THE SEA HAS MANY VOICES:
THE SEA AS METAPHOR IN THE POETRY OF T.S. ELIOT

A Thesis

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by

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The sea always held a special importance for T.S. Eliot, and images of the sea are incorporated in a number of ways throughout his poetry and other writings. Much of Eliot's sea imagery is based upon his own experiences at the Cape Ann shore, where his family spent summers throughout his childhood. Many of these images are directly linked to the function of memory, or moments of recollection. At other times, sea imagery, and especially drowning, is used as a metaphor of self-sacrifice or self-surrender. Another key image in Eliot's symbolism of the sea is the sea-change. Despite the various ways such imagery is incorporated in his poetry, Eliot most often uses sea and other related water imagery to represent a type of transcendent experience. This transcendent experience may be an attempt to overcome time, reality, death, self or society. Frequently, the image of the drowned man plays an important role as a representative of such transcendence.

Imperative to an understanding of Eliot's use of sea imagery are his own experiences at the seaside. As a child and as a young man, he spent most of his summers at his family's summer home at Cape Ann, Massachusetts. The house at the tip of Eastern Point was surrounded on three sides by a rocky shoreline. To one side lay the harbor, and to the
other two sides, lay the sea, broken by rocks and islands. Surely as a child, Eliot heard stories of risk and adventure at sea from local sailors. These stories conjured up images of hardship and heroism performed by simple and ordinary men. Such images of sailors at sea would occur later in his own writings, most notably, the original draft of "Death by Water," and in *The Dry Salvages*.

Eliot himself often went sailing in the area, accompanied by his brother, Henry, or his friend, Harold Peters. Once, Eliot was even stranded with Peters on nearby Roque Island, where they survived on lobster for about two days (Morison, 247). Even after Eliot moved to England, frequent journeys to the seaside gave him respite from the hectic life of the City, but his memories of Cape Ann would forever hold a special meaning for him. Lyndall Gordon explains the influence and significance that the setting of the coast was to have for Eliot:

Eliot was to return again and again to the Cape Ann shore and sea for scenes of crisis and revelation in his poetry. To the Cape Ann summers of his youth he owed his model, drawn from the Gloucester fishermen, of a heroic quester living on the thin edge of mortality. His imagination fastened, too, on the still pool and the light-filled water that recurred in his poetry as a tantalizing memory of unspeakable bliss. (8)

Such memories are expressed in passages like that of *Burnt Norton* (1) where the dry pool "was filled with water out of sunlight, . . . [and] / The surface glittered out of heart of light" and in *Little Gidding* (1), where "The brief sun flames the ice, on pond and ditches . . . / Reflecting in a watery mirror." Another similar touchstone experience is recorded by Eliot in *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism*, where he recalls:
There might be the experience of a child of ten, a small boy peering through sea-water in a rock-pool, and finding a sea-anemone for the first time: the simple experience . . . might lie dormant in his mind for twenty years, and re-appear transformed in some verse-context charged with great imaginative pressure. (78-79)

This experience was a key one for Eliot, and in various ways throughout his poetry, he frequently associates the activity of memory with the sea. In different contexts, some of the same images and phrases from this passage appear throughout his verse.

Often these images will be "transformed," but they are also frequently presented in a very straightforward manner. An example of the latter is demonstrated by Eliot's frequent use of the Cape Ann area and his experiences there as a source for specific images. These images are particularly evident in the original draft of the "Death by Water" section of The Waste Land where Eliot writes, "We beat around the cape and laid our course/ From the Dry Salvages to the eastern banks" (Facsimile, 55). Eliot's own knowledge of sailing is reflected in his use of nautical terminology: "Then the main gaffjaws/ Jammed. A spar split for nothing, . . . / And then the garboard-strake began to leak" (Facsimile, 57). The drama of the sea voyage is captured by Eliot when he writes:

And another night
Observe us scudding, with the trysail gone,
Northward, leaping beneath invisible stars

And when the lookout could no longer hear
Above the roar of waves upon the sea
The sharper note of breakers on a reef,
We knew we had passed the farthest northern islands.

(Facsimile, 59)

Details such as the vanished stars, which were vital to sailors' navigation, and the various sea-sounds, which also should have served as a warning to the men, indicate Eliot's familiarity with the sea and the men who sailed it.

In later poems, such as "Marina," Eliot uses similar images. The leaking garboard strake reappears, along with other ship references. The grey granite rocks of the poem, and the birdsong in the fog, are later clearly associated with the Cape Ann shore. In addition, the simple line, "Between one June and another September," indicates the time of summer, during school vacation, that the Eliots resided near Gloucester. Surely Pericles's cry of "What images return" was Eliot's as well, for the Cape Ann shore brought back many memories of his childhood.

Other Cape Ann images occur in The Dry Salvages. The sea-voices, first introduced in the draft of "Death by Water," reappear in the first movement as the "sea howl" and the "sea yelp." These are accompanied by "The distant rote in the granite teeth" and other sounds of buoys, wind, waves, and seagulls. The granite rocks of "Marina" also appear throughout The Dry Salvages. Fog wafts in and out of the poem, and lingers in the fir trees. The constant ringing of the bell buoy doubtless stems from childhood memories; Eastern Point was in fact marked by a similar buoy.

Eliot's desire for authenticity, accuracy, and detail is reflected in his concern for an error made in writing "hermit crab" for "horseshoe crab."
He wrote to John Hayward in 1945, four years after the publication of *The Dry Salvages*, explaining his concern:

... please alter *hermit* crab to *horse-shoe* crab. I do not know how I came to make such a blunder... How could one find the remains of a hermit crab on a beach? All there could be would be the shell of some other crustacean. (Gardner, *Four Quartets* 125).

This concern for accuracy in small details reflects Eliot’s desire that his work be as complete and precise as possible. However, an exception to this is Eliot’s explanation of the derivation of the name, Dry Salvages. He was later corrected in personal correspondence with Samuel Eliot Morison, who explained that Dry Salvages did not come from the French, *les trois sauvages*, but rather from seamen who saw that the rock was above water and dry at all times, in contrast to some of the surrounding rocks and ledges. Morison also speculated that Salvages was a remnant from the Renaissance spelling of *sauvages*, or savages. Nevertheless, Eliot let the headnote stand. In his correspondence with Morison, Eliot admitted that he recalled his brother, Henry, telling him of the French derivation, and this personal detail may be one reason Eliot did not modify the original headnote.

Even in his more informal writings, Eliot frequently used the sea as a metaphor. In a letter to Conrad Aiken in 1915, Eliot wondered, “The idea of a submarine world of clear green light — one would be attached to a rock and swayed in two directions — would one be happiest or most wretched at the turn of the tide?” (*Letters*, 88). This image captures the ambivalence and paradoxes inherent in contemplation of the sea. Later, when discussing his own theory of poetry, Eliot again turned to a similar
image: "I like to feel that a writer is perfectly cool and detached, regarding other peoples' feelings or his own, like a God who has got beyond them; or a person who has dived very deep and comes up holding firmly some hitherto unseen submarine creature." (Letters, 197). Here Eliot explicitly links poetic detachment to an experience at sea.

Such themes as self-surrender and disassociation from the self occur elsewhere in Eliot's essays, where he explains his impersonal theory of poetry. In Tradition and the Individual Talent, he describes the composing process as "a continual surrender of [the artist] as he is at the moment to something which is more valuable. The progress of an artist is a continual self-sacrifice, a continual extinction of personality" (Selected Essays, 17). This "extinction of personality" will occur throughout the poetry in the image of drowning. By giving oneself up to a greater power, either in poetic creation, or in the image of drowning, one enters into a type of transcendent experience. In Eliot's theory of impersonality, one actually transcends one's self, by escaping the limitations of self and personal emotions. This allows the poet a greater range of experience, and recalls Eliot's earlier comment of "getting beyond" his own emotions. Similarly, in the image of drowning, a character experiences an "escape from personality," and allows for a type of transcendent experience. However, the nature of this experience varies throughout Eliot's poetic work.

In other essays, Eliot expresses the necessity for a period of doubt or even repulsion before one can overcome the bleakness of reality by transcendence. This is related to the doubt and despair that often
precede the image of drowning as it occurs in his poetry. In "The Pensees of Pascal" Eliot explains that "doubt... is inseparable from the spirit of belief," and continues:

His [Pascal's] despair, his disillusion... are essential moments in the progress of the intellectual soul... they are the analogue of the drought, the dark night, which is an essential stage in the progress of the Christian mystic. (*Selected Essays*, 411, 412)

He explains in "Cyril Tourneur" that "the hatred of life is an important phase—even, if you like, a mystical experience—in life itself" (*Selected Essays*, 190). All of these expressions indicate that Eliot felt despair was a necessary prelude to transcendent experience. It is this despair that Eliot exposes us to in *The Waste Land*, which leads to hope and a promise of rain in the midst of drought. In addition, the writing of *The Waste Land* may have been an expression of Eliot's own "dark night" of despair, which led to his own conversion a few years later.

The theme of transcendence is expressed in another way in the image of the sea-change, which is also clearly associated with drowning. This association originates with Ariel's song in *The Tempest*, where he sings to Ferdinand:

Full fadom five thy father lies,  
Of his bones are coral made:  
Those are pearls that were his eyes  
Nothing of him that doth fade,  
But doth suffer a sea-change  
Into something rich and strange.
Sea-nymphs hourly ring his knell:
Ding-dong.

Hark now I hear them — ding-dong bell. (I.i.397-405)

Later Eliot associates the recurrent phrase, "Those are pearls that were his eyes" with the drowned Phoenician sailor in *The Waste Land*.

The notion of the sea-change also appears on at least two occasions in Eliot's critical works. The first occurrence of this is in "Shakespeare and the Stoicism of Seneca," where he explains that the struggle of the poet is to "transmute his personal and private agonies into something rich and strange, something universal and impersonal" (*Selected Essays*, 137). Here Eliot compares the poetic process of creation to the creative force of the sea-change, and to some degree, implies a type of metaphorical "death" to the self, much like that proposed in *Tradition and the Individual Talent*. Later, in *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism*, he describes memory's function in poetic creation and links it once more with the image of the sea-change. He explains that "again and again the right imagery, saturated while it lay in the depths of Shakespeare's memory, will rise like Anadyomene from the sea" and be transmuted into something "rich and strange," where "this reborn image or word will have its rational use and justification" (146-47). In this passage, although a death is only implied by the image of the sea-change, there is at least an explicit rebirth, or resurrection. Thus, for Eliot, the sea-change was both an image of figurative death, and an image of renewal or rebirth. In addition, Eliot uses language in this passage which is very similar to that used in his earlier description of the child by a rockpool. In both instances, an event is "submerged" in the memory, and then recalled in a later poetic context. Judging from
its frequent occurrence throughout Eliot's critical works, the image of the sea-change seems to have always held a positive association for Eliot.

Such an examination of Eliot's own direct comments and experiences of the sea provide a useful background for examining in detail his use of sea imagery in his poetry, where the images of the sea become more ambiguous. Like the sea itself, such images evoke wonder and fear, excitement and apprehension. Although Eliot uses such imagery in a number of different contexts, most often the sea and other related water imagery represent a type of transcendent experience. This is particularly true of the image of the drowned man. A thorough examination of Eliot's use of the symbol will lead to a better understanding of his work, and the importance that this particular symbol held for him.
CHAPTER II

EARLY POEMS

In his early poems, Eliot seems to experiment with the various implications of sea imagery. He does not restrict the meaning of such imagery, but rather explores different aspects of the sea and its symbolism. It is not until The Waste Land that such imagery is more fully developed, and gains both unity and variety in its interpretative contexts.

In one of Eliot's early successes, The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock, such sea imagery, and the related image of drowning, represents Prufrock's desire to escape the sordid realities he finds about him. Near the middle of the poem, in a simple, but startling sea image, Prufrock despairs: "I should have been a pair of ragged claws;/Scuttling across the floors of silent seas." In a half-mocking, half-serious tone, Prufrock groans that he would be better off as a crab or lobster at the bottom of the sea, than to pace the streets at night, watching "the smoke that rises from the pipes/Of lonely men in shirt-sleeves, leaning out of windows". One wonders if these "lonely men" are not reflections of an even more lonely J. Alfred Prufrock. A.D. Moody views the sudden sea image in a similar way, explaining that Prufrock desires to "escape the imperatives of consciousness" (36). Throughout
the poem, Prufrock moves rapidly and sporadically from reality to some imaginative form of escapism, only to be interrupted by reality again. This is due in part to Prufrock's indecisive nature. He is uncertain about any decision or choice that he makes, and thus is shallow and uncommitted to even the slightest action.

This uncertainty is also evident at the close of the poem. Prufrock searches for some type of escape from the trivialities that surround him. This escape is finally attained — at least for a moment — at the end of the poem. Wistfully, Prufrock tells us:

I have heard the mermaids singing, each to each.
I do not think they will sing to me.
I have seen them riding seaward on the waves
Combing the white hair of the waves blown back
When the wind blows the water white and black.

We have lingered in the chambers of the sea
By sea-girls wreathed with seaweed red and brown
Till human voices wake us, and we drown.

Here Prufrock seems to be caught up in an escapist reverie. When he is disturbed by the intrusion of "human voices," his underwater fantasy is dispelled. He is forced to wake up to reality, bringing death to his imaginative escape. Martin Scofield sees this passage as exemplifying "the desire to escape from the constricting round of social life into a richer and more vivid world of the imagination" (50). He adds:

It is a fitting close to the love song, a close in which Prufrock's thwarted and self-mocked romanticism is allowed a final momentary flowering, a vision which is
The mermaids are an escape from a life deadened by too much reality. As agents of the imagination, the mermaids offer a means to transcend, or get beyond, reality. Although this is certainly not a metaphysical experience, already Eliot is exploring the implications of the sea and drowning as representatives of transcendent experience. Eliot, like Prufrock, seems uncertain about such a transcendent reality, and it is precisely because of this that Prufrock does not fully give himself over to the mermaids. Such an action, according to folklore, would have led to his death. However, this death could have been a positive one, allowing Prufrock to experience some type of transcendent reality, in a figurative death and rebirth. This theme of a “transcendent drowning” will occur later in Eliot’s work, and will be more fully developed. However, as it is employed in Prufrock, the drowning and the transcendent death does not take place. Instead, Prufrock reawakens to the harsh voices of reality.

Prior to this reawakening, Prufrock imagines himself, and one or several companions, underwater: “We have lingered in the chambers of the sea.” Though this too, seems to be a drowning, Prufrock seems much more comfortable undersea than in the seedy streets of the city. The mermaids offer Prufrock a blissful mode of escape. He longs to follow the mermaids, but they ignore him. It is only when the influence of the mermaids is interrupted by “human voices” that Prufrock metaphorically dies, or “drowns,” and ends his imaginative reverie. Instead of the transcendent death of drowning that might have resulted
from following the mermaids, Prufrock is overwhelmed by the harshness of reality. It is reality that brings about Prufrock’s “death,” which is simply an ending, rather than a transcendent hope of overcoming the futility, hopelessness, and triviality of daily life.

Prufrock’s frustration is further indicated by Eliot’s allusion to a “Song” by John Donne. Donne’s poem claims that it is easier to “catch a falling star,/or Get with child a mandrake root,” or even to “Teach me to hear mermaids singing,” than to find a woman who is true (1-2,5). Like Donne’s narrator, Prufrock is also frustrated by women. His problem, however, is not finding women who are “true and fair,” but rather a woman who will accept him, and who will give his life meaning. His frustration is shown by the woman in his imagination who replies peevishly, “That is not what I meant at all./That is not it, at all.” Prufrock sighs, “And would it have been worth it after all.” Finally, even in his culminating imaginative escape, he is frustrated by women—the mermaids. While they are alluring, and Prufrock seems to be enchanted by them, they seem to ignore him. They do not sing to him, although he hears their song, and they are riding out to sea, away from him. Even in his final imaginative escape, he is still rejected by women.

Ultimately, Prufrock is frustrated by desire. On the one hand, he longs for fulfillment and meaning. On the other hand, he is simultaneously hesitant, uncertain, and indecisive. These qualities of longing and uncertainty are combined in his imaginative relationships with women. Prufrock finds women both attractive and repelling. He is frightened to make any commitment whatsoever, yet ironically, it is just such commitment that he desires. The result is that Prufrock can never
overcome the daily frustrations of reality. He must be willing to make decisions and take action, which will enable him to break away from his pathetic and paralyzing lack of will.

However, we soon find that the problems and shortcomings of Prufrock are our own. In the last section of the poem, the pronouns shift, and we become identified with Prufrock. Prufrock moves in his narrative from "I have heard the mermaids singing" to "We have lingered in the chambers of the sea." Certainly the reader of the poem is implicated in this statement, but is there another person within the context of the poem that Prufrock addresses? Probably, this is the same person in the opening line: "Let us go then, you and I." Speculation about the identity of this person has ranged from one of the women in the poem, to a type of "split personality" of Prufrock himself. However, in any case, the reader is at least obliquely included in these lines. Part of their startling effect is because of the implied address to the reader: "Let us go then...." and "We have lingered in the chambers of the sea." The reader is drawn into the poem, and automatically becomes a participant. As readers, we experience the magical escape into the "chambers of the sea" where the "sea-girls" sit, and so also we experience the shock of the final line: "Till human voices wake us and we drown." Certainly the effect would be diminished for us, as readers, had Eliot left the final lines in the first person. Because of the use of plural pronouns, Eliot implies that we, too, are as guilty of such shallow, pathetic agonizing over trivial matters as Prufrock. We, like Prufrock, "die," because we are unable to overcome the stranglehold of reality.
Reality, then, brings about Prufrock's metaphorical death in the final lines. The sea, however, represents the life of the escapist imagination. Had Prufrock allowed himself to surrender fully to the enticing song of the mermaids, he may have had a transcendent experience, opening the way for him to overcome the confines of reality. This type of transcendent drowning occurs later in Eliot's work. However, in Prufrock, the "drowning" in the final line is a fatalistic reawakening into reality. Prufrock's only escape from the daily round of trivialities and "indecisions" is the imagination, and even it is short-lived and disappointing.

In "Rhapsody on a Windy Night," a poem also from Prufrock and Other Observations, sea imagery is again linked to the subconscious. This time, instead of an imaginative escape, the imagery represents the memory:

The memory throws up high and dry  
A crowd of twisted things;  
A twisted branch upon the beach  
Eaten smooth, and polished  
As if the world gave up  
The secret of its skeleton,  
Stiff and white.

Here the memory is explicitly associated with the sea, revealing fragments from the past. A floating piece of driftwood becomes metamorphosed into the skeleton of the world, through the transformative power of the memory.

Eliot explicitly links transformation with memory when he explains in The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism that "The imagery of that fragment [of "Kubla Khan"], certainly, whatever its origins in Coleridge's
reading, sank to the depths of Coleridge's feeling, was saturated, transformed there — 'those are pearls that were his eyes' — and brought up into daylight again" (146). Here Eliot uses a number of sea images as a metaphor for the function of memory in poetic creation. Eliot also uses similar imagery to show the interrelationship of memory and imagination when he recalls the image of a child staring into a rockpool. For Eliot, it seems the sea held special significance as the representative of the "submarine life" of the subconscious, and the creative workings of memory and imagination.

An odd use of sea and drowning imagery occurs in "Mr. Apollinax." Mr. Apollinax disrupts the polite superficiality of Mrs. Phlaccus's party when he bursts out with rude and crass laughter. The impudent Apollinax

... laughed like an irresponsible foetus.
His laughter was submarine and profound
Like the old man of the sea's
Hidden under coral islands
Where worried bodies of drowned men drift down in the
green silence,
Dropping from fingers of surf.

This image is startling. Fetal laughter seems virtually unimaginable, and the subsequent lengthy metaphor seems as out of place as Apollinax himself in the socialite setting of Mrs. Phlaccus's splendid palace. There is added tension with Apollinax's laughter being compared first to that of "an irresponsible foetus," followed by an analogy with "the old man of the sea." Apollinax's laughter seems to transcend time — it is compared to both an unborn child and ancient old man of the sea. So disruptive is it that it also seems to suspend time.
The lengthy description temporarily suspends the events of the dinner party. The continuing sea imagery is disturbing - because it is out of place, and serves as a digression, but primarily because of its haunting, poetical description of the undersea world, populated by the "worried bodies of drowned men." Only a few lines later, the narrator looks for Mr. Apollinax's detached head, "rolling under a chair/ Or grinning over a screen/ With seaweed in its hair." His detached head recalls the tale of Orpheus, torn to pieces by Bacchanals. His body parts floated out to sea on the River Hebrus, and all along, his song did not cease. These short lines give Apollinax a mythic quality. In addition, the sea imagery associated with Mr. Apollinax certainly disassociates him from the more elite, "civilized" company of the Channing-Cheetahs, while also giving him an aura of mystery. The sea imagery serves only to emphasize the disruption of Mr. Apollinax's crude laughter. This disruption is to some degree analogous to the sudden "wakening into reality" experienced by Prufrock, but Apollinax is not seeking an escape, as is Prufrock. Instead, Apollinax is simply rude, but the disruption serves as a commentary on the superficiality of high society. Just as Prufrock seeks to escape the endless rounds of trivialities in his world, so does Apollinax serve to point out the shallowness of Mrs. Phlaccus and her friends. The poem is lighthearted, and mocks the ritual teas of high society, but the sudden interjection and elaboration of Mr. Apollinax's laughter interrupts the poem, just as it disrupts the polite social gathering of Mrs. Phlaccus and the Channing-Cheetahs.

Drowning imagery also occurs in the 1920 "Ode," a poem that was included in the British publication of *Ara Vos Prec*, but one which was
removed from publication in the American edition of *Poems 1920*. The first stanza tells of an apparent block in creative activity for the poet; the second relates a chilling, dispassionate narrative of a bridegroom, who rises, sees blood upon the sheets, and smooths his hair in indifference. This is followed by a wedding song sung by children, and the stanza closes with "Succuba eviscerate." Again Eliot uses a mythic figure, like the mermaids of *Prufrock*, to lure a man to catastrophe. However, unlike Prufrock's mermaids, the succuba here is only sinister, offering no indication of positive escape or bliss. Instead, she is a threat to sexuality and manhood. Finally, the last stanza becomes mythic, alluding to Perseus and his defeat of the sea-monster for the sake of Andromeda's hand. The stanza concludes with the image: "Now he lies there/ Tip to tip washed beneath Charles' Wagon."

The "he" of these final lines is ambiguous. It is possible that it refers to Perseus, though most mythologies do not mention what kind of death he suffered. In this reading, all three stanzas seem to refer to the painfulness of the creative process. The first stanza presents a frustrated poet; the second, an indifferent bridegroom, but with obvious negative connotations of sex; and finally in the third stanza, the grandeur of a mythic hero ends in a "cheap extinction" "beneath Charles' Wagon." Charles' Wagon is another name for the Big Dipper, and appropriate to myth, Eliot ends his poem with a constellation. However, the hero, Perseus, is not granted the high privilege of becoming a constellation, but instead, the stars are remote and indifferent. Perseus
is left as a corpse upon the beach. The drowning of Perseus is simply a "cheap extinction" of a mythic hero, with no possibility of hope or renewal.

An interesting and more plausible explanation is offered by Vicki Mahaffey. She first briefly discusses Laforgue’s "Persée et Andromède," a poem that Eliot alludes to in the first two lines of the last stanza. In Laforgue’s poem, Andromeda falls in love with the dragon that holds her captive, and is upset with Perseus for killing him. Mahaffey explains:

Eliot expands Laforgue’s version, adding another level of irony by showing the dragon as resentful, indignant and sexually frustrated after his nuptial night with Andromeda. Eliot suggests that Perseus fooled the dragon, making him anticipate his wedding night as he would a "golden apocalypse". . . . The revelation is anything but golden, and the dragon is next shown lying in his eternal stellar position beneath Charles’ Wagon. Thus the dragon has been transformed into the constellation Draco, which, in spring and summer, lies beneath Charles’ Wagon, or Ursa Major. Both of these constellations are associated with roughness and lechery, as Edmund reminds us in King Lear: "My father compounded with my mother under the Dragon’s/ Tail, and my nativity was under Ursa Major, so that it/ follows I am rough and lecherous." (I.ii.139-42) (Mahaffey, 611)

Thus the apparent drowning is not a drowning at all, but a transformation, from a dragon’s corpse to a constellation in the sky. Here, at least, there is a positive transformation, from mere corpse to a mythic position of honor as a constellation. This reading is much more plausible, and serves to unify the poem in its emphasis on sexual and creative frustration.
Another poem that is included in *Poems 1920* is "Dans le Restaurant." This poem is particularly important when examining Eliot's use of drowning imagery. Here Phlebas the Phoenician appears for the first time, and he will later be incorporated into the "Death by Water" section of *The Waste Land*. In "Dans le Restaurant," an old waiter tells a patron about a boyhood memory of being trapped in a rainstorm with a little girl. He gave the little girl some flowers, and tickled her. The waiter continues his story, and explains that this was his earliest sexual experience. The patron is appalled at his tale, but exclaims, "De quel droit payes-tu des expériences comme moi?" He then gives the waiter ten sous for the bath. After this exchange, Phlebas the Phoenician appears. His appearance is sudden and unexpected, but one association is clear: he somehow provides purification and cleansing. Since the Phlebas stanza occurs immediately after the patron's instructions to the waiter to take a bath, that bath is metamorphosed, almost mythologized, by the appearance of Phlebas. Phlebas represents an almost god-like figure who enables the waiter to be morally cleansed. This indicates the possibility of a type of "transcendent intervention," where a god intervenes on behalf of man in order to make him acceptable and pure. However, this particular transcendent hope is only hinted at in the Phlebas passage, and will not be more fully developed until later poems. In addition, this initial occurrence of Phlebas as an agent of purification and cleansing will also be incorporated into *The Waste Land*, where he gains greater and more complex symbolic associations.
Eliot's use of sea and drowning imagery in some of his early works provides a number of differing interpretations. Many times such images are used as metaphors for attempting to overcome the trivialities and oppression of daily life in the modern world. The sea acts as an imaginative escape for Prufrock, who seeks a way out of a life of futility. In "Mr. Apollinax," the sea imagery of his laughter serves as an indictment against the superficiality of high society. In other early writings, the sea serves as a metaphor for memory, or acts as an agent of transformation or purification. Drowning, especially in *Prufrock*, hints at a hope and distant possibility of a transcendent death, but Prufrock is unable to fully free himself from reality in order to experience such transcendence. The image of drowning in "Dans le Restaurant" represents a type of cleansing and almost mythic purification. Again there are indications that such purification may be of a transcendent quality, but this particular aspect is left undeveloped. The hope of a transcendent reality, and the representation of this hope by the use of sea imagery will be more fully developed in some of Eliot's later poems, primarily *The Waste Land* and *Four Quartets*. 
CHAPTER 11

THE WASTE LAND

While Eliot experimented with the implications of sea imagery in his early poems, it is not until The Waste Land that this imagery becomes more unified, and more symbolically significant. This imagery culminates in The Waste Land with the central image of Phlebas the Phoenician. When Eliot asked, after Pound’s extensive revisions, if Phlebas should also be removed, Pound replied, “Phlebas is an integral part of the poem; . . . he is needed ABSolooootly where he is” (Letters, 505). Eliot himself commented on the centrality of Phlebas, who in fact becomes almost as important as Tiresias in unifying the poem. In his note to line 218, Eliot writes that “the one-eyed merchant, seller of currants, melts into the Phoenician Sailor, and the latter is not wholly distinct from Ferdinand Prince of Naples.” They in turn become Phlebas, and their imagery is used in the “Death by Water” section to describe him, emphasizing the centrality of his role. Though “Death by Water” is the shortest section of The Waste Land, it is nevertheless a very important part of the poem. Within these ten short lines, Eliot unites a number of different themes of the poem. Because of this thematic unity, the way we interpret Phlebas’s fate directly affects our interpretation of “What the Thunder said,” and thus, the entire poem.
Phlebas and the theme of death by water is first introduced by Madame Sosostris: "Here, said she,/ Is your card, the drowned Phoenician Sailor,/ (Those are pearls that were his eyes. Look!)" (46-48). The implications of this draw - or that of the other cards - are not discussed. Madame Sosostris merely reports - she does not explain. Whereas the drowned Phoenician Sailor is introduced early in the reading, Madame Sosostris’s final pronouncement does not occur until the end: “Fear death by water” (55). However, this conclusion does not seem to be based upon the cards she has drawn, including the drowned Phoenician Sailor, but rather upon that which she does not find: “I do not find/ The Hanged Man. Fear death by water.”

One implication of Madame Sosostris’s statement involves an allusion to the opening scene of *The Tempest*. In the midst of the storm, Gonzolo remarks of the boatswain, "Methinks he hath no drowning mark upon him, his complexion is perfect gallows. . . . If he be not born to be hang’d, our case is miserable" (I.i.29-30, 32-33). Here, Gonzolo pins his hopes for survival upon a man destined to be hanged. Apparently he believes in the proverb, "He that is born to be hanged need fear no drowning."\(^1\) Because Gonzolo believes in the immunity of the boatswain, he hopes that the boatswain’s protection from drowning will shelter the rest of the crew as well. Therefore, in Madame Sosostris’s reading, the reverse of this is true: it is precisely because she does not find the Hanged Man that the protagonist is directed to fear death by water. The Hanged Man apparently would have protected him from this fate.

\(^1\)See note, I.i.28-30, *The Tempest*, Riverside Shakespeare.
In another allusion to *The Tempest*, Madame Sosostris's introductory comments are followed by the parenthetical phrase, "(Those are pearls that were his eyes. Look!)". The identity of the speaker is uncertain, and thus its significance is complicated. Some critics believe this to be Madame Sosostris's own warning, while others attribute it to the protagonist. Calvin Bedient remarks, "The excited interruption is clearly his [the protagonist's]; it is out of key with the clairvoyante's phlegmatic pronouncements. It has the note of genuine enthusiasm; her tones are all those of bored expertise" (53). These observations find further support when her final pronouncement is examined. Mechanical, dispassionate, she warns, "Fear death by water." No exclamation mark, and little concern. She, instead, is far more interested in the safety of the horoscope to be delivered to Mrs. Equitone. A prophecy of death by water is merely all in a day's work. Because of her matter-of-fact comments about the cards, and the fate which they reveal, it seems only reasonable to attribute the outburst "(Those are pearls that were his eyes. Look!)", to the protagonist, set off by parentheses to distinguish his voice from hers. His comment in turn reflects upon his character. Rather than expressing horror at being identified with the drowned sailor, he instead responds with fascination, immediately associating the image with a sea-change. Had this been Madame Sosostris's statement, it would be sinister and negative, like the warning to "Fear death by water." Instead, if this is in fact the voice of the protagonist, the response is positive. This finds further support when we recall Eliot's use of the sea-change in his prose work, where the image always indicates a positive transformation. This excited
interruption on the part of the protagonist is clearly an indication of hope, however fatalistic the results of Madame Sosostris's Tarot reading might be.

In both the Tarot fortune and later in the scene of the middle-aged couple in "A Game of Chess," there is a clear relationship to the hyacinth garden. The hyacinth garden is the last major scene prior to the reading of the Tarot fortune, separated from it only by Wagner's "Öd' und leer das Meer." The young man's response to the scene in the garden is romantic and transcendent:

I could not
Speak, and my eyes failed, I was neither
Living nor dead, and I knew nothing,
Looking into the heart of light, the silence. (38-41)

This remembered scene is a blissful timeless moment. It contrasts sharply with the conversation in "A Game of Chess." However, there is a clear relationship between the two passages, for much of the language is the same. The couple in the hyacinth garden may in fact be the same couple in Part II. In addition to linking the hyacinth garden with the couple in "A Game of Chess," the original draft of this section also indicates an association between the hyacinth garden and the drowned Phoenician sailor. The troubled wife begins: "'Speak to me. Why do you never speak. Speak'" (Facsimile, 11). She continues, nagging:

"Do
'You know nothing? Do you see nothing? Do you remember
'Nothing?'"
I remember
The hyacinth garden. Those are pearls that were his eyes, yes!

"Are you alive, or not? Is there nothing in your head?"
(Facsimile, 13)

Here, the loss of speech, sight, and response that was experienced in the
hyacinth garden occurs again in the bitter questions of the nervous
wife. The husband, however, links the blissful hyacinth garden
experience to the image of the drowned sailor, and his earlier response
to the Tarot reading. This association further indicates a positive
response to Madame Sosostris's warning to "Fear death by water."

The repetition of the phrase, "Those are pearls that were his eyes"
indicates a longing for change, and a restlessness and dissatisfaction
with current situations. The protagonist seems to be the only character
or "voice" in The Waste Land who is concerned about escaping the
situation of decay and impotence in the waste land. Like a prophet, he
has the wisdom and discernment necessary to see how bleak the
situation is, and yet hope for a better world. This "dark vision" is a
necessary prelude to experiencing a transcendent change, in this case,
death. One must first realize the futility of existence before he can
realize the necessity, and thus the hope, of transcendence. Perhaps
Madame Sosostris's pronouncement at the end of the Tarot reading is
not as dark as we would first believe. In her warning to fear death by
water, there is for the protagonist the hope of a transformation, or sea-
change. Inherent in such a hope, however, is a figurative, if not literal
death, preceding such a change. The protagonist must first realize the
futility of modern existence, and in effect, renounce it, before he can
experience such a transcendent death. Like the myth of Adonis and other gods, death is an avenue for new life, change, and transcendence.

Because death is necessary for such a transformation, the epigraph to *The Waste Land* becomes particularly relevant. It is only through death that the drought of the waste land can be overcome, or transcended. Thus the Sibyl's plea becomes that of the protagonist, but with an ironic twist. She sees death as a relief and a long-awaited end. She longs for death in the same manner that the parched desert yearns for rain. The protagonist, too, sees death as a form of relief, but he does not merely want his life to come to a simple end — he seeks transcendence and transformation through death. He desires not just a simple escape from the landscape of the waste land — the Sibyl's type of death would serve that purpose — but he desires a transcendent experience which will in turn lead to renewal and rebirth. It is only through this form of death-transformation that the decay of the waste land can be overcome.

This mystical death finally occurs in Part IV of *The Waste Land*, but the touchstone phrase, "Those are pearls that were his eyes" is notably absent. Does this indicate that the promised transformation does not take place? Perhaps, for the only line indicating any physical change of the body of Phlebas is, "A current under sea/ Picked his bones in whispers" (315-16). But this is imagery of decay, not of the "rich and strange" transformation promised by Ariel in *The Tempest*, and echoed by the protagonist in *The Waste Land*. This may indicate that Phlebas's death offers no hope of redemption or renewal. If the mysterious sea-change does not take place, if death cannot be
transcended, then hope vanishes from the waste land, and the best man can do is merely endure — "dying / With a little patience" (329-330). Thus the mystic words of the Thunder become ironic and distant. There is no peace if transformation, and thus escape from present circumstances, is impossible. Instead, there is only futility, and the Thunder's voice becomes a mocking god-like refrain. Where there is no transformation, there is no transcendence — only death.

To further explore Phlebas and the themes of death and transformation, it is useful to examine some of Eliot's other poems related to the composition of The Waste Land. At the end of the fragment, "So through the evening, through the violet air," Eliot explores the sensations of a diver without a clear sense of balance. The deaf mute swims deep, until, in an echo of Prufrock, we find "about his hair the seaweed purple and brown./ So in our fixed confusion we persisted, out from town" (Facsimile, 5-6). Here there is a clear relationship between the loss of direction of the diver, and the confused group of unidentified people of the last line. The diver continues to move "down and down," perhaps to a death by drowning. Similarly, the group of people of the final line may also be moving "down and down" in a moral, or otherwise symbolic descent, perhaps even to their own self-annihilative death. However, there is no explicit mention of death in this portion of poem, in contrast to the other fragments associated with The Waste Land.

In "The Death of St. Narcissus," Eliot addresses the theme of transformation and self-sacrifice. The poem opens with a scene by a rock that would later be incorporated into lines 26-29 of The Waste
Land. Oddly, the setting for this poem occurs in the desert, rather than on a riverbank, as in the traditional tale. Instead, Eliot is more interested in the various transformations of Narcissus, for "he was sure that he had been a tree," and "Then he knew that he had been a fish" (*Facsimile*, 21, 24). Finally, Narcissus becomes "a dancer to God," sacrificing himself to the arrows, like St. Sebastian. At last, after his death, he "is green, dry and stained/ With the shadow in his mouth" (*Facsimile*, 38-39). This last transformation is much like those experienced by drowning victims of other fragmentary poems by Eliot.

Two fragments specifically address the theme of death by water. In both "Dirge" and "Those are pearls that were his eyes. See!" Eliot elaborates the macabre sea-change, the decomposition of the body, rather than the more mystical change into "something rich and strange." In "Dirge" he writes:

```
Full fathom five your Bleistein lies
Under the flatfish and the squids.
Graves' Disease in a dead jew's eyes!
    When the crabs have eat the lids.
  Lower than the wharf rats dive
   Though he suffer a sea-change
Still expensive rich and strange
``` (*Facsimile*, 121)

Bleistein finds company with crabs, flatfish and squids. At the close of the short poem, instead of Ariel's sea-nymphs ringing a death knell, lobsters guard the corpse: "Hark! now I hear them scratch scratch scratch." This poem, full of hungry sea-creatures, simply details the literal decay of a body. Eliot's conclusion to the first stanza, claiming that Bleistein, though changed, is "Still expensive rich and strange," seems to be more of a sarcastic anti-Semitic statement than any attempt
to bring about a redemptive or hauntingly beautiful transformation, like that in Ariel's song. Similarly, in the fragment "Those are pearls that were his eyes. See!" Eliot describes a crab clambering through a corpse's stomach, and the drifting, indifferent algae floating above the corpse. Yet this fragment is less graphic, and more pensive than the "Dirge." Eliot ends the fragment with the lament, "Still and quiet brother are you still and quiet" (Facsimile, 123).

Because of the number of similar fragments, it would seem that from the beginning Eliot desired to incorporate some type of sea imagery, more specifically, drowning imagery, into the long poem that would eventually become The Waste Land. His frequent references to The Tempest and Ariel's song also indicate the importance that such images held for him. Although most of these short fragments seem be fairly straightforward in their meaning, with little symbolic import, they do indicate Eliot's fascination with the image of the drowned man, and may hint at the later importance of the figure of Phlebas as it appears in "Death by Water."

In the original draft of "Death by Water," Eliot details a New England fishing voyage, and its wreck on an iceberg. In an image much like that in Prufrock, the narrator tells of a foreboding sign:

I thought I saw in the fore cross-trees
Three women leaning forward, with white hair
Streaming behind, who sang above the wind
A song that charmed my senses, while I was
Frightened beyond fear, horrified past horror, calm,
(Nothing was real) for, I thought, now, when
I like, I can wake up and end the dream.

(Facsimile, 59)
Here the narrator is removed from his present circumstances. He experiences a mystical moment which is both in time and out of time. This vision is charming and calm, but also frightening and sinister. Within this section of the poem, the vision functions as an omen, portending the disaster that lies ahead.

The frenzy and confusion of the final stanzas of the section finally are stilled with the appearance of Phlebas the Phoenician. This passage was all that survived the heavy cutting of Ezra Pound on the original "Death by Water" section; intact, it became the entire Part IV in the final version of *The Waste Land*. This final version of "Death by Water" is more objective, less morose, than some of Eliot's previous attempts in the fragmentary poems to deal with the same theme. Instead of concerning himself with crabs, flatfish and squid, Eliot seems to be more concerned with the "consciousness" of the dead man. Phlebas seems to have some sort of consciousness, though his tale is narrated by an objective observer. Phlebas, as he drowns, forgets "the cry of the gulls, and the deep sea swell/ And the profit and loss" (313-314). Yet, as he enters the whirlpool, he remembers the stages of his life. Phlebas both forgets and remembers - just as in the opening of *The Waste Land* spring "mix[es] / Memory and desire" and winter "cover[s] / Earth in forgetful snow, feeding / A little life with dried tubers" (3-7). Death and life, forgetfulness and memory are mixed, and uncertain.

As Phlebas rises and falls with the currents of the water, he "passe[s] the stages of his age and youth." This phrase can simply indicate, in a literal sense, the decay of his body. More likely, this is a reference to a life-long review of his own memories and desires - both
fulfilled and unfulfilled. It is worth noting that this review occurs in reverse chronological order - Phlebas begins with his age and returns to his youth. It would seem that Phlebas himself is a young man, for the final line of "Death by Water" implies that at the time of his drowning, Phlebas was in fact, "handsome and tall as you," indicating youth and vigor. Phlebas's passing the stages of age and youth could imply that he reflected on the past life of his youth, and dreamed about the might-have-been of his future life in his age. This would also indicate a mixing of memory and desire - the memories of his past, and the desires for the future that were not to be fulfilled.

Phlebas's review of life, starting with age and returning to youth, is also significant because following this review, he is swallowed by the whirlpool. The whirlpool, as well as the sea itself, is often a representative of the feminine. In both senses, Phlebas has figuratively returned to the womb - the womb of the sea, the source of all life, and the symbolic womb of the whirlpool. This is especially significant since Phlebas's drowning flashback is in reverse order - passing, first, the stages of his age, then his youth, ending by his engulfment in the whirlpool - the womb. Both the sea and the whirlpool play upon the symbolic tension of "womb/tomb" - and these images serve in both functions. Does Phlebas's descent into the whirlpool-womb represent a redemptive death and subsequent rebirth or resurrection, thus bringing hope to the drought-stricken waste land?

The rebirth or renewal of Phlebas is certainly a possibility, especially in view of patterns of mythic fertility ritual which are incorporated throughout The Waste Land. In The Golden Bough, Frazer
explains the tradition of "carrying out Death" practiced in a number of European villages. Although this ritual may take several forms, the essence is the same. The people form an effigy of Death, most often out of straw or wood, and at the approach of springtime, carry Death outside of the village, either to be buried or thrown into a nearby stream. This ceremony is thought to promise prosperity and fertility for the village and the land. Frazer observes that "the being which has just been destroyed — the so-called Death — must be supposed to be endowed with a vivifying and quickening influence, which it can communicate to the vegetable and even the animal world" (364-65). Likewise, this ritual can be linked to the more ancient rituals of Adonis, when "images of him, dressed to resemble corpses, were carried out as to burial and then thrown into the sea" (389). After lamentation for the dead god, there was renewed hope, for he would be resurrected in the general growth of spring. This apparently was also a practice in ancient Phoenicia (Frazer 390). In addition to the dying and resurrected god, communities would appoint a scapegoat to appease the gods. Frazer mentions an ancient practice where a young man was cast in the sea to be drowned, in the belief that this "would rid the people of the evils by which they were beset" (671). Further, in a different context, Frazer explains a Russian custom of the figure of Kupalo. After passing an effigy of Kupalo through flames, either as a purification rite or to ensure adequate sun for the crops, the image is finally cast into a stream, in a gesture that Frazer interprets as a rain charm (755).

Using Frazer's findings as a background, the death of Phlebas by drowning has a number of implications. First, Phlebas may be the
"Death-figure" that is cast into the sea on behalf of a community, thus bringing renewal and blessing upon the crops and village for the following year. Secondly, Phlebas may also serve as a scapegoat. The scapegoat of the hanged god is missing, earlier in the poem, so Phlebas himself may serve in his stead. There seems to be little indication that Phlebas is acting as a representative of the rest of the citizens of the waste land, although the warning at the end of "Death by Water" is directed to us all. Finally, and perhaps the most likely reading, is that Phlebas functions as a type of rain charm. Similar to the Russian ritual of Kupalo, Phlebas’s death by drowning is preceded by the burning of "The Fire Sermon." After his death comes the thunderclouds, the lightning, and "a damp gust / Bringing rain" (293-94).

In addition, Phlebas may represent a type of baptismal ritual, which necessarily is symbolic of death and resurrection. Baptism is indicative of a rejection, or figurative "death" to a previous way of life, and a subsequent "resurrection" or "rebirth" to a new, purified life. Phlebas may act as a rejection on the protagonist’s part of the sordid life of the waste land, particularly that described in "The Fire Sermon." After this rejection, the protagonist seeks the positive sea-change of transformation and renewal which would grant him, perhaps, the peace promised by the Thunder in Part V.

In any case, Phlebas and "the deep sea swell" come as a relief following the impassioned cries of "burning burning burning" and the torment of "The Fire Sermon." But the water of Part IV may only serve to heighten and prolong the desire for water in the dry sterility of the waste land. Phlebas may be provided as a mirage-like image to
increase desire and agony, just as Ariel's song of illusion convinced Ferdinand of his father's death at sea, and grieved him. Phlebas's fate may be a reality, or may be only an illusion caused by the "tricksy spirit" of the poet/protagonist. If illusory, his death is even more disappointing, in view of the hope of transformation and figurative redemption that an actual death by drowning would provide in the context of the poem.

Ultimately, the final fate of Phlebas is uncertain. Is his death final or figurative? Does he experience a rebirth or resurrection? Ambiguity within the poem makes a definitive answer difficult, if not impossible. If he serves as a primitive rain charm, does the charm work? A close examination of "Death by Water," which would seem to be a relatively simple task, instead results in a complicated set of virtually unanswerable questions of interpretation.

To add to the complexity of the interpretation of Phlebas, a number of interesting readings have been proposed by some critics. One group of these readings is based upon Eliot's relationship to Jean Verdenal, and the poetic incorporation of this relationship in *The Waste Land*. Because Eliot links the hyacinth garden with the drowned Phoenician sailor in the early portions of the poem, some critics believe that the Phoenician sailor is a poetic stand-in for Eliot's close friend, Jean Verdenal. Both John Peter and James E. Miller, Jr. suggest some type of homoerotic attraction between Eliot and Verdenal, and Miller makes quite an issue out of Eliot's later recollection of Verdenal walking through a sun-touched garden with a branch of lilac in his hand. Miller finds this recollection particularly applicable to the scene of the
hyacinth garden. Eliot’s further reflection that Verdenal was “mixed with the mud of Gallipoli” finds parallels with Stetson and the “ships at Mylae,” which Miller interprets as “an oblique reference to the World War I sea battles over the Dardanelles, scene of Jean Verdenal’s death” (Miller 77). Similarly, Miller sees a link with Phlebas’s drowning as well, based upon the same quotation from Eliot. The basis of Miller’s argument, however, is not merely an interpretation of one or two sentences of recollection provided by the author of the poem, but rather concentrates on “Eliot’s imaginative transfiguration of the relationship [with Verdenal] in the shaping of his poetry” (163). Eliot himself often referred to the transformative role of memory in the poetic process, but Miller uses this concept to strengthen his view. He sees Eliot’s days of friendship with Verdenal as artistically productive ones, when Verdenal’s sudden death brings a halt to creative productivity. This is an accurate biographical detail, and is evident throughout Eliot’s correspondence of the time; however, Miller proposes that Eliot, “in search of cure for his anguish, . . . plunges into a marriage . . . that exacerbates rather than heals”(92). From this pain came The Waste Land.

Although Miller uses a number of accurate biographical details to support his view, he lacks clear evidence to indicate that Eliot’s relationship to Verdenal was a homoerotic one. A point that Miller finds particularly supportive of his interpretation is Eliot’s suppression of a 1952 essay by John Peter which also speculates about the nature of Eliot’s relationship to Verdenal. In a later (1969) “Postscript” to the essay, Peter explains: “At Eliot’s insistence all copies of this issue on
hand . . . were destroyed . . . and he refused to sanction the reprinting of my essay" which resulted in a silence of seventeen years (165). But Peter continues: "Anyone reading Eliot with real attentiveness today . . . can hardly avoid the conclusion that in his own youth, he had a close romantic attachment to another young man, and that this . . . friendship was rudely cut short when the other was drowned," and for further support, Peter cites a conversation that Eliot had with a homosexual friend, reported at second-hand (166).

In response to Peter's essay, and perhaps others, George Watson provides a brief biographical article on Jean Verdenal. Watson finds, in the same recollection cited by Miller, that Eliot knew Verdenal did not drown. His friend is "mixed with the mud of Gallipoli," not lying on the ocean floor, which "makes one imagined connection much less likely: that Verdenal is somehow represented by Phlebas the Phoenician" (467). This refutation seems rather simplistic, given the freedom of poetic transformation that Eliot insisted upon. After all, Miller himself does not attempt to make a direct one-to-one correspondence between the poem and the biographical details, but claims only that Eliot's own experiences appear transformed in The Waste Land. However, Watson's refutation does not rest solely on his simplistic dismissal of the Phlebas-Verdenal correspondence. Watson goes on to investigate the significance of Eliot's friendship with Verdenal. He concludes that their friendship was based on common interests rather than any homoerotic attraction. In addition, Watson replies that Eliot's conversation with a homosexual friend indicates only that Eliot was a sympathetic and understanding man, not necessarily a man with a homoerotic impulse.
The reading of Phlebas as Verdenal, according to Miller and Peter, necessarily demands a homoerotic relationship between Eliot and the young Frenchman. Such an equation rests more on speculation and assumption rather than the evidence that we have, and Watson's biographical examination provides a more plausible explanation — that the two men shared common interests which bonded them in a close friendship. There is little evidence that there was a homoerotic relationship between the men, although they were close friends. However, it is certain that the period after Verdenal's death, and the following years with Vivien, were painful ones for Eliot. This suffering, to some degree, did provide much of the material for The Waste Land. It is possible that the memory of Verdenal's death played some role in the composition of The Waste Land, but there is little evidence to indicate that his relationship with Eliot was a homoerotic one. Furthermore, there seems to be even less textual evidence for such a reading, since Phlebas drowns in the female element of the sea, and is sucked down by the symbolic womb of the whirlpool.

Despite this point of critical disagreement, there remain a number of interpretations for Phlebas and his significance in The Waste Land. He may serve as a primitive rain charm, bringing the thunderstorm of Part V. Likewise, he may represent renewal and fertility, providing an escape from the dry barrenness of the poem. Yet, while still representing these symbols, his death may fail as well. He may be a rain charm or fertility rite — which brings only the teasing promise of rain — without the fulfillment. Or, he may be merely a corpse. Even the waters, as well as the deserts, of The Waste Land may be tainted —
brining only death, and not renewal. Each of these interpretations seems to be a valid possibility, and perhaps the interpretation of Phlebas rests entirely upon one’s interpretation of Part V of *The Waste Land*: does the rain come?

If it does not rain in Part V, then much of that section must be interpreted ironically. The appearance of the hanged god, Christ, and his post-resurrection walk with the disciples to Emmaus may be only an illusion, empty of hope. The speaking Thunder, while giving wisdom to man, must remain distant — and while providing instruction, yet gives no way for man to implement the Thunder’s ideals. The Thunder is only a booming voice — but dry and sterile. The closing chant of “Shantih shantih shantih” becomes an ironic commentary of the lofty indifference and transcendent peace of the Thunder, in contrast to the feeble soul left panting for water on the desert plain. The protagonist is engulfed in his own whirlpool of swirling, fragmented images in the closing lines. This self-dissolution, like that of Phlebas, may result in the possibility of transcendence represented by the Thunder. But if the waste land remains dry, then hope, and transcendence, become futile and barren.

On the other hand, Part V may in fact produce the long-awaited rain, refreshing and renewing the landscape of the waste land with hope and promise. While Madame Sosostris did not find the Hanged Man in her Tarot deck, he appears in “What the Thunder said” as Christ. The appearance of the hanged god brings hope of renewal. This is developed even further by the journey to Emmaus passage, which involves a post-resurrection appearance of Christ, the hanged god. But
still there is no rain, only "cracked earth," and "empty cisterns and exhausted wells" (369, 384). Man remains at the mercy of God and nature. Yet there is hope: "In a flash of lightning. Then a damp gust/Bringing rain" (393-4). Though the leaves wait for rain, and the dark clouds remain distant, the voice of the Thunder breaks the silence. There is hope, promise - rain is in the air, though not yet falling. While Part V opens with desert scenes of dry, barren rocks, where there is no water, it closes with the voice of the Thunder, and two short scenes near the sea. In response to the Thunder's command to control, the protagonist recalls a boat scene at sea. This is followed by a shoreline scene: "I sat upon the shore/Fishing, with the arid plain behind me" (423-24). This seems to indicate hope, and a promise of refreshing, restorative rain. The final words of the Thunder, "Shantih shantih shantih" soothe the dry barren soul of the protagonist, just as the rain falls upon the thirsty, cracked desert of the waste land.

Although there may not be definitive evidence, it would seem that *The Waste Land* ends with hope, as well as peace. This evaluation would fulfill the hope of rain, instead leaving it as an ironic, dry echo of distant thunder. This would then place the role of Phlebas the Phoenician as a restorer, bringing rain, renewal, and spring-like resurrection to the waste land by a type of redemptive death.
CHAPTER IV

THE DRY SALVAGES

The image of renewal occurs more frequently in Eliot's later poems. In these works, the renewal becomes one that is specifically Christian in context. Although Christian symbolism is more frequent in the later works, Eliot also begins to explore abstractions, such as time and space. These themes are particularly evident in the Four Quartets.

One theme that is associated with the sea, from early poems such as "Rhapsody on a Windy Night" all the way to the Four Quartets, is memory. In Ash Wednesday (VI), for example, Eliot recalls a seaside scene, apparently from his childhood, which anticipates the The Dry Salvages:

In this brief transit where the dreams cross
The dreamcrossed twilight between birth and dying . . .
From the wide window towards the granite shore
The white sails still fly seaward, seaward flying
Unbroken wings

And the lost heart stiffens and rejoices
In the lost lilac and the lost sea voices
And the weak spirit quickens to rebel
For the bent golden-rod and the lost sea smell . . .
And smell renews the salt savour of the sandy earth . . .
Even among these rocks
Our peace in His will

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And even among these rocks
Sister, mother
And spirit of the river, spirit of the sea,
Suffer me not to be separated

And let my cry come unto Thee.

This passage compares life, the "dreamcrossed twilight between birth and dying," to a pleasant voyage at sea. The sea journey as a metaphor for life will also be developed more fully in *The Dry Salvages*. Though the journey here seems pleasant, there are, nevertheless, threatening rocks at the end of the passage. Like Mary, though, we should resign ourselves to the will of God, and trust Him for his provision. In addition, and in less theological terms, much of the sea imagery in this passage also indicates a longing for the past, or that which is "lost." These memories lead to a desire for renewal, which is associated with the location.

In one of the *Ariel* poems, "Marina," Eliot also uses sea imagery to represent or to spark the memory. This is indicated in the first stanza:

> What seas what shores what grey rocks and what islands
> What water lapping the bow . . .
> What images return
> O my daughter.

The images in this first stanza provide at least two interpretations. Either Pericles is lamenting the loss of his daughter, and clings only to his memories of her, or he is reunited with Marina, and the memories of the past are evoked. In any case, these opening images are directly associated with the activity of memory: "What images return." These images become clearer as the poem continues, and as Pericles's recognition of Marina becomes more certain. Yet he is still confused,
perhaps too frightened to believe the truth that will bring him joy: "I made this, I have forgotten! And remember." For a portion of the poem, he alternates references to his boat with references to Marina. He has forgotten to tend to his ship, but he remembers his daughter's birth and childhood, "This form, this face, this life." Finally, his recognition is complete, ending with, "What seas what shores what granite islands towards my timbers . . . My daughter." Thus the sea, while posing threats or disaster - like those which nearly wrenched his family away from him - also provides a means for Pericles to be joyfully reunited with his daughter.

Finally, Eliot unites and complicates the themes of memory, time, life and death, in the *Four Quartets*. Eliot uses a combination of abstractions and specific images to explore these themes. In *The Dry Salvages*, Eliot uses the sea as a metaphor. The setting of the poem is taken from Eliot's childhood summers spent at his family's summer home at Cape Ann, Massachusetts. The cluster of rocks known as the Dry Salvages could be seen from the porch of the Eliot home. According to Samuel Eliot Morison, these rocks were so named (contrary to Eliot's own note prefacing the poem) because they always remained above the water level, hence "dry." Two other rock clusters associated with the Dry Salvages were known as the Little Salvages, which were dry at low tide but covered at high tide, and Flat Ground, which remained submerged at all times. These three groups of rocks demanded careful and skillful navigation. They could be a threat to a lost or floundering ship, or they could also be a welcome sign on approaching the cape.
The Dry Salvages, in particular, were the final seamark when leaving harbor, and the first sign when returning home.

These geographical details are present in Eliot's poem, *The Dry Salvages*. Before he discusses the ocean, however, Eliot moves to an even earlier time of his life, his childhood by the Mississippi in St. Louis. In a letter quoted by Nancy Duvall Hargrove, Eliot recalls his early fascination with the river: "The river also made a deep impression on me; and it was a great treat to be taken down to the Eads Bridge in flood time" (167). In an address of 1960 to the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, Eliot explained the personal significance of the structure of *The Dry Salvages*: "You will notice, however, that this poem begins where I began, with the Mississippi; and that it ends, where I and my wife expect to end, at the parish church of a tiny village in Somerset" ("Influence of Landscape," 422).

Thus Eliot begins the poem with a commentary on the power of nature, specifically the "strong brown god" of the Mississippi River. This god, who acts as "destroyer, reminder! Of what men choose to forget" reappears at the end of section II, with its "cargo of dead negroes, cows and chicken coops." The river represents linear time, and man's own struggle against it. The river's rhythm is "present in the nursery bedroom," as if it gives us all life. Linear time brings both birth, and all too soon, death.

Eliot's main focus in the poem, however, is the ocean. After the introductory first paragraph, Eliot moves to the sea: "The river is within us, the sea is all about us." The river, as representative of linear time, is necessarily a part of our lives. The sea, in contrast, is eternal:
The tolling bell
Measures time not our time, rung by the unhurried
Ground swell, a time
Older than the time of chronometers.

In contrast to the river, the sea has "Many gods and many voices." The sea has both the power of creation, and the power of death. Ironically, the very images that Eliot uses to demonstrate the sea's "earlier and other creation:/ The starfish, the horseshoe crab, the whale's backbone," are also images of death — they are only skeletal remains. In addition to nature's remains, the sea also "tosses up our losses, the torn seine,/ The shattered lobsterpot, the broken oar/ And the gear of foreign dead men." The sea becomes an all-powerful force of both life and creation, and death and destruction.

The voices of the sea are threatening, coming in groans, whines, and wails. Amid the fog-enshrouded voices of "the whine in the rigging,/ The menace and caress of wave that breaks on water,/ The distant rote in the granite teeth," is "The tolling bell [which] / Measures time not our time, rung by the unhurried/ Ground swell." Among the many threatening voices, especially the sinister "rote in the granite teeth," the bell buoy rings with a fatalistic clang, indicating to the "anxious worried women" that time is irredeemable. Despite their efforts to "unweave, unwind, unravel" the work of the Fates, in an attempt, like Penelope, to stave off time, the buoy sounds the death knell of their husbands and sons lost at sea.

In part II, Eliot asks in despair, "Where is there an end to it, . . . . / Where is there an end to the drifting wreckage, / The prayer of the bone on the beach?" He then answers, "There is no end, but addition . . . . / Years of living among the breakage/ Of what was
believed in as the most reliable." Here we see the expanse of time past, with the debris and wreckage of past generations. There is no end, only death. We find ourselves trapped, "In a drifting boat with a slow leakage,/ The silent listening to the undeniable/ Clamour of the bell of the last annunciation." Our time passes on and slips away, like the leak in the boat, and we wait, helplessly, for death.

Next, Eliot questions the purpose of life. He explains, "We cannot think . . . ./ Of a future that is not liable/ Like the past, to have no destination." Again using the fishermen as examples, Eliot demonstrates that we must imagine the fishermen as "forever bailing/ Setting and hauling" while a stormy Nor'easter threatens. We cannot consider that their "trip . . . will be unpayable" or that their "haul . . . will not bear examination." We must imagine ourselves as striving towards some destiny or purpose, otherwise, we, too, may find ourselves and our lives not worth examination. Eliot again emphasizes that "There is no end of it." Death awaits us all. There is no end "To the drift of the sea and the drifting wreckage,/ The bone's prayer to Death its God." The sea and its representation of the passing of time leaves only wreckage and death.

In *Murder in the Cathedral*, a play closely related to the composition of *Four Quartets*, the chorus gives a vivid image of what it means to die when life, and death, have no meaning or purpose:

I have eaten
Smooth creatures still living, with the strong salt taste of living things under the sea; I have tasted
The living lobster, the crab, the oyster, the whelk and the prawn; and they live and spawn in my bowels, and my bowels dissolve in the light of dawn. I have smelt
Death in the rose, death in the hollyhock, sweet pea, hyacinth, primrose and cowslip. I have seen
Trunk and horn, tusk and hoof, in odd places;  
I have lain on the floor of the sea and breathed with the  
breathing of the sea-anemone, swallowed with  
ingurgitation of the sponge. I have lain in the soil and  
criticised the worm....

Here there seems to be a universal identification with sea creatures. By  
ingesting sea animals, the chorus becomes them, "breathing with the  
breathing of the sea-anemone," or swallowing like a sponge. Again, as  
in *The Waste Land* and its related fragmentary poems, it is as if the  
consciousness of a corpse is speaking — one in which the lobsters, crabs  
and oysters, spawn in its bowels. The entire passage of the chorus  
speaks of degradation and death, concluding by asking the Archbishop  
for forgiveness. Here the sea brings death, although the sea creatures  
themselves carry on life and its activities in indifference. They even  
spawn in the bowels of a corpse - an ironic juxtaposition of life and  
death. This kind of death seems to be merely an ending, with no hope  
of new life or transcendent renewal.

Such fatalistic imagery continues in *The Dry Salvages* although  
there always seems to be a voice which undercuts the more sinister,  
futile images. For example, near the end of part II, Eliot returns to  
imagery of the Mississippi, with its cargo of dead bodies and debris.  
This image is prefaced by the statement, "Time the destroyer is time the  
preserver." Time, which brings about death, is indeed a destroyer, but  
in Christian terms, death allows the soul to pass on to eternal life,  
preserving the soul. Thus death is both an end and a beginning. The  
river is not only a destructive force, but it preserves and maintains the  
very materials it has destroyed. These materials are evidence of the  
river's past activity and destruction. Just as the past is always present,
because the past in some sense determines the present, so the river carries its past with it. Similarly the presence of the past is reflected in the statement, "The bitter apple and the bite in the apple." The past action of Adam is still with us today — in the forms of both death and sin.

Finally, Eliot ends the section with the Dry Salvages, "the ragged rock in the restless waters." This passage is most often read as a commentary on the Church. Harry Blamires summarizes the view as follows:

In fairweather times of prosperity and maximum calm the Church is "merely a monument," something pleasant to look at perhaps, but useless. In navigable weather it serves as "a seamark to lay a course by," providing guidance for those who choose to have regard to it, and perhaps appropriately defining [sic] the turning-points of life (with Christenings, Marriages, and Burials)... In times of suffering or of sudden calamity it "is what it always was" — the indefinable destroyer and preserver. (101)

Although this reading is certainly valid and functions logically within the poem, it does not adequately account for the sinister threat that lingers over the ending of this passage. The rock does not seem to be a place of refuge, but is dangerous and threatening. Instead, the rock may represent death. For "waves wash over it, fogs conceal it," and on a pleasant day it is merely a monument, perhaps a "reminder/ Of what men choose to forget." It also serves as "a seamark/ To lay course by," but nevertheless avoid. The reality of death may be obscured, even hidden, by metaphorical waves and fog, or we may set up a monument, like a tombstone, in remembrance. When faced with the subject of
death, we may simply steer around it, avoiding it and perhaps using the distant threat of death as a reason for finding purpose or direction in life. Finally, however, the rock, and death, "in the sombre season/ Or the sudden fury, is what it always was."

Following the threat and presence of death and the hope of an afterlife through the Church, Eliot explores the presence of all time in the present, in the third section of the poem. Because we have been confronted with death, we must now contemplate life. The narrator warns us to think not that "'the past is finished, / Or, 'the future is before us," but rather, as Krishna states, we should "'Fare forward.'" After the threatening rock of the previous section, this admonition is appropriate. We are instructed to live fully in the present, which is the only moment that is truly "real." The past becomes only memories, and the future is uncertain and unknowable.

Eliot portrays all of mankind as voyagers, through life and through time, across the threatening and menacing sea. In part IV, the sailors become all men, and the narrator appeals to the Virgin to guard and protect us in our voyage through life. She is implored to protect and watch over the sailors, the women who wait at home, and even those who have already met their fate, who "Ended their voyage on the sand, in the sea's lips/ Or in the dark throat which will not reject them." Because prayer is petitioning God or the Virgin, prayer is seen to be one way that we can transcend time, and commune with the timeless.

But finally, we must surrender to time; we cannot expect to traverse the eternal sea. The final section of the poem makes this clear. Right action, and living for the present is our only hope and refuge. Yet
Eliot introduces the concept of the Incarnation as a way to transcend the futility and limits of human time. The Incarnation is simultaneously both in and out of time, representing the union of the temporal and the eternal:

Here the impossible union
Of spheres of existence is actual,
Here the past and future
Are conquered, and reconciled.

Finally, after presenting the reader with a number of death-images, Eliot offers the reader a means of transcendence. The two kinds of time presented in the poem, and represented by the river and the sea, are unified in the image of the Incarnation, and only when the temporal and eternal are reconciled, can man hope to escape the utter futility of death. Faith in the Incarnation allows man to overcome death, and allows him to pass into the realm of eternity.

In addition to the primary themes of time, life and death in *The Dry Salvages*, Eliot also addresses themes of his earlier poetry. For example, the sea in *The Dry Salvages* also acts as a record of memory, with the horseshoe crab and whale bone washed upon the beach, and the dead negroes and chicken coops floating on the floodwaters of the Mississippi. These are relics and reminders of the past of the ocean and river. The whale bone and the praying "bone on the beach" recall the childhood memory of a sea anemone and a rockpool, and the early poem, "Rhapsody on a Windy Night," where:

The memory throws up high and dry
A crowd of twisted things;
A twisted branch upon the beach
Eaten smooth, and polished
As if the world gave up
The secret of its skeleton,
Stiff and white.

In these examples, the sea contains the earth's memory. Fragments and relics of time-bound voyages are contained in the eternal, unchanging sea. The sea becomes an archive of history, keeping some secrets to itself, but washing other bits of remains upon the beach, granting man a peek into the past. Eliot's concern with memory can also be seen in the latter portion of section II, where an old man contemplates the past.

Although the sea acts as a repository of memory, particularly the earth's memory, it can also be forgotten by man. This theme is first indicated by the river, the almost-forgotten brown god, the "reminder/Of what men choose to forget." Man, confident in his supremacy and power, fails to acknowledge the power and force in the sleeping river and in nature as a whole. The result, of course, is flooding and destruction. Likewise, the ocean, too, can be forgotten or ignored by man. "Years of living among the breakage/Of what was believed in as the most reliable" indicates that man has forgotten his own mortality. Similarly, the menace of the hidden rock at the end of section II can also be forgotten, ignored, or obscured.

One of the early themes developed by Eliot and associated with the sea involves a transformation or change. This is also indicated in the imagery in *The Dry Salvages* although it is employed in a very different way. Instead of a corpse that is transformed "into something rich and strange," as in *The Waste Land*, Eliot uses sea imagery to contrast man's time and the ocean's eternity. Eliot uses the eternal nature of the sea, coupled with its destructive power, to emphasize man's own frailty and
mortality. The sea becomes a type of *memento mori*. We are forced to contemplate our own impending death. This, it would seem, will bring about a type of inner transformation — no longer will we believe that death is distant, and thus easily ignored for the moment. Now we must live for the moment, for the past is gone, and the future is unknowable. We must live for the present moment, as Krishna instructs us. Thus transformation, through contemplation of death, is also present in *The Dry Salvages*; though this is a different technique than that employed by Eliot in some of his earlier works. Part of this change in technique must be attributed to Eliot’s conversion, but the war and London bombings, along with his own aging, surely were factors as well. Life in London during the war could be analogous to an uncertain and unstable voyage at sea, which at any moment could result in wreckage and death. Living with death on a near-daily basis during the blitz would certainly make one value life even more.

This change in approach to the subject of modern life and the hope of transcendence is readily apparent in *The Dry Salvages*, where Eliot uses a number of themes explored in his earlier poetry. Memory is still closely linked to the sea, and the mystical transformative power of the ocean is also present. In this poem, as well as the other quartets, Eliot also addresses the central issues of time, eternity, life and death. Together, all of these themes in *The Dry Salvages* direct the reader to develop an appreciation for life and the present moment. In addition, the reader is encouraged to have faith in the hope of transcendence
presented by the Incarnation. These images and themes represent the culmination of Eliot's use of the sea as symbol, and in *The Dry Salvages*, end on a note of hope, rather than despair.
CHAPTER V
CONCLUSION

In his early poems, Eliot used the sea, and in particular, the drowned man, to represent a hope of transcendence or escape from the bleak and sordid realities of everyday life. Later, with his conversion, the symbol took on more religious meaning, and moved from an uncertain hope of transcendence to certainty and faith in God. Eliot's repeated use of the symbol indicates its poetic importance to him. The image of the drowned man is a key figure and the thematic implication of the symbol, the hope of transcending the bleak realities of the modern world, reverberates throughout Eliot's poetry.

In the early poems, Eliot seemed uncertain about the possibility of transcendence. He explores this theme with Prufrock. Prufrock's "indecisions and revisions" make him unsure about the hope of transcendence, and at the final moment when he seems to have attained it, it is interrupted by the coarse voices of human reality. Prufrock "drowns" into reality because is too overwhelming for him to escape by imagination alone. Instead, the shallow realities and trivialities of modern life have a stranglehold on him, which he cannot escape. This inability to escape may be because of Prufrock's own indecision. He agonizes over "the overwhelming question," but is just as indecisive.
about parting his hair or eating a peach. Prufrock is unable to take the action of deciding to escape or transcend his surroundings. In Prufrock, the transcendent power of the imagination is limited, and therefore unsatisfactory. This results in a temporary escape from reality rather than a fully transcendent experience. Imaginative escapism provides only a momentary relief from the suffering of modern life. When the brief imaginative experience is interrupted, Prufrock "drowns" back into reality at the end of the poem.

In The Waste Land, the image of drowning is more complex. Because of the highly ambiguous nature of the symbol in The Waste Land, Eliot himself may have still been struggling with the hope of a transcendent reality. In The Waste Land, as in Prufrock, Eliot presents a bleak, despairing picture of the modern world. In the landscape of The Waste Land, man is at the mercy of his burning passions and lusts. In a world in which even the most intimate human acts are reduced to a mere mechanical, indifferent meeting, Eliot dares to hope for some type of transcendent reality. Eliot seems to realize in The Waste Land that without this hope, mankind is doomed to futility. The death-in-life images that occur throughout the poem indicate man's hopelessness. We are mere automatons, with a pathetic lack of feeling for our fellow human beings, or our plight as a race.

After revealing the moral decay of society and the individual, and after portraying a series of pathetic and coarse relationships between men and women, we at last arrive at Phlebas, the drowned Phoenician sailor. His appearance is sudden, but is nevertheless a relief, and somehow even makes the desert scene of Part V more bearable. This is
not just because the Phlebas section involves water, and thus provides a relief from the burning of "The Fire Sermon," but because the section offers a hope of transcendence. Phlebas forgets "the profit and the loss," and becomes disassociated from the world that he once knew. He is annihilated in the whirlpool, but because of the hope of rain in "What the Thunder said," appears to serve a regenerative function as well. In a world where there was only despair in the desert, Phlebas allows us to "die to the world," and to be renewed and refreshed by hope and possibility.

Such transcendence through death or suffering occurs elsewhere in *The Waste Land* as well. Philomel, "so rudely forc'd," experiences a transformation into a nightingale, and is granted the beauty of song. She leaves behind her previous identity as a young woman, and becomes a bird with a beautiful song. Tiresias is also a figure of transformation. He has "foresuffered all/ Enacted on this same divan or bed" and after being blinded by Jove, is nevertheless granted the gift of prophecy - itself a type of transcendent communion with the gods. The prophetic voice in the desert is one further demonstration of Eliot's use of suffering as a way of transcendence. Eliot at least indicates that we must be fully exposed to the harsh and cruel realities of life in the modern world, and acknowledge them, before we can hope to possibly escape or transcend them. In other words, we must know and be aware of the moral wrongs and ills of modern life, before we can acknowledge the hopelessness of society. When we finally do understand the futility of modern life, we then must realize that on our own powers, we cannot
overcome such burdensome realities. It is only through the hope of transcendence, by some type of power or will beyond ourselves, that the futility and hopelessness of modern life can be overcome.

A related aspect of the symbol of drowning as developed in The Waste Land is the sense of the "dissolution of self." This is particularly evident in the early fragments related to the composition of the poem, where Eliot seems nearly obsessed with the physical decomposition of the body. Such images can be interpreted as representing the moral decay of modern life, or they may indicate a type of dissolving of the self into some greater force - literally, the ocean, or figuratively, perhaps God or simply hope. Just as the hope of transcendence comes from some type of force outside the self, so to realize this transcendence, we must "die to self." This "self-dissolution" would be the next natural step in the process of transcendence. After acknowledging the bleakness of modern life, and our inability on our own power to overcome it, we must act upon that realization. Since we are unable to overcome the futility of modern life, we must, in effect, "give up" ourselves to some greater, transcendent force. Although this force may be the Sanskrit "shantih" or the Christian God, it is as yet unidentified in The Waste Land. This is probably because Eliot himself was uncertain about the existence of such a transcendent force, and about its identity. Nevertheless, in The Waste Land he dares to hope for transcendence, for without the hope of transcendence, there is only despair.

One related image of transcendence used by Eliot in the context of drowning is that of the sea-change. This would involve a positive
transformation, into something "rich and strange" rather than a simple, literal decay of a body. This transformation could be the result of the transcendent experience. After being led from an attitude of despair to one of hope, surely there would be some type of change in the "inner man." In addition, changes in attitudes and practices in other areas of life, such as goals and lifestyle, could also be expected. This hope of positive transformation is also evident in several passages in *The Waste Land*, like Philomel. Philomel herself undergoes a transformation, which in turn represents a hope of transcending the bleakness and suffering inherent in the reality of the modern world.

In the early poems, Eliot seems uncertain and ambiguous about the possibility of transcendence. He appears to hope that there is some type of transcendent reality by which we can escape or overcome the depressing futility of modern life, but he cannot say with certainty or confidence that such a transcendence exists or is possible. However, with his conversion in 1927, transcendence, particularly in the Christian context, becomes increasingly central to his work.

In "Journey of the Magi," for example, Eliot indicates the spiritual paradox of birth and death. The birth of the Christ child feels like death to the magi. In a spiritual sense, they have died to the world, for they feel uncomfortable in their own kingdoms, where people follow after alien gods. This is exactly how Christians are to feel in the world, after they have been "born anew," for their homeland is no longer on earth, but in heaven. The poem ends with the magi longing for another death, a physical death, which will set their souls free.
Transcendence is explored in a number of ways by Eliot in *Four Quartets*. The images gain more religious significance than those occurring in his early works, since by this time Eliot had been a Christian for over ten years. In *Burnt Norton*, Eliot seeks to transcend time, and does so, even in the first movement, taking us "Down the passage which we did not take." This is a journey in memory to the past that "might-have-been." The experience of transcendence is a moment out of time, which enables us to be fully conscious, for "To be conscious is not to be in time." Time, with all of the other distractions of modern life, hinders the experience of transcendence.

In *East Coker* (III), Eliot presents a moment of self-surrender to God. This is analogous to the earlier image of "self-dissolution." Here, the narrator waits for God: "I said to my soul, be still, and let the dark come upon you/ Which shall be the darkness of God." These lines read much like the Biblical account of the creation, where "darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters" (Gen. 1:2 NIV). A more striking comparison can be drawn between these lines and the account of the Annunciation. Gabriel explains: "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you" (Luke 1:35 NIV). This allusion is especially important, since the Annunciation occurs later in *The Dry Salvages*. In addition, this represents a type of self-surrender to God; Mary's reply of "So be it according to your will" indicates a surrendering of her will and desires to God and His plan. Eliot's search for a
transcendent, almost ecstatic relationship with God is indicated in the final lines of the quartet, where he encourages us to seek a "deeper communion" with the divine.

The sea is reintroduced as a symbol of transcendence in The Dry Salvages. In this poem, the sea voyage becomes our uncertain voyage through life, with death a possibility at every moment. Here, the death at sea becomes explicitly transcendent. The bell that rings the "last annunciation," indicating the coming of death, is also the bell that rings the "Perpetual angelus," commemorating the Incarnation. It is faith in the Incarnation which makes man's transcendence possible. Because of Christ, we are enabled to overcome the burdens of everyday life. This involves a willing submission to God. Eliot explains that to comprehend "The point of intersection of the timeless/ With time, is an occupation for the saint," involving "a lifetime's death in love,/ Ardour and selflessness and self-surrender." Again the image of loss of self occurs, indicating that to fully lose oneself in God is the ultimate form of transcendence.

Finally in Little Gidding Eliot explores prayer as a type of transcendence. In the first movement, he explains that through prayer, both time and place are transcended: "the intersection of the timeless moment/ Is England and nowhere. Never and always." Time and place cease to matter, for prayer enables man to commune with the divine. Transcendence through purgatorial fire and holy fire is indicated in the fourth movement. Here the two types of fire have the same result of purifying the soul. Purgatorial fire results in purification by suffering,
while holy fire "fills up" the believer and purifies him from within. In the final movement, the transcendent moment is also one of surrender, "Costing not less than everything."

Thus the idea of self-surrender is essential to Eliot's belief of transcendent experience. A necessary prelude to such an experience is despair, for it is only when we realize that we are incapable of overcoming the futility of modern life that we are willing to totally surrender ourselves to some type of transcendent force. These two ideas of despair and self-surrender are apparent throughout Eliot's work. Eliot develops and explores these themes, and the related theme of transcendence, by using imagery of the sea. In particular, the image of the drowned man was used by Eliot to explore the hope and the possibility of transcendence. By Eliot's use of images of despair and self-surrender to explore the theme of transcendence, Eliot encourages us to "die to self" so that we, too, may transcend the despair and futility of the world around us.
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