

ABSTRACT

‘The Only Hope, or Else Despair’:
Disenchantment in T.S. Eliot’s “The Waste Land” and “Four Quartets”

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Countless theologians have debated the nature of spiritual meaning within the corporeal realm, with many defending the world’s inherent, sacramental character as the bridge between the spiritual and material. Theories of this *enchantment*—the infusion of the ordinary, physical world with spiritual value that elevates it to the status of the Lord’s reflection in creation—are discussed in the writings of Max Weber and Eugene McCarragher, whose ideas are developed and corrected in two of T.S. Eliot’s poetic works. “The Waste Land” and “Four Quartets,” written nineteen years apart, span Eliot’s journey into Christianity, as well as following the progress of his own, implicit view of enchantment. In this paper, the beliefs of Weber and McCarragher are examined before introducing Eliot’s own theory through a deep analysis of both poetic works. Following this analysis, the ramifications of his own conclusion are observed through the lens of modern society.

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‘THE ONLY HOPE, OR ELSE DESPAIR’

Disenchantment in T.S. Eliot’s “The Waste Land” and “Four Quartets”

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of

Baylor University

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the

Honors Program

By

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Waco, Texas

Spring 2022

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Although my name is on the title page, the completion of this work is indebted to those who have poured into me over the years. Before the idea for this thesis had come into being, I was being molded and encouraged by countless professors, friends, classmates, and family, whose academic and spiritual convictions formed the foundation of my own faith and scholastic pursuits. I am truly blessed to have experienced such profound community on Baylor campus—especially within the Honors Residential College and the University Scholars Program—that consistently pointed me toward hope and joy in Christ.

Firstly, I ought to thank my most devoted and faithful allies: my parents, Ken and Angie Thompson. Their unceasing prayer, advice, and scholastic expertise kept me focused on God and endlessly grateful for such steadfast supporters. The Christ-shaped home in which I was raised and their unfailing love for me (and for each other) have blessed me with a godly foundation that few could boast, for which I am forever humbly grateful. In addition, the persistent consolation and love from my beloved sister, Raelyn, and the encouragement and memes from my wonderful brother, Keaton, have cemented their rightful places as invaluable influences on this work.

Secondly, I must thank my dedicated thesis advisor, Dr. Alex Engebretson, whose availability, encouragement, and beneficial criticism at every stage of this work for the past year have been of utmost importance. Besides this, his class on religion and literature

was the catalyst for my consideration of this very topic. His commitment to the Lord and his own brilliant insights into my topic have surely improved it dramatically, and I only hope that this work rightly reflects the impact of his constant efforts and academic devotion.

To the Baylor honors program, the University Scholars program, and especially to every classmate or professor with whom I have had the privilege of discussing the great genres of literature—from poetry to plays to prose—I owe my sincere gratitude. These programs have fostered a clear, faithful community and context in which my own faith has been able to flourish and change, surrounded by (in my unbiased opinion) the brightest minds of this generation. My education and experience in these programs has changed me forever and for the better.

Many thanks also to Dr. Richard Russell, a professor whose own unfailing faith, devotion to all his students and to his work, and zeal for learning urged me to take three of his classes in my time at Baylor and have implanted in me a determination to maintain a posture of lifelong learning. His style of humble, Socratic discussion and curiosity-driven study has prompted me to pursue a career in education and shown me how to reconcile intellectual research with devotion to God in a classroom that edifies both.

Finally, to my unceasingly loving, carefully instructing, wonderfully mysterious God, Jesus Christ, who has taught me through these four years how to love, study, wait, laugh, and cry with confident dependence upon Him. “For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen” (Romans 11:36).

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction to Enchantment

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men” (John 1: 1-4). With these powerful words, John illustrates the sacramental nature of God’s created world, embodied in the enhancement and enchantment of its physical beauty through spiritual presence and meaning. In a profoundly beautiful paradox, the world breathes in a nexus of spiritual and material beauty, in which each beautifies and fulfills the needs of the other in perfect, symbiotic harmony. Cultures and communities have sought to preserve this powerful, necessary balance by providing material channels in which spiritual beauty can easily appear and communicate to physically-bound mankind. Thus, tales of the manifestation of spirits in mortal form have served to illustrate a bridge between these two gates, further establishing a sacramental system in which the spiritual and physical may weave together.

As one of the greatest poets of the twentieth century, T.S. Eliot ever wavered on this cusp, never quite able to doubt that something spiritual did exist but always struggling with its elusive nature and origin. The bridge between the spiritual and material imbues his bleakest poetry with a hidden assumption of a supernatural power that lies behind this mortal coil. Although some may argue that his first poems hold no such hope, these first echoes of his agonized mind demonstrate a heroic tenacity and

willingness to express doubt for the sake of discovery, analogous to Job's words of anguish,

Therefore I will not keep silent;

I will speak out in the anguish of my spirit,

I will complain in the bitterness of my soul. (Job 7:11)

Similarly, Eliot's poetry functions as a battleground for his soul's deepest turmoil. Across the deserted plain of "The Waste Land" and into the rising sun of his "Four Quartets," his testimony unfolds, and so too do his theories of enchantment.

In the Christian tradition, it is the simultaneous humanity and divinity of Jesus Christ that provide the basis for a culture of spiritual enchantment. The material has been infused with the spiritual, and Jesus, fully God and fully man, is the herald and testimony of this enchantment. Christ came as the Savior of the world, but his chosen vessel exemplified humanity's need for this union and prolonged the life of a culture that recognized the importance of its conservation. For hundreds of years, the practices and traditions of His followers demonstrated a deep, renewed understanding of the relationship between the spiritual and material in the world. Yet, man's depraved nature could not ward off delusion and corruption forever. As Eugene McCarragher writes in his book *The Enchantments of Mammon*, "the sciences dispelled the realm of mystery; the prose of reason hushed the poetry of superstition; greed and calculation fostered callous disregard for the earth and the bonds of community" (1). There was no one catalyst for this turn away from enchantment, but a turn to the humanistic system of the Enlightenment, the sixteenth-century exposure of corruption in the Catholic Church, and the resulting attempt at reformation each played a significant part (McCarragher 1).

Terrified of repeating the mistakes of the Church, the resulting Protestant factions rejected the idea of sacramentalism, creating a dramatic polarization that expedited a departure from enchantment.

On the road of industrialization, technology and modern developments in science replaced the lingering remnants of myth and spirituality with practicality and logic. If high-minded man could not explain something through science, how could it be believed? Faith was relegated to a low, laughable position to be utilized by the gullible and ignorant. The idea of *enchantment*, of spiritual presence in the world, was deemed childish and utterly disregarded. Yet with it was tied up the possibility of purpose and value beyond man's own mental limits, so the fruitless search for an object of worship continued despite the best efforts of science. Though enchantment was now snubbed, had it departed from the world entirely? Could it still be found somewhere, or, better yet, transferred to a chosen object?

According to the poetry of T.S. Eliot, this enchantment was not truly capable of being moved. The theories of Max Weber and Eugene McCarragher, two of the most popular minds on the subject of enchantment, begin to untangle the mystery of enchantment, but it is Eliot's conclusion—as expressed in “The Waste Land” and “Four Quartets”—that weaves both theories together into a stronger, thicker cord, unable to be unraveled. In the next sections, the ideas of Weber and McCarragher will be explored in order to set the stage for Eliot's own analysis: one that acknowledges the disenchantment of this modern-day waste land, while lighting a spark of hope enchantment may yet be rediscovered in the old, unchanging myths the secular world sought to bury.

Secularizing Enchantment

Some authors have proposed a radically secular answer for the disenchantment crisis. Going against the grain of traditionally religious scholarship on the subject, Joshua Landy and Michael Saler seek to show that such enchantment could be reestablished through “fully secular and deliberate strategies [...] with a common aim of filling a God-shaped void” (2). Their book, *The Re-Enchantment of the World: Secular Magic in a Rational Age*, enumerates the ingredients necessary for re-enchanting a desperate, aching world. According to the authors, such a world must be:

reimbued not only with *mystery* and *wonder* but also with *order*, perhaps even with *purpose*; [...] lives, must be susceptible again to *redemption*; there must be a new, intelligible locus for the *infinite*; there must be a way of carving out, within the fully profane world, a set of spaces which somehow possess the allure of the *sacred*; there must be everyday *miracles*, [...] and there must be secular *epiphanies*, moments of being in which, for a brief instant, the center appears to hold, and the promise is held out of a quasi-mystical union with something larger than oneself. (Landy and Sales 2)

Far from promoting a return to religious, sacramental values, the pair advocates for a blasphemous replacement of Christian mores with their twisted, secular counterparts. However, in doing so, they unintentionally concede the necessity of these spiritual values—mystery, wonder, order, purpose, redemption, the infinite, miracles, and epiphanies—even if they would prefer to find their secular parallels in the world rather than pump new blood to the diminished heartbeat of a fundamentally spiritual enchantment.

In another of his works, Michael Saler even attempts to assert the opinion that disenchantment is an illusion of prestigious, religious groups to combat their technological fears in the midst of modernity and disparage the powerful, new generation of science. He quotes Mark A. Schneider (a sociology professor and fellow philosopher of enchantment) as he insists that humans ““become enchanted only when this invidious distinction [between the mundane and the magical] is developed, and remain so only while it lasts: in its absence, by contrast, the magical and the mundane appear to us largely indistinguishable”” (qtd. in Saler 716). In his belief, the idea of disenchantment was (and is) a tool for enhancing the gap between social classes. Put differently, he sees “the discourse of disenchantment as the contingent creation of elites for purposes of prestige” (Saler 716). The purpose of this lie, in his opinion, is surely to convince millions of lapsed Christians to return to the Church body by brandishing the fire-and-brimstone message of the prospect of a futile, desperate life without spiritual enchantment.

Yet, it is clear that the advent of modernity brought about a kind of disenchantment due to the refocus on material gain and an overabundance of personal idols. In a generation marked by decreased self-esteem, anxiety, and spiritual confusion and ambiguity, it is difficult to doubt the more prominent theory: that disenchantment has occurred primarily as a result of materialism and an aversion to the sacramentalism that characterized Catholic Christianity. However, Landy and Saler do succeed in demonstrating the subtle, but damaging effects of disenchantment: it is far easier to try to live in a hopeful world full of possibilities than to acknowledge the inherent fruitlessness of a life without enchantment.

Max Weber on Enchantment

Perhaps the most prominent philosopher on disenchantment is Max Weber; in 1905, he wrote a deep and complicated analysis of the relationship between Christianity (specifically Protestant Christianity) and capitalism entitled *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. As he pored over the complexities of this relationship, he introduced his theory of disenchantment. In *Science as a Vocation*, Weber famously described the current generation as primarily characterized by “rationalization and intellectualization and above all the disenchantment of the world” (30). According to Weber, the world has been *disenchanted* as a result of developments in reason, religion, science, and economic systems. As Matti Peltonen writes in an essay exploring Weber’s thesis, Weber “lamented the loss of spirituality in modern life” (80). In Weber’s system of beliefs, there does not lie any hope that some life may be breathed into the ashes of enchantment. The closest he comes to a “re-enchantment” is in acknowledging that “the many gods of old, without their magic and therefore in the form of impersonal forces, rise up from their graves, strive for power over our lives and begin once more their eternal struggle among themselves” (Weber, *Science as a Vocation* 23). For him, this is no re-enchantment, but rather mankind’s attempt to choose what can control their lives. *Disenchantment* means that the spiritual forces, and with it any value or meaning, has gone out of the world and cannot return.

Eugene McCarragher on Enchantment

Eugene McCarragher, author of the 2019 book *The Enchantments of Mammon:*

How Capitalism Became the Religion of Modernity, expresses a different opinion on the modern plight of enchantment. While he and Weber find agreement in identifying the catalysts of disenchantment, McCarragher differs from Weber in his opinion on the extent to which enchantment has been lost. As he defines it, modernity is not an era of *disenchantment*, but rather of *displaced enchantment*: “a regime of enchantment, a repression, displacement, and renaming of our intrinsic and inveterate longing for divinity” (4). Drawing on the words of William Cavanaugh, he succinctly calls it a “migration of the holy” from proper objects of worship to those which we have chosen (4). McCarragher recognizes that man cannot survive without finding an “enchanted” way to live, even if that way is merely “a parody or perversion of our longing for a sacramental way of being in the world” (5). Although it would seem that man has scorned superstition and spirituality entirely, he merely scorned the mystery and power that it held over him. In a culture of displaced enchantment, he may choose the object which he enchants, and with this action embody his newfound, complete control over his own life.

Beneath this theory of displaced enchantment lies a profound knowledge of God’s boundless nature of grace. McCarragher exclaims that “the world can *never* be disenchanted, not because our emotional or political or cultural needs compel us to find enchantments—though they do—but because the world itself, as Hopkins realized, is charged with the grandeur of God” (11). The poem he references here—“God’s Grandeur” by Gerard Manley Hopkins—portrays God’s grace and love as unceasing and unmeasurable, despite man’s best efforts to “smear,” “stain,” or otherwise blemish it with his sin and cruelty. God’s enchantment cannot be ejected completely from His created world, but McCarragher contends that it can be moved. While Weber argues that man has

evicted enchantment from the cosmos, McCarraher clarifies that man has actually *transferred* enchantment from its right objects to perverse ones. This blasphemous attempt encapsulates man's futile goal to establish "a 'celestial city' on the fissured foundation of our aberrant loves" (McCarraher 12).

McCarraher's take on enchantment is founded on theological truths, but overlooks one important aspect. In advocating for a theory of displaced enchantment, McCarraher implicitly defines enchantment as a characteristic, as something which can be swapped and moved and passed around. Although he admits to the *futility* of placing enchantment in the wrong objects, he does not acknowledge the *impossibility* of enchanting something unworthy of it. Put another way, he recognizes that material objects and relationships cannot be enchanted in the same way as the proper objects of worship. However, he seems to imply that humans are the arbiters of enchantment, the ones with authority to shift it from place to place.

The large problem with McCarraher's argument revolves around his equivocating definitions of *enchantment*. For him, enchantment is simultaneously the sacramental presence of God in the physical world and also the depiction of pagan, mystical spirituality through man's chosen vessels and systems. McCarraher describes enchantment as something eternal and uncontrollable, which provides an accurate explanation of the former kind, but also something displaced and subject to the whims of man, which seems to more clearly illustrate his latter definition. After all, even McCarraher would agree that God's own grandeur cannot be manipulated by men, thus rendering it incapable of displacement. As a result of this equivocation, it is difficult to define his final thesis on enchantment precisely.

T.S. Eliot and Enchantment

In short, Max Weber believed that the world had become disenchanted in the modern age, and held no hope in a possibility of future re-enchantment. Eugene McCarragher, on the other hand, described modern society's plight as one of displaced enchantment, in which mankind has sought to divinize an economic system rather than find God's presence through its proper, sacramental vessels. While it is difficult to establish McCarragher's opinion on the transferability of enchantment (defining "enchantment" here as the method of God's spiritual presence in the material world) due to his equivocating terms, I would venture to declare a different conclusion to the plight of enchantment through an analysis of T.S. Eliot's best works.

Although his conversion to Christianity was rocky and gradual, Eliot's mind had always been trapped in the most existential themes of philosophy and theology. His forty-page, poetic work "The Waste Land," written five years prior to his conversion to Anglo-catholicism, explored many philosophical themes grimly and profoundly. Indeed, while his poetic work "Four Quartets" was published some nineteen years later, it comprised the same themes, albeit in a more developed and hopeful manner, having been written out of his new, Christian beliefs.

One thing these poems show is Eliot's tremendous knowledge of human nature: his poetry pulses with the lifeblood of the needs and desires of mankind, presented in their raw, basic forms for easy dissection and observation. In "The Waste Land," Eliot explores disenchantment in the clearest presentation of the phenomenon: a deserted, lifeless landscape. Upon this landscape, characters drift in and out, constantly and

fruitlessly searching for something which will breathe life back into their parched world. In a future chapter, further details and results of this futile search will be analyzed for its consequences upon the idea of enchantment. According to Weber's theory of disenchantment, the populace of "The Waste Land" should end drained of all hope, doomed to live out the tail-ends of their miserable lives in grim despondency. McCarragher would be unable to rationalize a waste land such as Eliot's, in which the world seems devoid of all hope. According to his philosophy, "God's grandeur" should still be buried underneath the seemingly deserted plains to which materialism has brought humanity. Eliot's conclusion is slightly different, consciously combining elements of both Weber's and McCarragher's theories to forge a new, religious philosophy of enchantment. Explored and detailed over the next few chapters, this theory merges Weber's correct belief in a disenchantment resulting from materialism and McCarragher's opinion that enchantment has been transferred (or, at least, that there has been an *attempt* to transfer it).

Eliot's "The Waste Land" and "Four Quartets" present a battleground for both theories of enchantment to struggle and grow and finally morph into something solid and well-earned. Through an in-depth analysis of these works, not only is his view on enchantment distinctly laid out, but these poems bring the reader into the heart of Eliot's most intimate, spiritual struggles. The story grows and deepens, eventually venturing into the terrifying territory of Christianity. Perhaps this was the last hope he had of redemption for himself, just as surely as it was for his Fisher King and the rest of his wasted kingdom, so he crept along carefully, desperate for the Living Water which was rumored to be capable of soothing his perpetual thirst. Almost not daring to, he hesitantly

brushed the edge of Christ's cloak and found thereafter a miraculous re-enchantment unlike anything he had envisioned. This renewal did not merely reinstate the sacramental imagination of the old world, but instead truly "made all things new" in the manner of the first Creation, per the words of Isaiah the prophet (Isaiah 43:19).

Thenceforth, his writing could not help but laud the eternal spring of enchantment available to anyone who sought it in gratitude and faith. Any "secular and deliberate strategies" that attempted to claim a place among the remedies to mortal futility and despair suddenly seemed laughable in the light of this panacea. "The Waste Land" and "Four Quartets" seem a parallel to his personal journey from disenchantment to re-enchantment, and as such are able to present a precise, realistic theory of enchantment, illuminated by Weber's and McCarragher's but finished with the intimate experience of a convert and the empathy of a poet. Only a man who experienced the miraculous rebirth into Christ could simultaneously illustrate the depravity of disenchanted modernity and the incomparable joy of re-enchantment that made it easy even for the rich man, who had many material possessions, to travel the difficult, penitential road to salvation.

CHAPTER TWO

An Analysis of Enchantment in “The Waste Land”

With the publication of his five-part poem “The Waste Land” in 1922, T.S. Eliot beckoned the greedy and insatiable Western civilization to explore the grim epitaph which would fastidiously recount their inevitable demise at the hands of disenchantment, given the self-destructive character of their current, chosen course. It is too simple, of course, to blame this predicted apocalypse solely on disenchantment, assuming that this *disenchantment* is best defined as the waning of spiritual value. Eliot was writing in the wake of World War I, and naturally much of the imagery in “The Waste Land” must be attributed to the spiritual and physical context of this war. Thus, the vacant landscape of the poem was born from a real, bleak series of events which deprived the next generations of the hope of any spiritual meaning or future. No doubt the plight of this “lost generation” laid the foundation for Eliot’s spiritually and physically desolate countryside in the poem. However, “The Waste Land” does not imply an altogether dichotomous turn from enchantment, but instead seems to highlight the principle of necessary idolatry: that mankind must have something to worship.

Although written five years before his official conversion to Christianity in 1927, the poem hits on some strikingly Christian beliefs, while drawing inspiration from secular sources, or even from other religious, non-Christian sources. This necessary idolatry is displayed throughout the long poem in the people’s constant search for a “savior” who will quench the physical thirst of the landscape (and the spiritual thirst of the community). In this way, “The Waste Land” cannot be described as a poem chiefly in

line with Max Weber's theory of disenchantment—which holds with it no hope for re-enchantment—but rather as bringing in McCarragher's view of displaced enchantment as well. While mankind's original fall from grace, and his more recent fall from enchantment, are demonstrated more clearly in Eliot's later poem "Four Quartets," it is "The Waste Land" which illustrates the futility of man without God and his inherent need for something which will satisfy his heart's deepest longing for Him.

T.S. Eliot is not known for his simplicity, so an analysis of his most difficult and dense poem requires some enlightenment upon the prominent topics interlaced throughout the work. To begin with, it must be noted that Eliot never explicitly uses the word "enchantment" to describe what "The Waste Land" society is missing (or destroying). Rather, this idea of enchantment emerges from two distinct works: Max Weber's 1905 work *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* and Eugene McCarragher's *The Enchantment of Mammon: How Capitalism Became the Religion of Modernity*, released in 2020. Although Eliot was unable to read McCarragher's account (and it is unclear whether he read Weber's work), these books present two views of disenchantment that are fundamental to understanding Eliot's own understanding. Weber and McCarragher would agree that enchantment can be described as a sort of high spiritual value that is given to something or to someone. The only proper end of enchantment should be Him who can fully satisfy it, which is God. Many of Eliot's poems can thus be interpreted through the lens of exhibiting the consequences of enchanting an object unworthy of it. However, the two authors diverge in their opinions of the direction that society has taken in enchantment. Weber believes in a complete "disenchantment," which has resulted in a hopeless society with no proper end for its desires. McCarragher, on the

other hand, argues for “displaced enchantment,” which assumes that man cannot exist without an enchanted idol and believes that society is spiraling down as a result of placing its enchantment in the wrong object, which is made easier in a capitalistic system.

While the industrialization of society has heralded an age of comfort and material satisfaction, it has also caused a multiplication of desired objects, and mankind has largely taken the bait. In this technologically-focused era, man maintains a significant amount of control over his environment that renders spiritual enchantment of God apparently unnecessary. Enchantment has given way to empiricism, and men only believe in that which can be proven.

Yet, a Christian perspective would observe a common and indisputable need for a Savior inside every man and woman. As long as material goods can satisfy the shallow parts of humanity’s longing for God, they distract man from this need, and thus an age of consumerism proves to be even more dangerous for the soul than a medieval age of sickness and death. It is difficult to convince a comfortable generation of its need for a Savior, but Eliot’s “The Waste Land” comes close. Through this long and complicated poem, Eliot portrays this futile society that has lost its right end, reminiscent of the lost tribe of Israel from Judges. Endless allusion and imagery draws on the rich legacy of literature and culture which implicitly played on the theme of enchantment in order to illustrate the need for something beyond the bounds of a poem. Interestingly, even though Eliot was not Christian at the time of his writing “The Waste Land,” the work shows a real, Christian recognition of this need. Though “The Waste Land” is not as hopeful (nor as explicitly Christian) as “Four Quartets,” Eliot’s display of futility and disenchanting devastation accurately portray the consequences to a soul without enchantment. In this

analysis, in order to explain of the poem's message on enchantment, the poem's themes will be viewed in a broader context before diving into an investigation of the work's portrayal of displaced enchantment through the means of secular consumerism, continuing on to discuss the idea of regeneration as it relates to enchantment, and finally ending with a reflection on the conclusion of the poem and the ramifications it seems to imply for this lost generation of wandering consumers.

Background

In a despairing manner, "The Waste Land" journeys from a heartbreaking reference to the cheery month of April turned cold and cruel in this new landscape to a last scene of nihilistic resignation which reads like the last sigh of one broken and dying, without hope for an afterlife. As the poem marches bleakly onward, from scene to dismal scene, the characters grow more and more fragmented, and the allusions increase in number until the last lines are engulfed in Sanskrit. Years later, in the writing of "Four Quartets," T.S. Eliot employs the use of various physical locations in the titles in order to express certain emotions and ideas, but he uses no such helpful tactic here. From "The Burial of the Dead" to "What the Thunder Said," Eliot just emphasizes the importance of allusion, which further serves to highlight the confusion and indecision of the lost society within the poem. Through these sections and allusions, he illustrates the significance of memory and the question of the role of feeling in physical pleasure, among other broader themes. The increasingly fragmented, seemingly random thematic style of "The Waste Land" brings the reader to a terrified understanding of what he could lose should his

attempt to displace enchantment lead to the inevitable disenchantment of all things, and thus all life.

The Futility of Consumerism

If the theme of “The Waste Land” can be encapsulated within one word, that word would certainly be “futility.” The very title of “The Waste Land” is written to evoke despair and apathy from the reader and to emphasize the crucial nature of the futility theme within the poem. The poem itself predated the Great Depression by seven years, and yet this air of futility comes as no surprise given the recent occurrence of the Great War. Although World War II could be seen as a fight between good and evil, World War I did not share in this dichotomous nature, and many on both sides had little idea the purpose behind their fighting. It thus follows that the war ended with many of its soldiers, on both sides, feeling disillusioned and permanently guilty, lost and searching despairingly for any kind of hope. In the wake of such a war, the materialism which had consumed the lives of so many seemed shallow and lifeless, and so “The Waste Land” was born into an age that was ready for the difficult and critical message which it carried. As the poem progresses, this futility can be clearly seen as the consequence of secular consumerism, and the audience is now in the right mindset to accept this evaluation.

Eliot jumps right into allusion as he begins the poem, with his opening lines echoing those of the Chaucer’s *The Canterbury Tales*: “Whan that Aprille with his shoures soote, / The droghte of March hath perced to the roote” (ll. 1-2). Eliot’s lines, on the other hand, read:

April is the cruellest 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. ('The Burial of the Dead,' ll. 1-7)

Throughout Chaucer's introduction, he connects April with refreshment, purity, and new life. Eliot does not necessarily dispute this claim, but he does dispute the underlying assumption that these are good things. April is not cruel in the usual way, but it is cruel because it distracts society from her desolate state. In the new flowers, memory is stirred and man feels his old wound reopened as he remembers what he possessed or becomes disillusioned with what he could still have. A parallel can be drawn between April's cheerful façade and the deceptive comforts of modern society, which disguise the wound which mankind inflicts upon itself until it is too late. Commas also split the lines so as to invoke the theme of fragmentation that progresses throughout the rest of the poem: everything is fractured and falling apart, and our own memory is especially broken.

In the next section of "The Burial of the Dead," Eliot cleverly employs the use of Tarot cards in order to convey the major themes of the poem as a whole. It is difficult (if not impossible) for the average reader to understand the significance of each card as "Madame Sosostris" lays it down before the narrator, but Betsey Creekmore sheds some light upon the subject in her article on this specific, crucial stanza. To begin the session, Madame Sosostris exclaims "Here [...] / Is your card, the drowned Phoenician Sailor," which may be interpreted as the card of "Death" (ll. 46-7). Creekmore explains the

significance of this card, saying that the card “signifies that the actual fact of death is an instrument of progress; thus, to escape the death-in-life of the Waste Land, the protagonist may and must die in order to be reborn” (919). Since this card is placed first, Creekmore defines it as the “Significator Card,” which represents the “querent and/or the query which has been made” (911). Thus, this card can be seen as representing the main theme of the whole poem: the Waste Land is “death-in-life,” and the narrator is on a quest to find a solution to this problem. In line 51, Eliot writes that the third card is “the man with three staves.” Creekmore also writes that this card, “The Three of Wands,” shows that “concern with human effort and human enterprise stand in the way of release from the death-in-life of the Waste Land” because they are “secular values, not spiritual principles” (919). This is clearly a reflection upon materialism, with Eliot rejecting pursuit of material goods and emphasizing the inherent emptiness of such a project.

The final example of this futility theme in “The Burial of the Dead” is seen in its last stanza, in which the narrator observes a great crowd of dead people in London, heaving “sighs, short and infrequent” (Eliot, line 64). In the narrator’s conversation with a dead comrade from the war, he asks him:

That corpse you planted last year in your garden,

Has it begun to sprout? Will it bloom this year?

Or has the sudden frost disturbed its bed? (‘The Burial of the Dead,’ ll. 71-3)

In this one-sided exchange, the corpse simultaneously illustrates the futility of death and rebirth that is only possible through it. This imagery extends the earlier theme of the “death-in-life” nature of the Waste Land, but lays the groundwork for the strengthening of the theme of possible regeneration.

In “A Game of Chess,” there is a shift to a different kind of idolized materialism: sexual consumerism. For instance, Julie Goodspeed-Chadwick argues that “Eliot’s economic insights [consisted] of the realization that London is functioning on ‘a sexual economy where there is more money chasing more bodies’” (383). As the two women in the section discuss Lil’s unfortunate situation with her husband, a man who cannot be satisfied by her body no matter how much she strives to do his bidding, Eliot draws a parallel to the Greek myth of Philomela. In the tale, Philomela was raped by her brother-in-law, but subsequently had her tongue cut out to prevent her from speaking about it. In a somewhat stretched parallel, Lil is unable to disclose the true pain that she feels to her friend, and this very inability demonstrates the “sexual economy” that enslaves women and traps men and women alike in a cycle of futile attempts at regeneration through physical pleasure. Lil is told to buy new teeth, to give Albert “a good time,” and Eliot even implies that her face is looking ancient due to an abortion she received to satisfy her husband:

It’s them pills I took, to bring it off, she said.

(She’s had five already, and nearly died of young George.)

The chemist said it would be all right, but I’ve never been the same.

(‘A Game of Chess,’ ll. 159-61)

No matter what Lil does in order to pursue some kind of desired, physical end, her beauty and sexual allure will only degenerate, thus proving the emptiness of sexual consumerism.

“The Fire Sermon” begins with the narrator mourning the loss of enchantment beside a river. He notes that “no empty bottles, sandwich papers, / Silk handkerchiefs,

cardboard boxes, cigarette ends / Or other testimony of summer nights” drift down the Thames anymore, representing a realization of the futility of consumerism and an end to the pursuit of material and physical goods (ll. 177-9). The sexual themes of “A Game of Chess” continue into this section in the form of three couples: the speaker and Mr. Eugenides, the typist and her husband, and Queen Elizabeth and the Earl of Leicester. All three indicate a perversion of sex and a subsequent loss of meaning and love within the act. When Mr. Eugenides proposes a sexual encounter with the male speaker, he is proposing a homosexual act. In addition, it is significant that he is a “Smyrna merchant” and has “a pocket full of currants,” since the former connects him to one of the seven churches mentioned in Revelations, while the latter symbolizes a defiled version of the Communion Wine (as mentioned in Eliot’s footnote) (ll. 209, 210). In these three ways, Mr. Eugenides shows himself to be corrupt, attempting to find meaning in perverted sexual acts. In the case of the typist in line 222, she is described as “bored and tired” as her lover assaults her with indifferent sex:

The meal is ended, she is bored and tired,
[he] Endeavours to engage her in caresses
Which still are unreprieved, 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. (‘The Fire Sermon,’ ll. 236-42)

When he has been satiated, the typist simply sighs, “well now that’s done: and I’m glad it’s over” (line 252). With Elizabeth and Leicester in line 279, there is little difference in

passion and desire, as Elizabeth is described as “supine on the floor of a narrow canoe” and unable to comment after the encounter (line 295).

Though “Death By Water” is brief, it leaves a strong impression with its image of the decaying, Phoenician sailor, whose youth and beauty have corroded in the strong waves. In the last lines, Eliot employs this stark image to implant a little wisdom in the heart of the reader, who may be tempted to dwell on earthly pleasures: “O you who turn the wheel and look to windward, / Consider Phlebas, who was once handsome and tall as you” (ll. 320-1).

In Eliot’s footnote of line 385 in the final section, “What the Thunder Said,” he references Jeremiah 2:13, which states that “my people have committed two evils; they have forsaken me the fountain of living waters, and carved themselves out cisterns, broken cisterns that can hold no water.” The line in the poem reads: “and voices singing out of empty cisterns and exhausted wells” (line 385). With this simple line, the theme of displaced enchantment continues as Scripture itself chastises the reader for carving out his own end, indeed for enchanting something unworthy of and unable to carry such a task. The final moments of this section offer some parting thoughts on this theme of futility with a reference to Dante and another to Thomas Kyd’s *The Spanish Tragedy*. The lines from Dante run thus: “*Poi s’ascose nel foco che gli affina / Quando fiam uti chelidon,*” and the footnote translates them as the end of a phrase from Dante’s *Purgatorio* which emphasizes the refining fires of Purgatory that cleanse physical transgressions and anticipates fire to come in the last sections of “Four Quartets” (Eliot, ll. 428-9). It is noteworthy that among Eliot’s last words in the poem are ones which invite the reader to be purified of his sinful desires in purgatorial fires. The words which

follow shortly after shed more light upon the subject, since these are taken from the words of Hieronimo in a predecessor to the Shakespearean play *Hamlet*. Though Eliot only quotes the first line, it continues upon this theme of materialism, saying,

Why then I'll fit you, say no more.

When I was young, I gave my mind

And plied myself to fruitless poetry:

Which though it profit the professor naught,

Yet is it passing pleasing to the world. (Footnote to Line 432)

Combining these two key references, it seems that Eliot is leaving the reader with the smallest glimmer of hope. Now that it is clear that worldly ends are “fruitless,” perhaps some sort of purgatorial fire is capable of filtering out the perverted desires of the human heart.

Reviving Enchantment

It is no secret that Eliot highly values allusions in his poetry, but “The Waste Land” actually houses one particular allusion to the Fisher King, which is crucial to understanding the subtext. The very title of the poem borrows its name from the legend of the Fisher King, specifically as it was retold in Jesse L. Weston’s book, *From Ritual to Romance*. The premise behind the Fisher King is that the man rules over a “waste land,” so called because he has lost his fertility through a genital wound, and his own inability to generate life is paralleled in the plight of his once-mighty kingdom. It is said that a chaste and perfect knight can heal the Fisher King, but Eliot’s Waste Land seems to conclude that no such knight exists. This tale provides much of the foundation of the

regeneration theme throughout the rest of the poem, and it is important to read every element in light of this myth.

“The Burial of the Dead” is written just as it sounds, in order to present a dismal picture of the Fisher King’s waste land. In an ecclesiastical manner, some of the first lines present to the reader a “heap of broken images” like “the dead tree [which] gives no shelter, the cricket no relief, / And the dry stone no sound of water” (ll. 22, 23-4). The first instance of possible rebirth is found in the tarot-reading stanza, in which Madame Sosostris shows to the speaker his future. In the place of the Significator card, she turns over a card revealing a “drowned Phoenician Sailor, / (Those are pearls that were his eyes. Look!)” (Eliot, ll. 47-8). According to Creekmore’s article, this last line alludes to Shakespeare’s play *The Tempest*, specifically to Ariel’s song “which describes a death that becomes a type of rebirth” (911). She further explains that “the actual fact of death,” according to this card “is an instrument of progress” (Creekmore 911). Thus, the poem has journeyed from a waste and completely devoid of hope to one with a faint glimmer of hope that is perhaps little better, since this hope requires death for regeneration. In lines 54-5, Sosostris overturns the sixth card, stating “I do not find / The Hanged Man. Fear death by water” (*T.S. Eliot*). Although some critics have explained that such a line implies “an absence of the card,” Creekmore explains that “Madame Sosostris’s statement that she does not see the Hanged Man is more likely an indication that the card has come from the pack reversed,” so “the figure is not as suggestive of an upside-down hanged man as of the Fisher King—of Frazer’s Hanged God who had to die in order to cause rebirth” (916). Importantly, she also writes that “the reversed figure, with its

definite halo, is in the general shape of a cross,” which implies that “after the sacred mystery of Death there is a glorious mystery of Resurrection” (916).

As discussed earlier, “A Game of Chess” spends most of its lines describing the consequences of sexual idolatry through the example of Lil and her husband, and the parallel myth of Philomela. “The Fire Sermon,” however, takes the reader back to the beginning of the poem, when the narrator was mourning the loss of fertility in the Waste Land. Similarly, these stanzas invoke the myth of the Fisher King, since the events take place, as the narrator explains,

While I was fishing in the dull canal

On a winter evening round behind the gashouse

Musing upon the king my brother’s wreck

And on the king my father’s death before him. (‘The Fire Sermon,’ ll. 189-92)

According to the footnotes, the Fisher King’s brother also mourns the King’s loss of fertility, as well as his father’s death. With a brief line in the next stanza, Eliot again invokes the Fisher King as he writes “*Et O ces voix d’enfants, chantant dans la coupole!*” (line 202). Though short, the line pulls in a long and difficult reference to a poem called *Parsifal* by Paul-Marie Verlaine, in which Percival cures

[...] the true king himself,

And the priest of the transcendent very holy Treasure.

In a golden robe he worships, glorious and symbolic,

the pure vessel where the royal blood blazes. —

And, O these children’s voices singing beneath the cupola!

(Footnotes to Line 202)

With this powerful allusion, Eliot at last references Christ's Resurrection, paralleling it to the kind of regeneration that will be necessary in order to heal the Fisher King, and thus the waste land as well. Eliot ends this section with two conflicting allusions that emphasize the necessity of an outside salvation in the rebirth of the waste land. In the last lines, he references Buddha's "Fire Sermon" and Augustine's *Confessions*, claiming that "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, footnote on line 309). Both, especially Augustine's "O Lord Thou pluckest me out" highlight the need for a "Lord" to pluck humanity out of the dismal, hopeless Waste Land (Eliot, line 309).

The Fisher King myth is again alluded to in "Death By Water" in the reappearance of the dead, Phoenician sailor, but it is in "What the Thunder Said" that the regeneration theme is fully revisited. With the first few lines, Eliot dives back into the Christ comparison with references to Judas's betrayal, Jesus's desperate prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane, and His death upon Golgotha (ll. 322-4). In the last lines of the stanza, he summarizes the consequences of His death: "He who was living is now dead / We who were living are now dying" (Eliot, ll. 328-9). Since the Fisher King's infertility is the source of the Waste Land's decay, there is a clear parallel being drawn here between this relationship and the relationship between the death of Jesus and, consequently, of humanity. This comparison continues on for some time in this section as Eliot draws on various allusions to aid him in the complicated imagery. The final appearance of the Fisher King comes in one of the last stanzas, as the narrator suddenly finds himself identifying as the Fisher King:

I sat upon the shore

Fishing, with the arid plain behind me

Shall I at least set my lands in order? ('What the Thunder Said,' ll. 424-6)

This last line calls to mind 2 Kings 20:1, in which Hezekiah is told by the prophet Isaiah to “put your house in order, because you are going to die.” With such an interpretation, the reader should expect that this clearly foreshadows the Fisher King’s doom and the permanent damnation of the Waste Land and its inhabitants. However, Hezekiah’s story did not end with this pronouncement of death: he prayed to God and was granted life (2 Kings 20:5). Does this mean that regeneration will be possible for the Fisher King and, by extension, for modern society as Eliot sees it? He leaves it unclear, but it seems a possibility, though only attainable through purgatorial fire and total sacrifice, administered by a divine power, as he demonstrates in “Four Quartets.”

Conclusion

While it is difficult to objectively analyze modern society through the veil of physical pleasure, Eliot’s “The Waste Land” displays the certain consequences of living in an era of displaced enchantment. However, his view, as shown through the poem, cannot be condensed into McCarragher’s theory of displaced enchantment, nor does it find itself fitting perfectly into Weber’s theory of disenchantment. Rather, the image of the Waste Land establishes a world absolutely forsaken and disenchanted *as a result* of its pervasive habit of displaced enchantment. Physical idols cannot hold the weight of enchantment, so displaced enchantment is rendered disenchantment. Meanwhile, mankind must live in an in-between world, simultaneously wishing to be free of this stained and broken world and incapable of believing in the possibility of salvation. R.J.

Owens describes this as “a transition period in which the basic needs are not satisfied: in which man is shown to live in a mixture of ‘memory and desire’ [...] this negative experience [...] gets meaning only through being apprehended in relation to its positive opposite” which is “the death of the god of fertility and his resurrection” (4). Although Eliot himself was not yet a Christian when he wrote “The Waste Land,” he seems to recognize that the only salvation for such a disenchanted world is through some paradoxical, supernatural means. Perhaps any lack of the clarity in the text can thus be attributed to his own doubts about the existence of such divine powers. Nevertheless, while the poem has its hopeless moments, the tale of the Fisher King demonstrates the spark of hope that Eliot deems possible, even for such a secular society. In “Four Quartets,” Eliot continues with this theme of secular materialism, with humanity’s original (and modern) fall from enchantment also being illustrated through the work in an attempt to resolve the bleak and dire situation that ends “The Waste Land.”

CHAPTER THREE

An Analysis of Enchantment in T.S. Eliot's "Four Quartets"

Footfalls echo in the memory

Down the passage which we did not take

Toward the door we never opened

Into the rose-garden. ('Burnt Norton,' ll. 11-14)

Although T.S. Eliot's "Four Quartets" was written fourteen years after his announced conversion to Christianity, the ways in which it differs from its thematically-similar predecessor "The Waste Land" are marginal. In the first stanza, the themes of the cycle of time, memory, and the freedom of choice in society persist—three of Eliot's favorite topics. An atmosphere of despondency undergirds these grave themes, seemingly unchanged in the nineteen years between his writing each one. Despite this intermission, Eliot returns to his examination of secular culture in "Four Quartets" with a voice apparently still bleak and critical, though nineteen years of spiritual growth should have imbued it with hope and new courage. Eliot's focus on secular society renders his own philosophy of enchantment within secularism notoriously difficult to surmise.

As discussed in Chapter 2, an apparent displaced enchantment is discernible in "The Waste Land," evident in the context of a materialistic society seeking divine intervention to save them from their appetitive natures. Eliot implies a turning away from the only right and sustainable object of enchantment (i.e. God) and a turning toward the broad "other" (e.g. sex, other gods, money), thus culminating in a displaced enchantment akin to the cycle of lament seen in Judges. Yet, despite the consequences of enchantment

of the secular that these first poems reveal, Eliot's famous essay "Tradition and the Individual Talent" acknowledges the indivisible nature of a man's art and the past culture—*by* which the art is unavoidably judged—and the present culture—*within* which the art is judged.

After his 1927 conversion, Eliot's works still include many allusions to the culture of the past and present, which distinguish him from his contemporaries and many of his predecessors. In a way, he uses this method of allusion in order to emphasize the need for something beyond it, for something divine. From this, it is clear that Eliot does not believe that a complete divorce of secular and sacred culture would be effective in the process of re-enchantment. Thus, it is no surprise that "Four Quartets" does not illustrate a dramatic change in his thematic presentation, but rather a more subtle change in his conclusion to the problem of materialistic enchantment. In fact, "materialistic enchantment" would not correctly summarize the particulars of this contemporary turn from the sacred. The most significant way in which Eliot portrays his shift in perspective between "The Waste Land" and "Four Quartets" is through the development of enchantment. Combining elements of the theories of Max Weber and Eugene McCarragher, Eliot demonstrates a philosophy that is not merely simplified into a black and white issue of displaced enchantment, but does justice to the intricacies of human nature and religion.

In order to demonstrate and explain the presence of enchantment in Eliot's "Four Quartets," there are certain themes that must be traced and established within the poem first. Enchantment, as defined in the first chapter, is not in the same category as simple, abstract ideas such as 'love' or even 'faith,' which do not thrive in subtlety. The idea of

‘enchantment’ has only recently become popular with the advent of modernity and the resulting secular society, though Max Weber’s *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* introduced the ideas of disenchantment and enchantment to the world more than one hundred years ago in 1905. Since then, the sudden onset of the technological age and the steep surge in scientific discovery have provided the catalysts for an even steeper descent into disenchantment.

In an older world—when simple events could not be rationalized by science—some amount of enchantment was required to illuminate an otherwise complex world. Events or tragedies unexplainable in primitive science (e.g., comets, hurricanes, earthquakes, etc.) could be resolved in a supernatural or mystical context. However, modern science renders any amount of enchantment difficult to believe, resulting in a society drawing further and further from any sort of religious faith. Despite this apparent ‘disenchantment,’ there is also the possibility—as espoused by McCarragher—that the world cannot exist without *something* being ‘enchanted.’ In *A Secular Age*, Charles Taylor wrote that “modern humanism [...] had to produce some substitute for *agape*. All this means that an acceptable form of humanism had to be imagined” (27-8). By *agape*, Taylor was referring to the sacrificial, selfless love of God which renders the world worthy of enchantment. A sudden turn to human-centered progress did not necessarily mean that the world had become disenchanted—as Weber suggests—but could imply a switch in the thing that is enchanted. The value of enchantment is not readily accepted, so any presentation of this idea must be accompanied by a message on its power and purpose, along with a commentary on the consequences of eliminating it.

Eliot creates a commentary on enchantment in “Four Quartets” in a way akin to

reverse psychology. He presents the world through a secular lens, with all its futile pastimes, but he contrasts this with a view of the modern world through a religious lens, revealing that the world looks futile and bleak through *both* lenses. In doing this, he proves that his purpose is not to argue for the glory and joys of faith and a subsequently ‘enchanted’ outlook, but to demonstrate the impossibility of successfully displacing enchantment. Eliot paints a world—now viewed through his post-conversion lens—that is bleak, mysterious, and uncontrollable, and allows the audience to journey with him as he discovers the reasons behind this aura of futility. In this essay, discovering Eliot’s full message on enchantment will require a brief overview of the poem as a whole, a glimpse into his presentation of secular materialism, an examination of the fall from enchantment, and a final conclusion on the consequences of enchanting something unworthy of it (and on the necessity of “the fire and the rose”), before his complete theory can be derived and compared with those of Weber and McCarragher.

Background

Before the investigation, it is important to contextualize and analyze some of the more prominent themes in “Four Quartets.” Written over a course of about six years, this set of four poems seems to ponder every major philosophical thought on its way to a final conclusion. In truth, the poems focus most fixedly on the theme of time, with a few smaller themes falling under this broad umbrella of thought. Traveling from a manor in Gloucestershire to a village in England, and from there to a collection of rocky islands off of Massachusetts, the poem finally lands squarely in a small, Anglican society. These four locations, along with a subtle nod to one of the four elements—air, wind, earth,

fire—in each poem, reveal the distinct, but related, nature of each one and imply a journey through Eliot’s own “poetic and personal development” (Connolly 5). Through these locations, Eliot addresses the power of time in relation to human mortality and analyzes its dominance over art, as well as exploring the nature of suffering and existence in this cycle of time. Though “The Waste Land” concludes that the prospect of humanity’s salvation is bleak and unlikely (if not impossible), the fatalistic outlook that began the “Four Quartets” transforms into a more hopeful note by ‘Little Gidding’ that finally admits to the value of suffering as a cleansing fire that may have the power to save us.

Secular Materialism

Before this purgative fire can be reached, however, the first step on the journey to Eliot’s enchantment must be made, which will involve scrutinizing the secular society—in particular, its materialistic focus. Since the entirety of “Four Quartets” spans almost forty pages, it will be most appropriate to take each of the four sections one at a time.

Eliot’s first poem, ‘Burnt Norton,’ is placed within a beautiful house known as Norton Manor, which tragically burned down in 1741. With imagery that emphasizes freedom, movement, and sky, ‘Burnt Norton’ is often the poem associated with the element of air, which can account for the cheery, open style and illustration in the first couple sections. Eliot wastes no time in immediately diving into the theme of time in the first five lines of ‘Burnt Norton’:

Time present and time past

Are both perhaps present in time future

And time future contained in time past.

If all time is eternally present

All time is unredeemable. ('Burnt Norton,' I.1-5)

The paradoxical nature of time continues through the rest of the forty pages of "Four Quartets," always pointing back to these five lines and questioning the extent of man's control over time. Although these lines sound bleak, the following stanzas comfort the reader and emphasize the superiority of the present moment over "time past" or "time future." Through these soothing words, it seems that Eliot is trying to eliminate some of the futile outlook his readers may be carrying to "Four Quartets" from the influence of his previous poem "The Waste Land."

Following this consolation, he begins to journey into the theme of materialism. However, the message sounds different from the conclusion of his previous work; rather than prescribe human relationships and material joys to fix humanity's desolation, he seems to immediately reject a fulfilling materialism as something inconceivable within the "time present" since it contains "neither plenitude nor vacancy" ('Burnt Norton,' III. 10). This modern age lacks the spirituality to view worldly possessions and glory with gladness, but also lacks the depression of utterly dry spirituality that would "[empty] the sensual with deprivation / [cleanse] affection from the temporal," meaning that the vacancy of materialism would be recognized and rejected ('Burnt Norton,' III. 8-9). The result is neither an Epicurean materialism nor an altogether nihilistic depression, but a nasty combination of the two: a secular apathy, repeatedly pursuing distraction after distraction, though these are "filled with fancies, empty of meaning" ('Burnt Norton,' III.

13). This numbness to reality is more dangerous than the dark sin of “The Waste Land,” which is perhaps why Eliot does not prescribe a turn to secular joys as the answer.

This same numbness, along with a familiar sense of futility carried over from “The Waste Land,” continues in the first stanza of ‘East Coker,’ in which Eliot gives a nod to Ecclesiastes with his anaphoric repetition of the different seasons in a person’s life. Actually, Eliot is referring to a *house’s* lifetime here, emphasizing his rejection of materialism with the personification of houses, which—like man himself—eventually die. Within ‘East Coker,’ the themes of simplicity and community underline the relation of the poem to the solid, reliable element of earth. However, after presenting the simple pleasures of dancing and laughter in sentimental Old English (perhaps as a way of reflecting back on the “glory days” of society), Eliot turns back to his Ecclesiastical sigh of futility and the uselessness of wisdom, except the wisdom of humility. After several stanzas of dark word choice and bleak imagery, the poem takes a slight upturn with the following lines:

The wild thyme unseen and the wild strawberry,
The laughter in the garden, echoed ecstasy
Not lost, but requiring, pointing to the agony
Of death and birth. (‘East Coker,’ III. 30-3)

Though words like “agony” and “death” make an appearance, the crucial takeaway from the lines is that the “laughter in the garden” and the “echoed ecstasy” is *not lost*. In the language of “The Waste Land,” the water is not completely dried up. Humanity is numb, but retains some hope of salvation if it chooses to go through this cycle of suffering from

birth to death. Constant pleasure is not the cure; this secular age cannot heal the wounds of a numbed and hopeless soul.

‘The Dry Salvages’ takes on the personality of the water element in its fluid, transient, and inevitable thematic tendencies. Continuing with the theme of building things that will not last, this quartet heavily highlights this fact with the imagery of a strong river god sweeping away what civilization has labored so hard to build. Here, Eliot remarks that humanity sees the river as a “reminder / of what men choose to forget. Unhonoured, unpropitiated / By worshippers of the machine, but waiting, watching and waiting” (‘The Dry Salvages,’ I. 8-10). In this way, Eliot indicates that man’s reliance on technology in the material age is his attempt to ignore the obvious, unstoppable power of nature. In suggesting this, he returns to the popular Naturalist perspective—which preceded the Modernist movement—that views man as the helpless pawn of Nature. In the wake of the great power of nature, humanity’s focus on the secular seems silly and impossible. This subtle change enables him to accentuate the humility of a past time, which may be the only hope of salvation for a selfish, greedy generation.

Eliot has journeyed far beyond thoughtful consideration of the secular as a possible source of salvation, concluding that this secular materialism is a weak attempt at distracting us from the inevitability of time. This view of materialism as feeble distraction is affirmed later on in ‘The Dry Salvages’ when he writes that

[...] emotion takes to itself the emotionless

Years of living among the breakage

Of what was believed in as the most reliable—

And therefore the fittest for renunciation. (‘The Dry Salvages,’ II. 9-12)

Far from being a kind of justification for the secular, this quartet asserts that the only way to climb out of this pit of apathy is to completely let go of past beliefs and practices, including the materialism that runs rampantly through “The Waste Land.” It is important to note, however, that Eliot does not completely reject everything to do with the physical dimension. In Section V of ‘The Dry Salvages,’ a brief moment of hope shines through the bleak, dark future he imagines for this numbed, secular society in which he reconciles a love for worldly experience with the need for a spiritual dimension. In a few lines that capture the world’s spiritual allure, Eliot writes

For most of us, there is only the unattended
Moment, the moment in and out of time,
The distraction fit, lost in a shaft of sunlight,
The wild thyme unseen, or the winter lightning,
Or the waterfall, or music heard so deeply
That it is not heard at all; but you are the music
While the music lasts. (‘The Dry Salvages,’ V. 22-8)

These lines highlight the beauty of the physical, consoling the reader that the physical world is not utterly forsaken. In addition, his poetic description of the beauty behind the physical dimension implies a spiritual enchantment to it, especially as seen in the sentiment behind “or music heard so deeply / That it is not heard at all; but you are the music / While the music lasts” (‘The Dry Salvages,’ V. 26-8).

A year after the publication of “Four Quartets,” C.S. Lewis—one of T.S. Eliot’s contemporaries and a famous apologist for the Christian faith—would refer to this enchantment in a similar way in one of his sermons: “These things—the beauty, the

memory of our own past—are good images of what we really desire; but if they are mistaken for the thing itself, they turn into dumb idols, breaking the hearts of their worshippers. For they are not the thing itself; they are only the scent of a flower we have not found, the echo of a tune we have not heard, news from a country we have never yet visited” (“The Weight of Glory,” pp. 31-2). Later on in this speech, he remarks that “you and I have need of the strongest spell that can be found to wake us from the evil enchantment of worldliness which has been laid upon us for nearly a hundred years” (32). Reading these words, it seems clear that Eliot and Lewis are addressing the same concept (and that Lewis most likely was influenced by Eliot in his sermon). Both believe that enchantment—the infusion of physical elements with spiritual power or truth—is necessary for materials to have any real meaning or long-lasting influence. The possibility of disenchanting materialism is utterly rejected through these lines.

This theme of spiritual enchantment beyond the bounds of the physical reappears in the final section of “Four Quartets,” ‘Little Gidding.’ In Section I, Eliot writes that

[...] what you thought you came for
Is only a shell, a husk of meaning
From which the purpose breaks only when it is fulfilled
If at all. Either you had no purpose
Or the purpose is beyond the end you figured
And is altered in fulfillment. (‘Little Gidding,’ I. 31-6)

Once more, the theme of physical emptiness surfaces, and Eliot reveals that the meaning is located *beyond the end you figured*. This differs dramatically from the ultimate conclusion in “The Waste Land,” where displaced enchantment renders the process of re-

enchantment impossible. His final thoughts in 'Little Gidding' bring in this problem of attachment to the physical, but does so by also rejecting its opposite: detachment from the physical. Section III relates these three, noting that they

[...] often look alike

Yet differ completely, flourish in the same hedgerow:

Attachment to self and to things and to persons, detachment

From self and from things and from persons; and, growing between them,

indifference. ('Little Gidding,' III. 1-5)

In addition to renouncing material attachment, Eliot implicitly dismisses a "detachment / From self and from things and from persons," which calls to mind the effects of a disenchanted worldview. He also dismisses an "attachment to self and to things and to persons," which echoes McCarragher's capitalistic, displaced enchantment. Thus, "Four Quartets" as a whole differs from "The Waste Land" in attempting to diagnose humanity's enchantment problem and offering a solution.

The Fall from Enchantment

Just like in "The Waste Land," Eliot does not expect his readers to believe that this 'waste land' appeared without forewarning. Another theme that builds with each new quartet is the cycle of death and rebirth that correlates to humanity's original fall from grace and its continued rejection of a return to enchantment. This theme is seen in the weather and landscape imagery that changes directly with man's proximity to this enchantment. Starting off in 'Burnt Norton,' summer imagery is especially seen in lines

the end of Section I, in which the speaker finds himself a garden inhabited by birds and children. In the third stanza, the speaker remarks that

Other echoes

Inhabit the garden. Shall we follow?

Quick, said the bird, find them, find them,

Round the corner. Through the first gate,

Into our first world. ('Burnt Norton,' I. 19-23)

The childlike language, —almost like a bedtime story—the personification of the bird, and the reference to *our first world* all point to this section representing an immaculate innocence resembling that prelapsarian world. Earlier in the same section, Eliot writes that this magical land is “down the passage which we did not take / Towards the door we never opened / Into the rose-garden,” further insinuating that this chaste paradise is that out of which man was cast. Later on, the author writes that a “pool was filled with water out of sunlight”—a stark contrast to the theme of thirst and barren desert representing spiritual desolation in “The Waste Land.” However, by the end of ‘Burnt Norton,’ the narrator seems to have been cast from the garden, from where “there rises the hidden laughter / Of children in the foliage” (V. 35-6).

‘East Coker’ extends on this fall from grace in its presentation of a simple, primitive community in Section I— written in Middle English, perhaps to connote a more pleasant society. Here, Eliot indicates the previous value of marriage when he notes that this primitive society held

The association of man and woman

In daunsinge, signifying matrimonie—

A dignified and commodious sacrament. ('East Coker,' I. 29-31)

In referring to matrimony as a 'sacrament,' he alludes to a time pre-modern society, when belief in spiritual graces being imparted through particular actions or objects was common. Subconsciously, Eliot seems to agree with Max Weber's belief that society has drifted from sacramental belief, which is akin to a drift from enchantment. By Section II, Eliot has illustrated the fall of these dancers in the last lines: "The houses are all gone under the sea. / The dancers are all gone under the hill" ('East Coker,' II. 49-50). In 'Burnt Norton,' humanity experienced the Fall, and in 'East Coker,' the narrator reminds us that the only cure to this rift is by

[...] obey[ing] the dying nurse

Whose constant care is not to please

But to remind of our, and Adam's curse,

And that, to be restored, our sickness must grow worse. ('East Coker,' IV. 7-10)

More imagery appears in 'The Dry Salvages' to emphasize our fallen state. In Section II, the harsh illustration of "the silent withering of autumn flowers / Dropping their petals and remaining motionless" is enough to break the heart of any sinful man, and the stinging metaphor of "a drifting boat with a slow leakage, / The silent listening to the undeniable / Clamour of the bell of the last annunciation" truly brings even the most hopeful heart to despair (2-3, 16-8). Even in the face of the Annunciation, the most glorious occasion and second chance for all of humanity, Eliot characterizes mankind's plight as that of a leaking boat. Throughout the rest of 'The Dry Salvages,' these images of withering flowers and the unprayerable annunciation resurface and continue to haunt man's final dreams of salvation.

This despair comes to a climax in the final quartet, 'Little Gidding,' when Section II outlines the death of all Earth's elements. The roses from the Edenic garden are reduced to "ash on an old man's sleeve," mocking the beautiful life that could have been ('Little Gidding,' II. 1). In a crucial metaphor, Eliot describes "the parched eviscerate soil / [gaping] at the vanity of toil," calling to mind Adam's curse: to work the ground for his living in vain ('Little Gidding,' II. 13-4). These first four stanzas describe the death of air, earth, water, and fire, subsequently leaving man to question whether there is any hope of rescue from this futile Earth. He writes that "water and fire shall rot / The marred foundations we forgot, / Of sanctuary and choir," indicating a desertion of religious ideals, of sacraments enchanted with grace ('Little Gidding,' II. 21-3). This last quartet firmly declares humanity's desperate condition: the one begun with the consumption of the bitter fruit and continued through our persistent rejection of enchantment.

Disenchantment

"Four Quartets" clearly articulates the importance of enchanting the right object through its negative portrayal of secular materialism and its delineation of mankind's fall from enchantment, but what exactly are the consequences of disenchanting objects or relationships? If following Max Weber's theory of disenchantment, the poem should showcase modern society as nihilistic and wandering aimlessly. If more in line with Eugene McCarragher's theory of displaced enchantment, the poem should portray happiness as an earthly possibility—resulting from a people imbuing other objects with a sacramental nature—that is ultimately inconsequential. What is seen in "Four Quartets" is

disenchantment resulting from an attempt to displace enchantment, reconciling the two different outlooks.

The tension between these two theories can be seen most evidently in Section III of 'Burnt Norton,' when the narrator writes that modern society has become a "place of disaffection" where there is

[...] neither daylight

Investing form with lucid stillness

Turning shadow into transient beauty

With slow rotation suggesting permanence

Nor darkness to purify the soul

Emptying the sensual with deprivation

Cleansing affection from the temporal. ('Burnt Norton,' III. 1, 3-9)

Though not a perfect representation, these two sides come very close to demonstrating a world of displaced enchantment versus a disenchanted world. A world bright with daylight that imbues earthly pleasures with beauty—but beauty that cannot fully satisfy—resembles one in which enchantment is displaced to the wrong objects. On the other hand, a world so dark that it can almost "purify the soul" by spurning these pleasures can only be described as utterly disenchanted. Yet, Eliot describes the modern world as something between these two extremes: "a place of disaffection." Is it possible that the modern era has devolved into one of nihilistic materialism—recognizing beauty in the world, but failing to look beyond the vessels through which it shines?

The passage in 'Little Gidding' that describes attachment and detachment from self—noted in an earlier section of this chapter— illustrates this tension well when it

describes the “place of disaffection” as

indifference

Which resembles the others as death resembles life,

Being between two lives—unflowering, between

The live and the dead nettle. (‘Little Gidding,’ III. 5-8)

The “indifference” that flourishes between displaced enchantment (i.e., “attachment to self”) and disenchantment (i.e., detachment from self) is akin to this disenchanted materialism described in ‘Burnt Norton.’ To Eliot, this indifference is worse than either of these other options—it “resembles the others as death resembles life”—because it demonstrates a profound ignorance of the importance of right enchantment. Modern people are not living lives of joyful idolatry; they have recognized the futility of earthly joy. However, even with this knowledge, they have not ceased to enchant the self and other objects, instead continuing to displace enchantment and as a result becoming disenchanted themselves.

Conclusion

“The Waste Land” illustrates the futility of the current society, but it is “Four Quartets” which embodies the place of enchantment in this modern society. It cannot be doubted that mankind has strayed from its religious ideals more and more in the past two thousand years, but how this disenchantment has manifested itself in society has been a common source of contention in scholarly circles. Though Max Weber and Eugene McCarragher each argue for a subtly different theory of disenchantment, it is through Eliot’s poetry that we see the issue in all its glorious, worldly context, begun with the first

bitter sin in the Garden of Eden and demonstrated today through the proven futility of our earthly efforts and the viciously never-ending cycle of idolatry.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Transferability of Enchantment: Eliot's New Theory and Its Application to Modern Society

To T.S. Eliot, enchantment is inherently religious, and as such any descriptions which attempt to divorce it from its spiritual context are ineffectual. In severing it from religion, enchantment does not simply become corrupted, but utterly disintegrated: disenchanted. Some authors, such as Landy and Saler from the first chapter, have advocated for secular remedies to disenchantment, believing that "enchantment" is something conferred and controlled by mankind. Yet, man cannot demonstrate even the slightest influence over spiritual phenomena; how then can it be believed that he is equipped to assign "spiritual value" a dwelling place? Even Landy and Saler cannot argue that "a quasi-mystical union with something larger than oneself" is necessary to form a secular enchantment, but how is there the faintest possibility of this union if there is indeed nothing larger than oneself? (2). The world must either be utterly devoid of any presence of God (and thus, was never enchanted in the first place), or else once was enchanted with spiritual value and may yet be again.

Eliot wrestles with this dichotomy in his poetic works, at times fearfully and desperately trying to claw his way from the pit of futility and anguish that would result from the former option, and at other points trudging courageously along the narrow, penitential path toward redemption and re-enchantment. In "The Waste Land," his bravest doubts illuminate a tragic world which, though utterly desiccated, still holds the

poorest memory of an old kingdom, verdant and refreshed. The inhabitants of the unfortunate world vainly seek pleasure in every nook and cranny, pursuing sex, money, spiritualism, and anything else that may replace their need for a spiritual bridge. Yet, all objects they seek to “enchant” fail to support the weight of such a blessing, and the poem ends in despair, yearning for a Fisher King—or perhaps a “fisher of men”—who may replenish His fallen people (Matthew 4:19).

The “Four Quartets,” arising from Eliot’s new baptism into the Christian life, finds faint memory restored to the people of the the disenchanted world. They still seek for pleasure in the wrong places, but now they bear in their hearts the knowledge of their fall from enchantment, reminiscent of the tale of the original Fall from Genesis. The gnawing conscience grows in power throughout the course of the work, as its effect changes from the guilt of a red-handed criminal to the shame of a chastised child. Eliot’s Christianity lifts his fictionalized populace up to God, under Whose gaze they bow in reverent, penitential fear and contrition. Finally, they understand the error of their ways, and the poem ends on the cusp of a possible re-enchantment by purgation.

The theories of Weber and McCarragher provide the basis for understanding modern views on disenchantment, elucidating humanity’s need and desire for purpose and value through their arguments. Weber, presenting the pessimist’s perspective, objects to the possibility of re-enchantment, himself believing that man’s departure from spiritual value (and subsequent turn to material idolatry) has permanently stained the baptismal robe of the created world. While McCarragher agrees that materialism, capitalism, and the era of Reformation and Enlightenment were the primary catalysts for man’s betrayal of sacrament, he sees the disenchanted world as Gerard Manley Hopkins described it in his

poem, “God’s Grandeur”:

And all for this, nature is never spent;
There lives the dearest freshness deep down things;
And though the last lights off the black West went
Oh, morning, at the brown brink eastward, springs—
Because the Holy Ghost over the bent
World broods with warm breast and with ah! bright wings. (9-14)

Within his theory lies not only the possibility of re-enchantment, but the high probability of it. In McCarragher’s opinion, enchantment that has been transferred to the wrong object may still be conferred back on its proper end. His argument, of course, necessitates the ability of man to transfer enchantment to his desired end.

Yet, Eliot’s own view, as shown in “The Waste Land” and “Four Quartets,” differs from both these theories. While they may be reconciled in many ways—with many of these being addressed and demonstrated in the previous two chapters—Eliot’s poetry looks back to Weber’s knowledge of man’s fallen nature and anticipates McCarragher’s hope for re-enchantment into a theory capable of weaving together such polarized perspectives. The disenchantment of Weber and the displaced enchantment of McCarragher become something akin to a *disenchantment resulting from displacing enchantment*.

T.S. Eliot’s Finalized View of Enchantment

In *The Enchantments of Mammon*, McCarragher writes that “capitalism has long been presumed to be a powerful solvent of enchantment—all that is holy is profaned,

ecstasy is murdered in the waters of calculation” (9). Capitalism is to him the definition of a society based on material idolatry, which is why he describes it as a “solvent” of sacramental enchantment. When directed to the right object, enchantment imbues it with true, spiritual value that connects the enjoyer to the final end of enjoyment, God. Material consumerism, on the other hand, directs the consumer’s attention to the value of something transient and physical. The more central this item becomes in the consumer’s life, the more spiritual value the consumer attempts to transfer to it. In this way, McCarraher explains that enchantment is transferred to the new object, which is “profaned” in being assigned to something unworthy of its status.

The dangers of material wealth provide the foundation for Eliot’s view of enchantment: a reflection on Madame Sosostris’s third card, in “The Waste Land,” will serve to show that even pre-Christian Eliot saw material idolatry as the source of mankind’s unhappiness and futility. This card—the man with three staves— was defined by Creekmore as a card that showed “human effort and human enterprise” as the barrier dividing the populace from salvation (919). Yet, curiously, Eliot does not display any of the alluring qualities of consumerism in his poem. Instead, the work is rife with miserable characters who dwell in sorrow, finding only dissatisfaction and despair by attempting to enchant material goods. McCarraher’s argument highlights the temptation of consumerism, and Eliot’s contrasting disregard for any good attached to it illustrates the emptiness at the heart of Eliot’s view. McCarraher states that man *transfers* enchantment to his desired object, while Eliot implies that such an attempt is impossible. While man may believe in his ability to transfer enchantment, Eliot’s poetry demonstrates that this very belief leads the consumer on a wild goose chase, constantly pursuing what he thinks

has been enchanted, in the hopes that it may lead to glory. McCarraher says that this transfer of enchantment profanes it, but Eliot is clear in dividing mankind from the divine. Man has no control over enchantment; he can persuade himself of this control, but any attempts to exert it do not profane the *enchantment*, but him *himself*.

McCarraher is correct in arguing that striving to enchant capitalism will end in futility, but Eliot's indifference to the positive draws of consumerism takes his theory of enchantment one, necessary step further. It is not that we have simply *displaced* enchantment onto something that will eventually crumble, but that the act of turning from enchantment and toward a secular system has *disenchanted* our hearts. This, then, is the reason for the emptiness that echoes throughout Eliot's poems: enchantment has not left the world, but our hearts need to be re-enchanted, which is to be redirected to their right end. The theme of rebirth, seen consistently in both "The Waste Land" and "Four Quartets"—particularly in the image of the sprouting corpse in "The Burial of the Dead" and the exploration metaphor in his fifth section of "Little Gidding"—highlights this need for re-enchantment through redirection. In Eliot's own words, "What we call the beginning is often the end / And to make an end is to make a beginning" ("Little Gidding," V. 1-2). According to McCarraher, consumeristic society can stand as a profaned system of enchantment. Eliot, however, vivisects the profaned hearts of his readers, exposing their hidden feelings of futility and despair and plainly displaying before them their own, secret desires.

In this case, if disenchantment is simply the constitution of the apostate's heart, the appropriate balm would be a type of repentance. In a Christian context, the heart of the sinner is considered dead until brought to life in Christ, or as Paul writes, "I have

been crucified with Christ: and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me, and the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me” (Galatians 2:20). It is to this transformation that Eliot refers persistently in his poetry. Whether stubborn or contrite, the disenchanted heart is a corpse: the stubborn corpse will continue to decay, but the contrite corpse may provide fertile soil for the growth of a new kind of life. Similarly, Eliot demonstrates that rebirth can be reached by the Christian “death to self” that reignites and re-enchants the old flame of enchantment. The attempt to displace enchantment onto a consumeristic culture disenchanted the heart, but re-enchantment is found through contrition and repentance.

Applying T.S Eliot’s Enchantment to Modern Society

Following the pessimistic conclusions of “The Waste Land,” Eliot’s narrator finds courage and unexpected hope in the unlikeliest of objects: “the intolerable shirt of flame” (‘Little Gidding,’ IV. 11). The word ‘intolerable’ alone is enough to dissuade the reader from seeking to don such a garment, but Eliot implies that such an action is not only necessary, but *desirable* for one who has discovered the true remedy for a disenchanted heart. The last two sections of ‘Little Gidding’ emphasize the symbol of fire, focusing on its relationship to purification and purgation. One vital image proves the relationship that Eliot sees between the spiritual and physical: the fire and the rose. His last few lines in “Little Gidding” bring this image into the narrative:

All manner of things shall be well
When the tongues of flame are in-folded
Into the crowned knot of fire

And the fire and the rose are one. (V. 43-6)

The imagery in this section highlights the importance of this union, which consist of the spiritual fire, often representative of purgation and the Holy Spirit, and the rose, which calls to mind the earlier mention of the “rose-garden” in “Burnt Norton.” It is no accident that this section is preceded by the image of the “intolerable shirt of flame,” which underlines the necessity of purgation, but also the *safety* of it. Although the roses referenced earlier in “Little Gidding” were burnt, the union of fire and rose exemplified in this last section presents a new chance at re-enchantment and a new chance at Eden.

Importantly, the immobility of the characters of “The Waste Land” has progressed into a desire for further exploration:

We shall not cease from exploration

And the end of all our exploring

Will be to arrive where we started

And know the place for the first time. (‘Little Gidding,’ V. 26-9)

Together, the desire for exploration and purifying fire suggest a remedy of purgation and perseverance. Eliot’s cure for the disenchantment which materialistic pursuits have brought into our hearts is one that purifies and reorders the heart’s desires, so they may reassume the innocence of childhood. Our minds typically seek to obtain pleasure and avoid pain, but this remedy requires an apparent purging of the nature of the flesh.

In an essay entitled “The Idea of a Christian Society,” Eliot explored the ideas which he implicitly introduced in “The Waste Land”—and more fully developed in “Four Quartets.” He states that “we have been accustomed to regard ‘progress’ as always integral; and have yet to learn that it is only by an effort and a discipline, greater than

society has yet seen the need of imposing upon itself, that material knowledge and power is gained without loss of spiritual knowledge and power” (*The Idea of a Christian Society*). It is clear by this quote that Eliot was not proposing an utter abandonment of capitalism. Rather, he demands a return to discipline, like the discipline of the early Church fathers: discipline with the focus centered on guardianship of God’s power, in and out of the world, within sacraments and within His adopted children. In this way, he similarly advocates for a “sense of religious fear, so that it may be overcome by religious hope” (*The Idea of a Christian Society*).

The futile consumerism of “The Waste Land” demonstrates that modern society has transgressed into a system whose end is pleasure. Anything that makes society uncomfortable is rejected in favor of simple, quick answers to the never-satiated urge for pleasure. In such a society, discipline, criticism, fasting, forgiveness, and many other virtuous discomforts have no place. Yet, given man’s God-given nature as simultaneously rational, appetitive, and spiritual creatures, man is not meant to live by only feeding his base appetites. From Eliot’s perspective, with all the good apparent in a democratic system, it “does not contain enough positive content to stand alone against the forces that you dislike—it can easily be transformed by them.” Thus, “if you will not have God (and He is a jealous God) you should pay your respects to Hitler or Stalin” (*The Idea of a Christian Society*).

While his comparison may seem dramatic—especially having been published in 1940, in the midst of World War II—the situation emphasizes the fervor with which Eliot believes in a society founded on the immovable, unfading doctrines of Christianity. In his mind, the progress of Germany toward domination, exemplified in the Munich agreement

in September 1938, shook the foundations of democracy, causing its citizens to question the “superiority and rectitude” of such a system (*The Idea of a Christian Society*). Such a society was “confident of its unexamined premises,” but not “assembled round anything more permanent than a congeries of banks, insurance companies and industries” (*The Idea of a Christian Society*). In the midst of the tragedies of World War II, Eliot saw the perfect opportunity to warn the disillusioned populace that their flourishing, idyllic homeland was, in fact, a waste land.

Interestingly, Eliot does not advocate for anything resembling a theocracy in his writing: in fact, he specifically rejects such an idea. Neither does he advocate for a particular form of political system, but rather proclaims the best type of government to be one that is “relative to the character and the stage of intelligence and education of a particular people in a particular place at a particular time” (*The Idea of a Christian Society*). For him, Church and state are separate, but Christianity must be held above the political system. After all, that which is deemed highest in a society is likely what man has idolized, and in displacing spiritual value from its true source (i.e., God), human hearts become disenchanting.

Therefore, Eliot insists that the key to re-enchantment is in a disciplined desire to undergo purgation and purification of the soul. In a society so accustomed to instant gratification, an outright suggestion of such a remedy would meet with a disgruntled and disbelieving audience. Yet, Eliot’s subtle introduction of the issue into a rich and moving work of poetry could be the surest way of stirring hardened hearts to repentance and reminding his forgetful readers of the need for discipline, especially in an age centered on distraction and consumerism. While McCarragher presents this society as another form of

enchantment, Eliot's illustration highlights what needs to be purged from it, rather than how this replacement succeeds in resembling the perfect, original source of enchantment.

Conclusion

Why are we here? Whether we realize it or not, this question drives the action of each man and woman. The choices of career, habits, friends, family, church, and many others are made on the basis of their inherent *value* and usefulness. Do these friends make me the kind of person I would like to be? Does this career show my value as a member of society? Regardless of religious system, man cannot live without a system of values that prompts and controls his life. Throughout the centuries, numerous philosophers have attempted to reduce this theory into manageable systems, using the spiritual terminology of *enchantment* to express the spiritual value assigned to these systems. Yet, many Christian thinkers have realized the problem with enchanting something beyond what is divinely provided for this purpose.

Weber presented this problem as the result of materialistic consumerism and lamented the impossibility of returning to a pre-capitalistic world, in which enchantment was rightly-assigned. McCarragher differed from Weber in acknowledging the everlasting nature of enchantment, pointing out that capitalism has not destroyed it utterly, but *profaned* it in transferring it to an unworthy system. Other thinkers like Landy and Saler have tried to apply secular remedies to mankind's undeniable need for value. However, their arguments make it clear that such secular cures would find their basis in an adaptation of religious ideals.

T.S. Eliot saw the hollow heart inside all men: the aching hunger for *spiritual* fulfillment. Even as a secular thinker, his poem “The Waste Land” displayed an astonishing ability to plumb the depths of the human soul and return with a rare knowledge of man’s deepest desires. Looking out at the secular societies of 1930s Britain and the United States, Eliot saw man desperately try all kinds of remedies, from sex to money to friendship, only to fall back into miserable sorrow. As he observed, he found himself in disagreement with Weber and the future thoughts of McCarragher: while this anguish was playing out in capitalistic societies, it was not capitalism that was to blame. Capitalism’s availability of pleasures only served to clearly illuminate the deeper problems of the lost human heart. The problem is not—nor has it ever been—with the political system, but with man’s stubborn, disenchanting heart. In displacing enchantment (or, rather, in persuading themselves that they had succeeded in displacing something incapable of displacement), they did not drive the true enchantment from the world, but merely disenchanting their hearts.

From “The Waste Land” to “Four Quartets,” Eliot’s poetry painted this picture in the only form that the world would accept it. Such a clear depiction of the emptiness and futility of modern culture demonstrated the regress of enchantment from its initiation into the world (at Creation) to its slow diminishment following the Fall. Whatever the political system, materialism has ever been a popular alternative to the purgative—but rewarding—path of spiritual enchantment. By the end of the two poetic works, the journey to “re-enchantment,” as well as Eliot’s personal journey to faith, has come to a beautiful conclusion that weaves together the best parts of Weber, McCarragher, and their fellow Christian thinkers.

Though the name carries a fantastical connotation, “enchantment” does not imply the ease and innocent beauty of a child’s fairytale. Eliot makes it clear that a re-enchantment of the heart will only be reached by carrying one’s cross along the road to salvation and sanctification:

The only hope, or else despair
Lies in the choice of pyre of pyre—
To be redeemed from fire by fire. (‘Little Gidding,’ IV. 5-7)

Yet, it is not alone that we must walk this difficult road. Even in the desiccated context of “The Waste Land,” Eliot reassures the reader with a simple, but profound allusion to Christ’s steady presence with His children:

Who is the third who walks always besides 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.
(‘What the Thunder Said,’ ll. 39-42)

Pursuing earthly pleasures may disenchant our hearts from their real cause for joy, but even the most hopeless of Eliot’s poems ensures his readers of the everlasting spring of grace flowing up for those who would be reborn. Our souls need not resemble Eliot’s parched waste land when nourished with the Living Water that provides purification, new life, and renewed courage for a faithful, arduous walk toward heaven. For even on this path, our hearts can continue with confidence, enchanted by the promise of the outstretched Arms that will welcome us home.

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