

T.S. Eliot, “The Waste Land”, and Yoga Philosophy

by

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ABSTRACT

While pursuing his graduate studies at Harvard, T.S. Eliot put a year into deep study of the Yoga Sutras with renowned scholar James Haughton Woods. Yoga, defined in the Sutras as the practice of stopping “the fluctuations of the mind-stuff” (Patañjali 8), provides the possibility of hope and equanimity in Eliot’s poem *The Waste Land* (1922), which depicts a world seemingly devoid of meaning. Not only can the influence of the Yoga Sutras be seen in the poetic form, style, and voice of *The Waste Land* and in the explanatory notes to the poem provided by Eliot, but classical yoga philosophy, as articulated in Patañjali’s Sutras, also forms the basis of a yogic spiritual journey in the poem.

Delving deeply into how yoga philosophy likely inspired T.S. Eliot gives a foundation for a close reading of *The Waste Land* as a spiritual journey. By reading the poem in this way, we not only better acknowledge all of the religious ideas that Eliot wrapped into the text, but we can successfully solve what I call “the enigma problem” in *Waste Land* scholarship. The poem can be about fragmentation and still make sense. In fact, this way of reading draws out an overarching narrative and provides a new and flexible way to read the poem that is both coherent and hopeful.

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to my husband, J. Daniel Cloud. He served as copy editor on this project and patiently edited each subsequent version while supporting me mentally and emotionally.

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CHAPTER I - INTRODUCTION

While pursuing his graduate studies at Harvard, T.S. Eliot put a year into deep study of the *Yoga Sutras* with renowned scholar James Haughton Woods. Yoga, defined in the *Sutras* as the practice of stopping “the fluctuations of the mind-stuff” (Patañjali 8), provides the possibility of hope and equanimity in Eliot’s poem *The Waste Land* (1922), which depicts a world seemingly devoid of meaning. Not only can the influence of the *Yoga Sutras* be seen in the poetic form, style, and voice of *The Waste Land* and in the explanatory notes to the poem provided by Eliot, but classical yoga philosophy, as articulated in Patañjali’s *Sutras*, also forms the basis of a yogic spiritual journey in the poem.

Among the many literary and philosophical sources of *The Waste Land*, the *Yoga Sutras* have not yet been fully acknowledged or explored, though P.S. Sri makes a promising start. In *T.S. Eliot, Vedanta and Buddhism*, Sri writes about *The Waste Land* as a spiritual journey infused with yogic concepts and metaphors:

Taken as a whole, *The Waste Land* traces the journey of a human soul across the desert of ignorance, full of thirst (*tanha*) and suffering (*dukkha*), to a vantage point from where the freedom of *nirvana* is tantalizingly glimpsed, if not fully realized. Thus, the pervasive images of sterility and futility serve to stress the dark night of the soul in its emptiness caused by separation from God, while the positive moments point to detachment from craving as a means to emancipation. (62).

In this study, I extend Sri's reading into a comprehensive formal analysis of the poem and explore the poem as a pathway through the *Yoga Sutras*. I do not argue that Eliot provides a full and adequate understanding of yogic philosophy in the poem but rather that yogic philosophy informs the structure of *The Waste Land*. Indeed, the poem sometimes seems orientalist in its mixing of discrete Eastern wisdom traditions and projects a particularly Western, or modern, yearning for mystical order upon them. Nevertheless, scholarship on the poem would be incomplete without a tracing of Patañjali's influence upon it, even though the poem remains a Western expression, caught up in its own modern preoccupations.

In *The Waste Land*, one can see yogic philosophy in the form of a journey. This journey gives shape to the poem which I argue begins with the recognition of suffering and pain, and the obstacles to overcoming that pain. In both Part One: "The Burial of the Dead" and Part Two: "A Game of Chess," the themes progress to further explore the causes of suffering. This journey continues in Part Three: "The Fire Sermon" which explores the concept of disgust. In this section, I argue, Eliot begins the process of detachment and discernment, fundamental aspects of yoga. In Part Four: "Death By Water," the poem offers a poetic representation of the condition called "isolation" (Patañjali xli). In the *Sutras*, this is described as a state where "all hindrances subside" which is the goal of yoga (Patañjali xli). Finally, in the last and longest section, "What the Thunder Said" the poem provides an extended meditation on what is required to attain a state of peace in everyday life. In this way, reinvigoration of the waste land is possible. Taken together, the five sections of the poem depict a yogic journey similar to that depicted in the *Yoga Sutras*.

In this article, I look at Eliot's interest in the philosophies of Asia. I then connect that to his period of mental breakdown during which he composed much of *The Waste Land*. His treatments during this period, I argue, led him to return to the yogic traditions he had studied at Harvard. After making that point, I offer my reading of the yogic philosophy undergirding the structure of this poem and the similarities of form between the *Yoga Sutras* and *The Waste Land*. After this general overview, I turn to a close reading of the yogic concepts represented in each section of the poem itself.

CHAPTER II – ELIOT AND COMPARATIVE RELIGION

T.S. Eliot's interest in yogic philosophy was part of his broader interest in the religious systems of Asia, including India, China and Japan. As a youth, he read *The Light of Asia*, about the life of the Buddha, by Edwin Arnold (Ackroyd 27). Eliot was raised in an important Unitarian family with many prestigious and powerful Unitarian ministers. In fact, Eliot's grandfather was called a "saint" by Ralph Waldo Emerson (Crawford 17). However, Eliot rejected the religious liberalism he was raised with, saying: "I was brought up outside the Christian fold, in Unitarianism; and in the form of Unitarianism in which I was instructed, things were either black or white. The Son and Holy Ghost were not believed in, certainly; but they were entitled to respect as entities in which many other people believed." (Childs 134). Being brought up Unitarian undoubtedly set the stage for Eliot's own religious explorations.

During his undergraduate career, Eliot struck up a friendship with his professor and "polymathic cultural critic," Irving Babbitt (Crawford 86). Eliot took Babbitt's course in French literature, but Babbitt also had in-depth discussions with Eliot about Buddhism, resulting in Eliot "absorbing much of Babbitt's interest in and attitude toward Buddhism" (Kearns 69 and Gordon 22). Manju Jain suggests Babbitt pushed Eliot to pursue further studies in Sanskrit (39). Babbitt and Eliot kept up correspondence until Babbitt died (Ackroyd 35) and Eliot biographer Robert Crawford states that Eliot regarded Babbitt as the professor at Harvard who had the greatest influence on him (131).

Eliot also availed himself of the extensive libraries at Harvard and spent a great deal of time absorbing texts on mysticism, perhaps most notably taking thorough notes on *The Varieties of Religious Experience* by William James (Gordon 141-142). James, who

had left Harvard by the time Eliot was a student, took a multi-religious perspective in his study. *The Varieties* highlights representatives of Indic religions, including Swami Vivekananda, a celebrated yogi and Hindu philosopher (James 400). Vivekananda wrote four books about yoga (*Karma Yoga, Raja Yoga, Jnana Yoga* and *Bhakti Yoga*) which were highly influential in the late 1800s in the United States, especially among the Harvard intellectual elite (Goldberg 79). Those who learned from Vivekananda include not only William James, but also Eliot's future professors Charles Rockwell Lanman, James Haughton Woods, George Santayana, and Josiah Royce (Chattopadhyaya 360).

Eliot's most in-depth academic exposure to the philosophies of Asia came during his graduate studies at Harvard University. Eliot was at Harvard during a time when there were many distinguished scholars devoting serious intellectual study to "Orientalism," particularly Indian philosophy and languages (Jain 102). In addition to his year (1912-1913) studying yoga philosophy with Woods, Eliot spent two years of his graduate studies learning Sanskrit and Pali with Charles Rockwell Lanman, from 1911 through 1913 (Jain 254-255). These two luminaries are the most influential in terms of Eliot's graduate study of Indic philosophy.

Charles Rockwell Lanman was the founding editor of the highly influential Harvard Oriental Series and the author of the "renowned *Sanskrit Reader*" (Jain 102). As a side note, Lanman was known to have practiced yoga asana near the river in Cambridge (Kearns 25). James Haughton Woods was from the department of philosophy and he had been to India twice (Jain 103). At the time of his death, Woods was a revered figure in a Japanese monastery (Kearns 25).

The *Yoga System of Patañjali* by James Haughton Woods was first published in 1914. Eliot had taken Woods's course in 1912-13, but Cleo Kearns states, "It is probable, of course, that in some form or another a preliminary version of Woods's work was available to his students" (58). We also know that Eliot used this edition after 1914, with William Butler Yeats noting that he used it "like a dictionary" (58). Thus, the Woods edition is the translation of Patañjali and the commentary on the *Yoga Sutras* that will inform my reading of *The Waste Land*.

Lanman and Woods each had their own complicated relationships with the Indic philosophies that they studied. Both of these venerated professors had a lasting impact on their field of study by making new texts available for future scholars (Jain 103). However, the impact of colonial thought patterns and evolutionary theory tainted Lanman's studies, "validating the racial and cultural superiority of the 'Occident'" (104). There is also evidence that Woods "shared some of Lanman's assumptions" (105). Manju Jain, in his study of *T.S. Eliot and American Philosophy*, concludes, however, that Eliot's "response to Indian philosophy and poetry was much more complex and positive than that of his teachers" (105).

Eliot pursued his interest in Asian thought well beyond his coursework with Lanman and Woods. He audited a course on Japanese Buddhism in 1913-14, taught by Masaharu Anesaki, who was visiting Harvard that year (Kearns 76-77). Also in 1913, Eliot audited an interdisciplinary seminar in comparative methodology with Josiah Royce, during which he explored religious and philosophical issues (Kearns 96). Finally, in 1913, Eliot attended a series of lectures given by the Indian poet, Rabindranath Tagore,

about religious and philosophical concepts including “Brahma” and “The Problem of Evil” (Crawford 181). In the 1930s, Eliot reflected on this period of his life:

Two years spent in the study of Sanskrit under Charles Lanman, and a year in the mazes of Patañjali’s metaphysics under the guidance of James Woods, left me in a state of enlightened mystification. A good half of the effort of understanding what the Indian philosophers were after – and their subtleties make most of the great European philosophers look like schoolboys – lay in trying to erase from my mind all the categories and kinds of distinctions common to European philosophy from the time of the Greeks. My previous and concomitant study of European philosophy was hardly better than an obstacle. And I came to the conclusion . . . that my only hope of really penetrating to the heart of that mystery would lie in forgetting how to think and feel as an American or a European: which for practical as well as sentimental reasons, I did not wish to do.” (Crawford 174).

This background information is critical to getting a picture of how Eliot approached Buddhism, Hinduism, and yoga philosophy. He clearly grappled with these ideas, not as passing fancies or mere intellectual curiosities. Rather, he struggled to absorb the ideas on a deeply personal level, wishing to “penetrate to the heart of that mystery” he saw in these traditions (Crawford 174). When he left for Europe in 1914, having been awarded the Sheldon Travelling Fellowship, he would continue his religious exploration (Ackroyd 54), interacting with numerous occultists and theosophists, many of whom drew inspiration from Hinduism and various forms of yoga. While Eliot was first exposed to Indic philosophy through the rational light of the Harvard ivory tower, he would now meet people who approached these traditions as esoteric mystics. One of the

first and most influential people he would meet would be Ezra Pound, who would later help Eliot edit *The Waste Land* (Ackroyd 55). Pound knew the poet W.B. Yeats and began almost immediately to set up an introduction between Eliot and Yeats (Crawford 207-208). By 1917, Eliot could often be found at the Omega Club in London talking to Yeats (Crawford 273).

Yeats and Pound both studied theosophy, an attempt at a universal religion informed, in part, by tantric yoga practices and imagery. “By the 1920s, theosophy had about 45,000 members worldwide” (Goldberg 51). Karl Baier characterizes theosophy as a “defiant movement that blended elements from various sources such as Freemasonry, Rosicrucianism, liberal Protestantism, Spiritism, Mesmerism, and modern magic” (310). Theosophists viewed India as a source of valuable wisdom and their “Orientalism motivated the theosophists to gather information about South Asian philosophies eagerly . . . in the hope of finding precious jewels of ancient wisdom” (323). Their search included direct contact with yogis (323). The findings were shared with theosophists around the world in the 1880s-1890s in the Theosophical Society’s publication *The Theosophist* (326). An offshoot of the original Theosophical Society, the Quest Society, counted among its attending members, Pound, Yeats, and Jessie Weston (whose book *From Ritual to Romance* is acknowledged by Eliot as a major source for *The Waste Land*) (Soud 13).

In the period between 1919 and 1921, Eliot would meet even more characters who may have exposed him to occult views, including Tantric yoga. Lady Rothermere hosted the “Russian theosophist” P.D. Ouspensky for a series of lectures which Eliot attended (Bramble 4). He also met Virginia and Leonard Woolf around this time. They were

arguably the center of what would become known as the Bloomsbury group. This group of privileged men and women (especially the Woolfs) were knowledgeable about tantric yoga philosophy and practices, though scholar J.C. Bramble characterizes their activities as “Bloomsbury Orientalism” and “a case of colonial syncretism gone mad” (100-101). Eliot may have agreed with Bramble’s assessment, as he remained on the outskirts of the Bloomsbury set.

Exactly how much Eliot knew about theosophy, about its connections to occult yoga philosophy, or about Tantric yoga, are unanswered questions. Eliot, for his part, bristled when *The Waste Land* was characterized as a “Theosophical tract” (Bramble 98). According to W. David Soud, who studied Yeats and Eliot and their respective relationships to mysticism in his book *Divine Cartographies*, “For Eliot, [Yeats] is the epitome of mystical aspirations gone wrong, a spiritual experience seeker” (189). Truly, Eliot seems to have had much more of a patrician perspective than his Bloomsbury or theosophy acquaintances, and this, coupled with his ascetic temperament, likely led to his preference for the more restrained religious practices and philosophies, such as those espoused by Patañjali. Given Eliot’s familiarity with yoga, then, I believe he turned to it in a moment of psychological crisis, as I explain in this next section.

CHAPTER III - BRAIN CONTROL

As Eliot's mental state deteriorated in 1921, he put himself under the care of Dr. Roger Vittoz, a psychologist in Lausanne, Switzerland (Crawford 389). Vittoz instructed Eliot in techniques for bringing his mind under control. The character of these techniques surely would have reminded Eliot of the practices articulated by Patañjali in the *Yoga Sutras*. Focusing on concentration, visualization, thought exercises, and meditation "on the idea of calm", Vittoz hoped to help his patients gain sufficient "brain control" to calm their anxiety (393). This contemplative approach echoes many of the practices advocated in the yoga philosophy Eliot studied in his Harvard days. Eliot found the techniques quite helpful (Crawford 394). He writes to Ottoline Morrell during this period, "I feel more calm than I have for many many years – since childhood – that may be illusory – we shall see" (Crawford 394, Ackroyd 116). Eliot biographer Peter Ackroyd notes about this moment in Eliot's life, "We have a picture of a neurotic and over-anxious man who for the first time was learning to release himself from formal restraints, to relax and depart from that strict order which he had imposed on himself and which had caused so much suffering" (116). This grounded center of calm (rather than depression and despair) characterized his frame of mind as he was finishing his composition of *The Waste Land*, particularly the final section, "What the Thunder Said," which he told Virginia Woolf he had composed in a trance-like state (116). Although one cannot be sure Eliot turned to yoga in this period, it is certainly the case that he continued to familiarize himself with eastern philosophy and with the *Yoga Sutras* in particular. In the next section, I offer a brief overview of recent scholarship on *The Waste Land* and then offer my reading of the yogic philosophical structure in this poem.

CHAPTER IV – THE ENIGMATIC PROBLEM

Ackroyd states there was always a lack of scholarly consensus about *The Waste Land*. He writes that even immediately after the initial publication, “we see the makings of that ambiguity which has always surrounded the poem” (127).

Rather than offer an overview of the critical heritage, though, I instead focus on the more recent critical attention to T.S. Eliot’s fascination with mysticism and the occult. These critics in their explorations reveal similar structures and themes in this poem to those that I argue can be found when one reads the poem in terms of the *Yoga Sutras*. For instance, Francesca Bulgiani Knox makes an attempt to read the poem in light of “the mystical Christian tradition popularized by Evelyn Underhill” (235). Knox begins her essay by challenging the assumption that the poem is an enigma and then argues that a “magic thread” can be found with which to read it. While she sees symbols of the Christian mystic tradition in *The Waste Land*, I see symbols pointing to the Indic philosophy of yoga, especially as articulated by Patañjali.

Eliot’s well-documented exposure to and academic training in yoga philosophy drives my reading of the poem. His broad and extensive knowledge of both Buddhist and Hindu religious ideas is on display in *The Waste Land* (Ackroyd 37, 47). Eliot tells us in his explanatory notes that the third part of the poem is named “The Fire Sermon” in reference to the Buddha, and that his juxtaposition of the words of St. Augustine and the Buddha is purposeful: “The collocation of these two representatives of eastern and western asceticism as the culmination of this part of the poem is not an accident” (Eliot 74). He also uses the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* to structure the ending of the poem in the final section, “What the Thunder Said” (75).

Before delving into my close reading of the poem via the lens of yoga philosophy, I propose that we consider a semi-coherent narrative voice behind the entire poem. I will call this narrator “the seeker,” who is synonymous with Tiresias. My proposal follows Eliot’s own instructions in his published notes to *The Waste Land*, when he wrote that Tiresias “is the most important personage in the poem, uniting all the rest” (72). Eliot states that all of the male characters meld into one and “so all the women are one woman, and the two sexes meet in Tiresias. What Tiresias *sees*, in fact, is the substance of the poem” (72). This indicates that there is a singular voice behind the various voices of the poem. The original working title of the poem was *He Do the Police in Different Voices*, specifically implying that there was one narrator behind all the mosaic-like scenes (Crawford 387). G.N. Rao follows this line of thinking, identifying Tiresias as similar to “Prajapati, an androgynous visionary who is said to be the narrator or visionary consciousness behind the Upanishads” (Kearns 206). While Cleo Kearns in her exhaustive study, *T.S. Eliot and Indic Traditions*, states that this interpretation is still under much scholarly debate and is only partially valid, she agrees that Tiresias “does see from a highly detached and reflective point of view” (207). The creation of such a reflective voice shows the influence of the *Yoga Sutras*. Kearns notes the similarity of the Tiresias figure to Patañjali’s sense of a “deep self that is the witness or observer of the play of seemingly outward events” (207).

One of the most important ways in which the *Yoga Sutras of Patañjali* influenced Eliot’s composition of *The Waste Land* is in its form. Indian scholar Amar Kumar Singh writes “Patañjali’s influence on the style, idiom, and linguistic texture of Eliot is palapable” (53). Kearns agrees, stating that the concepts of concentration, meditation and

detachment he encountered in Patañjali deeply influenced his writing (62). She states, “the impact of Patañjali, however, went beyond philosophy to questions of poetic language and technique” (62). The *Sutras*, considered alone, in isolation from the commentary, are cryptic and aphoristic. Woods remarks on the difficulties of the style: “Their excessively abbreviated and disconnected order of words is intentional. . . . The allusions are suggestive, but obviously elusive” (ix-x), a description that is also applicable to *The Waste Land*. Kearns remarks that the *Yoga Sutras* “are meant to be read through and *only* [emphasis hers] through a tradition of commentary, so that an apparently minor word or analogy takes on dimensions of importance and meaning not always evident in the text” (57). Eliot himself characterized his reading of Patañjali as being lost in mazes (Crawford 174). This same feeling would resonate with many readers of *The Waste Land*. Thus, Eliot provided his notes on the poem, providing some commentary (though often oblique) and many reference points to the literary allusions. Eliot created a work that ends up being read in much the same way as the *Yoga Sutras*. The poem itself is relatively short, with lines both suggestive and confusing. Some of the lines seem unfamiliar or are not in English, thereby sending readers to Eliot’s notes for further elucidation. Yet the commentary in the notes only sends readers further to the sources Eliot mentions, in an attempt to squeeze the full meaning out of the original cryptic lines. Eliot has done for literature what Patañjali did for the psychology of mind: created a community through shared reading and commentary. To emphasize just how closely Patañjali tracks with the overall structure and themes of this poem, then, I turn in the next section to a close reading of each individual part of the poem.

CHAPTER V – PART ONE: “BURIAL OF THE DEAD”

If one accepts that T.S. Eliot thoroughly absorbed yogic philosophy through both his academic studies and through the meditative techniques he was taught during his treatment with Dr. Vittoz, then it is not too much of a leap to argue that the poem, derived from his crisis of 1921, is itself steeped in Patañjali “from April to Shantih” to borrow Ezra Pound’s phrase (Ackroyd 117).

April is the cruelest month, breeding
Lilacs out of the dead land, mixing
Memory and desire, stirring
Dull roots with spring rain.

Winter kept us warm, covering Earth in forgetful snow, feeding
A little life with dried tubers. (1-6)

In this first stanza, I detect Eliot’s yogic influences. The phrase “mixing memory and desire” signifies a focus on the past and the future, never the present. Nostalgia (memory) and goal-setting (desire) rob us of our peace. In the Yoga Sutras, Patañjali states, “Present and future and past correlations with objects result unavoidably in pain” (xxxiv). Kearns sees this immediate connection between *The Waste Land* and the Yoga Sutras as well, likening the roots in the ground with the seeds of karma, or samskaras (63). “Patañjali uses the metaphor of seeds and roots to express this operation of ‘subliminal impressions’” (63). These traumatic experiences, sometimes from past lives, can rise up and disturb our ability to find equanimity. Kearns writes, “Memory, in this instance, Patañjali argued, can operate as a hindrance to ‘concentration’ or meditation because it can stir up these subliminal impressions infected by desire and activate them

into mind waves” (63). April is the cruelest month because it is the month where the dynamism of life begins to trouble our complacency.

But Patañjali tells us that these seeds of karma cannot be ignored. They must be dealt with. The commentaries explain that ignoring these karmic seeds leaves them in a “dormant state” and therefore they are always a latent threat (107). However, if properly dealt with through yogic practices, the seeds are “burned” and therefore represent no threat to our spirituality (107). The spring rain stirs dull roots but the root itself would prefer to retreat back to winter. In this passage, Eliot presents us with an image of roots, underground, doggedly holding position despite being prodded out of their lethargy. Although the seeker recognizes the state of spiritual winter, merely holding on to life, they are reluctant to start the journey, through and out of the wasteland. But, as the title of this section implies, we are here to bury the dead. Those who move forward will have to give up their half-life, their “little life with dried tubers.” The task going forward will be to grow in consciousness and full liveliness by burning away our “hindrances” (107). “For out of what can burned seed germinate?” (107).

The third stanza includes the famous “hyacinth girl” scene. Though this scene gives the seeker a tantalizing glimpse of something transcendent and worthwhile, at the same time it creates angst because of the impermanence of beauty.

‘You gave me hyacinths first a year ago;

‘They called me the hyacinth girl.’

- Yet when we came back, late, from the hyacinth garden,

Your arms full, and your hair wet, 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 (35-42)

This episode in the hyacinth garden has the narrator in a state of ecstatic arrest. The vision of the hyacinth girl hints at a sensual beauty that has a spiritual dimension and significance. P.S. Sri agrees that this is the moment where the possibility of an authentic spirituality is sensed but it is short-lived. He refers to it as “a momentary glimpse of the supreme truth, at once in and out of time” (90). Sri argues that this moment, this glimpse of possibility, enables the narrator to survive the wasteland (92). Yet the stanza ends with a line that, when translated, means “Waste and Empty is the Sea.” (Eliot 70). The ending note is despairing because the glorious beauty only reinforces the impermanence of the moment, thereby increasing the suffering. The commentaries on the Yoga Sutras mention this exact phenomenon, stating, “Exceptional beauty also comes to an end and so gives pain. Accordingly, that too the man of discrimination can only reject” (11).

The fourth stanza of “The Burial of the Dead” is the Tarot card scene. In *From Ritual to Romance*, Jessie Weston (a major influence on Eliot as he wrote the poem) asserts that Tarot came to Europe from India through the Gypsies (Weston 74-75). For the purposes of this analysis, it does not matter whether Weston’s thesis is true. In his published explanatory notes that serve as his guide to understanding *The Waste Land*, Eliot admits to having read Weston’s work. He even says “Miss Weston’s book will elucidate the difficulties of the poem much better than my notes can do” (Eliot 70). Weston’s views clearly influenced Eliot’s own views about the Tarot and its relationship to the East when he wrote *The Waste Land*.

Tarot cards are symbolically rich forms which can open up new levels of symbolic meaning in this poem. Francesca Bulgiani Knox states that Eliot chooses Tarot “as a device to give frame and unity to the quest that follows later in the poem, anticipating its characters and elements, and hinting at their ancient and secret roots” (240). She argues that this Tarot scene is a preview of the (in her argument, Christian) spiritual quest in the poem. To this extent, I agree with Knox. The various cards introduce characters and symbols that will become important later in the poem: the drowned Phoenician Sailor (about whom the entire fourth section of *The Waste Land* is written), the Wheel, and the Hanged Man. I will discuss these symbols more thoroughly in the sections for “Death by Water” and “What the Thunder Said” – parts four and five respectively.

Aside from accessing Tarot as a rich symbolic system, Eliot’s choice to show a Tarot card reading session in the first section of the poem gives us permission to experiment with new ways to read the archetypes in the poem. Tarot cards are dealt in a specific and meaningful order. The position in which they land is essential to the Tarot reading. If a card lands “reversed” (upside down) the meaning assigned to that card can also be reversed or accented, making your fortune slightly askew, or even drastically different, from the traditional meaning of that card. The inclusion of the Tarot scene signals to the reader that the symbols in the poem are meant to be read on different levels. Eliot claims in his notes to *The Waste Land* that he is “not familiar with the exact constitution of the Tarot pack of cards” (70). However, this is likely not completely true. He may have more accurately meant that he was less familiar with Tarot than were his acquaintances, some of whom actually participated in the creation of the modern Tarot

pack and wrote books about Tarot. Eliot was very likely to have been familiar with how Tarot cards are read, given his acquaintances and relationships with those designing the deck and writing interpretative books about the Tarot, such as A.E. Waite, who was also a member of the Quest Society (Surette 233). Although, as Angelic Rodgers-Webb mentions in her article on Tarot in *The Waste Land*, the timing wasn't right for Eliot to have seen the Rider-Waite deck (created by A.E. Waite), it was possible he would have been familiar with earlier Tarot decks, such as the Marseilles deck (21). Furthermore, Rodgers-Webb argues Eliot had knowledge of the meditative process of dealing the deck for a reading, including reversal of meaning for cards landing reversed (19, 25). Thus, Eliot would have been aware of the possibility for the symbols in his poetry to be read as "reversed" in light of his Tarot scene.

This ability to "reverse" the meaning of a symbol is particularly useful in making sense of the second stanza of "The Burial of the Dead", known as the red rock scene. Upon first reading, the rocks in "Burial of the Dead" are seen as ominous signs of the dry, lifeless nature of the wasteland. The speaker sees only:

A heap of broken images, where the sun beats,
And the dead tree gives no shelter, the cricket no relief,
And the dry stone no sound of water. Only
There is shadow under this red rock,
(Come in under the shadow of this red rock) (22-26).

While the rock certainly has a sinister quality, we might also consider the fact that stone can represent the immovable truth that the seeker strives to attain. Patañjali defines yoga as the "restriction of the fluctuations of the mind-stuff" (8). The river of unceasing

sensation, attachment, and thought is the origin of pain. The rock represents a changeless state, free from fluctuation.

Given this shift in perspective, this entire passage changes from a representation of arid despair to a verse of spiritual comfort and encouragement. The organic material in this passage offers nothing positive. The tree and the cricket cannot help. However, the “red rock” is depicted as welcoming and protective, providing shade from the beating sun.

The final stanza of “Burial of the Dead” portrays the “unreal city” as a representation of those who are doing merely what it takes to survive, as if that is all there is to life. Death has “undone” them because they have sacrificed their true human potential for a meal ticket. The Unreal City represents all of the “distractions to calming the mind-stuff” (Patañjali 63). These obstacles include sickness, languor, doubt, heedlessness, listlessness, worldliness, and erroneous perception (63). These states characterize the feeling each time we visit the Unreal City, both here and again in Part Three.

However, in the same stanza, Eliot gives us a character who makes some effort to establish meaningful connection with others:

There I saw one I knew, and stopped him, crying: ‘Stetson!

‘You who were with me in the ships at Mylae!

‘That corpse you planted last year in your garden,

‘Has it begun to sprout? Will it bloom this year? (69-72).

Here in these final lines of “Burial of the Dead,” Eliot challenges readers to “sprout” and “bloom” into our full humanity by questioning us (Eliot 55). Will we bury

the corpse of our past death-in-life now? Are we finally going to begin to transform? We will see this kind of urgent call to action again at the end of Part Two and Part Three.

In summary, in the first section of *The Waste Land*, “Burial of the Dead,” Eliot depicts life holding on merely for survival’s sake, a root resistant to growth. He then hints at spiritual possibilities through the Tarot card reading scene. In the Unreal City stanza, Eliot shows the reader the nameless throngs of bureaucrats marching off to work over London Bridge but he again hints at the potential for meaning and connection as the narrator cries out to a friend. Through repeated questioning, Eliot asks whether our lives will “bloom this year?” (72). If not now, when?

CHAPTER VI – PART TWO: “A GAME OF CHESS”

In Part One, we saw both tantalizing looks at transcendence and dreary depictions of the distractions from spirituality. In Part Two, Eliot goes deeper into explorations of spiritual disease, suffering and pain. Patañjali writes “To the discriminating, all is nothing but pain” (132). Part Two of *The Waste Land*, “A Game of Chess” is an extended meditation upon the identification of self with things external to the self, especially material objects and sexual relationships. The long first stanza describes the sumptuousness and sensuality of the surroundings. Whereas “Burial of the Dead” primarily takes place outside, “A Game of Chess” pulls back to an indoor scene.

In vials of ivory and coloured glass
Unstoppered, lurked her strange synthetic perfumes,
Unguent, powdered, or liquid – troubled, confused
And drowned the sense in odours (86-89).

We are obviously in a woman’s bedroom and the whole description feels humid, fecund, and damp. The “vials” filled with “strange, synthetic perfumes” overwhelm us and activate our animalistic sense of smell as they drown “the sense in odours” (56). This humid environment is related to mental uncertainty and instability, as the “unguent” and “liquid” substances are linked with the “confused” and “troubled” mind which occupies the room.

The troubled woman suffers from hysteria: “My nerves are bad to-night,” she says (111). She is not at home in the world, as she is repeatedly frightened by the wind rustling under the door. In this way, Eliot links materialism and neurosis. Not only is her identity merged with her ownership of things, but she is also hyper-stimulated at

the sensory level, making it difficult for her to find mental peace. In the *Yoga Sutras*, this manner of overstimulation (even when pleasurable) is linked to pain and, notably, anxiety. “Surely one aiming at pleasure and permeated by objects is sunk in the deep bog of pain,” and anxiety is “permeated by aversion and is dependent upon animate and inanimate instruments” (Patañjali 133). However, at the height of her attack, her companion in this scene absent-mindedly quotes the character Ariel from William Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*:

“Do you remember

Nothing?”

I remember

Those are pearls that were his eyes.

“Are you alive, or not? Is there nothing in your head?” (122-126).

Looking back to the source text, *The Tempest*, can elucidate our reading of this scene. Even while dramatizing such an emotionally barren relationship, Eliot finds something to be hopeful about.

Those are pearls that were his eyes:

Nothing of him that doth fade

But doth suffer a sea-change

Into something rich and strange (402-405).

Although the sailor suffers the disintegration of his material body, he is not lost.

“Nothing of him that doth fade / But doth suffer a sea-change into something rich and strange” (403-404). Everything about him is transformed. That the state of his physical

body is being repackaged into something beautiful implies that his spirit may also outlast death and become even more refined than it was in life.

The scene then changes and Eliot presents us with Lil, a lower-class female than the overstimulated neurotic. Lil shows us that although material wealth will not bring us equanimity, neither will poverty. Lil is penniless, her life riddled with empty relationships. Her husband has been deployed in the military, her teeth are rotting out of her head, and she cannot stand the idea of having sexual relations with her husband. Lil has had five children, although we get no sense of tender feelings between mother and child. Eliot also writes that she has had an abortion recently and given that her husband has been deployed for four years, it is likely that it wasn't his child. "It's them pills I took, to bring it off, she said / (She's had five already and nearly died of young George)" (159-160). Although traditional familial structures are replicated and societal roles have been fulfilled, the relationships (both traditional and illicit) are meaningless and perfunctory. Finding our identity in our societal roles will not free us from pain.

The urgent call to change that prodded the reader at the end of "Burial of the Dead" now happens again in a new form at the end of Part Two, with the repeated "Hurry Up Please It's Time." The phrase is repeated five times and is given added emphasis by being in all capital letters or small caps (depending on the edition) (141, 153, 166, 169-170). The repetition of this line seems to speak directly to the reader, saying that it is time to wake up and experience true intimacy. There is a feeling that it is time for spiritual change to bring our empty relationships to life. Kearns frames *The Waste Land* as a "mimesis of the process of the mind in the early stages of meditation. It proceeds from random, scattered and disparate thoughts, a profusion of intrusive voices and images"

(196). In this context, these urgent call moments serve a meditative function calling “us back to attention to the present” and “focus the wandering mind” (205).

CHAPTER VII: PART THREE: “THE FIRE SERMON”

In Part Three, “The Fire Sermon”, we see the beginnings of the yogic “means of escape” (xxxv). This section is filled with scenes of lustful sex and filthy riversides, which I argue represent the phenomenal world of our senses. By depicting a position of disgust regarding these scenes, we can see the ascetic influence of the *Yoga Sutras*. Patañjali gives a myriad of techniques and practices for the “means of escape” from pain. These are meant to bring about the desired state of equanimity that he calls “isolation”. Among the many specific techniques are the five abstentions and the five observances. One must abstain from injury, falsehood, theft, incontinence, and acceptance of gifts (178). The observances include cleanliness, contentment, self-castigation, study, and devotion (181).

The early part of “The Fire Sermon” is a depiction of disgust. The riverside is covered with trash. A rat creeps “softly through the vegetation/ Dragging its slimy belly on the bank” (187-188). The narrator, fishing nearby, is meditating on the death of his father and perhaps his brother. He imagines or sees their “White bodies naked on the low damp ground/ And bones cast in a little low dry garret,/ Rattled by the rat’s foot only, year to year” (193-195). At the height of his disgust, noises from a nearby brothel reach him. At this moment, the poet seems to combine the seeker’s disgust at the external environment, revulsion at the idea of death, and his aversion to the weaknesses of those lustful souls at Mrs. Porter’s establishment together into one appalling whole. In the *Yoga Sutras*, disgust is seen as prerequisite for cleanliness: “As soon as there is disgust with his own body, he has begun cleanliness. Seeing the offensiveness of the body, he is no longer attached to the body and becomes an ascetic” (186). Depicting this level of disgust, with

the very fact that we have bodies – that we are literally incarnate – is to begin a poetic spiritual cleanliness. Singh confirms this reading, stating “the central point is Eliot’s grappling with Patañjali’s ideas of renunciation, concentration, and meditation. . . . Eliot is deeply conscious of the tragedy of death, decay, impermanence, suffering, and despair in human life” (51-52).

The verse then moves back to the Unreal City, and the scene is now focused on Mr. Eugenides, who is “unshaven” (210), again triggering our attuned sensitivities to uncleanliness, honed by the disgust of the first section. In only a few lines, Mr. Eugenides is revealed to be a smooth-talker, a hustler, a confidence man. He offers lunch and a fun weekend getaway. “Asked me in demotic French/ To luncheon at the Cannon Street Hotel/ Followed by a weekend at the Metropole” (212-214). Mr. Eugenides makes the seeker an offer. Craig Raine proposes that this might even be a homosexual proposition (88). Like Buddha and Jesus, the seeker is being tempted. Following Patañjali’s advice to abstain from acceptance of gifts (lunch, a weekend away) will protect us from injury.

Next, Eliot gives us the scene of the typist and the “young man carbuncular” through the eyes of Tiresias (Eliot 61-62). However, this sex scene is almost entirely about power and conquest, not about sexual gratification. “Assurance sits” on the young man while the typist is preoccupied with laying out her meager dinner and finishing up the laundry. Then he moves to take what he wants, as he

Endeavors to engage her in caresses
Which still are unproved, if undesired.
Flushed and decided, he assaults at once;
Exploring hands encounter no defence;

His vanity requires no response,
And makes a welcome of indifference. (237-242)

The fact that the man is “carbuncular” or pimply is another instance of lack of purity and cleanliness (231). His lustfulness and lack of sensitivity are made manifest in the pustules on his face. But what is most interesting about this scene is the resignation with which the typist accepts this treatment.

She turns and looks a moment in the glass,
Hardly aware of her departed lover;
Her brain allows one half-formed thought to pass:
‘Well now that’s done: and I’m glad it’s over.’ (249-252).

This scene is the longest in which Eliot includes any rhyme in *The Waste Land*. The singsong quality of the rhyme scheme and the off-color content brings to mind a dirty limerick. And yet, there is nothing funny about this scene. It’s quite depressing to see someone approach sex this way (either as the “young man carbuncular” does, or as the typist does). But, seeing as she is the victim in this sexual exchange, her ability to endure has something admirable about it. This can be read as a form of self-castigation, defined by Patañjali as “the bearing of extremes” (181). Likewise, the typist seems to practice contentment, another of Patañjali’s observances, taking care of the small number of things she owns while remaining content with her meager rations. The typist, perhaps surprisingly, is a personage with yogic qualities that foreshadows a more forceful spiritual change.

Eliot transitions to a scene of fishermen relaxing and playing music in a pub. Fishing is one of the last remaining connections to a pre-agricultural past, a form of

hunting and gathering. The tone of the poetry is admiring of these men enjoying the earned repose of live music after a hard morning of work.

O City, I can sometimes hear
Besides a public bar in Lower Thames Street,
The pleasant whining of a mandolin
And a clatter and a chatter from within
Where fishermen lounge at noon: where the walls
Of Magnus Martyr hold
Inexplicable splendor of Ionian white and gold. (259-265)

This is in stark contrast with the work of the typist earlier in this section who cannot earn true relaxation. She has earned merely a pale imitation of leisure, as represented by the post-coital gramophone: “She smooths her hair with automatic hand / And puts a record on the gramophone” (255-256). We are one step closer to a new perspective and consciousness.

“The Fire Sermon” then moves into a few passages which Eliot calls “The Song of the Thames Daughters” (73).

The barges drift
With the turning tide
Red sails
Wide
To leeward, swing on the heavy spar (268-271).

We hear of a “turning tide” (63). Red and gold images begin to appear after the “brown fog” of the Unreal City (61-63).

Undid me. By Richmond, I raised my knees

Supine on the floor of a narrow canoe.

My feet are at Moorgate, and my heart

Under my feet. After the event

He wept. He promised 'a new start' (294-298).

Here we may have the only depiction of yoga postures or *asana* in the poem. The narrator is "supine on the floor" with knees raised, as in full wind pose (295). At Moorgate, the narrator's heart is under his feet. These postures precipitate extreme emotion which brings about the promise of a "new start" (298). This "new start" is one that mirrors that of St. Augustine after his sojourn in Carthage:

To Carthage then I came

Burning burning burning burning

O Lord Thou pluckest me out

O Lord Thou pluckest

Burning (307-311)

The fresh beginning is achieved through the unrelenting "burning" passage, the fire which refines, the fire of spiritual transformation. Here Eliot juxtaposes two voices, St. Augustine's ("To Carthage then I came" and later "O Lord Thou pluckest me out") and the Buddha's, the repetition of "burning" (307-311). Eliot says in his notes, "The collocation of these two representatives of eastern and western asceticism, as the culmination of this part of the poem, is not an accident" (Eliot 74). The Buddha says that all is "burning burning burning," but we are free to interpret this as either a consuming fire or as a refining fire. In the final stanza of "What the Thunder Said," Eliot will again

bring in more imagery of that fire which refines (including examples from Dante and from Egyptian mythology).

The same frantically urgent calls for change that were present at the end of “Burial of the Dead” and “A Game of Chess” come up again at the end of “The Fire Sermon” with the lines “burning burning burning burning / O Lord Thou Pluckest me out” (308-309). By reading it in this way, these poetic provocations to action can be contextualized in terms of spiritual development through yogic practice. Though we are still firmly in the materialist realm, something new is on the horizon. In order to get out of the wasteland, we must move beyond the realm of mere materialism to something more subtle and spiritual. Eliot’s repeated calls to change, spiritually, are somewhat like clapping in front of someone’s face to wake them from a deep sleep. Or as Kearns puts it, bringing the mind back to the meditation: “bring consciousness back to the present, to the *now*” (205).

CHAPTER VIII: PART FOUR: "DEATH BY WATER"

Thus far in *The Waste Land*, we have encountered the fact in "Burial of the Dead" that all things lead to pain and suffering. There the narrator, glimpsing transcendence with the hyacinth girl, acknowledges the inherent pain in such transient moments. In "A Game of Chess", the reader is privy to deeper demonstrations of the causes of suffering, which include identification of self both with objects and with others in the world. In "The Fire Sermon" the poet has dramatized some of the means of escape from pain, including disgust, which leads to self-castigation and cleanliness. Now we approach the fourth section of *The Waste Land*, knowing a huge spiritual change is forthcoming because of the passage regarding the refining fire at the end of the third section, stripping away our shallow attachments.

I argue that this section of the poem, "Death by Water" is a succinct portrayal of the state that Woods translates from Patañjali as "isolation". "Isolation is the inverse generation of the aspects, no longer provided with a purpose by the Self, or its Energy of Intellect grounded in itself" (347). Furthermore, it is a condition that when achieved, "all hindrances subside; all acts of the Self are spontaneous and free; absence of limitations which thwart one who wishes to attain the ultimate ideal of his own nature" (xli).

Let's see how the concept of isolation plays out in "Death By Water," which at only 10 lines long is the shortest section of *The Waste Land*:

Phlebas the Pheonician, a fortnight dead,
Forgot the cry of gulls, and the deep sea swell
And the profit and loss.

A current under sea

Picked his bones in whispers. As he rose and fell

He passed the stages of his age and youth

Entering the whirlpool

Gentile or Jew

O you who turn the wheel and look to windward,

Consider Phlebas, who was once handsome and tall as you. (312-321)

Eliot says that Phlebas the Phoenician has been dead two weeks (“a fortnight dead”). He has forgotten all about life and his body has been pulled apart by the sea. Again, the reader feels the bleakness of Eliot’s verse. But when this passage is read with the spiritual imagery at the end of the last section in mind (“burning, burning, burning”) a different interpretation becomes available. Phlebas is physically dead, but he is also free from worldly cravings. Any attachments are now “in the condition of seed burned by the fire of [intuitive] thinking” (Patañjali 340). The things most would consider important – his looks (“once handsome and tall”), his job and making money (“the profit and loss”), his senses (“the cry of gulls and the deep sea swell”) – have all become irrelevant to him (321, 314, 313). All of these things are impermanent and therefore contain the potential to cause pain. Kearns reads Part Four as a *memento mori*, or death meditation, the purpose of which “is to foster detachment from sensory things and purge unconscious terrors” (211).

Phlebas has “entered the whirlpool” of transformative change (318). Eliot gives us fair warning that this path is difficult and will require sacrifice. Those that “turn the wheel and look to windward” will have to die to their attachment in this world. Eliot

gives us an interesting juxtaposition of the wheel and the sailing motif. The “wheel” harkens back to the Wheel card from the Tarot (mentioned in “Burial of the Dead”). In Tarot, the Wheel card is the Wheel of Fortune, implying that humans do not control their fate. However, in Eliot’s metaphor, the reader takes the wheel and begins to control the ship. Furthermore, to “look to windward” means to sail into the wind and, therefore, to sail in the most difficult direction. The journey to spiritual awakening and out of the wasteland is not going to be an easy one.

Throughout the poem, water is depicted as dangerous and deadly, as it is symbolic of the flux of sensory input. We have a “Drowned Phoenician Sailor,” we are told to “fear death by water” (55), and we are shown “a current under sea [that] picked his bones in whispers” (315-316). But sailing and fishing are depicted as positive. “The world is ocean, water is pain and impermanence; a man is a voyager and his body a boat or ship, ripples of the ocean are man’s desires and hankerings, mussels and fish are his passions” writes Singh (54). To read these psychologically with yoga philosophy in mind, to sail on the water or to fish would mean see the possibility of life in the world but without attachment. The fickle waters of our animalistic, embodied selves are traversed with the expert control of a sailor.

Part Four, “Death by Water,” is the turning point. Eliot displays our two choices: 1) die without having made any meaning of our lives, clinging only to material things or 2) die to our material longings, while learning to be content. Phelbas has achieved the yogic state of isolation, where attachments, and therefore pain, are eliminated. “Phelbas’s death may be read, then, not as a merely natural or fated one but as sacrifice, the final sacrifice of the individual ego that must precede the full release of insight and liberation”

(Kearns 210-11). Therefore, Kearns sees “Death by Water” as “essential preparation for the peace and unity of Part V” (211). I concur with this view, as “What the Thunder Said” specifically was written when Eliot was himself peaceful and calm under the treatment of Dr. Vittoz. I argue that Eliot’s personal hopefulness and equanimity comes through and we see glimpses of how the wasteland might be revitalized.

CHAPTER IX – PART FIVE: “WHAT THE THUNDER SAID”

After the torchlight red on sweaty faces

After the frosty silence in the gardens

After the agony in stony places

The shouting and the crying

Prison and palace and reverberation

Of thunder of spring over distant mountains

He who was living is now dead

We who were living are now dying

With a little patience (322-330)

The first three lines of “What the Thunder Said” begin with the word “after.”

After darkness, strained relationships, physical pain and destabilizing emotional swings, Eliot says we are “dying with a little patience.” The seeker has died like Phlebas the Phoenician. “Dying with a little patience” in this interpretation means that the spiritually-awake individual has the ability to transcend the tumult of the emotions. The seeker has learned self-control and can exercise detachment in light of the knowledge that all life contains suffering and inevitable death.

The next two stanzas relate the story of an individual who is wandering in a mountainous desert. Eliot’s seeker is clearly frightened and desperately hopes to find water.

Here is no water but only rock

Rock and no water and the sandy road

The road winding above among the mountains

Which are mountains of rock without water (331-334)

As we have seen before, the rock bears a striking connection to yoga, which also stops the flux of thought, while water represents the dizzying array of sensations and meandering thoughts. Here we see the seeker somewhat afraid of having seen the truth. Avoiding the wasteland entirely is not the answer. The seeker longs to find an authentic way to live in the world and make it vital again.

If there were water

And no rock

If there were rock

And also water

And water

A spring

A pool among the rock

If there were the sound of water only (344-352)

We long for water, that representation of life-giving power but also the symbol of the emotional tumult that the seeker has already worked so hard to purge from the Self. This presents the problem and Eliot will integrate ideas from many traditions in this final section to provide the answer. The seeker is ascending the mountain of spiritual truth. On the ascent, the seeker detects an extra person on the journey.

Who is the third who walks always beside you?

When I count, there are only you and I together

But when I look ahead up the white road

There is always another one walking beside you

Gliding wrapt in a brown mantle, hooded

I do not know whether a man or a woman

- But who is that on the other side of you? (360-366)

In his explanatory notes to *The Waste Land*, Eliot has this to say about this hooded figure: “The Hanged Man [from the Tarot scene] . . . is associated in my mind with The Hanged God of Frazer, and . . . I associate him with the hooded figure in the passage of the disciples to Emmaus in Part V” (Eliot 70). So, this hooded figure is the Hanged Man Tarot card and the Hanged God. The description of the Hanged Man Tarot card is “Wisdom, trials, circumspection, discernment, sacrifice, intuition, divination, prophecy” (Waite 11).

The hooded figure that Eliot associates with the Hanged Man Tarot card and the Hanged God from *The Golden Bough* also allows Eliot once again to show that Indic spirituality and Christian religion are not necessarily in conflict with one another (Eliot 70). Frazer highlights many ancient cults that:

feature an androgynous god-figure . . . whose virility is connected to the fertility of the land. Frazer theorizes that those ‘dying gods’ are part of a continuous tradition that ultimately produced Jesus Christ . . . This suggests that the message of early Christianity is an expression of the cyclical nature of existence, from birth to death to rebirth (Maddrey 109).

Just as he did when juxtaposing the words of the Buddha and St. Augustine at the end of “The Fire Sermon,” Eliot here uses symbols to illustrate the underlying unity of diverse religious philosophies.

What, then, is the cure? We've escaped the wasteland. How are we to revitalize it? The Thunder will tell us. As we approach the end of the poem, we learn, at line 400, exactly "What the Thunder Said" (Eliot 68). The thunder gives three commands in Sanskrit: *datta*, *dayadhvam*, and *damyata*. Eliot translates these in his notes as "give, sympathize, [self-]control" (75).

The source for this section is the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*. The *Upanishads* are a collection of Hindu "spiritual treatises" and the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* is one of the oldest, composed between 800 and 400 B.C.E. (Mascaro 7). In contrast, Patañjali's *Yoga Sutras* were composed much later (300-500 C.E.) and are not directly connected with any one specific religious tradition as they owe as much to Buddhism as to Hinduism (Patañjali xvii, Samuel 221). One of the concerns of *The Upanishads* is the development of yoga, which is seen as "self-training for the vision of the unity" but in the *Upanishads* there is "more inspiration than definite teaching" (Mascaro 13, 35). Therefore, while this text is distinct from the *Yoga Sutras*, they are not entirely unrelated. Patañjali can be seen as a guide for the practical application of religious principles drawn, in part, from the Upanishadic tradition.

The *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* is structured as a dialogue between a sage and his wife. This *Upanishad* is a rich and lengthy text in its own right but the fifth section of it is titled "What the Thunder Said," exactly as the fifth section of *The Waste Land* is (Easwaran 116). In this section of the *Upanishad*, the Creator is teaching his three creations: gods, humans, and the godless ones (demons). He gives them the same three commands that Eliot cites, except in reverse order. When the Creator says "Da", the gods

hear *damyata* or self-control. The humans hear *dayadhvam* or be compassionate. The godless ones hear *datta* or give (116-117). Let us examine the first command in detail:

Then spoke the thunder

DA

Datta: what have we given?

My friend, blood shaking my heart

The awful daring of a moment's surrender

Which an age of prudence can never retract

By this, and this only, we have existed

Which is not to be found in our obituaries

Or in memories draped by the beneficent spider

Or under seals broken by the lean solicitor

In our empty rooms (400-410).

After the command *datta* (give), Eliot tells us about the “awful daring of a moment's surrender” which is “not to be found in our obituaries . . . Or under seals broken by the lean solicitor.” (Eliot 68.) So what we are commanded to give is nothing material, no alms. Our “awful daring” is to be found in surrendering our attachments to this phenomenal existence and beginning the search for truth beyond normal space and time. Once we complete this shift in perspective, we are no longer afraid of death and can live full, authentic lives.

The verse surrounding *dayadhvam* (sympathize, be compassionate) in *The Waste Land* describes emotional isolation and a state of ego-protectiveness.

DA

Dayadhvam: I have heard the key

Turn in the door once and turn once only

We think of the key, each in his prison

Thinking of the key, each confirms a prison

Only at nightfall, aethereal rummours

Revive for a moment a broken Coriolanus (411-417).

Turning the “key” in the lock shuts down the possibility of true intimacy and love and puts us in a “prison”. We must find a way to love others but still maintain our detachment. The solution is compassion and sympathy. We recognize the suffering in others and realize our underlying unity of experience with all that is living.

The final edict is *damyata*, or self-control:

DA

Damyata: The boat responded

Gaily, to the hand expert with sail and oar

The sea was calm, your heart would have responded

Gaily, when invited, beating obedient

To controlling hands (418-423).

Here Eliot returns to his sailing imagery. The boat which will respond “gaily to the hand” represents our persona in the world. The boat is controlled by the sailor who represents our true, fully conscious self. When this level of conscious control over our emotions is achieved, “the sea” will become “calm” and our “heart” will be “obedient to controlling hands.” At first this seems somewhat authoritarian until we remember that the “controlling hands” are the seeker’s own hands. Here is where we “turn the wheel and

look to windward,” as Eliot says, and live our lives in full awareness and moral control. Once the seeker has awakened and undertaken this great journey, he is to become a perpetual sailor on the waters of his own psyche. This is the place to begin building the path out of the wasteland, within one’s own self.

The final stanza of *The Waste Land* contains many literary allusions in five languages (English, Italian, Latin, French and Sanskrit) (Eliot 69). At first glance, Eliot’s ending appears cryptic, obtuse and confusing. The meaning of this final stanza comes into focus, though, after having read the entire poem as a representation of yoga philosophy:

I sat upon the shore

Fishing with the arid plain behind me

Shall I at least set my lands in order?

London Bridge is falling down falling down falling down

Poi s’ascose nel foco che gli affina

Quando fiam uti chelidon – O swallow

Le Prince d’Aquitaine a la tour abolie

These fragments I have shored against my ruins

Why then Ile fit you. Hieronymo’s mad againe.

Datta. Dayadhvam. Damyata.

Shantih Shantih Shantih (424-434)

Our seeker/narrator is sitting upon the shore, fishing, symbolic of the tides of our embodied lives meeting the calm contemplation of spiritual attainment. He is in harmony with nature and the tone implies that he is at peace with his place in the world. The seeker

muses “Shall I at least set my lands in order?” Eliot seems to be wondering whether he should tidily sum everything up for the reader. But, instead of a reassuring synopsis, he gives us nursery rhymes. The choice of “London Bridge is falling down” brings to mind not only the impermanence of human creations but also that of our own lives.

Eliot then gives the reader three lines, each in a different foreign language. “Poi s’ascose nel foco che gli affina” is from Dante’s *Purgatorio*. It translates as “He hid himself in the fire that purifies.” (Vernon 251). Eliot reminds us, with one line, we are living now in a kind of Purgatory and he brings our minds back to the burning at the end of “The Fire Sermon”. In this way, he reignites the resonances between Buddhism and Christianity and reminds us of our responsibility to refine our own minds and burn away our shallow attachments.

In the next line, the seeker/narrator quotes in Latin “When shall I be as the swallow?” and then cries out for the swallow in English. There are many layers to Eliot’s use of the swallow in this poem. In addition to alluding to the poem *Pervigilium Veneris*, this line also recalls the myth of Procne and Philomela, which is also alluded to in “A Game of Chess” and “The Fire Sermon” (Ackroyd 118, Eliot 56 and 61). Philomela and Procne were about to be killed by Tereus but they escaped by turning into birds – a nightingale and a swallow. The swallow has traditionally been associated with the coming of the dawn, the coming of spring, and the souls of the dead (Werness 394-395). The swallow thereby represents the eternal nature of the soul/consciousness, and escape from destruction.

The swallow has also, for centuries, been associated with sailors and is often used as a design element in nautical tattoos. This naval association began because swallows

are shore birds and for a sailor to see one is a sign that land is near (Hemingson 125). Eliot's use of the sailing metaphor for a spiritual, authentic life is given an interesting new form here in the swallow, which represents the seeker's spiritual hope and faith.

Lastly, the swallow has been associated from ancient times with the Great Goddess, especially Isis and Aphrodite (Werness 394-395). The story of Isis in her swallow aspect is told by Frazer in *The Golden Bough*:

Isis gave the babe her finger instead of her breast to suck, and at night she began to burn all that was mortal of him away, while she herself in the likeness of a swallow fluttered round the pillar that contained her dead brother [Osiris], twittering mournfully. But the queen spied what she was doing and shrieked out when she saw her child in flames, and thereby she hindered him from becoming immortal (Frazer 369).

Eliot notes that Frazer's work was a pivotal influence on *The Waste Land*, particularly Frazer's material on Adonis, Attis and Osiris (70). Therefore, it is safe to assume that Eliot knew about this scene where Isis is in her swallow aspect. This story of Isis includes the refining fire that is meant to help humans overcome death. Again, in one line, Eliot is providing a rich collection of symbols of hope and regeneration.

The next line ("Le Prince d'Aquitaine a la tour abolie") in addition to being drawn from Gerard de Nerval's poem *El Desdichado*, may also be an oblique reference to the Tarot. The Tower Card in the Tarot deck depicts a ruined tower that has been struck by lightning (Ackroyd 118). P.D. Ouspensky suggests that the Tower card represents "the force of Nature re-establishing the truth distorted by men" (17). A.E. Waite, who designed a Tarot deck, says that the Tower "is assuredly a card of confusion" (Waite Part 2, Section 16). However, the Tower can also be read as "awakening of the inner spiritual

self through sudden happenings which may have been shock, upsets or clear flashes of insight” (Zalewski 210). The Ruined Tower is thus a symbol of the entire *Wasteland*. The poem itself is confusing and the landscape it describes appears to be completely negative, but through the confusion, shock, and upset, those immersed in *The Waste Land* may find insight which may lead to spiritual awakenings.

In “What the Thunder Said” the poet/narrator goes on a terrifying journey but acquires the three commands necessary for spiritual growth. These commands give us the “key” to the path out of the “prison” (414). After achieving our spiritual aim, though, we will have to come back to the real world, confidently guiding the “boat” of our emotions with “the hand expert” (419-420).

The poem ends with a baffling stanza, filled with imagery of spiritual renewal and life. Now, London Bridge, which once supported the automaton bureaucrats on their way to work, is falling down. The wasteland is crumbling. The tower is ruined. Who will rebuild this barren world? Eliot leaves us with the commands “Datta. Dayadhvam. Damyata” (433) as if to say that we must first rebuild our self before we strive to rebuild the world.

* * *

If after reading *The Waste Land* through the lens of yoga philosophy, there was any doubt that authentic spirituality were possible, Eliot leaves us with these parting Sanskrit words: Shantih Shantih Shantih. He tells the reader in his notes that this translates as “the peace which passes understanding” and that this is the traditional closing for an *Upanishad* (76). This supports the idea that Eliot wrote *The Waste Land* to function as a vehicle for meditation: It can be read by people much like scripture,

returned to over and over again, each time with new meaning to be drawn out of its symbols.

Delving deeply into how yoga philosophy likely inspired T.S. Eliot gives a foundation for a close reading of *The Waste Land* as a spiritual journey. By reading the poem in this way, we not only better acknowledge all of the religious ideas that Eliot wrapped into the text, but we can successfully solve what I call “the enigma problem” in *Wasteland* scholarship. The poem can be about fragmentation and still make sense. In fact, this way of reading draws out an overarching narrative and provides a new and flexible way to read the poem that is both coherent and hopeful.

In Mulk Raj Anand’s book *Conversations in Bloomsbury*, Eliot is reported as saying he was “going beyond” *The Waste Land* at the time he was composing *Four Quartets* (161). A. David Moody confirms that Eliot believed that *Four Quartets* was “the more orthodox and culturally significant achievement” (115). Despite Eliot’s personal feelings to the contrary, *The Waste Land* is still his most widely known poem. Eliot found the religious texts of India helpful long after his conversion to Anglicanism, incorporating similar themes into later works such as *Four Quartets*, giving them a “refinement of distinction” (Kearns 237). By acknowledging the deep influence of Patañjali’s yoga philosophy on Eliot, it is my hope to give readers of *The Waste Land* a new framework for understanding this notoriously dense and difficult poem.

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