

Wasteland

A Journey



Introduction

It is a journey out of sickness and crisis to oneness and abundance. A treasure hunt, one could say, where I understand and accept the wasteland. Eliot's 'wasteland' makes for half the map that I follow, and the other half slowly appears with every step forward. Clues left by Blackie, Jung, Campbell and Mortan guide me when it's dark. I discover links between the crisis of the self, culture and environment and how one leads to the other. It is an intuitive curation of the fragments of my life, stitched together with Eliot's lines. A journey towards a cure, marked by different milestones (the chapters).

Reading about Celtic mythology and the underworld led me to understand better the wasteland, a place of crisis and opportunity, destruction and rebirth. Campbell helps me know that if I am to embark on 'The hero's journey', the first thing I must do is cross the wasteland. It is a journey that one makes not once but again and again, as the story is one of becoming. Eliot holds up a mirror to the dark side of modern life, bringing my attention to all things wrong in it, for I must acknowledge the adversity before I can begin to overcome it. I come in touch with reality when the meaningless facade of the compulsions of society falls through. And I realise the answer which was hidden in plain sight, all through. In a western city, with its thinkers as my guide, I come across the teachings of my home, something that I've always taken for granted for the lack of understanding and doubt, discovering a way back to myself, a full circle indeed.

Keywords

wasteland
environmental influence
fragmented psyche
journey
roots
oneness.

Notes

Throughout this work, lines and verses from Eliot's '*wasteland*' appear like such, i.e., *italicised*, *underlined and in blue*.

Because of the extent of their use and associated visual cues, as shown above, they have all been referenced in this section itself.

Cover Pages

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Boat figure: Sketched from '(510) Pinterest', *Pinterest* <<https://in.pinterest.com/pin/8655424277579701/>> [accessed 4 June 2022]



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Abstract

*Eliot's 'Wasteland'.
The first time I read it,
I didn't completely get it.
And so I picked it up,
As a puzzle if it were.
I zoomed in closer,
And also stepped back further.*

*I poured it out,
For it to flow,
And watched it crash on different shores.
I followed them,
The verses,
Figuring what connects,
For there were no dead ends.*

*This is my journey inwards,
To the labyrinths centre.*

*

*April is the cruellest month, breeding
Lilacs out of the dead land, mixing
Memory and desire, stirring
Dull roots with spring rain. (1-4)*

I remember

*Those are pearls that were his eyes.
"Are you alive, or not? Is there nothing in your head?" (124-126)*

*The hot water at ten.
And if it rains, a closed car at four.
And we shall play a game of chess,*

Pressing lidless eyes and waiting for a knock upon the door. (135-138)



*At the violet hour, when the eyes and back
Turn upward from the desk, when the human engine
waits
Like a taxi throbbing waiting. (215-217)*

A day/ Everyday

Walk, walk, walk

Run, run, run

Move!

Where am I trying to get to? Always late, always falling short. There is not enough time, need to schedule better. Time management? Speed reading classes? What else? Will I ever be efficient enough? Will I ever be enough?

Get up

get coffee

read

lookup an artist

watch a lecture

write

make something

what is happening in the world again?

Talk about your work.

Shit! Need to cook something

repeat

repeat

repeat

I forgot to exercise.

What about friends? That can wait, need to finish the list first. That's more important.

I am back in London; I was excited about coming here only till the time I landed here. I was supposed to go to college, I thought it would be great seeing people again, my cohort, but it's too late in the month to start with a Happy New Year wish and the holiday talks, I presume. What then? Never mind, I can just attend the classes online, I guess; that way, I can finish my list. Oh! so much to do.

I am busy all the time, yet I feel stuck in the same place; how do I move forward? What do I do? I am anxious; most people I see are. Is it our environment? Is it because of these walls that we are surrounded by? We reflect our surroundings and take in their energies. Is that why we build our walls inside these walls? Enough of this now; I can't be like this, be a part of this concrete jungle; I need to change,

I will meditate
sit in the park for a while,
try and talk to a friend,
go out with someone,

I add these things to my list as well.

I'm motivated now; I accomplish everything on my list the following day; such a good day. I feel content and think things are going to be different now.

Next day,

I wake up,

I get coffee,

I read

and I go back on the chase again.

As a kid, I hated those games in which I was supposed to run after someone to catch them; I could never catch them.

*

The land I habit
The land you inhabit
The land we inhabit
And the land that inhabits us.

We are always in conversation with our surroundings. And a genuine conversation is something that happens of its own accord; it cannot be conducted; rather, it's something we fall into.¹ 'A day/ everyday' is a glimpse of this conversation that I'm stuck in on a typical day; I wonder why that is. And more importantly, trying to understand its influencing factors by analysing the different conversations that people have had with their environment through the years.

Eliot calls it a '*game*' that we, the modern individual, play. We play a long game with ourselves, '*always competing, setting goals, and strategising*'.² A game we are conditioned to play, never really thinking why. He calls us '*The human engine*', constantly '*throbbing*' to get from one level to the next, and the game never ends. He asks, locked in your bodies, exhausted or paranoid, '*Is there nothing in your head?*'. He calls us dead souls with '*pearls that were his eyes*', living or dead, he asks next. He repeats '*nothing*' again and again, forcing us to acknowledge our lack, the looming thread of our existential crises.

Traversing through the soulless every day, I find Jung offering an insight. He says, 'the largest part of the soul is outside the body.'³

What if we could access it then? Maybe then we won't feel so empty. How do we connect? Trees connect to each other and their collective environment underground. The 'wood wide web' some call it.⁴ And so the first thing they do is root themselves, for that is how they sustain themselves.

D.H Lawrence says, 'We are bleeding at the roots because we are cut off from the earth and sun and stars, and love is a grinning mockery, because, poor blossom, we plucked it from its stem on the Tree of Life, and expected it to keep on blooming in our civilised vase on the table.'⁵

Root-less, the presence of an absence.

As Solnit puts it,

It is a place where we are not able to ‘feel the earth’,
where our sense of ‘belonging’ is lost,
where we are ‘cut off from the source of life’,
where the ‘ground is infertile’,
where the ‘hollowness’ speaks volumes,
where the ‘mechanics’ of the world ‘burn us out’,
where the ‘excess of connectivity’ and loneliness exist simultaneously,
where we never have enough time to sustain,
where we don’t feel ‘nurtured’,
and so we stop caring,
we ‘don’t feel responsible’ for the land anymore,
that is when we break the contract
and the land stops caring for us as well.
This place is the wasteland.
A sickness in the culture we are a part of.
Existing both on the outside and the inside.
Even if we don’t acknowledge it, we can still feel it.⁶

Eliot points to this crisis as well, when he ‘recognises the modern desire to return to ‘nature’ but sees it as cut off at the root, or at least only flowering as pain, lilacs destined to mix ‘*memory and desire*’ as a ‘*stirring* (of) *dull roots*’ out of ‘*dead land*’.⁷

Holyfield explains what might have caused us to cut off our roots in the first place. She compares us to Winnicott’s infant, where we have developed a split between ourselves and the earth to avoid terror and harm from natural forces, as humans, as a species, are comparatively young to earth. A result of this is our split from our inner experience, a disconnect, giving way to an abstracted life. It’s a crisis of our sense of home. Ecology comes from the Greek word ‘Oikos’, which means home.⁸

And so, one could say it is an ecological crisis, giving way to an existential crisis.

*

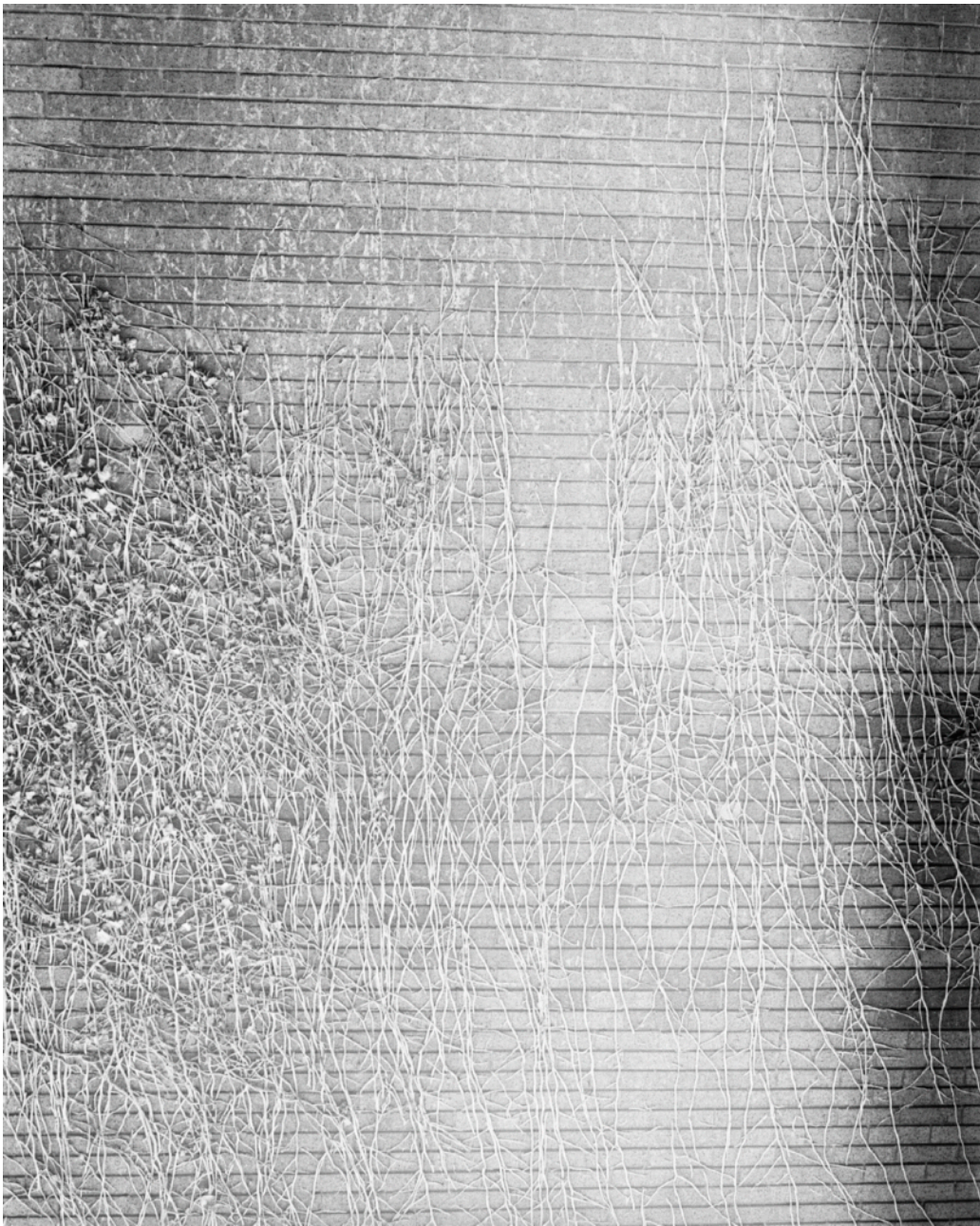


Figure 1: Priysha Rajvanshi, *Roots*, 2022

*The harshness of the winter will always affect us,
just as blooming again in the spring will always
depend on how well we've rooted ourselves.*

¹ Katrín Anna Lund and Karl Benediktsson, 'Introduction: Starting a Conversation with Landscape', in *Conversations With Landscape* (Routledge, 2011). *PG1 quoting (Gadamer 2004 [1960]: 385)

² 'The Waste Land A Game of Chess | Shmoop' <<https://www.shmoop.com/study-guides/poetry/the-waste-land/summary/a-game-of-chess>> [accessed 26 May 2022].

³ David Tacey, 'Mind and Earth: Psychic Influence Beneath the Surface', *Jung Journal: Culture & Psyche*, 3.2 (2009), 15-32 (p.16) <<https://doi.org/10.1525/jung.2009.3.2.15>>.

⁴ 'Wood Wide Web: Trees' Social Networks Are Mapped', *BBC News*, 15 May 2019, section Science & Environment <<https://www.bbc.com/news/science-environment-48257315>> [accessed 5 June 2022].

⁵ D.H. Lawrence *A Propos of Lady Chatterley's Lover and other essays* (Penguin,1961) cited in Sharon Blackie, *If women rose rooted* 2nd end (Denmark: September Publishing, 2019), p. 2.

⁶ My understanding of the term, rootless, came from the second chapter of this book, *Wells and waters: the wasteland*. Blackie, *If women rose rooted* 2nd end, p. 38-63

⁷ Geoffrey Berry, 'An Ecomythic Reading of T. S. Eliot's The Waste Land', *Trumpeter: Journal of Ecosophy*, 31.1 (2015), 1-13 (p. 7).

⁸ BARBARA HOLIFIELD, 'Listening for an Ecological Self', *Jung Journal: Culture & Psyche*, 7.1 (2013), 48-61 (p.53).

And I will show you something different from either
Your shadow at morning striding behind you
Or your shadow at evening rising to meet you;

I will show you fear in a handful of dust. (27-30)

Is your card, the drowned Phoenician Sailor,
(Those are pearls that were his eyes. Look!)
Here is Belladonna, the Lady of the Rocks,
The lady of situations. (47-50)

'A crowd flowed over London Bridge, so many,
I had not thought death had undone so many.
Sighs, short and infrequent, were exhaled,
And each man fixed his eyes before his feet.' (62-65)

I think we are in rats' alley
Where the dead men lost their bones.
(115-116)

He wept. He promised 'a new start.'



I made no comment. What should I resent?" (298-299).

And bats with baby faces in the violet light
Whistled, and beat their wings
And crawled head downward down a blackened wall
And upside down in air were toward (380-383)

Eyes at my feet

I usually look down when I'm walking, at my feet, what is coming at my feet,
checking for any trip hazards,
occasionally looking around to make sure I'm still in the right place.

I would like to believe that I am a curious person; why do I look down then? Probably because I
am curious,

it's the
same buildings,
same roads,
same posts,
same shops,
same ads,
maybe not the same, but the same nonetheless.

What about people?

Each person carries a story. That should be interesting.

I try looking at their faces; maybe I'll get a glimpse of their story. I like stories.

But so rarely do I find one.

It's always the same.

People act like they are running late or staring away,
encompassed by their devices or stuck in the same conversations.

They are nothing more than a reflection of the city they walk,
just like the buildings,

the signposts,

the shops,

and the industries.

And so I find my way back to my feet and what's ahead of my feet, checking for any trip hazards.

Do you ever feel like that? Like you are lost in a crowd, alone in a crowd or wandering in a long aimless way. 'Eyes are windows to the soul' what do the eyes of this foundering crowd look like then? Eliot compares them to '*pearls*', for the soul is dead and stiff now.⁹ Like zombies flowing over the '*London bridge*', Eliot compares modern life to living in hell by quoting Dante's Inferno, '*I had not thought death had undone so many*'.¹⁰ Eliot here describes a gruesome scene, a picture of a landscape which was based on Baudelaire's Paris, at the time when it was considered a decadent, overwrought paradise of science, technology, and innovation, but not very much culture, 'A nightmarish landscape that is not quite Paris, and is not quite London, but is meant to stand in for several places at once'.¹¹

When we walk the city, we see remains of a rich past, in the form of old structures, carvings on pillars and various other symbols, invoking reverence or telling a story. But remains are all they are, being dominated by adjacent glass buildings devoid of any meaning. Eliot's verse shows these remains 'scattered over the wasteland of modern and emotional life'.¹²

We've become machines of sorts, reflecting the repetitive structures around us, always fulfilling a meaningless function. We are succumbing to the technological nature of society, a spiritless machine, as an unforeseen consequence of the agricultural, industrial and digital revolutions. We are forever trying to control nature, mechanising it, something that is meant to be wild and chaotic, something we still don't fully understand even after years of research. It is where we come from, and in our foolish dream, it is what we are trying to control.¹³

Like Eliot's '*bats*', we've become monstrous in our quest for superficial pleasures, like directionless beings who keep crawling '*downwards*' towards the '*wall*'. He compares the place we inhabit to a '*rats alley*', an undesirable place indeed. '*Rats*' symbolise modern decay in Eliot's 'wasteland'.¹⁴ A sick place. Camus invokes the same symbolism in 'the plague' as well, where he warns the readers that the plague 'never dies or vanishes entirely', rather it waits, and 'perhaps the day will come when, for the instruction or misfortune of mankind, the plague will rouse its rats and send them to die in some well-contended city'.¹⁵ It sounds like a prophecy even, and so in the face of the ongoing pandemic, instruction or misfortune, I wonder, bringing death forwards.

Gazing into nothingness, I take notice of the shadows, the leaning shadow of the person in front of me or my own '*rising to meet*' me. Shadows prove we exist, so Eliot warns us, compelling us to wake up to life by showing us an image of death. He shows us '*fear in a handful of dust*', for dust is all that remains when it's too late, when nothing can be done, when the shadow itself ceases to exist for good.¹⁶ He still has his fair share of doubts if we will be able to bring about any change. He believes '*a new start*' to be a cliché.¹⁷ A change we often talk about but talk about only. So how do we move forward? How do we get out of this cultural, spiritual and ecological crisis, and bring about real change? Let's start with one of the most pressing concerns we encounter every day. The material remains of the wasteland, waste.

⁹ 'The Waste Land The Burial of the Dead | Shmoop' <<https://www.shmoop.com/study-guides/poetry/the-waste-land/summary/the-burial-of-the-dead>> [accessed 26 May 2022].

¹⁰ Ibid

¹¹ 'The Waste Land by T.S. Eliot', *Poem Analysis*, 2016 <<https://poemanalysis.com/t-s-eliot/the-waste-land/>> [accessed 29 January 2022].

¹² 'The Waste Land The Burial of the Dead | Shmoop'.

¹³ Geoffrey Berry, 'An Ecomythic Reading of T. S. Eliot's The Waste Land', *Trumpeter: Journal of Ecosophy*, 31.1 (2015), 1-13 (p. 3).

¹⁴ 'The Waste Land A Game of Chess | Shmoop' <<https://www.shmoop.com/study-guides/poetry/the-waste-land/summary/a-game-of-chess>> [accessed 26 May 2022].

¹⁵ Albert Camus, *The Plague* (London: Penguin, 2002), p.248.

¹⁶ 'The Waste Land The Burial of the Dead | Shmoop'.

¹⁷'The Waste Land The Fire Sermon | Shmoop' <<https://www.shmoop.com/study-guides/poetry/the-waste-land/summary/the-fire-sermon>> [accessed 26 May 2022].

Unreal City.
Under the brown fog of a winter dawn, (60-61)

"What shall I do now? What shall I do?
I shall rush out as I am, and walk the street
With my hair down, so. What shall we do tomorrow?

What shall we ever do?" (131-134)

Sweet Thames, run softly, till I end my song.
The river bears no empty bottles, sandwich papers,
Silk handkerchiefs, cardboard boxes, cigarette ends
Or other testimony of summer night. The nymphs are departed.
And their friends, the loitering heirs of city directors:
Departed, have left no addresses. (176-181)

A rat crept softly through the vegetation
Dragging its slimy belly on the bank (187-188)

White bodies naked on the low damp ground
And bones cast in a little low dry garret,

Rattled by the rat's foot only, year to year. (193-195)

Twit twit twit
Jug jug jug jug jug jug
So rudely forc'd
Tereu (203-206)



The river sweats
Oil and tar (266-267)

Who are those hooded hordes swarming
Over endless plains, stumbling in cracked earth (369-370)

Waste Age

I went to the design museum for the waste age exhibition and was fascinated by how they defined our age as the waste age.¹⁸ The more I saw, the sicker I felt.

I wanted to change the world somehow. Matter. Thus, on the road to making something, I started collecting what I was leaving behind, things that I would usually put in my bin. I started collecting my waste.

One bag,

two bags,

three bags...

it was time to keep it in segregated bags now,

I had a bag of milk bottles,

a bag for loose transparent plastic,

for colour plastic meshes,

clingy film,

black plastic,

for cardboard,

coffee grounds and filters,

College bands,

metal tins,

loose threads and ribbons,

bags bags bags.

I started reading up on waste, what's compostable, what's not, how the IR machines in waste management have trouble recognising black plastic and so they don't get recycled, how loose caps don't make it, and how even a greased pizza box has difficulty making it to the recycling chain.¹⁹

So many facts, so many bags.



Figure 2: Personal waste, Collected over a period of two months.
Priysha Rajvanshi, *Waste*, 2021

What do I do with these facts?

Maybe I'll make a dictionary, a waste dictionary.

What else can I make?

I'll make a being from all my collected waste,
He'll have a body
With eyes and ears
He'll look around and see the infertile land

He'll wonder

'Why did you create me?
What's my purpose here?'

He's feeling sick now.
Reflecting

'Did I do this?
Oh, God! What have I done?
I can't go on like this.'

And then he says out loud.

'This is not what I leave behind.'

And thus begins his journey...

A journey of transformation and revolution that'll move hearts.



Figure 3: biggary1972, *Samurai Silhouette*, 2020

Is it that simple? Will it bring about a change?
I started talking about it and the reactions varied.

'Love it'.
'It's didactic'.
'It's so weird; why would you even collect your waste first place'.
'We already know that the earth is dying'.

It wasn't working. It was too straightforward.
I was telling people what to feel,
Instead of making work, that in its very spirit was infectious.

I started to fall sick now, every couple of weeks. Being tired, in a new place, alone, with absolutely no idea how to incorporate this waste into my practice and somehow make sense of it. Maybe even trying to force it, but nothing was happening. All I did was replicate the mess I was in, on the inside, into a mess on the outside. I was trying to carry too much, dwelling in my misery, drowning in it.

It is a dangerous place to be in. I was in dire need of change. I went home for the break, not expecting anything to change, not knowing. For the time I was there, I didn't do anything I would call productive,

I didn't go to the exhibitions,
I didn't do any writing,
I didn't read any books,
I didn't make any work.

I was like a passenger passing through family, friends, places and emotions. And yet something changed; the contrast was too much to take. So when I came back to the mess I'd collected in my studio in London, I couldn't take it anymore. I thought I had to start afresh, thinking it was not doing the environment any good and certainly wasn't doing me any good.

I threw it all away.

I felt clean and relieved, wondering why I even started collecting this mess in the first place.

But where did it go?
Where is this away?

*



Figure 4: Public Artwork from Power to Change workshop at Tate, 30 October 2021



Figure 5: Chris Jordan, *Midway*

Waste and its impact concerned Eliot as well, for why else would he bring our attention to the '*brown fog*' in an '*unreal city*', a polluted modern city, one could say. Where we are, the '*hooded hoarder swarming*', a large group of rude, filthy and even uneducated people, it seems, for why else would we go around littering the city, which was once beautiful and clean.²⁰ We are '*stumbling*' on an arid plane, '*the cracked earth*', for the water is gone from the land, and the rivers don't help. '*Oil & tar*' is what we see in Eliot's '*river*', Thames. A polluted environment, polluted morals and an unclean spirit make up for the essence of this modern-day.²¹ It's a place where we cannot harness something beautiful; we can't see it or hear it, so the ugly sounds of '*twit*' and '*jug*' are all we get.²²

Eliot goes to the extent of imagining a world without humans. He first shows us the missing litter in the river, '*no empty bottles, sandwich papers...cigarette ends*'. Then he talks about the '*rat*' again, a symbol of death and decay, '*dragging its slimy belly on the bank*'. Ensuring we don't miss the point, he stresses '*Departed, have left no addresses*', we've ceased to exist. All that remains now are '*bones*', which are only '*rattled by the rat's foot*', invoking the image of death again and again.

But imagining the end of humans as a solution seems just to displace the problem and doesn't help at all with the current crisis. As Robin Wall Kimmer says, 'We are a vital part of the planet's ecosystems, and we have the capacity to assist in the restoration, regeneration, and protection of them'.²³ Which further begs the question of what can we do? Eliot seems to think that's all '*we ever do*', just question, question and question, for we don't know what to do with our time; we don't even know what's meaningful anymore.²⁴

So what if I started with solving the pressing concern of waste? Maybe that way, I could find meaning in this modern life. I began by collecting information on waste. I thought if I could figure out a way to spread these facts, they could help bring about the much-needed change.

In a lecture on 'embodiment', I came across the thoughts of Maurice Merleau Ponty on how 'meaning is embodied' and 'the body is our general medium of having a world'.²⁵ And so I started thinking, what if my waste had a body? What if I give it a glitch of consciousness like 'Wall-E'.²⁶

Illness and revolution are made of the same stuff, one end feeding the other.²⁷ I could imagine my waste-man, with a bandana on his head, embarking on a revolutionary journey, for Elworthy states, 'The deep masculine is the courage in the heart of every one of us, able fearlessly to confront the challenges facing the planet'.²⁸

But all this talk about waste and revolution wasn't doing anything; it wasn't moving people the way I'd imagined. In telling people to do the ethically right thing, I played with the very nature of the ideality of ethics, which is doomed to fail.²⁹ Maybe this is what founded the basis of my frustration with the collected waste and led to me throwing it all away, thinking I could start afresh.

Coming across a book by Brian Thill, 'Waste', made me question the very foundation of this idea. Where is this far off place my waste went to? Did it disappear into a magic hole, or did I just outsource its storage? So I won't have to look at it or deal with it anymore. As the saying goes, 'Out of sight, out of mind'. Calvino spoke about the ritual of getting rid of the things we are done with as a daily process so we could start afresh.³⁰ And thus, we are forever stuck in the repetition of consumption, discard and identity. We traverse the territory of desire and abandonment, forgetting and remembering. In rejecting our waste, we also try to leave everything associated with it, denying reality itself. Morgan says 'there is no away'.³¹ It's just an illusion we like to believe in, like the one of a 'clean home'. Today, the wasteland is not just heaps of trash objects we imagine, but it is also like the malls, flashy retail stores, and fifth avenue. It is also the structures of oppression which lead to poverty and want. Thill believes hoarders are doing a public service by storing their waste; they show us the legacy we are leaving behind for the future, and not some pristine world that we like to believe in from time to time. Waste is the object of desire and time. It is something we once found value in, but now, not so much, so we believe it has to go. We see a direct consequence of 'our desire for convenience' in Jordan's pictures (figure 6). We don't see beauty or vibrant colours or rules of aesthetics; we know the impact. We see the unaltered contents that lead to the eventual death of this creature. In today's world, most of the waste accounted for is industrial and nuclear, and so in places guarded and closed to the public, the effects of which are often not directly visible. So accurate images of this crisis rarely come up to the surface, as often there is no visual that can define it directly, as the mass extinction of species. And as we don't see it first hand, we let it give us cancer, kill the polar bears, destroy our seas, and countless more atrocities. What great images of waste do is more damaging, for they distance the viewer further from the waste, giving them a vantage point where they stop and might think about what could they possibly do to contribute from their comfortable position, not getting their hands dirty, not able to witness the actual disgust and despair. Thus going back to their stirring city lives once the thought has passed.³²



Figure 6: Dylan Martinez , *Rubbish during protest cop26*, 2021

Eliot believed that art could help us meet this challenge, but not in its traditional form.³³ We need to rethink how we create art itself if it is to address the problem of today.³⁴

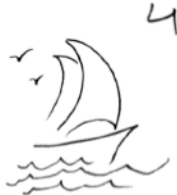
Mortan says, ‘the strangeness with which we encounter the fact that we are responsible for a mass extinction event is an intrinsic part of it’. Calling people out or yelling facts at them ‘deletes this strangeness’.³⁵ It makes the ‘ecological experience, politics and philosophy impossible’.³⁶ We need a level of indifference, as deleting that and being preachy doesn’t help. When ‘art tries to mimic sheer quantities of data’, it fails; it is not ‘effective persuasion’.³⁷ The aesthetic experience of ‘ecologically explicit art’ brings about ‘solidarity with the nonhuman to the foreground’; for no particular reason or agenda, we care without knowing why. ‘It does something’ to us, like magic.³⁸

Thinking about this point of solidarity, the element of strangeness emanating from the work itself means it incorporates the issue's core, coming from its heart. So I step away from the material waste and look at the bigger picture. What does it say? What if material waste is just a symptom of a much bigger problem. And the problem persists, for we were only trying to treat the symptom. So if waste is a symptom, and pollution and extinction its repercussions, then what’s the cause? Where is the root of this modern disease?

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- 18 'Waste Age' (exhibition) Design Museum, London: 2021.
- 19 Richard Headland, 'The problem with Plastic', *which?*, September 2019, pp. 16-18.
- 20 'The Waste Land What the Thunder Said | Shmoop' <<https://www.shmoop.com/study-guides/poetry/the-waste-land/summary/what-the-thunder-said>> [accessed 10 May 2022].
- 21 'The Waste Land The Fire Sermon | Shmoop' <<https://www.shmoop.com/study-guides/poetry/the-waste-land/summary/the-fire-sermon>> [accessed 26 May 2022].
- 22 Ibid.
- 23 @ecoresolution, (instagram post) 20 April 2022 <https://www.instagram.com/p/Cclbh_sOC6d/> [accessed 26 May 2022].
- 24 'The Waste Land A Game of Chess | Shmoop' <<https://www.shmoop.com/study-guides/poetry/the-waste-land/summary/a-game-of-chess>> [accessed 26 May 2022].
- 25 Gemma Blackshaw 'SoA/Soah Embodiment Lecture', Critical and Historical Studies, Royal college of Art, 29 October 2021 <<https://moodle.rca.ac.uk/mod/book/view.php?id=17784&chapterid=4661>> [accessed 5 January 2022].
- 26 *Wall-E*, dir. by Andrew Stanton (Walt Disney Home Entertainment:2008).
- 27 'Get Well Soon!' <<https://getwellsoon.labr.io/>> [accessed 18 February 2022].
- 28 Scilla Elworthy, *Pioneering the Possible* (North Atlantic Books, 2014) cited in Sharon Blackie, *If women rose rooted* 2nd end (Denmark: September Publishing, 2019), p. 245.
- 29 'Jung and Kierkegaard by Amy Cook' <<https://www.taylorfrancis.com/books/mono/10.4324/9781315563732/jung-kierkegaard-amy-cook>> p. 112.
- 30 Italo Calvino cited in Brian Thill, *Waste* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), p.34.
- 31 Timothy Mortan, *Hyperobjects: Philosophy and Ecology after the End of the World* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013) cited in Brian Thill, *Waste* p.50.
- 32 A summarisation of the book, Brian Thill, *Waste*.
- 33 'The Waste Land The Burial of the Dead | Shmoop' <<https://www.shmoop.com/study-guides/poetry/the-waste-land/summary/the-burial-of-the-dead>> [accessed 26 May 2022].
- 34 Ibid.
- 35 Timothy Mortan, *All art is ecological* (Great Britain: Penguin, 2021), p. 21.
- 36 Ibid., p. 23.
- 37 Ibid., p. 57.
- 38 Ibid., p. 58,67.

*So rudely forced; yet there the nightingale
Filled all the desert with inviolable voice
And still she cried, and still, the world pursues,
"Jug Jug" to dirty ears. (100-103)*

*And other withered stumps of time
Were told upon the walls; staring forms
Leaned out, leaning, hushing the room enclosed.
Footsteps shuffled on the stair.
Under the firelight, under the brush, her hair
Spread out in fiery points
Glowed into words, then would be savagely still.
(104-110)*



*"What is that noise?"
The wind under the door.
"What is that noise now? What is the wind doing?"*

*Nothing again nothing.
"Do
You know nothing? Do you see nothing? Do you remember
Nothing?" (117-123)*

The deficiency of story

I went for an opening last night. I found the invitation in my college newsletter. It looked promising; I'd never been to a poetry event before this. So I let my mind roam to what I could remember from the movies and the stories. The romantic notion of it stuck with me. Someone read a poem to me not long ago.³⁹ She asked me to close my eyes and listen. She asked me to move the tip of my finger and feel the landscape of my body. As she started, she started drawing me in like she was casting a spell. As my fingers moved, I felt as if I had been a visitor in my own body all this while, not fully inhabiting it. For how did I forget the texture of my skin? How did I never pay attention to the rise and fall of this landscape, my landscape? What is this energy in me? How am I feeling this intense feeling that I'm feeling right now? The energy I feel is bigger than me; it's connecting me to others; I can feel it, relating to where I am, I can feel it. It's pouring in me and then out of me.

I feel tears trickling down my cheeks. I feel whole, satisfied and nurtured for the first time after a long time. How can a simple gesture like this poem have such a cathartic effect on me? The experience was extraordinary.

In the hopes of maybe experiencing something like that again, I decided to go for the opening. It was an hour away from where I was. I didn't mind the commute; I was too excited to see what I would feel this time. I saw a crowd outside, towards the end of the lane; as I walked towards it, I heard all these voices, too many to make sense of any. There were tubs of ice filled with beer cans on either side, like the lure of poetry wasn't enough. It was as crowded inside as outside, with glasses clattering, a baby crying, talks, talks, talks, so many people, and so many words. I came in the hopes of listening to a decluttered language, and now I was drowning in a pool of words. I tried reading the words on the wall; I read and re-read, but couldn't make sense of any of it, couldn't feel any of it. How can this experience be so different from the previous one? Why do I not feel? All I feel is emptiness, nothingness; the more I try, the more I don't understand, naturally giving way to numbness and a long way back home.

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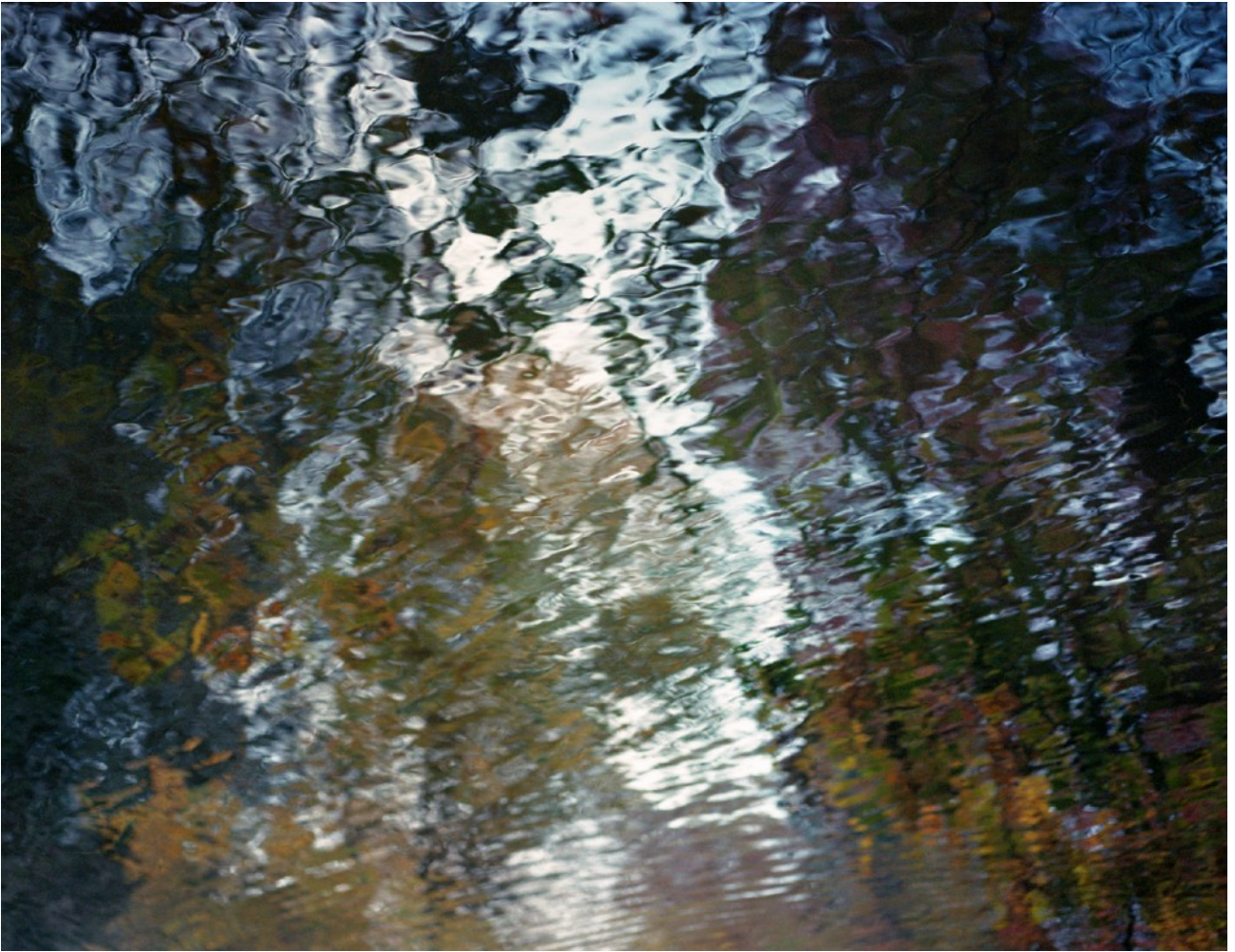


Figure 7: Priysha Rajvanshi, *Water*, 2021

Mortan claims free will is overrated; environment comes from the word 'veer', which means to swear towards. He compares the environment to an ocean filled with currents and surges, something we don't decide to dive into because we are already in it. It's not a neutral, empty box where we choose how to be.⁴⁰

Culture is an intrinsic part of what makes up for the environment. And Eliot believes the problem is a one of culture, the world we live in today is devoid of any stories that could unite us. In the past, the culture provided a common point of reference, but today our daily experiences lack that sense of unifying meaning.⁴¹ We've let go of those stories; we don't know them anymore, so even when we do come across one, a classical story, it just sounds like '*jug jug*' to our uneducated '*dirty ears*'.⁴² The stories and symbols are trying very hard to be heard, '*leaning*' out as carvings from the remaining structures of those times. But they are dying out, for we don't have the education to understand them.⁴³ As the verse structure reflects, we are the modern individual living a shallow life with a collapsing mind, separating '*Do*' from '*you know nothing?*'.⁴⁴

Not everyone, though; some people remember and are trying to propagate these stories like seeds, hoping for them to take root in the heart of our distress; Natalie Diaz is one of them. Seeds need water to spring to life, and her poem 'The first water is the body' does just that.⁴⁵ As explained in the personal account at the beginning of this chapter, the poem moved me, shook me, and engulfed me. Toni Morrison writes, 'All water has perfect memory and is forever trying to get back to where it was'.⁴⁶

Diaz illustrates the same by talking about the river that flows through us, as not a part of our body but our body. We can survive the loss of a part like our hand, leg or ear, but we won't be able to survive without water. It emphasises our larger body, which includes the air we breathe and the water we drink, thus unifying us with a larger self. She says in Mojave, the short for both land(amat) and body(iimat) is 'mat'.⁴⁷

'Unless you know the context of a conversation, you might not know if we are speaking about our body or our land. You might not know which has been injured, which is remembering, which is alive, which was dreamed, which needs care. You might not know we mean both.'⁴⁸

Jung also emphasised that the human psyche is a part of the psyche that we have immediate access to. We are often blinded to its cosmological dimension. He talks about the land's personification in cultures as an intuitive response to what emanates from the land, two-way traffic between mind and earth.⁴⁹

And this is precisely the kind of knowledge that used to be propagated in past cultures, through stories and rituals, as myths. As Anna Halprin says, 'Our myths identify and tap into our deeper need to take part in the mystery of life.' She defines myth as 'a series of symbols, actions, and stories that, when placed together in a particular order, create meaning and give significance to our individual and collective experience'.⁵⁰ We need to contemplate these myths that sustained civilisations through the years. But we can't just go back to following the stories we've never known. Our stories need to carry the essence of the now, rooted in the ruins of the modern-day itself, finally springing to life. Only then can we relate and find meaning in it.

Let's look at one such story from the past and its present remains.

³⁹ Reading of 'first body of water'. Natalie Diaz, *Postcolonial love poem* (London: Bloomsbury, 2020), p.49-56.

⁴⁰ Timothy Morton, *All art is ecological* (Great Britain: Penguin, 2021), p.89.

⁴¹ 'The Waste Land The Burial of the Dead | Shmoop' <<https://www.shmoop.com/study-guides/poetry/the-waste-land/summary/the-burial-of-the-dead>> [accessed 26 May 2022].

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Diaz, *Postcolonial love poem* p.49-56.

⁴⁶ '1996 - Toni Morrison Speaks at Library | Charlotte Mecklenburg Story' <<https://www.cmstory.org/exhibits/african-american-album-volume-2/1996-toni-morrison-speaks-library>> [accessed 26 May 2022].

⁴⁷ Diaz, *Postcolonial love poem* p.52.

⁴⁸ Ibid., p.52.

⁴⁹ David Tacey, 'Mind and Earth: Psychic Influence Beneath the Surface', *Jung Journal: Culture & Psyche*, 3.2 (2009), 15-32 (p.24) <<https://doi.org/10.1525/jung.2009.3.2.15>>.

⁵⁰ Anna Halprin, *Making Dances that Matter* (United States: Wesleyan University Press, 2018), p.5.

*Which I am forbidden to see. I do not find
The Hanged Man. Fear death by water. (54-55)*

*"My nerves are bad tonight. Yes, bad. Stay with me.
Speak to me. Why do you never speak. Speak.
What are you thinking of? What thinking? What?
I never know what you are thinking. Think." (111-114)*

Crosses the brown land, unheard. The nymphs are departed.(175)

*Here is no water but only rock
Rock and no water and the sandy road
The road winding above among the mountains
Which are mountains of rock without water
If there were water we should stop and drink
Amongst the rock one cannot stop or think
Sweat is dry and feet are in the sand
If there were only water amongst the rock
Dead mountain mouth of carious teeth that cannot spit
Here one can neither stand nor lie nor sit
There is not even silence in the mountains
But dry sterile thunder without rain
There is not even solitude in the mountains
But red sullen faces sneer and snarl
From doors of mudcracked houses (331-345)*



*If there were water
And no rockIf there were rockAnd also water
And water*

*A spring
A pool among the rockIf there were the sound of water onlyNot the cicada
And dry grass singingBut sound of water over a rockWhere the hermit thrush sings in the pine
treesDrip drop drip drop drop drop drop
But there is no water (346-359)*

And voices singing out of empty cisterns and exhausted wells.(385)

Where is the well?

I look out the window. I see something move. Black. A piece of plastic bound by the brown branches (figure 9). It's a part of the frame. The frame of my window. Through this frame, I see. I see the dry winter tree. I see the people layered in clothes. I see the rain. I see the storm. I see the first flakes of snow. I see the sun coming out. I see the leaves making their way back to life. The plastic witnesses it all as well. I wonder how long it has been here; I wonder how long I'll be here, witnessing on this side of the window. I wonder if it'll still be here when I'm gone. It looks like a crow even. What's the warning it carries this time, I wonder.

When I walk through the city, I spot the different colours of plastics that have found their way to the tree. They remind me of a sight back home. Once a year, on a day during my summer break, I would see a lot of women around a huge banyan tree in front of my house, praying and tying threads and pieces of cloth to the trunk and branches of the tree. The tree would radiate, carrying the faith and belief of so many women. We call it 'vat purnima' festival. My mother tells me this is the day I was born on. It is believed to symbolise the annual marriage of the earth and nature represented by Satyavan and Savitri. It is like the way the earth dies every year and is rejuvenated by the powers of nature.⁵¹

*

Many cultures around the world have their versions of this festival, their ritual and their meanings, which revolve around tying a piece of cloth to a tree. The reasons could vary, like wishing for a cure or a good marriage or even as a mark of reverence, among many others.⁵²

One example would be the Celtic tradition of the Cloutie well, where pilgrims come to the sacred well for healing. They tie a piece of cloth to the cloutie tree (figure 8) next to the holy well after washing or drinking from the well. It is believed that as the cloth disintegrates, the illness fades with it.⁵³

That brings me back to the plastic in the tree. It's not fading, making me wonder how long will the illness last. I think of the word 'well'. The word 'well' as an adjective finds its roots in Porto-germanic *wel meaning abundantly. As a verb, 'to spring, rise (in reference to a river) and gush'. And as a noun, 'it is a hole dug for water'. 'Proto-Indo-European root meaning "to turn, revolve," with derivatives referring to curved, enclosing objects. It is the hypothetical source of/evidence for its existence is provided by: Sanskrit valate "turns round," ulvam "womb, vulva"⁵⁴ And a womb is where life itself springs from.

Today I don't see any wells around me; I inhabit a 'dry' land, a concrete jungle, what Eliot would have called '*only rock*' (figure 10). A place where the water isn't clean and the people don't have any beliefs, a spiritual wasteland indeed. The flying plastic decides which are the cloutie trees of today. The tree that I see from my window, the one with the plastic, stands in front of a train station. Under it, I see the symptoms of the illness unfold. I see a homeless person asking for spare change. I see a man every day around noon shouting at someone in the sky. I see people cursing over the phone. I see a man being robbed. I see people on the verge of hitting each other. I see people hitting each other. Almost like characters of Eliot, with '*red sullen faces*' who '*sneer and snarl*'. Neurotic in their behaviour, with '*bad*' 'nerves'. People who've lost their capacity to even '*think*' clearly. For its always too loud or busy, so '*one cannot stop or think*'. We suffer from mental and emotional breakdowns because we lack the tradition and belief structures to support us.⁵⁵ And so in this spiritual desert, people hallucinate about '*water...also water...and water...sound of water...but sound of water...there is no water*'.⁵⁶ Just like '*voices singing out of empty cisterns and exhausted wells*', an obvious sign of society's decline, as there is no regeneration without water.⁵⁷

'Wells once were thought of as gateways to the Celtic Otherworld. Magical fish that lived in them might sometimes appear to those seeking insight into the future.... credited in mythology with being the bearer of the *Tomas*, a form of intuitive knowledge and wisdom which is the Otherworld's greatest gift'.⁵⁸

How do we find them then, our wells, our health, our wisdom? 'Water the old stories tell us, flows up from sources in the Otherworld and gushes out into rivers'.⁵⁹

What If I follow the river then? I walk by the Thames; I see it rise and fall. I see it ripple and crash. I experience its mightiness, and I find my respect for it. When the tide is low, I pick some rocks from its shores, rocks that it has shaped through the years. I find myself stumbling on different amalgamations of objects long thrown in the river, bones of the dead, bits of collapsed boundaries, remnants of the tools used and the pipes smoked (figure 10). The river carries the history of a place and all relics of our desires with it. 'The river is the flow of all our longings, the flow of all our journeys. You can follow her if you choose....she'll lead you out of the wasteland', says Blackie.⁶⁰

Will she still, though? For the magical guides in them, '*the nymphs*' have '*departed*' after suffering atrocities from the modern man. And with them went all the magic as well. Eliot reads our fate and says he doesn't find '*The Hanged Man*', a card that 'would've symbolised spiritual rebirth'.⁶¹ He ends with '*fear death by water*', i.e., by lack of water.⁶² And so I head out when it rains.



Figure 8: 'Madron Well', *Atlas Obscura*

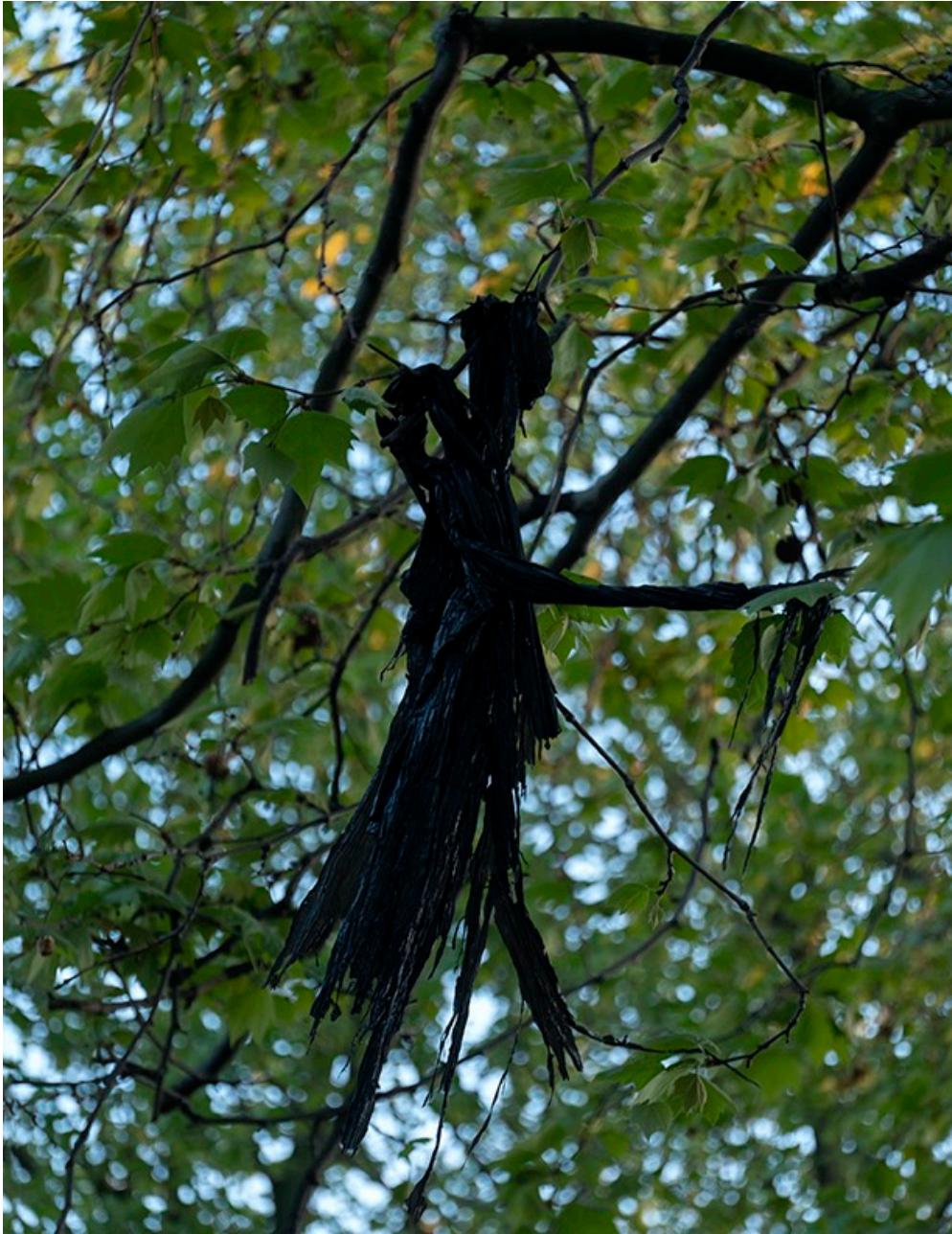


Figure 9: Priysha Rajvanshi, *Clotie Tree of Today*, 2022

THERE
IS NO
WELL

Figure 10: Priysha Rajvanshi, *Only Rock*, 2022

⁵¹ 'Vat Purnima', *Wikipedia*, 2022 <https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Vat_Purnima&oldid=1081753714> [accessed 4 May 2022].

⁵² Amots Dafni, 'Why Are Rags Tied to the Sacred Trees of the Holy Land?', *Economic Botany*, 56.4 (2002), 315-27.

⁵³ Sharon Blackie, *If women rose rooted* 2nd end (Denmark: September Publishing, 2019), p. 24.

⁵⁴ 'Well | Etymology, Origin and Meaning of Well by Etymonline' <<https://www.etymonline.com/word/well>> [accessed 4 May 2022].

⁵⁵ 'The Waste Land A Game of Chess | Shmoop' <<https://www.shmoop.com/study-guides/poetry/the-waste-land/summary/a-game-of-chess>> [accessed 26 May 2022].

⁵⁶ 'The Waste Land What the Thunder Said | Shmoop' <<https://www.shmoop.com/study-guides/poetry/the-waste-land/summary/what-the-thunder-said>> [accessed 10 May 2022].

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Blackie, *If women rose rooted* 2nd end p. 27.

⁵⁹ Blackie, *If women rose rooted* 2nd end p. 61.

⁶⁰ Blackie, *If women rose rooted* 2nd end p. 62.

⁶¹ 'The Waste Land The Burial of the Dead | Shmoop' <<https://www.shmoop.com/study-guides/poetry/the-waste-land/summary/the-burial-of-the-dead>> [accessed 26 May 2022].

⁶² Ibid.

'With a shower of rain; we stopped in the colonnade,
And went on in sunlight, into the Hofgarten,
And drank coffee, and talked for an hour.'(9-11)

O the moon shone bright on Mrs Porter
And on her daughter
They wash their feet in soda water
Et O ces voix d'enfants, chantant dans la coupole! (199-202)

 "On Margate Sands.
 I can connect
 Nothing with nothing.(300-302)

After the agony in stony places
The shouting and the crying
Prison and palace and reverberation

Of thunder of spring over distant mountains
He who was now living is now dead
We who were living are now dying
With a little patience (324-330)



 Only a cock stood on the rooftree
 Coco rico co co rico
 In a flash of lightning. Then a damp gust
 Bringing rain (391-295)

 These fragments I have shored against my ruins(431)

'With a shower of rain; we stopped in the colonnade'

What if we didn't
what if we walked in the rain,
with the sound of water drawing us in.
vibrating
seeping in the cracks
clearing
what's it saying?

Fragments in the rain

Tip tip tip
The people receded
And the birds hid their faces
At rest
The fox flashed
Orange
The board said everything
Everything you need
Everything and nothing
Dark clouds and a date
Sliced logs on the road
Black ooze on the wall
Deers on a window
And a window behind bars
A lonely bunch in a vase
Tip tip tip

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Figure 11: Priysha Rajvanshi, *Fall*, 2021



Figure 12: Priysha Rajvanshi, *Everything and nothing*, 2022

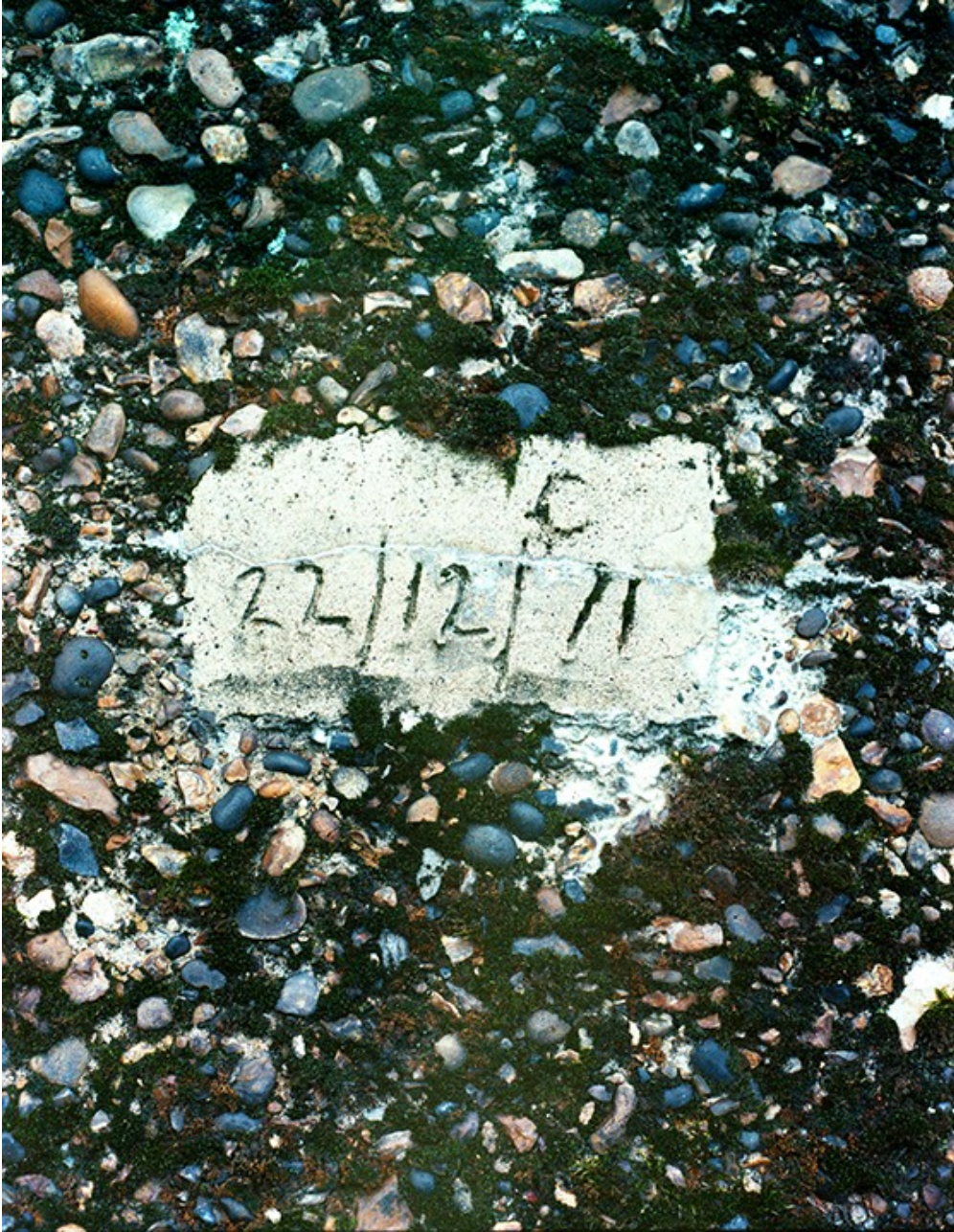


Figure 13: Priysha Rajvanshi, *A date*, 2022



Figure 14: Priysha Rajvanshi, *Regenerate*, 2022



Figure 15: Priysha Rajvanshi, *A window behind bars*, 2022



Figure 16: Priysha Rajvanshi, *A lonely bunch in a vase*, 2022

I walk in the *'rain'*, like a wanderer on a deserted plane. The wandering feet give way to a wandering mind on a path undefined. And that has its own effect on the eyes.

What do I see?

I see a world at rest, where people have receded to closed spaces, and the fox is making appearances. Where a chaotic mind finds its calm and presence, it is one of those days when the blindfold falls, like how in Matrix, Neo, after having the red pill, realises the illusion that he thought was his reality.⁶³ Alan Cohen says that 'most people on our planet live under a kind of mass hypnosis.'⁶⁴

A world where the media and culture keep us in check, ensuring that we keep running on the treadmill of work, advertisements and consumption. Never have humans in the history of our existence had such little time for ourselves.⁶⁵ We live in constant fear of missing out. And so keep falling into these predictable patterns, where we aren't developing but are just spaced out.⁶⁶ In our slow and undignified decline, we are traversing through the world half-dead, between 'living' and 'dying'.⁶⁷ Eliot says we, the modern consumer, *'can connect nothing with nothing'*, for we have lost our ability to think.⁶⁸ I came across an advertisement by Sainsbury; the board said, 'Everything you need for a fresh start' (Figure 12). And so I wonder, Everything? Everything and nothing.

The average person is estimated to encounter between 6,000 to 10,000 ads every single day.⁶⁹ Can you imagine the weight of this impact? We live in times where our value is defined by what we consume and how much. A place where we exploit natural resources to meet our ever-increasing demands and desire for consumption.

Mass production.

Mass circulation.

Mass consumption.

Loss of diversification.

A world that Elliot points our attention to,

where they *'drank coffee, and talked for an hour'*, which was 'boring and sterile and emptied of all nuance', where *'Marie'*, whom Elliot/(the narrator) is having coffee with, stands as a symbolic reference to European decadence, coinciding with our striving need towards replication and perfection, example Imagism.⁷⁰

Eliot believed consumption to be one of the critical reasons for our ruin, for we give in to temptation way too quickly; he even mocks our stupidity by saying, *'they wash their feet in soda water'*.⁷¹

It's the same world where 33 years later, Victor Lebow, a retail analyst and one of the architects of our consumer society, remarked, 'Our enormously productive economy demands that we make consumption our way of life, that we convert the buying and use of goods into rituals, that we seek our spiritual satisfactions, our ego satisfactions, in consumption....We need things consumed, burned up, worn out, replaced, and discarded at an ever-increasing pace.'⁷² It was only two years later that Kitaj settled in Britain, and in 1975 made his masterpiece, 'if not, not', which was based on Eliot's 'Wasteland', and how it bled into Kitaj's times. It is a disintegrated image, ruins of a civilisation as it were (figure 17).⁷³

Consumerism today is like the Plague. And Camus points out: 'when you see the suffering it brings,' Rieux remarks at one point, 'you have to be mad, blind or a coward to resign yourself to the plague'.⁷⁴

Mad, Blind or Coward?

A consequence of a disease of today.

A consequence of a lack of purpose and guidance.⁷⁵

Which makes me wonder,

What are the other fragments of this picture?

I see the world in fragments when it rains.

A broken picture?

A broken psyche?

Eliot says, '*These fragments I have shored against my ruins*', for he also recognises them, which is the first step in unifying them.⁷⁶ He's piecing the world back together.

'*Coco rico co co rico*', he says, calling for the night to end, and with the coming of rain, the land regenerates.⁷⁷

So I become a vessel for the rain,
it takes my illness to its grave,
for only then can it regenerate.



Figure 17: R B Kitaj, *If Not, Not*, 1975-6

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- ⁶³ Movieclips, *Blue Pill or Red Pill - The Matrix (2/9) Movie CLIP (1999) HD*, 2011 <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zE7PKRjrid4>> [accessed 29 March 2022].
- ⁶⁴ Patrick Solomon, FINDING JOE | Full Movie (HD) | Deepak Chopra, Robin Sharma, Rashida Jones, Sir Ken Robinson, 2020 <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s8nFACrLxr0>> [accessed 13 March 2022].
- ⁶⁵ The Story of Stuff Project, *The Story of Stuff*, 2009 <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9GorgroiggM>> [accessed 21 March 2022].
- ⁶⁶ Patrick Solomon, FINDING JOE | Full Movie (HD) | Deepak Chopra, Robin Sharma, Rashida Jones, Sir Ken Robinson 2020.
- ⁶⁷ 'The Waste Land What the Thunder Said | Shmoop' <<https://www.shmoop.com/study-guides/poetry/the-waste-land/summary/what-the-thunder-said>> [accessed 10 May 2022].
- ⁶⁸ 'The Waste Land The Fire Sermon | Shmoop' <<https://www.shmoop.com/study-guides/poetry/the-waste-land/summary/the-fire-sermon>> [accessed 26 May 2022].
- ⁶⁹ 'How Many Ads Do We See A Day? 2021 Daily Ad Exposure Revealed', *PPC Protect*, 2021 <<https://ppcprotect.com/blog/strategy/how-many-ads-do-we-see-a-day/>> [accessed 21 March 2022].
- ⁷⁰ 'The Waste Land by T.S. Eliot', *Poem Analysis*, 2016 <<https://poemanalysis.com/t-s-eliot/the-waste-land/>> [accessed 29 January 2022].
- ⁷¹ 'The Waste Land The Fire Sermon | Shmoop'.
- ⁷² The Story of Stuff Project, *The Story of Stuff*, 2009.
- ⁷³ The JC, 'How R B Kitaj Created His Holocaust Masterpiece' <<https://www.thejc.com/culture/features/how-r-b-kitaj-created-his-holocaust-masterpiece-1.42536>> [accessed 29 January 2022].
- ⁷⁴ Albert Camus, *The Plague* (London: Penguin, 2002), p.233.
- ⁷⁵ 'The Waste Land by T.S. Eliot', *Poem Analysis*, 2016.
- ⁷⁶ Ibid.
- ⁷⁷ 'The Waste Land What the Thunder Said | Shmoop'.

What are the roots that clutch, what branches grow
Out of this stony rubbish? Son of man,
You cannot say, or guess, for you know only
A heap of broken images, where the sun beats,
And the dead tree gives no shelter, the cricket no relief,
And the dry stone no sound of water.(19-24)

Phlebas the Phoenician, a fortnight dead,
Forgot the cry of gulls, and the deep sea swell
And the profit and loss.(312-314)

A current under sea
Picked his bones in whispers. As he rose and fell
He passed the stages of his age and youth
Entering the whirlpool.(315-318)

Falling towers Jerusalem Athens Alexandria
Vienna London
Unreal(375-377)



London Bridge is falling down falling down falling down
Poi s'acose nel foco che gli affina
Quando fiam uti chelidon

—O swallow swallow (427-430)

The water seeps under
Darkness
Womb
Darkness

In a dark room

I lost myself in the darkroom today.
Opening my eyes was the same as closing them.
The darkness engulfed me.

It became a part of me.
Instead, I realised I was a part of it.

As this realisation dawns on me,
A sense of calm washes over me.

The sound of water trickling down the tray
draws me in

I'm now present and not just being⁷⁸

A ritual is at play,
What will it say?

*

We are often afraid of embracing the dark, always trying to run to the light instead. But darkness is where the answers lie. Darkness 'licks at your eyes and grants you a different kind of sight'.⁷⁹ It is where we come from, where we find ourselves. It is the birthplace of visions and dreams, where our unconscious resides. As Jung says, 'Meaningfulness always appears to be in the unconscious first.'⁸⁰ And so it becomes our duty to embrace it, as only then is when we receive its gift.⁸¹

*

I had a dream once; I dreamt that something was stuck in my ear; it was a tiny ball made of white threads, interwoven and tangled together; it was a cocoon. But it wasn't complete; it had an opening at the top, so I peeped in and saw something move. Something inside. What was it trying to say?

Cocoons are places of transformation. It is where the caterpillar literally turns to mush; out of this mush grows a butterfly.⁸² The road to transformation is never easy but a necessary one. Solnit says, 'the butterfly is so fit an emblem of the human soul that its name in Greek is *psyche*, the word for soul.'⁸³ And so, our transformation is also a hard and slow one. We must disintegrate first, as only then 'we can begin the long, hard work of putting the fragments back together again, rebirthing ourselves into a new pattern' as Blackie expands, 'our descent starts with disillusion and ends with dissolution.'⁸⁴ I was holding on too tight, and maybe the dream was telling me that it's okay, I can let go, break down, I'm in my cocoon, for that's the only way I can become whom I'm truly meant to be.

In the story of the golden Buddha, the villagers cover the golden statue with stones and concrete, so the invaders wouldn't find any value in it and leave it be. The plan was a success, but the villagers themselves forgot about it as time passed. Until one day, a part of the stone broke, and the monk meditating in front of it saw the shimmer of the gold. The gold is inside us, and so is the ability to find it. The world we inhabit covers us with stone and concrete and hides away our shimmer until the day we forget about it ourselves.⁸⁵ But as time passes, there comes the point where we can't take it anymore, a point where we break, and that's when we transform.

Death is an integral part of the process, for a 'ritualistic death' is what precedes a 'spiritual rebirth'.⁸⁶ Only in the face of death do we see our lives pass before our own eyes, '*the stages*' of our '*age*'; it is when we finally try to make sense of our own lives.⁸⁷ It's where we forget about the worldly constructs of consumption and desire, '*profit and loss*'. As Eliot emphasises (line 428) with an image of hellfire, it is both a destructive and a purifying thing, and it is what we need to go through if we are to rise again.⁸⁸

*



Figure 18: Priysha Rajvanshi, *Wasteland*, 2022

I make this image in the darkroom. The light traces the negative, and the contact works like magic. I put my material in the developer. The word ‘develop’ means to grow.⁸⁹ But the developer in the tray is a toxic chemical. The longer I leave my image in this toxic environment, the more it breaks, carrying the scars in its flesh and ringing a bell.

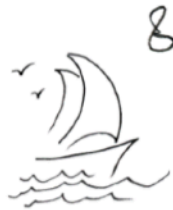
People tell me it looks like a ruin, a disintegrated place, an ‘*unreal*’ city. The city of Elliot, I wonder? ‘*A heap of broken images*’, a fragmented world where ‘*the dead tree gives no shelter*’. A result of an imbalance, where people are ‘ironically divorced from regenerative forces by the very success of their transformative technologies.’⁹⁰ He asks, ‘what could possibly grow from your spirit, which is like ‘*stony rubbish*’, where the soul is like soil without water’⁹¹ The city I inhabit is one of this imbalance as well. And its death is what we need to accept, for only then will the ruin take its course, and life will be able to take over. As Solnit says, ‘With ruins, a city springs free of its plans into something as intricate as life, something that can be explored but perhaps not mapped.’⁹² Something wild.

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- ⁷⁸ 'What Heidegger Means by Being-in-the-World' <<https://royby.com/philosophy/pages/dasein.html>> [accessed 28 May 2022].
- ⁷⁹ Sharon Blackie, *If women rose rooted* 2nd end (Denmark: September Publishing, 2019), p. 112.
- ⁸⁰ David Tacey, 'Mind and Earth: Psychic Influence Beneath the Surface', *Jung Journal: Culture & Psyche*, 3.2 (2009), 15-32 (p.22) <<https://doi.org/10.1525/jung.2009.3.2.15>>.
- ⁸¹ Blackie, *If women rose rooted* 2nd end p. 113.
- ⁸² Sheila Heti, *Motherhood* (London: Penguin Random House, 2019), p.227.
- ⁸³ Rebecca Solnit, *A field guide to getting lost* (Edinburgh: Canongate Books, 2017), p.81.
- ⁸⁴ Blackie, *If women rose rooted* 2nd end p. 119.
- ⁸⁵ Patrick Solomon, FINDING JOE | Full Movie (HD) | Deepak Chopra, Robin Sharma, Rashida Jones, Sir Ken Robinson, 2020 <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s8nFACrLxr0>> [accessed 13 March 2022].
- ⁸⁶ Geoffrey Berry, 'An Ecomythic Reading of T. S. Eliot's The Waste Land', *Trumpeter: Journal of Ecosophy*, 31.1 (2015), 1-13.
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- ⁸⁸ 'The Waste Land What the Thunder Said | Shmoop' <<https://www.shmoop.com/study-guides/poetry/the-waste-land/summary/what-the-thunder-said>> [accessed 10 May 2022].
- ⁸⁹ 'Develop' <<https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/develop>> [accessed 8 June 2022].
- ⁹⁰ Berry, 'An Ecomythic Reading of T. S. Eliot's The Waste Land'.
- ⁹¹ 'The Waste Land: The Burial of the Dead Summary' <<https://www.shmoop.com/the-waste-land/burial-dead-summary.htmlSummary>> [accessed 8 May 2022].
- ⁹² Solnit, *A field guide to getting lost* p.89.

*And when we were children, staying at the arch-duke's,
My cousin's, he took me out on a sled,
And I was frightened. He said, Marie,
Marie, hold on tight. And down we went.
In the mountains, there you feel free.(13-17)*

*Huge sea-wood fed with copper
Burned green and orange, framed by the coloured stone,
In which sad light a carved dolphin swam.(94-96)*

*Ganga was sunken, and the limp leaves
Waited for rain, while the black clouds
Gathered far distant, over Himavant.
The jungle crouched, humped in silence.(396-399)*



*I sat upon the shore
Fishing, with the arid plain behind me
Shall I at least set my lands in order?(424-426)*

Under the mother tree

I found myself sitting on a big cold rock, overlooked by an elder tree, protected under its magnificent presence. What do I see? Everything, everything I'll ever need, flowers are reflecting the light of the sun, and water flowing towards me, as if trying to reach out, leaves, dancing a bit, twirling a bit, in the wind, an orchestra, with the birds doing their job in the chorus.

There was a storm yesterday; I was sleeping when I first heard it, as if the winds were angry and the sky, crying. Why were the winds so furious? What caused the destruction that followed. Maybe they couldn't take it anymore, unnatural disturbances, it had been repressing all this while, and then came the threshold, followed by catharsis, as the water flowed down from the sky.

The trees suffered the consequences; it was the worst on the streets, where so many were massacred in a war that they were trying to prevent all this while. It was still better in the forest; there were casualties, but not nearly as many. The trees protected each other, side-by-side, big and small, young and old, green and brown, they all played their part.

Trees root themselves first and grow deep in the earth; that's where they connect and talk to each other; that's how they protect the land, and the land nurtures them. They belong to the land and protect life itself, bear fruits, help us breathe, and are full of stories. Only if one would listen. Today I listened.

*

We often think of ourselves as something other than nature, something above nature. This is a consequence of the western philosophies of the past 2000 years that have emphasised time and again about nature being separate from us, and humans with their intellect and reason as superior to it, with propagators like Plato, Descartes, Bacon and others.⁹³ A mechanistic vision had started taking shape ‘among elites who were directly or indirectly involved in the two great European projects of the time: the conquest of the Americas and the trade in enslaved Africans.’⁹⁴ Glacken stated, ‘The assumption of rationality, that Western civilisation was at the apex of civilisations in the march of progress, implied that mastery was rational mastery, that masters of nature were rational masters’.⁹⁵ A kind of thinking that finally led to the industrial revolution in the 19th century, and the theories of Charles Darwin, one feeding the other. As Nibbi puts it, ‘Darwin’s theory both shaped and was shaped by the individualist climate of Britain at the height of the Industrial Revolution, and could not have succeeded anywhere else at that time.’⁹⁶ Today, some say Anthropocene (period during which human activity has been the dominant influence on climate and the environment) started with the industrial revolution, and others speak with the agricultural revolution.⁹⁷ When I look at the big picture, I see a domino effect, and the question is, what comes next?

Jung may help us navigate. He believed the earth to be ‘sentient, knowing and intelligent and directed by explicable cosmic forces’, suggesting three different stages of approaching the non-rational. The first is animism, where the spirits of the earth are treated as forces ‘out there’, requiring the interventions of shaman priests and witch doctors. Modern anthropologists and scientists see these forces as projections of the human mind upon inanimate phenomena, considering them ‘irrational and anthropomorphic’. Stage two is a withdrawal of all these projections, where we are ‘in a spiritual and emotional wasteland’, for we aren’t left with anything to form a spiritual bond with. So the world isn’t considered sacred anymore; instead, just real estate or a natural resource to fulfil our desires, leading to degradation and exploitation and an ecological crisis. The third and final stage is where the world is ‘enchanted again’, but differently from animism. We realise that the projections aren’t entirely of our own making and might belong to the world's soul, the ‘anima mundi’. He believed that if nothing binds us to the world in a meaningful way, after withdrawing our projections, there is a problem with our philosophical worldview.⁹⁸

Today we live in the wasteland, i.e., stage 2, as Jung puts it. A world where Eliot says we’ve reduced nature to just a ‘*carving*’ on our great walls, where the ‘*black clouds*’ carry a warning, a warning of danger, and so its time for us to finally ‘*set*’ our ‘*lands in order*’. Enchantment is what we need to get to the next stage. In looking for a solution, I find myself drowning in a pool of categorisations.

‘biophilia’ ‘biophobia’
‘ecophilia’ ‘ecophobia’
‘ecopedagogy’ ‘ecocide’
‘symbiocene’ ‘sostalgia’

The answer is quite simple; it all started with alienation from nature, by putting reason over nature. What we need is unification over classification. In the old days, up until the 16th century, in Ireland, the ancient rites of kingship involved a sacred marriage (banais rìgh) between the king and the land. For life to be abundant and the land to be fertile, it was believed mutual respect must be achieved between goddess(of sovereignty) and king, land and people, nature and culture, feminine and masculine. The failure of which will lead to the wasteland.⁹⁹ And so, balance is what needs to be restored. It is ultimately about being at home, taking care of it, loving it and belonging to it. As Monica Gagliano puts it,

‘We are not in nature,
we don't go to nature,
we are nature.

We literally spring out of the planet.
And when we are removed from nature,
which is our own nature, we are naturally going to look for it again,
we are looking for ourselves’.¹⁰⁰

The word human comes from the Latin word ‘humus’, which means the earth; we are creatures of the soil.¹⁰¹ As David Abram puts it, ‘The eyes, the skin, the tongue, ears and nostrils- all are gates where our body receives the nourishment of otherness...every aspect of the earthy sensors could draw us in a relationship fed with curiosity and spiced with danger.’¹⁰² And so ‘*in the mountains*’ we do ‘*feel free*’.

*



Figure 19: Shirazeh Houshiary, [no title], 1992

We are looking at an image by Shirazeh Houshiary. It carries the colour of the forest. It is the colour of balance and harmony, a neutral colour for our eyes, lying in the middle of the visual spectrum, relaxing us and creating an equilibrium between our thoughts and emotions.¹⁰³ The image is made from layering words, words inspired by Rumi.¹⁰⁴ A Persian poet, who once said, ‘How should Spring bring forth a garden on hard stone? Become earth, that you may grow flowers of many colors. For you have been heart-breaking rock. Once, for the sake of experiment, be earth!’¹⁰⁵ The shape of the image, the concentric circles, resemble tree rings. Tree rings carry time with them, time marked by the days of summer and winter, the days of rain and drought, and even the fire scars.¹⁰⁶ The artist calls them the ‘Round Dance’, where the ‘repeated words represent the act of breathing’, revealing ‘language as a living organism’.¹⁰⁷ The circles, to me, look like a mandala. A circular geometric configuration which is used as a tool for spiritual guidance in meditation.¹⁰⁸ To heal.

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- ⁹³ Sharon Blackie, *If women rose rooted* 2nd end (Denmark: September Publishing, 2019), p. 33.
- ⁹⁴ Amitav Ghosh, *The Nutmeg's curse* (Great Britain: John Murray, 2021), p. 37.
- ⁹⁵ Glacken (1974,p.22)cited in '(PDF) Educating For and Through Nature: A Merleau-Pontian Approach', *ResearchGate* <<https://doi.org/10.1007/s11217-007-9059-x>>.
- ⁹⁶ Trevor Nibbi, 'Evolution in Context: The Theories of Charles Darwin in the Industrial Revolution', 16.
- ⁹⁷ 'Rooted beings' (exhibition guide) Wellcome collection, London: 24 March - 29 August 2022.
- ⁹⁸ David Tacey, 'Mind and Earth: Psychic Influence Beneath the Surface', *Jung Journal: Culture & Psyche*, 3.2 (2009), 18-21<<https://doi.org/10.1525/jung.2009.3.2.15>>.
- ⁹⁹ Blackie, *If women rose rooted* 2nd end p. 60.
- ¹⁰⁰ 'The botanical mind-A new model of intelligent life' *Camden art audio*, podcast, May 2020 <<https://open.spotify.com/episode/5v9LY5lGTThfpSJZibJSQI>> [accessed 2 April 2022].
- ¹⁰¹ 'Rooted beings' (exhibition guide) Wellcome collection, London: 24 March - 29 August 2022.
- ¹⁰² David (Abram, 1996, p.ix) cited in Ruyu Hung, 'Towards Ecopedagogy: An Education Embracing Ecophilia', *Educational Studies in Japan*, 11.0 (2017), 43-56 <<https://doi.org/10.7571/esjkyoiku.11.43>>.
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- ¹⁰⁴ Tate, "[No Title]", Shirazeh Houshiary, 1992', *Tate* <<https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/houshiary-no-title-p77593>> [accessed 9 May 2022].
- ¹⁰⁵ 'Rumi Quote', *A-Z Quotes* <<https://www.azquotes.com/quote/576524>> [accessed 9 May 2022].
- ¹⁰⁶ Jessica Stoller-Conrad, 'Tree Rings Provide Snapshots of Earth's Past Climate', *Climate Change: Vital Signs of the Planet* <<https://climate.nasa.gov/news/2540/tree-rings-provide-snapshots-of-earths-past-climate>> [accessed 9 May 2022].
- ¹⁰⁷ Tate, "[No Title]", Shirazeh Houshiary, 1992'.
- ¹⁰⁸ 'Mandala', *Wikipedia*, 2022 <<https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Mandala&oldid=1086670636>> [accessed 9 May 2022].

Burning burning burning burning (308)

_____ *Who is the third who walks always beside you?*
_____ *When I count, there are only you and I together*
_____ *But when I look ahead up the white road*
_____ *There is always another one walking beside you*

_____ *Gliding wrapped in a brown mantle, hooded*

I do not know whether a man or a woman—But who is that on the other side of you?(360-366)

There is the empty chapel, only the wind's home (389)

_____ *Then spoke the thunder*

_____ *DA.*

_____ *Datta: what have we given?*

_____ *My friend, blood shaking my heart*

_____ *The awful daring of a moment's surrender*

_____ *Which an age of prudence can never retract*

_____ *By this, and this only, we have existed*

_____ *Which is not to be found in our obituaries*

_____ *Or in memories draped by the beneficent spider*

_____ *Or under seals broken by the lean solicitor*

_____ *In our empty rooms (400-410)*



Datta. Dayadhvam. Damyata.

_____ *Shantih Shanith Shantih (433-434)*

A mandala represents a spiritual journey that begins on the outside and takes you to the inner core of your being.¹⁰⁹ It is a circular geometric form that speaks of one's inner self. Jung believed that it is 'the recognition and conscious integration of the contents of the collective unconscious', a critical step in individuation, i.e., becoming oneself by integrating with the shadow side.¹¹⁰ In Hinduism mandala is also called a 'yantra'.¹¹¹ It is control and liberation encompassed in one.¹¹² Yatra carries the same root -tra (liberation) and ya meaning 'go'.¹¹³ It is the journey one makes. A pilgrimage, some would say. Solnit states, 'A pilgrimage asks that we give up everything so we might learn, what is truly ours. It is a search for knowledge, a search for becoming.'¹¹⁴

But it is a different journey that everyone makes. We all have to find our paths. As the story of Arthur's knights goes, where they were told, 'If you go to the forest where there is already a trail, then that is one sure sign that you're not on your path.'¹¹⁵ We should never confine ourselves to the journeys that were never our own, and the next step will always have a mind of its own. It is on this journey that we make sense of our lives. As Heidegger says, 'man' is the 'strangest' for 'everywhere he or she belongs to the being or strangeness or chaos, and yet everywhere he or she attempts to carve a path from chaos.'¹¹⁶

Eliot tells us '*What the Thunder Said*'. Once upon a time, the Gods, men and demons asked their father how to live well. And he answered with the sound of '*thunder*'.

'DA'.

The men heard '*Datta*' (to give),
the demons heard '*Dayadhvam*' (to have compassion),
And the Gods heard '*Damyata*' (self-control).¹¹⁷

It's a story from the Upanishads. And Eliot warns us that if we don't learn how to give and leave that till the very end in our will, we will die in '*empty rooms*', where the only person left to take them will be our lawyer. He's asking us to come out of the confines of our egotistic heads and have compassion, and finally, let go of all temptation.¹¹⁸

There are many more stories in the Upanishads about ways of being. Each has specific mantras, which are meant to be repeated, for us to grasp their essence. All mantras begin with a chanting of the word 'Om'. Hindu scripture defines this word as the 'primordial sound of creation', 'the original vibration of the universe'.¹¹⁹ It impacts our physical, emotional and mental state, helping us align our frequency with that of the universe, to a state where our mind is aligned with our breath and in control, letting go of the material world.¹²⁰

Every part of the physical symbol ‘signifies a particular state of reality’-

The lower curve is the waking state (physical body and senses),

The upper curve is the unconscious state (a deep, dreamless sleep),

The middle curve is the dream state (subconscious),

The dot is enlightenment,

The crescent is Maya (an illusion that binds us to the material world, separating us from enlightenment).¹²¹



Figure 20: Premium Vector | Om Aum Brush

The chanting of Om is meant to lead us to peace (shantih). Eliot ends the wasteland with '*Shantih Shantih Shantih*' as a prayer for us, pointing us in the direction of eastern philosophies, the teachings of the Upanishads, which he believed would be able to bring us out of the wasteland. This final chant invokes peace on all three levels of consciousness, the waking, dreaming and sleeping state, harmonising earth, heaven and hell, and bringing peace to mind, body and spirit.¹²²

The central message of the Upanishads to us is Sat, Chit, Ananda.

Sat means 'you are pure existence', appearing in different forms because of Maya (illusion), ignorance of which leads to suffering and its awareness, to enlightenment.¹²³

Chit means 'you are pure consciousness'. According to science, consciousness is a product of the brain, but Upanishads believe it to be different from anything matter. It is the unchanging, undying essence which enables the mind and body, only known through its manifestations.¹²⁴

Ananda means 'we are pure bliss'. It means true happiness lies within us, and in our ignorance, we look for it outside, in worldly pleasures.¹²⁵

And so Eliot says '*burning burning burning burning*', describing the burning of passion, attachment and suffering.¹²⁶ He asks us, '*Who is the third who walks always beside you?*' Suggesting that God is always present with us, but we don't have the spiritual insight to recognise him.¹²⁷ And again, when he shows us an '*empty chapel*' pointing to the grail story, where the knight, after slaying every beast and resisting every temptation, has to move past the possibility that there is no God (on the outside) and 'continuing forward anyway', for only that is when he can know 'true immortality in Christ'.¹²⁸ It is the journey to authentic selfhood. As Kierkegaard says, 'For the great thing is not that one is this or that, but that one is oneself, and that is in every man's power if he will'.¹²⁹ It is a 'coming home'; as Russel Peter says, Ananda is 'the contentment that comes from retiring to our true nature.'¹³⁰ It is what Campbell means by Bliss, the final phase of the hero's journey when he comes back with his story to close the circle so the loop can start again.¹³¹

If we are to get out of the wasteland, we have to make this journey to oneness. We have to cross this threshold by letting go of the illusion of material bliss in the modern world. Only when the realisation of true bliss dawns on us can we restore our disintegrated psyche and bring about a balance between nature and culture, logical and spiritual. We have to find presence by growing deep in the soil of our existence, as that is when we begin to see the path we are meant to take and discover meaning along the way. We have to heal ourselves first, for only then will we have a story to tell, and collective healing will follow.



Figure 21: Tom Vander Well, 'Prophetic Pattern, Hero's Journey, and the Belly of the Whale', *Wayfarer*, 2017

I close my eyes
Keep my hands on my heart
And chant Om thrice

I ask
How do I be?

When it's raining, I run, nowhere specific, just run, through the trees, on the grass, as if to match the frequency of the rain. It falls on my skin, hair, feet, and lashes. It flows through me, back to this earth so that it can rise again.

I lie down now as if to become a vessel that it can flow through; I feel one with it. I feel alive. I'm climbing up a hill now; it's a narrow way up as if someone carved a path on a giant rock; the rock is on my left and a steep fall on my right. It doesn't scare me. The track is wide enough for me. It ignites something in me instead. A force. A force that keeps me moving. I feel the cold air on me. I like how it brushes past me; it freshens me up, as if it's entering my head through my eyes and my ears and my forehead, and my nose and mouth, cleansing me and leaving me anew and continuing on its journey.

I am in Water now; it's a world filled with water; I flow through it, my head directing the flow of the rest of my body; I feel lighter. I see the light peeping in from above as if trying to reach me, or maybe it's the other way around. I lie flat, facing it in a state that my words won't be able to explain. I feel the fishes swim through me, brushing past my hands, back, legs, neck, and all the spaces in between. They are going to the light and taking a part of me with them.

Shanti Shanti Shanti

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- 110 'Carl Jung - Mandala' <<https://www.carl-jung.net/mandala.html>> [accessed 30 May 2022].
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- 114 Sharon Blackie, *If women rose rooted* 2nd end (Denmark: September Publishing, 2019), p. 97.
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