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GRADE / DEGREE

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T.S. Eliot and Church Architecture
TITRE DE LA THÈSE / TITLE OF THESIS

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T.S. Eliot and Church Architecture

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Thesis submitted to the
Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the Ph.D degree in English Literature

Department of English
Faculty of Arts
University of Ottawa

Your file Votre référence
ISBN: 978-0-494-65556-6
Our file Notre référence
ISBN: 978-0-494-65556-6

This work is dedicated to
Dominic Manganiello
Guide, mentor and friend.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the members of my examining committee: Dr. Benjamin Lockerd from Grand Valley State University, and Dr. Donald Childs, Dr. Craig Gordon, and Dr. Keith Wilson from the University of Ottawa. They have all helped me enormously with my work and have been kind and receptive to my ideas.

I would also like to thank my supervisor, Dr. Dominic Manganiello, for his boundless energy, support, and kindness. I have been privileged to have his guidance.

I have been supported by numerous friends and family members, without whose good humour and generosity I would have foundered long ago. In particular I would like to mention Gaye Taylor, for making me an honourary member of the Taylor household; Michel Vachon, for cups of tea, glasses of port, and a listening ear; Charles Packer, for travel companionship, ideas, and enthusiasm; and especially Kevin Atkins, for faith, hope, and love.

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Abstract

T.S. Eliot's expressions of interest in church architecture are recurrent and persistent throughout his career, finding articulation in his personal letters; his pieces for the *Dial* and the *Criterion* which, taken together, form what might be called a campaign for the preservation of city churches; and in various representations in his poems and plays including *The Waste Land*, *The Rock*, *Murder in the Cathedral*, and "Little Gidding." The dissertation asks, firstly, why Eliot, prior to his conversion to Christianity in 1927, would be at all interested in church architecture. Secondly, the dissertation undertakes to trace important changes and developments in his thinking about ecclesiastical buildings over the course of his career.

The dissertation demonstrates that T.S. Eliot's engagement with church architecture parallels his broader ideas about the nature and role of art in society. He wrote in 1919 that ethics should not interrupt literary criticism, while in 1935 he wrote that literary criticism must be completed from an ethical, moral, or theological point of view. These two statements, widely divergent, reveal the trajectory of his thought about art prior to and following his conversion. The dissertation reveals that Eliot's investigation of church architecture can be seen as running exactly parallel to this trajectory and to the changes and developments in Eliot's intellectual and spiritual life.

Therefore, Eliot's representations of ecclesiastical architecture in his poems and plays are not simply interesting recurring images or symbols. Rather, they can be seen as forming an important part of his intellectual and philosophical journey. The dissertation closes by pointing out that it should come as no surprise that Eliot arrives, in his last major published poem which is in many ways a retrospective poem or book of memory, at the end of his exploring, only to find himself, once again, in a chapel and knows it for the first time.

Introduction
T.S. Eliot and Church Architecture

Details of architecture, if "architecture" is defined most simply and broadly as a structure or building, are everywhere in T.S. Eliot's poetry. Eliot uses vivid images of church edifices, gardens, houses, bridges, ships, pubs, staircases, windowsills, doorways, streets, walls to lend memorable visual clarity to his poems. These details are so prolific and various that they raise the question of whether this quintessentially urban poet incorporated features of his built surroundings into his work simply because they were useful as widely recognizable images and tropes, or whether architecture in fact held some magnetism for him: whether it was important to him and was therefore used by him to some other, symbolic end. This dissertation will not investigate all of the architectural images Eliot uses in his poetry – that task lies beyond the scope of this project. I intend to focus on a particularly significant aspect of Eliot's broad interest in the subject: church architecture.

The work of answering the question of what significance architecture held for Eliot has been begun in part by critics who view Eliot's recurring use of the details of landscape and setting as symbolically important in his poems. Several important critical studies to date have evaluated the importance of setting as a major source of inspiration for the poet's imagination and work. One of the earliest of these studies, and certainly still one of the best, is Helen Gardner's 1966 lecture, republished in *Critical Quarterly* in 1968, "The Landscapes of Eliot's Poetry," in which she writes that Eliot's landscapes manage to evoke an "exactness of feeling" that is somehow essential to an overall interpretive reading of the poems (316). This feeling or mood belongs in part to a history of landscape poetry in England, and perhaps, "our climate

with its rapid variations and its uncertainty ... makes our landscapes seem to be so exquisitely fitted to the variations of the heart" (313). Landscape poetry becomes, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, its own genre, and Gardner maintains that in the nineteenth century, landscape poems speak "pre-eminently" to the heart (313). The Victorians, she suggests, began to use Nature and landscape as an objective correlative for feelings of pleasure or pain (314), and the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century saw the urban scene incorporated into English landscape poetry. Out of this literary tradition, she says, come Eliot's settings, which she calls "landscapes of experience and of memory" (317). Gardner argues that familiarity with the details of Eliot's landscapes enhances the reader's understanding of the poems, and she feels strongly that "knowledge of a poet's country is an enrichment" (320).

Following from Gardner's lecture and from several essays written by Marshall McLuhan[1] analyzing the "landscape technique" in Eliot's poems is Nancy Duvall Hargrove's (1978) book-length and comprehensive study of Eliot's landscapes. She writes in her introduction that "Landscape as symbol is a basic element in all of Eliot's poetry" and "This pervasive use of landscape requires a reconsideration of Eliot's poetry and its sources" (7). She analyzes the complexity of the symbol as used by Eliot, and concludes that landscape in his poems "reflects with peculiar sensitivity both the outer and inner worlds" (11). Hargrove's book is valuable in its tracing of landscape imagery and sources throughout Eliot's poems, connecting the details of setting to Eliot's preoccupations with anthropology, philosophy, history, and religion.

[1] These essays are "Tennyson and Picturesque Poetry" (1951), "The Aesthetic Moment in Landscape Poetry" (1952), and "Introduction" to *Tennyson: Selected Poetry* (1956).

Perhaps with Hargrove and Gardner as guides, other scholarly readings of Eliot's specific settings have followed suit, notably John D. Boyd's (1998) excellent analysis of the landscape and seascape in "The Dry Salvages."

One specific setting that has captured the imagination of critics is the city, and a number of essays explore the symbolic significance of Eliot's city- and townscapes. Foremost among these is Robert Crawford's *The Savage and the City in the Work of T.S. Eliot* (1987) – important because it takes note of different cityscapes throughout Eliot's oeuvre. Crawford begins by noticing the many combinations of "apparent opposites in Eliot's work," among them "his linking of the most primitive and barbaric with the most sophisticatedly urban" (2). Crawford traces the patterns of connections Eliot makes between savage and city throughout his poetry, noting that Eliot's early ventures into contemporary anthropology and ethnology caused him to view the city, especially in his early poems, as a "city of the mind as well as a city of the external world" (45). As the poet's mind develops and changes, particularly after his conversion to Christianity in 1927, his social and religious thought were integrated into his exploration of the city, and "he sought to preserve the physical and spiritual bonds of his culture in the city of London" (192). Eliot focused on the city, Crawford argues, because it was in the urban centres that Eliot saw his civilization most "menaced by industrialization" and severed from its roots (201).

Other critical analyses of Eliot's city symbol tend to focus on London, usually the London depicted in *The Waste Land*. Notable are those by Robert A. Day (1965) and Marianne Thormählen (1978).[2] Day joins with Gardner in arguing that the

[2] These are obviously not the only analyses of Eliot's city in *The Waste Land*, but I have chosen to note them here because they are important in giving direction to the scholarly conversation. Day's essay is

London settings in *The Waste Land* are ones of reminiscence based on the poet's own experiences of living and working there. He writes, "I have not encountered a discussion of *The Waste Land* which makes much of these London references" but an exploration of the actual London described in the poem is important because "non-literary data – physical facts and things which Eliot had recently seen or heard ... must have gone into *The Waste Land*" (285). Therefore, Day rightly says, the London references should not be taken to be of merely passing interest: they are in actual fact "what Tiresias sees" (291) and therefore essential to a complete understanding of the poem. Thormählen, in a section in *The Waste Land: A Fragmentary Wholeness* (1978) reprinted in Michael North's Norton Critical Edition of *The Waste Land* (2001), continues this consideration of the importance of the cityscape, asserting that the city is "not merely a stage" but that it actively "[directs] the action" (North 237) of the poem, becoming, therefore, instrumental in guiding the reader through the layers of meaning and metaphor.

A discussion focusing on the city must inevitably address details of architecture to some extent, and therefore a few critics have undertaken studies of specific architectural images in Eliot's poems. In a remarkable and unusual study, Jesse T. Airaudi (1999) evaluates the "text of inherited architecture" in *The Waste Land* (8). Airaudi contrasts what he calls the "single-aim" society of modern consumerism and materialism with Eliot's "multiple-aim" society (sought through his social criticism)

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among the first to suggest that the experiential reality of the city is as important in the poem as are its metaphorical layers of meaning, and Thormählen's argument is significant in asserting that the city has an active role in the poem. Other excellent analyses of London in *The Waste Land* include Bernard Bergonzi's "Eliot's Cities" (1994), Jean Bessière's "Mémoire et temporalité de la ville" (2003), and Hee-Sung Kim's "Automatons in Modern Metropolis" (2004).

in which community and religion play a central role. He argues that the desolate architecture in *The Waste Land*, including St. Mary Woolnoth Church and the un-lit staircase observed by Tiresias in the violet light of the Unreal City, reflects the moral and spiritual emptiness of the single-aim modern metropolis. Eliot sees that historical memory is being killed in the city, Airaudi suggests, with the demolition of several city churches for profit, but he offers "rescue" or redemption through the architectural "text" (8) of St. Magnus Martyr Church and the grimy little lanes around Fish Street where community still seems possible (11). Airaudi's essay is of great interest because it asserts the presence of an "architectural text" in Eliot's poem; the architectural images in *The Waste Land* are not only important details of setting, but they tell a story that is essential to the poem's meaning.

Airaudi is not alone in suggesting that there is often an essential link between a poem's architectural images and the poet's ideas. Matthew J. Bolton's recent dissertation, *Transcending the Self in Robert Browning and T.S. Eliot* (2005), devotes a chapter to a contrast of Browning's "Childe Roland" with "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock", focusing on "psychogeography" (68): the connection between what one perceives and the (un)conscious mind in constructions of self though monologue. In a movement away from (though similar to) familiar analyses of Baudelaire and James Thomson's *The City of Dreadful Night* as precursors to the cityscape in *The Waste Land*,[3] Bolton revaluates the influence of Browning on Eliot's "Prufrock," arguing that "In Eliot's city, as in Roland's wasteland, one's self and one's surroundings are inextricably bound" (68).

[3] A number of scholars attest to the influence of James Thomson on Eliot's cityscapes. Steve Ellis, in his second chapter, makes a detailed analysis of this connection. He is joined by A. F. Beringause (1957), Elizabeth Schneider (1975), and Claire A. Culleton (1992).

Architecture interests critics not only in psycho-geographical terms within the poems themselves, but also as a creative technique or model. Steve Ellis (1991) offers an interesting reading that associates Eliot's classicism (in the *Quartets* specifically) with the goal of modernist architecture to "purify" buildings of unnecessary ornament and decoration. He suggests that "The idea of unitary forms being a means of instilling a measure of unity into a populace" (22), an ideal of Le Corbusier and Walter Gropius, is similar to Eliot's theory of classic language: "[setting] up a supposed 'common style' as the desired and authentic norm, hypothesizing linguistic individualism and plurality as abnormalities" (82). Ellis goes on to analyze Eliot's movement away from the metropolis toward the countryside and the rural community, emphasized in *Idea of a Christian Society* (1939), in the context of his "purifying" classicism. The connection Ellis makes between technique and design in modernist architecture and in *Four Quartets* is fascinating, but his argument does not take account of the fact that Eliot was probably highly suspicious of modernist architecture as a style of building. All of these readings specifically devoted to architecture reveal its importance and symbolic potential in Eliot's oeuvre, and consequently it seems that a more detailed study of this recurring image and of its relationship to Eliot's thought may be long overdue. On the other hand, these readings also indicate the complexities and difficulties inherent in such a study, as Eliot's textual representations of details of architecture are so prolific and so various that the ways in which these images can be understood seem inexhaustible.

The question, then, of what exactly the poet intends by his plentiful textual images of buildings and structures is still unanswered and perhaps even ultimately

unanswerable. That the details of architecture are interesting within the broad symbolic significance of landscape or setting within the poet's oeuvre seems, to the critics named above, largely acceptable, but how these details are to be grouped, read, or understood, or what conclusions can be drawn from them, is still unresolved. Perhaps the best way to approach the question is to narrow the focus. Studies of landscape or setting are too broad to do justice to the abundance of architectural images within the poems. In addition, the images of structures and buildings are so various, appearing in so many different guises, that it will be helpful to limit the focus still further and ask whether there is a particular style or type of building on which the poet's mind seems to dwell.

An answer to this question can be reached in part by looking closely at what Eliot has to say regarding architecture in his personal letters and in his writings for *The Dial* and the *Criterion* in the 1920s and 1930s. We know something of Eliot's general attitudes toward architecture because in these decades he wrote a number of pieces in which he responded to changes in London's architectural scene. A number of critics have noted these London Letters and Commentaries, but no one has yet drawn on them to discover more fully what Eliot's thoughts about architecture were and how his understanding of buildings, outlined in these reviews, might be translated into the architectural imagery of the poems. Perhaps this is because the London Letters and Commentaries have not been taken particularly seriously as aids to criticism. A. Walton Litz (1973), for example, calls them "at best peripheral, and at worst distracting" and argues that they do not belong to literary criticism (16). Ten years later Ronald Bush respectfully notes Litz's argument, but suggests that the

impressions noted in *The Dial* and *Criterion* are raw materials that shaped Eliot's "non-literary sensibility" and are therefore important for understanding the poet's mind (248). Dennis Ryan (1989) goes one step further and maintains that the London Letters and Commentaries are worth study because they are "packed with Eliot's ideological sentiments of the moment" (35). The critical consensus seems to be that the pieces in the reviews are interesting as demonstrations of Eliot's personal reactions, but they can only at best be viewed as biographical details not integral to the poet's creative decisions. Even Helen Gardner seems to follow this line of thinking in the conclusion of her 1966 lecture about Eliot's landscapes: "It may be simple and naïve and retrograde to want to visit the places he lived in, and to indulge in this kind of rambling biographical and geographical annotation. It has only slight relevance to critical evaluation" (329). I agree with Nancy Duvall Hargrove's response to Gardner's point: "On the contrary, it seems to me that this kind of knowledge has much to do with valid critical interpretation .... [L]ack of knowledge about the actual sources, as well as insufficient or incorrect knowledge, can distort or even reverse its symbolic import" (213). It helps to know what the poet thought about architecture in general and his own surroundings in particular because these sources, the reviews as well as his letters, aid in determining what kinds of buildings actually interested him, and what kinds of questions he raised about them.

Eliot's personal letters and his pieces written for *The Dial* and the *Criterion* reveal not only an acute sensitivity to the built environment in which he found himself, but an interest in and concern for ecclesiastical architecture in particular. The majority of his London Letters and Commentaries regarding architecture make up

what might be called a campaign for the preservation of City Churches. His personal letters also demonstrate a more than cursory interest in church buildings and in the architect widely known for London's City Churches: Sir Christopher Wren. Viewing Eliot's poetic oeuvre, it is noticeable that vivid images of ecclesiastical architecture recur in works as various as *The Waste Land*, *The Rock*, *Murder in the Cathedral*, and *Four Quartets*. Importantly, the interest in church architecture in his pieces in the reviews, his letters, and his poems and plays spans his pre- and post-conversion years. It is possible to conclude, therefore, that not just architecture in general, but church architecture in particular preoccupied T.S. Eliot enough to become a recurring trope in his poetry.

Further questions immediately arise. The most intriguing of these is why, before his conversion to Christianity and entrance into the Church of England in 1927, church architecture would be so interesting to Eliot. One thing that must be emphasized at the outset is that Eliot's early interest in ecclesiastical buildings is divorced from any religious sensibility. As a young man, Eliot rejected the Unitarianism of his family, finding it a highly conventionalized and emotionally bland approach to life. His studies of philosophy at Harvard taught him to look with suspicion upon any claims to an absolute way of knowing. Eliot focused in his dissertation on the philosophy of F.H. Bradley, who posited an Absolute that is the unity of experience: "Everything is experience, and also experience is one"; "There is but one Reality, and its being consists in experience. In this one whole all appearances come together" (qtd. in Brooker 196). Immediate experience is not subjective or known; the moment an experience is known it ceases to be immediate

experience and is merely an appearance. Eliot, struggling with Bradley's ideal, non-subjective Absolute, writes in his dissertation, "Everything, from one point of view, is subjective; and everything, from another point of view, is objective; and there is no *absolute* point of view from which a decision may be pronounced" (*KE* 21-2). Harriet Davidson sums up the problem that Eliot finds with Bradley's Absolute admirably when she says, "Immediate experience is foundational for knowledge, but insofar as this foundation can be said to exist, it is known, and thus is no longer immediate experience. Experience (the real) and knowledge (the ideal) ground each other at every point. Reality both escapes and determines our constructions, but without our constructions nothing could be said to exist" (62). Therefore, for Eliot there is no absolute point of view; there is only the "difference between points of view" and the value that a multiplicity of points of view gives to an experience (Childs, *Philosophy* 44; 73). The early philosophical Eliot was a skeptical relativist, probably an agnostic. It is interesting, therefore, that as early as 1921 Eliot was voicing a more than casual interest in church architecture.

This dissertation attempts to answer the question of why he should care about ecclesiastic buildings by investigating, firstly, whether it is possible to track important changes across the phases of Eliot's writing with regard to church architecture and, secondly and perhaps more importantly, whether there are any similarities, similar ideas or interests, appearing in different guises and with different emphases across the phases of his career in connection with religious buildings. The dissertation argues that such similarities do in fact exist, and that they are related to Eliot's ideas of tradition and community. Respecting church architecture, the concerns of the early

Eliot are a different version of those of the later Christian Eliot. The pre-1927 Eliot is interested in whether or not the religious tradition represented by church buildings has any relevance to modern life and whether it can be redefined and relocated as a kind of secular spirituality in secular surroundings, or whether the continued presence of ecclesiastical edifices in modern cities is merely ironic. Following his entrance into the Church of England in 1927, Eliot begins to investigate how religious buildings stand as reminders to society of a past and a religious spiritual tradition worth preserving; how these buildings symbolize a link not only between past and present but also between the temporal and the eternal.

In 1919, Eliot published his most famous articulation of his theory of tradition and the historical sense in "Tradition and the Individual Talent." In this seminal essay, still one of his most celebrated pieces of literary criticism, Eliot writes that tradition involves the

> historical sense ... and the historical sense involves a perception, not only of the pastness of the past, but of its presence; the historical sense compels a man to write not merely with his own generation in his bones, but with a feeling that the whole of the literature of Europe from Homer and within it the whole of the literature of his own country has a simultaneous existence and composes a simultaneous order. This historical sense, which is a sense of the timeless as well as of the temporal and of the timeless and of the temporal together, is what makes a writer traditional. And it is at the same time what makes a writer most acutely conscious of his place in time, of his own contemporaneity. (*SP* 38)

To unravel the sense of this passage, it is helpful to understand some of these ideas through the lens, albeit a simplified one, of some of Bradley's thought about the systematic nature of truth. For Bradley, the Absolute, or immediate experience, is a transcendent unity that includes all of the disparate parts of Experience within a whole. A whole implies parts; individual known experiences, or appearances, are the parts within the whole of immediate experience. Experience is all-inclusive, and everything that exists is a part within the system of the whole. Everything is therefore connected to everything else, becoming part of something bigger within the system of Reality. As Eliot puts it in his dissertation: "Facts are not merely found in the world and laid together like bricks, but every fact has in a sense its place prepared before it arrives, and without the implication of a system in which it belongs the fact is not a fact at all" (*KE* 60). In "Tradition and the Individual Talent," Eliot rearticulates this same idea, but about literature this time: "no poet, no artist of any art, has his complete meaning alone.... You cannot value him alone, you must set him, for contrast and comparison, among the dead" (*SP* 38).

In Bradley's philosophy, there is one unified whole that is Experience. Eliot is not able to accept that this absolute exists, but he does adopt Bradley's notion of the systematic nature of truth. For Eliot, there is not one absolute truth that can be reached; nevertheless, the widest and most organized system will verge most nearly on truth because all knowledge depends upon its own system (Longenbach 165-6). Thus the best poetry, says Eliot, will be that which has its roots in the widest system ("the whole of the literature of Europe from Homer"), rather than that of the isolated

poet striving for subjective originality. Eliot's system of tradition composes, then, an "ideal order," just as Bradley's system composes an ideal Absolute.

Eliot's "ideal order" of tradition has frequently been taken to mean a universal, imposed order that is fixed and immutable. In fact, however, Eliot's tradition is not an easy commerce between the past and the present. It involves novelty, a being in its own time, while at the same time conforming to and belonging to the past. In his study of Bradley, Eliot had written that knowledge is made up of different points of view, none of which is absolute. Eliot's historical sense asserts that the past cannot be separated from the present; as Davidson writes, "Knowledge of the past is mostly knowledge of the point of view from which we see the past, while knowledge of one's point of view is mostly knowledge of the past which determines this point of view" (81). The tradition, then, is not a fixed essence; rather it is a system of changing interpretations.

The old edifices that Eliot observed in London would have suggested themselves to him as sites where the past and present come together in interesting ways. Buildings, in fact, represent a tradition in Eliot's sense; if they are buildings from the past they remind passers-by of the time when they were built, and if they are new structures they represent the present moment which is, of course, defined by how a society views its past. Church buildings, in particular, are reminders of a kind of cultural mindset that he admired in Dante long before he converted to Christianity himself. Eliot admired Dante for his unified sensibility in which, he says, a thought and an experience were one because his philosophy represented a complete vision of life and way of being in the world (Childs, *Mystic* 50). The modern world has lost this

unity of thought and feeling and experiences instead what Eliot calls a "dissociation of sensibility" (*SP* 64) in which thought, experience, and feeling are separate rather than unified states of mind. Benjamin G. Lockerd argues convincingly that the source of the dissociation of sensibility was, for Eliot, the Cartesian split:

> Up until the seventeenth century, Western philosophy had generally maintained that the physical world was, in some sense, real and that the mind (which was also real) could know that world more or less well. ... The Cartesian doubt as to the very existence of the corporeal world inaugurated a period in which epistemology became the primary branch of philosophy, since the possibility of any common knowledge became questionable. ... The Cartesian split is the assumption that since matter and spirit are totally inimical, one must be real and the other unreal – winner takes all. (34)

For Eliot, this is heresy. He writes, "In the simple, lucid, and persuasive writings of Descartes the various elements are, so to speak, released from each other, so that you need only to press one aspect of his philosophy or another to produce the extremes of materialism and idealism, rationalism and blind faith" (qtd. in Lockerd 35). And these extremes of thought are emphatically not the organized system of multiple points of view that the Eliot of the 1916 dissertation champions. Moreover, with its emphasis on the self, the philosophy of Descartes creates a subjective solipsism, articulated in *The Waste Land* as "each in his own prison" (Lockerd 33). The self, isolated from spirit, is likewise isolated from other selves.

Church buildings, on the other hand, represented a world-view in which matter and spirit were not so clearly divided and the possibility for communion between

souls was possible: in which the emphasis was not on the individual mind but on community, not on the material world but on the meeting place between physical and spiritual. Eliot, especially prior to his conversion, did not believe that a return to this past was possible or even necessarily desirable. But his complaint regarding the dissociation of sensibility was that, as Donald J. Childs writes, "a defective sensibility is his inheritance by means of the restricted epistemological practice of the modern world" (*Mystic* 52). For Eliot, church buildings were reminders of a more unified mind-set, and they were valuable for offering this reminder to the present.

Church architecture may represent a more unified sensibility, such as that which Eliot found and admired in Dante, but it also stood as a physical reminder of the modern loss of such a sensibility. Ecclesiastical buildings could be seen as valuable bearers of a meaningful and coherent tradition in a dissociated and fragmented modern world, but they were also ironic markers of its demise (derelict, disused, sold off, and pulled down). In other words, they spoke to modern society as much of the present moment in which religion was dead as they did of the past when a religious spiritual dimension to life was more easily recognised. They represented the uneasy tension between old and new that was so much a part of Eliot's theory of tradition.

The dissertation argues that church architecture reflects the central idea of tradition that T.S. Eliot articulates in his most famous essay. Church architecture represents a meeting place between the past and the present in which the formation of the present is influenced by the past and the past is affected by the perceptions of the present moment. The old and the new are thereby held in dynamic balance. The past church architecture offers is one which Eliot valued and admired, but this past is no

longer part of the modern present. The buildings represent both the past and the movement away from the past in the present. These structures therefore have the potential to provoke many different interpretations of their meaning and significance. A building almost never leaves onlookers indifferent; they often feel compelled to react to it in some way. Some people can choose to ignore it, but most take the time to stop to look at it, enter it, walk around or through it, and may even decide, eventually, to tear it down or restore it. These varying responses indicate that human beings often exist in intimate relationships with their buildings.

Eliot's textual representations of ecclesiastical architecture always engaged, in one way or another, with questions about tradition. In his early writings about church buildings he asked whether the past they represented was still meaningful in the present, or whether it was obsolete. He investigated the kind of communities that the buildings once stood for, and asked whether any such community is viable for the present or whether it can be found, in a different form, in the modern world. Following his conversion to Anglicanism in 1927, his concerns for church architecture underwent a change: he started to value it as a symbol of sacredness. He viewed it as an important site of intersection between the human and the divine and as a potential symbol of spiritual change within individuals.

The thesis tracks Eliot's changing interpretations of church architecture, and identifies a common thread between his different points of view, not only by assessing important biographical information but also by examining his formal poetics. From the symbolists, much admired by Eliot when he was a young man at Harvard and in Paris, he learned to view the poem as an organic totality, one that can

become a kind of symbol of experience, whether it is the experience of the poet writing it or of the reader reading it. The thesis investigates how the different poems and plays mediate the reader's experience with respect to the images of architecture, asking how the poems predispose us as readers to interact with these images and how the poems enact or produce a kind of reality for us as we read them. It is possible to see, from the poems themselves, important changes in Eliot's attitude toward ecclesiastical structures.

Since so many of the images of church architecture in Eliot's poems are of buildings that he himself knew or admired, the thesis traces, when possible, the history of these buildings, telling the "story" of the structure leading up to the time when Eliot would have encountered it. It is helpful to know these stories, as they allow us (especially if we have not been able to see the buildings ourselves) to have detailed knowledge about the structures that Eliot chose, quite deliberately, to represent in his verse, and they help us to recapture something of the poet's own experience. Knowledge of the buildings' histories will grant us insight into why Eliot chose to represent particular structures at significant moments in his poems.

Given the fact that Eliot's interest in architecture began when he was very young, Chapter One explores the question of why certain kinds of structures, specifically church buildings, might have held a special fascination for him. The chapter surveys Eliot's various personal responses to architectural space and to church buildings, and it looks in some detail at the pieces Eliot wrote for the *Dial* and the *Criterion* campaigning for the preservation of the City churches. This body of evidence indicates that prior to his conversion Eliot's interest in churches was invested in ideas

of aesthetics, history, and tradition, and that after 1926 his valuation of churches underwent a distinct change. Eliot moved from viewing churches as aesthetically valuable carriers of an obsolete religious tradition to seeing the church building as an important physical symbol of spiritual ideas. The church was important because it constituted a sacred space, it represented ritual, and it symbolized community.

In Chapter Two I highlight the hitherto unexplored affinity between the work of Eliot and architectural historian W.R Lethaby. In 1923 Eliot wrote two letters to Lethaby, and in 1928 in the *Criterion* he named Lethaby "our greatest living authority on architecture." W.R. Lethaby was a member of the Arts and Crafts Movement, and he was heavily influenced by the work of the English anthropologists. Building on these anthropological foundations, Lethaby embarked upon his own study of the roots of architecture in primitive cultures, and he theorized that sacred architecture developed out of ritual. Lethaby claimed that a change was necessary in the creation of modern architecture: by understanding its ritual origins, modern architects would be able to see that meaningful structures are built with a real connection to a society's way of life as it is lived in the present. In short, the architect must look, Janus-like, in two directions. Given Eliot's expressions of admiration for Lethaby's work, and given the affinity between the ways they each formulated a theory of modern art with anthropological underpinnings, I speculate that his knowledge of Lethaby adds a significant layer of complexity to Eliot's responses to church architecture.

Chapter Three examines the two churches that figure prominently in *The Waste Land*, St. Mary Woolnoth and St. Magnus Martyr. I argue here that *The Waste Land* is a poem that creates the experience of asking questions without necessarily receiving,

or expecting to receive, answers. The representations of church buildings provoke questions about the meaning and relevance, if any, of church architecture in a modern city. The inhabitants of the waste land confer meaning or withhold it depending on the vantage from which they perceive the church building. The complex angles of vision from which churches in this poem, particularly St. Magnus Martyr, are seen suggest that the churches, with their traditional spiritual symbolism and their apparent irrelevance in the modern world, form part of the heap of fragments that the speaker decides to shore up at the end of the poem.

Chapter Four examines both the much-maligned pageant-play, *The Rock*, which Eliot wrote in 1934 for the Forty-Five Churches Fund, and certain relevant aspects of *Murder in the Cathedral*. These two plays demonstrate both continuity and development in Eliot's ideas about the role of church architecture following his conversion. The poet continues to ask questions about whether church buildings can provide spiritual nourishment to a modern society, but his focus is now on the church building as a symbol of sacred ritual and of community. Eliot cleverly employs ideas of ritual to give the audience the experience of collaboration in a communal enterprise that is centralized in the symbol of the church building.

The epilogue looks at the poet's last major published poem, *Four Quartets*, which ends, significantly, with a final representation of ecclesiastical architecture: the chapel at Little Gidding. I suggest that this chapel represents the culmination of Eliot's intellectual and spiritual journey that can be seen reflected in his various examinations of church buildings. The thesis concludes that all of Eliot's previous engagements with church architecture, both personal and poetic, are included and

transformed in the final quartet with the Christian poet's understanding of the sacred building as a place where "prayer has been valid."

Chapter One
"The least precious redeems some vulgar street": Eliot, Architecture, and Churches

The aim of this chapter is twofold. Firstly, it explores the ways in which T.S. Eliot was personally affected by and interested in the built surroundings in which he found himself. Architecture is a curious combination of the private and the public; it is built by humans for humans, and people exist in intimate relationship to the buildings in which they move, work, and dwell. Insights into Eliot's perceptions of architectural space are helpful, for they guide an understanding of why certain types of structures such as churches might have held special meaning for him. Secondly, the chapter goes on to investigate the ways that Eliot viewed church architecture in particular. His interest in church architecture is well known from his letters as well as from his campaign for the preservation of City Churches publicized in various pieces in the *Dial*[4] and the *Criterion*[5] in the 1920s. Therefore, it is worth examining the ways in which church architecture engaged and affected Eliot and how his interests and perspectives changed and developed following his conversion to Christianity.

It is possible to observe that Eliot's engagement with architecture, and specifically with church architecture, is implicitly similar to his engagement with all

[4] In 1921 and 1922 Eliot was the London correspondent to *The Dial* magazine published in New York by his Harvard friend Scofield Thayer. After he began editing his own periodical, *The Criterion*, in 1922, he did not have time to continue his London Letter series, though he occasionally still wrote articles for *The Dial*.

[5] Eliot launched *The Criterion* in 1922, and the magazine continued, fluctuating between being a monthly and a quarterly publication, until 1939. In the July 1923 issue, he explained the purpose of the magazine: "the *Criterion* aims at the examination of first principles in criticism, at the valuation of new, and the revaluation of old works of literature according to the principles, and the illustration of these principles in creative writing. It aims at the affirmation and development of tradition. It aims at the determination of the value of literature to other humane pursuits. It aims at the assertion of order and discipline in literary taste" (422).

art. We can see parallels between the way that Eliot discusses art and criticism before and after his conversion to Christianity and the way he talks about church architecture. We note that prior to 1926 Eliot was interested in ideas of "good art" in relation to the creation and articulation of an aesthetic tradition, but following his conversion he realized that his early perspective was incomplete. For the later Eliot, art in all cases needs to be regarded and completed from a moral point of view. For example, in 1919 Eliot writes in the *Athenaeum*, "Most critics have some creative interest – it may be, instead of an interest in any art, an interest (like Mr. Paul More's) in morals; but an interest in morals will not produce sound criticism of art. Consequently, we may say that the only valuable criticism is that of the workman" ("Local Flavour" 1333). Here Eliot is not only arguing for the exclusion of non-literary interests from literary criticism, but his choice of Paul More's interest in morals as an example of what he means by non-literary interests is surely not arbitrary, and we see that for Eliot at this time "good" and "bad" art is not related to morality, and the good literary critic will not confuse his aesthetic and his moral points of view. This argument can be contrasted sharply with Eliot's later essay, "Religion and Literature," written in 1935, in which he says, "Literary criticism should be completed by criticism from a definite ethical and theological standpoint. ... The 'greatness' of literature cannot be determined solely by literary standards" (*SP* 97). This is a remarkable change of perspective from the 1919 *Athenaeum* piece.

A good example of the development of Eliot's perspective regarding the value of art is the case of D.H. Lawrence. Some of Eliot's earliest published comments on Lawrence were written for *La Nouvelle Revue Française* in 1927, the year he joined

the Church of England. Despite the fact that this discussion of Lawrence falls after his conversion to Christianity, it is possible to associate Eliot's response with his earlier aesthetic concerns in relation to art. Eliot's reaction to Lawrence was always, as he said in "To Criticize the Critic" (1960), a wavering "between dislike, exasperation, boredom and admiration" (qtd. in Draper 20). In the 1927 piece, Eliot argues that Lawrence is an example of the loss of seriousness affecting the contemporary novelist. Nevertheless, Eliot praises Lawrence's "extraordinary gifts of sensibility" (qtd. in Draper 276). Eliot writes that

> Mr. Lawrence has a descriptive genius second to no writer living; he can reproduce for you not only the sound, the colour and form, the light and shade, the smell, but all the finer thrills of sensation. What is more, of *detached* and unrelated feelings, in themselves and so far as they go feelings of importance, he has often the most amazing insight. ... [T]he situation he describes is one which might occur to anybody, not necessarily a very complex or very highly cultivated person, but which has never been set forth with such accuracy or completeness before. It is revealed. (qtd. in Draper 276-7)

Eliot here demonstrates admiration for Lawrence as an artist. He continues, however, "when you read on, you feel that Mr. Lawrence has not grasped the meaning..." (qtd. in Draper 277). His reservations in this 1927 piece concern Lawrence's apparent failure to understand the wider meanings of an experience, rendered brilliantly by Lawrence in intensity, but lacking depth in reality. This critique of Lawrence stops short of morals. Eliot's praise of Lawrence is certainly an aesthetic appreciation of "good art," and his criticism about Lawrence missing the meaning of an experience is

likewise an aesthetic argument about the contemporary novelist's "limited sense of reality," which Eliot blames on contemporary psychology (Draper 276). In his comments on Lawrence in *After Strange Gods* (1933), Eliot's understanding of "good art" has undergone a significant change. Art is good not for its demonstration of technical prowess, but for the moral effect that it has on a reader. Eliot believes that Lawrence's heretical understanding of Good and Evil renders him "spiritually sick" (66), and the "extraordinary gifts of sensibility" that Eliot once praised in aesthetic terms are now precisely the gifts that Eliot fears will attract an audience that, undiscriminating, will be affected morally by Lawrence for the worse:

> I fear that Lawrence's work may appeal, not to those who are well and able to discriminate, but to the sick and debile and confused; and will appeal not to what remains of health in them, but to their sickness. ... The number of people in possession of any criteria for discriminating between good and evil is very small; the number of the half-alive hungry for any form of spiritual experience, or what offers itself as spiritual experience, high or low, good or bad, is considerable. (66-7)

His concern is that literature has the power not merely to influence, but to influence for the good or for the worse; its effect can be healthy or unhealthy. The point is one that Eliot repeats two years later in "Religion and Literature" that a book affects us, for good or ill, "whether we intend it to or not" (*SP* 101). Eliot's later perspective on art is, then, that it must be approached critically from a moral position to determine the effects, good or bad, that it will have on society.

I propose to demonstrate that Eliot's views on the significance of architecture, specifically church architecture, follow the trajectory of his views on art, and that his responses develop just as they do with regard to literary criticism. In other words, Eliot begins by asking questions about the value that a church building has aesthetically, but increasingly after his conversion he asks moral questions about the status of church architecture in the City. He concludes that church buildings, and societal responses to them, can be analyzed from an ethical and theological point of view to determine their meaning and their value.

Eliot, Cities, and Architecture

From the time of his early childhood, architecture would have had special meaning for Tom Eliot. His father, Henry Ware Eliot, worked for the Hydraulic-Press Brick Company in St. Louis, filling the positions of secretary and president over the course of his career. The Company innovated a dense brick formed under hydraulic pressure which was much heavier than the brick commonly in use at that time. One of the early projects of the Hydraulic-Press Brick Company in St. Louis was the construction of the Eads Bridge, well-known to the young Eliot as the place where his father would take him to observe the seasonal floods. It is possible that the Eliot family felt some kind of connection with the Eads Bridge, which was an important structure in St. Louis.[6]

The house where Eliot was born and raised at 2635 Locust Street was uniquely placed in architectural surroundings that would have recalled to young Eliot the far-

[6] The Eads Bridge was an iconic image of the city of St. Louis. Built as a response to the dwindling importance of the river trade, the bridge was completed in 1874 and was the longest arch bridge in the world.

reaching influence of his eminent grandfather, William Greenleaf Eliot, in St. Louis.[7] The house where Greenleaf Eliot had lived was just one half-block away from Eliot's childhood home. The property of the 2635 Locust Street house gave on to the adjacent Mary Institute for Girls that was founded by Greenleaf Eliot in 1858. A few blocks east was Tom Eliot's school, Smith Academy, which shared a building with Washington University, instituted by Greenleaf Eliot. Four blocks west was the Unitarian Church of the Messiah, which was also established by Tom's grandfather (Mabie 11). These buildings and structures most important to Tom Eliot when he was a child would thus have made architecture seem a curiously intimate part of his family history.

Growing up on Locust Street, Eliot was placed especially well to observe the architectural changes of St. Louis and the social transformations that accompanied them. The area where Eliot's family lived slowly and steadily became altered by the spread, growth, and development of factories and warehouses. The family's neighbours on Locust Street moved away from this industrial development, which brought with it the transformation of this part of the city into a slum. Eliot watched as the city of his childhood became unrecognizable.

City slums interested Eliot when he was a young man, and he took to slumming in Boston and Paris while a student in those cities. By the time Eliot entered Harvard in 1906, he had already rejected the Unitarianism of his family, finding it both spiritually and emotionally dead. He had not been taught by his parents about good

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[7] For the information on the Eliot family home, I am indebted to Josh Mabie who has kindly permitted me to refer for details to his unpublished paper, "Eliot's St. Louis." Mr. Mabie presented a shorter version of this paper at the T.S. Eliot Society Meeting in St. Louis in September, 2008. Mr. Mabie is a PhD Candidate at the University of Minnesota.

and evil, though he was painfully sensitive to the presence of evil in the world; instead, they spoke to him about what was "done" and "not done" (Gordon, *Early Years* 11). The Unitarians believed in a rational universe, a benevolent god, and the good effects of progress. Eliot found that this world-view promoted a conventional, bland, and even cold attitude to life. Rejecting Unitarianism, he was nonetheless introduced into Boston society by his uncle, Christopher Rhodes Eliot, who was a Unitarian minister. Boston society included a formidable branch of the Eliot family, which had flourished and become prominent in the doing of good works (Gordon, *Early Years* 17). Boston was a city of "rigid manners," self-consciousness, and materialism (Gordon, *Early Years* 18). The society he found there was, then, a version of one that he had already rejected, and it is unsurprising that he felt himself to be an outsider in Boston. Repelled by the Boston society he was introduced into, Eliot began to explore slum areas, trying to discover whether the people outside his own class were more emotionally alive. He determined that they were not, but though the slum areas both horrified and depressed him, he continued to seek them out, even after he had left Boston for Paris.

In 1908 Eliot read Arthur Symons's *The Symbolist Movement in Literature* and was instantly attracted to the work of the symbolists, particularly that of Jules Laforgue. He found that he had an affinity with the symbolists' horror of materialism, and he took to imitating the ironic voice of alienated self-defeatism that he found in Laforgue's verse. The symbolists attempted, through poetry, "to create a prolonged and heightened state of consciousness" (Pratt 20). Symons and the

symbolists conceived of art as a new kind of religion, one that would counteract the sordidness of materialism. Symons writes in the introduction to his book,

> Here, then, in this revolt against exteriority, against rhetoric, against a materialistic tradition; in this endeavour to disengage the ultimate essence, the soul, of whatever exists and can be realized by the consciousness; in this dutiful waiting upon every symbol by which the soul of things can be made visible; literature, bowed down by so many burdens, may at last attain liberty, and its authentic speech. In attaining this liberty, it accepts a heavier burden; for in speaking to us so intimately, so solemnly, as only religion had hitherto spoken to us, it becomes itself a kind of religion, with all the duties and responsibilities of the sacred ritual. (5)

Through the influence of the symbolists, Eliot became a student of his own perceptions and consciousness. While studying in Paris in 1910-1911, he was briefly converted to Bergsonism, and attended Bergson's lectures every week. Bergson taught Eliot about the primacy and fluidity of consciousness and intuition over the rigidity of time. Armed with sensitivity toward perception, intuition, and consciousness, Eliot was once again drawn to slums and began pacing the slums of Paris by night, "turning over his observations to find some clue to the meaning of life" (Gordon, *Imperfect Life* 58). What he found was vice, decay, and banality, the ingredients that were to become integral to the city in *The Waste Land*. Wandering the streets of Paris alone late at night, Eliot was to experience powerfully the sense of profound isolation that is strangely so much a part of city life. Boston and Paris were the first to teach Eliot that the city can be a remarkably lonely place.

It is not clear exactly what Eliot sought in his ventures into the slums of Boston and Paris. Lyndall Gordon does not make much of Eliot's experiences of the growing slums in St. Louis, indicating that Eliot's mother largely protected him from experiencing the grimness of the changing city.[8] However, Eliot would have been aware that the neighbourhood around him was shrinking as the upper-middle-class moved away from the area, and he would certainly have been conscious of his lack of playfellows, as there were, eventually, very few children of his own class left in the Locust Street neighbourhood. The Eliot family remained in that part of St. Louis for much longer because of the important ties that it held for the family, but eventually they too left. In Boston, Eliot sought the slums as a kind of potential antidote to the banal conventionality of life in the academic and social circles in which he found himself. He seems to have been interested in determining whether people in another walk of life were more "alive" than those of his own class – life in the slums might be vulgar, corrupt, and sordid, but Eliot was asking whether it held, at the very least, a liveliness missing in his own social sphere. The answer seems to have been no.

His slumming in Paris was not accompanied by any curiosity about whether or not life in the lower classes was any different. By the time he visited Paris, Eliot was steeped in a number of complex intellectual influences. Firstly, there were the symbolists who viewed modern life as banal, empty, materialistic, and sordid, and who pointed toward a view of art that saw in it some sort of redemption through moments of intense consciousness. Eliot was also attracted by Bergson, whose *durée*

[8] On this point Ackroyd writes, "Children who live in such places grow up amid dereliction and rapid decay – and for those of a sensitive nature, the first awakening impressions are associated with images that spring from such decay. Throughout his life, Eliot was to identify himself as an urban poet, and in his adolescent years he derived a strange pleasure from walking through the alleys and the slums" (24).

promised a transcendence over the limitations of time, because Eliot feared time, decay, and the possibility that there was nothing *else* to life to give it meaning. He was, however, unable to accept Bergson's mysticism, finding his promise of immortality an attractive fiction. He seems to have sought the slums no longer in hope of finding there a more vivid experience of life, but as affirmation of his sense that modern life was banal, sordid, decayed, and vulgar; that materialism had taken possession of people everywhere; and that religion was dead. His fascination with the slums at this time was a morbid attraction to something he found horrific; an unhealthy obsession with proving that life really had no other meaning.

When Eliot arrived in London, after reeling back from his experiences in Paris into the life of a graduate student of philosophy at Harvard, he did not continue his slumming, although while living at Crawford Mansions he was forced to be in a neighbourhood that he found repellent. His reflections on the physical spaces in which he found himself in London reveal that, for Eliot, the loneliness of the city was not simply due to the society he found there, but that it was also connected, in complex ways, to the actual built environment. Eliot's letters reveal how profoundly he was influenced by his own architectural surroundings. His considerations of architecture and locality in the letters, often involving London, describe not only the way a place or building looks but also how it makes him feel. Eliot responds intuitively and emotionally to his surroundings, finding them either meaningful and fulfilling, or dull and depleting. His early letters typically indicate preference for London over anywhere else, often comparing other places such as Oxford unfavourably with the English capital. This changes, of course, once he is living in

London in difficult circumstances with Vivien, and he ceases to find the city a source of inspiration. The early preference for London is undoubtedly connected to Eliot's attraction to its social and artistic life wherein he hoped to find a home. He eagerly scanned London for the figures, sights, and experiences of his extensive reading. As Herbert Howarth summarizes,

From one or two excursions in his miscellaneous prose we may guess how he arrived in London looking for images acquired in his early reading – …– and how he sympathetically discerned the images behind the façade of the London of 1916 and 1920. Sometimes his eye sought and found the London of Conan Doyle or Dickens; sometimes sought and found the London of Lancelot Andrewes, whom he was already reading before April 1921. (222)

After his marriage in 1915, he writes to Mrs. Jack Gardner, "Since I have been at Oxford I have, as you know, acquired a few literary connections in London, and made a few friends who have been very encouraging. ... I want to live in London, and if one is to do anything in literature this is the best place to be" (*Letters*, v.1 107). The references to London are often set within a social context, therefore, but their significance does not end there. In his letters, Eliot repeatedly meditates on his physical surroundings and on how they affect what life means in a big city.

Roughly ten years before Eliot arrived in London, Georg Simmel wrote his famous sociological essay, "The Metropolis and Mental Life" (1903) in which he discusses the psychic effects of urban existence on the individual. Simmel writes that in the metropolis the human brain has to cope with many constantly varying external

stimuli that demand heightened consciousness and intelligence.[9] The only suitable response to the high pace and diversity of experiences in the metropolis is rational objectivity, and the "Modern mind" becomes "more and more calculating" and impersonal (412-13). This is because in the hustle and bustle of the city anonymous persons come into brief contact with each other on the street or in shops, and they could quite possibly never meet one another again. Therefore, all transactions have to be impersonal and objective; people hold each other at a distance and do not experience the emotional and social ties that characterize a small community such as a village. One result of the constant demands the busy metropolis makes on the brain is to cause people to become blasé, or unresponsive and indifferent to external stimuli.[10] This in turn can result in a reserved attitude acting as a protective barrier between the individual's real feelings and the observations of other people. Thus, says Simmel, the curious phenomenon occurs of the urban dweller's not knowing by sight or name the person he or she has lived next to for years (415). The objective culture of the modern city reduces the individual to "a mere cog in an enormous organization of things and powers which tear from his hands all progress, spirituality, and value in order to transform them from their subjective form into the form of a purely objective life" (422). On account of the process of objectification that occurs in the city, a person does not experience lasting emotional or communal ties.

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[9] Simmel writes, "With each crossing of the street, with the tempo and multiplicity of economic, occupational and social life, the city sets up a deep contrast with small town and rural life with reference to the sensory foundations of psychic life. The metropolis exacts from man as a discriminating creature a different amount of consciousness..." (410).

[10] Simmel concludes, "An incapacity thus emerges to react to new sensations with the appropriate energy" (414).

Simmel's argument is not simply an unfavorable contrast between urban and small town life, however. He writes that as a result of the reserved indifference characterizing interactions between people in the city, the individual is in fact more free to cultivate mental distance and to think and feel as he or she wishes. The small town preserves its identity by establishing and maintaining strict boundaries and unity (417). Simmel observes, "Even today a metropolitan man who is placed in a small town feels a restriction" (417) that is the result of the small community's setting up barriers against threats to its inner unity.[11] Thus the city offers the individual a certain kind of mental freedom not to be found in small, closely knit communities.[12]

It is interesting to observe that Eliot's experiences of London share the same general contours outlined so famously by Simmel. His letters reveal a number of concerns similar to those that are outlined in Simmel's essay, and the letters demonstrate a reaction to the kinds of socio-psychological effects Simmel describes. There is a commonality between Simmel's piece and Eliot's recorded experiences. In a letter to Conrad Aiken in 1914, for example, Eliot unfavorably contrasts Oxford with London, focusing on both the architecture and the impact these cities were then having on his personal and social life. He writes,

I am back in London now ... at a pension off Gordon Square, in rather a nice street, where the houses are neither named nor painted. ... Oxford is all very well, but I come back to London with great relief. I like London, now. In

[11] Simmel explains, "The smaller the circle which forms our milieu is, and the more restricted those relations to others are which dissolve the boundaries of the individual, the more anxiously the circle guards the achievements, the conduct of life, and the outlook of the individual..." (417).

[12] Simmel says, "the reciprocal reserve and indifference and the intellectual life conditions of large circles are never felt more strongly by the individual in their impact upon his independence than in the thickest crowd of the big city. This is because the bodily proximity and the narrowness of space makes the mental distance only the more visible" (418).

Oxford I have the feeling that I am not quite alive – that my body is walking about with a bit of my brain inside it, and nothing else. As you know, I hate university towns and university people, who are the same everywhere, with pregnant wives, sprawling children, many books, and hideous pictures on the walls. ... Oxford is very pretty, but I don't like to be dead. I don't think I should stay there another year, in any case; but I should not mind being in London, to work at the British Museum. How much more self-conscious one is in a big city! (*Letters* v.1 74-5)

Here Eliot's aesthetic sense of his surroundings and his emotional response to them ("How much more self-conscious one is...") are connected. Firstly, he mentions the pension in Gordon Square with a note of approval, calling it a "nice street," and remarking that "the houses are neither named nor painted." The tradition of naming houses in England started with the halls, manors, and castles of the gentry, but soon many dwellings, even humble cottages, were given names. Cities such as London that experienced massive growth in housing developments relied on an address system of house numbers and street names, and house names became irrelevant. Naming a house in a place such as Gordon Square, therefore, would certainly seem to be an act of granting the building a particular personality, but it also evinced a certain kind of sentimentality that Eliot would have found distasteful. Similarly, painting a house would be another bid for individuality but it would mar the overall aesthetic order of a street. Eliot finds in the anonymity and plainness of Gordon Square in particular and London in general a grittiness that seems preferable to Oxford which is, nonetheless, "very pretty."

It is significant that Eliot uses organic language when speaking of the two cities, referring to "life" and "death." Eliot feels less alive in the relatively small community of Oxford than he does in the large city. University towns are, by their very nature, cloisters. To Eliot, the academic cloister of the university town is deadening, and he finds that not only does he dislike the society there, but he loses touch with himself. This seems to demonstrate a general commonality with Simmel's point that smaller communities restrict the mental freedom of their inhabitants. Likewise, the big city makes him more self-conscious, more attentive to his own thoughts and preoccupations. In this same letter he concludes that in a big city (London) "One walks about the street with one's desires..." (75). The city seems to make him more mentally alive even while it surrounds him with unnamed, unpainted anonymity.

In 1914 he writes to Conrad Aiken, "University towns, my dear fellow, are the same all over the world; only they order these matters better in Oxford. For intellectual stimulus, you will find it not in Oxford nor in Urbana Indiana (or is it Illinois) [sic]. Only the most matter of fact people could write verse here, I assure you" (*Letters* v.1 68). In Oxford Eliot experiences a stultifying effect. London, though less pretty, nevertheless provides him with a sense of life and movement, and consequently seems more real. In a letter to Eleanor Hinkley in 1915, Eliot calls London "healthy," while "Oxford is not" (*Letters* v.1 92).

Eliot's view of the healthiness of London undergoes a change both as a result of the post-war atmosphere that reigns in the city after he settles there with Vivien, and as a result of what he calls the "London grind" (*Letters* v.1 374), which he represents in *The Waste Land* with St. Mary Woolnoth's clock and experiences first-hand as an

employee of Lloyd's Bank. He starts to discover that along with the heightened individual objectivity of the metropolis comes a lack of meaningful connection between people. Eliot finds that, in contrast to his early expectation of finding in London's noise and grit a vibrant and coherent community, the experience of living and working in the modern city is stressful, draining, and isolating. In March 1916, the young Eliots settled in a very small flat in Crawford Mansions. We are indebted to Vivien for an enthusiastic letter to Henry Eliot in which she describes the flat:

I am going to buy some films for my camera today, and then we shall send you some photos of ourselves and our flat. We are very proud of this flat. It is the tiniest place imaginable – just a dining room – a drawing room – a large bedroom – a kitchen and a nice bathroom. We have constant hot water, which is a *luxury* in England, and as this building is quite new, we have "every modern convenience"! I chose all the papers, and we have some rather original effects. We have an *orange* paper in our dining room, (which is also Tom's dressing room and study!) and black and white stripes in the Hall. (*Letters* v.1 139-40)

Vivien sounds here like every young, new homeowner: full of pleasure at her little nest and quite ready to see its conveniences while not dwelling on its inconveniences. Almost exactly one year later, while the Eliots were staying at the home of Vivien's parents in Compayne Gardens, Vivien writes to Eliot's mother:

Tom enjoys and revels in the *large* and airy rooms in this house, the peace and quiet of the neighbourhood, and the green-ness of the open square behind and the creeper-covered houses in front. ... Living where *we* do (Crawford

Mansions) in a little noisy corner, with slums and low streets and poor shops close around us – (and *yet* within a stone's throw of great squares with big houses and one of the most expensive residential districts) it is like being in a wilderness, we are just 2 waifs who live perched up in our little flat – no-one around us knows us, or sees us, or bothers to care how we live or what we do, or whether we live or not. (*Letters* v.1 186)

Here the disadvantages of the Crawford Mansions flat are more keenly felt, especially when contrasted with the experience of larger rooms, quieter space, and greener outdoor surroundings at Compayne Gardens. Vivien's letter to Charlotte Eliot is a telling description of the curious kind of loneliness and isolation unique to city-dwellers who live cheek-by-jowl with their neighbours without getting to know or care about them. She also remarks here on the difference between districts in the city, which can be so close to one another in proximity but so different in feeling. The letter goes on to comment upon the vastness of the city, something Eliot remarks on in 1917 when he discovers, with surprise and pleasure, "a most beautiful dilapidated old square ... a square in the middle of town, near King's Cross Station ... with spacious old gardens about it" that he had never heard of before (*Letters* v.1 181).

By 1920, Eliot writes to his mother that he and Vivien have come to loathe Crawford Mansions because "of the noise and sordidness," and he writes that looking for a new flat is a challenge on account of the cost of leases and of keeping a servant. Later that year he writes, "We have been worried out of our wits. I have finally agreed to take one [a new flat] – it will cost a great deal for us. But I simply cannot any longer work where we are, or even rest. I have of course been unable to write, or

even read and think, for some weeks" (*Letters* v.1 412). Eliot's letter provides an example of the ways in which physical surroundings can affect physical health (unable to rest due to the noise) and mental well-being (unable to read, think, or write).

Perhaps Eliot's sense of disillusionment with the metropolis arose as a result both of the isolation he felt and his growing sense that, architecturally, the post-war city was losing touch with its past. Scott McCracken describes how, between 1873 and 1900, the streets of London changed from housing numerous small independent businesses (tobacconists, bootmakers, clothiers, newspaper offices) to supporting an ever-growing variety of chain industries such as ABC (Aerated Bread Company) and Lyons teashops (McCracken 86). These chains, fully established by the time Eliot arrived in London, may have contributed to his sense of the loss of community in the large city. In "A Cooking Egg" (1920), for example, Eliot even names the ABC chain, associating it with a kind of loss of vision:

Where are the eagles and the trumpets?

Buried beneath some snow-deep Alps.

Over buttered scones and crumpets

Weeping, weeping multitudes

Droop in a hundred A.B.C.'s (ll. 29-33).

Drooping in a hundred identical A.B.C. shops, the individual's subjective experience of having tea is transformed into a uniform, impersonal business transaction that anyone, for the same price, can have.

Commercialization and the introduction of uniform chain businesses affected the experience of city dwellers; so too did changes in building materials and techniques. Changes in technique have the potential to signal to city dwellers not only change but the direction that change is taking. Eliot's writing about architecture at this time registers some doubt about the apparent priorities seeming to be reflected in the city's architecture. Alan Powers writes that after the First World War British architecture proceeded along a non-dramatic path of preferring Georgian styles for domestic architecture and neo-classicism for civic buildings – what Nikolaus Pevsner calls neo-Georgian and neo-Wren forms. Put in its international context, this trend was perhaps loosely part of the *rappel à l'ordre*:[13] an attempt, after the chaos of the First World War, to return to the rationality of tradition and the revival of classicism (Cianci, "Ruskin and Eliot"134). This return to order in Europe was not a rejection of modernism but was instead another step in its development, and it disallowed imitation or iconolatry, becoming instead an "avant-garde classicism" (Cianci, "Ruskin and Eliot" 135). Giovanni Cianci writes that this classicism "assumed a daring, questioning and selective attitude" ("Ruskin and Eliot" 135) that was just as radical, in its way, as the revolutionary experimentalism of the early modernists had been. The modern structures of architects such as Le Corbusier[14] developed out of

[13] The term possibly stems from Jean Cocteau's book, *Le Rappel à l'Ordre* (1926). See Cianci's note 11 ("Ruskin and Eliot") for further explanation.

[14] Charles-Èdouard Jeanneret (Le Corbusier) was one of the modernist movement's most influential architects. He combined a desire to destroy the past with a goal to build a new architecture that would represent, as closely as possible, the functionality of the machine. He believed that modern life was progressing into an age in which the universal language would be that of the impersonal, mechanistic, and functional. He prized mechanistic forms above all others, claiming that they are Platonic and that they express ultimate development (Jencks 35). Le Corbusier is often considered the quintessential modernist architect and is often mentioned in discussions of the greater modernist movement in connection with Eliot and his contemporaries. Charles Jencks writes, "Le Corbusier, being an atheist, saw the machine as

this radical classicism, maintaining that architecture is the supreme symbol of logic.[15] Le Corbusier viewed the ornamentation of historic cities as "wasteful and antimodern" (Kotkin 120), and he promoted the demolition of historical monuments to make way for the future, even going so far as to support the architectural plans of the Soviet Union to tear down old Moscow because the "postwar construction of superblocs supported his ideas" (Kotkin 120). Of course, as happened with Le Corbusier's idealism, logic and functionalism can be pushed too far, to the extreme edge of self-restraint which rejects the human altogether.[16] In fact, however, Continental architectural developments were largely ignored in Britain in the early post-war years (Powers 11), and the classicism that resulted was imitative and nostalgic. It is well known that Eliot kept his eye on the innovative artistic world of Paris;[17] he would have seen the post-war *rappel à l'ordre* as well as the development of the utopian idealism of Le Corbusier's school that stressed the social functionalism of architecture. He would therefore inevitably view the trend of British architecture in the larger context of what was happening architecturally abroad. The point is not that

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evidence of a pure cosmic force uncontaminated by personal interference. In this love of the impersonal he was part of a broad international movement extending across disciplines and countries from T.S. Eliot in literature to Eisenstein in film" (54). What Jencks overlooks here is that Eliot's notion of the impersonal does not eschew or ignore human emotion and experience; rather it embraces complex emotion in a very profound way. The understanding of "*significant* emotion" as it is explained in "Tradition and the Individual Talent" depends upon the historical sense which allows for a concentration of meaning. Eliot's impersonality is inextricably bound up with the inheritance of the past; Le Corbusier's attempts to dissolve it.

[15] See Cianci's recent article, "Reading T.S. Eliot Visually: Tradition in the Context of Modernist Art" for a further explanation of the *rappel à l'ordre* and the "postwar revaluation of architecture as a touchstone of the arts..." (124).

[16] For further discussion of Le Corbusier and the reasons for the failure of his utopia, see Robert Hughes, *The Shock of the New*.

[17] Ronald Schuchard draws attention to the fact that Eliot kept abreast, through *Nouvelle Revue Française*, of artistic advances in France. See Schuchard's article, "Eliot and Hulme in 1916: Toward a Revaluation of Eliot's Critical and Spiritual Development."

modernist avant-garde classicism or an adoption of Le Corbusier's style would have been better for Britain, but that the conscious evasion of new forms was just as dangerous for British architecture as Le Corbusier's house-machine would have been. Part of Eliot's emerging disillusionment with London is connected to the apparent refusal of architects to consider seriously and thoughtfully a suitable architecture for the post-war era.

As a way of describing this deliberate avoidance in Britain of modernist innovation, Pevsner writes that England's architecture entered a style of "period imitation" that disregarded the changing political scene and the century's new modes (102-3).[18] Something that could not be ignored, however, was the change in building materials and techniques, and these created a tension between the outward appearance of a building and its structure. In other words, the techniques of building were modern while their façades (neo-classical, for instance) were attempts, in some ways, to hide this modernization.[19] Cheap steel and reinforced concrete meant that builders now had a range of new possibilities before them for lighter, higher buildings, and such buildings were greatly in demand in the rising industrialization and mechanization of the early part of the century. There was a trend with such buildings to give them the steel structures necessary to support both their new height and classical forms. The

[18] Pevsner explains the deliberate ignorance of Britain toward architectural innovations and developments thus: "England kept out of this momentous development. ... And so the sad spectacle offers itself of England throwing away her heritage of originality and retiring to a style of period imitation as barren in its neo-Wren as in its neo-Georgian form. ... It must be regarded as the outcome of two causes: the waning optimism of the early years of the century and the awareness of a new unrhetorical style growing on the Continent. But the City and the Government refused to face the fact of a disappearing Empire and of a new genuine style of the century in architecture" (*London and Westminster* 102-3).

[19] Powers explains the tension in these terms: "The Gothic Revival in Britain and France laid important ground rules for restoring the integrity of materials and the way they were treated, but it remained within the architectural language of the past. ... Good materials and workmanship were a substitute for trying to address the nineteenth century's awkward question 'What is the style of our time?'" (11).

modern materials would be clothed or hidden by classical details and Portland stone.[20] Until 1930,[21] British architecture struggled in this quandary of old versus new, structure versus façade, that in many ways reflects the confusion of the times. Pevsner concludes irritably,

> [T]here can be only one explanation of this style, which has neither the self-assurance of the Edwardian nor of the modern architects of other countries. It is a style of timidity, of playing safe, of introducing just enough of the [twentieth century] to avoid being ridiculous and keeping just enough of giant columns and the other paraphernalia of Empire to stake the claim of remaining a great nation. In the end no one is satisfied. The naïve customer is not bluffed by giant columns removed to the attic, and the intelligent customer recognizes the total lack of courage, enterprise, daring. (*London and Westminster* 104)

In short, the neo-classical architectural styles of post-World War One Britain were hardly less out-of-touch with history than the mechanistic style of Le Corbusier.

Walking to Lloyd's Bank every day, Eliot would have passed the chain stores and watched the steel structures going up. Simultaneously, he would have seen the destruction of old buildings to make way for the new ones. His disillusionment with London coincides in the 1920s both with the increase of modern buildings and his

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[20] Powers writes, "In London passers-by in the 1920s could see steel frames go up one month and be covered in Portland stone a few months later, almost as if they had never been there, classical in detail but not in spirit" (12).

[21] Powers clarifies the general acceptance of 1930 as a transitional year: "Apart from its convenience as a round number, the year 1930 has special significance in the history of the Modern Movement in Britain, as external economic and political factors influenced and accelerated the emergence of a new idea of architecture at this time. It was the beginning of three or four years of instability, when unemployment rose at home, the pound fell against other currencies when Britain left the gold standard, and there was much talk of a completely new start in Britain, after the promises of reconstruction in 1918 had turned sour" (18).

anger over the destruction of historical buildings in the city. In a 1928 *Criterion* Commentary titled "City, City" (reminiscent of the melancholic 'City, city' apostrophe of *The Waste Land*), Eliot writes,

Anyone visiting the City after an absence of ten years will be a very puzzled man. ... [W]hy are the City men pulling down good bank buildings, all sorts of buildings, and erecting grander banks, grander insurance buildings, grander office buildings? Even the old Bank of England, whose one story seemed to represent British solidity and independence, is sprouting, under the direction of Sir Herbert Baker, into a dizzy beanstalk. The other solid banks round about are doing the same, emerging in modern dress – nothing horribly modern, of course, but extremely expensive and smart. Sir Edwin Lutyens has been almost skittish – but classical – in his Midland Bank at the Cheapside end. Sir John James Burnet is giving Lloyds Bank a rich, discreet, not really old-fashioned dress suitable to a Lady Mayoress; Mr. Davis is giving a rather smarter but still very respectable costume to the Westminster. And Lombard Street, though it continues to sport its admirable hanging signs – the grasshopper is particularly good – has lately lost some grave, agreeable bank buildings where Nelson, or perhaps Sir William Hamilton, and Barnes Newcome may have cashed cheques. Up they go in the best Portland stone. Those who can remember the City as long ago as 1920 must feel very sad. And many more of the courts and passages on the Cornhill side have vanished. Birch's has taken its famous old ironwork elsewhere. Baker's Chop House, which did indeed once provide good chops, with its curved many-

paned front is gone; and the spacious well-barrelled wine shop in Cowper's Court which you entered down a stair; gone are the other dear dusty crevasses and shelves. Even the policemen there now can tell you nothing of these things. They are young, they are ignorant, they have no City lore and no City curiosity. And what has become of the City barmaid who knew good whisky from bad? (189-90)

This Commentary perfectly demonstrates Pevsner's later critique of 1920s building in Britain. Eliot mocks the grandeur and smartness of modern commercial building as well as the classical spirit that infuses it. Here Eliot's response seems based on an aesthetic distaste for the new structures, a reaction to the loss of a sense of the past in the City, and a complaint about the lack of community – a lack so much a part of his experience of London. Aesthetically, Eliot does not understand why "grander" bank and insurance buildings are being erected in the place of the "good" and "solid" buildings that were there before. He notes that while not overly modern, the new buildings are "extremely expensive and smart"; that this is not praise becomes clear by his use of the word "skittish" to describe the classical spirit of building in London at the time and the contrast between words like "expensive and smart" describing the new buildings and "grave and agreeable" expressing his feeling for the older buildings. Something agreeable is being forced to make way for something merely smart. He bemoans the aesthetic loss to the city of attractive signs and ironwork as well as the mysterious and enchanting passageways, courtyards, and "crevasses" that are reminders of the old City with its higgledy-piggledy streets and absence of town planning. Ironically referring to the older London as "long ago as 1920," Eliot

comments here on the speed with which a city can lose its memory when the physical reminders of the past, the old buildings, are no longer there. With the sense of sadness for the loss of the old buildings there is also a loss of experience. Entering one of the smart, expensive new banks may be a novelty, but it comes at the expense of being able to cash one's cheques in the same place as Nelson cashed his. The new bank cannot host the set of associations called up by an older building and its continuation with the past. The city in its new garb seems to be host to a new set of people as well: younger people who not only have no curiosity but who have no lore, no stories to tell about the older city and no sense of connection with the people who can remember this place "as long ago as 1920." Eliot's complaint about the loss of a good chop house and wine cellar and the shortage of people able to discern good from bad whisky might seem to be the purely material grouse of someone thinking of his stomach, but nonetheless it is true that the experience of good food and drink is not only functional but social as well. The loss of the good chop house and the barmaid who knows her whisky implies the loss of a community of people who appreciate such things. The gathering of people to enjoy eating a good chop, choosing a fine wine, or sipping an excellent whisky will no longer take place here, for the new buildings do not host it.

Eliot and Churches

What Eliot has to say about cities in his letters and in the *Criterion* reveals that his experiences of cities in general and of London in particular caused him to feel that they were strangely devoid of meaningful lively communities and that the destruction

of the old buildings to make way for the new was causing the city to lose a sense of its past, losing as well the potential for the continuation of tradition. These experiences caused Eliot to have a sense of dissatisfaction with the city and its inhabitants. It is unsurprising, therefore, that he should have begun to search in his physical surroundings for any clue that tradition, a connection with the past, and a sense of community was still possible in the city or in modern life more generally. Church buildings were obvious candidates for his interests. The City churches, of which there were many, were monuments of memory, recalling the time they were built and the communities they were built for. They symbolized the continuation of a tradition. Simultaneously, they represented the changes of the modern present as several of them were threatened with destruction or sale, and as they stood empty and disused where once a community regularly gathered. They were sites of memory, but they were also physical reminders to passers-by of the pastness of the past and the end of a tradition. Therefore, on the one hand they represented the continuation of principles that Eliot set great store by (tradition, sense of the past, and community), which were missing in his experience of the city; on the other hand churches perfectly symbolized their absence.

Eliot's writing about city architecture is not merely a collection of personal responses to the surroundings in which he found himself. While responding to his own surroundings, he likewise demonstrates a more than casual interest in the City churches. In fact, he focuses on church architecture to ask many of the important questions about modern life that occurred to him as he moved through the city. At first his interest in church buildings was aesthetic, not religious. Later, the religious

life symbolized by church buildings was of supreme importance to him. Despite this important distinction between his earlier and later ways of thinking about church architecture, the questions he asked were always about tradition, about the relevance of the past to the present, and about community.

Eliot's earliest experience of church architecture would have been the church where he was baptized in St. Louis: the Church of the Messiah at the corner of Locust and Garrison Streets.[22] This was the third structure that the Church of the Messiah had occupied since its foundation by Greenleaf Eliot in 1831. The building was commissioned by the congregation, and they chose the reputable Boston architectural firm of Peabody and Stearns for its construction. The beautiful church building[23] was created to reflect and symbolize the aspirations and achievements of the congregation and of the Unitarian vision. In 1885 the *St. Louis Republican* published an editorial about the church, commenting, "The congregation ... in culture, standing, and wealth, as well as in ... the more important qualities, zealous work, and devotion to duty, is not excelled in St. Louis. It numbers men and women who have achieved distinction

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[22] Once again I am indebted to Josh Mabie for his permission to cite his unpublished paper, "Eliot's St. Louis," in which he gives detailed information about the church's architectural history. Mr. Mabie has done extensive research in St. Louis, visiting the sites of the original buildings, even if they are no longer there, talking to St. Louis residents, and accessing the Greenleaf papers in the Washington University archives. Due to restrictions of time and funding I have been unable to perform this on-site research myself, so I am particularly grateful to Mr. Mabie for his good work and generosity.

[23] Mabie quotes from a description of the church written in 1881: "The wood of the interior is of native yellow pine, unspoiled by the painter's brush, and whose rich, natural grain and beautiful color lend an added charm to the wainscot and columns, beams, and arches into which it is fashioned. With the yellow hues of the wood is finely harmonized the dark red of the faced bricks which line the walls above the wooden dado; while the frieze and about and above the points of the arches and window heads are others of light yellow laid in masses or simple patterns. The sharply pitched roof, divided longitudinally by the clerestory into two parts, and separated vertically into bays by massive braces, tie-beams, and framing-timbers is of open timber work, and in design and execution revives the traditions of the best period of old English carpentry, resembling in the graceful forms of its curves and arches the great roof of the famous Westminster Hall." (qtd. in Mabie 4).

in business, in the professions, in literature, and in art" (qtd. in Mabie 6). In his dedication address, Greenleaf Eliot spoke to his congregation thus:

You have endeavored to assert your claims to Christian recognition, not by theological tests of orthodoxy, which continually change; not by disputations which engender anger and strife; not by sectarian attacks upon others, nor even by answering such attacks upon ourselves; but by the surer method of doing your part, much or little, as best you could, within your reach, and in advocacy of whatever principles of truth and righteousness have stood most in need of defence. (qtd. in Mabie 6)

The congregation's achievements and successes were memorialized in the very fabric of the building: the stained glass windows, instead of representing stories from the Bible or telling of the lives of saints, depicted and honoured prominent members of the congregation. The church also featured a number of memorial plaques and portraits of congregation members, the most prominent of which was a brass memorial plaque of Greenleaf Eliot, hung at the front of the church just to the right of the altar, which had no cross. The font was engraved with the words, "Loving Memory of Our Mother Isabella E. Bridge" (qtd. in Mabie 7).

Changes in the St. Louis cityscape during Eliot's youth gradually turned the area around the Church of the Messiah to slum. In 1906 the congregation moved to a new location, selling their beautiful building to an African-American Episcopal congregation (All Saints' Episcopal). The new location for the Church of the Messiah was a downsizing from the structure able to seat 900 people to one seating 500. The

congregation took their memorial plaques, portraits, font, and stained-glass windows with them to their new location.

The story of the Church of the Messiah at the corner of Locust and Garrison Streets highlights some of the complexities of church architecture that would later interest Eliot. Firstly, this remarkable building was commissioned and built directly in line with a particular community's ideals. The very building represented and emphasized the good works and principles of the Unitarian citizens of St. Louis. However, the locale of the church building was slowly subsumed over time into slum, seeming to suggest the decline of the influence of Greenleaf Eliot and others like him in St. Louis. When the congregation moved, they took their symbolic iconography with them, and the sale of the church to an African-American Episcopal congregation effectively closed the door of this special building to them. Moreover, the downsizing of the congregation in the move again indicates the decline of the Unitarian influence in the city.

The stained glass windows, font engravings, and memorial plaques of the Church of the Messiah represent some of the aspects of Unitarianism that Eliot found problematic and that led to his rejection of this form of religious practice – the emphasis on and celebration of zealous work and endeavor in human beings denotes a lack of attention to the metaphysical and the supernatural, to broader meanings of Good and Evil to which Eliot, many years before his own conversion to Christianity, was sensitive. The building, then, a powerfully symbolic edifice, was layered with complexity and subject to a variety of interpretations of its significance, representing different meanings at different times to different people. After the African-American

congregation moved in, the building was altered as well as renamed (All Saints Episcopal) to suit their worship practices and theological perspective (they were disappointed to discover that it would cost them over $5000 to make the building into "a real church" (Mabie 18)). The complex, and indeed sometimes contradictory, meanings given to this building offer a good introductory example of some of the intricacies of church architecture that Eliot was to appreciate and came to convey in several of his most important poems.

"Mr. Eliot's Sunday Morning Service," composed in 1917 when Eliot was at his most irreverent, might be read as a kind of reaction to some of the experiences of Unitarianism from his childhood, and possibly even of the Church of the Messiah. The church building in the poem is evidently a Catholic or Anglo-Catholic structure with stained glass windows very different from those of the Church of the Messiah. Mr. Eliot could be the poet himself, but there are always the associations of that name, particularly in a church setting, with his grandfather Greenleaf Eliot and also possibly with his cousin Frank Eliot who became a Unitarian minister in Boston and who led Sunday morning services that Eliot seems to have resented (Gordon, *Early Years* 70).

A bewildering piece, "Mr. Eliot's Sunday Morning Service" is one of Eliot's quatrain poems, and it creates something of a word puzzle for the reader, with neologisms such as "Polyprogenitive" and "piaculative," obscurities such as "gesso," and complex puns such as "sutlers." It is not, in other words, a poem that reads easily. The poem sets up a series of satiric contrasts between the dignity and holiness of the church building, its stained glass windows and images, and the idolatrous and

hypocritical worshipers therein. The complexities and contrasts in the poem are foreshadowed by the epigraph from *The Jew of Malta*: "Look, look, master, here comes two religious caterpillars." On the one hand, the caterpillar is a creature of potential; as the larva of a butterfly it represents the possibility for metamorphosis and transcendence from its present form into something beautiful and airborne. On the other hand, the sixteenth-century context from which the epigraph is taken used the word "caterpillar" to describe a rapacious extortioner, a predator upon society. The church building, with its images of the Baptized God, the Father and Holy Ghost, and the penitential gates, represents the possibility for transcendence like the caterpillar transformed into a butterfly. However, those who gather in this place are like the caterpillar that preys upon society; their words enervate and do not bring their listeners closer to communion with the Logos, the Word, and their penitence is in the form of compensative pennies.

On this Sunday morning a service progresses, and Mr. Eliot's eye wanders across the stained glass windows where he sees images of the early Church Fathers seeming to drift across his vision in a procession. The images provoke an ironic contrast between the Word of God and the words of Christian scholars and theologians. The poet puns on the phrase "The sapient sutlers of the Lord," in which "sutlers" can on the one hand mean one who gives provisions or on the other hand one who makes the Word of God so "subtle" through his learning that it is incomprehensible. In the second stanza, the poet contrasts the Word with Origen. Origen was an early Christian scholar and theologian who produced commentaries on most of the books of the Bible. St. Epiphanius exaggerated that in total Origen's written works numbered

about 6000 rolls, and the poet uses Origen here as representative of a group of theologians notable for their voluminous writings and copious words (Schanzer 153-4). The effect of these words, however, is enervating, and the words of the theologians seem far removed from the Word of God.

The poet then looks at an early Italian painting on plaster (gesso) that depicts the baptism of Christ. These lines offer imagery later taken up by Eliot in *The Waste Land*, such as "The wilderness is cracked and browned." Nonetheless, even though the water is "pale and thin," the poet notices that in the painting the "unoffending feet" still "shine," and the trinity is completed with the painter's depiction of the Father and Holy Ghost above the baptized Christ. A line of dots separates these lines from the stanza following, as though permitting a brief contemplative break. Then the poet's eyes move away from the painting to the members of the congregation who are contrasted with another religious painting depicting the Seraph guardians of Purgatory (Schanzer 155). The "souls of the devout" represented in this painting are distinct from those congregants in the "avenue of penitence," described by the poet as "red and pustular," gripping the pennies that will grant them an easy penance. Next the poet looks out of the window where he sees the busy bees on the garden wall. Their "Blest office" of pollinating and fertilizing is an implicit contrast with the ascetic sexlessness of the theologians with their "barren fare of words," and the bees' busyness seems a reproach to the presbyters waiting to pay their pence for atonement (Schanzer 157).

The poem closes with an abrupt movement away from the church setting to an image of the voluptuary Sweeney in his bath. Sweeney stirring the water of his bath is

paralleled to the "sapient sutlers" or the theologians who stir up controversy with their copious words, and his "hams" are contrasted with the shining "unoffending feet" of the baptized Christ in the river (Schanzer 157). Not attending church, Sweeney spends a pleasant Sunday morning in his bath, swirling the water around. Seemingly purely sensuous, Sweeney is submerged in water, which is a redemptive, healing, and regenerative medium. His bath could be a kind of baptism, and his happy swirling in this cleansing water could in fact be a more spiritually fulfilling experience than that of the "sable presbyters" in the church.

Eliot's critique in this poem is not of the church building but of those who gather inside it. The building still offers the images and the history of a meaningful spiritual tradition. The tradition has been perverted by those within, congregants who are not duly reverent but merely idolatrous. Undeniably irreverent, this poem represents some of the ambiguities Eliot felt about the Christian spiritual tradition. Not obviously about his Unitarian upbringing, the poem nevertheless points out the cold deadness of church-goers that Eliot witnessed when attending Unitarian church services, and the poem's representation of the meaningful imagery of the Catholic or Anglo-Catholic church building can be contrasted with what we know of the iconography and decoration inside the Church of the Messiah in St. Louis. Certainly there is something striking about the use Eliot makes of traditional Christian iconography in an imaginary church building that is the setting for an irreverent send-up of modern church-goers. It is possible to connect Eliot's antagonism to the Unitarian world-view with the criticism offered in this poem of people whose religious practice is more idolatrous than spiritual.

That churches interested Eliot very early is evident from his letters. While living in Paris in 1910-1911, Eliot made a brief visit to London in 1911. Writing about this London trip in a letter to his cousin, Eleanor Hinkley, in April of that year, he says,

I have just discussed my trip with the prim but nice English lady at the *pension*. She said "And did you go through the Tower? No! Madame Tussaud's? No! Westminster Abbey? No!" Here I triumphed again – "the Abbey was closed due to the coronation preparations!" (This is a remark which, in a novel, would be "flung back"). I then said – do you know

St. Helens

St. Stephens

St. Bartholomew the Great

St Sepulchre

St Etheldreda

And finally – Camberwell Work House! And she knew none of these. "I have it on you!" I cried (for I know her well enough for that). But she does not understand the American dialect. (*Letters* v.1 19)

Further in this letter Eliot lists the other, more conventional tourist sites that he did visit while he was in England:

National Gallery

Brit[ish] Mus[eum]

Wallace Collection (made notes!!)

S. Kensington (in large part)

Cambridge University

Hampton Court

The Temple

The City – thoroughly

Whitechapel (note: Jews)

St. Pauls

et al.

also the Zoo (note: gave the apterix a bun). (*Letters* v.1 19)

The cheeky exuberance of this letter is a play on the kind of one-upmanship that seems to dog determined tourists when they get together, comparing where they have been and trying to discover whether they have seen anything that their fellows have not. Eliot entertainingly relates his triumph at one-upping the woman at the pension with his knowledge of obscure City churches. This letter reveals, at the same time, that his interest in churches was obviously very real. His list of the other places he visited is certainly impressive (and anyone who has been a tourist in a foreign city will know how tiring it can be). Nonetheless, Eliot reveals here that he made special trips in addition to his other tourist excursions to see these churches. On a side note, it is interesting to remark that he visited the Camberwell Work House as well. This was the oldest and largest charitable workhouse in London, and it is possible that Eliot's visit was paid partly under the lingering influence of his grandfather, with his zeal and sense of responsibility for social reform.[24] In any case, it appears in this letter that, in

[24] In a convocation address at Washington University, Eliot said, "I never knew my grandfather: he died a year before my birth. But I was brought up to be very much aware of him: so much so, that as a child I thought of him as still the head of the family--a ruler for whom in absentia my grandmother stood as vice-regent. The standard of conduct was that which my grandfather had set; our moral judgments, our decisions between duty and self-indulgence, were taken as if, like Moses, he had brought down the tablets of the Law, and any deviation from which would be sinful. Not the least of these laws, which included injunctions still more than prohibitions, was the law of Public Service: it is no doubt owing to the impress

addition to visiting the usual tourist sites in London, Eliot paid visits to other buildings that were of interest to him, and these were, principally, church buildings.

While the interest in churches was very real, Eliot's early impulse to visit them was likely to have been based upon historical and aesthetic curiosity rather than upon a religious attitude. Some of the tensions Eliot felt toward religion are demonstrated in a letter he wrote to Lytton Strachey in 1919:

> You are very – ingenuous – if you can conceive me conversing with rural deans in the cathedral close. I do not go to cathedral towns but to centres of industry. My thoughts are absorbed in questions more important than ever enter the heads of deans – as *why* it is cheaper to buy steel bars from America than from Middlesborough, and the probable effect – the exchange difficulties with Poland – and the appreciation of the rupee. My evenings in Bridge. The effect is to make me regard London with disdain, and divide mankind into supermen, termites and wireworms. I am sojourning among the termites. At any rate that coheres. (*Letters* v.1 299)

The tone of this passage is complex. On the one hand, it is ironic; he suggests that his friend is naïve for thinking that Eliot might be attracted to contemplative quiet, and he satirically remarks that his preoccupation with things financial is of much more weight than those things that trouble the heads of deans, thus ironically placing the material higher than the spiritual. On the other hand, the financial questions he raises here are certainly most interesting and of great importance. There is a tone of wry

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of this law upon my infant mind that, like other members of my family, I have felt, ever since I passed beyond my early irresponsible years, an uncomfortable and very inconvenient obligation to serve upon committees" (qtd. in Mabie 1-2).

self-condemnation when he suggests that his life has become highly conventional ("My evenings in Bridge"), but he concludes his comment about living among the termites with the remark, "At any rate that coheres," as though it is somehow suitable for him to sojourn there. One thing stands out very clearly in this passage, and that is the separation between the world of the church and the world of industry. The questions of the church are relegated to rural cathedral towns while the humming centres of industry have no need or use for cathedrals or deans. It is clear on which side of the separation Eliot, albeit satirically, situates himself. The result is to give him a feeling of disdain toward London, a centre of industry, and toward his fellow termites. It is interesting to note that the termite is a social insect, known for its self-organized system reliant on swarm intelligence. Perhaps something of this was in his mind when he composed the lines in *The Waste Land* about the crowds of people commuting over London Bridge into the City. While he may feel disdain for London and the termites, Eliot apparently believes he has no other option open to him: the rural cathedral town is too far removed from him, and it is too ingenuous, meaning too simple or innocent, to think that he might be attracted there.

While clearly ambivalent at this point in his career about the Christian religion, perhaps drawn to it in some respects while highly suspicious of it in others, Eliot nevertheless kept himself up to date with what was happening in London regarding the City church buildings. The *Union of Benefices Act* of 1860 had permitted the demolition and sale of City churches that were unused or that had very small congregations to redistribute money to more active parishes, or to build new churches in other parts of London. After this act was passed, eighteen City churches were taken

down (Bradley 194). In 1919, the Bishop of London commissioned an inquiry into the current circumstances of the parishes in the City in London. The inquiry investigated the possibility of some rearrangement of these parishes. Such rearrangement might result in the demolition of nineteen of the City Churches. In 1920, a pamphlet entitled *Proposed Demolition of Nineteen City Churches* reported the results of this inquiry. Written by G. Topham Forrest (Architect of the Council) and James Bird (Clerk of the Council), this pamphlet outlined the reasons for the proposed demolition of nineteen churches and then proceeded to investigate the historical and architectural interest of the churches under threat. Forrest and Bird concluded that "These [churches] constitute ... some of the most interesting monuments of the City of London, and their architectural beauty and historical associations render them worthy of preservation. It should be emphasized also that London offers the finest opportunities for architectural study of any city in the kingdom, and that the work of the Wren period represents the culmination of English Renaissance architecture. The churches in that style produced by Wren in the City represent a series of buildings that is unique in Europe" (29). Although the proposal to demolish the nineteen churches was subsequently rejected by the Court of Common Council, it indicated a continued belief that City churches were too expensive to maintain when their usefulness in the City seemed negligible.

In 1921, Eliot used his London Letter for the *Dial* as a platform to respond to this pamphlet and to the proposal for the demolition of nineteen City churches. He writes, While the poetry lovers have been subscribing to purchase for the nation the Keats house in Hampstead as a museum, the Church of England has

apparently persisted in its design to sell for demolition nineteen religious edifices in the City of London. Probably few American visitors, and certainly few natives, ever inspect these disconsolate fanes; but they give to the business quarter of London a beauty which its hideous banks and commercial houses have not quite defaced. Some are by Christopher Wren himself, others by his school; the least precious redeems some vulgar street, like the plain little church of All Hallows at the end of London Wall. Some, like St. Michael Paternoster Royal, are of great beauty. As the prosperity of London has increased, the City Churches have fallen into desuetude; for their destruction the lack of congregation is the ecclesiastical excuse, and the need of money the ecclesiastical reason. The fact that the erection of these churches was apparently paid for out of a public coal tax and their decoration probably by the parishioners, does not seem to invalidate the right of the True Church to bring them to the ground. To one who, like the present writer, passes his days in the City of London (*quand'io sentii chiavar l'uscio di sotto*) the loss of these towers, to meet the eye down a grimy lane, and of these empty naves, to receive the solitary visitor at noon from the dust and tumult of Lombard Street, will be irreparable and unforgotten. ("The True Church" 690-1)

Eliot here responds quite passionately to the threat of demolition that so recently hung over these churches, and his reaction is based on aesthetic reasons similar to the defence of the churches argued in the 1920 pamphlet, *Proposed Demolition of Nineteen City Churches*. He writes that while the churches are not obvious tourist attractions, they are valuable for the pleasure they give to passers-by in the City. He

argues that their presence "redeems" the vulgarity of City streets, and that they have a beauty that is not to be found in the "hideous banks and commercial houses." Even the smallest and the plainest of these churches, he suggests, comes as a relief to the eye amid the other buildings of London's financial centre.

He responds dourly to the financial reasons that are given for the proposed demolition of the churches, commenting that while taxes probably paid for their construction and community funds for their decoration, the "True Church" is apparently willing to ignore such financial ties that, at one time, tangibly linked the church buildings with a community of people. The "True Church" appears to be, in Eliot's view in this piece, a disembodied and omnipotent source of power that will sell the churches for demolition and pocket the money, regardless of the connection between the churches' financial history and the communities of people they succoured. In this sense, the "True Church" does not seem to represent community at all. Eliot's tone, and his pointed use of the capitals in "True Church," indicates his antagonism to the Church as a religious institution. Whatever spiritual value, if any, Eliot places on these buildings in 1921 is certainly not mirrored in his view of the "True Church" which seems to be concerned, not with matters of community or religion, but with money. This is not to say that Eliot would not have understood the financial concerns of the diocese. As a banker, he would probably have been cognizant of the weight of expenditure that goes into the support and upkeep of an old building. But he argues for the preservation of these buildings because they are beautiful, and he suggests that in offering beauty to the streets of London they perhaps offer more, symbolically, than the banks and commercial houses do.

In a recent article, Matthew Bradley argues that Eliot is expressing in this 1921 *Dial* piece what Bradley calls the "aesthetic side" of the argument for preservation (196). Bradley argues that Eliot comes at the end of a "churches for art's sake" movement which began, he suggests, as early as 1880 in France. In associating Eliot with a late-decadent "churches for art's sake" movement, Bradley is pointing out that Eliot's interest in these buildings is aesthetic rather than religious. One of his reasons for associating Eliot with decadence is that, as he argues, the emphasis in Eliot's piece seems to be on an isolated urban flâneur who enters the church building as a solitary aesthete rather than as a participating member of a religious community. Bradley contrasts this solitariness with Eliot's post-conversion pageant play, *The Rock*, in which the claims of a community are of supreme importance.

Bradley is correct to locate Eliot's 1921 *Dial* plea for preservation in an aesthetic, rather than a religious, impulse. There is a hint, however, in this London Letter, that Eliot was already dissatisfied with the purely aesthetic response: a hint that "the loss of these towers" might symbolize something more distressing than the loss of beauty only. This hint comes in his reference to himself: "To one who, like the present writer, passes his days in the City of London (*quand'io sentii chiavar l'uscio di sotto*) the loss of these towers, to meet the eye down a grimy lane, and of these empty naves, to receive the solitary visitor at noon from the dust and tumult of Lombard Street, will be irreparable and unforgotten" ("The True Church" 691). Eliot's parenthetical allusion here is to *Inferno*, Canto XXXIII. In the ninth circle of Hell, Dante and Virgil are told the story of Count Ugolino's and his sons' imprisonment and deaths in a prison in Pisa. Count Ugolino and his grandson Nino shared the office of chief

magistrate of Pisa in the thirteenth century. Ugolino conspired with Archbishop Ruggieri to get Nino forced out of office, but as soon as Nino was gone Ruggieri betrayed Ugolino and had him and his sons imprisoned in a tower. They were kept in the tower for nine months, and in 1289 the Archbishop ordered the tower locked and the key thrown away. The prisoners died of starvation a few days later. Eliot's parenthetical quotation is an allusion to line 46 of Canto XXXIII, when Ugolino is thrown into prison: "I heard them nailing up the door" (*Inferno* 288). The parenthetical quotation follows Eliot's identification of himself as one who "passes his days in the City of London," clearly alluding to his sense of imprisonment in the City.[25] "I heard them nailing up the door" could also refer to the closing of the nineteen churches in the City: by demolishing the churches, the inhabitants of the City would be more than ever imprisoned by the "hideous banks and commercial houses," as the churches would no longer be there to "redeem some vulgar street" with their physical beauty and historical significance. In her commentary on this Canto in her translation of *Hell*, Dorothy L. Sayers notes that Ugolino and Ruggieri are partnered in sin – both are traitors. In betraying Ugolino, Ruggieri turns traitor on the traitor. Sayers writes, "This [pairing] is Dante's way of indicating that here in the ice of Cocytus we have the last state of the corruption of love: that every devouring passion ... that sets itself against the order of God and the City, bears in itself the seeds of treachery and a devouring passion of destruction" (216-17). In wishing to

[25] In Part V of *The Waste Land*, Eliot alludes to this moment in Canto XXXIII again. In his note on line 411 of the poem, he connects the line from Dante with a passage he quotes from Bradley's *Appearance and Reality* in which Bradley comments on the isolation of private experience. Both times he quotes the line from Dante the poet is describing experiences of extreme loneliness and isolation – in the City and in his own mind. Perhaps the church buildings offer some kind of antidote to the sense of individual imprisonment.

close the churches, pocketing the funds of their sale for demolition and ceasing to have the strain of their upkeep on its purse-strings, the "True Church" is betraying the City, which has already betrayed the churches by allowing them to fall into "desuetude." The passer-by in the City of London who will mourn the loss of the churches is an imprisoned traitor. The "irreparable and unforgotten" loss might be something additional to the loss of beauty in the City; it might be the loss of something spiritually meaningful. The churches are doubly betrayed, first by the City and then by the "True Church," and their loss might represent, as Sayers says, the "devouring passion of destruction" of a society for whom religion is dead – an imprisoned and starving society. Eliot's allusion to Dante's *Inferno*, Canto XXXIII with its story of imprisonment, betrayal, and starvation, might be simply a reference to Eliot's own unhappiness in the City, or it might be a hint, albeit small, that he viewed the church buildings not only as aesthetically valuable but also possibly as offering some sort of spiritual meaning not to be found elsewhere in the City.

Another part of his early reactions to the threatened City churches is Eliot's disappointment, not merely at the destruction of church buildings in London, but at the destruction of the works of Wren in particular. Sir Christopher Wren was responsible for rebuilding or restoring fifty-one of the City churches after the Great Fire of London, so it is not surprising that a number of his church buildings would come up for demolition – they far outnumber the works of any other City church architect. However, Eliot seems to find something particularly arresting about "Sir Christopher Wren and his school" which exacerbates his dismay at the pulling down of churches.

Two churches influenced by Sir Christopher Wren, St. Mary Woolnoth and St. Magnus Martyr, appear in *The Waste Land* not merely as details of setting but to represent important symbolic moments in the poem.[26] The poet's decision to use these two particular churches in the poem, coupled with repeated references to Wren in his *Dial* piece and letters, shows that Eliot's knowledge of and attraction to the work of the famous architect is more than simply a passing interest. Eliot reveals in a letter to Richard Aldington in 1921 that his interest in Wren was not merely cursory:

> Yes, I should love to write a book on Wren, or at least on the *églises assassinées* of London. But one would have to spend more money in travelling about seeing things than one would ever get out of a book. I long to see Rome and the Seventeenth Century architecture there – having been to Vicenza. (*Letters* v.1, 474)

Eliot takes the phrase "*églises assassinées*" from Maurice Barrès (1862-1923), who wrote in *La Grande Pitié des Églises de France* (1914) about the legislatures in France permitting the demolition of churches. Barrès was a French novelist, essayist and politician. He wrote about the moral and spiritual decline of the French Third Republic, arguing that cosmopolitan society was corrupt and that the young people of France needed to return to traditional and provincial values. His nationalism focused on the need for renewed contact with ancestral traditions. He located some of these meaningful traditions in the spiritual mission of the Catholic Church, even though he retained his own religious independence from the Church. He viewed with dismay the destruction of church buildings, which he considered important carriers of a spiritual

[26] While St. Magnus Martyr was rebuilt by Wren, St. Mary Woolnoth is the work of Nicholas Hawksmoor. Hawksmoor was Wren's pupil, and his work was heavily influenced by Wren's ideas. See the chapter on *The Waste Land* in this thesis for further discussion of Hawksmoor and his connection to Wren.

tradition that should, in his view, retain an important role in the future of France. Barrès argues that the churches are physical representations of spiritual well-being, and that their destruction is a desecration and a cause for deep concern and sadness.[27] Eliot takes the phrase "églises assassinées," with its associations with Barrès's sense that the loss of the church buildings represents the loss of a meaningful spiritual tradition, and applies it to the churches of London. Eliot's allusion to Barrès here suggests that he might feel the same way toward the loss of the churches in London as Barrès does about the loss of the churches in France, though for Eliot at this time the concern is largely aesthetic. He also connects the phrase with Wren, probably because the majority of the threatened churches in London were by Wren and his school. Eliot's remark about wishing to write a book about Wren might be simply a throw-away comment here, except for the fact that the interest in Wren seems very specific: "I should love to write a book on Wren, or *at least on* the *églises assassinées* of London" (emphasis added). The threatened churches are linked with Wren because most of them were built or restored by him, but Eliot's interest in Wren seems based not merely on this coincidence. In the London Letter in the *Dial* about the City Churches, written in the same year as this letter to Aldington, Eliot mentions Wren in

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[27] Barrès writes, "Aujourd'hui, pour la première fois dans l'histoire de France, c'est légalement que nos églises courent le danger de mort. Leur garde est tombée aux mains de ceux qui les détestent, pour qu'ils en fassent leur bon plaisir. Les texts sont très clairs. Les associations culturelles qui auraient eu les moyens et la charge d'entretenir les édifices religieux ne se sont pas constituées. ... Nos pauvres églises!" (8). ["Today, for the first time in the history of France, it is lawfulness that threatens our churches. They have fallen into the custody of people who hate them and who are now free to have their way with them. The fate of the churches is quite clear. Cultural institutions that might have had the means and a mission to maintain religious buildings were never established. .... Our poor churches!"] (my translation) By writing of the 'églises assassinées of London,' Eliot indicates his belief that London's churches stand in similar danger of destruction at the 'hands of people who hate them' and who do not understand or appreciate their value.

the phrase, "Some are by Christopher Wren himself." The wording of this reference to Wren suggests that, for Eliot, Christopher Wren's name is particularly noteworthy.

Sir Christopher Wren lived from 1632 –1723, during a very exciting and important time in architectural history in Europe as well as in England. The Renaissance, between c.1450 –c.1600 in Europe, was characterized by a new understanding of history, one that moved away from belief in divine ordinance toward confidence in human possibility and achievement. This new understanding of history and of human potential caused Renaissance scholars and artists to believe that they were experiencing the beginning of a new age in which intellectual confidence inspired the desire for architecture that would speak to the rational order they observed in the universe (Roth 317).

Wren, the English Restoration architect, grew up and was educated in a time of tension between religious vehemence and rationalist intellectual pursuit carried over from the political upheavals following the Renaissance in England. The intellectual atmosphere of the Restoration fostered a sense of a 'new beginning,' and of rapid and significant change. Nevertheless, change is inevitably accompanied by some doubt. Wren's era both welcomed new developments in science, philosophy, and technology, and reacted warily to them, desiring a system of education that focused on ancient models. Consequently, when Wren became an architect he had to find an intellectual position for himself within the dispute between the ancients and the moderns (Sekler 54). Wren had to negotiate his education and discern his role as an architect during a time of intellectual and artistic pressure. His response, both academically and architecturally, was to attempt a synthesis that placed him both at

the centre and on the margin of the tension. The conflict was due to the fact that classical education was increasingly popular while, at the same time, technology and the natural sciences were generating new knowledge far beyond ancient precedents.[28]

While it seemed possible to maintain respect for the old at the same time that one embraced the new, the act of reconciling these opposing impulses posed something of a challenge for the aspiring architect. In his education, as well as his interests, Wren was a modern. He devoted a great deal of time and energy to exploring new mathematics and experimental philosophy, and his inaugural lecture at Gresham College praised modernity, especially new developments relating to the telescope and microscope (Levine 174-76). However, his education also taught him to respect the ancients, and when he eventually turned his attention to architecture his aim was not to invent new forms based on modern technology and ability but rather to look to the ancients for practical knowledge and ideals (Levine 208). His reasons for wishing to return to classical styles of building were the result of the way he understood the meaning of architecture. Wren writes, "Building certainly ought to have the Attribute of the eternal and is therefore the only thing uncapable [sic] of new Fashions. ... an Architect ought to be jealous of Novelties, in which fancy blinds the Judgement .... The Glory of that which is good of itself is eternal" (qtd. in Levine 198). As one of

[28] Joseph M. Levine provides an excellent synopsis of the conflict between the ancients and the moderns: "The basic condition of the quarrel [between the ancients and the moderns] – and much of the intellectual history of the period – was a broad insistence that the ancient Greeks and Romans had set the supreme models and standards for every sort of endeavour.... While objections were raised occasionally, an exclusively classical education became more and more securely the foundation for all discussions of culture. ... But even at the same time, it was increasingly apparent that much that was new in contemporary culture had only recently been invented or developed – not least the English language itself.... Meanwhile, practical technology and the natural sciences seemed to be advancing beyond anything known in antiquity. In short, it appears that both modernity *and ancienneté* were increasing together..." (ix).

Charles II's chief architects, Wren's understanding of architecture was necessarily affected by the context of Restoration England. His buildings, including the palaces built for the king, reflect his task of representing, even of creating, England's national identity. With the religious and political upheavals of the previous decades still fresh in everybody's mind, Wren had to construct an architecture for England that would see her future not in terms of recent chaos, but as part of something greater and more lasting than the immediate past. Not surprisingly, therefore, he cast his eyes back to classical ideals when considering the future buildings of England.

Wren explains that the classical methods of building are the result of centuries of experience. He argues that architectural experiments are costly, and it is therefore better to consult the wisdom of the past than the whims of the contemporary imagination. In his *Discourse on Architecture*[29] Wren provides notes on the history of architecture including references from the Old Testament, Josephus, Pliny, Herodotus and Varro, explaining that a historical survey is necessary to give the public a more refined sense of architecture (Sekler 51). He writes, "I judge it not improper to endeavour to reform the Generality to a truer taste in Architecture by giving a larger Idea of the whole Art, beginning with the reasons and progress of it from the most remote antiquity" (qtd. in Sekler 51).[30]

Wren was convinced of the real importance of architecture and of its ability to convey messages to a society. This means that he took the art and theory of building very seriously and was deeply concerned with the meaning of forms. It was very

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[29] A manuscript of Wren's *Discourse on Architecture* is bound with the Heirloom Copy of *Parentalia* (Gregg Press 1965).

[30] Sekler does not provide a citation.

important to Wren that his buildings reflect his understanding of English nationality and English culture. Since he saw England moving into a more rational and intellectual time, away from times of religious fervour, superstition, and ignorance, he wished to build an architecture that would speak the language of rationality, good sense, and intellectual vigour. He believed that classical forms best demonstrated these qualities, and he wished to build structures that would take inspiration from the classical era while at the same time moving England forward into a new age of enlightenment, reason, and discovery. Wren's admiration of classical forms was by no means whimsical or prejudicial; he was neither a revivalist nor an imitator. In Sekler's words, "he was not lacking in historical sense nor was he out of sympathy with older buildings in his charge, for on many occasions he worked on what would nowadays be regarded as the care and preservation of ancient monuments." (74)

It is possible to see a commonality between Wren's project and Eliot's theory of tradition. Wren wished to create a new architecture for England, and to do this he looked to historical forms for his inspiration. However, the architectural styles he admired were originally created for the Classical world of Greece and Rome, and not for Restoration England. There is, then, in Wren the same tension between past and present that is so much a part of Eliot's theory of tradition. If the new and original art of the present moment depends for its creation on the art of the past, how can the past be used as guide and inspiration without the art of the present becoming merely nostalgic or simply an outgrowing of the past, which would render it unoriginal? Both Wren and Eliot seem to strive for an approach to tradition that allows the past to be transformed to speak to the present moment. Wren's work on the City Churches and

on St. Paul's Cathedral was a combination of preserving what was already there as well as taking the opportunity of the present moment to create something new. He felt the tension between the past and the present very keenly, engaging frequently in heated arguments with the king about what could or should be done to preserve, or to rebuild, the buildings damaged by the fire. Often financial constraints got in the way of his vision and he was forced to restore where he would have wished to make new, but he was caught as well in the conflict in his own mind between his admiration for the classical past and his current problem of how to translate that past into the present moment in a way that would energize the restored city by offering something new. Eliot, writing about poetry, confronts the same problem. As James Longenbach writes, Eliot is aware, even when writing "Tradition and the Individual Talent," that "it is not so easy to dispense with the tensions between the 'timeless' and the 'temporal,' between tradition conceived as an 'ideal order' of time-honoured monuments, and the individual talent conceived as a mind that alters the past 'as much as the present is directed by the past'" (13).

Eliot's expression of interest in Wren and in the *églises assassinées* of London in 1921 reflected an interest in tradition and art. The churches of Wren and his school in London offered beauty to a city in need, in Eliot's view, of attractive architecture. The church buildings offered a connection to the past: knowledge that a particular church was the work of Sir Christopher Wren would call up the historical associations of the Great Fire of London and the history of the City. There is some common ground between Wren's approach to the past in his buildings and Eliot's understanding of tradition in art as articulated in "Tradition and the Individual Talent." It is possible to

view the buildings fashioned by this architect as exemplifying the pastness of the past as well as its presence, the new growing out of the old, and the old being refashioned for the new. The *églises assassinées* of London were not merely artifacts or museum pieces worthy of preservation because of their age, but they were also carriers of an aesthetic and cultural tradition. There is an interesting affinity between the architect whom Eliot associates with these churches and Eliot's own ideas of tradition and its importance for art and culture.

Eliot's next public declaration of support for the churches of London was written for the *Criterion* in 1926. This year is largely accepted to have been important in relation to Eliot's conversion to Christianity, which was formalized by his Anglican baptism and confirmation in 1927. In the 1926 Commentary about the churches, it is noticeable that Eliot has moved away from the aesthetic interests that dominate his 1921 *Dial* Letter, and he seems also to have departed from his concerns with the aesthetic tradition as such. His focus is now overtly religious, and the value he places on beauty and tradition is directly connected to his post-conversion understanding of the church buildings as sacred space. In 1926, the *Union of Benefices and Disposal of Churches (Metropolis) Measure* was passed which again allowed the demolition and sale of churches in the City in order to join several City parishes that were considered too small to be separate, as well as to fund other ecclesiastical initiatives elsewhere in London. In the summer of 1926 Eliot writes to Bonamy Dobrée, "I quite agree about the distinction between the picturesque and the monument of a civilisation. And I make the further point that to destroy these churches is to accelerate the decay of the church – it is not party funds that makes a church prosperous" (qtd. in Dobrée 69).

Eliot and Dobrée together led a hymn-chanting protest procession through London on behalf of the City churches. Dobrée concludes his reminiscence: "The churches were saved" (70). In October of that year, Eliot writes about the 1926 *Union of Benefices Measure* in the *Criterion*, saying,

It is unfortunate that the Bishop's absence should occur at the same time as renewed rumour of the design to destroy the City Churches. Since the first attempt was made, several years ago, the church of St. Magnus Martyr has been concealed, on the side from which its beauty was most conspicuous, by a large industrial structure (not ill-favoured in itself) which reduces the church to the proportions and importance of a museum piece. This is bad enough, but in default of any central direction of municipal planning, it is what we must expect; and it is easier to demolish undesirable buildings than to erect desirable ones. But if those responsible for the preservation of these shrines wish themselves to destroy them, is it not at least to be required, by the people to which these guardians are morally responsible, that a public statement of the ecclesiastical exigencies, in the name of which this demolition is indicated, should be spread abroad? It is only what employers and trades-unions are constantly being called upon to do, whenever there is a strike. ... The proceeds of the demolitions (*ie*, chiefly the utilisation of the sites, we presume, for commercial buildings) are to be applied 'for the promotion of religion in accordance with the principles of the Church of England'.

We renounce any attempt to appeal to our Shepherds on the argument for Art, or the beauty of London. We would remind them rather – meeting them

on what should be their own ground – that if the church invisible is in decay, it is hardly likely in the long run, to be restored by the destruction of visible churches. A visible church, whether it assembles five hundred worshippers or only one passing penitent who has saved a few minutes from his lunch hour, is still a church: in this it differs from a theatre, which if it cannot attract large enough audiences to pay, is no better than a barn. The destruction of a church which has the added consecration of antiquity and even a little beauty, is a movement towards the destruction of *the* church, with Disestablishment on the way. Possibly some reflections of this nature might give our Shepherds pause: we shall cease to appeal in the name of Christopher Wren and his school, and appeal in the name of Laud and the *beauty of holiness*. (628-9)

This piece offers an interesting view into the movement of Eliot's mind away from aesthetic concerns with regard to ecclesiastical architecture. He begins by noting that the beauty and majesty of St. Magnus Martyr has been considerably marred by the church building having been recently dwarfed by an enormous industrial structure next to it. It is important to point out that his intention is not to say that the industrial building is ugly while the church is beautiful; the point he is making here is that it is unfortunate, while it is to be expected, that modern building will render the old churches visually insignificant as dwarfed, quaint museum pieces. Eliot's real concern in this piece is not with the aesthetic significance of church buildings, however; he wishes to call the Church leaders to book for their decisions to demolish ecclesiastical structures in the City. He wishes to remind them of what he considers their moral responsibility to be: not money, but spiritual matters. This is an early

demonstration of the point he makes later in "Religion and Literature" (1935) that art, in this case church architecture, should be approached from a moral point of view. His movement away from his earlier aesthetic concerns regarding church buildings is clear in the last paragraph: "We *renounce* any attempt to appeal to our Shepherds on the argument for Art, or the beauty of London" (emphasis added). Further, he concludes, "*we shall cease to appeal in the name of Christopher Wren and his school*, and appeal in the name of Laud and the beauty of holiness" (emphasis added). The argument for art, the beauty of London, and the name of Sir Christopher Wren, all so weighty to Eliot in his 1921 *Dial* Letter about the City Churches, is no longer of primary importance. Now he appeals for recognition of church buildings as sacred space; he argues that their chief value for society is spiritual rather than aesthetic.

Churches had long been for Eliot visible carriers of an aesthetic and historical tradition. They are now important physical symbols of a spiritual tradition. He offers a warning in this *Criterion* Commentary, asking the "Shepherds" to consider carefully what the loss of the physical symbol of a church building will mean: the church building is the church visible. Eliot asks the Shepherds to question whether the church invisible, already in decline, can really be supported in any spiritually meaningful way by the disappearance of its important physical monuments.

It is important to note that these buildings are very obviously sacred to Eliot in this 1926 piece. He has not ceased to value the buildings for the reasons that made him interested in them in 1921. The aesthetic and historical importance of a church building is, he says, an "added consecration"; while no longer the focus of his attention, it does not cease to be part of his complex appreciation for church

architecture. That he has moved away from his earlier concerns is clear in the last sentence, however, where "*The beauty of holiness*" is emphasized as the chief appeal. The church buildings are no longer merely redeeming vulgar streets by their beauty; they stand as monuments of holiness in a society that has lost its sense of the sacred. He argues that the Shepherds should recognize that people need these monuments of holiness more than the Church needs money, that the buildings are spiritually meaningful regardless of whether one person or many people enter them. In 1927, in another Commentary about ancient buildings and City churches, he repeats this point: "we would reiterate our argument of last October: that besides the powerful and concurrent reasons for preserving them as ancient buildings, there are other more powerful reasons for preserving them as churches" ("Ancient Buildings" 5).

Eliot reemphasizes his point about the beauty of holiness in a Commentary about Westminster Abbey in 1928. Here Eliot objects to proposed changes to the Abbey that include disinterring a number of bodies buried there in order to make room for "the next crop of deceased Statesmen" (2). He begins, "We approach this matter from the point of enquiring how best the Abbey may be preserved as an historical monument of great symbolic value and of aesthetic interest..." (1) but quickly moves to reminding his audience that "the Abbey was not originally designed primarily as a Pantheon, but as a Church," (2) and that "what is certain is that if a church loses its sanctity, it also loses its beauty" (3). Here he begins by appealing for the preservation of the Abbey on the grounds that it stands as a monument to English culture, but his real focus is on its significance as a monument of English religious tradition. The association he made in 1926 between beauty and holiness is even clearer here: in the

earlier piece, beauty and antiquity gave a building added sacredness, while in the strongly worded Commentary of 1928 they are inseparable, and the aesthetic is wholly absorbed into the spiritual: "if a church loses its sanctity, it also loses its beauty." It appears that by 1928 the significance Eliot placed on church architecture was more than ever centered on its role as a carrier of a religious tradition and on its sacredness.

Readers of the *Criterion* might well have been surprised at the emphasis Eliot was giving to ideas of sacredness and the church, as these concerns were not part of the aims of the literary review when he launched it in 1922. However, these new emphases were part of Eliot's movement towards classicism and religion, and they reflected his increasing sense that art should be approached from a moral point of view. In 1927, defending his aims for the *Criterion*, he writes, "To assume that everything has changed, is changing, and must change, according to forces which are not human, and that all that a person who cares about the future must or can do is to adapt himself to the change is a fatalism which is unacceptable. ... If we are to be qualified as 'neo-classicists,' we hope that 'neo-classicism' may be allowed to comprise the idea that man is responsible, *morally* responsible, for his present and his immediate future" ("Politique D'Abord" 283). This seems a far cry from Eliot's statement in the *Athenaeum* in 1919 that "an interest in morals will not produce sound criticism of art" (1333). For Eliot in 1928, however, morals must inform the criticism of art, and his sense of moral responsibility and his sense of duty towards art are "inextricably related" (Margolis 75). Eliot believes that the critic must ask, from a moral point of view, what effect art is producing upon society. It is unsurprising, then,

that for Eliot church architecture might become one of the subjects of study for the man of letters. His post-conversion concern for church buildings stems from his sense of moral obligation toward art and society; for him the destruction of the churches represents the disquieting loss of appreciation for the sacred in modern society, and his plea for their preservation is connected to his desire to reawaken his readers to a sense of spiritual wholeness by reminding them of a religious tradition worth preserving, and a vision of sanctity in the midst of modern life.

In the introduction to a volume of selected essays entitled *For Lancelot Andrewes* (1928), Eliot made his famous announcement of his "general point of view" as a classicist, royalist, and anglo-catholic. The essay on Lancelot Andrewes outlines Eliot's appreciation for the intellectual achievements of the Church of England, which contributed largely to his reasons for entering it (Margolis 106). In the *Dial* in 1928 Eliot wrote, "we demand of religion some kind of *intellectual* satisfaction – both private and social – or we do not want it at all" ("An Emotional Unity" 112). In *For Lancelot Andrewes*, he continues the point, saying, "A Church is to be judged by its intellectual fruits, by its influence on the sensibility of the most sensitive and on the intellect of the most intelligent, and it must be made real to the eye by monuments of artistic merit" (15-16). He continues,

The English Church has no literary monument equal to that of Dante, no intellectual monument equal to that of St. Thomas, no devotional monument equal to that of St. John of the Cross, no building so beautiful as the Cathedral of Medena or the basilica of St. Zeno in Verona. But there are those for whom the City churches are as precious as any of the four hundred odd churches in

Rome which are in no danger of demolition, and for whom St. Paul's, in comparison with St. Peter's, is not lacking in decency.... (16)

Eliot connects, in this essay, the intellectual feats of the English devotional verse of the seventeenth century and the writings of Lancelot Andrewes with the City churches, clearing indicating that the churches are as much "monuments of artistic merit" as are the poems and sermons of the English church. The church buildings are some of the "intellectual fruits" of the Church, and they appeal to the intellect and to the sensibility.

Eliot's post-conversion response to the City churches combined his earlier aesthetic appreciation of the buildings with a vision of them as representative carriers of an intellectual and spiritual tradition worth rediscovering and preserving. This tradition was increasingly threatened. Thinking particularly of his birth-town St. Louis, but also about modern cities in general, Eliot writes in 1948, "We are destroying our ancient edifices to make ready the ground upon which the barbarian nomads of the future will encamp in their mechanized caravans" (qtd. in Kirk 18). In the late 1920s when Eliot wrote his appeals to preserve London's church architecture, ancient edifices in other parts of Europe were being pulled down at the instigation of dangerous modern barbarians. For instance, upon Lenin's death in 1924 a memorial was proposed for the site of Moscow's ancient Christ the Saviour Cathedral. In 1931, the Soviets held the first competition for proposals for the Palace of Soviets to be constructed on the cathedral site. Later that year the cathedral was demolished, and in 1933 work on the palace began. As Russell Kirk writes, the modern world was in danger of surrendering to "the pseudo-authority of oligarchs ... who, though unable to

make heaven on earth, were quite competent to erect a terrestrial hell. Architecture of the latter sort was making swift progress under the direction of Stalin and of Hitler, in the year 1934" (189).

It is with no little urgency that, following his conversion, Eliot asked his readers to consider the value and use of church architecture and to reflect upon its symbolic role in modern life. Churches frequently (indeed almost inevitably) reflect a society's state of mind with regard to the spiritual tradition of the past and the present, and Eliot wished to remind readers that the future depends upon attitudes society holds about the past. If the past is seen as irrelevant, then the future will be built upon new precepts, some of which may prove to be anti-human ideas of progress that treat humans as machines and deny their spiritual complexity.

Chapter Two
T.S. Eliot and W.R. Lethaby

"Our problem in the present is not to cling to the detailed expression of the old magics, but to get back, or attain to, a sense of right and sanctity in what is to us reality and the nature of things." (Lethaby, *Nature and Magic* 101)

In January 1928, at the end of a Commentary for the *Criterion* subtitled "The Stones of London" in which Eliot argues for the preservation of Westminster Abbey, he adds a postscript acknowledging the work of W.R. Lethaby (1857-1931), architect and historian: "As we go to press we learn with regret that Professor W.R. Lethaby has resigned his charge of the Abbey structure, which he had held for 22 years. Our greatest living authority on architecture, he will be difficult to replace" (*Criterion* 1928, 4). Coming from Eliot, this is strong praise. This public avowal of respect for Lethaby was not Eliot's only expression of interest in the work of this architect. In September 1923, Eliot had written to Lethaby on behalf of the *Criterion*:

Dear Professor Lethaby,

I think that it is over a year ago that I wrote to you about the *Criterion*, so that you cannot complain that I have plagued you. You will see from this circular that your name represents a defect in what seems to me an otherwise brilliant list. I am sending you the essay on architecture which I enclose, in the hope that it may stimulate you to write at least a little paper for us. But remember that any subject in connexion with art or architecture that you choose would be welcome to us; and if this essay does not interest you, or if you are too busy, or for any other reason, do not bother to return it. There is no one else whom we should ask to write about these subjects. (*Letters* v.2, 211)

As the recently published (November 2009) second volume of Eliot's collected letters reveals, he was in 1923 avidly seeking papers from a variety of scholars for the *Criterion*. He wrote to Sir James George Frazer, for instance, and elicited a promise from him for a contribution to the quarterly publication, as well as to Jane Harrison, F.M. Cornford, and others. Typically with these requests he sent the circular of the *Criterion* to "give you some notion of the character of the paper and its contributors" (*Letters* v.2 162). In a compliment to Lethaby, he indicates that the fact that Lethaby's name is so far missing on this circular is a "defect." Moreover, he elicits Lethaby's response to an article on architecture, concluding with the remark that Lethaby's would be accepted as the last word on the subject. Though it is unknown which article on architecture Eliot sent to Lethaby, and though Lethaby never did write for the *Criterion*, he evidently answered Eliot's letter and in October 1923 Eliot wrote to him again:

Dear Mr Lethaby,

I think that I have not thanked you for your letter. Certainly it is right that you should not notice such an essay, and as you have that opinion of it I certainly would not let anyone else do so. But we do indeed want something from you very badly; it is appalling that there should be no one else in England who can write sense about architecture, but it is the truth.

I have just seen your book on Roman London: I congratulate you on an important and extremely interesting book: important I think as much by reason of the point of view toward architecture in general and the subject in particular, as by the erudition itself. (*Letters* v.2, 253)

Here, again, is a very strongly worded expression of praise and respect. This third letter from Eliot to Lethaby reveals two important points. Firstly, in saying that Lethaby is the only person in England who can "write sense about architecture," Eliot seems to indicate that he knows about other published works on architecture and that he admires Lethaby's above all. In other words, Eliot's interest in Lethaby does not exist in a vacuum but appears to be part of a wider awareness of scholarship on the subject of architecture. Secondly, he reveals that he is keeping up to date with Lethaby's work. Lethaby's book (*Londinium: Architecture and the Crafts*), mentioned here, was published earlier in 1923, so it appears that Eliot lost no time in getting hold of it. On the basis of his remarks in these letters, it is possible to assume that Eliot had read not only Lethaby's most recently published book but also other works by him as well. This speculation is possible because Eliot's second letter to Lethaby, which was apparently written before Eliot had seen *Londinium*, reveals a respect for Lethaby's opinion about architecture that suggests that Eliot was familiar, at least in part, with Lethaby's earlier works.

Lethaby was a follower of John Ruskin and William Morris and was also deeply influenced by the English school of anthropology led by Sir James George Frazer. This same anthropological school was, of course, very important to T.S. Eliot's development of a theory of tradition in art and of "the mythical method." Given Eliot's enthusiasm for Lethaby, and given the similarity between their understandings of the cultural importance of myth and tradition, I argue in this chapter that there is an affinity between the ways in which Eliot and Lethaby viewed the role of art and

architecture in society, and I speculate that Eliot's knowledge of Lethaby's work adds another layer of complexity to Eliot's views on ecclesiastical architecture.

William Richard Lethaby, architect, historian and educator, was a prominent member of the Arts and Crafts Movement led by William Morris which grew largely out of the ideas of John Ruskin. The members of the movement were passionate about traditional methods of craftsmanship, and they attempted to raise standards of design. The movement was reformist in character, and its members believed, following Ruskin, that the effects of industry on art were to obliterate beauty and freedom in design. In his section on "The Nature of Gothic" in *The Stones of Venice*, Ruskin argues that the standards of perfection aspired to in ancient civilizations such as the Greek made the workmen into slaves because the geometric forms "could be executed with absolute precision by line and rule" and thus allowed nothing of the individual soul of the workman to enter into his work (159-60). However, the forms of the Gothic are imprecise and imperfect, and in this very imperfection the workman is free to reveal himself. Ruskin writes,

> Understand this clearly: You can teach a man to draw a straight line, and to cut one; to strike a curved line, and to carve it; and to copy and carve any number of given lines or forms, with admirable speed and perfect precision; and you find his work perfect of its kind: but if you ask him to think about any of those forms, to consider if he cannot find any better in his own head, he stops; his execution becomes hesitating; he thinks, and ten to one he thinks wrong; ten to one he makes a mistake in the first touch he gives to his work as

a thinking being. But you have made a man of him for all that. He was only a machine before, an animated tool. (162)

The members of the Arts and Crafts Movement were concerned that the Industrial Revolution and the rise of factories had made machines out of men by disallowing the individual workman to consider what he was making and thus to chance the possibility of inserting a flaw into the design. In its early years, the movement aimed to undo the brutalizing effects of the Industrial Revolution by revaluating and reconstituting physical and psychological harmony in work, and, in so doing, to change the process and products of work (Cumming and Kaplan 9). It therefore looked to the past for lessons about the meaning of the arts and their theory and practice in pre-industrial societies. In the second decade of the movement, the Design and Industries Association was formed (1915). The DIA, which included Lethaby among its members, wished to work side-by-side with manufacturers to have an increased influence on mass-produced goods, for the members of the DIA believed that "Art is not a special sauce applied to ordinary cooking; it is the cooking itself if it is good" (qtd. in Greensted 67). Lethaby joined the DIA believing that "a machine-made object could be as well-made, well-designed and useful as a hand-made one" and that the future influence of the Arts and Crafts Movement on design methods depended upon the willingness of its members to collaborate with manufacturers (Greensted 70).

It is easy to see how followers of Ruskin would be drawn to the study of anthropology. In connecting the age of machinery with slavery and discussing the forms of the Gothic as symbolic of freedom in design, Ruskin's works encourage his

followers to look to a pre-industrial society for inspiration. Additionally, Ruskin writes,

A picture or a poem is often little more than a feeble utterance of man's admiration of something out of himself; but architecture approaches more to a creation of his own, born of his necessities, and expressive of his nature. It is also, in some sort, the work of the whole race, while the picture or statue are the work of one only, in most cases more highly gifted than his fellows. And therefore we may expect that the first two elements of good architecture should be expressive of some great truths commonly belonging to the whole race, and necessary to be understood or felt by them in all their work that they do under the sun. (180-1)

Without agreeing necessarily with what Ruskin says here about the picture or poem, it is important to note that he associates architecture with "the work of the whole race." The importance and meaning of architecture belongs, he says, not to any one civilization, but to humanity universally. This raises the question of precisely which "truths" in architecture inspired humans through the ages. It should not be surprising, therefore, that an architecture historian and disciple of Ruskin such as Lethaby should be interested in and influenced by the work of the English anthropologists who sought "truths" of the human mind across the ages and should undertake his own investigation into "some great truths commonly belonging to the whole race."

Eliot's own relationship to Ruskin is complex. It is known that as an undergraduate Eliot read and admired Ruskin, and that Ruskin's *The Stones of Venice*

impressed him deeply during his tour of Venice and Northern Italy in 1911.[31] In a recent article, Giovanni Cianci undertakes to speculate that "Eliot's familiarity with and absorption of Ruskin's work at this point in his career [1917-1921] has a particular significance" given that these were the years in which Eliot developed his theory of tradition (134). However, as Ronald Bush points out, Eliot's relationship with Ruskin's ideas is more complex than a mere imbibing of influential ideas about history and tradition; Eliot was openly critical of Ruskin and scarcely mentions him in his writings in the 1920s and 1930s ("Second Thoughts" 157). In 1931, on the other hand, Eliot writes in exasperation about "scientific education" and says that "we need another Ruskin" (Bush, "Second Thoughts" 161). However, in the 1940s Eliot became deeply disapproving of Ruskin's valuation of art over religion (Bush, "Second Thoughts" 157). Bush concludes, therefore, that Eliot's relationship with Ruskin's ideas was a complex mixture of "absorption and rejection," taking a number of different forms at different stages of Eliot's career ("Second Thoughts" 162). It is, consequently, beyond the scope of this study to investigate the nature of Eliot's valuation of Ruskin since it does not touch directly on the main issue at hand. Eliot would certainly have known of Lethaby's connection with the Arts and Crafts Movement and of Lethaby's association with Ruskin's ideas. It is highly probable, also, that Eliot would have recognized in Lethaby's works the influence of the English school of anthropology, and it is perhaps most helpful for this study to explore in some detail the anthropological influence, given that Lethaby's knowledge of Ruskin's famous work, "The Nature of Gothic" in *The Stones of Venice*, was probably instrumental in leading him to a study of the work of the anthropologists,

[31] See Ronald Bush, "Eliot and Ruskin: Second Thoughts" note 7, p. 163.

and these anthropologists were similarly influential on the development of Eliot's thought.

Eliot and Anthropology: Return to the sources

In 1913, at Harvard, Eliot attended Josiah Royce's seminar for which he wrote a paper, "The Interpretation of Primitive Ritual." Eliot's study of anthropology at this time marked the beginning of an interest that would last over twenty years. His reading in anthropology was extensive, and his knowledge of the subject was synthesized in his work in a number of interesting ways.

Harry T. Costello and Piers Gray both mention that when Eliot entered Royce's seminar he had been reading F.H. Bradley, the philosopher who was to become the focus of Eliot's doctoral dissertation. In his essay, "The Presuppositions of Critical History," Bradley asks a number of questions about historical knowledge that are contextually important for Eliot's seminar paper. Bradley asks, what is a historical fact, and how are historical facts to be proved valid? Bradley argues that history cannot be understood passively because every historical "fact" comes from a record that interpreted the importance of an event in some way and that has to be interpreted in the present by the historian. All historical "facts" are, therefore, based upon a complex system of interpretation. Moreover, because the historian views the study of the past from a perspective of growth or progress, the historian must accept that the experience of the present is different from that of the past, and thus the present-day historian interprets the past about which he has no experience. Furthermore, and this is an idea of Bradley's that Eliot fleshes out in his dissertation when writing about

Bradley's "system" of points of view, any age experiences its present in a limited and unselfconscious way: when the experience of the present is "taken up and made more whole by a later period there is growth and development," but this growth and development necessarily entails an interpretation of the past experience in light of the changes that have since taken place (Gray 112). In other words, self-consciousness involves a movement away from experience into interpretation.

Therefore, says Bradley, all historical "fact" is the work of interpretation: "And so the past varies with the present, and can never do otherwise, since it is always the present upon which it rests. This present is presupposed by it, and is its necessary preconception" (qtd. in Gray 104). If statements about the past share a scientific world-view, it is possible to accept their rationalist validity. However, how is it possible to understand the consciousness of a society that does not share a scientific or rationalist point of view? This is the starting place for Eliot's seminar paper on primitive ritual in which he poses the problem that there are no "neutral 'facts'," because all "facts" depend upon interpretation (Gray 109). The question of fact becomes acutely problematic in the study of an age of religious consciousness because the historian or anthropologist, working from a scientific point of view, does not share the same mindset. In his dissertation, Eliot writes, "A science is such because it is able to deal with objects which are all of one type; and the aim of each science is to reduce reality (so far as reality comes within the purview of that science) to one type of object, and the ultimate type of object I would suppose (acknowledging my incompetence to speak) to be points in mathematical relation" (*KE* 162). However, the social scientist cannot condense human beliefs and customs to "one

type of object" and "the very subject matter of his study is the changing consciousness of human beings, the change in time, that is, of points of view" (Gray 119). Therefore, Eliot concludes in his seminar paper that the only "fact" to be discovered in a study of ancient and primitive societies is the ritual. He says that the ritual itself can be studied separately from present and past interpretations of its meaning. Through a study of the ritual by means of the comparative method of Sir James George Frazer (who is successful in Eliot's view when he offers a comparison but not an attempted interpretation of religious behaviour), Eliot says, "We *can* come to conclusions as to what men did at one period and another, and can to some extent see the development of one form out of another" (qtd. in Crawford 87). Clarifying this in his Introduction to *Savonarola* (1926), Eliot says, "the meaning of the series of acts is to the performers themselves an interpretation; the same ritual remaining practically unchanged may assume different meanings for different generations of performers; and the rite may have originated before 'meaning' meant anything at all" (qtd. in Gray 127).

Eliot's extensive reading in anthropology, from Frazer and Harrison to Durkheim and Lévy-Bruhl, led him to the view that the origins of art were in ritual, and that art had not, in ancient and primitive cultures, been created solely for aesthetic pleasure. In his review of Durkheim's *Elementary Forms of Religion*, Eliot accepts Durkheim's thesis that ritual was not created to explain a myth; rather myths were "invented to make sense of inherited rituals" (Chinitz 74). He also accepts from Durkheim that a ritual is a collective experience that stems from "group consciousness"; individual members of a tribe "partake in a common nature which it is the function of the

religious festival to arouse" (qtd. in Chinitz 74). Art, therefore, emerges from ritual which is tied to this group consciousness.

Eliot is acutely interested in the communal role art had, through ritual, in primitive society. In his review of W.J. Perry's *The Growth of Civilization* and *The Origin of Magic and Religion* in 1924, he finds himself asking: "At what point ... does the attempt to design and create an object for the sake of beauty become conscious? at what point in civilisation does any conscious distinction between practical or magical utility and aesthetic beauty arise? ... [S]urely the distinction must mark a change in the human mind which is of fundamental importance" ("Review of W.J. Perry" 490). And additionally, Eliot writes, "a further question we should be impelled to ask is this: Is it possible and justifiable for art, the creation of beautiful objects and of literature, to persist indefinitely without its primitive purposes: is it possible for the aesthetic object to be a *direct* object of attention?" ("Review of W.J. Perry" 490-1). He asks whether, in the present, art has become too separated from its ritual roots to survive.

Eliot is interested not only in the distance separating the primitive from the civilized man, but also in the ways in which this distance is illusory. While admiring the work of Lucien Lévy-Bruhl, Eliot criticizes him for differentiating too sharply between the civilized mind and the "pre-logical" primitive mind: "he appears to me to draw the distinction between primitive and civilized mental process altogether too clearly" (qtd. in Gray 122). Eliot does accept from Lévy-Bruhl the notion that in the primitive consciousness there is an intimate connection between the human mind and the environment (Crawford 94; Spurr 268). Lévy-Bruhl theorizes that the primitive

mind imbues objects or phenomena with mystical properties that are intrinsic and unified (he calls this "collective representation"), while the civilized mind separates past from present, thought from object, being from non-being (this is translated by Eliot into the post-Cartesian "dissociation of sensibility"). Eliot does not accept, however, that there are pre-logical ways of thinking that are now extinct. The connection between primitive and civilized man can, he says, be rediscovered through art. If art is understood as developing out of ritual, then it can go some way toward repairing the modern dissociation of sensibility because this understanding places art in a communal role closely linked to a culture's way of life.

Eliot's study of primitive ritual, and his statement that "The maxim, Return to the sources, is a good one," was not a nostalgic program of reaching into the past. Rather, anthropology shows that art (recalling what he says about ritual in the Introduction to *Savonarola*) can alter "so completely in social function as to become a different object altogether" (Chinitz 77). The meaning of ritual, the meaning of art, is not static over time. Therefore, as Chinitz says, "Anthropological thinking makes it possible to reimagine the possibilities of one's own culture" (77). When Eliot says famously in his essay "*Ulysses*, Order and Myth" (1923) that the mythical method is "a step toward making the modern world possible for art" (*SP* 178), he means that the mythical method proposes a renovation of the role of art in society in which art becomes central to the experience of the world as it was in primitive cultures (Chinitz 80). A return to the sources teaches that art must be revivified in the present.

Lethaby the Historian: "If you would know the new, you must search the old"

The starting place for Lethaby's theory of architectural history was his conviction that art means something more than the mere aesthetic style of any given era. This idea was fueled by his reading of Ruskin's "The Nature of Gothic" in 1888. Because he believed that the meaning of art was essentially symbolic, Lethaby sought in his own work as architect a modern style that would be more meaningful than a mere pattern of rearranging or recombining aesthetic styles of the past. His biographer, Godfrey Rubens, reveals that Lethaby was always preoccupied by the idea of art as symbol, giving an example of a terrifying illustration drawn by Lethaby in 1889 titled "The Beryl Shrine" – an illustration powerfully influenced by Dante Gabriel Rossetti's poem *Rose Marie* and Keats's *Lamia*. Rubens argues that this illustration is not only indicative of an adventurous individualism, but also reveals, more importantly, Lethaby's quest for a modern symbolic style (65). Lethaby was unimpressed by much contemporary art, believing it to be a hollow recopying and recombining of elements of past artistic styles without any deeper meaning (Rubens 65; 80). He therefore set out to examine the myths, legends, and forms of ancient architecture to determine what meaning architecture might have had in the past. In this enterprise he was greatly aided and influenced by the work of the English anthropological school. In his first book, *Architecture, Mysticism and Myth* (1891), which is arguably as much a work of anthropology as it is one of history, Lethaby writes,

We cannot think of a time when Man had not asked, Where am I? Nor, when he had arrived at an explanation, that it was not set forth by representation; not a definition in a book, or by carefully chosen speech, but dramatically by that

parler aux yeux which is an increasing factor in speech as you go backwards in the history of intelligent communication. If we remember that 'old means not old in chronology, but in structure: that is most archaic which lies nearest to the beginning of human progress considered as a development,' we may roughly put as the beginning of graphic and descriptive astronomy the dance and the story. The dance, on the one hand, becomes a part of ritual, and the story passes into mythology. Every key applied to custom and mythology unlocks some of their secrets, and Mr Max Müller, Mr Andrew Lang, and Dr. Tylor are certainly agreed that to a large extent what is now mythology was once an explanation of nature. ... We ought at this point to examine rites and ceremonies, savage dances, priestly observances, courtly ceremony, and the pomp of war, the great festivals...; and in all these things we should find that man, after a certain stage was reached, was ever trying to conform himself to the ritual of nature, so that, like it in some respects, he might share its power and permanence. But ritual is too wide a subject merely to glance at; we must limit ourselves to things made, or poets' views of how they should be made. In these the tendency has been universal to embody the natural order: not a plan of the world for science, but as a religious mystery and symbol.... (33)

This passage reveals a number of important points about Lethaby's theory of architectural history. Firstly, he accepts the anthropologists' thesis that the art form develops out of ritual, rather than the other way around. Furthermore, due to the vastness of the subject, he does not try to interpret the ritual as such; rather he limits himself to what can be learned about the ritual from the forms created. He finds the

essential similarity between the forms in every case: that the art, in this case architecture, was universally developed as a religious and symbolic response to nature and the universe. In his book, Lethaby adopts the comparative method of Frazer; each chapter examines a particular architectural form – for instance the labyrinth – and places side by side examples of this form from different cultures and different eras, noting the similarities, differences and developments in its symbolic meaning. He writes elsewhere,

[E]very school of art is the product of the antecedent schools plus the national equation of the moment, and these two factors may be as almost distinct and existing side by side, or they may run together into a new compound form. So true is this that the history of art may be compared to chemical analysis; and one of the offices of its historian is to distinguish and weigh the components of any given example. If his tests were rigorous enough he should be able to trace every element. (qtd. in Rubens 249)

His task is likened to that of a scientific experiment in which the elements of a compound are to be separated, and conclusions will be drawn by looking at each of the separated elements when they are laid side by side.

Architecture, Mysticism and Myth is a historical study that argues for the first time that there is more to be learned from ancient architecture than the history and development of man's use of materials and tools; that ancient architecture in fact symbolizes human philosophy and psychology: "It is of this … that I propose to write; the influence of the known and imagined facts of the universe on architecture, the connection between the world as a structure, and the building, not of the mere

details of nature and the ornaments of architecture, but of the whole – the Heavenly Temple and the Earthly Tabernacle" (3). He begins by distinguishing between "building" and "architecture," writing that the study of "utilitarian origins" of structures and "the adjustment of forms to the conditions of local circumstance" is the history of *building*, whereas a study of the thought that was behind the form is the history of *architecture*: "Architecture, then, interpenetrates building, not for satisfaction of the simple needs of the body, but the complex ones of the intellect" (1). He therefore makes the distinction between architecture and building as one between soul and body, and continues,

> Of the modes of this thought we must again distinguish; some were unconscious and instinctive, as the desire for symmetry, smoothness, sublimity, and the like merely aesthetic qualities, which properly enough belong to true architecture; and others were direct and didactic, speaking by a more or less perfect realisation, or through a code of symbols, accompanied by traditions which explained them. The main purpose and burthen of sacred architecture – and all architecture, temple, tomb, or palace, was sacred in the early days – is thus inextricably bound up with a people's thoughts about God and the universe. (2)

Importantly in Lethaby's theory, the form is given meaning from the philosophy or religion; similarly, in the anthropological argument about art (such as is revealed in Jane Harrison's book, *Art and Ritual*), the art-form develops out of the ritual.

In 1928 Lethaby rewrote *Architecture, Mysticism and Myth* for publication in *The Builder*. He re-titled the work *Architecture, Nature and Magic*. He opens this re-

writing with a recapitulation of his debt to the anthropologists: "I would specially mention Sir James Frazer's *The Golden Bough*; Dr. Solomon Reinach's *Cults, Myths and Religions*; Dr. Farnell's *Cults of the Greek States*; A. della Seta's *Religion and Art*; and Dr. A.B. Cook's immense work entitled *Zeus*" (15). On the whole, *Architecture, Nature and Magic* is a much clearer presentation of the ideas in *Architecture, Mysticism and Myth*. Lethaby restates his thesis in very clear language:

> The works of man as builder have been of immense importance to him not only 'materially' and for his convenience, but as a means of developing his mind and releasing his spirit. Man is primarily a maker, a builder. As through the pre-historic ages he built his way, so he strengthened and enlarged himself and formed a frame for explaining the universe. ... One of my purposes in this essay is to open up a view of building and the crafts wider than 'aesthetic' appreciation, and understanding deeper than chronological cataloguing. (16-17)

Here he reveals one of the most important points of his theory of architecture. Because ancient architecture was built in connection with the development of the human mind, architecture, and the meaning of architecture, is always changing as the human mind changes. Architecture reveals the "enlarging" of the human mind across history. Paradoxically, it is because the developments of human philosophy and psychology direct the changing forms of architecture that the meaning of architecture through the ages remains the same; in other words, universally architecture symbolized the changes and growth of human understandings of the world:

Behind every style of architecture there is an earlier style, in which the germ of every form is to be found; except such alterations as may be traced to new conditions, or directly innovating thought in religion, all is the slow change of growth, and it is almost impossible to point to the time of invention of any custom or feature. ... It has, rightly, been the habit of historians of architecture to lay stress on the differences of the several styles and schools of successive ages, but, in the far larger sense, all architecture is one, when traced back through the stream of civilisations, as they followed or influenced one another. (*Mysticism and Myth* 2-3)

This point, that the symbolic meaning of architecture is always the same (architectural form is always developed out of human reaction to the universe) and always changing (human understanding of the world is always growing and this growth is reflected in the forms of architecture) is one Lethaby returns to again and again in his historical writing. For instance, in *Mediaeval Art* (1904), possibly one of his best-known books according to Rubens, Lethaby says, "I...have tried to suggest that unity in diversity of the stream of art which flowed down the centuries, every age showing a different manifestation of one energy as the old tradition was ever shaped by the need and experiment of the moment" (214). A study of the history of architecture is necessary, says Lethaby, not merely to see alterations across time in aesthetic style or to be able to hearken to a specific historical style in a contemporary building, but to understand deeply the growth and development of human philosophy and psychology, symbolized by architecture's changing forms, and thereby to comprehend how

contemporary society has grown out of the past. He therefore says in the Introduction to his book on Roman London, *Londinium: Architecture and the Crafts* (1923),

> It is curious that Roman buildings and crafts in Britain have hardly been studied as part of the story of our national art. The subject has been neglected by architects and left aside for antiquaries.... In attempting to give some account of Roman building and the minor arts in London, I wish to bring out and deepen our sense of antiquity and dignity of the City, so as to suggest an historical background against which we may see our modern ways and works in proper perspective and proportion. (8)

Lethaby argues, in effect, for the importance of what Eliot called "the historical sense" in understanding the architecture of London.

Integral to Lethaby's understanding of the history of architecture is the notion that, for the architecture of any given age to "live" or to have meaning and symbolic value, it must not reach back nostalgically to the past but must leap forward, adventurously, into the future. Architecture must change as human society changes. His study of ancient architecture concludes not that contemporary forms should look to the past for aesthetic styles, but that a study of the past reveals the importance of revivifying contemporary building for contemporary life.

Eliot and Lethaby: Making the modern world possible for art

It is striking that their different studies of the work of the anthropologists led Eliot and Lethaby to broadly similar conclusions about art. They were each interested in the ways in which, in primitive societies, art developed as part of ritual, thus

making art an integral part of the primitive human's understanding and celebration of the universe. Eliot and Lethaby were both convinced that modern society had lost this sense of ritual and connectedness in art, and that for art to be meaningful in the present moment a return to the sources was necessary. This return did not engender a nostalgic attempt to "get back" the old meanings of art – both Eliot and Lethaby were acutely aware of the separation between the modern post-Enlightenment scientific mind and the primitive religious or mystical mind, and they did not wish to create a false bridge between them – rather, they saw that a renewed understanding of the ways that art used to function in primitive society could lead to exciting potentialities for what art could become in the present. Broadly speaking, Eliot's and Lethaby's reading in anthropology led them to believe that a return to the sources was a necessary step for modern changes and developments in art.

In the *Athenaeum* in 1919, Eliot wrote that it is necessary to read and learn about "the medicine man and his works." He continued,

> And as it is certain that some study of primitive man furthers our understanding of civilized man, so it is certain that primitive art and poetry help our understanding of civilized art and poetry. Primitive art and poetry can even, through the studies and experiments of the artist or poet, revivify the contemporary activities.... More intelligibly put, it is that the poet should know everything that has been accomplished in poetry (accomplished, not merely produced) since its beginnings – in order to know what he is doing himself. He should be aware of all the metamorphoses of poetry that illustrate the stratifications of history that cover savagery. ("War Paint" 1036)

Here it is clear that, for Eliot, a study of the art of the past gives the artist a better understanding of his own task in the present, not to hearken unnecessarily to the past, but to move art forward. These ideas of the relationship between the past and the present in the creation of art are expressed in Eliot's famous essay, "Tradition and the Individual Talent," where he explains his theory of tradition in art. Firstly, a knowledge or respect for tradition should not result in an art that merely follows the footsteps of the artist of the past: "if the only form of tradition, of handing down, consisted in following the ways of the immediate generation before us in a blind or timid adherence to its successes, 'tradition' should positively be discouraged. We have seen many such simple currents soon lost in the sand; and novelty is better than repetition" (*SP* 38). Tradition, as he sees it,

> is a matter of much wider significance. ... It involves, in the first place, the historical sense, which we may call nearly indispensable ... and the historical sense involves a perception, not only of the pastness of the past, but of its presence. ... This historical sense, which is a sense of the timeless as well as of the temporal and of the timeless and of the temporal together, is what makes a writer traditional. And it is at the same time what makes a writer most acutely conscious of his place in time, of his own contemporaneity. (*SP* 38)

A sense of the pastness of the past involves an understanding of the ways in which there is always a distinction between the past and the present. However, Eliot also says that the historical sense perceives the presence of the past. He means that the past can only be understood in the present moment, and the present moment is only able to "know" the past via interpretation of the past. It is this sense of the split

between past and present as well as the perception that the past is known only in the present (and indeed has fashioned the present, but in ways that can only be interpreted) that makes the artist acutely aware of his own contemporaneity: everything he knows about the past is known through the present, and in the present moment all he knows is the past. Eliot writes, "Someone said: 'The dead writers are remote from us because we *know* so much more than they did'. Precisely, and they are that which we know" (*SP* 40). It is the sense of both the distinctness and the closeness of the past and the present that allows the artist to move forward. As Piers Gray puts it, "The historical development of the poet's art is understood as a constant re-ordering of the experience of the past" (113). Eliot explains that the artist must "be quite aware of the obvious fact that art never improves, but that the material of art is never quite the same. He must be aware that the mind of Europe ... is a mind which changes, and that this change is a development which abandons nothing *en route*" (*SP* 39). Therefore, when Eliot begins this essay by discussing ideas of originality in art and claiming that the truly original piece of poetry may be the one "in which the dead poets, his ancestors, assert their immortality most vigorously" (*SP* 38), he means that true originality stems from the re-ordering of the past in art to make something new and to move forward into change. An artist who craves spontaneous originality in the present creates art that exists in a vacuum – it does not belong to the process of development that Eliot calls the historical sense, and it therefore does not effect real change. A return to the sources breathes new life into the art of the present by allowing the artist to see his task in terms that take account of historical development and change.

Lethaby's understanding of the necessity for change in art and of the way that this change should take place, stemming from his readings in anthropology, is remarkably similar. Like Eliot, Lethaby decries contemporary imitations of the past in art: "Old architecture lived because it had a purpose. Modern architecture, to be real, must not be a mere envelope without contents" (*Mysticism and Myth* 7). For Lethaby, as for Eliot, the value of knowing the ritual origins of art is not to attempt to recreate the old meanings of art for contemporary society. That would not be possible or sensible because there is a gulf separating civilized from primitive societies. The real value for the present of studying the role of art in primitive society is that such a study teaches that art used to be integrally connected to a way of life and it used to reflect, in very real ways, the development of the human mind over time. Understood this way, art is not a mere aesthetic gloss on society, but is essential to its growth. Eliot and Lethaby wish to restore the role of art in society. They wish for change in art because change, taking place out of an understanding of the role of the past in the present, would indicate that art is becoming, once again, fundamental to a society's way of life.

Therefore, Lethaby writes,

A work of architecture was a cistern that held all that was poured into it of thought and intention and the old authentic things still to some extent preserve their content for us. In our modern efforts, however, all is different, for we have passed into another age that thinks in other ways. The mere 'look' of the old magic qualities without the awe and wonder that produced them is repulsive, silly, and mind-destroying. (*Nature and Magic* 26)

He is vehemently opposed to a study of history that results in nostalgia because art produced out of such a sentiment is a sham. He says, "In saying that the old ways are closed to us, please do not think I would have it so if it might be otherwise; my own mind rests with the poetries of ancient art and I am altogether inadequate for the methods of science. However, I do see that science has a new magic wonder of its own, and that the manufacture of sham antiquity in our buildings is vain and silly" (*Nature and Magic* 16). The point is not that the gulf between primitive and civilized understanding of art renders the creation of meaningful art impossible in a modern age. Meaningful art can and should be created in contemporary society, but it cannot be truly meaningful, says Lethaby, if it is not understood to belong to the very roots of society and therefore to the changes and growth of society. In 1918 Lethaby wrote,

> Although all these modern activities frighten me, and I would rather be dealing with rubble and thatch than with concrete and steel, I have seen much which causes one to look again, in great bridges spanning a valley like a rainbow; in roofs meshed across with thin threads of steel; in tall factory chimneys, great cranes and ships; or even in gasometers .... These things have vital interest for modern people because they are modern and part of our life.... There is nothing necessarily evil in modern materials or requirements; it is the spirit that tells. (qtd. in Rubens 256)

The spirit that Lethaby wishes to see in modern architecture is a renewed awareness of the centrality of art in the human intellect: art develops and must continue to develop in close association with human psychology and philosophy. If it does not, it will be empty and its emptiness will be destructive: "Our western architectural

methods of designing whim-works in the sham styles can hardly compete with such symbolical art.... Those ancient works were imitations of paradise, ours are exercises in commercial 'grandeur' and advertising vulgarity. Design must have some motivating *idea* in it...." (*Nature and Magic* 39). This motivating idea should be that art is created in response to the reactions of living people to their world: it is, he said in 1889, "the power to embody the old principle in the ever-new conditions ... distinguishing and setting aside that which does not form part of the living thought of the time, which is the true objective of the true architect" (qtd. in Rubens 74). Lethaby's program for modern art, like that of Eliot, involves a historical perspective that understands art to be a continual restructuring of past practices, knowledge, and experience.

Lethaby's study of history showed him that "All the arts had their origin in efforts to satisfy the needs of the body and the mind" (*Nature and Magic* 146), and the lesson of this study for the present age is that "A true architecture is built out of the hearts of its builders" (*Nature and Magic* 141). Therefore, he writes in 1923, "It is because I want poetry, humanity, and even sacredness in building that I see we must be experimental, courageous, serious, real. Archaeology has taught me 'Modernism' – that is reality and no pretence" (qtd. in Rubens 258). Eliot and Lethaby propose a revolution in art, one that looks to the past to discover how art, ritual in origin, was related to a people's way of life and beliefs about the universe in order to create an art for the present moment that is not mere ornamentation but that is central and vital in the modern world. In short, they propose a role for modern art that looks, Janus-like, in two directions.

Sacred Architecture: A true architecture is built out of the hearts of its builders

We know that Eliot admired Lethaby and that he had read at least one of the architect's books when he wrote to Lethaby in October 1923. Given the affinity between their formulations of the role of art and of the need for modern art to look to the sources in order to be refashioned for the present moment, it is possible to speculate that Lethaby's understanding of the symbolic significance of architecture would appeal to Eliot's own interest in the role of sacred buildings. Without assuming any kind of wholesale affiliation between Eliot and Lethaby, one can suggest that it is nevertheless valuable to hypothesize that Eliot's knowledge and appreciation of the work of Lethaby adds a layer of complexity to Eliot's own responses to church architecture.

In *Architecture, Mysticism and Myth* Lethaby explains that as the primitive human mind developed the meaning given to structures became increasingly complex until humans decided to build special structures that would embody the relationships between symbol and reality; these buildings would symbolize what humans knew and imagined about the universe and they were, consequently, sacred:

When the world was a tree, every tree was in some sort its representation; when a tent or a building, every tent or building: but when the relation was firmly established, there was action and reaction between the symbol and the reality, and ideas taken from one were transferred to the other, until the symbolism became complicated, and only particular buildings would be selected for the symbolic purpose: certain forms were reasoned from the

building to the world, and conversely certain thoughts of the universe were expressed in the structure thus set apart as a little world for the House of God – a Temple. (35)

These sacred buildings, says Lethaby, "were the scenes of great ritual dramas, and they were themselves of a magical character" (*Nature and Magic* 90). The act of building a sacred structure was itself "a magic with many rites, from the ceremonial marking out of an auspicious site, and laying the foundation at the right time with due sacrifice, to the consecration at the end" (*Nature and Magic* 90). Therefore, he says, "Ancient building procedure was associated with ritual practices to a degree which we cannot comprehend. Only a few ritual ceremonies remain to us, such as laying a foundation-stone, the orientation of a church, and the Christening of a ship" (*Nature and Magic* 99). Church buildings are reminders of the connection between art and ritual that ancient societies embodied in the structures they built.

Lethaby designed a number of church buildings himself throughout his career. A good example is the chapel of SS Colm and Margaret, Melsetter, designed and built by Lethaby in 1900. In the designs for this chapel Lethaby aimed for light and ease, but Rubens notes that he also sought in this building something "more powerful and more primitive" (150). Rubens describes the interior of the chapel as simple and personal, with a simple font and altar. The influence of Ruskin and Morris is felt in the chapel: Lethaby wrote, "As to Morris's Gothicism I think he saw modernness primarily as a principle, some places it is expressed quite clearly, and he used the word 'Gothic' in a special sense, not only historically for the fourth century on, but also for now and the future..." (qtd. in Rubens 153). This understanding of the Gothic,

taken from Ruskin and applied to Lethaby's design for the church, would mean that the church building would embody, as Ruskin says in "The Nature of Gothic," "the individual value of every soul" (160). Rubens calls this chapel "fresh, strong and savage" (153). It is an attempt by Lethaby to construct a place of worship that connected people both to a past when a building spoke to the soul and to the present moment through materials (concrete) and form (simplicity). For Lethaby, the modern church building should recall the ritual origins of architecture and, simultaneously, should represent the artistic sensibility of contemporary society.

For Eliot before his conversion, as he walked around London looking at the churches of Sir Christopher Wren, ecclesiastical architecture might appear representative of a time when humans embodied their religious apprehensions about the universe in buildings. In other words, the church buildings might seem to Eliot to symbolize some vestiges of the mystical mind still lingering, through these structures, in a modern setting. His appreciation of history, and his belief that the primitive mystical mind underlies the modern civilized mind, might have caused him to view church buildings as valuable reminders of the connection that existed in antiquity between art and ritual. However, Eliot noticed that the City churches were largely deserted and were threatened with destruction or closure. It would appear that the sacred meaning of these buildings had been lost or had become irrelevant in modern society, and Eliot asks, in *The Waste Land* for instance, what meaning, if any, the empty City churches have in contemporary life. On the one hand they reveal modern dissociation from spiritual ideas about the world, but on the other hand they

symbolize perhaps the need for some kind of translation into secular terms of the religious ideas they embody.

Following his conversion in 1927, Eliot's interest in church architecture underwent a change. He became deeply interested in sacredness; Eliot was drawn to church buildings because they symbolized for him human reflections on the relationship between human beings and God. Similarly, the ritual significance of a church building, of its construction and of the rituals taking place weekly or daily within it, appealed to Eliot's sense of the need, in modern society, for a reconnection with meaningful ritual. Churches might represent for the Christian Eliot the ways in which human beings have tried, and continue to try, to express their connection with God through art. His interest developed, in *The Rock* for instance, to ask whether a church building is able to bridge the gap between a person's spiritual life and daily life. For the post-1926 Eliot, the importance of a church building was not so much its aesthetic history but its potential to connect modern people to ritual and through ritual to community and to God. By the time he wrote "Little Gidding," Eliot viewed the church building as a site where past and present meet and are unified.

Since Eliot certainly knew at least part of Lethaby's scholarship on the subject of architectural history and would have been able to recognize Lethaby's investment in the work of the same anthropologists that influenced Eliot himself, and since there is such a clear affinity between the ways that Lethaby and Eliot formulated the role of art in society based on their readings in anthropology, it is possible to speculate that Eliot's developing appreciation first of the historic value and later of the sacredness of church buildings is connected, in important ways, to Eliot's early reading in

anthropology and to the ways in which anthropological thought continued to affect him throughout his career. If it is true, therefore, that knowledge of Lethaby's work contributed to the complexity with which Eliot viewed church architecture, then it is very probable that his understanding of church architecture, and the ways he represented it in his poetry and plays, was related to his broader reflections on tradition and ritual in art.

Chapter Three
"These fragments I have shored against my ruins": Churches in *The Waste Land*

When he was a student at Harvard, Eliot picked up a copy of Arthur Symons's *The Symbolist Movement in Literature*, and for a while he became profoundly influenced by the French symbolists, even going so far as to model a few of his early poems on the style of Jules Laforgue. Later, in London Eliot became the friend and colleague of Ezra Pound who, a few years before Eliot's arrival in London, had led a group of poets Pound christened the Imagistes. Imagism followed symbolism closely. Both movements sought, through poetry, an intensified state of consciousness. For the imagist, the poem was "a moment of revelation crystallized around an image" (Pratt 116). Even though Eliot arrived in London too late to be properly called an imagist, he did nevertheless employ some imagist techniques in several of his early poems, and Pound called *The Waste Land* "the justification of the 'movement' of our modern experiment, since 1900" (qtd. in Pratt 13). In an imagist poem, the individual words, or the image, were used to create a moment of heightened consciousness (Pratt 20). There are many such powerful images in *The Waste Land*, and arguably Eliot's textual representations of two well-known London, St. Mary Woolnoth and St. Magnus Martyr, offer important moments of revelation.

For the symbolist poet, both words and the poem itself constitute a symbol. The symbolist poet is acutely aware of the symbolical nature of his medium. He is aware, in other words, that the word he uses is merely a sign reaching out to something in the world. Words are used in an attempt to bridge the gap between the poet's individual consciousness and objects in the external world (de Man 151). The Symbolists were reacting to scientific realism, rediscovering interpretive meaning in the world and in

language. By using very carefully selected words and images, the poet is able to symbolize his experience of intensified awareness. Therefore, the poem itself becomes a kind of symbol of experience or consciousness. It is possible to read *The Waste Land* as a symbol of a certain type of experience.

The experience symbolically offered to the reader of *The Waste Land* is one of a lack of coherence and a proliferation of questions without answers. Harriet Davidson writes that even though the quest motif is paralleled, thanks to Eliot's notes about Frazer and Weston, to the prospect of a "symbolic order", "the symbols do not cohere" (113). The ideas, images, and words of the poem are fluid, "losing definition and fixity under the pressure of allusion, metaphor, and metonymy" (Davidson 120).The poem is as much about the absence of wholeness as it is about the quest for wholeness. Moreover, *The Waste Land* offers not a facile comparison of a fragmented, dissociated modern present with a more unified, and therefore more meaningful, past; rather history is as much a construction in the poem as is the questionable visionary mysticism of Madame Sosostris. Eliot is interested in the constructedness of knowledge, and this includes history. As Michael H. Levenson writes, history "is not some consistent or continuous inheritance but something that the poem constructs and whose unity can no more be assumed than the unity of personality" (204). History is a "complex product of overlapping traditions," but it does not follow that these traditions, while overlapping, cohere with one another (204-5).

If the historical inheritance of the poem is not unified, then no more is there a single voice or point of view to offer coherence. In his notes to the poem, Eliot

indicates that Tiresias fills the role of unifying personality, Tiresias who reconciles male and female, individual and community; but in the poem itself Tiresias represents both the possibility of reconciliation and its failure (North 100). What the poem offers, in fact, is a plurality of voices rather than a unified voice. Levenson makes this point very well in his useful analysis of the beginning of the poem, which opens firstly with an unidentified speaker who is, a few lines later, potentially identified with the "us" and "we" surprised by summer in the Starnbergersee and the Hofgarten. Even this perspective lacks unity, however, because the Starnbergersee and the Hofgarten are several miles from each other in Munich, and it is not even possible to see the Hofgarten from the Starnbergersee or vice versa. As Levenson argues, the questionable unity of the voice of "us" and "we" is interrupted by the lines in German, which insert another voice, another language, another subject, and possibly another recollection. And yet, he writes, "after that line a certain continuity is restored" because the poem reverts to the first-person voice again. Levenson concludes this helpful analysis of the voices opening the poem by saying, "Discontinuity ... is no more firmly established than continuity," and he continues, "no single consciousness presides; no single voice dominates" (170; 172). In his dissertation on Bradley, Eliot writes that no single point of view is going to be adequate for knowledge. What is needed is a system of multiple points of view through which reality may be perceived. *The Waste Land* offers multiple points of view which if they do not cohere do not cancel each other or exist in opposition either, and the text requires the reader to "retain the plurality of voices that sound in no easy harmony" (Levenson 191).

Eliot's deliberate representation of two of London's City churches in two distinct moments in *The Waste Land* exemplifies the text's complex layering of potential interpretations or points of view and the ambiguous role tradition plays in the poem. The churches represent the possibility for a spiritual tradition and a meaningful connection with the past as well as the modern loss of tradition and the death of God. Both churches share similar fates: St. Mary Woolnoth and St. Magnus Martyr have had, to some extent, to give way to the priorities of the City as it grew and developed. Both of these churches were threatened with demolition in 1919 when the Bishop of London commissioned an investigation into the City parishes, recommending that some churches be closed, sold, or destroyed to lessen the financial burdens of the diocese. Eliot responded to this threat in his London Letter in the *Dial* in 1921. Possibly the pamphlet about the proposed demolition of nineteen City churches brought St. Mary Woolnoth and St. Magnus Martyr to Eliot's attention, though it is much more likely, given their location in the City, that he would have passed them numerous times on his way to work at the bank.[32] Regardless, the proposal for their demolition would certainly have called Eliot's attention to the tension existing between the old churches, the developing City, and contemporary society, and he takes the opportunity, in 1921, to ponder their beauty and their historical significance.

Both St. Mary Woolnoth and St. Magnus Martyr share similar histories. Both were built or restored around the same time after the Great Fire of London by architects of a particular school. Both were dwarfed in stature by the development of tall office buildings around them, and both fell slowly into disuse. In 1922 when the

[32] Lyndall Gordon notes that Eliot often wandered in this part of the city on his lunch breaks from the bank, stopping to look at or even enter St. Magnus Martyr (*Early Years* 99). Also, of course, his office was just opposite St. Mary Woolnoth, so he was very familiar with that building.

poem was published, they represented a similar past and they shared a similar present. Nonetheless, the churches are by no means symbolically equal in Eliot's rendering of them in *The Waste Land*. They appear at two distinct moments in the poem, and they represent vastly different kinds of experiences. The difference comes not from their architectural history, but from Eliot's representations of the ways they are viewed. The implication in the poem is that depending on the way the churches are perceived they can be meaningful or not. The churches stand in the Unreal City of *The Waste Land* with all their symbolic potential for significance, and the ways that the poet chooses to represent them pose questions about their traditional value; about their significance, if any, for modern life; and about whether they are meaningful enough fragments to be worth shoring. The rendering of church architecture in *The Waste Land* exemplifies Eliot's early philosophy that meaning depends upon point of view.

St. Mary Woolnoth

To appreciate fully the ways that St. Mary Woolnoth is symbolized in *The Waste Land*, it is necessary first to look at the architectural image that precedes the image of the church in the poem: London Bridge. While this may be seen as a deviation from the main focus on church architecture, the history of London Bridge clearly reveals that when it was first built it was considered a sacred structure. Historically it was associated with the church, and it is possible to argue that this association connects it with ecclesiastical architecture. Regardless, the image of London Bridge is so closely connected to the image of St. Mary Woolnoth in *The Waste Land* that an analysis of

the church will begin most sensibly with an investigation of Eliot's representation of London Bridge:

Unreal City,
Under the brown fog of a winter dawn,
A crowd flowed over London Bridge, so many,
I had not thought death had undone so many.
Sighs, short and infrequent, were exhaled,
And each man fixed his eyes before his feet. (ll. 60-65)

This brief reference to London Bridge immediately places the poem in a gritty context of Dickensian industrial pollution, of present day (1922) monotonous traffic, and of the boredom and isolation of those moving daily towards their jobs in the financial centre of the city. Swirling like the fog around these tangible realities is the reference to Canto III of Dante's *Inferno*, indicating that life in this setting, lived in this way, is a death-in-life, or the torment of hell. The image of London Bridge is an appropriate introduction to the symbolic London of the poem because of its history, its present reality as a major artery for traffic and commuters, and its proximity, both in the lines of the poem and geographically, to the church of St. Mary Woolnoth.

Historically, London Bridge symbolized the civilization of the city. When Roman troops in the time of Claudius reached what is now London, bridging the Thames was an obviously necessary task for the future of the city's growth and commerce. Since Roman times, London's evolution and survival depended on the bridge. Timber remains at the foot of Fish Street reveal that a Roman bridge was built as early as 85-90 BCE. Bridging the waters of the Thames was a sacred act for the Romans, and

there is evidence that a temple of sorts was built on the bridge itself and votives offered to the sea gods Neptune and Oceanus. The bridge continued to have sacred associations over 1000 years later; in 1176 the building of the stone London Bridge was overseen by Peter of Colechurch, a parish priest. The fact that a priest was appointed overseer is not as surprising as it may seem at first, for medieval society viewed bridge building in the same light as church building.[33] Moreover, there is evidence that the original St. Magnus Martyr church was built on the stone bridge itself – again, the bridge structure has ecclesiastical associations.

Along with its sacred connotations, the bridge also represented civil authority. Historically, those wishful of conquering London had first to control the bridge, and mastery of London Bridge therefore represented proprietorship and guardianship of the city itself. Symbolically in *The Waste Land* London Bridge, and so by extension the City itself, seems to be "mastered" by the sighing crowds of commuters. The great civilization of London is reduced, in Eliot's representation, to the weary traffic of hell.

Later in the poem, the sing-song line "London Bridge is falling down falling down falling down" (l. 426) associates the bridge with the fragments that the speaker is considering shoring against his ruins. It is interesting to note that in its actual history the stone bridge was reduced to a heap of fragments. Bruce Watson records that when the old stone bridge was broken down in 1831-2 and Rennie's New London Bridge erected, its destruction awakened Londoners to a sense of its historical significance. All sorts of souvenirs were made out of fragments of the bridge so that

[33] For detailed history of the ancient bridge, see Watson, pp. 14 -29.

many people could own a piece of Old London Bridge. Additionally, whole sections of the architectural structure were salvaged from demolition and used elsewhere in the city and the country, in homes, quays, and churches.[34] These fragments literally make up the story of London Bridge. In the poem they add to the complexity of the speaker's decision to "shore up" fragments at the end of the poem. The fragments of meaning that the bridge represents include the history of London's civilization, the sacredness of the act of constructing a crossing over a body of water, and the contemporary experience of the bridge as an artery for traffic and shuffling pedestrians.

A Londoner reading Eliot's poem in 1922 would be able to picture the brown fog and the dense crowd on London Bridge. Any reader of Baedeker's Guide to London from 1908 could visualize the scene:

> [London Bridge] connects the City, the central point of business, with the Borough. ... It is estimated that 22,000 vehicles and 110,000 pedestrians cross London Bridge daily.... Newcomers should pay a visit to London Bridge on a work-day during business hours to see and hear the steady stream of noisy traffic. (qtd. in Hargrove 67)[35]

Eliot did not only see and hear the stream of traffic, but was part of it. Eliot was forced to be one of the umbrella- and briefcase-carrying commuters, and his sighs mingle audibly with those other sighs on London Bridge. Strangely, it seems to me,

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[34] See Watson, pp. 54-55.

[35] Hargrove notes that Eliot's copy of Baedeker's *London and Its Environs* (1908) is in the King's College, Cambridge collection. She remarks that "many places [in the text] are marked in pencil, including St. Magnus Martyr, St. Mary Woolnoth, and other City churches" (218).

the experiential quality of Eliot's London references in *The Waste Land* have been downplayed by critics, who seem to have overlooked their import. These references carry the ideas and themes of the poem and have tremendous power precisely because through them we experience simultaneously the metaphorical and material realities of the poem.[36]

In the allusive line "I had not thought death had undone so many," the word "undone" can be understood in the sense of ruined, but it can also be read in the sense of something unaccomplished. In the third Canto of the *Inferno*, Virgil and Dante enter the suffering city. Paradise has earlier, in Canto I, been figured as a city, and here there is a parallel image of Hell as a city. Dante hears the lamentations and sounds of pain, and he cries, "Master, what is it that I hear? Who are / those people so defeated by their pain?" (ll. 32-3). Virgil tells him that those souls suffering here are the cowardly: "the company of those who were not rebels / nor faithful to their God, but stood apart. / ... / Those who are here can place no hope in death" (ll. 38-9; 46). These are the souls of people who did not truly live in life; likewise they cannot truly die in death, and they are continually goaded. Virgil tells Dante that these are people "who have lost the good of the intellect" (1. 18), alluding to Aristotle's view that the good of the intellect is truth, and God is the source of truth. The intellect can function automatically, as it does for these people, but it does so without knowledge of truth or of God. It is interesting to speculate about whether, when he wrote this passage of *The*

[36] See Day's excellent discussion of the problem of disregarding the experiential quality of Eliot's London references in *The Waste Land*. Day begins this section saying "I have not encountered a discussion of *The Waste Land* which makes much of these London references. ... explications of the poem which delve exhaustively into religious and mythological allusions, extrapolating with a vigorous lack of inhibition, pass over Moorgate and Highbury as little more than bits of local colour. But they could not have been so to Eliot, nor to any Londoner familiar with his city" (286).

Waste Land, Eliot was recalling the letter he wrote to Aldington in which he said about his experience of London that here "I am sojourning among the termites" (*Letters* 299). Termites operate by swarm intelligence; they act on instinct but are not aware of whether what they are doing has any larger meaning. Likewise the people that Dante sees here have lived like automatons without knowledge of truth.

In this passage Eliot represents the crowds crossing London Bridge as those who are not alive in life or dead in death. In having "no hope in death," these people are linked metaphorically with the Cumaean Sibyl whose lamenting desire for death is the epigraph of the poem. Death would offer some kind of peace, but it is not to be vouchsafed those who move automatically, without hope and without knowledge of truth, across the bridge into the financial centre of London. The word "undone" in "I had not thought death had undone so many" is a reference to the destruction of those whose experience of the modern world is a death in life, and it also refers to the finality and peace of death as something unaccomplished. These people are "[obliged] to live without hope of rest" (Levenson 175).

The allusion to Dante is complex. It metaphorically parallels the crowd on the bridge with the sufferers of Hell. However, in quoting Dante's words, "I had not thought death had undone so many," the speaker of the poem is placed in the position of observer, just as Dante observes the souls of the cowardly, or the Neutrals, as they are sometimes called. When he enters the suffering city, Dante reads the inscription on the gate:

Through me the way into the suffering city,

Through me the way to the eternal pain,

Through me the way that runs among the lost.

Justice urged on my high artificer;

My maker was divine authority,

The highest wisdom, and the primal love.

Before me nothing but eternal things

Were made, and I endure eternally.

Abandon every hope, who enter here. (ll. 1-9)

There is no return for the soul that enters Hell, nor is there any path to Purgatory. The inscription worries Dante, but Virgil tells him, "Here one must leave behind all hesitation / here every cowardice must meet its death" (ll. 14-15). Dante is not entering the suffering city as the soul of one who has died; Virgil counsels him to let go of doubt (hesitation) and fear (cowardice). Dante must undertake the journey through Hell with faith, and if he is able to maintain his faith there will be "a way out" of Hell for him (Sayers 20). As an observer of the crowds moving over London Bridge, the speaker of *The Waste Land* is paralleled with Dante. There is, then, some implication that, while those who cross the bridge and pass St. Mary Woolnoth on Lombard Street are lost, there may still be some hope for the speaker whose role is to observe, comment, and salvage what meaning he can from what he sees.

In the poem, after crossing London Bridge the commuters move into the centre of London's financial district, which is also London's medieval heart: "Flowed up the hill and down King William Street, / To where Saint Mary Woolnoth kept the hours / With a dead sound on the final stroke of nine" (ll. 66-68). Various critics have commented on the poet's representation of the strokes of St. Mary's bell, for it is

complex.[37] For instance, church bells sound the hours of the day. For city workers, the bell tolls the hours of their working day and, metaphorically, of their death as the bell's sounds signify the dying of the hours. If the allusion to Dante from the previous lines is carried into the image of the people passing St. Mary Woolnoth on Lombard Street, it is possible that the sounding of the hours acts as a kind of goad to these living dead, moving them on through time which they are powerless to stop. Historically, church bells ring out to call a community together. There does not seem in *The Waste Land* to be a community gathered by the call of St. Mary's bell: the crowd does not stop but continues to flow past. Moreover, this call to community ends with a muffled sound. Eliot's careful detail about the bells does not call to the reader's mind the sounds of triumphant church bells pealing happily over the city. Eliot comments in his notes that the "dead sound" on the final stroke is a phenomenon he "often noticed" (*WL* notes 68). The bell could represent a call to Mass; church bells are often rung before the start of a service, and the dead sound on the final stroke evokes a sense of gloom. Additionally, in Catholic or High Church services, the Host is lifted up as the bells ring a nine-fold peal; but in this peal the ninth note is deadened or muted, a dreary sound where there should be triumph. Finally, the "final stroke of nine" could be a reference to the Gospels of Matthew and Mark in which Christ on the cross cries out at the ninth hour, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"[38] Traditionally a call to community and worship, here the bells of St. Mary resonate sadly over the waste land.

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[37] See Day pp. 287 & 290, Hargrove pp. 68-69, and Bedient p. 65.

[38] See Matthew 27:46 and Mark 15:34.

St. Mary Woolnoth was in many senses the banker's church. Parish leaders deliberately scheduled services at specially chosen hours to permit the workers in this area of London to attend if they so desired (Day 287). Aware that in the modern working world free time was scarce, the parish made a point of accommodating its rhythms to those of the work day, becoming as accessible as possible to those who worked nearby. There was an acknowledgement on the part of the parish that the priorities and constraints of the working day would take precedence over participation in church activities. The attempts to organize services at suitable times in the City highlight the effort the parish made to continue to serve the City as best it could.

This tiny church is hemmed in by the larger buildings of the business and financial district. In the poem its physical presence does not compel the commuters to lift their eyes from their feet as they walk past. This church seems firmly rooted in time, as the detail given about it centres on the tolling of the bell. With its wealth of symbolic meaning in the poem, it is surprising that no critic has so far taken the time to trace comprehensively the historical significance of this structure.[39] Day briefly points out in a note that Eliot clearly had knowledge of the background of the churches he mentions in *The Waste Land*, [40] and, as my earlier chapter indicates, his knowledge of and responses to London architecture were, in fact, profound. It is helpful to know the story of the church, as it allows us to understand St. Mary

[39] Hargrove briefly mentions the broad geographic and historical context of the church: "located on the corner of King William Street and Lombard Street, directly across from Lloyd's Bank where Eliot worked from 1917-1925. ... The dominant characteristics of the church of St. Mary Woolnoth, built from 1716-27 by Hawksmoor, a pupil of Wren, are heaviness, squareness, and mathematical symmetry. It is located directly over an Underground station, and an exit sign mars the front view" (69). In contrast, Robert L. Schwarz simply says, "[The church of St. Mary Woolnoth is] one of those lovely religious monuments that spoke in silent eloquence of the past, the great age of classicism in England" (115-16).

[40] See Day, note 31, p. 290.

Woolnoth's place in London's history and to visualize the building as Eliot would have experienced it. Moreover, with the great number of City churches for Eliot to choose from he chose St. Mary Woolnoth specifically, and it is more than likely that the history, as well as the location, of this particular building informed his choice.

The first record of a Christian church on the site of St. Mary Woolnoth is from the twelfth century when a church was built in the parish of Wilnotmariecherche. This church was rebuilt in 1438, and in 1486 a steeple and chapel were added. The church survived the Great Fire of London in 1666 but sustained damage. Different sources cite that Sir Christopher Wren or Sir Robert Vyner directed its repair in 1677.[41] In 1716 the church was demolished and, as part of a 1710 commission called the "Fifty New Churches," Nicholas Hawksmoor began the task of building a new St. Mary Woolnoth church on the same site. This commission was a Tory High Church scheme to combat non-conformism in the city by building "fifty new churches of Stone and other proper Materials, with Towers or Steeples to each ... in or near the Cities of London and Westminster, or the Suburbs thereof" (qtd. in Downes 98). Hawksmoor's church was completed in 1727.

In 1716 when he began work on the foundations of St. Mary Woolnoth, Hawksmoor discovered the remains of a Roman temple on the site of the demolished medieval church.[42] Hawksmoor was a student and disciple of Wren; he was apprenticed in Wren's office after 1693 and worked with Wren on the commission to repair fifty-one of the City churches following the 1666 fire. As a student of Wren,

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[41] David Cast (p. 318) and Bradley and Pevsner (*The City Churches* p. 113) write that Sir Thomas Vyner patched up St. Mary Woolnoth after the fire, while Pierre de la Ruffinière du Prey (pp. 106-7) and Kerry Downes (p. 98) maintain that Wren was in charge of the repairs.

[42] See Du Prey for a description of the Roman remains on this site, p. 107

Hawksmoor was not only deeply interested in and knowledgeable about classical antiquity, but was firmly convinced that an architect must have a historical mind when designing new buildings, and that the redefinition of the Church of England taking place at this time was accompanied by important architectural decisions.[43] As a result, Hawksmoor would have been fascinated by and sensitive to the knowledge that the site of his new church had not only a medieval but a classical history. It would have been highly significant to him that the spiritual story of his structure began in antiquity.

Various analysts of Hawksmoor's building are convinced that he designed the church to have associations with the present, with the medieval church, and with the traditions of worship from antiquity. One such critic points out that, small as it is, St. Mary Woolnoth keeps the viewer's eyes in constant motion. The church's exterior is surprisingly complex, and, although some found Hawksmoor's design unattractive, it is undeniable that "the eye is kept engaged, crossing from part to part, making similitudes, so too is the mind, the historical mind, equally exercised, thinking of the past and the present..." (Cast 318). Part of the past recalled in St. Mary's structure is the original medieval structure. The most obvious architectural connection between Hawksmoor's church and the medieval structure is in the construction of the twin towers. The site of the church was extremely cramped, meaning that the church's foundations could not be substantial, and Hawksmoor was therefore limited in what

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[43] Cast writes, "the designs that Hawksmoor used have precedents in Wren, and are for newly defined parishes and churches. But ... [they] may be seen as architectural accompaniments to the redefinition of the Church of England that was indeed going on during these years, and, beyond that, to the succession of the Protestant monarchy and its search for a true history" (319).

he could do above the roofline. The twin towers of St. Mary Woolnoth are squat in comparison with the soaring towers and spires of the other Wren and Hawksmoor churches in the city. Nevertheless, the twin towers are characteristic of medieval church forms, and Hawksmoor's new design recalls the old demolished church (Hart 144).

While recalling the original Christian church on this site, Hawksmoor's design of St. Mary Woolnoth also speaks to the needs and concerns of the Church of England of his day by recalling the temples of antiquity. In post-Reformation England, scholars and theologians desired to find an identity and authority for their Church that would escape the divisions that had afflicted Christianity for centuries. As a result, they began seriously to study the religious practices of the early Christian Church. Their studies led them to consider architectural questions that eventually caused them to reason that they could evade Rome and create architecture that would be based on a "truer" religion by discovering and imitating the structures of the earliest Christian rituals (Du Prey xv-vi).[44] As part of his apprenticeship with Wren, Hawksmoor had studied in detail the temples of the ancient and Judeo-Christian worlds. Such studies caused Wren and Hawksmoor to create contemporary architecture that accentuated age-old traditions and ideals (Du Prey 4).

[44] In his introduction, Du Prey writes, "Scholars increasingly asked themselves questions that had an architectural bearing. Were the earliest churches simple meeting places? Did churches derive from contemporary synagogues, or from the splendid Temple of Jerusalem, or from equally magnificent basilicas of the ancient Romans, or from a combination of all these sources of inspiration? ... They reasoned that if they could correlate the true forms of early worship with their own, a special sort of legitimacy would ensue. ... According to these theories, it stood to reason that if a denomination built its architecture in emulation of early Christian churches, then the places of worship themselves would bestow greater holiness on the worshippers gathered within. People attending church would experience the spiritual benefits of a truer, purer religion." (xv-vi).

Early in his career, Hawksmoor made extensive notes on the design and iconographic details of Solomon's Temple, dictated by God to Ezekiel, paying particular attention to the cubic layout of Ezekiel's visionary structure (Hart 96).[45] Solomon's Temple was considered by theologians to be a model of the early Christian church that Hawksmoor used as inspiration for his own creations. As Vaughan Hart records, the archetypal Solomonic Temple was associated with a cube stone, and foundation rituals consequently used a cubic cornerstone (98). Various axonometric drawings of the church reveal that St. Mary Woolnoth resembles nothing more closely than a stone cube.[46] Critics of Hawksmoor's work maintain that given his depth of knowledge of Solomonic masonry lore, the associations between St. Mary Woolnoth's form and Solomon's Temple would have been clear. The church, modeled on the Temple of Solomon, built by an architect who in many ways exemplifies the historical sense, becomes an acutely ironic image in *The Waste Land*, associated as it is with death and the *Inferno*.

The story of St. Mary Woolnoth does not stop with Hawksmoor's completion of the building in 1727, and its later history would certainly be known to Eliot. In 1897, The City and South London Railway (C&SLR) planned to demolish the church in order to build the Bank Tube Station. However, public outcry saved the church, and instead of the actual station under the church the C&SLR built a booking station and entrance to the Bank station immediately under St. Mary Woolnoth. In order to do this, and save the church, it was necessary to support the foundations of the church

[45] See Ezekiel chapter 40.

[46] See Du Prey's reproduction of Alison Shepherd's axonometric projection drawing (p. 106), originally printed in John Summerson's *Georgian London* (London, 1945).

with metal girders and columns.[47] On either side of the entrance to the church were staircases leading down into the crypt and the booking station. Big signs pointing to these entrances, labelled "Underground" with an arrow, were erected above either side of the enclosing rail of the church. Thus, on his daily commute Eliot would have seen not only the little church dwarfed by the commercial buildings around it, but also the enormous signs indicating the entrances to the Underground Railway which manoeuvred thousands of commuters in and out of the City each day. While there is no definite proof that Eliot used the Bank Tube Station in his daily commute from Crawford Mansions into the City, it is likely that he did. Using a 1920 map of the London Underground, Josh Mabie has traced the route that Eliot was most likely to have taken, concluding that Eliot probably took the Bakerloo Line from Marylebone Station near Crawford Mansions to Oxford Circus. There he would have transferred to the CLR, which would take him to Bank Station, a few minutes' walk away from old Lloyd's Bank. It is extremely likely, therefore, that Eliot would not only have seen the Underground signs on the outside of St. Mary Woolnoth, but would have experienced the descent into the crypt of the church to access the Tube Station.

In the poem, not only does the church become a symbol of time-keeping for the City workers, but also it is literally associated with the commuters as its physical site, familiar to Eliot's London readers, assists them to move back and forth every day. It is impossible that Eliot, associating this commuting movement with the goaded torment of those souls trapped in the Suffering City, would not have found it intriguing that the commuters actually had to emerge from or descend into what was traditionally the crypt of the church in order to get to the Underground station,

[47] See Bradley & Pevsner's *London: The City Churches* p. 114.

reinforcing the association between the daily commuting ritual and Dante's hell created by the poet's earlier allusion to Canto III.[48] This movement into or out of the crypt also recalls the line in Canto III that describes these souls as having no hope for death. The crypt of the church was transformed by the booking station from a place where souls were at rest to one of hustle and bustle and restless movement. Moreover, these commuters were extremely close to the church, even entering its very foundations, but their relationship with the building was restricted to the place traditionally used as a burial vault. The stairs built by the C&SLR giving onto the street above meant that the commuters never needed to enter the church sanctuary at all, and there was therefore no, or very little, relationship between the commuters and the architecture built for worship, penance, and reconciliation.

Part I of *The Waste Land* is titled "The Burial of the Dead" in an allusion to the Christian office of that name. The Christian burial rite combines the ceremonial lowering of the deceased into the ground with the singing or saying of prayers and psalms that speak of the resurrection of the dead. These themes, death, burial, revival, and resurrection, echo continually throughout the whole poem and are especially noticeable in this first part. The poem's opening lines begin with what Armin Paul Frank calls "root consciousness" (40). The emphasis in the first lines on roots and tubers, and the first-person plural in the line "winter kept us warm" places us in the perspective of something that has been buried but is not dead. The first word of the poem, April, evokes the annual seasonal call to rebirth and revival. However, in the opening lines the promise for rebirth is questionable – April is called cruel, the roots are dull, and the tubers dried – and the response to the seasonal call to revival is

[48] In Part III of "Burnt Norton" Eliot again links the descent into the Underground to the descent into hell.

doubtful. "Winter kept us warm, covering / Earth in forgetful snow" implies a preference for the half-waking, half-sleeping state. Moreover, the details of dried tubers and dull roots suggest that the life that remains under the snow is, in fact, barely alive.

The poem's title, *The Waste Land*, is an allusion to the fisher king myth and the story of a dead or dying king whose revival brings the land back to life. Additionally, Eliot tells us in his notes that he is indebted not only to Jessie L. Weston but also to James Frazer for much of the "incidental symbolism" of the poem. Frazer records many different myths about the rising of a dead god, and in *The Waste Land* we are in the presence of resurrection imagery and allusion. Frazer also relates a number of myths about ghosts, and the inhabitants of the waste land are ghostly; they are both haunting and haunted. The people sighing as they cross London Bridge could be seen as haunted ghosts, those who "have no hope for death" and who are doomed to a restless continuance. Additionally, they haunt the speaker who observes them ("I had not thought death had undone so many") and through the speaker they haunt the reader. The inhabitants of the waste land are also potentially haunted by the dead god. The speaker meets Stetson and cries, "That corpse you planted last year in your garden, / Has it begun to sprout? Will it bloom this year?" Grover Smith suggests that this buried corpse is a dead god, and the image of it sprouting suggests some kind of revival or resurrection. There is, at the same time, however, something rather horrifying about the idea of a sprouting corpse. The opening section of *The Waste Land*, with its images of April, dull roots, dried tubers, and a sprouting corpse, offers ideas of life-in-death and death-in-life, the death of God and his potential

resurrection, without resolution. The boundaries between life and death are continually blurred.

Placed as it is between the sighing commuters who are aligned through Eliot's allusion with the Neutrals in Dante's suffering city and the speaker's encounter with Stetson, the image of St. Mary Woolnoth is closely associated with the poem's themes of death and rebirth and with the blurred limits of life and death. A church building is a symbol of spiritual hope and of communion with a resurrected God, but the crowd does not stop either to enter the church or even to look at it, and the church bells ring with a dead sound on the final stroke. The crowd's lack of response to the church might add further weight to the idea that, in the waste land, God is dead. The following encounter with Stetson, if the buried corpse is indeed a god, might suggest that there is still some hope for resurrection. Moreover, the speaker's place as observer, similar to Dante's role as observer, might suggest that, for the speaker at least, there may be a way out of the waste land. But if this way out depends upon faith, there has been little evidence thus far in the poem to suggest that faith is possible.

Architecturally, the church of St. Mary Woolnoth is complex and highly symbolic. Built by an architect who was trained and taught by Sir Christopher Wren, one of Eliot's favourite architects, and who sought to create associations in the "historical mind" when designing his building, the church stands on a site that has been used for sacred worship since Roman times. The very structure of the building connects past, present and future: the cubic form recalls the visionary temple of Solomon, the twin towers recollect the demolished medieval church, and

Hawksmoor's design embodies his hopes for the future of the Church of England. The church building certainly represents the uneasy tension between past and present that is so much a part of Eliot's formulation of the idea of the role of tradition in art. Rendered physically insignificant when viewed among the large business buildings of this area of London, the very structure of the building had to give way to the demands and priorities of the modern City, being significantly altered to support the creation of an Underground Railway booking station. Representing an ancient spiritual tradition, the church also symbolizes the loss of this tradition in the modern world: threatened again by the prospect of demolition in 1919 due to under-use, the church seems to have become merely a financial burden on the diocese of London by the time Eliot writes his defence of the churches in 1921 and *The Waste Land* in 1922.

Nevertheless, this "disconsolate fane" is included deliberately by the poet in this section of *The Waste Land*. The architecture, with all of its symbolic potential, stands between the ironic image of London Bridge reduced to a thoroughfare for souls in torment and the speaker's meeting with Stetson and his inquiry into the status of the buried god. The poet does not use this image to suggest that, in the modern world, the church's symbolic meaning is worthless. The poem does not say that the meaning is defunct – it indicates that the meaning is not recognized. The church still stands in the waste land, with all of its profound symbolic potential, but its significance is not noticed by the flowing crowd. The irony of this image rests not on the church building itself, but on the way it is perceived. The problem, Eliot indicates in "The Burial of the Dead," the problem of death-in-life or life-in-death, is one of perception.

If perceived as meaningless, the church will be meaningless in the waste land, and its bell will toll sadly.

St. Magnus Martyr

Perhaps the other image of a church building in *The Waste Land* offers an experience of a different kind of perception. Eliot's representation of the church of St. Magnus Martyr in "The Fire Sermon" is in many ways a corresponding, but in other ways a contrasting, image to that of St. Mary Woolnoth in "The Burial of the Dead." The two churches share a similar history. St. Mary Woolnoth was built by Hawksmoor; St. Magnus Martyr was rebuilt after the Great Fire of London by Wren. The two church buildings, as they were known to Eliot in the 1920s and as they still are, have historical associations with late-Restoration England and the styles of architecture that developed and flourished during that time. Both churches, moreover, have important historical roots that pre-date the structures of Hawksmoor and Wren.

St. Magnus Martyr stands on Lower Thames Street, close to the water and London Bridge. A forged Westminster Charter, dated 1067, documents a church on this site, but the church more probably has a twelfth-century foundation. The original church, and Wren's rebuilding, was actually situated on Old London Bridge itself. Before the bridge was demolished in 1832 and Rennie's New London Bridge moved further west along Lower Thames Street, it was a home to many houses, shops, and even churches which were built along its sides. These were constantly in peril, either of toppling off the side of the bridge, or of burning down. Their presence also caused the actual road and pedestrian walkway to be quite narrow, so between 1762 and 1768

attempts were made to widen the roadway onto the bridge. This meant disturbing the structure of St. Magus Martyr since its west bays touched the bridge. The two west bays of the church were demolished and the tower base was converted to create a kind of porch with two arches that became a pedestrian route on the widened road.[49] Day writes that the church was known as St. Magnus *ad pontem* (290). The Roman name means "at the bridge" or "near the bridge" and it is related to the word *pontifex*, which literally means "bridge-builder" or "preparer of the road." The title *pontifex maximus* for a high priest had, therefore, a deeply symbolic meaning: for the Romans, the office of bridge-building was a high and sacred one, so the connection of "bridge-builder" with priest is unsurprising. Moreover, pontifices were understood symbolically as those who prepared or smoothed the road or the bridge between the living and the dead. Later, of course, in Catholic terms, *pontifex maximus* signified a chief priest or bishop, and was used unofficially to refer to the pope. The significance of the name St. Magnus *ad pontem*, with its etymological connections with the Catholic and Roman uses of *pontifex maximus* is complex. Literally on or "by the bridge," St. Magnus historically provided a cultural junction as pedestrians from Old London Bridge had actually to pass under its shelter onto Lower Thames Street (Airaudi 11). Potentially, then, the architecture of the church and the bridge literally forced foot passengers into contact with sacred structures; the bridge, itself historically a sacred symbol, provided access for foot passengers to the church, beyond and through which they would gain the City. The church represents *pontifex maximus*; as a Christian building it supports worship of Christ, the great "bridge-

[49] See Bradley and Pevsner, pp. 97-98.

builder" or the "preparer of the road" between the human and the divine. However, like the Underground booking station that became part of the physical structure of St. Mary Woolnoth, the pedestrian walkway between the bridge and St. Magnus was constructed so that people could pass by the church without going in. In many ways, the church building was reduced just as much from its sacred role to one of ferrying commuters as was the church of St. Mary Woolnoth with the Underground station beneath it.

Wren's original structure, before the renovations for the pedestrian walkway, had nine bays on the north wall and four tall windows on either side of a door that opened onto Lower Thames Street. In 1782, the door was blocked off and the tall windows converted to high round ones. These changes were made largely to reduce the noise and smell of the busy road and the Billingsgate fish market down the street (Billingsgate was London's principal fish market from 1699-1982). If looking at these changes symbolically, one can argue that the church building was being closed off from the bustling and smelly street; perhaps this signifies a kind of separation between the priorities of the sacred structure and the City street. It is in practical terms, however, hard to fault parishioners for wishing to sit in relative quiet and comfort when attending church.

St. Magnus Martyr is named for the Earl of Orkney (1075-1115), the patron saint of Orkney and the Shetland Islands. He was a man of peace who came into conflict with his contemporaries due to his refusals to participate in violent acts such as raids on other territories.[50] His final conflict was with his cousin over the succession of

[50] For the story of St. Magnus, see *Orkneyinga Saga*, p. 90.

Orkney. The cousins decided to meet and make peace, each agreeing to bring two ships to the meeting place on an island on April 16, 1115.[51] Magnus honoured the agreement, but his cousin arrived with eight ships and Magnus was overpowered and killed. After his death and burial, legends of healing and new life sprang up around his grave: the grave site was said to restore sight to the blind, and the rocky landscape of the grave was turned into a fertile, green field.[52] These legends are of particular interest to those studying the significance of the church of St. Magnus in *The Waste Land.* To some extent based on the fertility myth of the fisher king, the poem's themes circulate around ideas of water, fertility, dry or rocky ground, death and growth. It is interesting, then, to note that St. Magnus, and consequently the church named for him, is associated with legends of the transformation of barren ground into fertile soil. Moreover, the legend of new sight to the blind is particularly significant at this moment in the poem. As several critics have indicated, the church offers a kind of alternative vision in the waste land setting, and it is possible to understand this vision in the context of the legends associated with St. Magnus. The church, literally an image of light in the poem, potentially offers a new kind of sight.

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[51] The time of their appointed meeting fell in Holy Week, a fact that gains significance in the context of the Easter colours associated with St. Magnus Martyr Church in London.

[52] The *Orkneyinga Saga* records a number of miracles happening on or near the grave site of St. Magnus, which include the following: "The place where this happened was rocky and overgrown with moss, but soon God revealed how worthy Earl Magnus was in His eyes, for the spot where he was killed turned into a green field" (95); "There was a farmer in Shetland called Bergfinn Skatason, who was blind. He ferried two cripples, Sigurd and Thorbjorn, south of Orkney and all three of them kept vigil at the grave of St. Magnus. The Holy Earl revealed himself to them and with the help of God gave them back their health. ... A little later ... twenty-four sick people kept vigil at his grave and all got back their health" (103); and "One day the bishop was praying alone in Christ Church in Birsay and as he stood up to leave he suddenly went blind and could not find his way to the door. For a long time he tried to get out. Then he was seized by a great terror, went to Earl Magnus' grave and prayed there in tears.... And after that, there at the graveside, he got back his sight" (103-4).

The feast day for St. Magnus became April 16, the day of his death. Day points out that in 1922 Easter fell on April 16, six months before *The Waste Land* was published in *The Criterion* (Day note 29, 290). Critics such as Day, Smith, and Julie Nall Knowles[53] call *The Waste Land* a Good Friday or an Easter poem, and it is undeniable that the colours of St. Magnus Martyr, stressed in the poem, are the Easter colours white and gold that contrast with the violet light (Good Friday colours) of the Unreal City. It would probably have seemed to Eliot a nice coincidence that Easter in 1922 fell appropriately on April 16, the feast day of the saint whose namesake church in London exhibits the Easter colours to an extraordinary degree.

The stories of the churches of St. Mary Woolnoth and St. Magnus Martyr in London are very similar. Each, over time, has had to give way to the City, both in terms of parish size and usage and in architectural terms as changes have been made to their structures to better accommodate the priorities of the modern commercial city. Just as with St. Mary Woolnoth, structural changes to St. Magnus Martyr have made it a convenient artery for traffic that passes by the church without entering it. It could seem that St. Magnus Martyr holds as little sacred significance for the modern world as St. Mary Woolnoth, whose bell sounds with a deadened finality. However, in *The Waste Land*, the image of the church of St. Magnus Martyr is not symbolically the same as the image of St. Mary Woolnoth. The experiences the church buildings

[53] See Day, who names *The Waste Land* a "a Good Friday-Easter poem, among other things..."(290); Smith's chapter "Memory and Desire: *The Waste Land*" for a full discussion of the connections between the fertility myths, the Grail legends, and Easter; and Knowles, pp. 375-76, for her discussion of Chrétien de Troyes's version of the Grail legend in which Perceval goes to the castle of the Fisher King and experiences an Easter conversion, and her subsequent connection of this legend with the poem: "*The Waste Land* is also a story of Good Friday and Easter" (376).

represent in the poem are not equal. There are some important contrasts, as well as some similarities, between the ways that the two churches are represented.

The image of St. Magnus Martyr comes in "The Fire Sermon" after the sterile sexual encounter between the typist and the young man carbuncular, which is witnessed by Tiresias. This takes place in the evening, after a long work day. It occurs in the "violet light" that Eliot associates with the Unreal City. The colour purple is a colour of death and mourning. The failing light associated with evening can be reminiscent of the gloominess of the "brown fog" that Eliot describes in "The Burial of the Dead" when the commuters cross London Bridge in the morning. Whether "brown fog" of morning or "violet light" of evening, the Unreal City seems to have a lack of bright light or clear visibility.

Just as "each man fixed his eyes before his feet" in the passage preceding the image of St. Mary Woolnoth in "The Burial of the Dead," here in "The Fire Sermon" the sexual meeting between the two people is like the convergence of two automatons:

The time is now propitious, as he guesses,
The meal is ended, she is bored and tired,
Endeavours to engage her in caresses
Which still are unreproved if undesired. ...
His vanity requires no response,
And makes a welcome of indifference. (ll. 235-8; 241-2)

Bored, undesiring, and indifferent, she allows him to do what he likes. Vain, he requires no response and scarcely notices her as another human being – certainly

uncaring about what might be going on in her mind, he is also remarkably uninterested in her body except as it serves some function for him. The sighs of the crowd crossing London Bridge commingle without there being any meaningful connection or sense of community between individual pedestrians. Similarly here there is a lack of connection, of human feeling and care. The encounter is entirely mechanical. The automated functionality of their meeting reflects the image of the city worker that opens this section of the poem: "At the violet hour, when the eyes and back / Turn upward from the desk, when the human engine waits / Like a taxi throbbing waiting..." (ll. 215-17). As Michael North points out, the subject of these lines is one individual in a generalized set of city workers: "The feeling given is one of infinite, simultaneous repetitions of a single gesture in which isolated body parts detach themselves from the work that has both held and dispersed them" (97-8). Moreover, as North writes, the typist is known by the name of her job and she becomes a "type." She therefore represents all of her "type" (98). The implication is, then, that the encounter between her and the young man is not unique – it is a type of relationship that could be observed in any number of houses in the Unreal City. Their relationship is a type to be found in the modern waste land. As such, because it is linked to the "human machine," it is more than ever automatic and meaningless. After the young man leaves she is vaguely pleased that he is gone, and "She smooths her hair with *automatic* hand, / And puts a record on the gramophone" (ll. 255-6, my emphasis). The encounter takes place at the dying of the day (reminiscent of the dying hours tolled by the clock of St. Mary Woolnoth), and it enacts a kind of death, being devoid of feeling, warmth, communion, or care. The typist then tries further to

alleviate her boredom by following the mechanical sexual encounter with the mechanized production of recorded music on the gramophone. All of this – the way the light is described, the isolation of the souls inhabiting the waste land, and the automated nature of their movements – means that same kind of experience of disconnection and death-in-life precedes the images of the two churches in "The Burial of the Dead" and "The Fire Sermon." As the lines in "The Fire Sermon" go on, however, some important differences in representation begin to emerge.

There is a shift in perspective in the lines that follow the conclusion of the section about the typist. The speaker of the next section is not necessarily Tiresias. It is possible that the first-person observer of the St. Magnus section is aligned with the first-person observer of the London Bridge and St. Mary Woolnoth section in "The Burial of the Dead." In any case, the view shifts from the typist's room and her gramophone music to the streets again. The speaker hears music: "This music crept by me upon the waters" (l. 257). This is a different sort of music from the music of the gramophone. It is an allusion to Ferdinand's speech in Shakespeare's *Tempest*, and evokes Ariel, spirit, and the suspension of grief.[54] As the speaker moves through the streets, he hears the "pleasant whining of a mandoline" (l. 261) being played beside a bar in Lower Thames Street, wherein there is "a clatter and a chatter" (l. 262). Very different to the unresponsiveness of the typist with the young man, here there is live music, talk, possibly laughter. Following the sights and sounds of Lower

[54] See *The Tempest* I.ii.393-99:

"Sitting on a bank,
Weeping again the King my father's wreck,
This music crept by me upon the waters,
Allaying both their fury and my passion
With its sweet air. Thence I have followed it,
Or it hath drawn me rather. But 'tis gone.
No, it begins again."

Thames Street, St. Magnus Martyr bursts upon the eyes of the speaker and upon the vision of the reader of *The Waste Land*: "the walls / Of Magnus Martyr hold / Inexplicable splendour of Ionian white and gold" (ll. 263-5). The long line, "Inexplicable splendour of Ionian white and gold," features a number of drawn-out syllables: "splendour," "Ionian," "gold." The long vowel sounds cause the reader to slow down. The image is pleasant to the eye (even the mind's eye), and the sound of Eliot's line is pleasant to the ear – and it is even pleasant to the tongue and mouth if reading the line out loud.

This short section, beginning with "'This music crept by me upon the waters'" and ending with "Inexplicable splendour of Ionian white and gold," offers a moment of relief in the experience of *The Waste Land*. In contrast to sighs and scratchy gramophone noises there is live music and chatter. In contrast to dingy light there is white, gold, and brightness. In contrast to loneliness and isolation, there is a group of people sitting together apparently enjoying each other's company. There is a pub scene in these lines that contrasts with the earlier pub locale in *The Waste Land*. In the earlier pub setting, the predominant note struck by the conversation between the pub's occupants was sordid and lifeless as Bill, Lou, and May discussed such topics as false teeth and abortion. Here, the speaker does not overhear actual conversation, but the "clatter and chatter," combined with the music from the mandoline, suggests a liveliness and energy lacking in the other pub scene.

A colon separates the image of the fishmen lounging at noon and the description of St. Magnus Martyr. A colon is a punctuation mark used to signify amplification, clarification, or explanation of a point. If a colon is used in a sentence, the two parts

of the sentence separated by the punctuation mark are understood to be very close in association, and an author uses this specific punctuation mark to emphasize a precise connection between ideas. Eliot's use of the colon here seems to suggest a close relationship between the image of the fishmen lounging and the church building. If these lines do offer a glimmer of hope in the waste land, hope for a meaningful, cheerful community of people who gather to enjoy each other's company and listen to or play live music, then perhaps the colon signifies that somehow the presence of the church fosters this kind of communal existence. In other words, perhaps there is some connection between the beautiful, symbolic building and the group of people who gather in the street near it. If this church, unlike St. Mary Woolnoth which is viewed in terms of darkness and dreariness, is perceived as a place of light and splendour, then perhaps this perception translates some meaning and joy into the lives of those who see it or lounge close to it.

On the other hand, the colon could be an ironic emphasis. The fishmen are, of course, in a public bar, not in the church. It was to protect against their "clatter and chatter" as well as against the smell of the fishing trade that the windows and doors on the north side of the church were altered and made smaller in the eighteenth century. The public bar is the chosen gathering place in the modern secular world, not the church building. The irony goes deeper if we consider who these fishmen are. They are either fish porters or fish merchants from the nearby Billingsgate Fish Market on Lower Thames Street. They are not fishermen, and Eliot makes this clear with the use of "fishmen" rather than "fishermen" in his lines. Some London lore that would have been familiar to Eliot's readers is that "billingsgate" is a word used to

mean coarse or foul language. The fact that the fishmen are almost certainly employed by the Billingsgate market creates an association between them and the other meaning of "billingsgate." Billingsgate foul language is certainly not what one would expect to hear near a church building if the church is being viewed with respect. The implied association of the fishmen with foul language could suggest that the fishmen are either unaware of the church nearby, or that they simply do not care – its presence is irrelevant to them. Additionally, the fishmen belong to the Billingsgate market which, in turn, belongs to the City livery company of fishmongers. This livery company received its first royal charter in 1272, and so the presence of the fishmen evokes a long history of trade in London. Perhaps their proximity to the church connotes some connection with the story of Christ turning the money-lenders out of the temple. Here the fishmen, with their coarse language, lounge uninterrupted outside the church walls. It is possible to infer that, in the modern waste land, no one will arrive to protect the sacred space from their language or their trade.

It is, therefore, necessary to read these lines of *The Waste Land* with caution. Words or phrases may have double meanings, and ironies may lurk underneath what appears, superficially, to be a pleasant image of a group of people in a bar and the church nearby. For instance, in addition to the image of splendour and the beautiful words, "Ionian white and gold," describing the church, there are words like "clatter and chatter," which may refer to the happy noises of a lively community, but which also recall the reconstruction of the north wall of the church as a defence against such noise. As well, there is the curious description of the mandoline music: "pleasant whining" (l. 231). There is an irresolvable tension between "pleasant" and "whining."

Lyndall Gordon notes that when Eliot went to Margate for a rest cure in 1921, Vivien bought him a mandoline (*Early Years* 104). Perhaps Eliot, in attempting to play the instrument, experienced the different ways a mandoline can sound pleasant if played well, or whining if played badly. Undoubtedly, however, the mandoline music in *The Waste Land*, whether pleasant or whining, is a live sound. It contrasts with the typist's gramophone and follows the evocation of Ariel. Another complex word in this passage is "lounging." Very seldom, thus far in the poem, has there been an image of people at rest, or relaxing. "Lounging" connotes comfort and ease, a feeling scarce in the Unreal City. It also, however, implies laziness or slothfulness. There is, additionally, the question of why the fishmen are lounging here at noon. Surely their work day is not over? Could they simply be enjoying a long lunch break, or have they retired to the bar to escape their duties? Finally, in the context of the associations between the fishmen and billingsgate, the word "Inexplicable" becomes complex. Does "Inexplicable" refer to something transcendent (the splendour of the church) or something trangressive (the foul language of billingsgate)? Perhaps the colon connecting the fishmen with the church implies that the splendour of the building will remain inexplicable because the company of people nearby is unlikely to notice, value, or attempt to understand it. Perhaps the beauty of the church and the life of spiritual redemption it symbolizes is unfathomable, something wholly incomprehensible, in the modern waste land.

The complexity of this passage does not begin and end with the layers of potential ironies in Eliot's choice of words, however. The allusions in this moment of *The Waste Land* are dense. Firstly, the church building is not only beautiful, as it is

represented in the poem, but is associated with a complex and significant history in London. As well, the link between the fishmen and Fishmongers' Hall is important and adds to the complexity of the reference to fishmen at this precise moment in the poem. Fishmongers' Hall, built for the Worshipful Company of Fishmongers, is a prominent building on the Thames by London Bridge, not far from the Billingsgate Market and St. Magnus Martyr. The motto of the Company is "Al Worship be to God Only," and the Company's coat of arms sports the three keys of St. Peter, one-time fisherman who holds the keys to the Kingdom of Heaven. In the fifteenth century, a fraternity of fishmongers caused there to be a guild to Our Lady de Salve Regina in St. Magnus Martyr church, recorded thus:

Be it remembred, that Rauf Capelyn du Bailliff, Will, Double Fishmonger, Roger Lowher Chancellor, Henry Boseworth Vintener, Steven Lucas Stockfishmonger, and other of the better of the Parish of St. Magnus near the Bridge of London, of their great Devotion, and to the Honour of God and his Glorious Mother our Lady Mary the Virgin, began and caused to be made a Chauntry, to sing an Anthem of our Lady called Salve Regina, every Evening. And thereupon ordained five burning Wax Lights at the time of the said Anthem, in the Honour and Reverence of the five principal Joys of our Lady aforesaid; and for exciting the People to Devotion at such an Hour, the more to merit to their Souls. (Strype 175)

St. Magnus Martyr church was not, originally, the church of the fishmongers' guild. That church was St. Michaels, Crooked Lane, which was also the parish church of the Worshipful Company of Plumbers. In 1831, with Rennie's renovations to London

Bridge, St. Michael's, Crooked Lane, was demolished and the parish was joined with St. Magnus. Since then, St. Magnus has been the church of the Company of Plumbers and the Company of Fishmongers. In the vestry of St. Magnus there is a carved fireplace that belonged to the Hall of Plumbers, and two of the stained glass windows display the arms of the Company of Plumbers (*The City of London's Livery Companies* online). There is, then, a direct link between St. Magnus Martyr and two of the oldest livery companies in London. Once again, the link (signified by the colon) between the fishmen lounging and the walls of St Magnus in Eliot's poem assumes a significance; perhaps it is not so surprising as it may seem that the fishmen feel comfortable lounging outside this particular church which is, actually, a parish home to several of London's livery companies, including theirs.

Furthermore, while these are not fishermen, Eliot nevertheless identifies them as fishmen, and the symbol of the fish has enormous significance. Day argues that the "fish" in "fishmen" recalls the Apostles, many of whom were fishermen, and also the secret sign of the early Christians: a fish. The word fish in Greek is *ichthus*, which became an anagram for the words *Iesous Christos Theou Uios Soter* – Jesus Christ, God's own Son. As well, in the context of the fisher king legend the association of the fishmen with fish (for even if they are not fishermen they are in the fish trade) seems significant: Jessie L. Weston writes that "the Fish is a Life symbol of great antiquity" and "the title of Fisher has, from the earliest ages, been associated with Deities who were held to be specially connected with the origin and preservation of Life" (119). The fishmen seem connected, in one way or another, with the church of St. Magnus

Martyr, and sites legendarily associated with St. Magnus were believed to bring forth life and miracles.

All of this is perhaps starting to seem rather complicated. In teasing out the layers of meaning and allusion in this passage of *The Waste Land* I am attempting to demonstrate, firstly, that the image of the church is intricate and, secondly, that the symbolic meaning of this representation of church architecture is not the same as that of the earlier image of St. Mary Woolnoth. While potential ironies abound, as they do in the earlier reference to St. Mary Woolnoth, the symbolic significance of the church of St. Magnus Martyr is far too complex to call it merely another ironic allusion to spiritual deathliness in the waste land. In fact, regardless of the ironies, this is an image that includes live music, a chattering community, and a moment of light and beauty. That the reader's experience of the church is meaningful because of its associations with a religious tradition or a sacred community is nowhere insinuated in *The Waste Land.* Nonetheless, the church building is not only beautiful, but is linked to the ideas of light and community that pervade this section of the poem. Perhaps some kind of translation is taking place between the sacred structure and the community in the bar. The community of fishmen is not a spiritual one as such (certainly not in religious terms), but their "clatter and chatter" suggests a much more lively and energetic connection between souls than does the preceding encounter between the typist and the young man carbuncular. Perhaps, then, even though the church is not represented as offering a viable spiritual alternative to the materialism and secularism of the waste land, St. Magnus does still have something to offer. It might represent the possibility of making a connection with something that was once

meaningful and that can still hold value for the modern urban dweller, even if it is just the reminder that the church represents a desire to take human life seriously. There is still something valuable and beautiful here, something that is not found in the earlier image of the church of St. Mary Woolnoth.

In his notes, notoriously enigmatic, to *The Waste Land*, Eliot provides a note for each of the two churches. About St. Mary Woolnoth, he notes that the dead sound of the bell is "A phenomenon which I have often noticed" (*CP* 81). He provides a longer note on St. Magnus Martyr: "The interior of St. Magnus Martyr is to my mind one of the finest among Wren's interiors. See *The Proposed Demolition of Nineteen City Churches* (P.S. King & Son, Ltd.)" (*CP* 83). Both of these comments offer insight into Eliot's own experience of London; both are personal observations. The note on St. Mary reveals that the lines, "St. Mary Woolnoth kept the hours / With a dead sound on the final stroke of nine" (ll. 67-8) is not only symbolic but also realistic and enters the poem via the poet's own experience. The note about St. Magnus is not a fact, like that about St. Mary, but an opinion expressed by the poet about the beauty of Wren's church. Moreover, in this second note, Eliot cites the *Proposed Demolition of Nineteen City Churches* about which he had written a London Letter in the *Dial* in 1921. In fact, as readers of this pamphlet will discover, both St. Mary Woolnoth and St. Magnus Martyr were threatened with destruction, and the authors of the pamphlet defended them by stressing their historical and aesthetic importance. But Eliot chooses to cite the pamphlet with reference to St. Magnus, not St. Mary. Citing it here emphasizes that he finds St. Magnus Martyr not only beautiful but also valuable. We can read this note on St. Magnus as partial evidence that Eliot believed the church

was important; this belief gets translated into the way the church is represented in the poem. This is not to say that Eliot did not value St. Mary Woolnoth architecturally; readers of Eliot's 1921 *Dial* piece will know that he places great value on all the churches of Sir Christopher Wren and his school, and Hawksmoor's church is part of that school of architecture. However, in *The Waste Land*, St. Mary Woolnoth is symbolized as having no value for the inhabitants of the Unreal City. St. Magnus Martyr, on the other hand, is represented as having value, albeit complex, and Eliot's note on St. Magnus underscores its beauty, the fact that it has recently been threatened by the City, and its continued value for the modern city. It is perhaps fair to say that the notes on the two churches in *The Waste Land* accentuate the differences between the ways they are represented in the poem.

The ways that the two churches are symbolized in *The Waste Land* are not equal. Both churches have rich histories in London. Both are architecturally complex and represent a sacred tradition that is no longer recognized in the modern city. Both representations of the churches are layered with ironies. The poet implies that the churches will be meaningless if they are perceived as meaningless, and their presence in the Unreal City will be ironic. However, the people gathered near to St. Magnus Martyr are very different from the sighing commuters who pass by St. Mary Woolnoth, and the lines of the poem imply some sort of connection between the fishmen and the church. Perhaps it is the case that for every group of people that views the churches as meaningless there will be a group that finds some meaning, albeit an ambiguous one, in them. The images of the two churches in *The Waste Land* provoke more questions than they answer. Nonetheless, we can see that while St.

Mary Woolnoth is represented as empty and cold, St. Manus Martyr is represented as still having some value.

The Chapel Perilous

Eliot's representations of St. Mary Woolnoth and St. Magnus Martyr raise questions about the relevance of tradition in the waste land. Both buildings symbolize tradition in Eliot's meaning of the word: as structures with ancient origins, the churches stand for the continuation of the past in the present. As buildings whose meaning and significance have changed over time, along with inevitable changes to their architectural make-up, they represent the pastness of the past as well as its presence. They symbolize the tension between the past and the present: holders of an ancient religious tradition that has become irrelevant in the modern present, the churches are both symbolically meaningful and ironically emptied of meaning. Eliot uses them to ask questions about the relevance of the past to the present, and about the viability of the spiritual tradition they stand for. While the poem nowhere demonstrates that a return to a religious tradition is necessary, possible, or even desired in the modern world, there is nonetheless a suggestion that a place offering a sense of tradition, a moment of beauty, and a possible connection between souls is valuable. Perhaps symbolically the two churches, battered and fragmented by layers of ironies, are added to the heap of fragments the speaker will try to shore up.

The final image of a piece of ecclesiastical architecture in *The Waste Land* does not stand in London or anywhere else. It is the mythological Chapel Perilous of the Grail legends. In some ways, the poet's representation of the Chapel Perilous

provides a summary of the questions about church architecture posed in *The Waste Land*. The Chapel Perilous appears in the fifth and final section of the poem. In "What the Thunder Said," we are in the midst of the same thematic imagery of death and resurrection as in the poem's opening section, "The Burial of the Dead." Unlike the opening of "The Burial of the Dead" with the tubers lurking, still living though dried, under the snow, "What the Thunder Said" opens with an image of the dead god, whose death appears final: "After the torchlight red on sweaty faces / After the frosty silence in the gardens / After the agony in stony places / ... / He who was living is now dead" (ll. 321-3, 328). However, if this is indeed a Good Friday poem, then the god is supposed to be dead on Good Friday. His death is, however, not the end of the story. That this death is not the end seems indicated by the appearance of the third person walking, "Who is the third who walks always beside you?" (l. 359): an unmistakable allusion to Christ's appearance, following his resurrection, on the road to Emmaus, recounted in Luke 24. In this story Christ tells the disciples that the cause of their despair is the result of their misreading of scripture. They grieve in the present, believing that their hopes in the past have betrayed them: "But we trusted that it had been he which should have redeemed Israel" (Luke 24: 21). Christ offers a new reading, one that sees past, present, and future bound together in a spiritual whole. Just as the disciples cannot tell who the stranger is, the speaker of the poem senses the presence, but cannot see clearly who he is. In the poem, however, the third figure remains hooded, gliding mysteriously along beside the travellers, and he does not reveal himself or provide counsel. Michael North suggests that the ambiguity of this presence is its real import in the poem:

Eliot suggests by his use of this particular part of the resurrection story that Christ is present in our very doubts and confusions about him; he is the third who insists on being counted even though it throws off the total. The fact that experience does not add up, these lines suggest, is our best evidence of the hand of God, not of the symmetry and order of the cosmos but its excess over human forms of order. (103-4)

Christ does not appear in the poem, but his presence is felt, and, as Benjamin Lockerd says, "the readers know who the third one is and how the story ends" (185). The fact that the third presence on the road provokes more questions than answers and represents in equal parts doubt and comfort is fitting for the experience of *The Waste Land*. Moreover, the questions raised by the presence of the third on the road are a good introduction for the speaker's encounter with the Chapel Perilous that follows.

The ambiguous appearance of the unidentified figure on the road complicates the apparent finality of the death of the god in the opening lines in "What the Thunder Said." If this is Christ, then the resurrection has taken place and death is conquered. However, the figure does not identify himself, and his presence is as much ominous as it is reassuring. What kind of risen god this is has not been made clear, and what sort of hope, if any, he brings to the dry waste land remains to be seen. The image of the empty chapel poses similar questions and ambiguities about the possibility for communion with a divine presence and the hope for the end of the quest.

There has been much critical debate about the chapel in "What the Thunder Said": whether it is an image of hope or of despair, whether the crowing of the cock signifies a betrayal or is the precedent to the coming rain, and whether the wind is a

Pentecostal wind of spiritual rebirth or a Gerontion-type wind of emptiness.[55] Two important points arise about the chapel which are incontrovertible, however. The first is, as Lockerd points out, that its emptiness marks it unmistakably as a Grail chapel. Jessie Weston provides a number of different accounts of the chapel, some of which depict the chapel as lit by one or more tapers, as empty and bare, as old and ruined, or as fair and little (173-8). In each account the altar is usually bare, though sometimes the body of a knight lies upon the altar. The knight who enters the chapel is always the only living soul inside it. The chapel is in each case a place of danger, a site of spiritual contest between good and evil. Some accounts indicate that the chapel is situated in the middle of a Perilous Graveyard where lie the bodies of knights who have failed to pass the test of the chapel and have been slain by the Black Hand. All of these stories suggest, as Weston points out, that the chapel is symbolically a testing ground. In *From Ritual to Romance*, Weston writes that the Grail legends place high stress on the chapel, and it is essential to "the secret of the Grail" (180). This is because, she says, "*this is the story of an initiation* (or perhaps it would be more correct to say the test of fitness for an initiation) *carried out on the astral plane, and reacting with fatal results upon the physical*" (182).[56] In other words, the chapel hosts

[55] Frank finds it significant that "dry bones can harm no one," believing this line to counter the earlier "I will show you fear in a handful of dust." He believes that here the dry bones are benign and there are no malignant ghosts. Consequently, the "*absence* of any ghostly apparition" means that the crowing cock is likewise benevolent (see *Hamlet* I.ii.230). Frank believes that this cock is "reminiscent of the folk belief that the evil powers that might have been busy during the night are rendered powerless by the crowing of the first cock" (37-38). This pattern of imagery, says Frank, renders the chapel a safe place. Likewise Lockerd attributes the wind in the chapel to an empowering or Pentecostal wind, the opposite to the oppressively closed atmosphere in "A Game of Chess" (186). On the other hand, Thormählen argues that the Questor fails to understand the full significance of the chapel by calling it "only the wind's home" and the cock crows to set the seal on this misperception ("Winds" 135).

[56] Weston's italics.

an encounter between the physical and spiritual worlds, an encounter which only a select few may survive.

In effect, the windy, empty chapel in the poem is linked to the Arthurian tradition in which a successful encounter with a similar chapel signifies ultimate success in the quest (Lockerd 186-7). There appears to be, however, no peril in this chapel. There is no test to withstand, and no sanction or weapon given to help the Questor on the rest of his journey (Brooker and Bentley 186). As Brooker and Bentley write, "all spirits have departed," and this is perhaps why "dry bones can harm no one" because any spirits, good or evil, are gone. Likewise the wind might signify breath or spirit, but it might just as easily be the same wind as in "A Game of Chess," emphasizing hollowness. This might in fact be the peril of the chapel. Eliot's description of the chapel indicates that "the door swings." This might be an allusion to the door of a tabernacle, the dwelling place of the divine and the place where the Blessed Sacrament is kept in Catholic and Anglican churches. The door swings, the divine presence is gone, and, as Evelyn Waugh later poignantly writes in *Brideshead Revisited*, the tabernacle is left "open and empty, as though from now on it was always to be Good Friday" (200). The challenge or test of this chapel is to believe that after Good Friday comes Easter and the resurrection of Christ, which has already been foreshadowed by the gliding third figure on the road to Emmaus and by the earlier splendid white and gold Easter colours of St. Magnus Martyr but similarly undercut by the ambiguities associated with both.

At first the image of the Chapel Perilous ("In this decayed hole among the mountains/ .../ There is the empty chapel, only the wind's home./ It has no windows,

and the door swings ...." (ll. 385, 388-9)) seems to recall the earlier dead church of the poem, St. Mary Woolnoth, with a reminder of St. Mary's tolling bell: "And upside down in air were towers / Tolling reminiscent bells, that kept the hours..." (ll. 382-3). However, the next line recalls also St. Magnus Martyr and its associations with living voices and with music: "And voices singing out of empty cisterns and exhausted wells. /... / In the faint moonlight, the grass is singing..." (ll. 384-6). Just as Ariel's music leads the narrator towards the mandoline music and the vision of St. Magnus, so here some spirit of the air, the wind, is home in the chapel, around which the grass sings. The grass perhaps also recalls the legends of St. Magnus where rocky ground becomes a fertile field, and here the very shoots of life from the soil, albeit the soil of a graveyard, sing. On the other hand, the description of the chapel ends with an image of the graveyard outside: "Dry bones can harm no one" (l. 390). This graveyard offers a potential contrast to the corpse buried in the garden in "The Burial of the Dead." There the corpse, associated with the myths of a dead and rising god that guide the symbolism of the poem, is identified in terms of potential resurrection when the speaker asks, "Has it begun to sprout? Will it bloom this year?" (l. 72). There is danger associated with the sprouting corpse. It is unclear whether its sprouting will be the revival of the king whose healing will restore the land, or whether this is a malignant corpse that will rise to seek some kind of restitution. Regardless of this danger, and of the horribleness of the image of a sprouting corpse, there is, nonetheless, a spark of life in Stetson's garden. But in the graveyard of the Chapel Perilous, "Dry bones can harm no one." This suggests, like the opening lines of "What the Thunder Said," that death is final. The speaker can move through the

graveyard unharmed because there is no revived spirit to intercept him. However, it is after the image of the graveyard that the speaker hears the cock crow and feels the "damp gust / Bringing rain" (ll. 393-4). It is easy to see that, like the image of St. Magnus Martyr, the representation of the Chapel Perilous is layered with ambiguities.

In naming the Chapel Perilous in his notes on this section of the poem, Eliot aligns the speaker of this section of the poem with the Questor of the grail legends. Weston reveals that often the Questor does not know the goal of his quest, but sometimes the Questor can reach the goal by asking questions. If he asks the right question, the land will be restored and the king healed. This emphasis on questions is very important, for as Harriet Davidson points out, it seems to "[point] up the enigmatic quality of the quest" (113). If asking the right questions becomes the essential key to the quest, then "The goal of the quest seems to be the quest itself" (Davidson 113). In other words, questions rather than answers assume a primary role in the Questor's advance. *The Waste Land* emphasizes the posing of questions, and in fact the poem goes a long way toward positing that no answers are possible. However, even if there is no answer, the Questor must go on asking questions and must recognize the importance of the quest itself (Davidson 104). In his dissertation, Eliot wrote, "The life of the soul does not consist in the contemplation of one consistent world but in the painful task of unifying (to a greater and less extent) jarring and incompatible ones, and passing, when possible, from two or more discordant viewpoints to a higher which shall somehow include and transmute them" (*KE* 147-8). *The Waste Land* is a poem that reveals the struggle for a wider and fuller point of view even while complete knowledge of an Absolute is at all times

unattainable. If the Questor stops questing, he might become like Dante's Neutrals alluded to in "The Burial of the Dead" who abdicated from active participation in life. A life of questing, it is to be inferred, is preferable to a life of tormented boredom in the Unreal City.

In the final lines of the poem the speaker asks the all-important question: "Shall I at least set my lands in order?" (l. 425). Is there any order and coherence that the speaker can salvage from the chaos of modern life? As if to reveal that such order is not possible, the lines following his question are a cascade of literary fragments. However, the speaker follows these by saying, "These fragments I have shored against my ruins" (l. 430). The implication is that not only these literary fragments, but all of the fragments of experience, history, and tradition that he has witnessed in the waste land will be shored against approaching ruin. It is important to note that by gathering and shoring the fragments to put them into some kind of order the speaker is creating something new. His task is not only to preserve but to give new meaning, and in this he becomes not merely the inheritor but the bearer of tradition. A coherent wholeness may not be possible, but the speaker seems to have decided that some sort of meaning, albeit partial, is salvageable, and the poem ends on a note of peace.

The representations of church architecture in *The Waste Land* contribute to and are part of the poem's experience of asking questions. The churches are symbols of tradition, and this tradition is figured both as something that the modern world has lost and as something that may be recovered, in one form or another, and still found meaningful. In his approach to the churches in this poem Eliot is consistent with his early attitudes toward church architecture that are revealed in his London Letters in

the *Dial*, his Commentaries in *The Criterion* and his personal letters. That is, he is both respectful and sceptical toward what they represent. They are symbols of history and tradition, and moreover they offer beauty. However, the religious life that they embody seems out of place in the modern world, and the poet ironises any potential for spiritual renewal in the waste land. On the other hand, some sort of renewal is necessary, and churches have the ability to represent something more meaningful than the mere reflex of function represented elsewhere in the poem, even if this meaning is translated into secular terms. The meaning, however translated, depends upon people's ability to recognize it. In sum, images of ecclesiastical architecture in *The Waste Land* participate in and represent the poem's themes of death, life, despair and renewal. They also belong to the heap of fragments that the speaker will try to shore up against his ruins, and they are broken carriers of a peace that passes understanding.

Chapter Four
Ritual, Community and Churches: *The Rock* and *Murder in the Cathedral*

Two of Eliot's earliest dramas, *The Rock* (1934) and *Murder in the Cathedral* (1935), deal with ecclesiastical architecture in various ways. *The Rock* was written specifically for the Forty-Five Churches Fund, which was a fund-raising campaign attempting to raise enough money to build forty-five churches in London's suburbs. At the centre of the play is a church that is in the process of being built, and the ideas of the play are centred in the symbol of church architecture and the various levels of meaning that can be associated with the word "building." *Murder in the Cathedral* was commissioned for the Canterbury Festival and focuses on the martyrdom of Thomas Becket. It is not explicitly about the ecclesiastical structure, as is *The Rock*, but it was written to be performed in the Cathedral, and the particular setting of the play becomes highly significant in the context of *Murder*'s themes and ideas.

These two plays demonstrate some continuity with Eliot's earlier ideas about church architecture, and they also represent several developments or changes in these ideas. Questions about the relevance of church buildings and their uses in the modern world, as well as questions about their potential as symbols to offer spiritual nourishment to a secular society, swirl around these two plays as they do in the representations of ecclesiastical buildings in *The Waste Land.* However, the poet, who was received into Anglicanism in 1927, was more than ever interested in the meaning of church buildings as centres of community when writing *The Rock* and *Murder in the Cathedral.* The plays create situations in which community means the bringing together of people, the connecting of past and present through tradition, and the

unifying of time with eternity, of the visible with the invisible, of the human with the divine. In the two plays community, with all of these layers of meaning, becomes the focal point, and the location of community is the church building. While some questions about the viability of religion and church buildings in the modern secular world still add complexity to the poet's ideas in the plays, the centralization of meaningful communities in church buildings is much more affirmative than it is in *The Waste Land*. Moreover, the spiritual life represented by church architecture is no longer translated in secular terms for a secular world: the churches are, for the post-1927 Eliot, symbols of Christian spirituality. It is the Christian community, represented by church buildings, that he finds so important.

In 1935, the same year as *Murder in the Cathedral*, Eliot wrote his essay, "Religion and Literature," in which he argues that "Literary criticism should be completed by criticism from a definite ethical and theological standpoint" (*SP* 97). He goes on, "In ages like our own, in which there is no such common agreement [on ethical and theological matters], it is the more necessary for Christian readers to scrutinize their reading ... with explicit ethical and theological standards" (*SP* 97). He argues that Christian readers should not separate their moral convictions from their appreciation of literature, for "we are affected by it [literature], as human beings, whether we intend to be or not" (*SP* 101). His concern with modern literature is that it "is corrupted by what I call Secularism, that it is simply unaware of, simply cannot understand the meaning of, the primacy of the supernatural over the natural life: of something which I assume to be our primary concern" (*SP* 105). Criticism should be completed, then, not merely from an aesthetic point of view, but from a moral,

ethical, and theological point of view. By the same token, it is possible to see that Eliot, in this period, is likewise concerned with the creation of literature from an ethical and theological point of view. Since his conversion, Eliot was engaged in a slow process of refashioning himself as a Christian poet, and it is clear from his works in the 1930s and onwards that he was attempting to put into practice in his own poetry, as well as in his criticism, the principles he expounds in "Religion and Literature."

While refashioning himself as a Christian poet, he was also invested in recreating himself as a verse dramatist, and these two preoccupations are in many ways separate parts of the same enterprise. In 1933, in *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism*, Eliot is interested in the social "uses" of poetry. He writes, "The people which ceases to care for its literary inheritance becomes barbaric; the people which ceases to produce literature ceases to move in thought and sensibility. The poetry of a people takes its life from the people's speech and in turn gives life to it; and represents its highest point of consciousness, its greatest power and its most delicate sensibility" (15). However, the problem for the modern poet is that poetry has "[ceased] to be the expression of the mind of a whole people" (22). It is not even, as in the case of Dryden, able to appeal to "something like an intellectual aristocracy" because in the modern age there is no intellectual aristocracy "when power is in the hands of a class so democratized that whilst still a class it represents itself to be the whole nation" (22). Therefore, the modern poet finds himself in a double quandary: to whom does one appeal and how does one go about doing so? Eliot contends that the poet wishes to reach as wide an audience as possible, and therefore the alternatives to addressing

an intellectual elite (either soliloquizing or speaking to a coterie) are alike unpalatable (22). He writes in the conclusion, "I believe that the poet naturally prefers to write for as large and miscellaneous an audience as possible, and that it is the half-educated and ill-educated, rather than the uneducated, who stand in his way" (152). He adds, "The most useful poetry, socially, would be one which could cut across all the present stratifications of public taste – stratifications which are perhaps a sign of social disintegration" (153). Therefore, he announces, "the ideal medium for poetry, to my mind, and the most direct means of social 'usefulness' for poetry, is the theatre" (153).

Eliot goes on to say that it is difficult or nearly impossible to talk about the "uses" of poetry. However, in summing up his points, he articulates what he believes to be the value of poetry:

> It may effect revolutions in sensibility such as are periodically needed; may help to break up the conventional modes of perception and valuation which are perpetually forming, and make people see the world afresh, or some new part of it. It may make us from time to time a little more aware of the deeper, unnamed feelings which form the substratum of our being, to which we rarely penetrate; for our lives are mostly a constant evasion of ourselves, and an evasion of the visible and sensible world. (155)

Poetry, therefore, especially if approached in the making with the principles he lays out two years later in "Religion and Literature," has a direct social function and an important role in helping people to understand themselves and the world around them.

The best way for poetry to perform this social function is to reach as many people as possible, and the best way to do that, says Eliot, is in the theatre.

"Every poet would like," Eliot writes in the conclusion of *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism*, "to be able to think that he has some direct social utility" (154). However, if poetry is relegated to the arena of an intellectual elite, where it will receive veneration if not enthusiasm, its social utility is doubtful (Chinitz 68). Eliot's studies of anthropology had convinced him that "a living art is continuous with a living popular culture" (Chinitz 68), and he saw a need both for the revitalizing of poetry in its social uses and for the refurbishment of drama. Focusing on the creation of verse drama, then, "is not only a question of rescuing a declining literary mode from irrelevance. By working in a popular form the poet also wins the opportunity to engage with a substantial public, to speak to as well as to entertain an audience" (Chinitz 68).

Eliot admired such prose dramatists as Ibsen and Chekhov, but he felt that a preferential view of prose drama as more realistic than verse drama should be disputed. In "Poetry and Drama" (1951), he declares that "prose, on the stage, is as artificial as verse: or alternatively, ... verse can be as natural as prose" (133). Therefore, the question of the prose or verse medium is not one of naturalism or realism, but one that considers which speech medium best conveys the dramatist's sense. In *The Aims of Poetic Drama* (1949), he phrases the question thus: "what is to be gained by writing in verse instead of prose? Why go to all that trouble, and add to the difficulties of both actor and audience, by saying in verse what can be said as well as in prose?" (5). Eliot believed that poetry is the best linguistic expression of

emotion; moreover, he desired that drama should fuse the spiritual and the physical (Sarkar 58; 34). In "Poetry and Drama," he explains,

It seems to me that beyond the nameable, classifiable emotions and motives of our conscious life when directed towards action – the part of life which prose drama is wholly adequate to express – there is a fringe of indefinite extent, of feeling which we can only detect, so to speak, out of the corner of the eye and can never completely focus; of feeling of which we are only aware in a kind of temporary detachment from action. There are great prose dramatists – such as Ibsen and Chekhov – who have at times done things of which I would not otherwise have supposed prose to be capable, but who seem to me, in spite of their success, to have been hampered in expression by writing in prose. This peculiar range of sensibility can be expressed by dramatic poetry, at its moments of greatest intensity. At such moments, we touch the border of those feelings which only music can express. ... For it is ultimately the function of art, in imposing a credible order upon ordinary reality, and thereby eliciting some perception of an order *in* reality, to bring us to a condition of serenity, stillness, and reconciliation; and then leave us, as Virgil left Dante, to proceed toward a region where the guide can avail us no farther. (*SP* 145-6)

The question, then, is not which speech medium is more realistic, for both are equally natural and artificial on the stage, but rather which can express the fullest range of emotional intensity. For Eliot, poetry is capable of putting into words what prose can only render in silence (Sarkar 58-9).

Eliot often remarked on the essential relationship he saw between the drama and the Mass; he believed there was an important connection between drama and liturgy.[57] In Greek tragedy, the drama was religious in spirit, with subjects selected from sacred mythology (Sarkar 8). The Christian liturgy is essentially dramatic, and in England the medieval miracle plays were based on liturgy (Sarkar 11). These two ancient dramatic traditions demonstrate an aspect of all art, and especially drama, that Eliot found essential: the collaboration between artist and audience that is inseparable from ritual. The drama has its roots in ritual, and in his Introduction to *Savonarola* Eliot writes, "Dramatic form may occur at various points along a line the termini of which are liturgy and realism; at one extreme the arrow dance of the Todas and at the other Sir Arthur Pinero.... In genuine drama the form is determined by the point on the line at which a tension between liturgy and realism takes place" (qtd. in Chinitz 87). In Eliot's view, modern prose drama has moved away from liturgical conventions and has, therefore, lost the collaborative aspect of ritual (Chinitz 87).

Eliot has, therefore, good reasons for wishing to reinstate the verse drama in contemporary theatre. Verse has, in his view, the capacity to express emotional intensity beyond the capability of prose, and the verse drama has its roots in ancient sacred rituals wherein the viewer is not passively entertained but is a learning participant. If the Christian Eliot wishes to write poetry that will connect with as large an audience as possible in a collaborative enterprise whereby the audience becomes a participant in the dramatic fusion of spiritual and physical, then the verse drama might be the best medium for his aims. However, Eliot knows, as Chinitz says, that "To resume a ritual outside the cultural paradigm that had produced it would be

[57] See Eliot's Introduction to *Savonarola*; also "A Dialogue on Dramatic Poetry," *Selected Essays*, 31-45.

merely to supply an exotic confection for the delighted palates of leisured faddists" (87). In other words, his verse dramas must not be a nostalgic reaching back to the roots of dramatic ritual, for if they are they will fail to connect with a contemporary audience. The challenge that Eliot faced as he began to write verse dramas was one of whether there was still in existence a ritual or collaborative model that he could manipulate and build on to create the all-important communal sense. *The Rock* and *Murder in the Cathedral* are attempts to rediscover ritual, collaboration, and community in drama. It is significant, therefore, that these two plays are centred on ecclesiastical architecture which is the physical home of Christian ritual and community.

The Rock

Critics have, in general, not been kind to *The Rock*. For instance, David Ward begins his discussion of *Murder in the Cathedral* by saying flatly, "*The Rock* is a failure..." (180), and there is a general air of embarrassment in what little criticism there is on *The Rock*. Subhas Sarkar, while kinder than Ward, calls the play "a hack-work" (41), and Grover Smith says it is "unfortunate," and adds that though Eliot cannot be blamed for the mediocrity of the scenario, "he may barely be acquitted, on grounds of piety, of having abused his talent with such hackwork" (*Sources* 171).[58]

[58] The response of Eliot's friends to *The Rock* was hardly encouraging (see Chinitz, pp. 130-1) and many contemporary reviews of the play were skeptical: In "After Ash- Wednesday" Conrad Aiken says that *The Rock* is too glib, and it makes the audience uncomfortable (Chinitz 130). Similarly, D. W. Harding's review in *Scrutiny* in September 1934 remarks that *The Rock* is unconvincing (Chinitz 130). Michael Sayers in *New English Weekly* says that the "stage dialogue is tedious and flat"; while Harry Thornton Moore in *Adelphi* comments, "The author of *Prufrock* should have had a sufficient sense of humour, the author of *For Lancelot Andrewes* should have had too much intelligence, and the author of *The Waste Land* should have had enough poetic feeling, not to have committed a thing like *The Rock*" (qtd. in Malamud, *Sourcebook* 59). In *The Spectator*, Derek Verschoyle writes, "Mr. Eliot's defence of the Church

Certainly some critical dismay is understandable for the propagandist style of many of the speeches in the play and the intrusive and over-the-top use of Cockney dialect which is dangerously simplistic and stereotypical. Some critics excuse the general lack of attention paid to *The Rock* by arguing, with some reason, that Eliot himself did not take the play too seriously. The commission for the play came at a period when Eliot was experiencing some extremely difficult personal upheavals in his relationship with Vivien, and he felt at the time that his well of poetic expression had dried up. He writes in "The Three Voices of Poetry,"

> To be, in such a moment, commissioned to write something which, good or bad, must be delivered by a certain date, may have the effect that vigorous cranking sometimes has upon a motor car when the battery is run down. The task was clearly laid out: I had only to write the words of prose dialogue for scenes of the usual historical pageant pattern, for which I had been given a scenario. (qtd. in Browne 7)

Here he takes responsibility neither for the genre (pageant) nor the scenario, and the image of cranking poetry out of a run-down engine is hardly felicitous. The printed version of the play, produced by Faber and Faber in May 1934, contains the following prefatory note:

> I cannot consider myself the author of the 'play', but only of the words which are printed here. The scenario, incorporating some historical scenes suggested by the Rev. R. Webb-Odell, is by Mr. E. Martin Browne, under whose

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is based rather on invocations than on definition, and he seems reluctant to commit himself to logical justification. For the most part the Church's cause is assumed and not stated, and at times Mr. Eliot's unwillingness to substantiate his beliefs makes him appear to be doing little more than strike an attitude. His picture of the society in which the Church must work is simplified and thereby distorted" (qtd. in Malamud, *Sourcebook* 60).

direction I wrote the choruses and dialogues, and submissive to whose expert criticism I rewrote much of them. Of only one scene am I literally the author: for this scene and of course for the sentiments expressed in the choruses I must assume the responsibility. (6)

In fact, the only portions of the play that Eliot chose to preserve in his *Selected Poems* were the choruses. This fact, taken with Eliot's abdication of responsibility for the play's setting and scenario, has sometimes, it seems to me, led critics to believe that Eliot felt the same embarrassment for *The Rock* that they do, and that consequently the play should be written off as an unfortunate lapse.[59] Eliot is, however, notorious for his deprecatory comments on his own work. For instance, when his dissertation was eventually published, Eliot commented that it was unreadable and that he no longer understood his own arguments. Furthermore, his comments on *The Waste Land*, about its being a piece of "rhythmical grumbling" and a "grouse against life," are famous. Happily, critics have had the courage to ignore these comments and to continue to study the dissertation and *The Waste Land* with the respect and attention that both works deserve. I shall attempt to demonstrate that there is much in *The Rock* that is of interest; while flawed, this play reveals some important developments in Eliot's ideas about church architecture, ritual, and community.

Eliot did not choose the scenario for *The Rock*, but there is little doubt that he would have refused the commission if it held no interest for him. As my earlier chapters have shown, church buildings held complex meaning for Eliot, and a pageant-play about the construction of a church would, not surprisingly, have been a

[59] John Xiros Cooper suggests that this is not the case, however, and "Eliot seems to have thought these 'Choruses' far more important in the development of his work than most of his critics" However, he says, "Even Lyndall Gordon, his most sympathetic reader, virtually ignores this work" (72).

topic that the poet could approach with some special energy. The play was commissioned for the Forty-Five Churches Fund, which was organized by the Reverend Webb-Odell. The Fund was given the task of raising enough money to build forty-five new churches in the rapidly expanding suburbs of London.[60] The diocese of London was attempting to transfer money from the centre of the City, where the population was decreasing, to the suburbs. This included the sale and demolition of old church buildings in the City that were no longer in use. The transfer of funds from the centre to the periphery was, however, a slow and laborious process that included "plenty of traditional, legal and aesthetic barriers against such action" (Browne 3). Therefore, the Forty-Five Churches Fund faced a colossal fund-raising challenge. To meet the challenge, Webb-Odell believed that "some major demonstration" was necessary, one that would recall "the great history of the Church in London, and [commend] to the people the task of carrying on the tradition which it enshrined" (Browne 3).[61] For this demonstration, Webb-Odell fixed on the idea of a pageant. E. Martin Browne, called upon by Webb-Odell to undertake the direction of the pageant, convinced Webb-Odell that "some way must be found to focus attention on present needs and hopes and to see the past in a perspective view from the present" (Browne 6). To make the pageant of dramatic interest they needed a poet, and they fixed on T.S. Eliot because, though he could be considered "too modern: too

[60] I am very grateful to Rex Walford for corresponding with me on the subject of the Forty-Five Churches Fund and for providing me with some detailed notes to supplement my reading of his recent book, *The Growth of "New London" in Suburban Middlesex (1918-1945) and the Response of the Church of England* (2007).

[61] The Forty-Five Churches Fund, under the directorship of Webb-Odell, got under way in April 1930 when Webb-Odell spoke at the London Diocesan Conference (Walford, "Extracts" 1). By October 1933, £55,000 had been raised, and "10 of 15 sites needed had been acquired, 7 new dual-purpose halls/churches had been built, and 8 fresh mission districts launched" (Walford, "Extracts" 5). *The Rock* raised a further £1,500 for the Fund.

difficult," he was also "the major poet of his time.... His was the distinctive voice of the age. ... And it was at the same time the voice of a prophet" (Browne 6).

Matthew Bradley points out that in accepting a commission to build new churches in the suburbs, some of the funds for which came from the sale or demolition of old City churches, Eliot demonstrated a remarkable change of front with respect to his earlier appeals to preserve the City churches, made in the *Dial* and *Criterion*. Bradley is right; Eliot's support of the Forty-Five Churches Fund represents a significant development in his thinking about the role of church buildings. It is not, though, a complete alteration of his earlier views: he always found churches valuable, but the reasons he gives for their value have changed. Much later, in 1951, Eliot gave an address to the Friends of Chichester Cathedral on *The Value and Use of Cathedrals in England Today*, in which he says,

> I have always held that the amalgamation of country parishes is at best a deplorable necessity; and with regard to the City churches of London, that all of which even the shell remains should be preserved and used as churches. The closing of any church is a disaster. But with shifts of population it is sometimes justified; and where there are two churches near each other, in a neighbourhood that needs only one, it is better that one Church should be properly kept up and staffed than that both should be half-empty and half-derelict. The question of whether a particular church is 'useful' is the question whether the funds and the clergy would not be better employed, for the glory of God and the salvation of souls, elsewhere. And even if there was no lack of either

there might still be something unedifying in there being two churches in near proximity, both very poorly attended. ... A church needs a congregation.... (4-5)

Here Eliot begins by reasserting a view familiar to those who have read his appeals for the City churches in the *Dial* and the *Criterion*: that the closing of a church "is a disaster." He says that he has "always" held this view, presumably meaning both before and after his conversion. The change in his perspective comes when he says that perhaps sometimes the closing of a church is justified. This is not something that the Eliot of the 1921 *Dial* piece about the "least precious" that "redeems some vulgar street" would have said. It represents a development of his post-conversion ideas regarding the use of a church building. Here, the main use of a church is not its aesthetic or historic interest; rather, it is "useful" for "the glory of God and the salvation of souls." When a church ceases to have this usefulness, due to lack of funds, clergy, or congregants, he grants sadly that perhaps its closure is justified. Eliot is now most interested in a church's religious and spiritual function. Therefore, he is particularly attentive to the church's role in a community. The closure of a church would, for the early Eliot, have been a "disaster" for reasons connected to his ideas about art and tradition. Now it is a "disaster" because it reveals the increasing apathy of the populace towards the Christian religion. Churches are useful, in this view, when they serve a community. He is demonstrating, here, consistency with his argument in "Religion and Literature," that art (in this case the church building) should be approached or understood from an ethical or theological point of view. Therefore, Eliot would have been sympathetic to the aims of the Forty-Five Churches

Fund in desiring to build churches for communities that had none. He consequently accepted the commission for the pageant play.

Critics who consider *The Rock* to be an unfortunate lapse often do so because of its loose and even chaotic structure as well as its somewhat stereotypical and certainly two-dimensional Cockney characters who are the actual builders of the church in the play.[62] The play's structure is apparently sloppy, including multiple characters from disparate historical periods, pantomime, ballads, choruses, prayers in Latin, and a benediction. This somewhat haphazard mixture has led reviewers and critics to label the play a hack-work. However, as David Chinitz points out in the introduction to *T.S. Eliot and the Cultural Divide*, we are prone to take Eliot too seriously, to forget that underneath the philosopher-poet and social critic there was a man who loved the novels of P.G. Wodehouse, who was inordinately fond of cats and wrote the *Practical Cats* poems, who wrote about stilton cheese and English cows, who attended the music-hall. In this latter there is the clue to the reason for the mixture of characters, scenes, and sketches in *The Rock*, as well as the clue to the reason for Eliot's attempts in the pageant to approach ritual and to forge community. The dramatic style of *The Rock* recalls the music-hall, and by using a style that would have been familiar to his audience of the 1930s Eliot is not only entertaining them but manipulating a collaborative model to his own ends.

Using the music-hall style in *The Rock*, Eliot is going some way toward answering the question of whether there was still in existence a kind of ritual that he could tap into in his verse drama in order to generate the all-important communal sense, for as Chinitz writes, "Eliot understood the generation and preservation of a

[62] See especially David Ward, p. 180.

sense of community to be a primary function of ritual" (92). In the music-hall, Eliot saw the collaboration between artist and audience in terms of a kind of modern ritual. In "Marie Lloyd" (1922), Eliot stresses the importance of collaboration between artist and audience. He calls Marie Lloyd the "greatest music hall artist of her time in England" and emphasizes her popularity: "And popularity in her case was not merely evidence of her accomplishment; it was something more than success. It is evidence of the extent to which she represented and expressed that part of the English nation which has perhaps the greatest vitality and interest" (*SP* 172). Marie Lloyd was not, Eliot argues, popular only for entertaining the audience. Rather, her importance in Eliot's eyes stems from her ability to "[give] expression to the life of [the] audience, in raising it to a kind of art. It was, I think, this capacity for expressing the soul of the people that made Marie Lloyd unique..." (*SP* 172). In "expressing the soul of the people" Marie Lloyd's act was raised, in Eliot's view, to the level of art because he understands art to stem from ritual and the primary role of ritual to be the formation of community. Marie Lloyd's art generated the communal sense and the collaboration that is, for Eliot, art's ritualistic function: "The working man who went to the music-hall and saw Marie Lloyd and joined in the chorus was himself performing part of the act; he was engaged in that collaboration of the audience with the artist which is necessary in all art and most obviously in dramatic art" (*SP* 174). This collaboration between the music-hall artist and her audience allowed Marie Lloyd's art to give to the working-class viewers "the expression and dignity of their own lives" (*SP* 173); or, to use Chinitz's language, the living art was "continuous with a living popular culture" (68). In this, the music-hall was more like ritual than "the most elaborate and

expensive revue" (*SP* 173), and Eliot writes that with the decline of the music-hall, with the demise of this ritual, the working-class will lose its communal identity. At the end of his piece on Marie Lloyd, he writes,

> In an interesting essay in the volume of *Essays on the Depopulation of Melanesia*, the psychologist W.H.R. Rivers adduced evidence which has led him to believe that the natives of that unfortunate archipelago are dying out principally for the reason that the 'Civilization' forced upon them has deprived them of all interest in life. They are dying from pure boredom. When every theatre has been replaced by 100 cinemas, when every musical instrument has been replaced by 100 gramophones, when every horse has been replaced by 100 cheap motorcars, when electrical ingenuity has made it possible for every child to hear its bedtime stories from a loudspeaker, when applied science has done everything possible with the materials on this earth to make life as interesting as possible, it will not be surprising if the population of the entire civilized world rapidly follows the fate of the Melanesians. (*SP* 174).

In concluding his remarks on Marie Lloyd and the music-hall this way, Eliot is clearly seeing the success of the music-hall, and the problem of its demise, in anthropological terms. The music-hall not only gave interest and entertainment, but it was an art-form which, in generating communal collaboration, was a kind of modern ritual fostering and preserving of community.

In *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism*, Eliot writes that the theatre is the best place "to convey the pleasures of poetry, not only to a larger audience, but to

larger groups of people collectively" (154). He continues, "There might, one fancies, be some fulfillment in exciting this communal pleasure.... All the better, then, if he [the poet] could have at least the satisfaction of having a part to play in society as worthy as that of the music-hall comedian" (154). In light of what Eliot said in his piece on Marie Lloyd, it is possible to read his comment here about the "satisfaction" of the worthy role of the music-hall comedian not as a slight on the poet who uses his art to become a popular entertainer, but in praise of one who is able to create art that taps into ritual as Marie Lloyd's did. As Chinitz writes, in accepting the commission for *The Rock*, Eliot was "deliberately and consciously crossing a sacrosanct cultural line out of 'literature' and into some unexplored terrain lying between high culture, popular culture, and religious expression" (132), and he used the music-hall style to help him negotiate that terrain.

The disparate characters, scenes, and sketches of *The Rock* were created directly in line with the music-hall genre,[63] and in writing the play this way Eliot was working within a mode familiar to his audience. Randy Malamud explains that by the 1930s the heyday of the music-hall had passed; in fact the music-hall was in decline in the 1920s when Eliot wrote his piece on Marie Lloyd. However, Malamud writes that in the 1930s several music-hall reenactments took place in West-End theatres, as the genre still held some appeal, albeit nostalgic now, for an audience (*Communities* 39).

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[63] Malamud writes, "The most pronounced music-hall aspect of *The Rock* is its general sense of spectacle: 300 actors representing characters of widely disparate periods and stations – biblical, historical, famous, pedestrian, individualized, stereotyped, prophetic, histrionic, caricatured – involved in dozens of scene changes, tableaux, elaborate costumes. The play features scenes specifically in the mode of a music-hall program, such as Bert and Mrs. Bert's ballad, "At Trinity Church I met my doom", and the ballet of Dick Whittington and his cat. The general tenor of the Cockney's patter, which structurally unifies the pageant, identifies the genre as vintage music-hall: their stage presence is marked by broadly comic dialect, humor, exaggerated earnestness, heavy-handed setups for each other" (*Communities* 35-6).

The audience of *The Rock* would have recognized the play's genre as that of the music hall. Eliot deliberately makes use of the familiar music-hall style to capture his audience's attention and to entertain them as well as to manipulate the genre to his own purpose. The genre brought the play as close as possible to a modern dramatic ritual which encouraged audience participation. It appears that the use of the music-hall mode worked, to some extent at least, in *The Rock*: Chinitz comments, "Eliot must have felt gratified when the audience, music hall style, began joining in the choruses, a sign that despite many obstacles, and whatever the critics said, he had succeeded in turning a popular form to his own ends" (134). In *The Rock*, the music-hall genre serves as a model for the poet's experimental effort to generate community in a Christian context.

Using the apparently harmless and entertaining music-hall form as a starting place for his play about the formation of a Christian community, Eliot includes other, older forms of ritual to connect the ideas of the play, not only with popular culture, but also with an artistic and a religious tradition. One of these is the chorus. The chorus in *The Rock* is one of Eliot's first attempts to use this dramatic device. He uses it again, to better effect, in *Murder in the Cathedral*. Nevertheless, the choral passages in *The Rock* have met with some critical acclaim, and they are the only portions of the play that the poet chose to preserve in the *Collected Poems*. The presence of the chorus instantly hearkens to the dramatic tradition of Greek tragedy. Helene P. Foley writes that modern revivals of the chorus have met with a number of difficulties, principally the fact that "it is impossible to reproduce the complex original relation between audience and performance on the modern stage" (354). The

"undifferentiated collectivity" of the chorus is an anathema to a modern audience's ideas about individual subjectivity and autonomy (354). Despite this difficulty, Eliot determined to use the chorus in *The Rock* as a way of representing a community that has its roots in ritual. One of the most challenging aspects of the chorus is that it remains on stage continuously; Foley writes that the audience could not avoid the visible (made more so by lavish costumes and striking masks) and constant presence of the chorus. Indeed, she indicates that the chorus exists at the very heart of the tragic genre, and that in the fifth century BCE the "choral tradition was likely to have been far more developed than the acting tradition" (355). The central importance of the chorus was its role as a mediator between the audience and the actors. Usually placed close to the audience, the chorus mediated physically and spatially between the viewers and the stage (Foley 354). Choral commentary or songs often linked themes between different episodes and indicated the passage of time between acts (Foley 355). The chorus mediated emotionally as well, channeling and facilitating the emotional reactions of the spectators. Moreover, its religious invocations and prayers served to link the audience to the spiritual aspect of the drama and served to remind the audience of "its ritual function" (355). Essential to this ritual function was the role of the chorus as "a repository of cultural memory" through myth (355). The chorus was rarely able to interpret myths correctly, and as a result it helped to facilitate audience response, for the audience members were unable to depend upon the wisdom of the chorus and had to try to puzzle out the meaning of the drama on their own while at the same time sympathizing with the interpretive struggles of the chorus (355). The ritual origins and social component of the chorus are deliberately

manipulated by Eliot in *The Rock* as a way of pulling a community together. The chorus combines prophecy and colloquial speech; it watches, comments, and learns; and it pulls the music-hall mode, essentially a form of modern popular culture, in line with an ancient dramatic tradition, ritual in origin, to suggest that the subject of the play is not merely entertaining but that it has, in fact, a religious dimension and is associated with myth.

Another way that the play represents and generates community through ritual is its form as a pageant. E. Martin Browne offers an excellent description of the pageant genre:

> The open-air pageant was in its heyday before the First World War, though it continued to flourish until the Second. Its purpose is to celebrate the history either of a place or of an institution, and it does so by showing a chronological series of scenes, each led up to by a processional entry. It gives a great multitude of amateurs, concerned with the subject of the pageant, an opportunity of taking part without any severe strain on their ability.... The total effect can hardly be called dramatic; it is a display of panoply, a more relaxed and less disciplined version of a great parade. (4)

Arguably, the commemorative function of a pageant, combined with its communal impulse, puts it on the plane of ritual. The pageant form is, of course, highly significant in terms of community, and *The Rock* is, in fact, meta-communal: a community puts on a pageant about community. The pageant form was especially suitable for the aims of the Forty-Five Churches Fund, for in gathering the community together to act in a play about community which would hopefully achieve

the raising of funds for a community, its very form emphasized the importance of the play's ideas.

A final way in which *The Rock* uses ritual to forge community is the benediction at the end of the play. The church has been built and blessed, and the bishop steps forward to offer the final blessing to the actors as well as to the audience. In this moment, the audience is included wholly with the community on stage that has built a church; the audience and the players become one in the reception of the benediction that blesses their lives as well as their communal enterprise. Moreover, the benediction, an invocation for divine guidance and blessing, typically comes at the end of a church service. By ending with a benediction, *The Rock* becomes a service and the audience becomes a congregation. This pulls the content of the play in line with Christian ritual to suggest that the action of the play, that of building a church and considering the present church in the context of the historical Church, is an act of Christian worship similar to the attending of worship services. This implies that God is served in the act of ritual worship and in the act of building, which becomes its own kind of ritual in the play.

This leads us to the all-important point that all of the various forms of ritual manipulated through the style, form, and structure of *The Rock* occur within the central theme of the construction of a church building. Church architecture is the physical manifestation of Christian ritual and community and, as I have suggested earlier, Eliot's reading in anthropology (and his reading of W.R. Lethaby in particular) would have made him sensitive to the fact that the act of building a religious edifice is itself sacred, and that the structure, once completed, not only has

functional value but also represents the divine in the physical and the eternal in the temporal. In short, all of the allusions to and ideas about ritual in the play come together in the central symbol of ceremony and community that is the church building itself.

In the play, the verb "to build" takes on a number of layers of meaning. Firstly, and most obviously, it is associated with the actual building of a church in London. The audience learns about the progress of the church's construction from the conversations between the three Cockney workmen, Ethelbert, Alfred, and Edwin. "To build" also connotes the fostering of a Christian community; it denotes the development of the present and future based on the past; it signifies the creation and recollection of spiritual meaning in a modern world taken up by the hustle and bustle of the "timekept City" and the search for the perfect refrigerator. The image of the church building symbolically holds all of these meanings of "to build" together.

The play opens with the chorus describing the Church's current situation in London:

I journeyed to London, to the timekept City,
Where the River flows, with foreign flotations.
There I was told: we have too many churches,
And too few chop-houses. There I was told
Let the vicars retire. Men do not need the Church
In the place where they work, but where they spend their Sundays.
In the City, we need no bells:
Let them waken the suburbs.

I journeyed to the suburbs, and there I was told:

We toil for six days, on the seventh we must motor

To Hindhead, or Maidenhead.

If the weather is foul we stay at home and read the papers. ...

[T]he church does not seem to be wanted

In country or in suburb.... (7-8)

Readers of *The Waste Land* will be familiar with several of the images of London evoked in this passage: for instance, the river, with its "foreign flotations" recalls the opening of "The Fire Sermon", and the phrases "timekept City" and "In the City, we need no bells" are reminiscent of the tolling bells of St. Mary Woolnoth in "The Burial of the Dead" that count the hours. After this potentially disheartening opening, with its explanation that the church is not wanted or needed anywhere, the Rock enters to adjure the Chorus with the main theme of the play, that the act of building is one of faith: "I say: take no thought of the harvest, / But only of proper sowing" (9). With more imagery familiar to readers of *The Waste Land*, the Rock goes on to make clear the importance of building:

The desert is not remote in southern tropics,

The desert is not only around the corner,

The desert is squeezed in the tube-train next to you,

Squeezed like tooth-paste in the tube-train next to you,

The desert is in the heart of your brother.

The good man is the builder, if he build what is good. (9)

Here building is equated with fighting the desert, which is figured not as a landscape where "there is rock and no water" but in more mundane terms such as sitting tightly together in a tube-train. But the desert is no less horrifying, for it is located "in the heart of your brother," which brings it very close to home. The way to counter the desert is to "build what is good." The chorus of workmen is heard chanting their purpose:

If men do not build
How shall they live? ... In this street
There is no beginning, no movement, no peace and no end
But noise without speech, food without taste.
Without delay, without haste
We would build the beginning and end of this street.
We build the meaning.... (11)

The phrase "beginning and end" has strong associations with Christ, who in one of the "I am" statements in the Gospel of John called himself the alpha and omega. Christ's image of himself as the beginning and the end is one that ties up all of life's experiences within himself, creating a unified whole out of something that humans perceive as linear and binary. This chant allies the act of building with spiritual wholeness, emphasized by the line "We build the meaning." What is being built is not only a building, but it is something much more important than that, something that counters the desert in the heart and that wraps all of life up into something unified. Building is identified very early in the play as an act both physical and spiritual.

All of the images of London given in the first few moments of the play before the workmen appear on the stage are waste-landish ones of isolation and emptiness. As the play progresses all of the images associated with what the Rock identifies as the desert are contrasted with the idea of community. The community is at once one that rescues people from the isolation and empty distractions of the modern world, one that connects people spiritually with God, and one that unites the Christian communities of past and present. The Chorus asks, "What life have you if you have not life together? / There is no life that is not lived in community" (21). The modern suburban situation is antithetical to ideas of community:

And now you live dispersed on ribbon roads,
And no man knows or cares who is his neighbour
Unless his neighbour makes too much disturbance,
But all dash to and fro in motor cars,
Familiar with the roads and settled nowhere.
Nor does the family even move about together,
But every son would have his motor cycle,
And daughters ride away on casual pillions. (21)[64]

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[64] Rex Walford cites a historian who describes the problem of the suburbs in London in these terms: "new suburbia presented a unique problem ... there is nothing in the world's history or at any point on the earth's surface to correspond with the essential aloofness of English suburbia. Desiring privacy more than all things, and having uprooted themselves from the pattern of immemorial social community, the suburbans presented the great apparently insoluble problem for all churches, all political parties. They wouldn't be organised and the Church's ancient parochial system was ill adapted to deal with these novel districts and types of mind ... they were conscious only of separations not kinships" (qtd. in Walford, "Extracts" 16). Furthermore, Walford writes, "society and life-style was changing. The increase in motor-cycle and car-ownership, the greater leisure time available at weekends and the greater privacy allowed by owning your own house and leaving the 'extended family' home of the inner-city created more opportunity for independence. Allied to the growth of radio and film as popular media of entertainment, there was less acceptance of the conventions of time past, both in thought and deed. To the church, this represented a considerable challenge. Those who had attended in the past through familial convention or pressure might well change their habits. Those who had not, were scarcely likely to put church-going high on their

The problem that *The Rock* identifies is not merely that in the busyness of modern life people have forgotten how to live together, but that life is lived without a sense of spiritual need. The loneliness of the "asphalt road / And a thousand lost golf balls" (30) stems from the fact that modern life is lived as an evasion of both mortality and spirituality. In denying that they are mortal, people are in fact avoiding the spiritual questions that mortality provokes, such as whether there is any greater meaning to life than "the grandeur of your mind and the glory of your action" (31). Community means not only the gathering of people, but the spiritual connection between people and God. Therefore, the Chorus says, "Where there is no temple there shall be no homes" (30) and goes on to describe the dwelling places of the modern urban-dweller, arguing that while these are shelters in the meaning of the act they are not homes, not resting places in a spiritual sense. The Chorus asks,

When the Stranger says: "What is the meaning of this city?
Do you huddle close together because you love each other?"
What will you answer? "We all dwell together
To make money from each other"? or "This is a community"? (30-1)

The Rock posits the challenge that people need to start paying attention to each other and to themselves in spiritual rather than in functional terms.

The formation of a Christian community that counters the boredom and emptiness of modern secular life is figured also, in the play, as one that connects the past and the present. The sacred act of building is one that continues across the strata

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priorities in the years following a World War through which the church's previous standing had been diminished and teaching questioned. And if 'free-thinking' and the advocacy of scientific rationalism was an intellectual fashion only for some, a more 'liberating' atmosphere in the post-war decade put hedonism high on the popularity list as a general life-style" ("Extracts" 17).

of human history. This is represented in part by the fact that the three modern-day Cockney workmen have Anglo-Saxon names that clearly link them to England's history. Moreover, Ethelbert, Alfred, and Edwin find themselves joined and aided in their enterprise of building the church's foundations by builders of the past. One of the themes of the play is the cycles of time. *The Rock* suggests that the unpropitious modern present is not very different from any other time: "The Church must be forever building, for it is forever decaying within and attacked from without..." (21). The act of building and restoring is never finished, and the play proposes that the present, while faced with its unique set of circumstances, is not unique either in its disregard or its need for spiritual answers. Ethelbert says to his comrades, "There's some new notion about time, what says that the past -- what's be'ind you -- is what's goin' to 'appen in the future, bein' as the future 'as already 'appened. I 'aven't 'ad time to get the 'ang of it yet; but when I read about all those old blokes they seems much like us...." (16). As the workmen struggle to set the foundations of the church in a marshy ground, they are joined by Rahere, a twelfth century monk who founded St. Bartholomew's Hospital and the Church of St. Bartholomew the Great in London. He tells the workmen that he too had to build on marshy ground, and he sends his own workers to help. Rahere's men enter, saying,

Ethelbert, Alfred, Edwin,

With all those who give their hand to this work,

We shall work with you,

We shall stand beside you,

For a moment visible and again invisible,

Until your foundations are made firm ...

Until the dedication of your church. (28)

These lines forge a connection not only between the modern workmen in the play and the church builders of the past but between the audience and the actors as well, for as people attending the play in support of the Forty-Five Churches Fund the audience members are included in "those who give their hand to this work." In this passage and in others like it in the historical sequences that punctuate the modern-day action, the play manages to suggest that the Christian act of building creates a community of past and present that is built into the very foundations of the church. Rahere's men arrive to help when Ethelbert and his colleagues are struggling with the foundations; the workmen are united in their efforts with all church builders of past, present, and future, and the church building is constructed on foundations of a tradition of building in unpropitious circumstances on unfavourable soil.

All of the ideas about community in *The Rock* are symbolized by the church building under construction. Like the church itself, the community is in the process of being formed, and Bert associates the church building very closely with the aims of the community when he says, "When you thinks o' all the 'opes and worries and thinkin' and prayin' that's gone into this 'ere job, and all the disappointments maybe on the way, why 'ere we are buildin' 'em all into this church; and in buildin' this church we're buildin' somethin' more than walls o' bricks and mortar" (13). They are building a structure that represents the sacred bonds between people and between humankind and God.

In the play, the act of building is associated with a tradition of worship. Bert says, "There always 'as been someone buildin' a church. Always someone buildin', buildin', buildin'. It's God's 'ouse and it's the people's 'ouse and it's our 'ouse. You and me, Fred, and you, young Edwin, are doin' somethin' for God and somethin' for humanity what always 'as to be done" (13). It is possible to see that the construction of the church itself is a kind of ritual act; it is not a rite, but the building is a sacramental work in the sense that it stands as a visible sign of an invisible reality, and the act of constructing it is defined by Bert as an act of worship (connected by Bert to Solomon's building of the Temple).

Bert comments on the symbolic significance of the actual church building. He says,

There's somethin' strong and lastin' about a buildin'. You needn't believe in God but you've got to believe in a buildin'. It goes up and up in the sky, and on and on through the years, and it speaks with its lights and its bells in the night, and in the sunshine – and it stands when you and I are dust, what built it for the glory of God – and that church 'as been put up with 'ands, buildin', buildin', buildin' – all through the years – in the ruddy rain and 'eat and 'ail and snow – workin' in bricks and mortar, goin' on forever and ever and ever.... (13-14)

It is interesting that Bert starts this speech by saying that "you needn't believe in God but you've got to believe in a buildin'." The speech almost seems to echo some of Eliot's early thoughts about church architecture; that even for a non-believer the church offers something valuable, that the building itself (the art) partly justifies the

philosophy that went into its construction. Writing about Dante in 1929, Eliot asserts that it is not necessary to share the poet's world-view in order to appreciate the greatness of the poetry. Dante's philosophy is coherent, and it provides "an objective system of reference for both the poet and reader" (Manganiello 5). In "Poetry and Propaganda" (1930), Eliot writes, "we can hardly doubt that the 'truest' philosophy is the best material for the greatest poet; so that the poet must be rated in the end both by the philosophy he realizes in poetry and by the fullness and adequacy of the realization. For poetry ... is not the assertion that something is true, but the making that truth more fully real to us" (*Literary Opinion in America* 106). This is what Eliot calls the "esthetic sanction" of the philosophies of poets like Dante and Lucretius for their art (Manganiello 5). Dante and Lucretius attempt principally to create through poetry "a fusion between [the] philosophy and [their] natural feelings, so that the philosophy becomes real and the feelings become elevated, intensified and dignified" (*Literary Opinion in America* 106). Concluding his essay on "Poetry and Propaganda," Eliot asserts that "Poetry cannot prove that anything is *true*," but it can prove that "certain worlds of thought and feeling are *possible*" (*Literary Opinion in America* 107). Placed within these terms, Bert's speech suggests that the "esthetic sanction" of the church building is that it makes real (in bricks and mortar) the Christian philosophy, and it stands as a physical symbol to the notion that "certain worlds of thought and feeling are *possible*."

In *The Rock*, the act of church building is a living necessity that goes on and on. The play suggests that for as long as people are alive, churches will need to be built. Humankind's need for churches, according to the play, is one that does not change

over time (the Rock says, "However you disguise it, this one thing does not change: / The perpetual struggle of Good and Evil" (9)), but circumstances do change and these changes must be taken into account in church building. The church represents something permanent in an impermanent world, but the Chorus is frequently distressed or troubled by the particular difficulties of the present situation in regard to church building. In Part II, the Chorus says bleakly that something has happened in present modern society that has no historical precedent, and the Chorus is therefore rendered confused about the shape of the future: "it seems that something has happened that has never happened before: though we know not just when, or why, or how, or where. / Men have left God not for other gods, they say, but for no god..." (50-1). The Chorus is dismayed by the complete separation from spirituality that characterizes the modern secular world, and begins to ask, "Has the Church failed mankind, or has mankind failed the Church?" (51). The Rock appears to reassure and bolster the Chorus, offering a reminder that "In every moment of time you live where two worlds cross, / In every moment you live at a point of intersection..." (52). Eliot continues to struggle with the idea of living at a point of intersection later in the *Four Quartets*. What it means for the symbol of church architecture in *The Rock* is that the building represents the eternal and invisible while being built out of the tangible and temporal.

Some of these ideas are taken up in the very funny exchange of views about church decoration that occurs near the end of the play. When the church is nearly completed, the Major, Millicent, and Mrs. Poultridge arrive to look at the building. Mrs. Poultridge unwittingly reveals in her first sentence that she has a certain kind of

selective eyesight. She remarks, "I'm afraid I left my glasses in the car," but she is able to spy a gin bottle in the possession of Ethelbert and his companions. When challenged about how she knows it is a gin bottle when she hasn't her glasses on, she answers quickly, "Well, one of those beverages" (68-9). She is revealed as a woman of quick judgment who has her own way of seeing things. These qualities are reflected in her first reaction to the church: "I'm glad *I* don't have to worship here, that's all *I* have to say!" (69). It appears that the church building is displeasing to Mrs. Poultridge because it is not built in the gothic style, and therefore offends her ideas of "devoutness" (69). She continues,

I mean what you feel when you go into one of our dear old simple late Gothic churches. Even the *ivy* seems to make a difference; it seems to me that God made ivy to help us pray. But of course you can't expect to have ivy in town. I do believe that if the Church gives up Gothic, it may come to disestablishment, or reunion, or nonconformity, or almost anything. (69-70)

Mrs. Poultridge goes on to say that in her church, built in perfect conformity with the "style of fourteen eighty-four," the vicar is "unpleasantly modern. Some of the things he does are so modern as to make him seem almost an *anachronism* in that perfect setting" (70). Clearly Mrs. Poultridge's ideals of church worship and church architecture are unrelated to her existence in a modern world. Her church is in a rarified setting – she disparages town for not being able to produce the requisite ivy for the church walls, so her own church must not be in the heavily populated city. Her worship experiences are uncommon in the "perfect setting" of 1484 gothic where the vicar is out of place. Presumably other modern-day congregants are out of place in

such a setting as well. Mrs. Poultridge's ideas about church buildings and religious worship have very little to do with contemporary life and nothing whatsoever to do with a living community.

This is a point that Eliot elaborates on in *The Value and Use of Cathedrals in England Today*. He writes,

What is important is that the perfection of service is a religious obligation, and that the artistic decorum is a part of the worship. I do not want cathedrals turned into art museums, whether of medieval or of modern art. For painting, sculpture and music should all be considered as ancillary to worship: they should never distract from it. I know that the first effect of a piece of church furniture by a living artist may be, to many worshippers, distracting. It is a form of art to which they are not accustomed; it is in a style with which they have no religious associations. If it is second-rate it may always remain an intruder. But when it is really good, it seems to me that work by modern artists quickens devotional feeling. When people are used to ecclesiastical ornament only of a particular historical period – and I have known people habituated to Gothic, who found baroque architecture unfavourable to devotion – it may be that their religious life and their daily life are too far from each other. To feel in a devotional mood, they have to be surrounded by reminders of some particular past, and, as they think, more pious age. Surely it is the great task of the religious artist, musician, and even the creative writer, to realise religious feeling in the

terms of his own time. For this reason, the Church ... needs the living artist. (9)

This is a development of his earlier views about the aesthetic and historical importance of church buildings. While Eliot would never repudiate the value he placed on the buildings of Sir Christopher Wren, here his interest is not on the aesthetics of a church building as such but on how the art of the building reflects and contributes to devotion. Earlier, the beauty of a church building, coupled with its age, made it valuable and worth preserving in Eliot's opinion. He does not alter that opinion, but the focus of his view now is on whether art, of any era, quickens or intrudes upon religious feeling. Based on the answer to this question, the art will be deemed good or bad. For Eliot now, church architecture as art is significant in the context of worship. The rituals of church worship follow a long tradition, and a church service brings that tradition into contact with the present. Therefore, he says, religious feeling, while connected to a tradition, needs to be felt fully in the present and to do this, he suggests, the church needs living artists whose work will contribute to the religious life of the living community. Mrs. Poultridge's gothic architecture, while undoubtedly beautiful (covered with ivy, for instance), represents the separation between "religious life and daily life" that Eliot identifies in *The Value and Use of Cathedrals in England Today*. Her devotional feeling is rarified, nostalgic and cut off from her every-day existence.

The extreme nostalgia of Mrs. Poultridge for a church architecture in keeping with the gothic style of 1484 is countered in *The Rock* by another extreme. Millicent begins her argument with a statement that sounds sensible in contrast to Mrs.

Poultridge's views: "simplicity should be the keynote in church building" (70). But she quickly continues, "I don't believe that our English religion needs to depend upon art. Religion is religion, and Art is Art, and people who want Art can go to exhibitions and cocktail parties" (71). She concludes, "*All* church decoration is vulgar. ... If you take money away from those things [libraries and health centres and milk for the children] to decorate a church you're worshipping idols" (72). In separating art from religion so entirely, Millicent is exhibiting an attitude that Eliot will, one year later, call dangerous in "Religion and Literature" (1935). Millicent separates her moral and religious principles from her understanding of art; she approaches art passively as something that entertains ("people who want art can go to exhibitions and cocktail parties"). In "Religion and Literature," Eliot writes, "if we, as readers, keep our religious and moral convictions in one compartment, and take our reading merely for entertainment, or on a higher plane, for aesthetic pleasure, I would point out that the author, whatever his conscious intentions in writing, in practice recognizes no such distinctions" (*SP* 101). Art, Eliot says, "affect[s] us wholly" (*SP* 101), and if it is approached passively as something separate from moral beliefs its effect can be unconsciously pernicious. Moreover, Millicent's argument denies the possibility for the artist to use his craft for the worship of God, and she shuts the artist out of the religious community.

Surely some happy medium is to be found between the extremes represented by Mrs. Poultridge and Millicent. The Chorus finds it: "The soul of Man must quicken to creation" (75). Humans, the Chorus says, are creatures who must create, whether it is out of "the formless stone ... joined with the artist's eyes, new life, new form..."; or

"out of the sea of sound the life of music"; or "out of the slimy mud of words ... There spring the perfect order of speech, and the beauty of incantation" (75). The Chorus argues that "the Lord who created must wish us to create" (76), and the service of man to God is in spirit as well as in body. Therefore, the works of hands in the physical realm can be as much a part of religion as the prayer of the spirit: "Visible and invisible, two worlds meet in Man; / Visible and invisible must meet in His Temple" (76). According to the Chorus, the visible works of art in the church building are an important and necessary part of the complexity of living "at a point of intersection" between the physical and the spiritual. The physical church should be built for the glory of God in the physical realm: in this view, art can quicken the soul toward God, and the building represents the invisible in the visible.

The Rock is full of religious truisms, and it is undoubtedly a piece of propaganda. For these reasons, critics have approached it with a degree of embarrassment, perhaps even of hostility. However, within its context, the propaganda is to some extent necessary: a fund-raising effort that lacked conviction would be unlikely to raise many funds. Eliot could not write a play for the Forty-Five Churches Fund that tentatively suggested that churches might be a positive thing for London suburbia. To do the job properly, in other words to assist in the challenge of the diocese to raise money, he had to write a play in which churches are figured as being not only important but also essential. In doing so, he was not likely to be doing violence to his own feelings, for the value he placed on church architecture was always considerable, and following his own conversion his view of its importance in religious terms was intensified. Looking closely at *The Rock*, however, one can see that amid the religious

truisms there remain some remnants of the cautious complexity with which the earlier Eliot approached religion and church architecture.

Firstly, there is a curious exchange between the workmen that suggests that religious fervour needs to be tempered by intellectual restraint. Alfred remarks that advances in science and education seem to have rendered religion unnecessary in the modern world, but "people [are] goin' on bein' religious when there don't seem no reasonable excuse for it..." (14). He continues,

it come to me as religion is like drink. People may not want it drawn very strong, or very much o' the time, most of 'em; but they seems to like to know that it's always there *if* and *'ow* they do want it. And if they don't get it one way, they will another. Look what's been 'appenin' in the U.S. these recent years. You can't keep people off drink by tellin' 'em it's so 'armful they mustn't 'ave it; and you can't keep 'em off religion, seemin'ly, by tellin' 'em it's so old-fashioned they oughtn't to want it. (14-15).

Alfred concludes by asking Bert whether he thinks the people in Russia will be able to continue long without religion, and Bert responds, "If people don't take their religion in the usual proper way, they'll take it in other ways, such as politics; and then they get into a 'ell of a muddle" (15). The death of Christian society, Eliot says in *The Idea of a Christian Society* (1939), paves the way for totalitarianism, for as politics and religion are separated the state moves into a position in relation to the community that religion used to fill: "the tendency of totalitarianism is to re-affirm, on a lower level, the religious-social nature of society" (*ICS* 73). This is a point that Donald Childs explains very well:

The problem is the same peculiarly modern heresy that Eliot combats in his dissertation and literary criticism – the notion that thought should be reduced to feeling. The modern world, suffering from spiritual anaemia, simplifies one half of the truth, that represented by reason, by replacing it with or reducing it to the other half, that represented by unreflective enthusiasm." (*Philosophy* 139)

Political enthusiasm taking the place of religion causes "a 'ell of a muddle." On the other hand, religion likewise must be moderated by thought. Eliot writes,

> The Idea of a Christian Society is one which we can accept or reject; but if we are to accept it, we must treat Christianity with a great deal more intellectual respect than is our wont; we must treat it as being for the individual a matter primarily of thought and not of feeling. The consequences of such an attitude are too serious to be acceptable to everybody: for when the Christian faith is not only felt, but thought, it has practical results which may be inconvenient. (*ICS* 43)

Members of a Christian society must try to maintain a balance between feeling and thought so that religion does not become like drink, in the sense of being intoxicating or a means of escape from reality. *The Rock* was written five years before *The Idea of a Christian Society* in which Eliot's ideas on this subject are more clearly formulated, but the play is cautious on the subject of religious fervour, advocating the same middle ground between the personal and the impersonal that Eliot aims for in philosophy and literature. In *The Idea of a Christian Society*, Eliot warns against viewing Christianity as a foundation of morality; rather, morality should be the result

of a complete Christian philosophy. He says, "As political philosophy derives its sanction from ethics, and ethics from the truth of religion, it is only by returning to the eternal source of truth that we can hope for any social organization which will not, to its ultimate destruction, ignore some essential aspect of reality" (82). Christianity must be treated intellectually as a philosophy, rather than as a passion, because "hysteria is not the privilege of the uneducated" and "It is not enthusiasm, but dogma, that differentiates a Christian from a pagan society" (*ICS* 78-9). *The Rock* does not portray an entirely happy-go-lucky approach to religion.

Secondly, *The Rock* asks some difficult questions about the practicalities of churches. The play gives the Unemployed a poignant voice which, when combined with the questions of the Agitator (unsatisfactorily dismissed by Bert), reveals a deal of sympathy for those who question the use of land and money for churches when, in 1930s Britain, many people are experiencing hardship. Chinitz puts this well:

> *The Rock* at least went beyond ... comic stereotyping in expressing a concern for contemporary social problems. Eliot was disturbed by the effects of Depression-era chronic unemployment on English workers, who were suffering, in addition to financial privation, hopelessness and a loss of self-esteem. ... *The Rock* portrays this plight affectingly through the offstage "Voices of the Unemployed," who speak in tones very different from the stalwart Cockneys at centre stage.... (133)

In response to Ethelbert's query, "what's your objection to the buildin' o' churches, apart from they bein' a outworn superstition?" the Agitator responds, "Ain't all this money and labour and material bein' diverted from its rightful purpose o' providin'

decent 'omes for the workers?" (34). Bert's response is somewhat unsatisfactory: "Deny if you can as there's enough clay and lime and tools and men to build all the 'ouses that's needed in this country, and all the churches too? Well, that bein' the case, I say: *to 'ell with money!* You can arrange the convenience of money so's to get these things" (75). As though he knows he hasn't answered very well, Bert then chases the Agitator off-stage.

It is easy to say to hell with money, but it is economically questionable. The issue of money comes up again in *The Value and Use of Cathedrals in England Today*, where Eliot says,

I should like at least to make clear at the start that I propose to avoid all consideration of what is and is not practical. I do not pretend to any knowledge of cathedral administration and finance; I am not myself expert in any form of finance; and I am completely incompetent in what are called ways and means. I say this to anticipate objections which are likely to occur to your minds long before I have finished. Otherwise, you are likely to say ... this is all very fine, but how are these things to be done without money, and where is the money to come from? But I hold that the proper order in which to consider these matters, is to draw as clear a picture as we can, of what we should like to have if we could get it; and only in the second place, to consider how nearly we can approach to this ideal with the means at our disposal. ... I would only suggest, that if we keep before our eyes what is desirable, even when it appears impossible of realisation, we may find that it is not all so impossible as it seems; for things sometimes become more possible if we want them

enough. And that, on the other hand, if we limit our desires to what can be easily had, we are likely to sink further into mediocrity. (1-2)

Setting aside the fact that it is odd for Eliot, who was a banker and a good one at that, to say that he is no expert on the subject of finance, he raises here the point that, while he acknowledges the economic challenges faced by the maintenance and building of ecclesiastical architecture, he wishes to focus attention on "what we should like to have if we could get it"; in other words, his discourse is about the purpose and meaning of the cathedral, which do not belong to economic calculations. In a "Pageant Supplement" handed out with the Diocesan leaflet explaining the aims of the Forty-Five Churches fund at the performances of *The Rock*, Eliot writes,

There is no problem of a community to which the presence or absence of a church is irrelevant; and he who is concerned that a church should be built is committed to a concern with all the problems of the community which the church is intended to serve. The problem of church-building is integral with the problem of more and better housing in general. The employment of men for building churches suggests the whole problem of unemployment.

There are many who will say 'in these times' the money and the labour might be put to better purpose, or at least to satisfy more pressing needs; and while repudiating the assumptions on which such objections are made, we must assert that these needs are all one need, and that they can all be satisfied. There is sufficient stone, clay, lime and other materials in the country for all the building of every kind that is wanted; there is sufficient unemployed labour. The world is ready enough to employ money for the

purpose of making more money, or for the purpose of destroying competition; what it needs is more non-productive activity. (qtd. in Walford, *Growth of "New London"* 132)

Where the Agitator character in the play goes wrong, according to the views expressed here, is in seeing the value of the building only in terms of money. While in practical terms the economic problems of the world persist, the Church is not building competitively nor is it in the business of making a profit (as Eliot says several times elsewhere on this point, a church is not a theatre). Therefore, viewing the church building in these kinds of economic terms is inevitably going to lead to misconceptions about its "usefulness."

For all its idealistic cheeriness, *The Rock* delivers an image of the church that is precariously balanced between darkness and light. The church that has been built by the community is, the Chorus says, a visible light in the world of darkness: "it is now a visible church, one more light set on a hill / In a world confused and dark and disturbed by portents of fear" (84). The church building symbolizes, in a small way, the Invisible light of God. But, the Chorus asks, "what shall we say of the future? Is one church all we can build?" (84). Repeated throughout the play has been the idea that the Church must always be building, be pulled down, and be restored. The Christian community, both past and present, represented in the play is always having to struggle against hardship: against poor foundations, indifference, political turmoil, doubt, and sin. In the end, despite the successful building of a church, the world is still a dark place. In *The Idea of a Christian Society*, Eliot says,

[W]e have to remember that the Kingdom of Christ on earth will never be realized; we must remember that it is always being realized; we must remember that whatever reform or revolution we carry out, the result will always be a sordid travesty of what human society should be – though the world is never left wholly without glory. ... A wholly Christian society might be a society for the most part on a low level; it would engage the cooperation of many whose Christianity was spectral or superstitious or feigned, and of many whose motives were primarily worldly and selfish. It would require constant reform. (79)

The propagandistic idealism of *The Rock* is tempered with images of darkness in the final chorus. It is a darkness that the Chorus has felt at different moments, and for different reasons, throughout the play. The darkness is not figured as something outside the Christian community – the community is not protected or exempt from it. Living somewhere between darkness and light is the fate of those who exist at the point of intersection between the visible and invisible worlds. The Chorus speaks of the little light, the church, that has been built as being "dappled with shadow." Perhaps in a foreshadowing of *Murder in the Cathedral* where "humankind cannot bear too much reality," the Chorus speaks of the lights of the candles on the altar as the only "little lights" that humans can themselves create in the world, and also as the only "little lights for which our bodily vision is made"; in other words, man's vision is small and fragile, and a truer image of Invisible light would be too dazzling. The church building represents the small light that humans are able to create and to see in the world. It is a symbol of hope, but the play also offers a reminder that spiritually

humans "[advance] progressively backwards" (51). The Chorus has to acknowledge the darkness in the world and in the human soul, and in the end says, "we thank Thee that darkness reminds us of light" (85). This is not trite. It is an expression of humility and of acceptance that "Even for the most highly developed and conscious individual, living in the world, a consciously Christian direction of thought and feeling can only occur at particular moments during the day and during the week... (*ICS* 59). The church building represents the light that people are never able to see entirely.

At the end of the play, a bishop appears and blesses the actors and the audience. The audience is thus drawn irresistibly into the action of the play and into the traditions of Christian ritual. *The Rock* provides an image of church architecture that is at once the central symbol of ritual and community and the symbol of the invisible being made visible in the world. The play is, for the most part, a light-hearted romp, but it also asks some of the difficult questions about the role of churches and religion in modern society that have always formed a part of Eliot's interest in church architecture. Nevertheless, the play's overwhelming focus is on the church as a symbol of community. Eliot makes use of various techniques of dramatic ritual to emphasize the formation of community, and at the heart of community in *The Rock* is the church building.[65]

Murder in the Cathedral

[65] *The Rock* was remarkably successful. Not only did it raise £1,500 for the Fund, but the effects of its vision of community were felt in some interesting ways following the performances. Notably, as Rex Walford records, a group of men from the congregation of the John Keble church, Upper Hale, Mill Hill, (self-named "The Gang") set about to prepare for the builders the site for their permanent church building, and, using an old bus roof for a notice-board, they proudly painted the refrain from *The Rock*: "A church for us all and work for us all and God's world for us all, even unto this last" (Walford, *Growth of "New London"* 175-6).

Some critics view *The Rock* as a kind of rehearsal for *Murder in the Cathedral.*[66] The second play certainly improves upon some of the techniques of the earlier pageant-play, such as the use of the chorus and the situating of the drama in ritual origins. In addition, *Murder in the Cathedral* is, like *The Rock*, very interested in audience collaboration and the formation of community, and it is located in ecclesiastical architecture as setting for both the action in the play and the first performances of the play. *Murder in the Cathedral* is not about church architecture in the same way as is *The Rock*, nor is there a particularly telling image of church architecture in the play. The architecture is integral to the play covertly by being the setting for the action which, given its emphases on community response and the submission of the human to divine will, causes the architectural setting to become deeply symbolic.

A number of critics have commented on the fact that *Murder in the Cathedral* is rooted in various forms of dramatic ritual. For instance, Leo Aylen writes that the play is "near in spirit to Greek tragedy" by being "formally similar; it uses myth in the same way ... and the myth bears the same relation to the religion of Eliot's audience as the myths of the Greek poets' did to their audience's religion. It is based on ritual, and the action is carried out principally by the chorus, not by an actor." He also makes the point that *Murder* was "performed at a festival, not before a theatre-going public" (qtd. in Malamud, *Sourcebook* 80). In addition to its ties with Greek tragedy, *Murder* has its roots in the tradition of English religious drama. In "Poetry and Drama" Eliot openly acknowledges that he modeled the versification of *Murder*

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[66] See Carol H. Smith, p. 85; David Ward p. 181.

on miracle plays and moralities, and particularly on *Everyman* which, as David Ward says, is a play that has "clearly departed not very far from the original liturgical impulse" (182). In addition, *Murder in the Cathedral* commemorates the historical origin of the "ritual practice" of pilgrimage to the shrine of St. Thomas at Canterbury Cathedral (Ward 182). Chinitz mentions that the play, by honouring the death of England's favourite saint and simultaneously recalling centuries of Christian pilgrimage to this site, becomes associated with "the beginnings of the English *poetic* tradition as well" because of the connection between Canterbury Cathedral and Chaucer's pilgrims (136). Eliot's play is thus connected both to dramatic ritual and to the English poetic tradition; this is significant for the poet who wished to reinstate verse drama as the best medium for conveying intensity of feeling to an audience. The association between the play's subject and the English poetic tradition emphasizes the appropriateness of poetry to convey ideas of the universal human condition and the response of man to God.

There is one more important form of ritual that the play taps into: liturgy. Kenneth W. Pickering writes that, during the performances of the play in Canterbury Cathedral, after Becket's sermon, "Eliot weaves the liturgy into the fabric of the play .... Singers from St. Augustine's theological college were positioned in a gallery erected at the rear of the Chapter House and their plainsong mingled with the action on stage" (qtd. in Malamud 72). Eliot viewed the Mass appreciatively as a form of drama because, in his opinion, religion should be based on collaboration, and in the Mass the congregation joins with the "action" as a chorus does in a play. Moreover, by the end of the Mass, every individual has "absorbed" Christ into himself or herself

through the Eucharist, and each member of the congregation is united with all of the others in the Body of Christ (Ward 185). Set in the Cathedral, the site where the drama of the Mass is daily performed, Eliot's play parallels certain aspects of liturgy not only via plainsong but by turning the audience into a congregation. The congregation is addressed directly by Becket through his sermon, which is the play's interlude and which effectively draws the audience into the play's action preparatory to the role of witness and judge that the audience must accept by the end of the play.

The main emphasis of *Murder in the Cathedral* is not on a character sketch of Thomas Becket or on the individuals involved in his death; it is rather on the effect of the event of Thomas's death on the community. The play investigates how the meaning of Thomas's martyrdom is absorbed into the community. The play invites the Chorus, and more broadly the audience, to become one in the experience of witnessing and of learning. The real question of the play is not why and how Thomas was killed, but it is a question of how his death affects and influences the community's relationship to God. The conflict of human weakness and liability to temptation and doubt is dramatized by widening circles of participation in the action: firstly the drama is about Thomas and the conflict is seen to be within him, personified by the four tempters. Secondly, the conflict is in the characters as they participate in and witness the action. Finally, by being drawn into the community of witnesses and by becoming participants rather than spectators, the audience members find themselves involved in the conflict.

The play invites audience collaboration in a number of ways. The Chorus performs its important dramatic function as mediator between the actors and the

audience. It mediates, firstly, in terms of conveying emotion. In "Poetry and Drama," Eliot writes, "the essential action of the play – both the historical facts and the matter which I invented – was somewhat limited. A man comes home, foreseeing that he will be killed, and he is killed. ... I wanted to concentrate on death and martyrdom. The introduction of a chorus of excited and sometimes hysterical women, reflecting in their emotion the significance of the action, helped wonderfully" (*SP* 140). Secondly, the Chorus mediates linguistically between the events of 1170 and the present-day audience of 1935. Eliot comments,

> The problem of language which [*Murder in the Cathedral*] had presented to me was a special problem. Fortunately, I did not have to write in the idiom of the twelfth century, because that idiom, even if I knew Norman French and Anglo-Saxon, would have been unintelligible. But the vocabulary and style could not be exactly those of modern conversation ... because I had to take my audience back to an historical event; and they could not afford to be archaic, first because archaism would only have suggested the wrong period, and second because I wanted to bring home to the audience the contemporary relevance of the situation. The style therefore had to be *neutral*.... (*SP* 139)

He therefore keeps the versification of *Everyman* in mind and writes a choral drama (*SP* 139-40). The language moves fluently between the twelfth-century action and the modern present, "encompassing as well, one supposes, all the time between" (Malamud, *Communities* 65).

One of the fluidities of the language, which simultaneously encourages audience participation, is the movement between verse and prose at strategic moments in the

play. The first time the verse changes to prose is in Becket's Christmas sermon, wherein the audience is addressed as "dear children of God." The sermon offers Becket's farewell, and it asks the congregation to reflect upon the meaning of Christian martyrdom, which is the theme of the whole play. The sermon thus adjures the audience, now transformed into a congregation, to reflect carefully on the meaning of the events in the play. E. Martin Browne writes that Becket's sermon "has always been the best-remembered scene of the play, the one which comes instantly to the mind of almost everyone who thinks of it" (47). If this is true, it is probably because the sermon is the first moment in the play wherein the audience is addressed directly and it is also, of course, the moment when the audience members become congregants and are spoken to as a Christian community. The sermon does not allow the audience to remain passive spectators; addressed as participants in the drama, the audience is challenged by the sermon to think seriously about the meaning of the play's theme, martyrdom, not in a twelfth-century context, but in the present.

The verse changes to prose a second time when the Knights step forward one by one to deliver their speeches, explanations, and excuses to the audience. They are well aware that they are speaking to a present-day audience, and their speech is consequently colloquial, conversational, and ingratiating. The shift into colloquial prose is surprising, and the Knights' ways of expressing themselves are entertaining. This entertainment is insidious, however, for it has the potential to lull the audience into a false state of security in a situation in which the audience is, in fact, being

tempted.[67] The temptation is couched in terms that play not only on the language but also on the preconceptions of modern society. Browne writes,

> There have been critics, and members of many audiences, who have found this scene an excrescence upon the play. The notes show that it was an integral part of the original plan; and it clearly parallels the Temptations in matter and the Sermon as a prose passage of direct address. ... [I]t has the effect of a real temptation; many are the spectators who have found themselves agreeing with the Knights' propositions, since they accord far more with the presuppositions on which our society is based than do those to which the Chorus assent in the last scene. (53)

The audience has been called to witness the events of Becket's martyrdom; now it is called upon to make some judgment about the meaning of those events. In a sense, the outcome of the play, the meaning that the audience members will take away with them when they leave the cathedral, is left to the audience to determine. Browne writes that in order to emphasize to the audience that the speeches of the Knights are in fact a kind of temptation he wished to double the parts of the four Tempters with the four Knights. Thus the audience would be able to see that the figures that tempted Thomas are the same that tempt the audience at the end. Eliot agreed to this, but in 1956 he revised his view:

> I am by no means now sure that it is not better to have the knights played by different actors from the tempters. I like to leave questions for the audience to

[67] Browne comments that when the play was performed in Paris, the clichés of the Knights' speeches did not translate easily into French and the effect was menacing rather than funny. This is an interesting effect, and Browne writes, "I think that however much English audiences laugh at the scene, it is well that this kind of menace should underlie its performance" (60).

resolve for themselves, and one question which is left for them if the knights ands tempters are different actors, is whether the fourth tempter is an evil angel or possibly a good angel. After all, the fourth tempter is gradually leading Becket on to his sudden resolution and simplification of his difficulties. (qtd. in Browne 58)

Eliot likes leaving questions for people to resolve themselves. By having the Knights speak directly to the audience in colloquial prose, Eliot draws the audience into a situation in which it has to make a choice between "two mutually incompatible standards of judgment" (Ward 191). One is the judgment of human experience and intelligence. The other with-holds judgment and lets God decide (Ward 191). The conflict in the play stems from the tension between human and divine will, and the audience is called to collaborate in "the struggle, the suffering, and the triumph of the hero" (Ward 186). This collaboration causes the drama to become a kind of ritual. *Murder in the Cathedral* is thus structured for "ritual purposes," wherein the ritual repositions the audience with regard to the "consciousness of its own identity" as a Christian community struggling to live at a point of intersection (Ward 186).

Eliot uses what he calls the "trick" of prose both to shock the audience and to provoke a response (*SP* 140-1). The prose passages, addressed directly to the spectators, pull them into the drama as participants. This technique, combined with the play's ritual structure, creates a situation in which the audience is transformed into a community of witnesses. Like *The Rock*, *Murder in the Cathedral* is invested in the formation of community. The setting of Canterbury Cathedral is remarkably apt for the play's ritual structure and emphasis on communal experience. This is true,

primarily, because of what the Cathedral symbolizes. As the principal church of a diocese, a cathedral represents authority.[68] The word cathedral comes from the Latin *cathedra*, meaning seat or chair. The cathedral contains the seat or throne of the bishop, which is a symbol of teaching. The cathedral is the meeting place for the chapter of the diocese, and in addition it offers daily church services. As a gathering place, then, the cathedral represents a centre of liturgy and authority. People will attend the cathedral on major religious festivals and to hear the imparting of important information. The cathedral does not belong to a small individual community as does a parish church; rather it represents the whole community of the diocese and beyond that the larger religious communion. Writing about the purpose of a cathedral in *The Value and Use of Cathedrals in England Today*, Eliot says,

> The 'use' of the cathedral is for the performance of the complete liturgy of the Church for the Christian Year. The numbers of lay people attending services seems to me of quite minor importance. I should feel no misgivings even were there no congregation at all, so long as I believed that the people who weren't there were all attending a service in a parish church instead. A cathedral is doing its proper work even when no one is present except celebrant, deacons and servers; and if it omitted a single service because no one attended it, then it would be failing in its proper work. This work is the continuity and completeness of the liturgy and the continuous prayer and worship by its clergy. ... [T]he attendance of the public is only important, if important at all,

[68] The authority represented by a cathedral derives from the authority of the Bishop; in other words, it is specifically the symbol of Episcopal authority, as opposed to ecclesiastical authority in a broad sense or the authority of the Dean and Chapter in a narrow sense.

when there is some ceremony which concerns the whole diocese or the whole province or perhaps the whole nation. (5-6)

While it seems that here Eliot is claiming that the cathedral has no community, that community is not the main function of the cathedral, this is not in fact his meaning. Earlier in *The Value and Use of Cathedrals in England Today*, Eliot spends a certain amount of time differentiating between the cathedral and a parish church. The parish church, such as the one being built in *The Rock*, exists in direct connection with a specific community of people. If there is no community, the work of the parish church cannot continue. However, even without a congregation present, the work of the cathedral in completing the Christian liturgy is continued. The cathedral does not belong to a single congregation; rather it is the parent church of all of the congregations in the diocese. Eliot makes the point that people should not attend service at the cathedral because it is grander there (we can think of Mrs. Poultridge in *The Rock* whose preference for gothic architecture and ivy had a lot to do with her sense that it was somehow more devout); to do so would be to neglect the community of the parish church. Services at the parish church should be preferred over those at the cathedral, he says, because the parish church is at the centre of the communities where people live and work. When people attend service at the cathedral, they do so to hear or witness something important. The learning that they receive at the cathedral is then carried back to the individual parish churches and spread throughout the smaller communities within the diocese. Therefore, it is not to say that the cathedral has no communal function but that this communal function is made meaningful through the parish churches of the diocese. In *Murder in the Cathedral*, the women of

Canterbury gather at the Cathedral on a premonition that they are going to witness something significant. They form a community of witnesses together while they are there, but it is a community that belongs not to the cathedral, but to Canterbury and to all of England. It is important that they witness the events in the cathedral, for the cathedral symbolizes the significance of these events for "the whole diocese or the whole province or perhaps the whole nation."[69]

Canterbury Cathedral is of particular significance because it has long been the site of pilgrimage, and it represents a rich cultural history. At the core of Canterbury Cathedral was the ancient church of St. Augustine, built around 602 using Roman stones from the almost deserted Roman town of Cantiacorum. This church was one of the first stone buildings erected after the Romans left, and it symbolized the spread of a new religion and new ideas (Cannon 38). In 1070 it was demolished and rebuilt by Archbishop Lanfranc, and it came to symbolize Episcopal power. The post-Becket rebuilding of the eastern arm of the cathedral is closely associated with the cult of Becket and with the rise of a new age of saints initiated by his death and the stories of miraculous healings that followed it (Hearn 19). The setting for the play is thus inextricably linked with its action, and the very architecture speaks to a post-Becket audience of the events they are witnessing. The play connects the audience with the cathedral's history of pilgrimage and with all the pilgrims that sought this place. The audience itself is taken on a kind of pilgrimage as the events of Becket's death are commemorated, as the historical beginning of prayers to St. Thomas is evoked ("Lord, have mercy upon us. / Blessed Thomas, pray for us."), and as the audience

[69] I am grateful to The Very Reverend Shane Parker, Dean of the Anglican Diocese of Ottawa and Rector of Christ Church Cathedral, for his assistance with this section.

itself is compelled by the play to witness, to judge, and to reconsider the meaning of martyrdom.

The setting of the play thus evokes the powerful history of Canterbury Cathedral. Within the collaborative model established by the play's ritual structure and prose "tricks," the audience becomes part of the action and is, as a result, pulled symbolically into the setting and into association with all of the historical resonances of the cathedral. The first audiences of *Murder in the Cathedral*, of course, were not only connected symbolically through their collaboration with the drama with the setting, but they actually gathered, like the women of Canterbury in the play, in the cathedral to watch and to witness. The play was staged in the Chapter House, approximately fifty yards from the place where Becket died. Browne provides some helpful details about the setting:

> The martyrdom took place in the chapel of St. Benedict, at the foot of the flight of stairs which leads from the north nave-aisle to the ambulatory round the choir. Becket came down these stairs to meet the Knights, and turned off into the little chapel, where he was slain before the altar. Beside the chapel is the door into the cloisters, and half-way along the eastern walk is the entrance to the chapter house, where the Festival plays were given. This sense of proximity to the actual event affected the author at least as much as the audience. (36)

We might say, given Eliot's known interest in ecclesiastical architecture and his investment in dramatic ritual, that Browne is putting it lightly. Eliot would have been not only "affected" but acutely conscious of the complex implications and resonances

of this setting. The cathedral is a gathering place for the community of the women of Canterbury within the play, and it was also the gathering place of the community of spectators at the Canterbury Festival in 1935.

Though the exigencies of the setting in the Chapter House of Canterbury Cathedral, and their impact on stage direction, were not in any way planned by Eliot (the Chapter House was the location of Festival plays and was not specifically chosen by Eliot for the staging of his play), there are some interesting points to note about how the staging of the play in the Chapter House affected Browne's direction of the action. It is especially relevant that the choices Browne had to make based on the limitations of the Chapter House actually contributed directly to audience collaboration and to the themes of community within the play. For instance, the Chapter House had only one door at the back, and all of the actors' entrances and exits had to be made through the centre aisle between the seats in the audience (56-7). As a result, Browne decided to stage the play with as few entrances and exits as possible, but this brought with it some problems of its own:

> I remember complaining to the author that, since I had no egress for any of them, the number of persons on stage during the Temptations added three Priests, Becket and four Tempters, and for twenty minutes, while the latter's duologues went on, all the other characters had to 'freeze' in full view. It was indeed a strain for the actors; but for the ritual pattern of the play it was justified. I had the Tempters enter in a body through the audience and stand at the foot of the steps, each going up in turn to confront Becket, then retiring into one of the niches of the arcading backstage and holding his menacing

position until at the end of the act all four of them together advance from behind upon Becket. When he banished them, they had to make as swiftly as possible the long exit through the audience. (57-8)

The movement of the actors through the audience only served to make the audience even more closely connected to the action; the audience was spatially as well as emotionally drawn into the events taking place. The advance and subsequent retreat of the tempters through the audience emphasized the notion that all humans are prey to internal struggle and temptation, for the tempters seemed somehow to come from the audience itself and to disappear back into it as the play went on to reveal how temptation can be overcome by submission of the human will to God. Similarly, Browne had the four Knights (actors doubling the roles of Tempters and Knights) advance through the audience to the stage. Their menace was thus emphasized long before they ever confronted the audience and addressed it directly. Finally, after Becket was murdered his body was carried through the audience (Malamud *Sourcebook* 72). The audience thus became part of the community left to mourn Becket's death and to determine how to carry on after witnessing a martyrdom.

Staging the play in the Chapter House of Canterbury Cathedral contributed to the themes of the play in perhaps unexpected ways. Obviously, however, not all subsequent performances have taken place in that specific location. Nevertheless, the play's emphases on audience collaboration and community have been felt strongly by audiences in some surprising situations. For example, Browne cites a performance of *Murder in the Cathedral* that took place in an air raid shelter in London during the Second World War. These "emergency" versions of the play were performed for three

years in diverse locations such as air raid shelters, schools and churches to even more diverse audiences. One of these performances took place in an air raid shelter before a "deeply stirred audience mostly hailing from Hackney," and "for the first ten or fifteen minutes the form and language of [the play] seemed strange to them; then they got caught up by it, and it was one of the most 'shared' performances I have ever known." (qtd. in Browne 155). As Chinitz says, "Clearly the right performance under the right circumstances could reach an unexpected variety of audiences" (137). Whether the play was staged next door to the chapel where Becket was murdered or not, the setting of the play remains the cathedral building, and audiences, even in air raid shelters, are drawn imaginatively to that setting. The cathedral, with its rich historical associations and its complex and important role within the religious community, is integral to the play's themes as well as to its action.

Murder in the Cathedral, like *The Rock*, has church architecture as the symbolic centre of its ideas about community formation and response. However, if *The Rock* is a more-or-less lighthearted piece of propaganda about the joys of church building and the good cheer of the Christian community, *Murder in the Cathedral* presents a more complex vision of religion, one in which doubt and fear are much more prominent than joy. Becket provides the Chorus with an example that sets it on the path toward God, but the Chorus seems to feel little hope of arriving at the final consummation (Malamud 79-80). Like *The Waste Land*, which opens with the sense that spring is cruel and with a wish to remain buried under the numbing snow, the Chorus in *Murder in the Cathedral* fears the coming of spring. The "common folk" of Canterbury rely on the passing seasons for their livelihood and stability: "the world

must be cleaned in the winter, or we shall have only / A sour spring, a parched summer, an empty harvest" (57). The Chorus comments on the farmer's work between Christmas and Easter to make sure that the ground is prepared for new growth and abundance. The women of Canterbury fear disruption in the normal routine of the seasons and of their lives. The events they are witnessing threaten such disruption in which the seasonal cycles are seen in terms of the Christian year. The death of winter is likened to "death in the Lord" that will "renew" the world. Spring, with the approach of Easter, must be a time of preparation for new life or rebirth in the Lord (57). However, though Thomas shows them the way, the women fear the disruption of the seasons and the work that must be done between Christmas and Easter when the seasonal cycles are transformed in spiritual terms:

Night stay with us, stop sun, hold season, let the day not come, let the spring not come. ...

We did not wish anything to happen.

We understood the private catastrophe,

The personal loss, the general misery

Living and partly living;

The terror by night that ends in daily action,

The terror by day that ends in sleep ...

Every horror had its definition,

Every sorrow had a kind of end ...

But this, this is out of life, this is out of time,

An instant eternity of evil and wrong. (85)

Willing to go on in a routine of "living and partly living," the Chorus is well aware of the waste-landish terror of mortality, but the finitude of human existence promises a predictable ending. The cataclysmic event the Chorus has just witnessed and the clash of body with spirit and time with eternity that Becket's submission to God has provoked turn the hum-drum mortal world upside down. Forced to acknowledge the mystery of the divine, the Chorus is terrified. It is better able to see the need for purgation than feel the hope of Heaven.

The final speech of the Chorus is in two strophes. The first is a lengthy prayer of duty, reverence, and praise to God; it is the kind of thing with which readers of *The Rock* are familiar. The final strophe, however, is a prayer for forgiveness. The Chorus meditates in the final lines of the play on the fear with which humans contemplate the blessing and the love of God. This fear holds them back from the kind of spiritual affirmation represented by Becket, and the Chorus ends with a plea for mercy. As Malamud writes, Becket's community seems to fail in faith, and the play ends not with an assertion of Christian courage but with an admission of human limitation: "Eliot's saint's play is not a resounding affirmation of uncompromised spiritual faith; it is, rather, a somewhat frail indication that the playwright is willing ... to attempt to imagine a story whose ending points in a direction that may indicate a morally upward trajectory..." (*Communities* 72).

All of the play's complex ideas about faith, Becket's affirmation of God's will as well as the Chorus's fear of God's blessing, are set within the Cathedral, which is seen to be a place that represents both the life lived in service to God and the struggle to find the peace of God in the world. When the Knights arrive to kill Becket, the

Priests wish to bar the doors of the Cathedral: "Bar the door. Bar the door. / The door is barred. / We are safe. We are safe" (78). They see the Cathedral as a place of refuge from the violence and sin of the world. However, Becket responds by crying,

Unbar the doors! Throw open the doors!
I will not have the house of prayer, the church of Christ,
The sanctuary, turned into a fortress.
The Church shall protect her own, in her own way, not
As oak and stone; stone and oak decay,
Give no stay, but the Church shall endure.
The church shall be open, even to our enemies. Open the door! (78)

Here there is a distinction between the church visible and the Church invisible. The church building is not a place to be sought for protection or hiding. It is interesting that he calls the church a "house of prayer," which at first glance might seem to designate the church as a place set aside for quiet, away from the hectic noise of the world. However, this is not the case. The house of prayer, the church, "shall be open." It belongs to the community and must be open to it, even open to hostility. The church visible, the Cathedral, is built of oak and stone which, he says, decay. It is, in other worlds, built out of the stuff of the mortal world. The Cathedral, being made of finite matter, seems to belong to the world of the dismayed Chorus that feels the sting of mortality and dread more than the promise of redemption in Christ. However, the Cathedral is also the seat of the archbishop who understands and does not fear the blessing of God. Thus the visible and Invisible meet in this structure. The building represents both the mortal world and the eternal promise of salvation.

In its final speech, the Chorus thanks God for holy places:

For wherever a saint has dwelt, wherever a martyr has given his blood for the blood of Christ,

There is holy ground, and the sanctity shall not depart from it

Though armies trample over it, though sightseers come with guide-books looking over it ...

From such ground springs that which forever renews the earth

Though it is forever denied. (93-4)

Eliot once said to his friend Victor Turner Levy that "for some of us, a sense of place is compelling. If it is a religious place, a place made special by the sacrifice of a martyrdom, then it retains an aura. We know that once before a man gave of himself *here* and was accepted *here*, and it was so important that the occasion continues to invest the place with its holiness" (qtd. in Levy 41-2). The cathedral represents the continuation of sanctity in a hostile (armies trampling over it) and secular (sight-seers with their guidebooks) world. Like the church in *The Rock*, the cathedral is finally a symbol of light in darkness, of the need for and the blessing of prayer.

The Rock and *Murder in the Cathedral* were both written and performed for Christian audiences. Even though *Murder in the Cathedral* went on to be performed nearly 400 times in London between 1935 and 1937, and to be performed on tour in New York and Boston, it is, as Chinitz says, limited in its popular appeal (137). Part of the reason for this, Chinitz writes, is that while "The poetry of *Murder in the Cathedral* is splendidly crafted and often profound," the experience of the play is such that "one never does forget that one is listening to poetry. This is not the recipe

for a verse drama that will compete on an equal footing with prose drama" (140). In "Poetry and Drama," Eliot writes that

> What we have to do is to bring poetry into the world in which the audience lives and to which it returns when it leaves the theatre; not to transport the audience into some imaginary world totally unlike its own, an unreal world in which poetry is tolerated. What I should hope might be achieved, by a generation of dramatists having the benefit of our experience, is that the audience should find, at the moment of awareness that it is hearing poetry, that it is saying to itself: '*I* could talk poetry too!' Then we would not be transported into an artificial world; on the contrary, our own sordid, dreary daily world would be suddenly illuminated and transfigured. (*SP* 141)

Poetry, he says in *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism*, heightens the intensity of emotion and experience. Verse drama, through its traditional connections with ritual, is a collaborative model that has the potential to transform an audience from passive spectators into a community that shares the same experience. In *The Rock* and *Murder in the Cathedral*, Eliot experiments with various kinds of ritual structures and verse in an attempt to speak to, and engage the participation of, a Christian community. In both plays, ecclesiastical architecture is a central ingredient in the experiment of representing through drama the Christian experience of community.

Epilogue
Little Gidding: To know the place for the first time

Four Quartets is Eliot's last major published poem. It is a retrospective poem, recalling the places and experiences of the poet's life and recollecting the images, tropes, and ideas of Eliot's poetic oeuvre. It is in many ways a tremendously personal poem for Eliot: a book of memory. "Little Gidding," the final of the four poems in the *Quartets,* represents not only the culmination of the four individual quartets, gathering and re-gathering the pattern of meditations on time and timelessness drawn in each of the four poems, but it also represents the culmination of Eliot's poetic corpus. The final words of "Little Gidding" could be said to signify Eliot's last poetic offering in this his final major poem. It is tremendously significant, therefore, that "Little Gidding" ends with a reflection on life's journey from a "secluded chapel," the chapel at Little Gidding in Huntingdonshire. It should not be surprising to readers who have paid sufficient attention to Eliot's persistent interest in church architecture that a chapel is the setting for Eliot's final meditations in the *Quartets*. Eliot's repeated published acknowledgements of the interest that church buildings held for him reflect, in many interesting ways, the journey he has taken as a poet and critic from an aesthetic appreciation of art to an insistence that aesthetic appreciation be completed or understood from a moral or theological point of view. The end of Eliot's exploring, as it is articulated in Part V of "Little Gidding," brings him to the secluded chapel. It is a place he has been before, when visiting a City Church on his lunch break while working for Lloyd's Bank, when expressing dismay at the threat of destruction hanging over the churches of Sir Christopher Wren, when adding two churches to the complex web of meanings and questions in *The Waste Land*, and

when writing a commissioned pageant-play for the fundraising efforts of the diocese of London to build new churches in the suburbs. It is a place he has been before, and as "Little Gidding" demonstrates, it is a place he knows again for the first time. The chapel at Little Gidding represents the culmination of Eliot's poetic thought about the meaning of ecclesiastical architecture; it represents likewise the final stage of the intellectual and spiritual journey he has undertaken which is reflected in his various examinations of church buildings.

Four Quartets meditates upon moments of intersection between the human and the divine and discovers that such mystical moments somehow elude or go beyond the power of words to express them. Earlier, with respect to another church building in *The Waste Land*, Eliot called the incapacity of words to express divine illumination "inexplicable splendour." In the waste land, the splendour, or the light, represented by the church building was inexplicable at least in part due to the inability of people to perceive it or, if able to glimpse it, their inability to understand it. Eliot was always, from the time of his dissertation, acutely aware of the difficulty, even the impossibility, of reaching or expressing essence or an Absolute. In his dissertation Eliot wrote, "the line between the experienced, or the given, and the constructed can nowhere be clearly drawn" (*KE* 18). Knowledge and experience belong both to reality and to the methods of interpretation by which humans construct and order that reality. Reality is thus always experienced through human conventions of ways of knowing. This means that, for Eliot in the dissertation and in *Four Quartets*, the fundamental human experience is to exist in a state of tension between ideal and real, between seen and unseen, between belief and doubt. In *Four Quartets* he articulates an experience

of belief that transforms human life, but it is simultaneously an experience of belief that can only be translated by humans in human terms, which are finite and limited.

The mystical moments in *Four Quartets* are both enlightening and confusing as the poet attempts to articulate them. While drawn to mysticism, Eliot was always nevertheless deeply suspicious of so-called mystical experiences. In *After Strange Gods* (1933), he says in relation to D.H. Lawrence, "of divine illumination, it may be said that probably every man knows when he has it, but that any man is likely to think that he has it when he has it not; and even when he has had it, the daily man that he is may draw the wrong conclusions from the enlightenment which the momentary man has received: no one, in short, can be the sole judge of whence his inspiration comes" (64). We must be very cautious, he says, of identifying experiences as mystical and even more wary of our methods of interpreting these moments. In "The *Pensées* of Pascal" (1931) Eliot articulates a similar wariness of the mystical experience:

> the higher form of religious inspiration [does not even] suffice for the religious life; even the most exalted mystic must return to the world, and use his reason to employ the results of his experience in daily life. You may call it communion with the Divine, or you may call it a temporary crystallization of the mind. Until science can teach us to reproduce such phenomena at will, science cannot claim to have explained them; and they can be judged only by their fruits. (*SP* 238)

The fruits of the mystical experience will only be known in every-day human terms, in which both vision and understanding are limited. The fruits of the mystical moments in *Four Quartets* resolve themselves into a pattern of speechlessness.

Each of the four poems in the *Quartets* meditates on an experience, one that might be called mystical, of timelessness within time. In attempting to express it and to articulate its meaning, the poet finds in every case that the mystical experience eludes his ability to put it into words. For instance, following the vision of light "at the still point of the turning world" in Part IV of "Burnt Norton," the poet says in Part V, "Words move, music moves / Only in time; but that which is only living / Can only die" (ll. 137-9). He continues,

Words strain,
Crack and sometimes break, under the burden,
Under the tension, slip, slide, perish,
Decay with imprecision, will not stay in place,
Will not stay still. (ll. 149-54)

This is a remarkably tangible and vivid description of the difficulties of language. Words are portrayed as physical things that can "strain," "crack," "break," "slip," "slide," and "perish." The words "perish" and "decay" place the problems of language in very human terms; like human life words are finite, existing in a temporal order to which they are subject. It is significant that Eliot repeats the word "still" in these lines in a reversion to the way "still" was used earlier in Part IV of the poem when "the light is still / At the still point of the turning world" (ll. 135-6). In Part IV of "Burnt Norton," "still" refers to a mystical experience of light and timelessness; in Part V with reference to the problem of words, however, stillness is a quality that cannot be achieved through language. Thus the mystical experience is contrasted, through this repetition of "still" with differing meanings, with the poet's experience

of trying to express it through language. Looking back at his poetic career in Part II of "East Coker," Eliot says almost despairingly that he is always left "with the intolerable wrestle / With words and meanings" (ll. 70-1).

The poet finds himself "Caught in the form of limitation / Between un-being and being" ("Burnt Norton" ll. 167-8). He accepts a position for himself in "the middle way" between un-being and being, acknowledging that with words "every attempt / Is a wholly new start" and at the same time "a different kind of failure" ("East Coker" ll. 172; 174-5). Each attempt to express his experience, especially the mystical experience, is

a new beginning, a raid on the inarticulate
With shabby equipment always deteriorating
In the general mess of imprecision of meaning,
Undisciplined squads of emotion. ("East Coker" ll. 179-82)

It appears, then, that existence in the tension between un-being and being, between time and eternity, between ideal and real leaves the poet struggling to express the inexpressible through language. The struggle leaves him, in short, in a condition of silence because the experience of belief ("Here the impossible union / Of spheres of existence is actual" ("Dry Salvages" ll. 216-17)) is likewise the experience of inarticulateness.

The telling word "silent" or "silence" is used or implied by the poet in a number of ways throughout *Four Quartets*. In "East Coker" and "The Dry Salvages," the word belongs to the finite world of time that moves humans inexorably toward death. It also belongs to the inability to speak that can be seen reflected in the struggle Eliot

identified in his dissertation of trying to approach the Absolute. In Part III of "East Coker," for example, "silent" is used to describe the movement of all people "into the dark" that is time and eventual death: "we all go with them, into the silent funeral" (l. 110). The poet adjures his soul to go into another kind of darkness, following the path of the mystics into the dark night of the soul ("I said to my soul, be still, and let the dark come upon you / Which shall be the darkness of God" (ll. 112-13)). However, the darkness of God is one in which a soul must "wait without hope" for nothing in human knowledge and experience can assist to bring the soul into the union with the divine that it seeks. The darkness is likened to being in the underground train, stopping too long, "And the conversation rises and slowly fades into silence / And you see behind every face the mental emptiness deepen / Leaving only the growing terror of nothing to think about" (ll. 119-21). Here silence is figured as the end of human thought and communication, and the travelers in the train sit in isolation and darkness. This movement into the dark night of the soul is one in which human hope, love, faith, and thought are somehow insufficient, and there is only the waiting for God which points "to the agony / Of death and birth" (ll. 131-2). Similarly, in "The Dry Salvages," silence points to an awareness of mortality and to the "hardly, barely prayable / Prayer of the Annunciation" (ll. 83-4) that is nearly impossible to voice because in human experience there is no end to time, mortality, and death. In both "East Coker" and "The Dry Salvages," then, attempts of the soul to merge with the darkness of God, or attempts to voice the prayer of the Annunciation, dwindle into silence where knowledge, experience, thought, and words fail.

Silence as the end of meaning and the failure of expression is not the only use the poet makes of voicelessness in *Four Quartets*, however. The first time the word "silent" appears in the poem, in "Burnt Norton," it is associated with light, a mystical or divine light that is "still / At the still point of the turning world" (ll. 135-6). *Four Quartets* is a poem of echoes. Images, phrases, tropes, and ideas from Eliot's earlier poems swirl around the *Quartets* as the poet recollects and re-imagines himself. Each of the four poems in the *Quartets* contains echoes of the others as well until the final lines of "Little Gidding" where all of the *Quartets* are gathered together through a collection of their images. The divine light associated with silence in Part IV of "Burnt Norton" is an echo of the "heart of light" in Part I of the same poem. In Part I, the poet enters the garden and, looking into the dry and empty pool, he has a vision of a lotos rising, he sees the pool filled with "water out of sunlight," and "the surface glittered out of the heart of light" (ll. 35; 38). This is a fleeting moment of illumination that passes as the cloud crosses over the sun, and the poet is left wondering what it means and how to express it in words. Careful readers of Eliot's poetry will know that the phrase "heart of light" associated with this moment is an echo from *The Waste Land* where there is another important moment in a garden:

Yet when we came back, late, from the hyacinth garden,
Your arms were full, and your hair wet, I could not
Speak, and my eyes failed, I was neither
Living nor dead, and I knew nothing,
Looking into the heart of light, the silence.
Oed' und leer das Meer. (ll. 37-42)

Importantly, in the lines from Part I of "Burnt Norton," Eliot does not repeat the whole line from *The Waste Land*: "the heart of light, the silence." He repeats only the phrase "heart of light" because to echo the whole line would suggest that this moment by the dry pool in the garden of Burnt Norton is the same kind of experience of silence. In the line from *The Waste Land*, the silence is a failure of words, sight, and knowledge, and the waste and sadness the speaker feels is reflected in the allusion to *Tristan und Isolde*. In "Burnt Norton," however, the "heart of light" is a different kind of vision. Certainly fleeting, the vision of light in the dry pool is connected with the poet's meditations on time present and time future that "point to one end, which is always present" (l. 46). This same light is re-echoed in Part II of "Burnt Norton" when the poet is attempting to re-articulate this sense of the "one end, which is always present":

The inner freedom from the practical desire,
The release from action and suffering, release from the inner
And the outer compulsion, yet surrounded
By a grace of sense, a white light still and moving. (ll. 70-3)

This white light is the still point of the turning world, re-echoed in Part IV where it is associated with silence: "After the kingfisher's wing / Has answered light to light, and is silent, the light is still / At the still point of the turning world" (ll. 134-6). The kingfisher's wing answers light to light, and the silence that follows the movement is associated both with the passing of the mystical moment and with the light that continues to enfold it. In the punctuation of the lines, the word "silent" sits between the two different kinds of light, the light of the sun that catches the kingfisher's wing

for a brief moment before a cloud passes over, and the light at the still point that continues after the sun's light is gone. The phrase "and is silent" bridges these two lights and connects them. Silence, when it is finally connected with the echo of the "heart of light" from Part I, is therefore a very different sort of silence from the silence in the lines from *The Waste Land* recalled by the phrase "heart of light." There the silence was a failure in the face of beauty, mystery, and love. In "Burnt Norton" the silence is a stillness, a mystical peacefulness that, though defying the power of words to express it, does not provoke a sense of fear and waste.

Having associated silence with the light that is at the still point of the turning world, Eliot goes on, in Part V of "Burnt Norton" to meditate on silence. Here silence, belonging to stillness, is contrasted with the famous lines about the difficulty of words straining and cracking under the pressure to make meaning. Silence does not belong to the limitation of words in these lines; it belongs, rather, to the stillness articulated in the opening lines of Part V, a stillness that contrasts, a few lines later, with the imprecision of words that will not stay "still":

Words move, music moves
Only in time; but that which is only living
Can only die. Words, after speech, reach
Into the silence. ...
Not the stillness of the violin, while the note lasts,
Not that only, but the co-existence,
Or say that the end precedes the beginning,
And the end and the beginning were always there

Before the beginning and after the end. (ll. 137-40; 144-8)

The violin, wonderfully resonant, is an instrument of harmonics. What this means is that the notes of the violin, when played perfectly in tune, contain all of the echoes of the octaves of that same note up and down the scale. Therefore, ending on one of these "ringing" notes, and lifting the bow off the string, the violin player can hold the audience members captive in a spell lasting several seconds as they "hear" a note that does not actually exist (it is not being played) and that at the same time contains all of the octaves within itself. It is the beginning and the end of the note that was played. It is a wholeness and a stillness (the bow is still, frozen in the air above the strings).[70] Eliot uses the musical analogy in an attempt to express what is not possible in language. It is an analogy he uses again in 1956 in his Introduction to Paul Valéry's *Art of Poetry*:

> I speak as one with no technical training in music, but I find that I enjoy, and 'understand' a piece of music better for knowing it well, simply because I have at any moment during the performance a *memory* of the part that has preceded and a *memory* of the part that is still to come. Ideally, I should like to be able to hold the whole of a great symphony in my mind at once. The same is true, surely, of a great tragedy: the better we know it, the more firmly we hold it in mind, during the action, what has preceded and what is to come, the more intense is our experience. (qtd. in Manganiello 118).

This is a similar idea to the analogy of the violin note expressed in "Burnt Norton." Holding a whole symphony in mind at once, or having an abstract sense of the whole of a tragedy, is an idea of a mental stillness that is both within and beyond the actual

[70] I write of this remarkable effect from experience; I have been a violin player for 18 years.

notes the orchestra is playing or the lines the actors are speaking. It is also a new wholeness that understands the symphony or tragedy from a position beyond the beginning and the end. The sound and the action are held together in a unity that is exempt from time. It is, of course, a silence. Stillness is thus achieved through this new meaning of silence rather than through the medium of words that "will not stay still."

This understanding of silence, as the violin note lingering on after the bow has been lifted from the string and the note that lasts being one that contains within itself all of the other notes of the octaves sounding on without movement and outside of time (the note has ceased to be played and yet it sounds on), resonates in the poet's description of the chapel at Little Gidding as a place "where prayer has been valid." Eliot names the chapel as a place of prayer, and then goes on to describe the ways in which prayer is more than words: "prayer is more / Than an order of words, the conscious occupation / Of the praying mind, or the sound of the voice praying" (46-8). The complexity of prayer, according to the poet, is that it goes beyond the words being prayed and beyond the moment in time when a mind is bent on prayer. Prayer is more, in fact, than the words, the sound, or the consciousness of prayer. It is a kind of silence, but it is not the silence of inability. It is, rather, the silence of the resonating violin note. Eliot goes on, "And what the dead had no speech for, when living, / They can tell you, being dead: the communication / Of the dead is tongued with fire beyond the language of the living" (ll. 49-51). The "language of the living" belongs to the words that crack and strain, but the communication of the dead is beyond these limitations. Because the chapel is "a place where prayer has been valid," it is a place

where the communication of the dead resounds in the present. The chapel is the *Four Quartets*'s last symbol of "the intersection of the timeless moment" where the voice of the praying pilgrim in the present is joined with the voices of the dead that resonate in the silence.

Historically, the chapel at Little Gidding represents the tension between divine inspiration and human limitation that Eliot has identified, consistently, with church architecture. Its early history is somewhat vague. At some point in the Middle Ages it became an independent benefice from the larger parish of Great Gidding, and in the fifteenth century the manor of Little Gidding was bought by Christopher Druell and was passed to his son and grandson. In the late 1590s, Druell's grandson leased the manor to Sir Gervase Clifton who was reckless with his estates and was eventually arrested (Maycock 110, 111). He committed suicide in the Tower, and the Crown granted his properties to his son-in-law. It was from this same son-in-law that the Ferrar family bought the manor of Little Gidding.[71] Nicholas Ferrar and his family planned to create a small religious community at Little Gidding where the forms of the *Book of Common Prayer* would be the guiding centre of life. In his 1938 history of Nicholas Ferrar, Alan Maycock[72] writes that when the Ferrars first arrived in Little Gidding the chapel was in great disrepair, and Mrs. Ferrar's first aim was to have the chapel cleaned and restored, even before seeing to her own comfort (114). Maycock

[71] Nicholas Ferrar's mother purchased the manor and the deeds were signed on May 30, 1625 (Maycock 111).

[72] Alan Maycock's biography of Nicholas Ferrar was published in 1938. He concludes his book by saying, "one wonders whether Little Gidding will ever again become more than the occasional resort of a few interested antiquaries. Will the torch ever be re-lighted in this holy place? Will it ever again belong to a community who will pass to and from the church in procession for the daily offices ...? Will it ever be thus restored to God's greater glory and become once again a spiritual power-house from which the Church and her children may draw strength and inspiration? " (304-5).

writes, "The building stood neglected and desecrated. The nave and chancel were stuffed to the roof with hay, and part of the fabric – perhaps the sacristy on the south side – had been used as a pigsty. There was no glass left in the windows; all the woodwork was decayed and rotten; the floor was littered with every kind of filth and rubbish" (129). Long before the chapel repairs were complete or the interior was decorated and furnished, the family began using the chapel for daily prayer. Nicholas Ferrar inscribed over the west door (an inscription that is still there today) "This is none other than the house of God and the gate of heaven" (Maycock 130). After his death, Nicholas Ferrar's tomb was built in the centre of the pathway that leads to the chapel door (Maycock 143), and this is the "tombstone" referred to in line 30 of Eliot's poem.

The community at Little Gidding was a source of interest in various quarters and it saw many visitors. Some of these were travelers who turned off the highway to break their journey at Little Gidding while others came to participate in the community for a day or two. The community welcomed George Herbert and Richard Crashaw, both friends of Nicholas Ferrar; King Charles I visited the community several times, once in 1633, again in 1642, and finally in 1646 following his defeat at Naseby; and the community was also visited by those who wished to uncover "popish superstitions."[73] While the community was originally formed as a withdrawal from the political factions of the time, it could not remain untouched by the violence of

[73] Edward Lenten, sent in 1641 to learn what he could about the "nuns" of Little Gidding, writes, "I find them full of humanity and humility. And others speak as much of their charity: which I also verily believe, and therefore am far from censuring them: of whom I think better than of myself. ... I shall be glad to observe how wiser men will judge of them , or imitate their course of life" (qtd. in Mayor xxxvi).

these years. In 1642 hostilities of the Civil War began, and in 1643 John Ferrar left for Holland with his family where he waited the war out for two years:

> [In] the present sad and turbulent condition...a general deluge of consumptions of estates fell upon the whole land for our great sins...this last judgment of God an universal and unheard of punishment fell upon all for all had sinned; and in our particular estate we were scourged...we were fain to submit to a long sequestration for then the wars raged horribly but that was not all: to save our consciences from what was imposed that that might not ruin also we rather resolved to leave our native country and so I took you and my VF [Virginia] and went beyond sea...there being so many open wide throats gaping to devour Little Gidding. (qtd. in Blackstone 302)

Allegations of Puritan raids on the chapel and the desecration of organ and font have recently been discovered to have been false, but Parliamentary soldiers arrived several times at Little Gidding, once with the intention of doing violence, but "God Almighty, in his special providence, did turn away their fury at that time and it then passed over" (qtd. in Muir and White 111).

In 1657 the community ended with the death of Nicholas Ferrar's brother John. In 1715 John Ferrar's grandson renovated the chapel, reducing it in length by two feet and adding a new façade. In 1848 William Hopkinson purchased the property, built Ferrar House (the old manor having disappeared) and began to restore the chapel. The restoration was completed in 1853 and the chapel was not restored again until the 1920s. Eliot visited Little Gidding on May 25, 1936, in company with the dean of Magdalene College, Cambridge. Though he apparently visited it only once, Little

Gidding had a pull on Eliot and it continued to interest him. In 1946 Alan Maycock visited Little Gidding and, finding it in great disrepair, he wrote to the vicar of Great Gidding to propose founding The Friends of Little Gidding. This society had a number of objectives: to give thanks to God for the lives of Nicholas Ferrar and his family, to venerate the ideals of the Ferrars' Little Gidding community, to care for the upkeep of the chapel and its precincts, and to arrange pilgrimages to Little Gidding in order to uphold it as a holy place. Maycock asked Eliot to be an honorary patron of the society. It is fitting that this chapel, the last piece of church architecture represented in Eliot's poetry and the culmination of his examination of ecclesiastical structures, should have the biggest personal pull on him. He may have stepped into St. Magnus Martyr on his lunch hours in London, he may have used the booking station under St. Mary Woolnoth in his tube travels in the City, he may have contemplated the destruction of London's churches with dismay and campaigned for their preservation, he may have been commissioned by the dioceses of London and Canterbury to write plays, but his most significant personal involvement with a church building was to become a patron of the society formed to preserve Little Gidding architecturally and liturgically.

In its history, then, the chapel represents the tension between the physical and the spiritual that is so much a part of the human experience and that Eliot finds so particularly symbolized by church architecture. Physically subject to disrepair and repeatedly standing in need of restoration, it is a place where people went to seek spiritual fulfillment and peace, but it is also associated with civil strife, political intrigue, violence, and war. Even as he writes his poem about this place, Eliot's own

world is in the middle of the Second World War. In September 1939, Eliot adds a note to *The Idea of a Christian Society* (1938):

The whole of this book ... was completed before it was known that we should be at war. But the possibility of war, which has now been realized, was always present to my mind, and the only additional observations which I feel called upon to make are these: first, that the alignment of forces which has now revealed itself should bring more clearly to our consciousness the alternative of Christianity or paganism; and, second, that we cannot afford to defer our constructive thinking to the conclusion of hostilities – a moment when, as we should know from experience, good counsel is liable to be obscured. (83)

War, instead of shelving the question in the exigencies of the moment, rather brings it forward more clearly – which kind of society will serve and preserve us better? The Ferrars must have asked a similar kind of question when they abandoned the city and moved to Little Gidding. Their "Christian Society" aimed for the ideals of a life of prayer and communion with God and with each other, but civil unrest and violence continued to affect their community. Similarly, Eliot in *The Idea of a Christian Society* writes, "we have to remember that the Kingdom of Christ on earth will never be realized" (79), and 1940 saw Eliot watching for fires in London during the Blitz. It is no accident that Eliot sets this poem, written during the war, at Little Gidding. In doing so, he connects his own poetic pilgrimage to this place to a past and present of war. It seems that the tension between spiritual ideal and human reality, always present in each of his explorations of church architecture, is no less focal here. War, strife, and separation are as much part of the experience of "Little Gidding" as is the

poet's spiritual pilgrimage to a sacred place of prayer. However, the chapel also represents, in the poem, a movement beyond this tension to the silence or stillness that transfigures it.

When the poet continues his meditation on Little Gidding in Part III of the poem, he considers how the strife of history can "become renewed, transfigured, in another pattern." Considering the history of Little Gidding, he writes,

If I think, again, of this place,
And of people, not wholly commendable,
Of no immediate kin or kindness ...
United in the strife which divided them;
If I think of a king at nightfall,
Of three men, and more, on the scaffold
And a few who died forgotten
In other places, here and abroad,
And of one who died blind and quiet ...
These men, and those who opposed them
And those whom they opposed
Accept the constitution of silence
And are folded into a single party. (ll. 169-71; 174-9; 188-91)

Here, for the last time in *Four Quartets*, is the telling word silence. It is not the silence of defeat, of death, but of "A symbol perfected in death." It is the silence that, like the violin note, moves beyond the beginning and the end to something whole that includes the beginning and the end within itself. In this understanding of silence, old

factions are folded into a unity that is a symbol of a meaning beyond human knowledge and experience and that transcends a fear of the future or the control of the past ("history may be servitude, / History may be freedom" (ll. 162-3)) . Eliot concludes Part III: "And all shall be well and / All manner of things shall be well / By the purification of the motive / In the ground of our beseeching" (ll. 196-99). This purification is arrived at from the "dove descending" of Part IV, with its "flame of incandescent terror." The purifying fire of the Holy Spirit in Part IV of "Little Gidding" is the same "refining fire" to which the compound ghost in Part II adjures the poet to submit "the gifts reserved for age." Similarly, it is the same fire that, in Part I, tongues the communication of the dead "beyond the language of the living" in the chapel "where prayer has been valid." In other words, in "Little Gidding" Eliot enters into an understanding of the symbolic meaning of the church building that takes him beyond his earlier ideas about ecclesiastical architecture. The building still represents the tension between spiritual inspiration and human limitation that he has always identified as part of the peculiar intensity of church buildings, but in "Little Gidding" the Christian Eliot arrives at a new understanding of silence that is not the end of words or meaning but that, "through the purification of the motive," points to a wholeness that is beyond language.

In "Little Gidding" the chapel's function represents another turn in Eliot's exploration of what it means to experience church architecture. Ultimately, in the poem, the chapel is significant not for its aesthetic value or for its rich history. These things are tied up with the fundamental importance of this sacred structure, which is that it is a place where prayer has been, and continues to be, valid. This new meaning

of the church building is a development and a transcendence of Eliot's earlier interests in aesthetics and history related to church architecture. The chapel represents a new phase of knowing that is beyond what was known before and even beyond what might be expected:

If you came this way,
Taking the route you would be likely to take
From the place you would be likely to come from ...
It would be the same at the end of the journey,
If you came at night like a broken king,
If you came by day not knowing what you came for,
It would be the same ...

If you came this way,
Taking any route, starting from anywhere,
At any time or at any season,
It would always be the same: you would have to put off
Sense and notion. (ll. 20-3; 26-8; 39-43)

The meaning of the chapel is not given to it by the individual aims of the people who come here. The chapel resounds with prayer even when there is no one left to voice the prayer, much as the violin resounds with the note after the player has lifted bow and finger from the strings.

Four Quartets is about new ways of knowing. The poet goes retrospectively over his career, discovering that he continues to experience the "intolerable wrestle / With words and meanings" while at the same time he moves beyond words and meanings.

When he meets the compound ghost in Part II of "Little Gidding," the poet is cautioned against "the gifts reserved for age" that belong to the transitory human world where "body and soul begin to fall asunder." The ghost tells him, rather, that his motives and his view of his own life's path must be submitted for restoration to the "refining fire." The Christian poet seems to have moved beyond the aspirations of his earlier poetry when he sought to "purify the dialect of the tribe." In "Poetry and Drama," Eliot writes, "it is ultimately the function of art, in imposing a credible order upon ordinary reality, and thereby eliciting some perception of order *in* reality, to bring us to a condition of serenity, stillness, and reconciliation; and then leave us, as Virgil left Dante, to proceed toward a region where that guide can avail us no farther" (*SP* 146). It appears in *Four Quartets* that Eliot has reached a place where poetry can avail him no farther. This is his last major published poem, one that includes within itself echoes and reenactments of his earlier works. It is simultaneously a poem in which the poet finds himself constantly on the edge of language; the language of poetry, like Virgil, has brought him so far and leaves him to proceed differently. In "East Coker," the poet writes, "the poetry does not matter." Somehow his vision of himself as a poet has been transfigured.

It is immensely significant, therefore, that Part V of "Little Gidding," the final section of *Four Quartets* that gathers all of the images of the *Quartets* and makes them one, is set in "a secluded chapel." In some of the best-known lines of the poem, the poet goes over the retrospective journey he has undertaken in *Four Quartets*:

We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring

Will be to arrive where we started

And know the place for the first time. (ll. 239-42)

Where he has arrived in "Little Gidding" is in a chapel. It is possible to read these concluding lines from "Little Gidding" as a summary of the intellectual and spiritual journey Eliot has undertaken through his interest in church architecture. This is a journey that is intimately connected to the poet's own life experiences and, as I have shown, to the intellectual and philosophical ideas directing several of his most famous poems. This secluded chapel, by belonging to the tension between human and divine and, simultaneously, by moving beyond this tension into the silence that includes and transforms it, represents a new phase of knowing in Eliot's approach to church architecture. Eliot was always drawn personally, and intellectually, to church buildings. When a young man, he was attracted to churches as sites for tourist curiosity; he later took lunch breaks in the churches of Sir Christopher Wren in London; he campaigned for the preservation of these churches and included two Wren churches in *The Waste Land*; he wrote a commissioned pageant-play for the creation of churches in London's suburbs; and he used the cathedral setting to great effect in his martyr's play, *Murder in the Cathedral.* Always appreciative of the aesthetic and historic value of church buildings, Eliot was as a young man skeptical about their relevance in modern society or about how the meaning they symbolized might be translated into secular terms for a secular culture. Following his conversion, his view of the aesthetic value of churches was subordinated to his growing sense of their importance as sacred places, and he began to complete his earlier appreciation of church architecture from a theological point of view. After his reception into the

Church of England, the emptiness of churches continued to trouble him, not as a sign of their irrelevance as earlier, but as a symbol of his society's spiritual anemia. In his final quartet, the secluded pilgrimage chapel at Little Gidding represents all of the poet's varied and complex responses to church architecture and, simultaneously, it moves beyond them. He writes, "You are not here to verify, / Instruct yourself, or inform curiosity / Or carry report" (ll. 43-5). These are all the reasons why in the past people have visited Little Gidding. They are also all of the ways in which Eliot has previously approached church buildings. However, now "You are here to kneel / Where prayer has been valid" (ll. 45-6). Eliot has known many of these places in his life and in his poetry; however, as he says in "The Dry Salvages," "We had the experience but missed the meaning." What he finds at Little Gidding is that the silence of the secluded chapel is a pregnant silence of prayer that continues on and on whether anyone in the present moment is voicing it or not. This resounding silence is the true value of the church building, and it gathers up all of Eliot's earlier knowledge and experience of ecclesiastical structures and transforms them. Surely, in "Little Gidding," Eliot arrives where he started and knows the place for the first time.

List of Abbreviations

ASG – After Strange Gods

CP – Collected Poems: 1909-1962

ICS – The Idea of a Christian Society

KE – Knowledge and Experience in the Philosophy of F.H. Bradley

"LG" – "Little Gidding"

MC – Murder in the Cathedral.

SP – Selected Prose of T.S. Eliot. Ed. Frank Kermode.

SW – The Sacred Wood

UPUC – The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism

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