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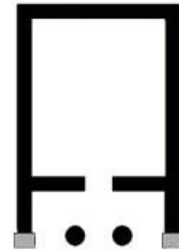
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Survival beyond Life and Death: The Buddhist Transcendence of Dichotomy in *The Waste Land*

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T.S. Eliot's interest in Buddhism can be traced back to his boyhood, when he was once obsessed with Edwin Arnold's *The Light of Asia*, a long poem about the life of the Buddha. Later, Eliot took up Indian Studies, including Indic Philology and lectures on Buddhism, from 1911 to 1914.¹ His knowledge of Buddhism, therefore, was significant, and this especially within the context of Indian thought. From his early poems up to *The Waste Land*, the concern over human suffering deepens, and a vision of the hollowness of human existence gradually comes into form.

The revelation of emptiness and the contemplation of possible salvation through intuitive understanding of emptiness shares considerable affinity with Buddhism. Kristian Smidt observes that in Eliot's poetry 'the Oriental view of spiritual discipline has been given great prominence and is juxtaposed with the Christian view of grace'.² The same can be said about *The Waste Land*. The spiritual experience in the poem cannot be wholly claimed by any single religion; however, the persistent scepticism makes the poem congenial with Buddhism. Eliot's use of the Buddhist Fire-Sermon in Section Three, itself called 'The Fire Sermon', reflects the significance of Buddhism for the understanding of the poem.³ Furthermore, in his notes to the poem, Eliot also compares the Buddhist Fire-Sermon to the Sermon on the Mount, which shows that the application of Buddhist thought is to be taken seriously.

Existing scholarship on the Buddhist influence on Eliot, particularly *The Waste Land*, focuses more on the theme of suffering, rather than the nuance of Buddhist nirvana and its relationship with the universal phenomena of suffering. Scholars such as Smidt faithfully note the 'obvious references to Oriental religions and mysticism' in *The Waste Land*, and list some relevant ideas such as 'the annihilation of the individual' and metempsychosis connected to a kind of 'universal cycle', but how the ideas are integrated into the poetic expression of suffering and the quest for spiritual salvation is not sufficiently examined.⁴ Other major works of criticism that analyse the Buddhist element in Eliot include P.S. Sri's *T.S. Eliot, Vedanta and Buddhism*, Cleo McNelly Kearns's *T.S. Eliot and Indic Traditions*, and Paul Murray's *T.S. Eliot and Mysticism*. In general, these are here read as not paying

¹ See Manju Jain, *T.S. Eliot And American Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 254.

² Kristian Smidt, *Poetry and Belief in the Work of T.S. Eliot* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1961), p. 189.

³ See T.S. Eliot, 'The Waste Land', in *The Poems of T.S. Eliot, Vol 1*, ed. by Christopher Ricks and Jim McCue (London: Faber and Faber, 2015), pp. 62-6. Henceforth cited in-text as (WL, section.line number/s).

⁴ Smidt, pp. 182, 184-5.

enough attention to the relationship between the spiritual waste land and the Buddhist transcendence of dichotomic thinking. This paper, by comparing the exalted moments in the poem and the Buddhist idea of nirvana, or spiritual relief, explores the spiritual nature of the poet's quest for survival beyond the waste land of endless life and death. It can be interpreted as the unification of sensibility, which reconciles subjective intuition with objective reality. In them, the poet finds himself at one with 'the still point of the turning world', the experience of which is similar to Buddhist nirvana.⁵

The Waste Land can also be read as a spiritual investigation into the nature of human suffering. In the unadopted epigraph to *The Waste Land*, Mr Kurtz retraces his whole life in his mind as if he relives it again. However, 'that supreme moment of complete knowledge' only drives him to despair, as he cries out 'The horror! The horror!'.⁶ Eliot later reveals that it is exactly 'the dying words of Mr. Kurtz' that he originally intended to link to the poem;⁷ this seems to confirm Eliot's claim that *The Waste Land* is, first of all, 'simply a struggle'.⁸ Furthermore, the various facets of this struggle circle around some supreme moments that penetrate time and space, intensifying worldly suffering into ambivalent emptiness, such as the spiritual ecstasy in the hyacinth garden, the death of Phlebas, and the voice of the thunder. They penetrate time and space, and pure intellect seems to fail to categorise them into either nothingness or complete fullness. Besides, the supreme moments are also those that witness the unification of sensibility, which reconciles the dichotomy of the subjective and the objective, and sends the speaker's mind into the timeless mode of perception where the boundary between life and death dissolves. In those moments the speaker seems to experience the integration of personal sensibility and some form of universal existence. The experience can be compared with Buddhist nirvana. "Nirvana" originally means 'extinction', but it can also be extended to the cessation of the mental habit to see the world in different forms of dichotomy. As the Buddha said, on the plane of nirvana there is 'neither perception nor nonperception [...] no coming or going, no staying, no passing away'.⁹ It suggests the appeasement of the mind of discrimination and the consequential unification of sensibility. Thus, the supreme moments can be taken as the nirvanic moments, which leads the speaker to see through the endless circle of life and death, and intuitively perceives a state of being that survives when the circle is deemed empty, if not entirely illusory. With that insight, the poet tries to transcend the mind of discrimination and sees the world as a whole, all while trying to arrive at a new interpretation of existence, which sees life as an endless process of evolution.

As a whole, the first section, 'The Burial of the Dead', is primarily occupied with the lingering contemplation of death as an unfinished event in the circle of endless rebirth. Cleo McNelly Kearns argues that the beginning lines of 'The Burial of the Dead', which reveals the acts of stirring old roots and breeding new lives, echoes 'the metaphor of seed' in Indic

⁵ T.S. Eliot, 'Burnt Norton', in *The Poems of T.S. Eliot*, pp. 179-84, p. 183, II, ln. 16.

⁶ Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness* (London: Harper Collins, 2017), p. 90.

⁷ Ricks and McCue, 'Commentary', in *The Poems of T.S. Eliot*, pp. 349-1227, p. 591.

⁸ *ibid.*, p. 574.

⁹ *The Princeton Dictionary of Buddhism*, ed., R.E.J. Buswell, and D.S.J. Lopez (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2013), p. 1743.

traditions: '[it] indicates the way in which *samskaras*, or deep scars of experience of former lifetimes, can, if they still carry a certain charge of desire or attachment, become activated again in a present lifetime'.¹⁰ There is a sense of original sin in this process of breeding, for every new individual self 'grow[s] | Out of this stony rubbish' of the acts of craving in the past (WL, I.20). It seems that rebirth here means the beginning of a new round of desiring and the consequential suffering. In this sense, the dead never really die, and even the burial of the dead is unable to stop them from sprouting.

However, the spiritual experience in the hyacinth garden is a field where the speaker encounters a specific mode of existence beyond life and death. That is to say, the spiritual experience in the hyacinth garden transcends the endless circle of rebirths:

"You gave me hyacinth first a year ago;
"They called me the hyacinth girl."
—Yet when we came back, late, from the hyacinth garden,
Your arms full, and your hair wet, I could not
Speak, and my eyes failed, I was neither
Living nor dead, and I knew nothing,
Looking into the heart of light, the silence (WL, I.35-41).

Eliot describes such supreme moments in the following manner: 'what happens is something *negative* [...]. The accompanying feeling is less like what we know as positive pleasure, than a sudden relief from an intolerable burden'.¹¹ It can be argued that, in *The Waste Land*, the intolerable burden is the endless repetition of life and death, and that which survives such nightmare survives the repetition. In other words, to survive is not to be born, or incarnated, and thus not to die. Buddhism also describes nirvana as a manner of being beyond life and death. As a Buddhist master Nagarjuna says, in nirvana, '[there] is no origination, there is no destruction'.¹² The quest for a kind of existence beyond the endless circles of life and death probably derives from what Paul Murray describes as 'Eliot's almost obsessional horror of the transient world [...] which brings him close to the "negative" spirituality of Buddhism'.¹³

In analysing the similarities of spiritual negation in these supreme moments, Buddhist scholar D.T. Suzuki contends that '[what] appears to be a mere negation from the logical point of view is really the is-ness of things'.¹⁴ And the is-ness refers to the protagonist's natural and uncategorised state of being. In this sense, the moment of spiritual negation in

¹⁰ Cleo McNelly Kearns, *T.S. Eliot and Indic Traditions* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1987), p. 201.

¹¹ T. S. Eliot, 'The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism', in *The Complete Prose of T.S. Eliot: The Critical Edition, Volume 3*, ed. by Jason Harding and Ronald Schuchard (Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press, 2016), p. 686.

¹² Chr. Lindtner, *Nagarjuniana: Studies in the Writings and Philosophy of Nagarjuna* (Copenhagen: Akademisk Forlag, 1982), p. 109.

¹³ Paul Murray, *T.S. Eliot and Mysticism* (London: The MacMillan Press, 1991), p. 128.

¹⁴ D.T. Suzuki, *Mysticism: Christian and Buddhist* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1957), p. 96.

the hyacinth garden can be regarded as affirmative, rather than nihilistic. It points to a state of the mind which is not occupied by dichotomic thoughts. It harbours the potential of some positive energy, as it is 'the heart of light'.

It can be argued that such a state of mind corresponds to the concept of "true self" in Buddhism.¹⁵ As Sallie Behn King observes, '[t]he word "self" stands for nothing but the [mind of] detachment'.¹⁶ The mind of detachment requires that the subject neglects nothing en route that comes to the mind, because it is not particularly troubled by any of them. And what the experience presents would be more than the egotistic self, for the mind is at this moment free from the attachment with any facet of life by accepting all of them at once. Rather than relying on the efforts of unifying multiple aspects of experience, to access the true self, one should let go of subjective endeavour of holding on anything to the mind, which means to empty the self in order to see its true nature, unstained.

The description of the hyacinth moment is likely to be a development from Eliot's early poem 'Silence', which may prove helpful in illuminating the poet's line of thought. The second half is as follows:

This is the ultimate hour
 When life is justified.
 The seas of experience
 That were so broad and deep,
 So immediate and steep,
 Are suddenly still.
 You may say what you will,
 At such peace I am terrified.
 There is nothing else beside.¹⁷

The broad sea can be linked to the sea in '[o]ed' und leer das Meer' (meaning 'Empty and waste the sea'), and '[t]he sea [that] was calm' in the Damyata session of 'What the Thunder Said' (WL, I.42; V.420). The poet asserts that it is the moment when 'life is justified', but he also acknowledges the terrifying effect of such peace (there may be a link between such peace and 'shantih'), and this likely because of the feeling of nothingness. One can see that, in 'Silence', the poet's focus is more on how such peace altered the conscious feeling of common things. He maintains an eye on the world outside of himself, revealing how the true self connects the personal with the impersonal. There is no fundamental conflict between the two. McNelly Kearns points out the Buddhist assertion that phenomenal existence is not cut off from nirvana, for it means 'to restore to the here and now its full

¹⁵ See Sallie Behn King, 'The Buddha Nature: True Self as Action', *Religious Studies*, 20, (1984), 255-67, p. 255.

¹⁶ *ibid.*, p. 262.

¹⁷ T.S. Eliot, 'Silence', in *The Poems of T.S. Eliot*, p. 243, lns. 8-16.

dimension of importance'.¹⁸ In the poems, the supreme moments are deeply related to individual experience outside the moments, and the poet explores the universal phenomenon of becoming in relation to individual existence.

Furthermore, the true self manifests itself in the individual's natural state of being, when the individual is conscious of things that come to the mind, but is not attached to any of them. Nagarjuna compares the true self to a mirror: 'dependent on a mirror the outline of a face [...] appears though it has not moved into it', and the outline 'does not exist without [the mirror]'.¹⁹ The significance of such a comparison is that when things appear in front of the true self, it naturally reflects them, without egotistic desire to hold on to them. And when they are gone, the mind at the same time restores itself back to its original tranquillity. It does not discriminate and it sees the world as a whole by emptying the mind. In this sense, what seems a negative act becomes a positive one. Therefore, returning to the poem, the meaning of 'I knew nothing' could be "I knew nothingness itself", rather than "there was no one thing that I knew", though they are two sides of the same coin. They reflect each of the two spheres of life, one in the immediate united experience of the true self and the other in the consciousness in chronological time. At that moment, the conscious self is thrown into a realm where it cannot tell whether it is living or dead, for it loses the time-space frame of reference in the common sense, as if the awareness of the difference between the self and the world is suspended, and there emerges a sense of wholeness that encompasses any pair of extremes.

On this, Suzuki holds that the feeling of nothingness reveals 'a state of absolute [...] Emptiness which is absolute fullness'.²⁰ He highlights the identification of the two sides, and even the significance it shows in breaking through human intellect in the sphere of consciousness: 'It starts from the absolute present which is pure experience, an experience in which there is yet no differentiation of subject and object'.²¹ This explanation coincides with Eliot's idea of the unification of sensibility. In this sense, it is not really a complete void, but, on the contrary, represents the protagonist's natural state of being as one which is not changed with the flow of time.

The above discussion of emptiness may remind the reader of Eliot's 'The Hollow Men'. However, the hollowness of 'the stuffed men', their heads filled with straw, is not the emptiness of the true self ('The Hollow Men', 2).²² Since the hollow men are the stuffed men, they are not genuinely empty, and this can be read from the angle of either Christianity or Buddhism. On the one hand, as one of the epigraphs of 'Sweeney Agonistes' shows—which is from St John of the Cross—'the soul cannot be possessed on the divine union, until it has divested itself of the craving for all created beings'.²³ On the other hand, it matches the central Buddhist principle of non-attachment or disinterestedness. The Christian reading stresses the element of a divine Other, while the Buddhist teaches that emptiness is itself

¹⁸ McNelly Kearns, p. 109.

¹⁹ Lindtner, p. 203.

²⁰ Suzuki, p. 69.

²¹ *ibid.*

²² T.S. Eliot, 'The Hollow Men', in *The Poems of T.S. Eliot*, pp. 81-4, ln. 2.

²³ T.S. Eliot, 'Sweeney Agonistes', in *The Poems of T.S. Eliot*, pp. 105-17, p. 114.

divine, in the sense that it is the ultimate nature of all beings. It is full of possibilities and potentials but it is also where all embodiments of them ultimately return. In this sense, it is arguably the only thing that survives the crushing wheel of life and death.

However, although the ultimate reality of the true self is beyond life and death, the mortal beings in 'The Waste Land' are not. In the first section, the famous opening lines 'April is the cruellest month, breeding | Lilacs out of the dead land' begin the poem's general contemplation of death as an unfinished event in the circle of endless rebirth (*WL*, I.1-2). In the following stanza, the poet lays bare the sterility beneath the flimsy happiness: 'what branches grow | Out of this stony rubbish?' (*WL*, I.19-20). The prophetic voice of 'I will show you fear in a handful of dust' hints at the ugliness of life, covered only by the forgetful snow of the gentle warmth of memory (*WL*, I.30). The problem here becomes clear: should we bury the ugliness and be content with the feeble but nevertheless comfortable joy on the surface of life? Or do we have to probe into what we really are before we can locate the real coordinates of our existence in the universal scheme of being? The major agony in the poem thus likely derives from the poet's confrontation with the abyss of the mind. Furthermore, it seems that the experience in the hyacinth garden is even deeper than the barrenness shown by the prophetic voice. Indeed, instead of 'the heart of darkness', Eliot chooses 'the heart of light' to match the experience. This to some degree clarifies the poet's attitude, that the experience is to be accepted as the access to some spiritual power, though it may appear incomprehensibly negative to common consciousness. The fear concerning the sprouting of the corpse in the garden reveals the use of such spiritual power, that is how to break the circle and transcend the endless reincarnation of human misery. To survive the spiritual waste land is, to use Smidt's words, to be 'freed from the eternal cycle' of life and death.²⁴ As such, the poem can be read as a quest for the spiritual holy grail that may help the quester survive the waste land of endless suffering of life and death, living and dying.

Compared with 'Burial of the Dead', the second section 'A Game of Chess' concentrates more on dramatising the chasm between personal condition and the universal pattern of existence. The husband seems to poignantly realise the Buddhist idea that life is full of desiring and suffering, but he stops there, as if misery is all that there is. We can feel the calm despair in his conversation with his wife: "'What is that noise?' | The wind under the door. | 'What is that noise now? What is the wind doing?'" | Nothing again nothing' (*WL*, II.117-120). At this point the spiritual quest in the poem tumbles into a dead end, for the poet presents a mind lost in the preoccupation of the ultimate nothingness of the material world. The nihilistic despair cancels the value of existence. The whole world is like a suffocating little chamber where people play the game of chess of desire, 'waiting for a knock upon the door' (*WL*, II.138). The background voice 'HURRY UP PLEASE ITS TIME', on the other hand, seems to advocate action from the players themselves (*WL*, II.139). The horror of the futureless-ness of the game is wrapped up by the dual voices of the London woman's 'goonight' and Ophelia's 'good night' (*WL*, II.171-2). It seems that after the woman is gone, Ophelia's voice still rings in the empty space, and is to reincarnate in some other woman the next day. Ricks and McCue's notes argue that '[though] not her

²⁴ Smidt, p. 145.

very last lines, Ophelia's farewell anticipates her death'.²⁵ It is not sure whether this 'good night' suggests ultimate annihilation or the recurrence of the nightmare of rebirth. This is probably the moment of crisis when one either breaks through spiritual death into a new life, or falls back to the previous suffering.

The situation only gets worse in 'The Fire Sermon', as Tiresias's experience renders personal pain universal. Similar to the husband, Tiresias seems to occupy himself with only the timeless vision of the misery in time throughout history: 'I Tiresias, old man with wrinkled dug | Perceived the scene, and foretold the rest' (WL, III.228-229). In his visions, life is painful and death is not the end of suffering. The sarcastic statement that 'I can connect | Nothing with nothing' reveals the bitterness of absolute demotivation (WL, 301-302). If mortal life is already nothing in relation to the timeless, and the timeless also appears nothing for the common beings in time, then the desperate question re-emerges: 'What shall we ever do' if whatever we do is bound to be reduced to nothing, both the good and the evil? Georg Sigmund, in his comments on *Bhagavad Gita*, a Vedantic text that Eliot was familiar with, points out the tendency of nihilistic isolation among some Eastern sages: 'The denial of the reality of the human world community has been pushed to extremes here while the fundamental appreciation of good and evil has been suspended.'²⁶ However, in 'The Fire Sermon', Tiresias experiences intimately the cruel reality of the human world with a timeless vision. According to the notes provided by Eliot himself, Tiresias is the central figure that unites all the other personae. Although what he sees are figures devastated by the fire of desire, Tiresias gains the necessary knowledge about human existence in the at once eternal and universal present. He sees, as if he experiences it, the burning pain of the life of endless craving, which corresponds to the main idea of the Buddhist 'Fire-Sermon'. What comes out of this intuitive knowledge of life is the Buddha's conclusion in 'The Fire-Sermon' that '[all] things [...] are on fire', a possible reference to the Buddha's particular comments on consciousness and sensations that are hooked up by desire.²⁷ As McNelly Kearns argues, Tiresias's visionary consciousness is itself enlightening because '[only] when hollow experience becomes deep enough to provoke this recognition of [...] the "non-ego" of all entities does its pain become a form of purification'.²⁸ Iqbal Singh explains it aptly in *Gautama Buddha*: 'Here we are in a universe which is devoid of tension—not because contrarities and conflicts have ceased to operate, but because they have somehow become intelligible'.²⁹ This kind of knowledge, its intuitiveness being suggested through Tiresias's visions, is similar to F.H. Bradley's idea of the immediate experience: 'the general condition before distinctions and relations have been developed, and where as yet neither any subject nor object exists'.³⁰ The experience itself is beyond any form of dichotomy, including that of life and death. Besides, the realisation that craving and attachment with

²⁵ Ricks and McCue, 'Commentary', p. 640.

²⁶ Georg Sigmund, *Buddhism and Christianity: A Preface to Dialogue*, trans. by Mary Frances McCarthy (Tuscaloosa, AL: The University of Alabama Press, 1980), p. 141.

²⁷ As quoted in Ricks and McCue, p. 640.

²⁸ McNelly Kearns, p. 208.

²⁹ As quoted in Christmas Humphreys, *Buddhism* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1951), p. 215.

³⁰ T.S. Eliot, 'Knowledge and Experience', in *The Complete Prose of T. S. Eliot: The Critical Edition, Volume I*, ed. by Jewel Spears Brooker and Ronald Schuchard (Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press, 2014), p. 243.

material fulfilment are a form of burning may lead the individual towards what does not burn, which is also what survives.

Section Four, 'Death by Water', seems to propose a paradox: that the only solution is not to find any. This section seems to confirm what Eliot says: 'to look to *death* for what life cannot give'.³¹ If to live is to burn, the struggle of life would never succeed in helping it escape itself. A certain form of death is necessary to inspect the struggle from an outsider's view, and thus to enable the sufferer to wholeheartedly accept life as it is. At the moment of death, Phlebas 'passed stages of his age and youth' (*WL*, IV.317). If it is compared with Kurtz's death in *Heart of Darkness*, it indicates a similar supreme moment when he '[lives] his life again in every detail of desire, temptation, and surrender'.³² The major difference is that, in 'Death by Water', the dominant feeling is relief rather than horror. Death puts an end to the restlessness of life, and death itself is also transcended by the whirlpool of eternal changes, which penetrates the dichotomy of life and death:

A current under sea

Picked his bones in whispers. As he rose and fell

He passed the stages of his age and youth

Entering the whirlpool (*WL*, IV.315-318).

The sense of relief is the outcome of surrendering subjective endeavour to escape the fate of death. It seems that spiritual survival is possible only after some form of self-surrender. Furthermore, the acceptance is less intellectual assent than a kind of naturally emerging state of mind. It is when the ego loosens its grip on any object of attachment, including the obstinate struggle to get away from the pain of life's burning. The eternal current of changes symbolised by the whirlpool gives birth to life but also destructs it. The world is in fact always changing and nothing is isolated. Life and death are different aspects of the same universal mode of existence. As Nagarjuna writes, the "annihilation" of something created "is an illusion".³³ Although nothing created can last forever, nothing can be completely wiped away without leaving any trace. Rather, they are transformed into some other way of being.

As the hyacinth moment comes before 'A Game of Chess', Phlebas's dying experience comes before 'What the Thunder Said'. There is still 'no water but only rock', and the chapel is empty; unlike the desolation in 'The Fire Sermon', however, here the speaker clearly feels a certain presence, where '[t]here is always another one walking beside you' (*WL*, V.362). The presence seems omniscient, not as something from outside, but intuitively perceived. It is not to be sought as an individual existence with a certain form, but has something universal in it. One must keep in mind that the supreme moments in the poem are first of all personal. It is only through the personal that the individual can dive into the universal and acquires a kind of existence not limited to the personal. This may shed light on the paradox

³¹ Ricks and McCue, 'Commentary', p. 576.

³² *ibid.*, p. 323.

³³ Nagarjuna, p. 105.

in Eliot's poetics of impersonality, that 'only those who have personality and emotions know what it means to want to escape from these things'.³⁴ In a similar sense, one may say that only those who know that general condition of human suffering between life and death can understand what it means to endure and survive the suffering.

In 'What the Thunder Said', the three Sanskrit admonishments intensively tackle this relationship between the egotistic self and the universal true self. For the Sanskrit word 'Datta', meaning to give, the poet's first response is not to provide a declarative interpretation, but to ask a question that seems to express doubt about its real meaning. The question is 'what have we given?' (WL, V.401). One may take it for granted that self-surrender to a higher spiritual force is a giving away the self, the same as the quest for the Grail which for some readers naturally presupposes a Grail; in fact, however, there is nothing to give nor to seek. What the supreme moment reveals is the intuitive realisation of the oneness of the universal existence and the personal, which always remains unchanged despite the flow of time. To give is more a gesture indicating the intuitive realisation than the actual abandonment of a part in the totality of the personal experience. The next line, however, is more baffling: 'My friend, blood shaking my heart' (WL, V.402). The identity of the friend is not offered. Although it probably refers to the reader, it could also be one who is related to the cause of 'blood shaking my heart'. It is interesting that Eliot particularly provided a French translation of the word 'friend' to a translator of *The Waste Land*. He used the feminine "amie" instead of the masculine "ami", a strong indication that the friend could be a female whom the poet might have been drawn to.³⁵ Lyndall Gordon insists that Emily Hale is Eliot's prototypal Beatrice that occupies a persistent and essential place in his poetry, especially in those pure spiritual moments such as that in the hyacinth garden: 'the higher dream [is] associated with Emily Hale'.³⁶ This is a hypothesis which directly links the supreme moments in Eliot's poetry to romantic love, and suggests that in those intense moments, an object of love is inescapably in the background.

The phrase 'blood shaking my heart' also shows the irrational, or even mystical, element that may become overwhelming, and an object of love could be that which induces and directs irrational emotion. Behind this surge of the irrational emotion—now the poet ruminates and makes a rare positive judgment—is '[the] awful daring of a moment's surrender | Which an age of prudence can never retract | By this, and this only, we have existed' (WL, V.403-5). Eliot links the moment's surrender to the absolute reality, and seems to claim that the absolute reality determines the existence of temporary beings. The poet goes on to limit its definition: 'Which is not to be found in our obituaries | Or in memories draped by the beneficent spider | Or under seals broken by the lean solicitor' (WL, V.406-8). In other words, the absolute reality does not lie solely in death that calls an end to the time of life from a place outside the time of life. Besides, any form of artificiality can get the individual nowhere near it, for we contrive, suffer, and struggle all 'in our empty rooms'

³⁴ T.S. Eliot, 'Tradition and the Individual Talent', *The Complete Prose of T. S. Eliot: The Critical Edition, Volume 2*, ed. by Anthony Cuda and Ronald Schuchard (Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press, 2014), p. 111.

³⁵ See Ricks and McCue, p. 700.

³⁶ Lyndall Gordon, *T.S. Eliot: An Imperfect Life* (New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company, 1998), p. 242.

which are our common state of individual existence (WL, V.409). In conclusion, the spiritual surrender seems to send the speaker's mind into a new realm of sensibility, which the intellectual habit of categorisation and differentiation cannot access. As the three Sanskrit words all derive from 'DA', which represents a universal voice, the three corresponding interpretations are also inherently related. The metaphor of the empty room is further elaborated in the 'Dayadhvam' section, which also further confirms the element of love in the form of compassion: 'I have heard the key | Turn in the door once and turn once only' echoes '[t]he awful daring of a moment's surrender', both of which are very rare spiritual penetrations (WL, V.411-412; V.403). 'Thinking of the key, each confirms a prison' shows how latent contemplation cannot open the door of immediate experience; on the contrary, it locks the conscious self in its own futile striving in search of the key. This can be seen as a conclusion of the spiritual journey before the final enlightenment, which does not lie in a definite intellectual destination, but rather in the intuitive grasp of the nature of the journey itself. This is why Suzuki emphasizes the idea of suchness in Buddhism. We do not need to wait for Buddha-hood to come, because it never really leaves, the idea of which calls for a twist of the mind soaked in common sense. However, our instinctive craving for love seems too deeply rooted and powerful to be merely a cultural convention taken for granted. The act of giving has 'blood shaking [the] heart' as inner momentum, which is similar to the revival of 'a broken Coriolanus', who in the end breaks through public and political affairs and resorts to his personal feeling kindled by his love for his mother (WL, V.416). In this context, '[b]y this, and this only, we have existed' seems to point to the love experience which has the sweeping force that breaks through the individual prison of consciousness. It helps one bypass the differentiation of the subject and the object and feel the wholeness of our being. A. David Moody proposes that Eliot's interpretation is 'a final formulation of the primal love-experience, in the hyacinth garden'.³⁷ As in the 'Datta' session, the experience at the supreme moments is deeply involved with love. In the poem Eliot never directly speaks of love as distinguished from mere desire, but here he assigns universal compassion to 'Dayadhvam', which is close to Moody's 'primal love'. Such universal compassion, or 'great compassion', is highly praised in Buddhism, and refers to 'the wish to free all sentient beings from suffering'.³⁸ Siegmund argues that 'this absolute love [...] becomes credible to the person who has retreated into himself only when he experiences the appeal of fully selfless love'.³⁹ In this sense, personal feeling, when at its extreme, becomes universal. And compassion is the perfect means to push the personal to its frontier. Therefore, the idea of sympathy in this context means the power to amalgamate the personal and the universal, and thus to see the universal through the personal.

In the light of the above discussion, the third admonishment, 'Damyata' ("to control"), is not simply about self-control in the sense of morality. The notes provided by Ricks and McCue suggest a link to Eliot's early observation of the relationship between the body and the soul, reflecting on Aristotle's theory of the soul: '[it] holds only in that the sailor directs

³⁷ A. David Moody, *Thomas Stearns Eliot: Poet* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), p. 102.

³⁸ *The Princeton Dictionary of Buddhism*, p. 1467.

³⁹ Siegmund, p. 151.

the ship as the mind directs the body'.⁴⁰ We can see that Eliot seems to find it wanting, for it touches rather the relationship between the ego and the body. It is noteworthy that in the poem, Eliot makes another comparison, that of the mind and some force greater than the mind: 'your heart would have responded | Gaily, when invited, beating obedient | To controlling hands' (WL, V.420-22). But the controlling hands bring the reader 'to the hand expert with sail and oar', which suggests that the heart is the boat, and the sea is the sea of experiences (WL, V.418-9). We may venture to say that the hand expert is analogous to the true self. Therefore, '[t]he boat responded | Gaily, to the hand expert' can be regarded as a vivid demonstration of the experience in the supreme moments. The puzzling use of 'would have' seems to point to the poet's realisation that the sea of experience has always been calm, and it is only the ego that is restlessly pestering itself. The struggle and suffering in most of the poem would not lead to spiritual relief, which naturally unfolds only after the mind stops the futility of seeking it; rather, the heart would have responded to the true self if the ego receded. The cooperation of the heart and the true self means the unification of sensibility, and Suzuki conclusively describes the experience in the following manner: 'The actor is the acting, and the acting is the actor'.⁴¹ The boat and the hand expert are one. And the cooperation of the heart and the true self means the unification of sensibility that connects individual life and the universal form of being.

Eliot comments on *The Waste Land* that '[it] certainly was not consciously a Christian poem', which suggests that the final revelation may not involve the descent of God's grace onto the sufferers.⁴² What is more, the three admonishments make no prophecy of an apocalypse or any event of salvation by divine intervention in the future. This spirit is more Buddhist than Christian, as it accepts 'things as they are', rather than existence limited within life and death.⁴³ In this sense, Datta ("to give"), Dayadhvam ("to sympathise"), and Damyata ("to control") can be interpreted as the self-surrender of one's self, compassion for all humanity, and religious self-control. In order to move beyond one point of view, the breaking through of immediate experience is unavoidable, and as a consequence, the reward for weakening the subjectivity of a single point of view is the intuitive understanding of another one. This idea echoes Eliot's poetics of impersonality. What is more, Eliot puts the self-willed depersonalisation into the context of a living tradition, and thus personal existence integrates into historical existence. In other words, one no longer exists as an isolated phenomenon, but as the continuation of the collective life of one's community.

At the end of the poem, the fragments of the ruins are still there, but the people who are bound to face them may finally have the necessary courage to face them, as facing the evacuation of the dead for final exhumation. 'Hieronymo's mad againe', but this time the madness is different (WL, V.431). Those who are still craving and struggling in the waste land are unaware that they are different generations of actors performing the same roles on the same stage. Hieronymo is the one who knows what is bound to happen and who lets it happen. The madness is the madness of non-self, incomprehensible to those who are still

⁴⁰ Ricks and McCue, 'Commentary', p. 704.

⁴¹ Suzuki, p. 40.

⁴² Ricks and McCue, 'Commentary' p. 579.

⁴³ Harold E. McCarthy, 'T.S. Eliot and Buddhism', *Philosophy East and West*, 2 (1952), 31-55, p. 47.

ignorant of their misery. It reflects the Buddhist enlightened mind which is not only the still point of the turning world, but is also inside the turning world as an integrated part of it.

The above three admonishments are all practical suggestions that concern moral choices in daily life. The starting point is rather on the personal feeling in the here and now. They begin from the personal in the realm of life and death, but reach out to the universal and timeless scheme of being regarded from an egoless perspective. As P.S. Sri observes, 'we are caught up in our regrets about the past or in our worries about the future that we are never quite conscious of the innocence and promise of the present'.⁴⁴ Perhaps it is in the here and now that the speaker may reconcile the subjective and the objective, and so as to be integrated into a mode of existence not limited to the personal. The poem struggles towards some ultimate response to human suffering in living and dying, which is concluded by the last word 'shantih', repeated thrice, meaning "[the] Peace which passeth understanding" (WL, V.433). It seems that, in the end, what we have is an attitude. But perhaps this means, as Eliot puts it at the end of his later poem *Four Quartets*, '[a] condition of complete simplicity | (Costing not less than everything)'.⁴⁵ It shows that the transcendence of life and death does not mean immortality, or the union with God in mystical experience. Immortality does not cease the endless suffering that goes along with life, which is exactly what Eliot warns us by introducing the fate of Sybil in the epigraph, who is forever ageing but can never die. Real transcendence, for Eliot, means to face the diverse fragments of human experience with one universal perspective, which is beyond any form of subjective judgment. In the poem, it is to set in order the jarring fragments of suffering according to Datta, Dayadhavam, and Damyata, and in the end even to fuse the three moral disciplines into one universal and tranquil voice: shantih. To use Harold McCarthy's description of Buddhist enlightenment, the survival beyond life and death is 'not freedom from time as such, but freedom from bondage to the temporality of time; not freedom from desire as such, but freedom from enslavement to blind and shifting desires'.⁴⁶ It shows that the quest for possible salvation should be deep enough to refer itself to the absolute and timeless reality, which transcends the any form of dichotomy. It points to a new frontier of being, at which one may see that the nature of life has not been changed, but one's attitude towards life changes. It involves the intuitive understanding of the transiency of worldly existence, the acquirement of which ushers in the state of non-attachment that renders one immune to the dichotomic thinking of life and death.

⁴⁴ P.S. Sri, *T. S. Eliot, Vedanta and Buddhism* (Vancouver, BC: University of British Columbia Press, 1985), p. 100.

⁴⁵ T.S. Eliot, 'Little Gidding', in *The Poems of T.S. Eliot*, pp. 201-9, V, lns. 40-1.

⁴⁶ McCarthy, p. 53.

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