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**PRUFROCK AND  
1920 POEMS:  
ANALYSING  
THE PROTO-  
WASTELAND**

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## THE CITY AS ORIGIN

T.S. Eliot's earlier poems, published in two volumes titled *Prufrock and Other Observations* (1917) and *1920* (initially named *Ara Vos Prec*) have been eclipsed by *The Waste Land* (1921) and its extraordinarily rich, multifaceted reception. Yet most of the poems contained in these first two books prefigure what was to come later: what explodes in *The Waste Land* is as it were latent in the verses that preceded it. Although it may sound paradoxical, we could even state that the poems written before 1921 complete the poem that followed them. This impression is reinforced by the fact that most readers come to "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" or "Gerontion"<sup>1</sup> after having read Eliot's best-known poem, even perhaps with some critical or historical knowledge about it.

The purpose of this essay is to analyse Eliot's earlier production, in search of consistencies with the later poems (especially *The Waste Land*) in terms of imagery, where they are more obvious. A number of images will be discussed in the sections that follow; together, they make up an imagery cluster or construct that could be labelled "the city," or, as suggested by the title, "the proto-wasteland," since it contains, developed or in embryo, some of the basic components of "the wasteland" construct, more complex in its range of images and the meanings they convey.

## WANDERING IN THE STREETS

Let us begin by considering urban imagery, common to several poems in *Prufrock*. The city, as imagined by the poet for his first creatures to inhabit, is a composite space, having its roots, according to Viorica Patea, in the American poet's childhood and adolescence in his hometown, Saint Louis (Missouri):

Eliot se crió en Saint Louis, una ciudad dinámica, pero poco próspera, marcada por señales cada vez más visibles de decadencia urbana y por escándalos financieros y políticos ... Aunque acomodados, los Eliot vivían en una zona que con el tiempo se volvió más modesta, destartalada y sórdida. Este ambiente constituyó el núcleo emocional de las imágenes urbanas de sus primeros poemas... (PATEA, 2005: 11)

This decadent setting will later be transformed and enriched by Eliot's familiarity with the two European cosmopolitan centres: Paris and London. Having completed his degree at Harvard, Eliot spent an academic year in Paris (1910-1911). The French city was a fascinating cultural mecca, but also a bohemian centre where Eliot, due to his Puritan upbringing, must have felt uneasy at times. In 1914, shortly after Britain had entered World War I, Eliot arrived in England to continue his post-graduate education at Oxford. One year later, he married Vivienne Haigh-Wood and they settled in London, where Eliot found a job as a secondary school teacher. The newcomer had found London shrouded in the turbulent atmosphere of the large-scale conflict. Young Eliot's first years in the city were inevitably determined by the war situation and this permeated the poems produced at the time.

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<sup>1</sup> Initially, Eliot's intention was to include "Gerontion" in *The Waste Land* as an introductory section, but was dissuaded from doing so by Ezra Pound.

City imagery in the *Prufrock* poems comprises darkness, smoke, dirt, unpleasant smells, lost or deranged *flaneurs*. These images can be associated with restlessness, decadence and troubling mystery, perhaps echoing Baudelaire's portrayal of bohemian Paris life. The streets that Prufrock wanders are far from being inviting, and in a powerful metaphor, they are compared to troubling, recurring obsessions which lead to an inescapable critical turn:

Let us go, through certain half-deserted streets,  
The muttering retreats  
Of restless nights in one-night cheap hotels  
And sawdust restaurants with oyster-shells:  
Streets that follow like a tedious argument  
Of insidious intent  
To lead you to an overwhelming question... (4-10)

This "overwhelming question" becomes the centre of the poem precisely because Prufrock does not dare to face it -we will come back to this pivotal theme later. The image of "one-night cheap hotels," which so successfully contributes to an effect of vulgarity and even sexual laxity, can be contrasted with Mr Eugenides' inviting the lyrical speaker to spend a weekend at the Metropole (207-214), a luxury hotel in Brighton. The phrase "a weekend in Brighton" suggests a sexual encounter in a secret rendezvous. This episode of "The Fire Sermon" has been referred to as no less than "brutalització eròtica" and "seducció victimitzadora" (FERRATÉ, 1977: 153).

Furtive sex recurrently hints at moral degradation in *The Waste Land*, notoriously in the narration of the encounter between the typist and "the young man carbuncular." The poet is successful in conveying the impression that these two characters, despite physical contact, are emotionally as distant from each other as two people can possibly be. The "small house agent's clerk" (l.232) watched by Tiresias as he arrives at the girl's place, "at the violet hour" (l.215), bears resemblance with the "lonely men," whom Prufrock watches "at dusk:"

Shall I say, I have gone at dusk through narrow streets  
And watched the smoke that rises from the pipes  
Of lonely men in shirt-sleeves, leaning out of windows?... (70-73)

Other poems in Prufrock, such as the "Preludes," also offer a dispassionate view of the city as a puzzling, troubling realm of impersonality and soulless life. In the lines that follow, profusely synaesthetic, the poet uses synecdoche to refer to the citizens in the streets (whom he seems to be watching from a window or from a distance), grabbing a coffee before going about their everyday tasks. Interestingly, the city is personified (endowed with a conscience), whereas the people who wander in it are reduced to body parts, performing automatic actions:

The morning comes to consciousness  
Of faint stale smells of beer

From the sawdust trampled street  
With all its muddy feet that press  
To early coffee-stands. (14-18)

In the stanza that follows, all these movements are called “masquerades” and the distanced point of view is maintained. Patea suggests that poems like “Preludes” or “Rhapsody” “niegan el optimismo bergsoniano, que reduce el mundo a un funcionamiento mecánico” (26). Eliot was always ambivalent about Bergson’s philosophy: he was deeply impressed by his revolutionary conception of time, but rejected his enthusiastic belief in progress as the motor of history. One cannot help comparing these automatons, whom progress does not seem to have taken very far, with the Londoners flocking over London Bridge in “The Burial of the Dead.” These people who keep perpetuating their routine are in turn the modern transposition of the neutrals, whom Dante pities on account of their life aloofness at the beginning of his journey through hell:

<p>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. (60-63)</p>	<p>..... e dietro le venìa sì lunga tratta di gente, ch’io non avrei mai creduto che morte tanta n’avesse disfata. (<i>Inf.</i>, III. 55-57) <sup>2</sup></p>
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Prufrock, who, like Gerontion, becomes fully aware of his insignificance in old age, could be numbered among the brotherhood of the neutrals. He could never take a prominent role (“I am not Prince Hamlet,” 111) but simply aspire to “swell a progress” (113). A “progress” was a stylised procession, a common stage effect of Elizabethan drama, whose dull modern version would be the train of clerical workers crossing London bridge.

In “Rhapsody on a Windy Night,” someone’s wandering, late at night, enhances the atmosphere of mystery and uneasiness. The poem’s protagonist walks along the empty streets and a speaking street lamp directs his attention to other disturbing presences: a woman wearing a torn dirty dress, in the second stanza (a prostitute approaching the man?), a cat taking advantage of the desertedness and feeding on bits of food that have been left behind, in the fourth stanza. The following lines, despite their playfully sequenced actions and straightforward rhyme, are to most readers subtly-and effectively-repulsive:

‘Remark the cat which flattens itself in the gutter,  
Slips out its tongue  
And devours a morsel of rancid butter.’ (35-37)

These images are made more immediate by the use of the present tense. The third presence noted by

<sup>2</sup> “...and behind it came so long a train of people that I should never have believed death had undone so many” (translation into English by John D. Sinclair; see “References” for publication details). Eliot specifically draws attention to this reference and quotes *Inferno* in one of the “Notes” to the poem.

the wandering citizen is that of the moon, personified as a dignified gentle lady and placidly imaged: it would seem that the poet is setting this figure against the street woman or perhaps trying to counteract the disgust that the scruffy street cat inspires. The moon's behaviour, conveyed in a lyrical tone that sets the lines apart from the rest of the poem, consists also of a sequence of metaphorical actions, but these are diametrically opposed to the cat's:

She winks a feeble eye,  
She smiles into corners.  
She smooths the hair of the grass. (52-54)

However, as we read on, it becomes clear that these lines are an ironic parenthesis. The speaking street lamp breaks the spell by comparing the moon's surface with the scarred skin that results from suffering smallpox. It then goes on to complete a definitely decadent portrait of the moon, that is likely to meet -at least partial-rejection, both from other poetic voices and from readers:

A washed-out smallpox cracks her face,  
Her hand twists a paper rose,  
That smells of dust and eau de Cologne,  
She is alone  
With all the old nocturnal smells  
That cross and cross across her brain. (56-61)

Personification suddenly deviates, not to elevate the moon from the squalor on the paving, as might appear from the lines above, but to anchor it down: the moon, having lost its traditional poetic lure, is just as unappealing as the rest of images that make up the city imagery construct. The knot is tightened through lexical and image associations, first with the other female figure in the poem (the woman's dress is stained with sand and the paper rose that the moon holds smells of dust), but also with female characters in other poems: the Lady in "Portrait" also twists a flower (a lilac) "in her fingers while she talks" (43) and, like this moon and like Marie Larisch in *The Waste Land*, shows an aristocratic attitude which a divergent environment causes to appear pathetic.

In "Rhapsody," the moon, as the central image, holds all the rest together and determines the point of view in the poem: "Along the reaches of the street / Held in a lunar synthesis ..." (2-3). If this were a short story, we might refer to this narrator as being unreliable, since we are warned in the very first stanza that memory, as the rational faculty whereby we can establish time relations, is suspended:

Whispering lunar incantations  
Dissolve the floors of memory  
And all its clear relations,  
Its divisions and precisions. (4-7)

The street lamp's words are interspersed with images of lifeless nature and the dingy city, brought to

mind by memory. The first one is a branch left on a beach by the sea waves, gnawed at by the currents and resembling a human bone. The verse line “I will show you fear in a handful of dust,” from “The Burial of the Dead” (30) could be included in “Rhapsody” as “I will show you fear in a twisted branch:” the sea, which has swallowed life through the ages, reminds humans of their mortality:

The memory throws up high and dry  
A crowd of twisted things;  
A twisted branch upon the beach  
Eaten smooth, and polished  
As if the world gave up  
The secret of its skeleton,  
Stiff and white. (23-29)

A comparison of these lines with others from subsequent poems by Eliot shows that certain images run through his whole production, evolving and reflecting his state of mind and spiritual stance: the branch / skeleton on the shore is “stiff and white,” whereas the bones in *Ash Wednesday* (published in 1931) sing and shine, anticipating resurrection through the intercession of the Lady (section II). The sea image, with which the poet expresses the complex dualism mortality-eternity, is retaken and elaborated on in “The Dry Salvages,” twenty-four years later: in the third of the *Quartets*, the sea “... tosses / its hints of earlier and other creation” (17-18).

Towards the end of “Rhapsody,” memory is reactivated and various images swarm the brain. The first two are visual and tactile, and they also hint at death: the “sunless dry geraniums” (in the first stanza, a dead geranium, being shaken by a madman, had been compared to memory being shaken by midnight) and the “dust in crevices” (cf. dust in *Genesis* and “fear in a handful of dust” in *The Waste Land*; the woman’s dress stained with sand and the dusted paper rose held by the moon). The other images are olfactory and would perhaps be pleasant in the context of a different poetic world, but here get through as somewhat suffocating:

The reminiscence comes  
Of sunless dry geraniums  
And dust in crevices,  
Smells of chestnuts in the streets,  
And female smells in shuttered rooms,  
And cigarettes in corridors  
And cocktail smells in bars. (62-69)

Earlier in the poem, the cat vision separated the branch image from other sea-related imagery: the solitary child with the blank expression (“I could see nothing behind that child’s eye,” 40), playing on a quay, and the “old crab with barnacles on his back” (44), found in a pool, and which also has its counterpart in *Four Quartets*: the “horseshoe crab,” tossed by the sea in “The Dry Salvages” (19).

## ASCENDING THE STAIRS INTO ASPHYXIATING ROOMS

Are there any alternatives to the discouraging urban imagery analysed so far? The speaker in “Rhapsody” has seen others “peer through lighted shutters” (42), from the dark streets. In “Prufrock,” the “half-deserted streets” (4) that lead to the protagonist’s failure are clearly opposed to a room where “... the women come and go / Talking about Michelangelo” (13-14). But old Prufrock never sees them: he seems to be listening to them from the staircase. The ladies’ presence is intimidating, although they remain, in cinematic terminology, off screen.

At the end of the poem, Prufrock, coming back to the first person plural, reveals the fatal consequences of remaining in the “chambers of the sea.” In an intriguing variation on the mythology of Ulysses’ seafaring, men do not drown and are devoured by the sea-girls because they were enraptured by their song, but because they are woken up by human voices—in the poem, those of the women in the room, discussing Italian Renaissance art:

We have lingered in the chambers of the sea  
By sea-girls wreathed with seaweed red and brown  
Till human voices wake us, and we drown. (129-131)

The “chambers of the sea” are the dwelling place of the sea-girls, but the metaphor also includes the actual women, not hidden from view undersea, but behind the walls of their private room. These chambers belong to the realm of dreams, whence Prufrock is woken and it seems natural to consider it a symbol of the unconscious and the desires that throb in it—quite a straightforward psychoanalytic association. The reference to mermaids unequivocally characterises these impulses as sexual and the verb “lingered” suggests that they have been repressed for too long. This interpretation is in accordance with some of the symbolic attributes traditionally attached to mermaids: “Son también símbolos del deseo, en su aspecto más doloroso que lleva a la autodestrucción, pues su cuerpo anormal no puede satisfacer los anhelos que su canto y su belleza de rostro y busto despiertan” (CIRLOT, 1997: 419).

In Prufrock’s particular case, self-repression is not totally indistinct from impending self-destruction: he is seized away from the idealisation of his objects of desire in a dream-like atmosphere (the mermaids at sea) by their concealed actuality in waking life (the women in the room). Interestingly, there is no mention of sea-girls’ singing in the poem: the unseen ladies’ talk (“human voices”) is powerful enough to cause the man listening to drown symbolically.

Drowning is among the central images in “Death by Water,” the section in *The Waste Land* where the climactic moment of rebirth to a new life, taking the form of an ancient rite, begins but is probably not completed. Phlebas the Phoenician’s life is carried away by the whirlpool, engulfed, washed out by the currents without a trace: he will not return from the “chambers of the sea” and his mortality results in strict, appalling nothingness.

The Lady’s visitor in “Portrait” is, like Prufrock, a victim of his own paralysing thoughts. Unlike

Prufrock, the speaker here does pay his visit, but his visit will be disastrous, since the lady, voicing her perturbing wisdom, will precipitate in her feigned friend a paralysing emotional crisis. As the trivial conversation with the lady (compared to a musical performance throughout) progresses, the young man cannot help entering the dangerous whirlpool of his troubled conscience:

Among the windings of the violins  
 And the ariettes  
 Of cracked cornets  
 Inside my brain a dull tom-tom begins  
 Absurdly hammering a prelude of its own,  
 Capricious monotone  
 That is at least one definite 'false note.' (29-35)

The room where the lady receives her visitor could be thought of as the primitive, minimal version of the ironically rich setting in "A Game of Chess," the second section of *The Waste Land*, where a desperate woman (akin in some respects to Virgil's Dido and Shakespeare's Cleopatra or Innogen) unsuccessfully tries to elicit answers from a silent male partner. The description of the Lady's room where the tea ceremony (and the ceremony of words) are about to begin is sober, compared to the elaborate one in *The Waste Land*.

Besides from its Shakespearean echoes, bringing in the poetic glory of the Golden Age of English literature (even if it is bound to become strident in a modern context), the word "laquaeria," borrowed from Virgil's description of the room where Queen Dido of Carthage hosts a banquet in honour of Aeneas (Aen., I. 697-756), is successful in conjuring up a past of luxury and splendour. Even though the allusion consists of a single unequivocal word, there are other elements in Virgil's description that could be linked to Eliot's stanza and to its Shakespearean substratum, which will be presently explored: for example, Queen Dido is said to be lying on a golden bed, covered with exquisite tapestries, and fifty maids are busy, among other things, burning perfumes as offerings to the gods.

These effective allusions cause the atmosphere evoked at the beginning of "A Game of Chess" to be at odds with the sequence of unconnected questions and thoughts that follows and with the pathos of the pub scene that complete the section. Only at the very end Shakespeare (*Hamlet*) reappears, so that the second part of *The Waste Land* is framed. Significantly, Ophelia's last words in the play, before her "death by water," set against the naturalistic, demotic "goonights" of the people leaving the pub at closing time, become the gentle, melancholy, lyrical close to "A Game of Chess."

Psychanalytic criticism has interpreted the images of the staircase and the room, featuring in several of the poems under consideration, as reflecting sexual behaviour and desires from a male perspective. Prufrock, not daring to enter the room, eventually turns back and descends the stair (line 39) and in "Portrait," the young man starts the narration of his last visit to the Lady with his timid ascent of the steps leading to the room where she is waiting for him ("I mount the stairs and turn the handle of the door / And feel as if I had mounted on my hands and knees," 86-87). Pinkney compares the men's ascent with the sailing of the river Congo, the structuring image in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, identifying in them an Oedipus complex



component: “the journey up the Congo, like Eliot’s ascent of the staircase, is a penetration into the maternal body”. The neurotic woman’s room in “A Game of Chess” is identified -in rather striking elaborate terms- with the female body and the equation could perhaps be extended to the other rooms on top of the stairs:

The ‘rich profusion’ of the throne-room ... its dense and cloying voluptuousness, is an objectification of the slow viscous inner fermenting of the female body, and even flame, most ‘spiritual’ of the elements, is clogged and choked, ‘fattened’ into an obscene corporality of its own. The vials of Cleopatra’s perfumes are ‘Unstoppered’, as if the unmannerly seethings of their contents had elbowed their corks and stoppers aside, and yet the perfumes still ‘lurk’ within, tenaciously clinging to the internal depths whose thick secretions they are. (PINKNEY, 1984: 111)

In “Portrait of a Lady,” the Lady’s room, like the disturbed woman’s, contains a glass that will capture the young man’s unease (lines 99-100), burning candles and a ceiling projecting their light. Everything is there waiting, as part of a set on a stage, for the actors to speak their parts:

And four wax candles in the darkened room,  
Four rings of light upon the ceiling overhead,  
An atmosphere of Juliet’s tomb  
Prepared for all the things to be said or left unsaid. (4-7)

The reference to Juliet’s tomb, which Romeo calls “bed of death” (5.3.28), “detestable maw,” “womb of death” (5.3.45) and “palace of dim light” (5.3.107), opens a vein of romantic decadence and is especially suitable for the Lady. However, it may be considered an example of Eliot’s ironic allusiveness, if we compare not only the young virginal Juliet with a Lady who is “about to reach her journey’s end” (67), but also the events that take place in both settings.

In the vault where Juliet’s body has been taken all the tragedy unfolds: Romeo kills Paris, Juliet’s suitor; then, believing Juliet dead, kills himself by drinking the apothecary’s poison and finally, Juliet awakes from her potion-induced sleep to find Romeo’s dead body beside her and stabs herself with a dagger. In the Lady’s room, on the other hand, small talk and social convention progressively mutate into embarrassment and tension, leading the young man to puzzled inaction. In fact, the reversed sequence of events constitutes a further layer of irony: Juliet, being only apparently dead, experiences a symbolic resurrection, and the Lady’s visitor, only momentarily alive in a world of pretence, returns to his death-like apathy after his visit.

The Lady’s visitor’s last thought in the poem is an anticipation of the woman’s death, which he imagines might surprise him “pen in hand,” not having written to her since he left, as she suggested, still not knowing what to tell her. The second line below is comparable, in the depth of feeling it conveys and in its syntax, to those spoken by one of the lovers in the hyacinth garden, in “The Burial of the Dead” (“... I was neither / living nor dead, and I knew nothing,” 39-40):

Doubtful, for a while  
Not knowing what to feel or if I understand  
Or whether wise or foolish, tardy or too soon... (118-120)

But let us continue with the comparative analysis of the rooms occupied by Shakespeare's and Eliot's women. The stanza containing the description of the neurotic woman's chamber in "A Game of Chess" begins with a calque of the opening of Enobarbus' account of his first seeing the Egyptian Queen in Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra* (2.2.190). Although Eliot only acknowledges this Shakespearean source in his note, echoes of Iachimo's description of Innogen's chamber in *Cymbeline* (2.2 and 2.4) may also be identified. In one of the climactic scenes of this play, Innogen's lover, Posthumus, asks Iachimo to describe her bedchamber in full detail, as proof that he has succeeded in seducing Innogen, the princess. The two plays are connected by Iachimo's description of the tapestry in Innogen's room: its design (called "the story") is exactly what Enobarbus describes. Shakespeare seems to be indirectly quoting a play that he had written three years earlier:

... it [Innogen's bedchamber] was hanged  
 With tapestry of silk and silver; the story  
 Proud Cleopatra when she met her Roman,  
 And Cydnus swelled above the banks, or for  
 The press of boats or pride-a piece of work  
 So bravely done, so rich, that it did strive  
 In workmanship and value, which I wondered  
 Could be so rarely and exactly wrought,  
 Such the true life on't was. ... (2.4.66-76)

The Shakespearean scenes, explicitly or implicitly alluded to, all have in common their combination of hyperbolic rendering of female beauty (which again, can only compare to the portrayal of the Lady and the neurotic woman ironically), further embellished by elaborate, powerful description of settings. There are some interesting coincidences between Eliot's, and Shakespeare's lines: the presence of Cupids (as decorative elements or as one of the terms of a comparison), marking the women as objects of desire, the intoxicating smells and the reference to Philomel's rape by Tereus. Some of these, as indicated above, are also to be found in Virgil's verse.

Other significant details about the Lady's room are given: there is a bowl of lilacs, and one cannot help thinking of "The Burial of the Dead," where lilacs are said to grow out of the dead land. The atmosphere in the room is definitely oppressive, and the visitor's mood mimetically reflects it: "My smile falls heavily among the bric-à-brac" (92). He is so uncomfortable with the Lady, that he momentarily wishes he could escape and breathe some air, slip into a pattern of socially conventional actions:

-Let us take the air, in a tobacco trance,  
 Admire the monuments,  
 Discuss the events,  
 Correct our watches by the public clocks.  
 Then sit for half an hour and drink our bocks. (35-40)

The citizens whom Eliot portrays in his first book not only go through the motions collectively, in

the streets, but also in the privacy of their rooms. The lyrical speaker in “Preludes” watches people bustling about outside and imagines what others must be doing indoors:

With the other masquerades  
that time resumes,  
One thinks of all the hands  
That are raising dingy shades  
In a thousand furnished rooms. (19-23)

The next section of “Preludes” contains one of the most shocking images in the book: the woman addressed (we assume she is a woman because she seems to be using hair curlers: “You curled the papers from your hair,” 36) is confronted by her complete own moral horror, reflected on the ceiling of her room:

You dozed, and watched the night revealing  
The thousand sordid images  
Of which your soul was constituted;  
They flickered against the ceiling. (26-29)

Eliot’s characters are lost, disorientated or repeat their automatic behaviour outdoors; then again rooms fail to shelter them from the bewilderment in the air. It is in these rooms, isolated from the comfortable and illusive city inertias, that some of these people have to come to terms with their inability to communicate, their failure, their miseries and frustrations.

### **STREETS THAT LEAD YOU TO A CRISIS POEM**

The imagery of Prufrock and 1920, examined here, is predominantly urban and anticipates the Unreal City in *The Waste Land*, inspired by Dante’s Limbo, swarming with neutrals, and Baudelaire’s “foumillante cité,” the ghostly, foggy and dirty space featuring in *The Flowers of Evil*. Eliot’s unreal modern London is the first setting evoked in “The Burial of the Dead,” to be given a mythical dimension as the Waste Land<sup>3</sup>.

The city as an imagery construct will become a component assimilated by a larger construct, the Waste Land proper, claustrophobic in the extreme. The poems analysed here, therefore, are not only interesting in themselves, but in their connections with subsequent poems by an author whose production is at the same time cohesive and extraordinarily coherent in its evolution. These connections involve not merely the images in themselves, but of course the themes they serve the purpose to express, some of which have been hinted at above: modern alienation, moral neutrality, sexual timidity, and so forth. Links are likewise reinforced by the presence of characters (such as the aristocratic lady or Sweeney) that can be considered different expressions of a single archetypical personality.

More specifically, the poems composed up to 1920 can be considered the historic antecedents to Eliot’s crisis poem. After *The Waste Land* and *The Hollow Men* (1925), one has the feeling that the poet cannot descend any lower into the pits of modern shallowness and has no alternative but to find a way out. Eliot chose

<sup>3</sup> *The Waste Land* (in italics) obviously refers to the title of the poem, whereas “the Waste Land” refers to the mythical setting or cluster of images.

the way of purgation, progressing towards spiritual confidence and a purer poetic voice, leaving the menacing spectral city behind. The titles of the Four Quartets (written between 1935 and 1942), the culmination of Eliot's production, are place names that symbolise an idyllic community life, as well as harmony with God and nature, and are hence the peaceful counterpart of the streets and rooms of the Unreal City.

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