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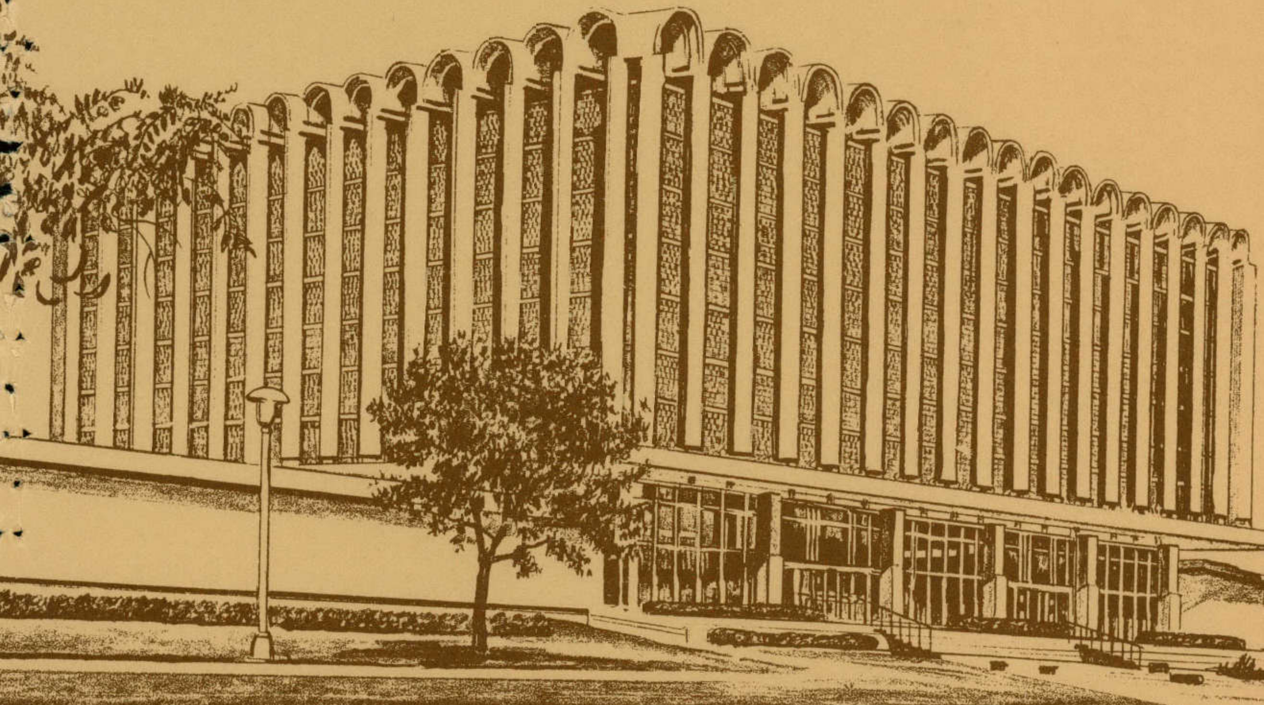
The Waste Land as Grail Romance: Eliot's Use of the Medieval Grail Legends

Everett A. Gillis



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Graduate Studies No. 6
26 pp.
22 February 1974
$1.00

Graduate Studies are numbered separately and published on an irregular basis under the auspices of the Dean of the Graduate School and Director of Academic Publications, and in cooperation with the International Center for Arid and Semi-Arid Land Studies. Copies may be obtained on an exchange basis from, or purchased through, the Exchange Librarian, Texas Tech University, Lubbock, Texas 79409.

Texas Tech Press, Lubbock, Texas

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The Plan of The Waste Land

In acknowledging his indebtedness in the notes section of *The Waste Land* to Jessie L. Weston's *From Ritual to Romance*[1]—a seminal study of the medieval Grail sagas against the background of the ancient Mystery cults of Greece and Rome—Eliot declares that not only his title but the "plan" and, to a large degree, the "incidental symbolism" of his poem owe to his reading of her work; that her book would, as a matter of fact, "elucidate the difficulties of the poem" much better than his own notes.[2] The derivation of Eliot's title from Miss Weston's volume is clear enough, for it is the designation she herself uses throughout her work for the mythical realm of Logres, the traditional setting of the medieval Grail romances; and truly, the topography of Eliot's landscape in *The Waste Land* is sufficiently desolate—with its barren stony wildernesses and waterless deserts standing side by side with stagnant waterways and swampy morasses—to merit the same epithet. Also abundantly clear is Eliot's use of incidental symbolism from Miss Weston's study, many of his pivotal symbols, including water, hair, stone, plant life, the seasons, deriving from her discussions of the ancient Mystery rites.

The relevance of the "plan" of *The Waste Land* to the Weston book, however, is not quite so readily apparent; though it seems likely that Eliot's concern in his poem with the trappings of the Grail romances and his use of them to illustrate the demise of religion in the modern world were directly influenced by her own interest in the significance of the Grail tales as an authentic historical record, thinly veiled, of the decay of once august Mystery rituals still surviving during the medieval period, though driven underground into secrecy and disrepute by a hostile ecclesiasticism. Of particular interest in this respect is the fact that Eliot's own work echoes, though often in a dim and inchoate fashion, many of the characteristic features of the original Grail story, to such a degree, indeed, that it may be considered, in effect, a modern Grail romance itself, complete with a Waste Land and a Grail Quest, and other supporting phenomena traceable directly to the corpus of the varied Grail tale versions circulating during the Middle Ages throughout Europe.

1. The most available text of Miss Weston's book is the Doubleday Anchor Books paperback edition (Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1957), and is the text used here.

2. Although Eliot's indebtedness to Weston's book is generally recognized, no thorough investigation has yet been made to establish the precise degree to which some of his most familiar scenic effects owe to her work. The present study, undertaken under a grant-in-aid from the Organized Research Program of Texas Tech University, is a partial effort to remedy this situation. To a lesser degree, Eliot also levies for detail upon Sir James Frazer's *The Golden Bough*, a volume he acknowledges in his opening note along with his reference to Miss Weston's book—as not only a source but one of the profoundest essays of his generation. Frazer's volume, unencumbered by the need to support a hypothesis as in the case of Weston's study, offers a much broader review of the vegetation ceremonies of the Mystery cults than hers, and in general provides an excellent introduction to the whole subject.

In view of the preceding facts, it is highly probable that by the term "plan" Eliot had in mind, not the sense in which the word is often employed to designate the central organizational pattern of a work, for in this sense the principal organizational plan of *The Waste Land* is its fundamentally thematic structure,[3] but in the sense of general intention or purpose. From this point of view the plan of his poem is its establishment of a Grail story format, which in collaboration with other devices in the poem, provides an acute reflection of the disintegration of moral values in contemporary civilization. The overt formlessness and insubstantiality of this Grail romance façade—differing as it does so radically from the carefully contrived plots of other contemporary examples of the modernization of the earlier story material such as Tennyson's *Idylls of the King* or E. A. Robinson's more recent modern instances, works employing as fictional framework for distinctly modern truths the medieval panoply of knights and ladies and chivalric adventure—owes no doubt to Eliot's astute evaluation of his audience.[4] Any less degree of sophistication and subtlety than that revealed by his own particular form of Grail romance would scarcely have appealed to the sensibilities of the postwar generation of the twenties, wary of any suggestion of moral charlatanism. To furnish a more palatable intellectual diet than Tennyson's earnest Victorian preachments, under a semblance less overtly reminiscent of the traditional Matter of Britain, while at the same time capitalizing upon the profoundly archetypal values implicit in the Grail Quest motifs themselves, was the essence of the problem. Eliot's actual achievement of some such optimum balance in his poem is undoubtedly corroborated by its widespread contemporary acceptance by his own and later generations.

The end result of Eliot's efforts toward an acceptable format was his rejection of the simple story form, with its realistic rendering of detail—the chief hallmark of other contemporary adaptations of the medieval tales—for a purely impressionistic representation of the original elements: one in which all the specifics of the Grail legends are present—the Grail and its associate symbols of Lance, Cup, and Sword; the Fisher King and the Quester Knight; the waterway, river or

3. The chief formalizing principle in Eliot's work is its thematic movement, the ramification of which is controlled by a special musical structure. The three broad thematic areas in the poem, which are given their concrete pictorial implementation by sequences of narrative and lyric passages—including, in part, the Grail detail—are the decline of Western Culture and its traditional institutions and beliefs; the failure of love as an effective life force; and the decay of religious aspiration. For the last named, which by emphasis and degree of space in the poem devoted to its implementation is the dominant thematic motif, Eliot employs not only conventional Christian imagery, but the less familiar doctrinal and ritualistic patterns of the Mystery cults as well, simply following Miss Weston in this respect, who in her discussions in *From Ritual to Romance*, saw the two as inseparably linked. And since both of these faiths share a common body of religious symbols—ritualistic meal (the Attis feast, the Christian eucharist), a hanged god (Attis, Christ), a divine mother (Astarte, Mary), an official ecclesiastical edifice (Mystery cult temple, Christian church)—Eliot may use them interchangeably to evoke the various facets of his religious theme. A corollary to this—and one of particular importance to Eliot's Grail romance format—is that since the scenic paraphernalia of the medieval Grail romances also reflect the rites and tenets of the classical Mystery faiths, a similar interchange between Christian and romance symbols is also possible. Thus the churches of Saint Mary Woolnoth and Magnus Martyr may stand either as themselves, official institutions of the Christian faith, or as the Grail Castle, the equivalent in the Grail romances of the Mystery temples of the ancient cults.

4. It would be interesting to know whether Eliot was in any way influenced by Miss Weston's description of the Grail Quest tales as "a congeries of widely different elements—elements which at first sight appear hopelessly incongruous, if not completely contradictory" (Weston, *Ritual to Romance*, 2). This particular comment is perhaps equally apt as a characterization of the reputed formlessness of Eliot's romance façade.

seashore, adjacent to which the Grail Castle traditionally stood; the intolerable ferocity of the cruel environing Waste Land—but only in shadowy obscurity or standing so remotely in the background as to be for all practical purposes invisible; for, as it were, a format that in its ironic and distorted mirror reflects in a high degree of exactness of detail the very life-in-death existence it portrays: the somber Infernolike cities, the stricken institutions, the "hooded hordes swarming over endless plains" of contemporary culture.

But before undertaking a formal detailed reading of *The Waste Land* as Grail romance, three important preliminary matters may be profitably examined: the specific nature of Miss Weston's general theory; the variant versions of the original Grail romances; and the special difficulties inherent in Eliot's obscurantist methodology—all three of which play an important role in the shaping of Eliot's Grail romance materials.

Mystery Cult and Grail Romance

Miss Weston's hypothesis regarding the origin and history of the Grail legends, developed at length in *From Ritual to Romance*,[5] is that they derive ultimately from, and reflect in their specific features, certain ancient nature cults that in their mature forms flourished in Asia Minor, and later in Greece and Rome, as fully developed Mystery religions before and during the early history of Christianity: cults which had as their most holy teachings the mystery of the death and rebirth of a god—Osiris, Adonis, or Attis[6]—and ceremonies devoted to the initiation into, and rapprochement with, the secrets of a life principle based not upon the blood symbolism of Hebraic-Christian tradition, but upon the less familiar life symbolism of the reproduction of vegetable, animal, and human life. In their earlier forms, as Miss Weston points out, these religions simply reflected the identifying of the life cycle of the god with the seasonal cycle of the vegetable world: the aligning of his death and rebirth with the decline of natural processes in the autumn and winter, and the annual renewal of vegetation and the increase of flocks and herds in the spring. But as they gradually developed, the cults assumed more sophisticated, more abstract forms of doctrine, the latter conceiving of the possibility of man himself participating in a more spiritual way in the blessings of the god's rebirth; in the possibility, specifically, by means of ceremonial rites profoundly secret, and available only to the initiate, of sharing in the god's very resurrection. As Miss Weston, in writing of the annual celebration of the cult, declares, "In its esoteric 'Mystery' form it was freely utilized for the imposing of high spiritual teaching concerning the relation of Man and the Divine Source of his being, and the possibility of a sensible union between Man, and God."[7]

5. Because Miss Weston proceeds inductively rather than deductively in her work, her general theory does not appear until almost the end of her treatise (see pp. 203-207). The following chapter titles are perhaps the most pertinent in the development of her argument: "The Task of the Hero," "Tammuz and Adonis," "The Symbols," "The Fisher King," "The Secret of the Grail," "Mithra and Attis," "The Perilous Chapel."

6. The three gods represent respectively the Egyptian, Greek, and Roman forms of the Vegetation cults. Inasmuch as it is the Adonis and Attis rites that most specifically function as source materials for the later romances, it is with these that Miss Weston's book concerns itself chiefly.

7. Weston, *Ritual to Romance*, 203.

The public rites at the various centers of the worship of the Vegetation Deity were marked by elaborate ceremonials depicting the various facets of the Mystery teachings, involving sessions of violent weeping and ritualistic chants of mourning, and other elaborate manifestations of grief; also by a public commitment of an effigy of the god to a burial place, followed in turn by further demonstrations, of relief and joy, as the god was subsequently restored to a living status once again. In the Adonis cult, this process was symbolized by the rite of casting the god's image into water,[8] and its subsequent retrieval with great joy by priesthood and worshipers; in the Attis form of the religion, by the god's crucifixion upon a pine tree, with his subsequent return to life.[9]

A special feature of the esoteric rites at such celebrations was a feast of which the worshipers of the inner circle partook: the food involved, representing symbolic sustenance as well as physical nourishment, corroborating the communicants' power to participate, in prospects of their own rebirth and resurrection, in the mystery of the death and subsequent revival of the god. In the Attis version of the rites, this action constituted a ceremonial meal of great importance and consisted chiefly of the partaking, with appropriate prayer, of food and drink from vessels sacred to the god.

Originally imported from Asia Minor as a sociological by-product of the widespread Phoenician maritime commerce, the Mystery religions flourished in all parts of the civilized Mediterranean world, often side by side with the rising manifestations of Christianity; with which, according to Miss Weston's theory, an actual liaison, lasting several centuries, ultimately took place through a process of absorption of the Mystery teachings by the dominant Christian faith.[10] During the Middle Ages, however, in Miss Weston's opinion, the Mystery rites were expurged by official interdiction, consequently retreating to locations far removed from centers of population "in caves, and mountain fastnesses, on islands, and in desolate sea-coasts," as Miss Weston points out[11]—where they could exist and observe their rites unknown to the orthodox community of the Church, or scarcely understood by it if known.

In the fact of the existence of Christian forms of the Mysteries, lies Miss Weston's chief key to the possibility of the fertility cults representing the basic source of the imagery and ritual pattern of the Grail Castle activities and accompanying story materials. As she remarks:

> Turning from a consideration of the Adonis ritual, its details, and significance, to an examination of the Grail romances, we find that their *mise en scène* provides a striking series of parallels with the Classical celebrations. . . .
>
> Thus the central figure is either a dead knight on a bier (as in the *Gawain* versions), or a wounded king on a litter; when wounded the injury corresponds with that suffered by Adonis and Attis.
>
> Closely connected with the wounding of the king is the destruction which has fallen on the land, which will be removed when the king is healed. . . . We are face to face with

8. *Ibid.*, 47.

9. For an account of this rite, see James George Frazer, *The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion*. Macmillan Paperbacks ed. (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1960), 405.

10. Weston, *Ritual to Romance*, 44.

11. *Ibid.*, 204.

> the dreaded calamity which it was the aim of the Adonis ritual to avert, the temporary suspension of all reproductive energies of Nature.
>
> While the condition of the king is the cause of general and vociferous lamentation, a special feature never satisfactorily accounted for, is the presence of a weeping woman, or several weeping women. . . .
>
> In the version of the prose *Lancelot* Gawain, during the night, sees twelve maidens come to the door of the chamber where the Grail is kept, kneel down, and weep bitterly, in fact behave precisely as did the classical mourners for Adonis—"They sob wildly all night long."—behavior for which the text, as it now stands, provides no shadow of explanation or excuse.[12]

The august objects in the Grail Castle—the Grail itself, the Lance, the Cup, and the Sword—held in such awe and regard by all by whom they are witnessed, she conjectures, were ceremonial objects in some hidden or isolated temple of the interdicted Mystery faith and employed in the inner secret rites of its esoteric phase in connection with the sacramental meal of the Attis cult already mentioned; the latter in Miss Weston's opinion showing a curious parallel with the feast participated in by the Quester Knight as guest of the Grail Lord and his retinue in the banquet hall of the Grail Castle. In both instances, she explains, the food involved an element of spiritual sustenance:

> In the Attis feast the initiates actually ate and drank from these vessels; in the romances the Grail community never actually eat from the Grail itself, but the food is, in some mysterious and unexplained manner, supplied by it. In both cases it is a *Lebens Speise*, a Food of Life. This point is especially insisted upon in the *Parzival*, where the Grail community never become any older than they were on the day they first beheld the Talisman. In the Attis initiation the proof that the candidate has successfully passed the test is afforded by the revival of the god—in the Grail romances the proof lies in the healing of the Fisher King.[13]

Of the remaining Grail Castle emblems, she feels that the Lance and Cup are explainable, especially in view of the strong phallicism implicit in the fertility cults, on sexual grounds, particularly in their juxtaposition: being, as she declares, "sex symbols of immemorial antiquity and world-wide diffusion, the Lance, or Spear, representing the Male, the Cup, or Vase, the Female, reproductive energy . . . absolutely in place as forming part of a ritual dealing with the processes of life and reproductive vitality."[14] The inevitability of such an ensemble of four sacramental objects existing in the Grail Castle is demonstrated by Miss Weston by comparison with other kabalistic or holy emblems: particularly with the Tarot cards used in ancient times for divination and similar sacred purposes, the four major suits of which correspond, in one form or another, to the Grail, Lance, Cup, and Sword symbols in the Grail Castle.[15]

The Grail legend in its earliest form, Miss Weston theorizes—probably an eleventh-century Welsh tale written by a certain Bleheris[16]—was a thinly dis-

12. *Ibid.*, 48-49.
13. *Ibid.*, 147-148.
14. *Ibid.*, 75.
15. Miss Weston's statement of their equivalents is as follows (*ibid.*, 77): "Cup (Chalice, or Goblet)—Hearts. Lance (Wand, or Sceptre)—Diamonds. Sword—Spades. Dish (Circles, or Pentangles, the form varies)—Clubs."
16. See Weston, *Ritual to Romance*, chap. 14, for her complete statement on the authorship of this text.

guised account of an initiation of a candidate into the intricacies of the Mystery faith in one of the hidden sanctuaries of the cult: the story, in her words, of "the visit of a wandering knight to one of these hidden temples; his successful passing of the test into the lower grade of Life initiation, his failure to attain to the highest degree."[17] In the fictional detail providing the symbolic scaffolding of the ritualistic teachings thus contained, the exoteric rites were represented by the episode of the Perilous Chapel, an ordeal in which the knight succeeds; the esoteric rites by the adventure of the Grail Castle, in which the knight fails outright, as in Perceval's first visit, or in which he succeeds in part, as in the case of Gawain. At first, Miss Weston conjectures, the story preserved its original character of "a composite between Christianity and the Nature Ritual, as witnessed by the ceremony over the bier of the Dead Knight, the procession with Cross and incense, and the solemn Vespers for the Dead," and correctly representing "the final stage of the process by which Attis-Adonis was identified with Christ";[18] but in later hands intrusions and emendations and general misunderstanding of the purpose and meaning of the original Grail story blurred and confused its outlines, producing the present amorphous state of the extant materials. As she concludes:

> When the tale was once fairly launched as a romantic tale and came into the hands of those unfamiliar with its Ritual origin . . . the influence of the period came into play. The Crusades, and the consequent traffic in relics, especially in relics of the Passion, caused the identification of the sex Symbols, Lance and Cup, with the Weapon of the Crucifixion, and the Cup of the Last Supper; but the Christianization was merely external, the tale, as a whole, retaining its pre-Christian character.[19]

The Grail Castle Adventure: Perceval and Gawain

The earliest text of the Grail legend[20] available is the *Perceval* or *Le Conte du Graal* of the twelfth-century French poet Chrétien de Troyes, author of a number of romances dealing with the Arthurian cycle. As Miss Weston points out, the *Conte del Graal* depends upon a source, the real nature of which is unknown, though Chrétien states that he discovered the tale in a volume given him by Philip, Count of Flanders. Moreover, Chrétien's poem breaks off abruptly in the middle of a sentence after some 10,000 lines, and to the truncated tale "continuations" are added by three later poets, Wauchier de Denai, Manessier, and Gerbert de Montreuil; none of whom adhere closely to Chrétien's version of Perceval's cycle of adventures, and all of whom exhibit knowledge of other widely-separated forms of the tale. Indeed, in the Wauchier version the Grail Quest is given to an entirely different central figure, Sir Gawain, and the Grail and its accompanying symbols are conceived of in an entirely different light.[21] Finally,

17. *Ibid.*, 204.
18. *Ibid.*, 205.
19. *Ibid.*, 205.
20. For a complete review and critical evaluation of texts, see Roger Sherman Loomis, *The Grail: From Celtic Myth to Christian Symbol* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1963), chap. 1 and Appendix; also Alfred Nutt, *Studies on the History of the Holy Grail* (London, 1888), 8-126, and Jessie L. Weston, *The Quest of the Holy Grail* (London: G. Bell and Sons, Ltd., 1913), chap. 2.
21. A full discussion of the textual problems involved in the "continuations" to Chrétien's poem may be found in Weston, *Quest of the Holy Grail*, 5-10.

the Perceval versions of the Quest, which occupy the bulk of the Grail texts, differ considerably among themselves as to the nature and function of the mysterious talismans in the Grail Castle and the task to be achieved by the Quester on his arrival.

In the Perceval version of the Grail legend, as related by Chrétien de Troyes, the Grail Quest is an incident in a long series of events, beginning with Perceval's rearing by his mother far from the haunts of courts and city, and the boy's precipitous entry, raw and ignorant, into the complexities of feudal and knightly customs and manners. In Perceval's first encounter with the Grail Castle, he finds himself at nightfall in its vicinity, and perceives two men fishing on a nearby river. At his request for information about lodgings, one of the men (whom he learns later to be the Fisher King) gives him directions to the Grail Castle, where he may spend the night. At first, to his anger and frustration, he is unable to locate it by the fisherman's directions, when suddenly it appears before him as if materialized from the very air—an imposing edifice topped by a tower of stone flanked on either side by two lesser towers, and making a distinguished and impressive sight. When he reaches the Castle, Perceval is given a courteous reception and later brought into its central hall, where he perceives the Fisher King again, reclining on a couch before an enormous log fire in a fireplace, the chimney of which is supported by four great columns of heavy copper. As he seats himself beside the King, who is maimed and cannot rise, a squire now enters with a sword, which is presented to Perceval with the information that it will never break except in one peril. This squire is followed in turn by another youth grasping by the middle a sturdy lance tipped with a point of white iron, from which issues blood that runs down upon his hand. Though Perceval is seized by an almost ungovernable impulse to ask the meaning of this wondrous phenomenon, he stoically resists, recalling the admonition of the lord who had taught him the rules of chivalry, namely, that the young knight profits most who speaks least. Following the departure of the squire of the bleeding lance come two others bearing candelabras of gold, in each of which ten candles burn.

Finally, before the group appears a fair and gentle lady bearing a Grail in her hand, a vessel described as of such brightness that like "the stars before the rising moon, the very candles seem to lose their light."[22] It is, moreover, richly adorned with an array of precious stones surpassing all others one might imagine either on land or sea. Immediately after the Grail bearer follows another damsel with a silver tray. And then, as have the others of the Grail procession, after they have passed before the King's couch, these two also depart into another room. Afterwards there is a banquet, and a broad ivory table is now brought out and covered with snowy cloth, and the King and Perceval partake of a spiced haunch of deer that is set before them. Once more during the meal the Grail is carried before the assembly, but, as before, Perceval once again fails to ask its meaning.

Next morning Perceval awakens to what appears to be an empty Castle, and as he leaves to search for the company, the drawbridge rises mysteriously behind

22. Chrétien de Troyes, *Le Roman de Pecrceval ou Le Conte du Graal*, ed William Roach (Geneve-Lille, 1956), 11. 3227-3329.

him. A little afterward, he encounters on the road a maiden mourning a slain knight, who informs him that his host of the evening before had been the "rich Fisher King," who, wounded in both thighs by a javelin-thrust in battle so that he may not resume his normal kingly duties, finds his only solace in fishing; and that had Perceval asked concerning what he had seen, the King would have been wholly healed and the land blessed.

In many respects, the version of the Grail adventure in Wolfram von Eschenbach's *Parzival* is very similar to that of Chrétien's, and is probably dependent upon it for its basic outlines.[23] In Wolfram's poem, Parzival is likewise directed to the Grail Castle by two fishermen; he also sees the bleeding lance and partakes of the viands provided by the Grail, receives a costly sword, and goes to his bed for the night without asking the important questions about the nature of the objects he has seen. As he leaves the Castle next morning, however, he is mocked by a squire for not inquiring of the Grail ensemble; though later on, as with Perceval, he also is reprimanded by a maiden for failing to ask the necessary questions to heal the Fisher King.

The two most important differences between the two accounts, perhaps, are the activities of the Grail company on Parzival's arrival at the Castle and the nature of the Grail. Parzival finds that the Castle on his arrival is in partial mourning over the King's disabilities, the normal festivities of Castle life being reduced to more solemn activities. Moreover, when dinner in the great hall is announced, maidens appear wearing flowers in their hair and bearing candlesticks; and, following them, servants carrying a table top hewn from "garnet-hyacinth" stone, which is placed upon trestles for the King's service. Finally, the Grail Queen herself appears, richly clad and bearing the Grail upon a costly cushion: "It was the pride of Paradise she bore, root and branch, beyond price: that which men called the Grail, in the presence of which all earthly glories faded."[24] The Grail, as in the French form of the tale, is also a bountiful source of all foods and noble wines no matter how elaborate the variety desired by the knights of the Castle. But it is depicted as a stone called *lapsit exillis*, rather than a serving dish, and all who remain near it are assured that they cannot die of any illness or of old age while in its presence, nor their youthful beauty and prowess be ever impaired. Parzival, as he observes its power and beauty, is also consumed with desire to know its meaning, but bethinks himself in time of his mentor's warning and allows his opportunity to pass.

The Gawain version of the visit to the Grail Castle Miss Weston feels to be the closest of any of the Grail accounts to the original Grail saga material. Moreover, it shows several very important differences in detail from the Perceval versions, as may be noted in the following summary. As the tale opens, a stranger knight, without the courtesy of acknowledgment and greeting, rides past Queen Guinevere's pavillion, where she is awaiting the return of Arthur from an expedition. Angered at the slight, she sends, first Kay, then Gawain, after him to require his return. The stranger cites his urgent need to pursue a quest that only he

23. Weston, *Quest of the Holy Grail*, 10-11.

24. Wolfram von Eschenbach, *Parzival*, ed. Gottfried Weber (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1963), 235, 21-24.

can perform, but is persuaded by Gawain, under the assurance of his own personal aid in his enterprise, to accompany him. But just as they arrive at the Queen's court, the knight is slain by a javelin hurled apparently from nowhere. In his grief and horror at this unexpected turn of events, Gawain readily promises the dying stranger to perform the task in his stead; whereupon, he dons the knight's armor and mounts his steed, and taking leave of the Queen, immediately sets off just as night is falling.

Gawain rides far into the night, and upon a great storm's arising takes shelter in a mysterious chapel, but is terrified to observe a hideous hand, accompanied by cries of lamentation, appear from nowhere and extinguish the only light, a taper upon a tall candlestick. Then suddenly Gawain's horse bolts and carries him out into the night again. But the storm has abated, and Gawain continues his journey as before.

By morning Gawain, having passed the bounds of Arthur's realm, into the kingdom of Logres, rides on for an entire day through a land that is waste and desolate, arriving finally at nightfall at the seaside, where he perceives a great Causeway over-arched by dark trees, and a glimmer of light at the further end. Gawain is inclined to wait for morning; but the horse, sensing familiar ground, seizes the bit in his teeth, and leaps into the Causeway at great speed, bringing the Knight ultimately to the lighted doorway of an imposing Castle. He is at first received with great joy by the Castle's inhabitants, but when his armor is removed and his hosts become aware that he is not the Knight they had expected, they leave him abruptly, and he is alone in the great hall, which is occupied only by a bier on which a dead Knight lies in state. The account then continues:

> When Sir Gawain beheld the bier he made the sign of the cross with his hand, like a man in terror. Over the bier, for honor, was spread a fine scarlet cloth worked from Greek samite, embroidered in gold thread with a cross. Sirs, on the breast of the corpse lay half a sword blade, the other portion missing. And never did men see steel so bright as the sheen of the sword fragment against the red silk! At head and foot of the bier stood four great burning candles in candlesticks of silver, one at each corner, from which also hung incense censors fashioned of gold. For a long while Sir Gawain remained there, filled with fear and perplexity, for he knew not which way to turn.[25]

Finally, however, a procession of priests enters, preceded by an ecclesiastic bearing a great silver cross, to perform the service of the dead over the dead knight, chanting the funeral mass and censing the body with the censors that hung on the candlesticks at the corners of the bier. Afterwards enter the Knights and Ladies of the Castle, weeping and lamenting; then suddenly vanish, leaving Gawain still more dolefully afraid.

Later, as Gawain awaits uncertainly in the hall, the people return, led by the Lord of the Castle, who invites him to join the evening meal. It is a sumptuous repast and mysteriously served, not by a retinue of servants, but by a Grail, a serving dish which mysteriously comes and goes without aid of human hand:

> As Gawain watched, a rich grail, entering, served the knights with great speed, placing bread before them and filling with wine rich cups of gold; immediately thereafter placing at each table silver dishes containing food. Sir Gawain, marvelling at the man-

25. William Roach, ed., *Continuations of the Old French "Perceval,"* (Philadelphia: The American Philosophical Society, 1952), 3: 463, 11. 7155-7175.

ner in which the company was served by the Grail without aid of servants, could scarcely eat. When all had partaken as much of the first course as pleased them, it was quickly replaced by a second. . . . So the meal continued, and when it ended the whole company vanished in a single blink of the eye into thin air.[26]

Gawain, once again alone, now sees near the corpse of the knight what had not been there before, namely, a lance—fixed upright in a vessel—and from it flowed a constant stream of blood. And as Gawain is absorbing this wonder, the Grail Lord reappears with a broken sword, and graciously requests him to reunite it, if he can, with the blade upon the breast of the dead Knight. When Gawain is unable to do so, his host offers him the opportunity to ask any questions he might desire, and he does so concerning the bleeding lance; but as the King is giving his answer, Gawain, bone wearied from his exhausting journey, falls asleep.

Next morning on awakening he finds himself and his horse and accoutrements in a field by the sea, and is unhappy and ashamed of having succumbed to his weariness of the night before. But as he rides away he discovers that the desolation of the countryside has been partially transformed during the night: "Never was beheld a land better furnished with water, wood, and meadows. What, the evening before, was the waste kingdom, wholly void of every good thing, God had now restored in the night; returning the streams to their proper channels throughout the countryside at the very moment he had asked why the lance bled."[27] But the people as he passes by them cry out that he has both "healed" and "slain" them, for he had asked only of the meaning of the lance, and not "why the Grail served."

Other versions of the Gawain account differ in such details as the descriptions of the Grail Castle and the Grail procession. In one, the Lord of the Castle is an old man lying on a couch, and the Grail is borne by a maiden weeping bitterly, who is accompanied by a youth bearing the bleeding lance, another maiden who carries a silver dish, and four attendants with a bier on which lies a body and a broken sword. This time Gawain awakens in a morass. In still another version, as Gawain enters the Grail Hall, in company with two other knights, Lancelot and Calogreant, he sees his host watching two youths playing chess. "In this version," according to the account, "the king is old, to all appearances ill, and is found in a goodly hall, all bestrown by roses, for it is summer-time. His vesture is white, cunningly wrought with diaper work of gold, and he is watching two youths playing chess when the knights enter."[28]

Stylistic Difficulties

The sophisticated styling and technical brilliance of Eliot's romance façade, his rejection of a conventional story format, his choice of an impressionistic rather than a realistic rendition of story data, throw up certain obstacles to the ready recognition and comprehension of the poem's essential meaning as Grail

26. *Ibid.*, 3:467, 469, ll. 7240-7262, 7271-7274.
27. *Ibid.*, 3:495, ll. 7716-7729.
28. Weston, *Quest of the Holy Grail*, 37.

romance. Almost every Grail story device present in the poem, for example, is embodied in some twisted or illusory facet of experience, which serves, in effect, to hide as much as it reveals the very object it may be presumed to represent. In this respect Eliot brings to his task a whole array of obfuscating techniques perfected during the course of his earlier verse experiments: distortion, irony, intentional ambiguity, exaggeration, parody; plus, in addition, an arsenal of stylistic and rhetorical devices particularly characterizing *The Waste Land's* own special *modus operandi*: telescoping and coalescing effects; bold and unexpected confrontations of antithetical styles; rapid kaleidoscopic scenic shifts. Under these conditions the reader perceives, as though through a glass darkly, Grail Castle, Grail Feast, Quester Knight, Perilous Chapel—all the appurtenances of the original Grail story complex—with only rarely any sharpening of focus in the direction of clarity and precision.

The impact of such tactics is further heightened by Eliot's substitution of what is essentially a thematic treatment, in place of the usual descriptive-narrative framework of conventional narrative verse. This fact does not mean, of course, that the original *mise en scène* of the medieval tales is not present in the poem; only that its details are not there in the sequential order of a tale, being evoked, rather, according to the needs of thematic movement. Since the latter is essentially repetitious in nature, particular Grail story equivalents in Eliot's poem, consequently, appear and reappear in a more or less random fashion from section to section throughout the poem, though typically—except for a few instances—under a variety of shapes and forms. Thus, the Grail Castle, to cite only one example, appears twice in Part One, once in Part Two, seven times in Part Three, and two times in Part Five; and under several bizarre disguises: once each as the city gas works, a cheap hotel, an ornate boudoir, a brothel, a rented flat; and twice each as a tower and a church. Furthermore, for the most part, as we survey the Castle we seem to be outside its walls, viewing its exterior façade silhouetted darkly against the cruel expanse of the barren wilderness environment; though in one important instance (Part Two), we are within the structure itself, in the great Grail Hall, observing as in a grotesque charade the varied scenic attributes of the medieval story: dead Knight; the copper-columned fireplace; Grail procession; maimed Fisher King; the bounty of the Grail.

One further technical detail aiding and abetting the general camouflaging of the Grail romance structure of the poem is Eliot's persistent doubling—and even, at times—tripling of meaning. This is essentially a thematic device, but applicable to the romance format as well. The phenomenon may be illustrated by reference to the chief speaker in the poem, who, though his primary function relates chiefly to the broader thematic substance of the poem, may in addition be found in the habiliments of the Grail Knight diligently engaged in his task as Quester; or those of the Fisher King, enjoying his leisurely pastime of fishing or holding lonely vigil in the Castle until the Grail Knight should arrive; or, on some occasions, wearing the masks of both Knight and King simultaneously. A second striking example of such ambiguous doubling of meaning in Eliot's poem is the episode of the Perilous Chapel in Part Five, which, while it is devoted princi-

pally to depicting by means of a wild illusory vision the Chapel and its environs, also contains epithets descriptive of the Grail Castle as well, though the latter is never mentioned as such per se: so that at one moment we seem to be observing the Chapel, and at another, by a sudden shift of emphasis, the towers of the Grail Castle, hanging inverted, miragelike, in the air.

Yet despite the almost overwhelming obscuration of the surface details in Eliot's Grail romance format just described, there are, nonetheless, certain aspects of its events and scenes that stand out in sufficiently clear outlines to be recognizable as such when one holds the specific key to their meaning. One of the most obvious of these, of course, is the Waste Land topography in the poem. The latter appears chiefly in two forms: on the one hand, as a formidable desert landscape, grim and forbidding, desiccated by drouth and heat; and, on the other, as an impregnable morasslike setting, infested with rats and marked by the mouldering remains of human bones. The desert form of the Waste Land, invariably associated by Eliot with the Christian aspect of the decay of religion theme in the poem, recurs sporadically throughout the poem though principally in Parts One and Five, the swamp form—associated essentially with the Mystery religions—chiefly in Part Three.[29] Other forms of Waste Land terrain, however, also appear briefly in the poem, though they are less readily identifiable, being in effect symbolic rather than descriptive in nature: *e.g.*, the season of winter; the Infernolike landscape of contemporary London; the tedious meaningless existence of both upper and lower classes of modern society.

Not quite so obviously portrayed, but achieving a degree of substantiality of meaning with the application of the proper clues, are the Grail Castle with its connecting Causeway, and the Grail Feast partaken of by the Grail Castle company and the visiting Knight. The Feast is consistently evoked during the course of the poem by invideous references to food or repasts of various sorts: the dried tubers of the opening lines of the poem, for example, or the hot gammon of Lil's and Albert's Sunday evening meal in Part Two. For its part, the most overt clue to the presence of the Castle is it location near water. As Miss Weston points out, proximity to water in some form is a characteristic feature of the sacred edifice in the medieval tales, which traditionally stood, as she suggests, "either on or near the sea, or on the banks of an important river."[30] Thus, both of the churches in *The Waste Land*, Saint Mary Woolnoth and Magnus Martyr, which because of the mutual interchange of Christian and Mystery elements in the poem (see footnote 3) can be considered to symbolize the Castle, are close to water, namely, the Thames River. Saint Mary in addition is located near what is in effect a Causeway—London Bridge, at its Southwark entrance. By this same token, other, and less likely, candidates for the Grail edifice also appear: *e.g.*, the Cannon Street Hotel, which is part of the immediate Thames environment, and the municipal

29. The desert landscape, inasmuch as it is associated in Eliot's mind seemingly with the decline of historical Christianity, was probably suggested to him by the body of Biblical metaphor in which the use of the desert as an image of spiritual desiccation plays a prominent role. His employment of a swamp-form of Waste Land to evoke the Mystery cult backgrounds in the poem was probably occasioned by his reading of the version of the Gawain adventure in which Gawain, the morning after his visit to the Grail Castle, awakens to find himself in a dismal morass.

30. Weston, *Ritual to Romance*, 51.

gas works, which, as described in the poem, adjoins one of the man-made canals in London's industrial district.

One final point to be noted is that the hope of the ultimate healing of the Fisher King, and, through sympathetic magic, of the restoration of the Waste Land to its pristine fertility—wholly achieved at the conclusion of the Perceval story, partially in the Gawain version—never occurs in *The Waste Land*. This is quite understandable in view of the fact that all human values in Eliot's poem are consistently traduced and subverted by the overwhelmingly pejorative nature of its general methodology and the total negativism of its themes—religious decay, love sterility, cultural decadence. Moreover, wherever affirmative values do momentarily appear—invariably for purely ironic purposes—their ameliorative force is immediately revoked by the virulence of the matter directly following. This affirmation-negation formula, which is a standard technique in the poem, may be illustrated by what is perhaps the most poignant example of affirmation in the poem—one on which, incidentally, commentators on the work have most frequently based their hypothesis that *The Waste Land* reveals a degree of hope for the unfortunate creatures who inhabit its doleful realm—namely, the suggestion of rain, which concludes the episode of the Perilous Chapel: "Then a damp gust / Bringing rain" (11. 394-395). What is actually the case is that any affirmation implied is immediately and effectively negated by what follows in the opening lines of the Voice of the Thunder passage, which offers not the full consummation of the promised moisture in abundant rain, resulting in turn, as in the Gawain version, in verdant fields and flowing streams; but a picture of imminent drouth and desiccation, in which the withering of vegetation and the receding of water are paramount factors: *viz.*, "Ganga was sunken, and the limp leaves / Waited for rain" (11. 396-397). Nor is there any further evidence in this particular passage, or in the remainder of the poem for that matter, that any such fulfillment ever actually occurs.

The Romance Façade

The specific elements making up the romance façade of Eliot's poem—the journey of the Grail Knight, the events clustering around the Grail Castle, the Waste Land itself—have their initial development in Part One: "The Burial of the Dead." Thus, in the very opening lines there are intimations of a doleful winter Waste Land, grim and desolate, to which the Waste Landers desperately cling, fearing the rehabilitation of their land through the healing of the Fisher King. Hence, for them April, whose fertile freshets would signal this propitious event, is the "cruellest" of months. Also evoked in this opening April passage is the Grail Feast, in the meagre repast of withered roots—"dried tubers"—of which the Waste Landers partake, ignoring the rich *Lebens-Speise* of the Grail's original bounty as they ignore the refreshing rains of spring for the winter's barren camouflage of snow.

A similar symbolic Waste Land occurs in the Hofgarten section that immediately follows, this one constituted by the hopeless and tedious existence of modern upper-class society. Here occurs also the first hint of the ubiquitous presence of

the Grail Castle in the poem, by means of a suggestion of its "colonnade"—the series of columns supporting its entablature and roof; and by the proximity of water nearby, the Starnbergersee, its surface dotted with pleasure craft and other evidences of water activities, further affirming the Castle's presence in the vicinity—though it itself is not actually seen. The pleasure seekers enjoying the facilities of the park, like their brethren in the preceding passage, have the same fear of the coming of the life-giving water, fleeing for shelter to escape its sudden influx in a summer shower, beneath the colonnade; where they further illustrate the tedium of their useless lives by consuming the time in idle chatter and endless cups of coffee. Of such desultory moments, it is implied, are their whole lives composed: a phenomenon in significant contrast to the life of the Grail Castle company at the moment of arrival of the Grail Knight in the Parzival version of the tale. The latter, accoutred sadly and soberly, in deference to their wounded lord, the Fisher King, dutifully constrain their normal chivalric recreations, mourning his unfortunate fate.

Near the end of the Hofgarten passage occur two further instances in this section that may be construed in Grail romance terms: a reference to mountains ("In the mountains, there you feel free"—line 17), which anticipates in capsule form the tortuous mountain passage of Part Five through which the Grail Knight labors on his way to the Chapel Perilous; and one to the custom of the leisure classes of making their annual pilgrimage to the temperate climates of southern spas, which points obliquely to the Grail Quest journey of the intrepid Knight ("I read, much of the night, and go south in the winter"—line 18).

The first suggestion of the Grail itself in the poem occurs in the Son of Man passage that follows, with its description of a great rock standing solitary in the desert wastes, darkly silhouetted by the reddening rays of the evening sun against the barren desert vista. The Son of Man section is inseparably linked by its arid imagery, the familiar Hebraic symbols of root and branch out of Jesse, and Eliot's own note to line 20 on the prophet Ezekiel, with the Christian tradition in the poem. But the Red Rock is additionally the Grail; for this stone is not only the Rock on which Christ declared he would build his church, but the Grail-Stone of Wolfram's *Parzival* as well; an identification, incidentally, which is further reinforced in Eliot's passage by the line: "What are the roots that clutch, what branches grow" (line 19), which echoes Wolfram's account of the Grail as "the prize of Paradise . . . root and branch, beyond price." In contrast to the provision of eternal life proffered by the Grail in the original tale, however, Eliot's Grail Stone offers no equivalent hope to his Quester Knight. For though invited to come in under the shadow of the Rock to be shown something more than the tenuous span of human life, namely, the promise of a life beyond the grave, he is shown instead only what he knows already, his own inner uncertainty regarding this very same potentiality: that is, "fear in a handful of dust" (line 30).

Within the broader thematic pattern of Eliot's work the speaker or "I" of his poem is generally identifiable as a modern equivalent of the traditional vatic or religious poet, either in the Hebraic-Christian sense of a prophetic voice, a modern Ezekiel, or as the epic poet associated with the writing of the Grail ro-

mances. But he may as well, in accordance with given needs of the Grail romance machinery in Eliot's poem, assume either the mask of the Fisher King or that of the Grail Quester, as in the episode concerning the Red Rock in the desert. It is in the latter role also that we find him in the Hyacinth Garden passage, which reflects in terms of the Grail romance façade the meeting of the Knight with the Grail Maiden (pictured here under the semblance of the Hyacinth Girl), who instructs the Grail Knight, in some of the Grail tale versions, regarding the location of the sacred structure. "It is invariably a maiden," suggests Miss Weston in *From Ritual to Romance*, "who directs the hero on the road to the Grail Castle."[31] The hyacinth blossoms in the Girl's arms and the wetness of her hair, perhaps from the morning dew, or tears, are, of course, symbols of fertility and growth, and hence of the earlier pristine condition of the Waste Land prior to the wounding of the Fisher King—and of its potential condition subsequent to his healing. The meeting of the Knight and the Maiden, however, lacks the propitious ending of the original episode, for this modern Grail Knight is totally incapable of sustaining the necessary communication for proper reception of the Maiden's message, describing himself as follows: "I could not / Speak, and my eyes failed, I was neither / Living nor dead, and I knew nothing" (11. 38-40). As a result, his mission is thus rendered impotent from his failure to learn the way to the Castle.

The two German quotations that enclose the Hyacinth Garden section— borrowed from Richard Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde*—also have significance for the Grail romance façade of the poem: *i.e.*, both serve to evoke particular facets of Wagner's opera, which in turn suggest certain aspects of the Grail story. The first of the quotations constitutes part of a short aria sung just before the scene in which the illicit passion between Isolde and Tristan is precipitated by their drinking from a cup containing a powerful love philtre. The latter is, of course, readily identifiable with the romance Grail vessel, itself like the magic love cup possessed of miraculous powers. But Eliot may also have meant for this quotation to evoke as well the original meeting between the two lovers, where, though the fact is unrecognized by either, the unconscious course of their deepening affection had had its initial beginning. On that occasion, Tristan had sought help of the Irish princess' necromantic skill in medicinal herbs for a battle wound that would not heal. Isolde's powers had returned the Knight to health, but not before she had discovered a notch in Tristan's sword which matched perfectly a sliver of steel earlier embedded in the fatal wound of her betrothed knight, Sir Morold. Only the power of her incipient love for the hero had then prevented her from slaying the helpless Tristan in revenge. Both Tristan's unhealing wound and his damaged sword offer rather close parallels to certain Grail romance motifs: the first, to the Fisher King's own unhealing lance-wound; the second, to the broken sword lying upon the breast of the dead knight in the Grail Castle hall.

The one-line quotation that closes the Hyacinth Garden section is the cry of Tristan's servant sent, near the conclusion of the opera, by his dying master to herald the arrival of Isolde's ship when it should come bearing her and her healing herbs. But the servant sees nothing; there is no ship in sight; and he cries in

31. *Ibid.*, 169.

anguish: "*Oed' und leer das Meer.*" Eliot's Grail Knight, who at the conclusion of *The Waste Land* witnesses no clear vision of the expected Castle, may likewise cry out in equal sorrow and despair: "Wide and empty the sea!"

The Madame Sosostris passage that follows the Hyacinth Garden lines seems designated in Grail legend terms to present the Knight at the very beginning of his Quest. The Madame would obviously correspond in this relationship to some authentic priestess in the original Mystery faith instructing the initiate in the exoteric and esoteric teachings of the cult. Here the original priestess has degenerated into a common fortune teller and the sacred Tarot cards—the Madame's "wicked pack of cards"—into their conventional contemporary usage in amateur or professional circles for the casting of horoscopes. Though the cards in general in the Madame's deck are more relevant to the Mystery cult features in Eliot's poem than to the Grail romance format, two of them, the Drowned Phoenician Sailor and the Man with Three Staves, do have a direct bearing on the latter. The first of these, the Phoenician Sailor, historically reflects the arrival of the classical Mystery cults from Asia Minor as part of the cultural impact of Phoenician commerce, and belongs, as Madame Sosostris declares, to the Quester: "Here, said she, / Is your card, the drowned Phoenician Sailor, / (Those are pearls that were his eyes. Look!)"—lines 46-48. The effect of the drowned status of the Sailor is, of course, to frustrate dramatically for Eliot's modern romance the original spiritual affirmation implicit in the historical Mystery cults and their medieval heritage in the romances, inasmuch as their establishment was successfully achieved, not by wrecked vessels and lost seamen, but by live, undrowned human forces. The second card, the Man with Three Staves, according to Eliot himself, is designed to evoke the presence of the Grail Castle Lord, because, as he himself remarks in his note to line 46, he associated the Man "quite arbitrarily, with the Fisher King himself." Yet despite Eliot's avowal of the arbitrariness of this association, there is nonetheless a degree of logic in it. For the pictorial representation on the card's face may be taken to suggest certain aspects of the Grail Castle King, as well as the meaning traditionally denoted in the card's use in fortune telling. An authentic member of the Tarot pack, the card of the Three Sceptres or Wands displays a distinguished person standing on a cliff, from which vantage point he observes the passing of his fleet of merchant ships, the three staves planted in the ground beside him.[32] The ships, of course, immediately evoke the image of the Phoenician seamen leaving their religious faith along with their goods in the ports of the classical world, including their Vegetation Deity, prototype of the Fisher King of the romances. The three staves can only evoke the three great towers of his Castle as it is described in the Perceval version of the tale.

The closing section of Part One, the Unreal City passage, depicts still another version of the traditional Waste Land of the romances: the spiritual Inferno of modern London, where the souls of the Waste Landers, flowing like spectres over London Bridge, are completely without hope of spiritual restitution either for themselves or for their land. Nor is the Grail Castle, symbolized in the passage

32. Kimon Friar and John Malcolm Brinnin, *Modern Poetry: American and British* (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, Inc., 1951), 479.

by the church of Saint Mary Woolnoth, close by the Thames and London Bridge, its attendant Causeway, any more efficacious in its spiritual power, since its only recorded virtue is its power to toll the hours of the day. The persona, once more in the Grail Quester mask, is depicted as having arrived in the vicinity of the Castle; but he does not enter, nor does he make proper inquiry, for he ignores entirely the sacred Grail Castle emblems, and directs his questions not to the Grail King—who is, incidentally, not even present—but to a Waste Lander in the city street, a certain Stetson, concerning a mouldering corpse in the latter's garden: "That corpse you planted last year in your garden, / Has it begun to sprout? Will it bloom this year?" (ll. 70-71). The reference to sprouting recalls Sir James Frazer's description of the Vegetation-God effigies made of corn and planted in the fields in the Egyptian Mystery rites,[33] the germination of which signified the god's resurrection, with consequent assurance of a bountiful crop. Hence the corpse in Stetson's garden may be identified with the dead Knight in the Castle, one of the equivalents in the Grail romances of the ancient Vegetation Deity. Frazer's further comment that the annual rise of the Nile to flood stage, bringing by its inundation fertility to the fields, was heralded by the presence of the Dog Star, Sirius, in the Egyptian nocturnal sky toward dawn,[34] may have been the inspiration for Eliot's ironic paraphrase of lines from Cornelia's dirge in John Webster's play *The White Devil*: "O keep the Dog far hence, that's friend to men, / Or with his nails he'll dig it up again!" (ll. 74-75); the suggestion of which is that the speaker does not wish the intended resurrection of the god, which would automatically transform the wasted lands once again into fertile fields, to occur.

From Part One, which offers only an exterior view of Castle scenes, Eliot takes us, in Part Two, directly inside the Castle walls, where certain salient features of both the Perceval and the Gawain adventures[35] are presented. Thus, in the opening Lady's Boudoir passage there seems to be a rather extensive cataloging of sights and scenes strongly reminiscent of the Perceval account. Note the following list of parallels: *item,* the ornately adorned couch of the Grail Castle Lord and the Lady's chair "like a burnished throne" (line 77); *item,* the candlesticks carried by the youths in the Grail procession and the "seven-branched candelabra" (line 82) on her dressing table; *item,* the Grail Castle fireplace with its chimney columns fashioned of thick solid copper and the Lady's own fireplace, constructed of colored stone (copper, it may be noted, though it does not enter into the fireplace's construction, is nonetheless present: *i.e.*, the fire that blazes within it is "fed with copper"—blue vitriol flakes—to color its flames "green and orange"—ll. 94-59); *item,* the Grail Lord and the "barbarous king" Tereus (line 99); *item,* the Grail itself, invideously belittled by comparison with a common kitchen vessel by Eliot's use of an Elizabethan verse convention, which characterizes the beautiful song of the nightingale by a purely conventional epithet: " 'Jug Jug' " (line 103).[36]

33. Frazer, *The Golden Bough*, 437.

34. *Ibid.*, 429.

35. Eliot, it may be noted, draws indiscriminately throughout his poem from both the Perceval and Gawain versions for Grail legend data, using whichever seems most appropriate for his particular context at the moment. The Boudoir passage, which follows, offers an excellent example of the latter practice.

36. Compare John Lyly's "Alexander and Campaspe": "What bird so sings, yet does so wail? / Oh, 'tis the ravished nightingale, / Jug, jug, jug, jug, tereu, she cries, / And still her woes at midnight rise."

From the same passage may be added a few other important reflections, equally impressionistic in form, of Perceval's visit to the Castle: the dainty and exotic dishes set before the King and Perceval at the Grail Feast, evoked by the profusion of cosmetic jars and perfume vials that cover the Lady's dressing table; the dazzling luminence emitted by the Grail as it is carried into the Grail Castle Hall, suggested in the "glitter" of the Lady's jewels refracting in brilliant facets the smoky light of the multibranched candelabra; the Fisher King once again, in the fish symbol dimly perceived in the light of the fire ("In which sad light, a carved dolphin swam"—line 96) adorning the wall above the fireplace; and, finally, the air of expectancy of the Grail company patiently awaiting the imminent arrival of the Grail Knight, intimated by the Lady's impatient combing of her hair as she listens for the sound of footsteps on her stairway.

But the passage's rich evocation of Grail Castle elements is still not exhausted: for an important event of the Gawain account is also highlighted in the Boudoir section—using, incidentally, some of the very same pictorial vignettes already cited, the latter now viewed as it were from a slightly different angle. The incident in question is the funeral mass entoned over the dead Knight as Gawain stands near the bier in the great Grail Hall. To accomplish his purpose Eliot uses a device that also appears elsewhere in his verse with regard to other forms of religious services, namely, the scurrilous parody.[37] As the device is applied here its details are too blurred to establish it in a clear-cut fashion, but they are sufficiently plain to suggest in broad outline the accoutrements and actions of the priests as they conduct the service for the dead. Thus the traditional ornateness of the Catholic altar is reflected in the luxurient magnificance of the Lady's dressing stand; the altar candles in the seven-branched candelabra; the sacred wine and the altar boys, in the supporting structure of the dressing table, described as "wrought with fruited vines / From which a golden Cupidon peeped out / (Another hid his eyes behind his wing)"—11. 79-81 (are we not here meant to see in the fruited vines a suggestion of the precious wine that becomes the blood of Christ, and in the cupidons a vision of mischievous altar boys?); the censing of the body by the ecclesiastical incense in the Lady's synthetic perfumes, "unguent, powdered, or liquid" (line 88), caught up in the ascending smoke of the candles; and the holy Chalice in the rendition of the nightingale's song by a pejorative phrase: " 'Jug Jug' to dirty ears" (line 103).

The middle and concluding portions of Part Two, consisting of the Bad Nerves section and the London Pub scene, continue the interior view of the Castle begun in the opening section, clothing its particular details in various ulterior disguises. Thus for the noble company of Lords and Ladies who occupy the legendary Grail Castle, we get instead, as derogatory representations of their chivalric refinements, the neurotic posturing of an overly strung upper-class woman and the Cockney vulgarity of Lil's loquacious girl friend; for the sound of the Grail Quester knocking for admittance, mere noise ("What is that noise?"—line 117); for his auspicious meeting in the medieval tale with the Grail Maiden, a suggestion

37. For example, "Sweeney Among the Nightingales" and "Mr. Eliot's Sunday Morning Service." For a full discussion of the device, see my article, "The Scurrilous Parody in T. S. Eliot's Early Religious Poetry," *Descant*, 16 (Spring 1972):43-48.

(echoing the earlier Hyacinth Garden passage) of his earlier failure to comprehend the maiden's directions: "Do you know nothing?" (line 122); and, finally, for the Grail Quester's task successfully completed in whole or in part in the original versions, a repetition of the earlier reference to the Drowned Sailor's total incapacity: "I remember / Those are pearls that were his eyes" (11. 124-125).

But perhaps the most brilliantly conceived of the parallels with the Grail story in these two latter sections of Part Two are the chess game that climaxes the Bad Nerves passage, and the evening repast that graces Albert's and Lil's Sunday evening in the London Pub section. Regarding the first of these, it should be recalled that in one of the Gawain versions, as Gawain arrives at the Castle, he perceives the Grail Lord observing two youths engaged in a game of chess. In the original account, because the common expectancy is that the Knight when he arrives will successfully fulfill his task, the game is simply a pleasant pastime to while away the hours until the arrival shall occur; but in *The Waste Land's* romance format, the event is charged with an atmosphere of disillusionment and despair, arising from a sense of the absolute impossibility of the Grail Quester's ever arriving! The modern inhabitants of the Castle thus live in a state of intolerable ennui, unable to rest or sleep, "Pressing lidless eyes and waiting for a knock upon the door (11. 137-138)—the knock of the Quester Knight with the potentiality of spiritual healing for themselves and their land. But a knock that may never come!

The Grail Feast, as represented by the Sunday evening dinner at Albert's and Lil's, is similarly disparaged; consisting not of the miraculous Life-Food of the medieval Grail, but of a cheap pork delicacy enjoyed by lower class London society, a hot gammon: "Well, that Sunday Albert was home, they had a hot gammon, / And they asked me in to dinner, to get the beauty of it hot" (11. 166-167). The denigration of the Grail Feast's momentous significance is thus accomplished by the reduction of the various Grail Feast components to a conspicuous level of inanity: the Castle to a lower class London flat; the Castle's inhabitants to low class Pub frequenters; the Feast itself to a commonplace meal; the Knight to a supercilious Cockney woman! The climax of this general degenerative process is perhaps the concluding phrase in the preceding quotation, which changes the emphasis of the Feast from a wholly spiritual connotation to the mere physical titillation of the appetite: *i.e.*, "to get the beauty of it hot."

Part Three returns again to the exterior view of the Grail Castle—which, incidentally, remains the dominant point of view for the rest of the poem—opening with an elaborate view of the Thames as it flows through the heart of urban London. At the beginning of the passage we are reminded of the barren silence of the desert form of the Waste Land, where the wind of the spirit "Crosses the brown land unheard" (line 175). But almost immediately we move into a Waste-Land swamp, a desolate and noisome scene of sullen waters, rattling bones, and rats creeping through the vegetation, dragging their slimy bellies on the bank. Nearby is a grotesque representation of the Grail Castle, the city gasworks, and the persona in the mask of the Fisher King engaged in fishing: "While I was fishing in the dull canal / On a winter evening round behind the gashouse" (11. 189-190). The terms of the scene are wholly derogatory. For this is not the lucid trout

stream of the Perceval version of the tale, but a stagnant industrial canal; and the season is not the propitious season of spring, projecting the hope of life and growth, but the Waste Landers' death wish for the barren comfort of winter. The term "gashouse," of course, is patently a denigratory epithet for the Castle, "gas" being a particularly unprepossessing adjective to denote the spirit of life dwelling within the original edifice.

The gashouse is the first of four major representations of the Castle in Part Three—all more or less equal in the degree of scurrility of their descriptions. The second instance is the Cannon Street Hotel, in the Mr. Eugenides section, in which the persona of the poem, now back once again in the mask of the Grail Knight, is given a gratuitous invitation by the Smyrna merchant to a business luncheon in the hotel dining room. The episode comprises another sordid manifestation of the sacred Grail Feast, the hotel's Business Man's Special representing the Grail's beneficent bounty, and the Smyrna merchant the Fisher King. The nationality of this rather unsavory character offers the chief clue to this identification, his business address being Smyrna, a principal city in Asia Minor and the original home of the Mystery cults.

The Typist's flat, depicted in the following Clerk-Typist section, constitutes the third important rendering of the Castle and its affairs in Part Three. The anticipated arrival of the Typist's lover, of course, reflects the expected arrival of the Knight; her preparation of a meal—she "lights / Her stove, and lays out food in tins (ll. 222-223)—the Grail Feast; and the Clerk, the Knight himself. Over all lies the unsavory aura of a sordid assignation. Finally, there is in this passage as well an intimation of the Grail itself, obscurely hidden within the surface details of the scene. For the descriptive term "carbuncular" applied to the particularly unpleasant appearance of the Clerk's complexion may also be taken in a second meaning of its noun form "carbuncle" as an ambiguous reference to the precious stone the garnet, the term "carbuncle" referring to the gem when it is cut into a rounded, unfaceted shape. As may be learned from the description in Exodus 28:15-20 of the function and accoutrements of the high priest Aaron, the carbuncle was one of the jewels used in the symbolical decorative design of the breastplate worn during the performance of his official duties. From this identification it is an easy transfer via the ecclesiastical interchange in the poem between the Hebraic-Christian tradition and the Mystery religions, matrix of the Grail romance tales, to the sacred Grail Stone in the Parzival story.

The most conventional portrayal of the Castle appears in the fourth example of its evocation: namely, as the church of Magnus Martyr, situated, as mentioned earlier, near the Thames, close by a public bar—"Where fishmen lounge at noon" (line 220). The latter oblique reference by means of the piscatorial symbolism to the Fisher King, of course, strengthens the identification of the church as the romance edifice. Like Saint Mary Woolnoth before it, Magnus Martyr suggests a failure of its ecclesiastical function, for the color symbolism adorning its outer walls is described as totally incomprehensible to its parishioners: "where the walls / Of Magnus Martyr hold / *Inexplicable* splendor of Ionian white and gold (lines 263-265—italics mine). The church's spiritual inadequacy is equally applicable, of course, to the Grail Castle in the modern Waste Land of Eliot's poem.

Throughout Part Three there appear numerous minor parallels to Grail legend scene and event, which may be mentioned briefly before leaving this section of the poem. These include the anticipated arrival of Sweeney at the establishment of Mrs. Porter; Sweeney offering a particularly unwholesome equivalent of the Quester Knight, and her establishment of the Castle. Especially appropriate to these matters is the scurrilous suggestion, in the washing of their feet in soda water by Mrs. Porter and her daughter, of the washing of the feet of Parsifal in Wagner's opera of that name by the witch Kundry; and the closing line of Paul Verlaine's sonnet "Parsifal," which constitutes line 202 of *The Waste Land*. Verlaine's poem generally details the trials and ultimate triumph of the Grail Knight over sundry temptations. To these may be added: 1) various references to nautical craft on the Thames, which suggest the Fisher King's boat in which he and a companion are engaged in angling when Perceval first sees the King; 2) a still further comparison in the poem of the sacred Grail vessel to a jug (line 204); 3) a fleeting glimpse of the Grail Castle's towers in the suggestive phrase "White towers" (line 289); and, finally, 4) the reference to the entry of the youthful St. Augustine into the city of Carthage—"To Carthage then I came" (line 307)—portraying once more the arrival of the Grail Knight at the Castle door.

Part Four, which consists only of a short interludal lyric in Eliot's overall sequence, generally speaking, has only a slight bearing on Eliot's poem as Grail romance, reflecting more accurately a facet of the poem's general thematic structure, the Mystery cult ritual of the casting of an effigy of the Vegetation God into the river,[38] though it should be mentioned also that it is in this portion of the poem that the Madame's horoscope to the Grail Knight, "Fear death by water" (line 55), is fulfilled. Part Five, however, as if in compensation, contains perhaps the clearest evidence in the poem that Eliot's plan regarding his poem is indeed its representation in modern form of the scenic details of the original Grail romance sagas; for it is Eliot himself who, in his opening note to Part Five, formally designates the Chapel Perilous as such, and the journey of the poem's persona through a desertlike mountain pass as the "approach" to it. Now, since only the Gawain version of the Grail legend includes the Perilous Chapel episode, it may be assumed that the persona at this point is wearing the mask of Gawain in the latter's role as Grail Quester, and that the visit to the Chapel in Eliot's version will roughly parallel that of Gawain's in the Gawain account.

And so it does, though the episode itself is actually much less of a narrative fact—even though the Chapel is physically present—than a horrendous vision, a wild mirage set against the cataclysm of a dissolving universe. Its mountainous-wilderness environment is marked by ruinous scenic detail and hallucinatory images: of the sound of water on stone where no water is; of a distorted vision of Christ on the Emmaus road; of the hooded hordes of the dead swarming over the endless plains of a vast Inferno—all of which, of course, offer incidental evocation of Grail story elements reported earlier: desert wilderness; rock; the illusory sound of water that has no real existence. As the Quester Knight approaches nearer and nearer the Chapel's immediate locale, these illusory effects rise to a

38. See Miss Weston's account of this rite (*Ritual to Romance*, 47).

climax, crowding in rapid succession upon each other, in an almost unbearable accumulation of horrifying sights and sounds. Above, "high in the air," occurs the mournful susurrus of weeping, eerie cries of lament, the "Murmur of maternal lamentation" (line 368); in the violet air cities crack, re-form, and burst again: "Falling towers / Jerusalem, Athens, Alexandria / Vienna London" (11. 374-377). Below, in the immediate setting of the Chapel, like a fantastic nightmare, a woman fiddles a wild overture on the strings of her hair; bats "with baby faces," whistling and beating their wings, crawl head downward on blackened walls; towers hang "upside down in air" like a bizarre inverted mirage; while haunted voices sing out of "empty cisterns and exhausted wells" (line 375). Amidst this overwhelming desolation the Chapel itself is spiritually empty, being, in the most literal sense, "only the wind's home" (line 389), without meaning or purpose; around it a ruined graveyard, tumbled and uncared for. Then suddenly from the Chapel's roof there is the sound of a cock crowing, followed by a flash of lightning and "a damp gust / Bringing rain" (11. 394-395), and all is abruptly calm again.

Eliot's chief variations from the Gawain account of the Perilous Chapel may be observed by reviewing the details of the original. As Miss Weston points out concerning the episode of the Perilous Chapel generally:

> The details vary: sometimes there is a Dead Body laid on the altar; sometimes a Black Hand extinguishes the tapers; there are strange and threatening voices, and the general impression is that this is an adventure in which supernatural, and evil, forces are engaged.
>
> Such an adventure befalls Gawain on his way to the Grail castle. He is overtaken by a terrible storm, and coming to a Chapel, standing at a crossways in the middle of a forest, enters for shelter. The altar is bare, with no cloth, or covering, nothing is thereon but a great golden candlestick with a tall taper burning within it. Behind the altar is a window, and as Gawain looks a Hand, black and hideous, comes through the window, and extinguishes the taper, while a voice makes lamentation loud and dire, beneath which the very building rocks. Gawain's horse shies for terror, and the knight, making the sign of the Cross, rides out of the Chapel, to find the storm abated, and the great wind fallen. Thereafter the night was calm and clear.[39]

Miss Weston also points out that in some accounts of the Chapel there is, in addition, a Perilous Cemetery close by, the two being closely connected with each other, not only in location but in spiritual meaning as well.[40]

As may be seen, Eliot omits in his account of the Chapel several of the items in the original Gawain account, which he otherwise follows rather closely. There is no black hand, for example, extended through a window behind the altar to extinguish a taper; indeed, the Chapel is without windows at all; nor is there either altar or candle present. As a matter of fact, Eliot's Chapel is totally empty; its walls blank and staring, its door swinging idly to the wind's thrust. On the other hand, there are also certain likenessess between the two versions: *e.g.*, the imminent presence of a great storm, much like that through which Gawain rode and from which he sought refuge in the Chapel, and the sudden calm afterwards; a ruined graveyard, the stones tumbled and scattered, bathed in an eerie moonlight glow.

39. *Ibid.*, 174.
40. *Ibid.*, 178-179.

But what is perhaps most interesting about Eliot's account is the fact that several of its details seem more apposite to the original description of the Grail Castle and its environs than to the Chapel: *e. g.*, the sound of maternal lamentation, which, although it offers a more accurate reflection of the lament of the women over the dead god in the ancient Mystery cults, also recalls the mourning of the knights and ladies of the Castle over the dead Knight lying in state in the great hall; a Waste Land, like some nebulous Inferno realm where the dead swarm over endless plains, the latter still desolate and unhealed; hallucinatory effects like those perceived by Perceval attempting to follow the Fisher King's directions, only to be misled, seemingly, until, as if by magic spell, the Castle abruptly appears; inverted towers hanging mysteriously in the air, suggesting the Castle's imposing three-tower front; and, finally, the unexpected gust of rain, recalling the waters loosed in their channels at the moment of Gawain's original inquiry of the meaning of the lance, refreshing and reviving the barren land.

Eliot's intrusion of descriptive detail from the Grail Castle section of the original Gawain story into those of the Perilous Chapel passage seems intended, not only as part of the broader derogation of Grail story scenic materials which marks his poem in general, but to suggest as well both the spiritual incapacities of the Grail Knight, who is too bemused by the hallucinatory impact of the Chapel to recognize it clearly as such, and a ghastly foreboding of what he will find at his ultimate destination: the seashore flanking the wilderness through which he has ridden; a shore on which the Castle does appear, but fallen upon evil days, its Causeway collapsing into disrepair and its central tower fallen into ruin.

We are offered a firm glimpse of this very desolation in the final passage of the poem, which follows after the Voice of the Thunder section, with its aura of despair and unfulfillment of the promises proferred by the original Thunder fable; for as the persona Grail Knight sits disconsolately upon the seashore,[41] "Fishing, with the arid plain behind me" (line 425), the only sign of a Causeway is a crumbling bridge ("London Bridge is falling down falling down falling down"—line 427) and of the Castle itself a broken tower ("*Le Prince d'Aquitaine a la tour abolie*"—line 430). And though he imagines that he might discover some feasible substitute to alleviate the disaster he has found—"Shall I at least set my lands in order?" (line 426)—there is available for the task only impotent fragments, so that in reality he is defeated even before he begins.

Like the original legend of the Grail, Eliot's modern Grail romance— as may be seen once the obscurities of its details are obviated—depicts the adventure of a religious Quester under the symbology of Perilous Chapel, Grail Castle, Fisher King, Grail Knight, Grail Feast; but whereas Gawain attains a limited success, successfully passing the ordeal of the Chapel and partially achieving the blessings of the Castle, Eliot's Grail Knight fails each, at the conclusion of his journey both the Fisher King and his Land remaining unhealed, unblessed. Like its medieval

41. Although the Grail Knight mask seems most appropriate here for the persona, that of the Fisher King is also germane. We have seen him earlier fishing in a "dull canal." His efforts to set his lands in order—*i.e.*, the healing of himself and the restoration of his Kingdom to its original fertile state—could be as unrewarding as the Grail Knight's, considering the fragmentary nature of his materials—tag phrases and broken quotations.

counterpart, also, Eliot's poem portrays the decline of religious values in the world; but whereas in the original tale, despite the concomitant decadence of the Mystery cults, the Christian faith remains vigorous and triumphant, both Christianity and Mystery cults have lost their power and meaning in the modern Waste Land of western civilization. The failure of both Eliot's persona generally, and his Grail Knight specifically, is consequently irreparable and total.

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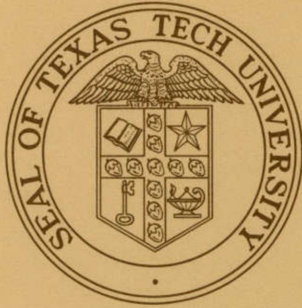
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