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Quest Journeys in T.S. Eliot's Poetry

by

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## **Chapter 1:**

### **An Introduction to the Quest Journeys**

Much of T. S. Eliot's poetry concerns quest journeys carried out by various travelers searching for such elusive objects and events as love, the way home, the Grail or spiritual truth, which combine to form a single search for meaning in life and in the poetry. This theme is especially present in "The Waste Land" and "Four Quartets", but it is also present in some of Eliot's early poetry, such as "Rhapsody on a Windy Night".

These quests are different, of course. "The Waste Land" alone could be divided up into different sort of quests: there is the Grail quest, the Buddhist quest for understanding and the quest for meaningful relationships. However, all these quests feed into one search for the restoration of order in the poem. The different quests are therefore both symbols of the overall search for meaning and valid journeys in and of themselves. The final goal of "The Waste Land", as made explicit in its last line, is spiritual peace. This foreshadows the quest for spiritual truth in the "Four Quartets". In fact, though both poems are about a search for meaning, they go about it in very different manners. In "The Waste Land", the speakers try to restore order to what readers know to be the fragments of the poem, while in "Four Quartets" the speakers look for spiritual truth by descending into chaos. These quests are also prefigured in some of the early poems in which the speaker travels through time and memory. For instance, in "Rhapsody on a Windy Night", the speaker travels through the early morning hours, searching for both a way home and meaning (which he finds in his memory) in the various city scenes presented before him.

Criticism on the quest themes in these poems has been varied. J.C.C. Mays writes that "Rhapsody on a Windy Night", one of the early poems in which a quest theme

figures, "charts a progress through the night, towards a mounting stair, and then nothing" (Mays 112). The implication is that nothing comes of the quest in this poem, though Mays does acknowledge that there is a journey throughout the poem's structure.

According to Mays, this incompleteness is seen in much of Eliot's poetry: "He represents things in ways that are beautiful and suggestive, but the representation does not pretend to embrace the whole of life, and what he says is no less memorable for its admitted incompleteness" (Mays 108-109). The quest journey in "The Waste Land" is also acknowledged by the critics. Hugh Kenner writes that "the journey eastward among the red rocks and heaps of broken images [in the first section, "Burial of the Dead"] is fused with the journey to Emmaus and the approach to Chapel Perilous [in the last section, "What the Thunder Said]" (Kenner, Invisible 171). This remark emphasizes the quest journey in "The Waste Land" as one that lasts throughout the whole of the poem, though Kenner also characterises it as "a nightmare journey in a world now apparently deprived of meaning" (Kenner 173), thus noting the well-known fragmented images and language in the poem. The fragmented nature of the quests in "The Waste Land" can also be seen in the many allusions throughout the poem. A.D. Moody refines that image of a nightmare journey with the reminder that "the poem begins to work and be whole only when we perceive that it has a structure other than sequential" (Moody, Thomas Stearns Eliot 80). He also writes that it is a mistake to simply "read the poem as a critique of culture" (Moody, Thomas Stearns Eliot 79), for the reader must also examine "The Waste Land" as "the fullest possible expression...[of]...the poet's own mind and feeling" (Moody, Thomas Stearns Eliot 79). This claim lends credence to the idea of "The Waste

"Land" as ultimately a quest for spiritual peace and meaning, whose findings can be applied to both the poet and the world at large. In fact, for James Olney "The Waste Land" is also "the story of the poet back to Chaucer, back even to Homer" (Olney, Cambridge Companion 11-12), emphasizing both the allusions Eliot used and the way the poem gives depth to his own feelings. In that way, the poem could also be seen as the journey of the poet from antiquity to the present, giving a new layer to the quest theme.

As seen from above, there has been plenty of criticism on T. S. Eliot's poetry, especially on "The Waste Land" and the "Four Quartets", though much has been done on the early poems as well. This brief review only scrapes the surface of more than a half-century's worth, and as Richard Shusterman wrote of Eliot's own changing criticism of other writers throughout his lifetime, "Consequently, as feelings and situations change and multiply over history, so do valid interpretations" (Shusterman, Cambridge Companion 41). In this paper, I intend to search out and explicate my own interpretation of the quests in T. S. Eliot's poetry, by looking at the poems through my own eyes and by consulting the criticism already written. As it is self-evident that quest themes exist in both the early and later poems that I am writing about, I will study the nature of the quests themselves and also the similarities and differences among them.

For instance, the quests share some similarities of inspiration. As Harriet Davidson writes, "stories of death and renewal or damnation and salvation, from the Grail legends and fertility myths outlined by Jessie Weston in *From Ritual to Romance* and from Dante's *Divine Comedy*, greatly haunted Eliot's imagination" (Davidson, Cambridge Companion 125). The effects of that haunting is seen in his poetry. For instance, the idea

of rebirth, as mentioned above, is prevalent in "The Waste Land" through myths relating to rebirth. The Fisher King/Grail myth is one obvious theme in this poem, in which the stranger in the Fisher King myth and the Knight must answer ritual questions before they can succeed in their quests. Both myths also include ravaged lands and people that must be healed or brought back to life in order for the quests to be successes. Jessie Weston also connected the Fisher King/Grail myths to fertility myths that were concerned with the need for the symbolic death and rebirth of a god each year in order for the land to thrive. In From Ritual to Romance, she states that the "basic idea of the Grail tradition...[is]...the position of people whose prosperity, and the fertility of their land, are closely bound up with the life and virility of their King, who is not a mere man, but a Divine re-incarnation" (Weston 56). Eliot also refers to the Fisher King myth at the end of "The Burial of the Dead" by having one of the speakers in that section ask another character, "That corpse you planted last year in your garden,/Has it begun to sprout? Will it bloom this year?" ("The Waste Land" 71-72). Since the Fisher King myth is about a dead king and a dead land returning to life, the verses about a corpse making flowers bloom are highly symbolic of an idea of rebirth and triumph over death.

As seen from the lines above, there is a layered quality to Eliot's poetry. This arises from the way the emotions in his poetry are taken from his experiences and transformed into something universal. Eliot himself described this process in Tradition and the Individual Talent: "The poet's mind is in fact a receptacle for seizing and storing up numberless feelings, phrases, images, which remain there until all the particles which can unite to form a new compound are present together" (Eliot, Selected Prose 41).

Thus, Eliot's poetry is filled with random-seeming images and language that the reader must attempt to resolve and is also imbued with strong feeling that captures that same reader even before a resolution of the poem can begin. This universal quality of emotion is vastly important, for it is that quality that opens Eliot's quest poems up to its audience .

However, all of Eliot's quests have another quality to them: the questors only achieve partial, incomplete success. Evidence of this incompleteness is seen both in the criticism quoted above and more importantly in the poems themselves. For instance, in "The Waste Land", the Grail, the symbol of life and order, is never found and the speaker is left with only the "fragments I have shored against my ruins" ("The Waste Land" 430). It is imperative to note that this is an incomplete failure as well; the speaker has actively accomplished something and is not passive. Connecting this with the idea of rebirth, readers find that often "a triumphant return to life is made to coincide with an inability to die" (Levenson 175) in "The Waste Land", making the victory over death incomplete and somewhat terrifying. This mood runs throughout all of Eliot's poetry as well and "...it is compounded of effort and inevitable failure of pathos and insistence; it traverses an area of feeling from the foresuffering of Tiresias in 'The Waste Land' to the exultant humility of 'Four Quartets'" (Mays 109). This similarity in mood is due to another similarity in all the quests. Eliot's speakers look for memory, for order, for spiritual truth by descent into disorder. These are all demanding concepts and Eliot rightfully recognises that they are just out of the reach of even the most determined mortals. But that does not mean that the effort is not vital. Rather, Eliot seems to be saying, in using the theme of quests so frequently, that the effort to search for some kind of truth or meaning is very important.



Both inspiration and incompleteness make the quests in Eliot's poetry similar, but their differences also matter equally. Both the language and the content of the poetry reveal these differences. I will argue that throughout "The Waste Land", chaotic and fragmented imagery and language leads to a search for order, while in the "Four Quartets", tightly controlled imagery and language leads to a search for chaos through death and the denial of time.

In "The Waste Land", a question is asked: "Shall I at least set my lands in order?" ("The Waste Land" 425), which is followed by a rush of images and allusions: "London Bridge is falling down falling down falling down/*Poi s'ascose nel foco che gli affina/quando fiam uti chelidon* - O swallow swallow/*Le Prince d'Aquitaine a la tour abolie*" ("The Waste Land" 426-429). Thus, a recognition of the need for order is juxtaposed with the chaos of fragments coming from poems/songs of four different languages. And although allusions are common both in "The Waste Land" and "Four Quartets", they clutter up the former poem, making it impossible to read a few lines without stumbling against at least one allusion - which then requires one to stop in the process of the quest and trace the allusion. The wholeness of the poem is thus interrupted constantly. In this way, the quest for the Grail and all the other quests referred to within "The Waste Land" are simply all part of a larger search for order among the myriad allusions and images.

In contrast, the reader is told in "Burnt Norton", the first part of the "Four Quartets", to "Descend lower, descend only/Into the world of perpetual solitude" ("Burnt Norton" III:114-115). The writing is carefully controlled and the world that speaker is

talking about is precisely described in later lines. An example of this description is the assertion that this world of solitude is a "Desiccation of the world of sense" ("Burnt Norton" III:119). However, the need to descend into this lonely world is emphasised. The poem does not urge the reader towards a recognition of order, but tells the reader of the need to go alone into a world of chaos.

But why the difference? If both poems are quests for spiritual meaning, why are they so radically different? The answer, I believe, lies in Eliot himself. There are twenty years between the publication of "The Waste Land" (in 1922) and the last of the "Four Quartets" (in 1942). In this time, Eliot converted to Anglicanism in 1927, wrote "The Hollow Men", "Ash-Wednesday" and many other works and critical essays. In short, he matured and changed both as a poet and as a human being. I thus believe that the change of both style and content between "The Waste Land" and the "Four Quartets" represent a spiritual growth. Eliot seems to be saying that one cannot just rely on order alone as a spiritual truth. Ultimately, the imposition of order throughout the physical life will give way to the disorder of death. Therefore, it is better to meet that chaos head-on and confront it so as to be able to accept it.

It would be possible and perhaps tempting to look at "Four Quartets" and the need to use disorder on the journey towards spiritual truth as the only valid account of the quest journeys in Eliot's poetry, since it is his final statement on the subject examined here. However, it is imperative to remember that the quest theme serves many purposes. The poems in which there are quests are full of both personal and impersonal emotion; they are about travel and memory, spiritual truth and peace. All of the quests in

"Rhapsody on a Windy Night", "The Waste Land" and "Four Quartets" share a sense of failure. The meaning that the travelers are searching for will always be incomplete. This is particularly evident in the differences between "The Waste Land" and "Four Quartets". Although these two poems approach the aim of spiritual meaning in radically different ways, they both only attain a partial success at their conclusions. Both poems are incomplete because Eliot found it impossible for a human being to ever come to a real complete and whole spiritual truth.

Yet it is a vital act to make the journey because the quest could always uncover some of the lost meaning. Without the quest journey, we will have had "the experience, but missed the meaning" ("The Dry Salvages" II:93). In looking at T. S. Eliot's poetry, we can first examine the beginnings of the quest theme in his early poetry in "Rhapsody on a Windy Night" and then move on to look at the differences between the quest journeys in "The Waste Land" and "Four Quartets" and how the former poem might foreshadow the latter poem. Finally, in conclusion, we can study how all of the quest journeys are searches for meanings through the use of forces of order and chaos.

**Chapter 2:**  
**Through Memory and Time:**  
**The Quest in "Rhapsody on a Windy Night"**

Although the theme of the quest journey is more obvious in "The Waste Land" and "Four Quartets", Eliot used this theme in several of his early poems as well. One of the clearest examples of this use of the quest theme in those poems comes from "Rhapsody on a Windy Night", published in 1917. This is a poem that resonates with both memories and time and, as in all of Eliot's poetry, imagery and language are vastly important in "Rhapsody on a Windy Night".

"Rhapsody on a Windy Night" traces the journey of a man who has been out late as he walks through the night and throughout the streets of Paris in order to get to his door. This can be seen as the first level of a highly multileveled poem. However, there are problems with only looking at the poem from this surface level. For instance, the journey seems to be somewhat unconscious; the point of view is from a semi-omniscient speaker, not the traveler, and the poem does not describe his need to get back home, but rather describes what is going on around him. In fact, the reader doesn't learn until the conclusion of the poem that the traveler has been looking for "the number on the door" ("Rhapsody" 72). In that respect, it seems that "Rhapsody on a Windy Night" is much more than what could be construed as simply a drunken walk.

Furthermore, the imagery in this poem can be confusing and even chaotic. It is hard to make sense of "Rhapsody on a Windy Night" on the first reading and examining only the surface level of the poem yields few answers. However, Eliot's use of different devices that reinforce a concern with time and memory impose order on the chaotic imagery of the poem. Thus, the quest is partially a search for order amidst the surface confusion of the imagery, making "Rhapsody on a Windy Night" a predecessor to the

grander scaled quest for order in "The Waste Land".

Since the marking of time is one of the devices that order the poem, "Rhapsody on a Windy Night" could also be described as a journey through time. The traveler in "Rhapsody on a Windy Night" is moving (and sometimes stopping) from twelve o'clock to four o'clock in the morning. The time is marked by the street-lamps that he passes, each beating "like a fatalistic drum" ("Rhapsody" 9). These street-lamps seem to call up the images, making it so that each marking of the time is associated with a collection of different images. As time goes on, the traveler (and the reader along with him) moves through each collection with the guidance of the street-lamp, so that each set of images, chaotic as they may seem, is tied to an easily grasped unit of time.

This use of time gives "Rhapsody on a Windy Night" structure and order to a series of confusing images, causing the reader to feel that one is traveling towards some event. But the marking of time is not the only device used in the quest for order in the surface chaos. Memory, which is linked with time, is also used as part of that search. The first connection that is made between time and memory is in the first few lines of the poem. As the traveler makes his way down the street, he finds that "through the spaces of the dark/Midnight shakes the memory" ("Rhapsody" 11). This connection between time and memory persists throughout the entire poem. This suggests that as well as the images the traveler sees while walking, the passing of time also evokes his memories. So does the search for order make the poem also a quest for lost memories? This conclusion seems to make a certain amount of sense as the traveler is searching for home through the time of the night. He does not remember where he lives but on the way to find his

doorway, he discovers many images and feelings that are, if not always shocking and new, at least different. Indeed, Piers Gray observes that the narrator seeks “the correct memory to guide the self towards action” (Gray 44). Though he often finds himself disorientated, walking among the street-lamps and the dark, the quest for memories is linked again with the quest for order and home.

For instance, in the second stanza of the poem, the traveler is told by the anthropomorphic street-lamp to regard "that woman/who hesitates toward you in the light of the door" ("Rhapsody" 16-17). The traveler has most likely seen prostitutes before. However, in the strangeness of the early morning, he notices several details: "the border of her dress is torn and stained with sand,/And...the corner of her eye twists like a broken pin." ("Rhapsody" 19-22). These all are rather unusual observations that, however, tie into the chaotic and unusual imagery of "Rhapsody on a Windy Night" as a whole. The word 'twist', for instance, seems to have a sexual connotation attached to it, which does make sense for a passage about a prostitute.

However, in the next stanza, 'twist' is also linked to memory: "The memory throws up high and dry/A crowd of twisted things" ("Rhapsody" 23-24), revealing that these memories are going to impose order on the confusing image of the woman. The speaker goes on to describe two different objects:

A twisted branch upon the beach  
 Eaten smooth, and polished  
 As if the world gave up  
 The secret of its skeleton,  
 Stiff and white.  
 A broken spring in a factory yard,  
 Rust that clings to the form that the strength has left

Hard and curled and ready to snap. ("Rhapsody" 25-32)

Both these memories are evocative of endings: the world is a skeleton, making the reader think of death, and the spring is ready to snap, its usefulness done. Memories are, by definition, about things that have already ended. If the word "twist" connects memories and sex, then the references to twisted things could be taken as memories of sex and lust that ended. Already, some order is given to a set of chaotic images. But the quest for lost memories and order is, I believe, also on a different level. Memory is part of what makes us human, just as lust and sex are also necessary aspects of humanity and must remain so if we want to survive. Experiencing the evidence of lust (when he sees the prostitute), perhaps the traveler's mind went to memories of his own lust, connected with images of twisted things that reveal how that lust ended. This negativity towards sex and lust explains the disgust evident in the description of the woman, who sounds completely pitiable. Moreover, the memories evoked change throughout "Rhapsody on a Windy Night" to reflect the development of the poem, becoming guides to both the reader and the traveler as we delve further and further into his consciousness - and perhaps the consciousness of humanity as a whole. Therefore, the search for order is not kept within the poem, but rather becomes a search for order in the chaos of human consciousness.

However, this quest is also, as noted above, linked to time. Thus, memory in "Rhapsody on a Windy Night" is connected to time and the scenes on the street, imposing order on the poem and once again suggesting a journey throughout the traveler's consciousness. For instance, at half past two, in the fifth stanza, the urban image of "...the cat which flattens itself in the gutter,/Slips out its tongue/And devours a morsel of



rancid butter" ("Rhapsody" 33-35) spurs the child's seaside memory of "a crab one afternoon in a pool/An old crab with barnacles on his back,/...[that]...Gripped the end of the stick which I held him" ("Rhapsody" 42-44) to life in the traveler's mind. As time passes, the travelers' memories go deeper than lust and into childhood. On the surface the image and the memory seem to be just another part of the poem's outer chaos; however I found that this memory imposes order on the image of the cat scooping up the butter, as it reminds him both of another animal and the way he also held onto survival by gripping the stick. Humans are animals as well, and there might well be a sense that the traveler, too, does what he needs to in order to survive. However, there is an underlying current of disgust in the description of the cat, with words such as "devour" and "rancid" that is not found in the memory of the crab. Is the traveler then remembering times when the scenes he saw seemed more positive? And could this also be a hunger for a place outside of the dirty, disgusting city? I believe both are true. There is a sense of innocence in the memory of the crab, an innocence that has now been lost to both lust and the necessity of survival in the city. Thus, the memory of the crab explains the image of the cat, imposing order on this stanza of "Rhapsody on a Windy Night" and on the examination of the consciousness of the traveler, while the marking of the time serves as a reminder that the journey is ongoing.

Eliot seems to take note of this examination, for the traveler also notes in this stanza that "I have seen eyes in the street/Trying to peer though lighted shutters" ("Rhapsody" 40-41), just before recalling the crab in the pool. This can be seen as both a nod to the journey into consciousness and a bit of jibe about the difficulty of the

examination of it. No one can see into another's mind, into the darkness of their street. Even the lamps, that link images and memories, are only able to help somewhat. Yet the attempt, the need to understand is part of being human and an important point to this otherwise chaotic poem.

Thus, at half-past three in the next stanza, the nature of memory itself is explored, as it had been for thousands of years in other texts and philosophies. St. Augustine called memories "footsteps, left imprinted on our minds" (Augustine, Book 2) and finds that memory and the self are intertwined: "What nature am I? A life various and manifold, and exceeding immense. Behold the plains, and caves, and caverns of my memory, innumerable and innumerably full of innumerable things" (Augustine, Book 10). Without memory of the self, the self does not exist.

This idea is present in "Rhapsody on a Windy Night" where the street-lamp states that "the moon has lost her memory" ("Rhapsody" 53) which subverts the image of the moon as a symbol of wisdom since to "be rendered amnesiac is to be made thoughtless" (Gray 46). Without memory of wisdom, wisdom does not exist. Again, Eliot emphasizes the importance of memory. The poem has returned to the disorientation found in the first stanza and as the traveler gazes at the ruined moon, the "reminiscence comes/...[of]...female smells in shuttered rooms,/And cigarettes in corridors/And cocktail smells in bars" ("Rhapsody" 58-64). In this way, the expression of disorder that is the outward image of a moon with her face ruined with "washed-out smallpox" ("Rhapsody" 54) is linked with both the negative lust (the disgust at female smells) and the horror of life in the city seen in earlier stanzas. The image and the memory therefore

depend upon each other, in the same way memory and the self depend on each other, in order for the reader to make sense of the poem. It is thus shown in "Rhapsody on a Windy Night" that there needs to be an image or an event to trigger a memory. This journey into the consciousness of the traveler thus would be meaningless without the seemingly chaotic and confusing images, but would not be possible without the memories, which are evidence of the inner workings of the mind. As time passes and the journey draws to a close, both the memories and the images order the traveler's consciousness in a way that the reader can make sense of both the traveler's mind and the poem.

And in the last stanza, the narrator finds the place he's looking for and time and memory are directly connected yet again: "Four o'clock,/Here is the number on the door./Memory!" ("Rhapsody" 66-68). In journeying through his consciousness, seeking memories, the traveler has also allowed his consciousness to be able "to call upon those reminiscences which guide it accurately through the environment" (Gray 50) and thus to make it back to his door and concrete, clear images that provides a contrast with the fragmented and disorientating memories of the earlier stanzas. Again, it is this connection between the different kinds of memories and the sense of time passing that helps bring order to "Rhapsody on a Windy Night" among a bewildering array of images.

However, the connection between time and memory also emphasizes that memories evoke lost times, and that time is always passing, and thus we are always losing something to the beat of a "fatalistic drum". In that way, the quest for order using memory and time is incomplete, as seen from the last few lines of "Rhapsody on a Windy

Night" which describe the traveler's discontent at finally finding his door. The street-lamp tells him:

You have the key,  
The little lamp spreads a ring on the stair.  
Mount.  
The bed is open; the toothbrush hangs on the wall,  
Put your shoes at the door, sleep, prepare for life. ("Rhapsody" 69-73).

But after his travels throughout time, memory and consciousness, searching for order amidst the chaos of the scenes on his journey, the banality of these words seem to depress him. They imply the necessity of the return to ordinary city life, which is already ordered and waiting for him. This is despite the negativity (connected to both lust and survival) of it that he had discovered on his journey. Indeed, he sees it as the "...last twist of the knife" ("Rhapsody 74), connecting the end of the poem and the quest to the negativity associated with the twisted things seen and remembered earlier in the poem.

Therefore, it is impossible to impose order on the whole of "Rhapsody on a Windy Night", since the traveler eventually comes to a place that is, on the surface, already ordered. By ending the poem in this manner, Eliot makes it impossible for the quest for order to be completed, though the search for home is finished. Thus the quest for order is also somewhat of failure. If the traveler can order the scenes he sees and his consciousness by use of memories and time, but cannot do the same with ordinary life, the poem speaks of the limits humanity places upon itself and its imagination. The quest for order, or any other kind of quest at all sought by a human, is thus inherently limited by lack of imagination and by the constraints of survival. This is a motif that will appear

again and again in Eliot's poetry.

"Rhapsody on a Windy Night" is ultimately an uncompleted quest for order in the chaos and the language of the poem, disguised as a story of a man walking along the streets of Paris. Eliot uses devices such as memory, time and the street-lamp guides in the poem to impose structure on an exploration of human consciousness and to suggest something of the limits of human imagination and life.

**Chapter 3:**  
**Three Quests in "The Waste Land"**

T.S. Eliot's "The Waste Land", like "Rhapsody on a Windy Night", is composed of outward chaotic images that the quest journey must somehow order, even if it be in an incomplete manner. Unlike the earlier poem, however, this longer and more complex piece is comprised of many different kinds of quests. Order is tied to restoring the various waste lands found in the poem and is sought through such journeys as the Grail quest, the Buddhist quest for peace and the search for a meaningful relationship with other human beings. There is also a sense that the places described in the poem were once ordered and that a different sort of order can be restored to them. This differs from "Rhapsody on a Windy Night", in which order is only imposed on the images by memory and by the marking of time.

One of the more obvious quest journeys that can be traced in "The Waste Land" is the Grail quest. The quest for this Grail has been called a "powerful narrative image for man's search for spiritual truth" (Southam 95) and the searcher for the Grail is a knight, whose quest takes him to the Castle Perilous where he must answer certain questions about the Grail before the life is restored to the land and the people.

The Grail quest was also connected to the Fisher King myth and in his notes to the poem, Eliot refers to From Ritual to Romance by Jessie Weston. From Weston's book, Eliot used her account of the Fisher King. He is a figure in many fertility myths whose land is under a curse and thus is barren. The Fisher King himself is impotent through the workings of the curse and his people are also infertile and miserable. The curse can only be lifted by the arrival of a stranger who can save the king, his land and his people by answering ritual questions.

Thus, both the stranger in the Fisher King myth and the Knight must answer ritual questions before they can succeed in their quests and both myths include ravaged lands and people that must be healed or brought back to life in order for the quests to be successes. Jessie Weston also connected the Fisher King/Grail myths to fertility myths that were concerned with the need for the symbolic death and rebirth of a god each year in order for the land to thrive. In From Ritual to Romance, she states that the “basic idea of the Grail tradition...[is]...the position of people whose prosperity, and the fertility of their land, are closely bound up with the life and virility of their King, who is not a mere man, but a Divine re-incarnation” (Weston 56). And so “the absence of the Life-giving deity was followed by precisely the same disastrous consequences” (Weston 57) as was the debilitation of the King in the Fisher King myths.

This Grail/Fisher King quest is used in the search for order in this very disordered poem. The imagery and the language of the first section "The Burial of the Dead" is in chaos. Just observing the sequence of first-person pronouns in the first stanza of "The Burial of the Dead", for instance, ‘us’ turns into ‘we’, then a ‘me’, then an ‘I’, until finally ‘Marie’ implies the emergence of a single speaker. However, can “the person who was ‘kept...warm...in forgetful snow’ be that Marie who prefers to ‘go south in the winter’?” (Levenson 171). It does not seem likely for such a profound change in attitudes and desires to occur in one person, and, of course, it doesn't, since the speakers in this poem are discontinuous. But their very discontinuity and differences add to the fragmentation of the poem, and the evolution in attitudes is also marked by a change from landscape to cityscape, “the dead land...into the Hofgarten” ("The Waste Land" 2-10),



and a change from a generalisation to a specific memory, “April is the cruellest month...we stopped in the colonnade, And went on in sunlight, into the Hofgarten, And drank coffee, and talked for an hour” (“The Waste Land” 1-11). Also, the adjective-noun pattern breaks and a series of participles are replaced by a series of verb conjunctions with “Winter kept us warm, covering/Earth in forgetful snow, feeding/A little life with dried tubers” (“The Waste Land” 5-7) changing into “Summer surprised us, coming over the Starnbergersee/With a shower of rain; we stopped in the colonnade,/And went on in sunlight” (“The Waste Land” 8-10). This break in word pattern accents the fragmentation by making the poem discontinuous.

However, at first, it seems as if the landscape of the poem has nothing to do with the Fisher King’s wasteland. It begins with restoration already taking place in April, “stirring/Dull roots with spring rain” (“The Waste Land” 3-4). Though F. B. Pinion suggests that Eliot is keeping “to the vegetation myths...[with his]...year beginning with spring; it is the season of rebirth, the time for a renewal of spiritual life” (Pinion 120), the presence of spring rain does not suggest a wasteland. Yet the restoration this spring rain offers is false, with the first speaker longing for winter and suggesting that “April is the cruellest month” (“The Waste Land” 1). Since spring is usually associated with the feeling of joy, and not with cruelty, these contradictions suggest a landscape where the seasons are distorted and where a search for true restoration is needed. Indeed, in the second stanza of the section, a question is asked: “What are the roots that clutch, what branches grow/ Out of this stony rubbish?” (“The Waste Land” 19-20). This question seems to suggest a true wasteland, perhaps arising from the wasteland of the fragmented

first stanza.

The fact that this wasteland is suggested in the form of a question proposes that it could stand for one of the questions the stranger or Knight must answer in order to gain their reward. Yet the speaker answers his own question, saying “Son of man,/You cannot say, or guess, for you know only/A heap of broken images” (“The Waste Land” 20-22).

The address to the son of man and the concept of a heap of broken images both come from the book Ezekiel in the Old Testament, where Ezekiel is told that he must preach the coming of the Messiah to his people, who do not believe him. In his position as prophet, Ezekiel could be seen as a knight trying to save a people who are too deep inside the wasteland to want to be saved. The inability of Ezekiel to help his people perhaps explains that when he is shown “something different” (“The Waste Land” 27), the Grail is not revealed and he only sees “fear in a handful of dust” (“The Waste Land” 30). The wasteland remains dominant and Ezekiel's people remain in a trap of their own making. Eliot also refers to the Fisher King myth in the end of “The Burial of the Dead” by having the speaker ask Stetson “That corpse you planted last year in your garden,/Has it begun to sprout? Will it bloom this year?” (“The Waste Land” 71-72). Since the Fisher King myth concerns a dead king and a dead land returning to life, the idea of a corpse making flowers bloom is highly symbolic of the myth.

Tracing the Grail/Fisher King quest journey helps impose order on the imagery of “The Burial of the Dead”. The direct references to this quest as part of the overall search for order pick up again in “The Fire Sermon”. Here, the speaker tells the readers of a rat that “crept softly through the vegetation...While I was fishing in the dull canal” (“The

Waste Land" 187-189). The mention of fishing makes reference to the *Fisher King* myth, since "the Fish...[is seen]...as a Divine Life Symbol" (Weston 121) and one "which, with the Grail, provided a mystic meal of which the unworthy cannot partake" (Weston 110). However, the lines that follow seem to support, rather than refute, the chaos of the poem, as the speaker is "Musing upon the king my brother's wreck/And on the king my father's death before him" ("The Waste Land" 191-192). If the speaker is the Fisher King, why does he speak of other kings? Perhaps it is just a mark of the general degradation of the land, which can lay three kings to waste. Or perhaps it is another example of the poem's disordered nature and the speakers have changed once again. In his notes about "The Waste Land", Eliot refers to The Tempest I, ii. In that part of the play, Ferdinand, reminded by Ariel's music, is thinking of his father: 'sitting on a bank, /Weeping again the king my father's wrack'". But no matter what these lines specifically refer to, they still emphasise the degradation of land through the destruction of the king and thus the necessity of putting the land and the poem in order.

More evidence of the degradation of the land is revealed through reference to the "brown land" ("The Waste Land" 174) and the repeated fact that the youthful sexual symbols of life "nymphs are de-/parted" ("The Waste Land" 174-175). Still, the possibility for the restoration of order is present through the voice shouting "*Et O ces voix d'enfants, chantant dans la coupole!*" (Eliot 202). The translation is 'And O, these voices of the children, singing in the dome', taken from Verlaine's *Parsifal* (Notes on the Waste Land, line 202). In the Grail myth, a choir of children sings at the ceremony of the foot-washing which comes before the lifting of the curse from the Fisher King, his people

and the land. However, no restoration follows this song and the search for order remains incomplete.

The next few lines of this section have Mr. Eugenides asking the speaker “To luncheon at the Cannon Street Hotel”, a parody “of the Grail legend, in which the Fisher King invites the questor to the Grail castle” (Southam 124). Note that the identity of the Fisher King has shifted again, this time to Mr. Eugenides. Since the speakers and personalities within "The Waste Land" are inconsistent and discontinuous (as noted before), this is not unusual, but it does suggest a certain instability in the person of the Fisher King linked to the instability of the land, and to, perhaps, the instability of the poem itself. This instability is also shown through the lines that state “ ‘On Margate Sands./I can connect/Nothing with nothing./The broken fingernails of dirty hands./My people humble people who expect/Nothing./la la” ("The Waste Land" 300-306). The speaker cannot connect anything and sees only ruined hands that no longer build. From this image of the wasted Fisher King, one moves to an image of his people, who expect nothing of their degraded land and king. But even this nothingness is unstable and breaks down into nonsensical singsong.

Yet even the instability of the quest helps bring order to the diverse images of "The Waste Land", as the lack of stability is at least evidence of some effort being made to complete the quest and order and restore the waste land. This effort is most clearly seen in the last section of "The Waste Land", "What the Thunder Said".

One of the three themes employed in this section is “the approach to Chapel Perilous” (Notes on the Waste Land), which is the final stage of the quest that Jessie

Weston writes about in From Ritual to Romance. For instance, in the first stanza of the section, Eliot writes about “He who was living is now dead” (“The Waste Land” 328) referring to the yet to be reborn Fisher King. The next line, “We who were living are now dying” (“The Waste Land” 329) links “What the Thunder Said” to “...the realm of death in life of the opening section” (Southam 136) which corresponds to the death and rebirth of the Fisher King. A physical wasteland (which could also be a metaphor for a spiritual wasteland) is also referred to in the second stanza with the speaker’s assertion that “Here is no water but only rock” (“The Waste Land” 331). The speaker goes on to describe a dry, mountainous place with rebellious people whose “red sullen faces sneer and snarl” (“The Waste Land” 344). This description seems to emphasise the impossibility of rebirth into fertility for the wasteland and thus for the Fisher King, even as the speaker imagines the “sound of water over rock” (“The Waste Land” 356) in the land.

Later on in this section the Chapel Perilous of the Fisher King myths is described as “the empty chapel, only the wind’s home” (“The Waste Land” 388). It seems a desolate place, empty of heroes or knights, containing only dry bones that “can harm no one” (“The Waste Land” 390). However, at the end of the stanza, “a damp gust/Bringing rain” (“The Waste Land” 394-395) comes, suggesting the possibility of fertility and order for the dry wasteland described earlier. This need for order is invoked again in the final stanza when the Fisher King, fishing on the shore of his dry land, asks himself “Shall I at least set my lands in order?” (“The Waste Land” 425). Again, evidence of the effort to bring the chaos of the waste land into some kind of order is made clear, despite the

incompleteness of such effort.

However, the quest for order is not always found in the Grail/Fisher King mythology. In "The Waste Land", there is also a search for a meaningful relationship. In particular, romantic and sexual relationships in the poem are deeply dysfunctional, revealing another kind of a waste land that can occur in the empty spaces between two human beings. For instance, in the second section titled "A Game of Chess", Eliot refers to the "change of Philomel, by the barbarous king/So rudely forced" ("The Waste Land" 99-100). When King Tereus of Thrace rapes Philomela, he has her tongue cut out and she eventually transforms into a nightingale to escape. The escape from the chaos of such an event and a transformation into a completely different form suggests hope for the restoration of order in Philomela's life and in the waste land. Yet, Philomela's transformation is not complete, for "still she cried, and still the world pursues,/Jug Jug to dirty ears" ("The Waste Land" 102-103). Jug Jug was "a crude joking reference to sexual intercourse" (Southam 117) and thus Philomela has not escaped the fact of her rape. The wasteland cannot be fully left behind because the past informs the present, which contains everything the past did as Eliot wrote in Tradition and the Individual Talent. Because Philomela's past is so potent, it haunts her present heavily. Though she is changed, she still cannot form relationships with others, who remember her past and taunt her with it. This is no restoration of order, but simply a transformation into a different mode of chaos.

In fact, the quest for meaningful relationships is not so much about order, but about physical and emotional desire: Philomela is as much marked by her desire to

transform herself as she is by her inability to form a relationship with another in the world. Speakers in "The Waste Land" will also continue to put effort into dysfunctional relationships, propelled by these desires.

The next part of "A Game of Chess" proceeds as a series of questions asked by a neurotic woman to an indifferent man. This miscommunication in their relationship reveals the possibility of a different kind of wasteland, not occurring in the physical reality, but existing between two people. One of the woman's first questions is "What are you thinking of?" ("The Waste Land" 113). The man's reply is chilling: "I think we are in rats' alley/Where the dead men lost their bones" ("The Waste Land" 115-116). The woman's desire to form a connection with the man compels her to speak, even though the man answers her cryptically (and yet he is speaking the truth, for surely the bones of this relationship are lost). Their conversation communicates a sense of decay that is paralleled in the other relationship depicted in this section.

In that relationship, Lil's husband Albert is coming back from the war. But she has aged horribly by taking "them pills" ("The Waste Land" 159) to induce an abortion. Age, births, and an abortion have laid waste to her body, and it is clear from the words of the speaker that he expects them to lay waste to her relationship with her husband as well, since Albert just "wants a good time" ("The Waste Land" 148). It is implied that Albert's physical desires are the only reason for his relationship with Lil. This is not a meaningful relationship and Lil knows it, yet compelled by her own desire, she worries about it instead of just giving up on it. Though both the relationship between Lil and Albert and the relationship between the woman and the man earlier in "A Game of Chess" represent

a certain kind of waste land where “religious dearth or superficiality is reflected in despiritualized love” (Pinion 122), these relationships are not destroyed completely. The people in these relationships continue to search for meaning within the relationship and their different desires get tangled up in the chaos, making love a wasteland where no restoration of order is possible.

The most important figure in "The Waste Land" to observe and negotiate the search for meaningful relationships is Tiresias. Tiresias is the ancient blind hermaphrodite from Greek mythology who provides commentary on certain scenes. As an “old man with wrinkled dugs” ("The Waste Land" 228), he has “Perceived the scene” ("The Waste Land" 229). This perception is seen with the image of a young man assaulting an indifferent woman in "The Fire Sermon", engaging her “in caresses/Which still are unreproved, if undesired.” ("The Waste Land" 237-238). In this scene, the physical desires of the young man clearly form part of the dysfunction in the relationship. Tiresias watches this scene unfold, and because of his hermaphroditic state and seer abilities, has “foresuffered all/Enacted on this same divan or bed” ("The Waste Land" 243-244). By this suffering, Tiresias, even as he reveals that the search for meaningful relationships is ultimately somewhat futile (adding to the incompleteness of the quest journeys as a whole), shows himself to be a symbol for all that occurs between the sexes and gives order to the whole history of sexual relationships. But he is injured and ravaged figure, which implies this history is also terribly battered. These marks of destruction are where desire leads humanity. Thus, Tiresias also symbolizes the destruction that comes of desire and this is why the quest for meaningful relationships



remains incomplete in "The Waste Land".

However, there are other ways that contribute to the search for order in "The Waste Land". Several of Eliot's references were from Eastern texts, such as the Upanishads which are taken as an origin of both Hinduism and Buddhism. Buddhism, in particular, emphasizes a turning away from desire in order to find peace. Since desire drives the search for meaningful relationships and the Grail quest is from a Western tradition, this overlaying of Eastern religion and philosophy on the poem brings a different kind of order to its disorienting images.

One of the prime examples of this is in the third section of "The Waste Land", titled "The Fire Sermon". The Fire Sermon is the name of an important work by the Buddha. In this section, Eliot combines a quotation from the Fire Sermon with one from St. Augustine's Confessions, thus connecting the two:

"Burning burning burning burning  
O Lord Thou pluckest me out  
O Lord Thou pluckst

burning" (308-311)

Burning, taken from the Fire Sermon, is an obvious reference to desire, and so the speaker seems to be praying to be plucked, the lines taken from the Confessions and rescued from desire, which can lead to unhappiness and chaos. This can provide a resolution to the search for meaningful relationships, since letting go of desire will mean letting go of relationships driven by desire. That quest would end with the recognition that desire is, in and of itself, disorderly. Equally important in this part of the poem is the

connection between eastern and western religious philosophy, since just a few lines before the speaker states "I can connect/Nothing with nothing" ("The Waste Land" 301-302). The entwining of the Fire Sermon and the Confessions belies the chaos implied by the stated lack of connection in the previous lines. It also gives authority to the recognition of desire as part of chaos since two very different traditions are combining to make the same statement about desire.

A pre-Buddhist text is also important in suggesting a restoration of order at the end of "The Waste Land". In the penultimate stanza, Eliot's recitation of " 'Datta, dayadhvam, damyata' (Give, sympathise, control)" from the Upanishads (Notes on the Waste Land line 401) gives a process by which this restoration might be achieved. By giving instead of taking, by sympathising instead of being apathetic, and by controlling rather than being controlled, the speakers in "The Waste Land" might "Revive for a moment a broken Coriolanus" ("The Waste Land" 416) and order their disarrayed land. Finally, the poem ends with the chant of "Shantih shantih shantih" (Eliot 433), which "Eliot's note tells us that this Sanskrit word so repeated signifies 'The peace which passeth understanding', and serves as the formal ending to the Upanishads" (Southam 145). By placing this chant at the end of "The Waste Land", Eliot is perhaps, with these syllables that, as Piers Gray writes, "promise the unimaginable" (Gray 244), suggesting a peace for the wasteland that was found through searching for order amidst the chaos of "These fragments...shored against my ruins" ("The Waste Land" 430).

Although order is never fully restored, it is interesting to see that the last line of the poem has to do with peace. Perhaps the final goal of the poem is peace, and a

spiritual peace at that, brought about by the restoration of order and letting go of desire - so that peace comes to the physical and spiritual waste lands described in the poem (including descriptions of the barren Grail lands and dysfunctional sexual relationships). "The Waste Land" is thus different than "Rhapsody on a Windy Night" in which the search for order is simply to make sense of the disparate scenes presented. The end of "The Waste Land" might then reveal a growth in Eliot's ambitions, a reaching for more than just the past, but the future as well. In that way, "The Waste Land" is more than a search for order, but is the beginning of a search for peace and spirituality that will be evident in Eliot's later poetry, such as the "Four Quartets" in which the search continues with an emphasis on spiritual truth.

## **Chapter 4:**

### **Descend Into Chaos:**

#### **Seeking Spiritual Truth in the "Four Quartets"**

In "Rhapsody on a Windy Night", time and memory imposed order on the chaos of seemingly random images throughout the traveler's journey. Memory and the past were emphasized as a way to make sense of the present. With "The Waste Land", the many different images and allusions (the waste lands of the poem) suggested a need for restoration of outward order. The tracing of the Grail quest throughout the poem, as well as the search for a meaningful relationship and the entwining of Eastern with Western asceticism attempted to realize this order, which was needed to bring peace to the seeker and to the various physical and spiritual waste lands described in the poem. This restoration also placed emphasis on bringing order to the present state of the poem and thus did not truly look forward to the future. However, the "Four Quartets" is outwardly a very ordered poem, with few of the random images and allusions that graced the earlier poems. Yet, throughout the four poems of the sequence, Eliot seems to search for a kind of death, a sort of chaos, instead of peace achieved through the restoration of order. This speaks of spiritual growth on Eliot's part, for he has turned away from the imposition of order as the solution for humanity and has instead embraced a kind of chaos as he moves towards an exploration of the inner self and soul. The poem is also very forward-looking, for Eliot is seeking a spiritual future. In this way, "Four Quartets" is a future-seeking search for spiritual truth by descent into chaos.

This embrace of chaos is first seen in "Burnt Norton", in which paradox and other expressions of contrariety are necessary to open up the soul to true spirituality. Indeed, in Section I of "Burnt Norton", the formal pattern and logic of the stanza lead up to an impossible moment at which point the order of the section is broken. The formal order is

shown in the neatness of such logic statements as "If all time is eternally present/All time is unredeemable" (I:5), though they are not easily resolved. However, even this frail logic is broken completely when the image of a dry pool with "dry concrete, brown edged" was suddenly "filled with water out of sunlight,/And the lotos rose, quietly, quietly,/The surface glittered out of heart of light,/And they were behind us, reflected in the pool." (I:34-39). The ubiquitous 'they' reflected in the pool reveals that there is knowledge to be gained by delving into the chaos of sudden changes. Also, the "lotos and 'heart of light' both suggest spiritual life" (Cahill 142), affirming that the knowledge is of the spiritual type. This knowledge is the aim of the quest journey in "Burnt Norton", though it has to be taken in small doses, for "human kind/Cannot bear much reality" (I:42-43). And the joy that this knowledge can bring, being "something above and beyond the temporal" (Bergsten 157) and human sphere, is hinted at the end of this first section of a four poem sequence. In this reality, "the leaves are full of children,/Hidden excitedly, containing laughter" (I:40-41) and their innocence and joy suggests the happiness to be found at the end of the quest journeys in "Four Quartets".

By Section II of "Burnt Norton", further expressions of disorder are seen in the first listing of paradoxes in "Four Quartets". Paradoxes represent the undoing of chaos, for they present two opposite events or objects as both true at the same time. They are a major part of the "Four Quartets", forming much of the third section of "Burnt Norton" as well as part of this section, in which "...neither arrest nor movement" (II:64) can describe "the still point of the turning world" (II:62). Stillness and turning both make up part of the search for spiritual truth. In one way, Eliot seems to be saying that paradox and the

ability to accept it and to accept chaos are important for the exploration into spirituality. The Incarnation itself is a paradox, with God and man existing in one being, and perhaps the acceptance of lesser paradoxes leads up to the acceptance of that major Christian mystery. This need to be flexible in the journey towards future spiritual truth is emphasized by Eliot's insistence that one does not "...call it [this still point] fixity" (II:64); acceptance of the paradox is required. And as a result of this acceptance, one might be given the "inner freedom from practical desire/...yet surrounded/By a grace of sense" (II:70-73), a paradox in and of itself. No longer is simple peace and the imposition or restoration of order the poet's answer to the problems of human life and spirituality. Chaos, in the form of paradox, is reflected in human nature and in the outer logic of "Burnt Norton".

The necessity of disorder is also suggested in Section III of the poem. The seeker of spiritual truth is told to "Descend lower, descend only/Into the world of perpetual solitude,/World not world, but which is not world,/Internal darkness, deprivation..." (III:114-117). Not only are both other people and the self to be cast away, but the very concept of "world" is questioned. Eliot refers to the reality in Section I as "our first world" (I:21) and he suggests here that to enter it again, we have to give up not only concepts of self and others, but the entire way we think about our world. Much as bad habits must be killed before good ones can be installed, our world - both material and what we think of as spiritual - must be destroyed before a new spiritual world can be approached.

But if the old world is let go, how can the new be approached? Eliot proposes in

Section II that consciousness of the world is needed and "Time past and time future/Allow but a little consciousness" (II:83-84). So "while the world moves...on its metalled ways/Of time past and time future" (III:124-126), the way to "be conscious is not to be in time" (II:85), though it "is a consciousness that cannot be sustained" (Cahill 147). Not to be in time suggests those fleeting moments of spiritual awareness, expressed, for Eliot, in communion with nature or in a "draughty church at smokefall" (II:88). Yet, even those moments are paradoxical for they can only happen *in* time, and they push the quest journey further towards some future spiritual truth that would be impossible without them. The traveler must thus while "the world moves on its endless circle of desire and frustration...descend into the absolute darkness that precedes the reception of grace" (Bergsten 184). Then we are told at the conclusion of this section that "Only through time time is conquered" (II:90). This statement contains perhaps the ultimate paradox of "Burnt Norton", asserting that we must live in time to search for timelessness. It will be seen as essential to the quest journey, with Eliot returning to it in "Little Gidding".

But first the relation between the complexity of the poem and human spirituality is seen again in the final section of the poem, Section V. "Words move, music moves/Only in time; but that which is living/Can only die." (V:137-139) Humans die, but words do not. Are words then our immortality? Not always so, for words come from humanity and like humanity, they sometimes fail:

Words strain,  
Crack and sometimes break, under the burden,



Under the tension, slip, slide, perish,  
 Decay with imprecision, will not stay in place,  
 Will not stay still. (V:149-153)

The failure of words is tied into the failure of the poem, however complex, to fully articulate divinity, for it must "use words and speech to reach towards the silence of the divine Word" (Moody, Tracing 178). And even the language used to describe the divine has no guarantee of stability, for "The Word in the desert/Is most attacked by voices of temptation." (V:155-156). If words are not sure against death, the ultimate form of chaos, then what is? Eliot replies that "Love itself is unmoving" (V:163) and timeless, since it exists both in life and death. But can this love be truly expressed in a poem written in "the aspect of time/Caught in form of limitation/Between un-being and being" (V:166-168)? It seems impossible to communicate timeless love while inside time. Thus, the speaker must learn that "To not be what he is in time is the way towards what he would be out of time" (Moody, Thomas Stearn Eliot, 191). This way is communicated in the words of the poem which urge the reader to descend into chaos, to be rid of these limitations on the journey towards spiritual truth.

This quest journey continues in "East Coker", the second poem in the "Four Quartets" sequence. The poem starts with an ending and concludes with a beginning. "In my beginning is my end" (I:1) and "In my end is my beginning" (V:209), Eliot says, emphasizing both the paradoxical and cyclical nature of the spiritual journey. In the first section of "East Coker", the speaker notes the cycles and seasons of houses: "Houses rise and fall, crumble, are extended,/Are removed, destroyed, restored, or in their place/Is an open field, or a factory, or a by-pass." (I:2-5). Houses are made by human hands, and

like humans, they fall and die: "O dark dark dark. They all go into the dark" (III:101). But the divine is immortal, it is "here/Or there, or elsewhere." And thus there is constancy in change and chaos. Much of the quest journey in "Four Quartets" will be about descending into chaos, but the spirituality that Eliot is searching for remains unchanging. It is the traveler on the journey who must change *himself* in order to find his future.

Indeed, according to Eliot, even poetry and experience do not matter on the journey. In Section II, he writes that there is only

At best, a limited value  
In the knowledge derived from experience.  
The knowledge imposes a pattern, and falsifies,  
For the pattern is new in every movement  
And every moment is a new shocking  
Valuation of all we have been. (II:81-86)

The patterns discussed here could also be taken as other words for order. So imposed order would be false; it would lead only to itself, not to reality. (And if this is true, then should its opposite, chaos, lead to truth instead?) This is quite a change from the order imposed by memory in "Rhapsody on a Windy Night" and the search for restoration of order in "The Waste Land". Instead of a search for a meaningful relationship as in "The Waste Land", there is a warning about looking for human love, because it would not be divine love, but "love of the wrong thing" (III:125) And instead of the restoration of order, there is the faint suggestion of "laughter in the garden, echoed ecstasy" (III:132), like the children's laughter in "Burnt Norton". Eliot also makes a deliberate reference back to his earlier poems, for he writes that "the poetry does not matter" and that he spent

"twenty years largely wasted" trying to find the right words to communicate his meaning - which are remarkable statements for a lifelong poet to make. But Eliot no longer believed that the patterns produced by his poetry hold truth. That lack of belief reveals his spiritual growth since "The Waste Land", where he had seemed supremely confident of his pattern of themes, images and allusions. Now he finds that the only wisdom "is the wisdom of humility: humility is endless" (II:98).

Also, if every moment is new and brings with it a new valuation of ourselves, because these lines "affirm...not any value in experience, but just its being a valuation of ourselves" (Moody, Thomas Stearns Eliot, 215), then chaos more accurately describes the process of experience than order does. This is another reason that humility is so vital. Because if we believe that we have wisdom and that we know the pattern, then we really know nothing since the pattern is by definition false and because the human knowledge and love that imposes the pattern is inevitably limited. Only divine knowledge and love is unlimited, and humans need humility to be able to work with that lack of limits. As Cahill writes of the limits of humanity confronting the divine, "Only through an acknowledgment of our predicament can we be lifted out of it" (Cahill 161). Therefore, the traveler needs humility on his quest journey for spiritual truth.

And then in Section IV, the speaker explicitly links the journey with Christian imagery of the communion and the passion:

The dripping blood our only drink,  
 The bloody flesh our only food:  
 In spite of which we like to think  
 That we are sound, substantial flesh and blood -  
 Again, in spite of that, we call this Friday good. (IV:167-172)

This emphasizes the sacrifice made by Christ in the Christian tradition as connected with the quest journey in the "Four Quartets". In those five lines, Eliot, who had converted to Anglicism in 1927, gives another reason for humility and seems to suggest that our flesh and blood do ultimately not matter (though we fool ourselves into thinking they do), but that it is our souls, fed with Christ's sacrifice, that are truly important. This is more evidence of Eliot's spiritual growth throughout his poetic development, for these sentiments were never expressed in earlier poems.

However, this is not the end of the quest journey. In the final part of "East Coker", the travelers must be "still moving/Into another intensity/For a further union, a deeper communion/Through the dark cold and the empty desolation" (V:195-199). They are moving "into the timeless" (Moody, Thomas Stearns Eliot, 222), which is the realm of the divine. This journey, begun in "Burnt Norton", continues here with the realization that the divine is constant and limitless through human change and death, and that it is necessary to have humility to move through the chaos so as to have the ability to search for spiritual truth, represented (in part) in "East Coker" by Christ's death on Good Friday.

The quest journey continues in Section I of "The Dry Salvages" with another reminder that the divine is everywhere and in many forms: "The sea has many voices,/Many gods and many voices" (I:24-25). Even with this recognition, the traveler finds that time and future are paradoxical. The future is really futureless "When time stops and time is never ending" (I:44). Though there is a movement towards the future here it is halted by the paradox of time. How can time be both stopping and never-ending?

While that question remains unresolved, the traveler on the quest journey cannot think about the future or about moving forward to a greater spirituality. Eliot writes that "We cannot think of time that is oceanless/Or of an ocean not littered with wastage/Or of a future that is not liable/Like the past, to have no destination" (II:69-72). The sea has been linked to the divine earlier in "East Coker", but this ocean chokes with spiritual waste. There is no path to a positive, if any, future through this ocean. The quest is therefore stopped by the limits of human imagination, which looks at concepts of time and future and sees only the loss of order. Humans ask "Where is there an end of it, the soundless wailing.../Where is there an end to the drifting wreckage" (II:48-51) and do not realise that there is no true end to suffering and to searching through the waste. "There is no end, but addition" (II:55) and continuing along the quest journey may bring that additional, spiritual dimension to human suffering.

But what does that dimension consist of? According to Eliot, it consists of *time*: "The moments of happiness - not the sense of well-being,/Fruition, fulfillment, security or affection,/Or even a very good dinner, but the sudden illumination -" (II:90-92). These moments of illumination are one of the keys to spiritual truth, in which to illuminate means to cast light on, in this case, our experiences. For these moments taken out of time, for surely they seem like an eternity, restores the meaning to our experience of life, for "We had the experience, but missed the meaning" (II:93), and considering the fact that these are poems dedicated to spirituality, it seems well to conclude that the meaning includes the divine. This answers the paradox of time stopping and yet not ending, for the time spent with the divine in these moments is tiny, but could conceivably feel like an

eternity. Nor are they always connected with a positive emotion, for "the moments of agony...are likewise permanent" (II:104-107). These are also moments of extreme disorder, since they demonstrate a paradox and are seemingly inexplicable communions with the divine. Thus, the moments of illumination in Section II of "East Coker", illustrate both chaos and the paradoxical nature of time discussed earlier and are shown to be an important way to move closer to a deeper spiritual truth.

In the next section of the poem, the question of the future is asked again. Examining the human inability to find a destination for themselves beyond the limits of their imaginations, Eliot looks to Hindu mythology. Specifically, the story of Krishna, as he admonished Arjuna on the field of battle, not to fare well, but *fare forward*, since death is but a transmigration from one form to another in this Hindu tradition. Again, Eliot puts the point in terms of the sea and seafarers: "O voyagers, O seamen,/You who come to port , and you whose bodies/Will suffer the trial and the judgement of the sea/Or whatever event, this is your real destination" (III:163-166). The journey is the destination; it is imperative to make the attempt at crossing the sea of the divine, no matter what happens. The end of the journey may be death, but in death a real communion with the divine will be possible instead of only the small moments of illumination. That point (and metaphor) is emphasized in Section IV, where a prayer to the Virgin for "all those in ships" (IV:169) and all involved with the sea makes up the entire section of the poem.

Finally, in the last section of "The Dry Salvages", Eliot confirms that the moments of illumination are of the divine and thus important to the spiritual journey. As

mentioned above, the moment of illumination is "the moment in and out of time,/The distraction fit, lost in a shaft of sunlight,/The wild thyme unseen, or the winter lightning" (V:207-209). These spaces of illumination demonstrate the paradoxical nature of time stopping and never-ending and often occur while viewing beauty. But they also represent "The hint half guessed, the gift half understood" which is "the Incarnation" (V:215) of the divine. But is not only necessary to wait for these moments of divine illumination to happen, for "what our least time-ridden moments can give us...[is] not timelessness but a glimpse of it; hence to decide that we live for these moments is to be content with the parody of the real" (Kenner 316). Thus we must also have "prayer, observance, discipline, thought and action" (V:214) in order to seek out spiritual truth and a life, instead of only moments, filled with the divine. It is necessary to fare forward on the quest journey in "Four Quartets", using many different methods to look for spiritual truth, including the acceptance of unordered moments of illumination of the divine.

The theme of a quest for spiritual truth is reemphasized in Section I of "Little Gidding", in which the poet writes about making a pilgrimage to a holy site. He tells the reader that no matter how they travel to the holy site, which is the chapel in the village of Little Gidding itself, a "restoration of an earlier place destroyed...[when]...Cromwell's soldiers sacked it in 1647 and the saintly community scattered" (Kenner 319), they will find a "world's end" (I:38). Although there are many places like this in the world, where "what you thought you came for/Is only a shell, a husk of meaning" (I: 32-33) and your original purpose "is beyond the end you figured/And is altered in fulfillment" (I: 36-37), this one is the nearest in the poem. However, this description of the Little Gidding chapel

suggests that the pilgrim to this site can be expected to undergo great changes in his expectations of authentic spiritual truth. It also suggests abandonment of the self; one is not meant to "verify/Instruct yourself, or inform curiosity/Or carry report" (I: 46-48), but to pray in a place where "prayer has been valid" (I: 50). The one word 'valid' "contains notions of health and faring well, and ties them to the idea of being true and right" (Moody, Thomas Stearns Eliot, 245). Eliot also seems to imply that these true and right prayers should not be the usual conscious string of a certain "order of words" (I: 51), but rather a communion with the dead saints who lived in and around the chapel, for what the dead "had no speech for, when living,/They can tell you, being dead" (I: 53-54). The dead "are speaking the Word" (Moody, Thomas Stearns Eliot, 245) and the living must journey as close as possible to the state of death for the divine and thus spiritual truth to be communicated to them. This idea of the dead communicating wisdom to the living is developed more in Section II, when the speaker encounters a ghost-figure. In the meantime, prayer at the Little Gidding chapel is another example of a "timeless moment" (I: 57) that Eliot has classified earlier as moments outside of time that are filled with revelation. Thus, through the speaker's journey to the chapel, the casting aside of his expectations and the communion with the dead, which all culminates in a moment outside of time, Eliot shows how the quest for spiritual truth is undertaken by a descent into the disorder of abandonment of the self in order to commune with the dead.

The sense of a journey being undertaken in "Little Gidding" continues with a conversation with a ghost-figure in Section II. Such conversations with spiritual "guides" are a staple for travelers seeking the divine. Virgil and Dante are just one example. Thus,



the speaker meets "one walking" (II: 94) and "caught the sudden look of some dead master" (II: 100) in the ghost-figure he encounters. To the speaker, the ghost is a compound figure of the poets and men who came before him, and also strangely a part of himself, for he assumes "a double part" (II: 105) and proceeds to speak with the figure, knowing that he is "himself yet someone other" (II: 108). This suggests that the speaker is not only tapping into the wisdom compiled by people over the ages, but also the wisdom every person carries within himself. The ghost-figure then refers to another journey between "two worlds become much like each other" (II: 130), which can be taken as referring to the spiritual world and the earthly world.

Since the speaker is looking for a way to become closer to the spiritual world and spiritual truth, he listens as the ghost-figure discloses "the gifts reserved for age" (II: 137), which include the failure of the body, knowledge of and rage at human folly and "the rending pain of re-enactment" (II: 146) of all he has done. These steps all emphasise the disorder of human existence on the journey towards spiritual truth that will continue forever unless the speaker's spirit is "restored by that refining fire/Where you must move in measure, like a dancer" (II: 153-154). The refining fire can be taken to mean a purgatorial one, the penultimate step to arrival in heaven "with the flames of the Spirit as a manifestation of divine Love" (Bergsten 240). Purification will bring the traveler closer to the timeless love that asserted before in the "Four Quartets" as the only entity that does not change and move with death. Therefore, the speaker's conversation with the ghost-figure emphasizes the many steps to go on his journey and the importance of purification to moving closer to spiritual truth.

Finally, in Section V of "Little Gidding", the speaker finds that the beginning of his journey and the end of it are the same. This is yet another example of the paradoxes which mirror the paradox of the Incarnation and that must be accepted in order to move forward on the quest for spiritual truth. The end of the journey turns out to be "where we start from" (V: 233), but the perception of the beginning of the quest changes. For the speaker, any action becomes a "step to the block, to the fire, down the sea's throat" (V: 243) and thus the end of the journey towards spiritual truth is both death and rebirth, for we "die with the dying...[and we]...are born with the dead" (V: 245-247) encased within Eliot's "pattern/Of timeless moments" (V: 252-253). In these timeless moments, "the fire and the rose are one" (V: 277) - which are of course symbols: the fire of purification and the rose of timeless love. Purification and timeless love have been noted before in the "Four Quartets", and Eliot concludes that they are the components of true spirituality that can only be reached on earth in moments out of time or by dying and being reborn. This is why, although the "Four Quartets" has a very ordered structure, the quest journey for spiritual truth and knowledge throughout the poem is achieved through the chaos of paradox and death. Thus, when the quest is over in "Little Gidding", the speaker is just beginning to appreciate the necessity of dying and being reborn and the pattern of timeless moments in which purity and love brought about by the fire and the rose are one. Like death, in which we die only to be born again, the quest for spiritual truth never truly ends but begins again.

"Four Quartets" represents a shift from Eliot's earlier poetry. From trying to impose or restore order on words and images, Eliot turns to seeking disorder within

language and humanity. However, disorder need not be seen as merely a negative force. N. Katherine Hayles, writing on the linking of chaos in literature and science by culture, says that "the crucial turn comes when chaos is envisioned not as an absence or void but as a positive force in its own right" (Hayles 3). As a positive force in the "Four Quartets", disorder helps the travelers obtain a degree of spiritual truth by forcing them to confront death and the limitless divine while working within human limits.

Order does work as a way to find meaning, spiritual or otherwise, in "The Waste Land" and "Rhapsody on a Windy Night". In "Rhapsody on a Windy Night", the marking of the hours of the early morning imposes structure on the poem and memory, which is closely identified with the self, imposes order on the images presented to the traveler as he attempts to find a way back to his door. This imposition brings meaning to the poem and also serves to find meaning in the traveler's consciousness. Order thus works in this way to explicate "Rhapsody on a Windy Night".

With "The Waste Land", there is some sense that the waste lands the poet describes once had some semblance of order to them. Thus, the speakers seek a restoration of order in the Grail/Fisher King quest, the search for meaningful relationships and the quest informed by Eastern asceticism. With the letting go of desire that fuels the search for meaningful relationships, the Eastern traditions of Buddhism and Hinduism intertwine with the Western tradition of the Grail and Fisher King myths and the quest combine to find a kind of spiritual peace that foreshadow the search for spiritual truth in "Four Quartets". This peace was found by the ability of the various quests to restore order to the fragmented meanings of the poem.

However, in all three poems, the search for meaning and truth is incomplete. No image or event is ever fully explained, and in that way all of the quests at least partially fail. But the quest for spiritual truth in the "Four Quartets" is the deepest and most difficult, due to the use and the acknowledgement of chaos as a positive force that can be applied to find meaning and truth. It ends with the reminder that the poems only explicated the beginning of the journey and thus it fails the least.

Yet, "Rhapsody on a Windy Night", "The Waste Land" and "Four Quartets" are all incomplete and all are quest journeys for truth and meaning. In this way, "Four Quartets" represents not a radical shift, but a culmination of a pattern of quests that move from using order to using chaos as positive forces that Eliot developed over his whole career.

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