial of the Dead" to:

I said: 'The wonder that I feel is easy,
Yet ease is cause for wonder. Therefore speak:
I may not comprehend, may not remember.'
And he: 'I am not eager to rehearse
My thought and theory which you have forgotten.
These things have served their purpose: let them be.' 19

While the epigraph and The Waste Land scene depict the entrapment found in hell, this scene in "Little Gidding" shows

19 Eliot, CPP, p. 141.
that there is always return and a need to continue jour­
neying. Just as there is, to the ghost's amazement, a re­
turn to streets "I never thought I would revisit / When I left my body on a distant shore," there is also an ex­
amination of the gifts reserved for age.

The slow debility of age has been seen in Prufrock, Gerontion, and the Eliot in "Ash Wednesday," but in "Little Gidding" another dimension is added, that of return and pur­
gation: "Then fool's approval stings, and honour stains. / From wrong to wrong the exasperated spirit / Proceeds, unless restored by that refining fire / Where you must move in measure, like a dancer." A "lifetime's effort" is crowned with fire, foreshadowing what is to come in the last section. Like the "still point," the compound ghost is but a reminder, perhaps a guide, to keep the penitent on his way between hope and despair, between the experience and the meaning, between attachment and detachment, caring and not caring--always between.

At this center between "heaven and damnation" is sin--not the unpardonable sin of despair, but the inevit­
able sin of imperfection, the kind of sin that prevents man from entering heaven without casting him into hell. Sin is a human condition that simultaneously separates man from his fellow man but also unites him with his fellow sinners: "All touched by a common genius, / United in the strife which divided them." In the fire the penitent loses a sense
of total individuality, blending himself with all those who have gone before him, who are with him now, and who will come after him; solipsism slowly melts away as lust or power or mental acuity gives way to the one constant but still moving center: love. Nothing but love could "devise the torment" for which man would gladly castigate himself—and not for reward or goals, but for the will of God to be done in man. Though most critics see Eliot's discussion of love as strictly teleological, placing him finally in a paradisal state, it must be remembered that even hell was created by Love, for over the gate of Hell in Dante's *Inferno* are inscribed the words, "Diving Power made me and Supreme Wisdom and Primal Love." Eliot seems to have applied the same logic to this purgatorial experience: "Love is the unfamiliar Name / Behind the hands that wove / The intolerable shirt of flame / Which human power cannot remove."

Eliot's purgatorial experience, starting with "The Ariel Poems," stresses community, connection with fellow penitents. The Hollow Men suffer the absurdity of hell because they fail to make connections among themselves and between themselves and God. The Eliot of "Little Gidding" suffers the significance of the refining fire. Though both

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actions look the same, they could not be more different. Given the choice of "either fire or fire," the Hollow Men and all who went before them suffer the tortures of goal-oriented desire while the characters in "The Ariel Poems" and the Eliot in "Ash Wednesday" and Four Quartets suffer the torment of Love which allows them to continue journeying in their purgation as they wait in the fire.

One of the crucial marks differentiating heaven from purgatory is a sense of accomplishment and joy. Eliot's poetry lacks both. "The dove descending" is not a peace-filled image. It is pentecostal to be sure, but that in itself calls believers into suffering, and into action but not action as the world knows it. "The drawing of this Love and the voice of this Calling" requires the penitent to live in a circularity that ends at the beginning and begins at the end--without accomplishment or reward, without a thought of "the fruit of action" but involved in an action that "shall fructify in the lives of others." Dead and living unite, returning to "a pattern of timeless moments":

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We shall not cease from exploring
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time. 21
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Always plunging back into the fire, the penitent learns of the previous moment by concentrating on the present. Slowly he acquires the meaning of past experiences, thereby redeem-

21Eliot, CPP, p. 145.
ing his time without ceasing to suffer. Eliot repeats Julian of Norwich's belief that "all shall be well," and it shall be well because the penitent has chosen to stand still in his journey--"A condition of complete simplicity (Costing not less than everything)."

Everything is thus connected. Past, present, and future, as well as the living and the dead, form the pattern. By entering this connectedness, man is both in and out of time, forming a complicated but significant pattern of redemption. Indeed, the tongues of flame above every penitent shall become "infolded into the crowned knot of fire." This is perfected suffering, symbolizing the crown of thorns, the crown upon one's lifetime's effort, the dance into the fire, and so many other images from Eliot's canon. It also represents eternal circularity, and no release, for a knot holds things in place. But the knot is also a homonym of "not," perhaps intensifying the negation found in "Ash Wednesday" and Four Quartets. All this emphasizes a suffering from which one is not freed but in which one finds significance. Though the penitent is not completely connected with God, he is not permanently deprived of God either. Within purgatory the penitent knows that the fire and the rose, both symbols of human and divine love, are one. While most critics interpret these last lines as evidence of Eliot's "arrival" into heaven, it must be pointed out that fire and roses have also meant lust for
Eliot. Somewhere between perfect love and debauched lust the penitent "waits without hope"; that "somewhere between" is purgatory.

It is not, of course, Dante's Purgatory. It is not the place that awaits man after death but a place which is both "now" and "always"; moreover, it has no geography but is "England and nowhere." The purgatorial experience is available to anyone anytime. Beyond this assertion of his deepest faith, Eliot does not go. "The rest is not our business."

Either praise or disapproval of Eliot's Four Quartets centers on the overwhelmingly popular predilection to place Eliot's canon in a conventionally Christian, usually Dantean, teleological schema.\(^{22}\) The critic, whether applauding Eliot for converting or condemning him for "changing" his poetic style to write religious tracts, is given only one way to view the poetry, that is, teleologically, and is actually judging the poetry on a single event. The reader inevitably sides with the critic who comes closest to the reader's own opinion of religion, leaving Eliot and his poetry in limbo. In so doing, critics and readers have failed to see that something as pronounced as a formal conversion is part of a life process, not an end product after which all is settled and easily done. All believers, par-

\(^{22}\)Smith, p. 297.
particularly the most spiritually aware, struggle to meet God. Eliot, in his struggle, sees himself as one in need of purgation, and thereby focusses in and on the refining fire rather than on paradise. *Four Quartets* slows the reader down so he may know purgatory. If the reader tries to rush the poem into paradise, perhaps it is because he does not know what it means to "wait without hope" or finds discomfort in choosing between fire and fire. Eliot has learned and wants only to try to sit still. The rest is not our business, for it is the journey within this eternal moment of suffering that he finds significance.
Althouh Eliot's poetic canon spans almost three decades, it is basically a poetry of middle age, of a mind in the middle of the struggle between memory and desire, of a spiritual journey between the insufficient extremes of hope and despair. These are the constants present from "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" to Four Quartets, and yet Eliot's poetry shows a progression. To chart this, critics have conveniently bisected the canon into two main parts, the pre-conversion and post-conversion poems, but along with such a division came an unfortunate inclination to sever the later religious poems from the earlier urbane poems. While this common method has its advantages in pointing out how the Eliot of 1917 differs from the Eliot of 1943, it also has serious drawbacks, for it fails to show how much Eliot remains the same throughout his poetic career. Seeing the canon as a two-part whole keeps the reader's attention on what amounts to differences within the canon, many of them superficial, preventing the reader from venturing into the core of Eliot's works. This line of criticism is easily exhausted, as is shown by the numerous image studies or source studies that, after tortuous
routes into a single image or simplistic explanations for Eliot's conversion, sadly keep the reader on the surface of Eliot's poetry.

Despite the growing number of articles written about Eliot, few offer new perceptions, for virtually all studies, whether or not they favor Eliot's post-conversion poetry, see Eliot's conversion as the turning point within his work and therefore view the canon teleologically. Forcing it into a pre-determined pattern may indeed be the cause for some justified complaints about Eliot's later poetry. It may be the criticism, not the poetry, that is too thin or too contrived or too "religious." If one were to move beyond the surface, one would notice that Eliot's canon progresses without any ultimate arrival into paradise, despite Eliot's conversion. Further, of one were to view the canon as a continuum, as many critics say it should be, one would realize that the "religious" sentiment so obvious after 1927 is present all along.

To quote Eliot, "There is no end, but addition"; with the end and the beginning at the same place, Eliot's poetry is a non-linear progression, a gradual waking up to the struggle to believe. Perhaps if one were to use the conventional pre-conversion/post-conversion dichotomy, it would be interesting to note that the pre-conversion poetry sees life through the eyes of middle aged characters whose own lives are absurd: Prufrock, Gerontion, Lil's husband,
the Hollow Men, while the post-conversion poetry shows a middle aged Eliot without those masks. In the later poetry Eliot writes himself directly into the poetry. As he does this, his poetry becomes more abstract but more human and more significantly charged.

At the center of Eliot's canon is this search for significance. Eliot consciously moved away from the collegiate verse of "Aunt Helen" and "Cousin Nancy" to write the serious poetry for which he is known. If Eliot had "changed" the kind of poetry he wrote, it was between his Harvard poetry and his professional poetry, beginning with *Prufrock and Other Observations*, for it is within the latter that he forsakes ennui to examine the nature of suffering. The first volume begins to show the urban world Eliot will always return to, a world of trivialities and persons disconnected and alienated from one another, a world of entrapment and victimization. Though many of the poems in the first volume have men as their central characters, the poems actually describe a world of "lunar incantations" into which sensitive men are initiated and, in one way or another, imprisoned.

This sense of entrapment grows more intense in the second volume, *Poems 1920*, where satire is added to the urban landscape of Eliot's early poetry. Though this volume is often quickly dismissed, it adds an important dimension to the entire canon: religion. Poems like "The
Hippopotamus" and "A Cooking Egg" are often interpreted as "silly," but they contain discussions of "heaven" that have been wrongly ignored. As early as 1917, Eliot had already concluded that a "conventional" heaven was absurd, an opinion he did not change. While most people would not think of comparing "The Hippopotamus" to "Ash Wednesday," the two poems share a disregard for heaven, although for different reasons.

Yet, both the wit of Prufrock and Other Observations and the satire of Poems 1920 only take the narrator in hopeless circles, paralyzing him a little more at every turn. Eliot's hell is becoming more dangerous, for as characters move more quickly from trap to trap, they search more frantically for the wrong things. Two forces, sex and religion, send characters on a cruel circuit of increasing absurdity. They constantly return to the same issues thinking that they must choose either extreme, and in so doing continue to hang between them.

This dilemma is most extremely felt in The Waste Land and "The Hollow Men." What had been established in the first two volumes reaches its nadir of Eliot's hell. The alienating liaisons of the earlier poetry prepare the reader for encountering the imprisoned couples in The Waste Land; indeed, the first three sections of the poem focus on perverted relationships, not just those between men and women, but also those involving mankind and nature (time
and God). Each look into relationships shows only failure, and the characters fail because they are disconnected from one another, which is, paradoxically, their only point of similarity and the reason for their being in hell. Sexual conquests are easily made and quickly forgotten without ever bringing man and woman together—while Prufrock could not win women's favor, the carbuncular clerk finds no resistance from the typist, yet Prufrock and the clerk suffer the same absurdity: both remain disconnected from their worlds.

Having displayed the absurdity of both "memory and desire"—both of which involved a mindless, endless rehearsal of the past—Eliot draws the logical conclusion, the one drawn by the Buddha in his Fire Sermon: renounce all desire and live ascetically. Section five of The Waste Land consequently explores the possibilities of the desert and the commandments of the Upanishads, but these already appear to have dubious value, as the poem ends in madness.

Like sex without love, asceticism without faith elicits only death. Within their perverted unity ("leaning together / Headpiece filled with straw"), the Hollow Men form some kind of mutated community. But their rituals are as fruitless as the commercial sex in The Waste Land. Replacing sex with asceticism only makes the constant circling about the prickly pear more cruel and ironically more teleological. The pre-conversion characters suffer absurdly
because of their goals. No matter how many times they circle back to the problem, they never learn anything and are forced to repeat the same mistake, having the same experience but always missing the meaning. The problem never changes, only the characters' growing sense of insignificance and despair. Whatever they do is done "for the wrong reason"; changing what they lust after, either sex or asceticism, does not alter their motive. Therefore, despite the switch from carnal to cerebral knowledge, Eliot's pre-conversion characters remain rooted in hell.

This takes Eliot up to his conversion, often cited as the turning point in his poetry. Actually, it is not a turning point but a re-valuation, a return to familiar yet discomforting feelings. The hell in "The Hollow Men" is not terribly different from the purgatory in "The Ariel Poems" or "Ash Wednesday." "The Hollow Men" contains enough references to "death's other kingdom" to show that Eliot at least acknowledged the presence of another dimension even though he could not move there. That presence of something else is seen even in Poems 1920, not just in the satire, but also in Gerontion's adamant refusal to believe. The major difference between the pre-conversion and post-conversion poetry is faith, but faith does not make the later poetry easy or palliative. If anything, the poetry from "The Ariel Poems" on shows more rigor because it limns Eliot's own response to his faith which, while (presumably)
admitting heaven's existence, does not hope for it, making Eliot's poetry (whatever his "belief" may have been) unconventionally Christian and certainly not as dogmatic as many think.

There exists no "ultimate vision," as most critics claim, but a need to continue journeying, to "redeem the time," to cleanse oneself of sin--in short, to suffer, but to suffer significantly. This is the difference. If one could use the typical two part division of Eliot's canon, one would see that the early poetry shows characters trying to escape pain either through sex or asceticism but suffering nonetheless and finding their suffering purposeless. But in the later poetry one sees Eliot diving into the refining fire, allowing the will of God to work upon him. While this does not release Eliot from suffering, it certainly makes his suffering meaningful. Paradoxically, Eliot's purgatorial suffering is non-teleological in that it exists only to cleanse, not to get Eliot ready to arrive into heaven. Once Eliot moves past hoping "for the wrong thing," he realizes that heaven is not something one can aim for but is invited into, and to be invited into heaven one must not want it--one must deserve it--and to deserve it, one must be so free of hope and despair and desire that one is disinterested in heaven.

Disinterest lies at the center of Eliot's purgatory, teaching Eliot "to care and not to care . . . to sit still."
In "A Song for Simeon" the old man asked not to have "the ultimate vision"; throughout the following "Ariel" poems, "Ash Wednesday," and Four Quartets that petition is granted, for in all these poems there is a simultaneous journey into the fire and return to the past: to put meaning into past experience, to return to where one began "and to know it for the first time." Redemption for Eliot means revisiting the past and purging it of insignificance, neither hoping nor despairing in the return. Asking to learn this kind of indifference certainly does not mean that Eliot has mastered the lesson, as "Ash Wednesday" and Four Quartets show, for there is always temptation. Even if Eliot masters desire, he could fall into false pride for doing so; instead of focusing on the action that fructifies in the lives of others, he could wrongly look at the fruit of action itself. Purging oneself from oneself in order to become more of oneself is difficult to do, and doing that without hope of reward is more arduous still.

Only love makes this possible. Eliot has known lust and has progressed to love—not just Divine love, which most critics see as the "still point," but human love, love for one's fellow man. Ultimately, this is the progression: Eliot's move from self to community. Throughout the early poetry one sees characters like Prufrock trying to make connections, but they fail because they do not go far enough. And they do not go far enough because they
care too much about whether they will succeed. They are paralyzed by their obsession, hoping for the wrong thing, then despairing of it. They lack faith.

Faith differentiates purgatory from hell, nothing else. The landscape in the poetry remains the same, as do many of the images. It is as if Eliot had to keep circling around accepting faith, first satirizing it, then despairing over his lack of it, and finally accepting it within himself. In his acceptance of faith, Eliot establishes community between himself and society, between himself and God. One cannot help but see that his is a slow process that cannot be so easily divided into "pre" and "post" periods without noticing the connections between them. To suppose that Eliot's progression ends in paradise, as most critics claim, merely widens the supposed gap. But there is no gap. To reach heaven, Eliot would have to be joyful, which he never is. Critics have mistaken Eliot's faith for joy, consequently minimizing all the references to sin, suffering, death, and return. Even the "crowned knot of fire" ("Little Gidding," v) has been interpreted as celestial when it is actually purgatorial (see "East Coker," iv and "Little Gidding," ii). Denying Eliot's constant return into the refining fire does violence to the entire canon.

For Eliot discovers significance in the fire, a significance that keeps him moving in stillness, a signifi-
cance that redeems his humanity. Though it took him years to learn it, Eliot did realize that moving frantically like the Hollow Men got him only further into hell, but learning to "wait without hope" allowed him to keep exploring. The impotence that stymied Prufrock enables the speaker in "Ash Wednesday" to move in other directions. Ultimately, Eliot, like Christ and Buddha, discovers a middle way, a new kind of betweenness, one that allows the pilgrim to journey without end.

All of Eliot's characters stand "between," but those in hell stand in a betweenness that entraps while those in purgatory wait "between two waves of the sea." Eliot thus redeems history, learns how to suffer, and discovers a significance even though he remains limited and capable of failure.

Tracing Eliot's non-teleological progression from hell to purgatory allows one to view Eliot's poetry in a new light, for it offers an organic methodology in which a reader can track the various layers of hell and different purgatorial experiences. More than an image study, this examination charts the growth of a poet's soul. In a sense, this study connects Eliot to his readers, for though it is primarily about Eliot's individual response to "the voice of this Calling," it also may put the question of "what shall I do to be saved" to the reader. Undoubtedly, Eliot's answer differs from John Bunyan's. But what is
imperative is the struggle, the risk, the trying--often made in a dark, insecure, and trembling faith--the "rest is not our business." Eliot's choice to become more fully human by moving through his suffering rather than escaping it assures him that indeed there will be times: now, here, and always.
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Social Criticism


Works by Other Writers


The dissertation submitted by Dianne R. Costanzo has been read and approved by the following committee:

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The final copies have been examined by the director of the dissertation and the signature which appears below verifies the fact that any necessary changes have been incorporated and that the dissertation is now given final approval by the Committee with reference to content and form.

The dissertation is therefore accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

April 9, 1982
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