View metadata, citation and similar papers at core.ac.uk
brought to you by CORE
provided by College of William & Mary: W&M Publish

WILLIAM & MARY
CHARTERED 1693

W&M ScholarWorks

Dissertations, Theses, and Masters Projects

Theses, Dissertations, & Master Projects

1986

The Quest for Meaning in "The Waste Land" and "Sanctuary": A Comparative Study

Mary Katherine Compton
College of William & Mary - Arts & Sciences

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarworks.wm.edu/etd

Part of the American Literature Commons, Comparative Literature Commons, and the English Language and Literature Commons

Recommended Citation

Compton, Mary Katherine, "The Quest for Meaning in "The Waste Land" and "Sanctuary": A Comparative Study" (1986). *Dissertations, Theses, and Masters Projects.* Paper 1539625352.
https://dx.doi.org/doi:10.21220/s2-mb3f-k002

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Theses, Dissertations, & Master Projects at W&M ScholarWorks. It has been accepted for inclusion in Dissertations, Theses, and Masters Projects by an authorized administrator of W&M ScholarWorks. For more information, please contact scholarworks@wm.edu.

THE QUEST FOR MEANING IN THE WASTE LAND AND SANCTUARY: A COMPARATIVE STUDY

A Thesis
Presented to
The Faculty of the Department of English
The College of William and Mary in Virginia

In Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Arts

by
Mary Katherine Compton
1986

APPROVAL SHEET

This thesis is submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

Mary Katherine Compton

Author

Approved, August 1986

Walter P. Wenska

Walter P. Wenska

John W. Conlee

John W. Conlee

Henry W. Hart

Henry W. Hart

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The writer wishes to express her appreciation to Dr. Walter P. Wenska, under whose guidance this study was completed. The author is also indebted to Dr. John W. Conlee and Dr. Henry W. Hart for their careful reading and criticism of the manuscript.

ABSTRACT

Frazer's The Golden Bough has had a profound impact on modern literature, especially on the understanding of the centrality of myth in the human experience. Two works that utilize vegetation mythology from Frazer's study are T. S. Eliot's The Waste Land and William Faulkner's Sanctuary, as demonstrated by John Vickery in The Literary Impact of the Golden Bough and by Thomas McHaney in "Sanctuary and Frazer's Slain Kings." In his discussion of The Waste Land Vickery proposes that the vegetation/fertility rituals serve as a means through which the protagonist is able to achieve a heightened religious consciousness. Myth is similarly central in Horace Benbow's search for meaning in Sanctuary.

The purpose of this study is to examine the extent to which Frazer's vegetation/fertility rituals and myths are used by both Eliot in The Waste Land and Faulkner in Sanctuary as progressive stages in the reclamation or attainment of religious consciousness and to trace the protagonist's development or lack of conscious development in the respective works.

While Eliot's protagonist in the end perceives an intrinsic mythic order that leads to the expansion of his religious consciousness and the restoration of the waste land, Horace Benbow searches for but cannot find an underlying positive mythic pattern that would set his own world in order.

THE QUEST FOR MEANING IN _THE WASTE LAND_ AND _SANCTUARY_: A COMPARATIVE STUDY

Certainly Frazer's The Golden Bough has had a profound effect on the understanding of the centrality of myth in the human experience. That T.S. Eliot knew and utilized The Golden Bough in addition to Jessie Weston's From Ritual to Romance as a source for vegetation and fertility ceremonies in The Waste Land is documented in his Notes (Complete Poems 50). Similarly, Thomas McHaney asserts in the article "Sanctuary and Frazer's Slain Kings" that William Faulkner knew and utilized vegetation and fertility myths from The Golden Bough in the novel Sanctuary (McHaney 224). McHaney also suggests that Faulkner was influenced by T.S. Eliot's use of Frazer and finds that Sanctuary is "a brilliantly successful adaptation of Eliot's idea in The Waste Land, a subtle and fully articulated suffusion of primitive myth and ritual into a modern fiction" (224). As evidenced by the use of vegetation myth in their respective works, both Eliot and Faulkner found myth a means of "giving a shape and a significance to the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history" (Eliot, Dial 480-83).

Beyond providing an inherent order, myth aids both Eliot and Faulkner in articulating thematic concerns. John Vickery in his explication of The Waste Land in The Literary Impact of The Golden Bough asserts that in The Waste Land nature myths and fertility rituals "convey the theme of growth and recovery of religious consciousness of man throughout his history" and that vegetation myths and rituals are presented as "progressive stages in the gradual evolution of man's religious consciousness" (244-45). In Vickery's view, the whole of The Waste Land can be seen as the protagonist's quest for religious consciousness with fertility/vegetation rituals providing rites of passage to ultimate reclamation of religious knowledge; these rites of passage or trials are "calculated to determine whether or not the protagonist is a true hero" (244). A similar interest is apparent in Sanctuary, especially seen in the protagonist Horace Benbow's search for meaning in the waste land presented in the novel.

The purpose of this study is to examine the extent to which vegetation/fertility rituals and myths are used by Eliot and Faulkner in The Waste Land and Sanctuary as progressive stages in the reclamation or attainment of religious consciousness and to trace the protagonist's development or lack of conscious development in the respective works.

Initially some clarification of the nature and role of the protagonist in The Waste Land and Sanctuary is in order. Both Eliot and Faulkner present protagonists who seek meanings beyond those that are offered by contemporary society. Eliot's multifaceted protagonist searches for meanings for the present in ancient ritual. Not only is Eliot's protagonist acting for himself, but he is the "hero savior of his people who seeks spiritual and psychological salvation for his society" (Vickery 246). "Hero savior of his people" is an ill-fitting epithet for Faulkner's Horace Benbow, who has been described by Cleanth Brooks as "a bookish, middle-aged inhabitant of the modern waste land" (130). It is clear, however, that Horace is particularly suited for his role as protagonist inasmuch as he seeks personal fulfillment and refuge from the torment of his marriage outside the bounds of contemporary society. Armed with a book of poetry, Horace as questor seeks the Delta uplands, and "a hill to lie on," searching for restoration in the solitude of a natural setting (Sanctuary 16; ch. 2). That he is uniquely capable of recognizing that the restoration/fulfillment and refuge he seeks must be found beyond the modern waste land fundamentally links Horace to Eliot's protagonist.

The season that serves as the opening for both The Waste Land and Sanctuary is paradoxically a dead spring: both beginnings reinforce the "interrelation of death and life on the vegetative level" (Vickery 247). While in both works spring signals the seasonal blooming and even seething of vegetation--as in the case of Faulkner's Heaven Tree outside the Jefferson jail--this furious rebirth is anthropologically juxtaposed with burial ceremonies and rituals for the protection of men from the power of evil. The ritual deaths of both Christ and the vegetation god Adonis are particularly associated with protection from evil and physical and spiritual regeneration (Vickery

248). Ironically, Horace Benbow finds no protection through ritual from the depravity that he discovers in the course of the novel and becomes completely ineffectual in his contest with evil (Brooks 116).

Eliot's depiction of April as the cruelest month has its anthropological source in Frazer, who records that in the interval between mid-April and the middle of June "the land of Egypt is but half alive, waiting for the new Nile" (Vickery 248). Just as Eliot's April establishes a bond with vegetative rites and ritual behavior found in The Golden Bough, so Benbow's beginning his quest on May 3rd becomes ritually significant, since early May is traditionally linked to the regenerative/restorative ceremonies integral to the celebration of the rites of spring (Frazer 137-54).

In addition to the depiction of spring as ritually critical in anthropological terms and its ironic connections with death, spring is also portrayed by both Eliot and Faulkner as a season of sterility and desolation. Eliot's inclusion of images of arid waste marked by sun-scorched roots, trees, and rocks, in conjunction with the opening description of breeding lilacs and the stirring of dry roots, indicate a physical fecundity on the vegetative level while spiritual sterility and death remain constant. Likewise, Faulkner's description of the Old Frenchman place demonstrates quite clearly the waste land equation of chaotic, rife verdure juxtaposed with spiritual/moral sterility:

> The gaunt ruin of the house rose against the sky, above the massed and matted cedar, lightless, desolate, and profound. The road was an eroded scar too deep to be a road and too straight to be a ditch....choked with fern and rotted leaves and branches. (18-19; ch. 2)

In the property is reflected the sterility and depravity of the inhabitants as Horace discovers--after his encounter with Popeye--the blind, unkempt grandfather, the half-wit Tommy, and Ruby with her debilitated infant.

The idea that the desolation of the land is reflected in, and perhaps caused by, the sterility--both physical and moral--of its inhabitants finds its source in Jessie Weston's From Ritual to Romance, specifically in her depiction of the Fisher King whom Eliot adapts in the creation of his protagonist (Complete Poems 50-51). In Weston's study the Fisher King, a prominent figure in the Grail legend cycle, is sexually impotent and his loss of virility--whether by wound, sickening, or old age--is sympathetically reflected in nature, bringing about "a suspension of the reproductive processes of Nature" and making the land waste; it becomes the task of the Grail knight to restore the land to fertility (23). Weston demonstrates the intrinsic linkage of the Fisher King to ancient fertility and vegetation rituals as explained by Frazer and emphasizes their importance as factors "'in the evolution of religious consciousness'" (qtd. in Williamson 119). In The Waste Land the Fisher King becomes the prototype for the male characters in the poem "who melt into one another," suggesting a synthesis of protagonist/questor and impotent king (Eliot, "Notes" 50). In "The Fire Sermon" the Fisher King sits fishing in the dull canal, contemplating the desolation and waste about him, as yet unable to restore the land, whereas, by the end of the poem--having undergone ritual purging and having achieved an understanding of the meaning of the words spoken by the thunder--the Fisher King sits "upon the shore/Fishing," the restoration of his land to fertility possible at last. The focus is not on the irretrievable waste of the land, but on the possibility of finally setting the land in order.

A correlation exists between the Fisher King as characteristic of the male character in Eliot and the characteristics of the prototype evident in Faulkner's Horace Benbow and Popeye. Popeye's syphilitic impotence and his reign over the inhabitants of the Old Frenchman place, as well as those who stray into his domain, make him an ironic Fisher King. Another relation Popeye bears to the Fisher King in The Waste Land is seen in the male sex totem, the "fishing bird," that sings its monotone song in the opening of the novel (McHaney 229). Unlike the Fishers presented by Eliot and Weston, Popeye seeks no restoration of his waste kingdom; the sterility and depravity he propagates (as seen in his corncob rape) prevent the occurrence of any such change.

Even more significant are the relationships between

Horace Benbow and the archetypal Fisher King. While impotence from sickness or wounding is not apparent, age and fear of sexual desire are factors in the apparent loss of virility that Horace experiences. Well aware of his inherent weakness, Horace offers an admission of his frailty to Ruby Lamar:

> You see...I lack courage: that was left out of me. The machinery is all there but it won't run. (16; ch. 2)

A correlation exists between Benbow's machinery that won't run and the mechanical men and women who inhabit the waste land. Machines underscore the sterility of sexual activity in the mechanical age, seen in the "sound of horns and motors" (WL 3.197-98) that heralds Mr. Sweeney's visit to Mrs. Porter. The gestures and copulation of the typist and her young man have become automatic and machine-like. Just as her lovemaking is mechanical, so the typist's music is machine-produced; "with automatic hand" (WL 3.255), she places a record on the gramophone.

Indeed, Horace in his weakness and impotence must seek his own restoration and refuge; there is no one in the waste land he inhabits who is capable of effecting this regeneration for him. A further correlation with the Fisher King is found in Horace's weekly deliveries of shrimp to his wife, Belle. Rather than fishing "in the dull canal," Horace gets his box of shrimp off the train and walks home with the dripping carton, "thinking Here lies Horace Benbow in a fading series of small stinking spots on a Mississippi sidewalk" (17; ch. 2). That Horace as Fisher associates his catch with desolation and death provides a striking contrast to Weston's argument that the "Fish is a life symbol of immemorial antiquity" (125). An additional irony is seen in Weston's statement that "the title of Fisher has, from the earliest ages, been associated with deities who were...connected with the origin and preservation of life" (125). Rather than preserving his marriage through the performance of a ritual with ancient, life-affirming associations, Horace desires to relinquish his role as "Fisher." Additionally, Horace's delivery of shrimp is described as a "wretched perversion of a once meaningful religious act"; an ironic connection exists between the Friday shrimp and Roman Catholic ritual fasting (McHaney 239). "Shrimp" is also used perjoratively by Little Belle as a name for Benbow, clearly underscoring both his innate weakness and linking him figuratively to the very object of his loathing (McHaney 239).

While the desolation and sterility of the land is reflected in the impotence and enervation of the Fisher King and his prototypes, certain remedies for restoring the land to fertility are offered to the protagonist. Vickery suggests that if the protagonist "fails to grasp the significance" of the remedies offered, then the ritual and "his own actions become debased and meaningless" (Vickery 250). If the questor is to progress from the imitative fertility rituals to a heightened religious consciousness, he must be able to discern the significance of solutions proffered (Vickery 250). The initial remedy offered is the possibility of achieving a higher love, which is prefigured in Eliot's hyacinth garden scene (Vickery 250). The hyacinths the girl holds, traditionally "the flowers of desire," are connected with the sacred marriage of Apollo and "the aboriginal vegetative deity" Hyacinth; they represent the union of God and mankind (Vickery 250-51). Even so, the protagonist senses and fears his desire for the hyacinth girl, failing to perceive the symbolic higher love she represents (Vickery 250-51). His fear of desire has sapped all powers of speech, sight, and understanding and thrust him into a limbo where the recovery of these powers seems impossible:

> You gave me hyacinths first a year ago;
> They called me the hyacinth girl.
> --Yet when we came back, late, from the Hyacinth
> garden,
> Your arms full, and your hair wet, I was neither
> Living nor dead, and I knew nothing,
> Looking into the heart of light, the silence.
> (WL 1.35-41)

The failure of sight the protagonist experiences is one example of the recurring theme of vision and insight in The Waste Land. Madame Sosostris, a seer with limited vision, is forbidden to see what the one-eyed merchant carries on his back and cannot find the Hanged Man in the Tarot pack. Sosostris is a foil to Tiresias, the blind seer, whose observation of the relations between the typist and the clerk is at once all-seeing and voyeuristic. In Sanctuary Faulkner's blind old man becomes emblematic of the moral blindness and degeneracy of the occupants of the Old Frenchman's Place. Popeye, clearly a voyeur, is incapable of insight; his eyes, "like rubber knobs" (5; ch. 1), underscore his inhumanity. The subject of his "observations," Temple Drake, while physically sighted, is also morally blind; like Popeye, her eyes are soulless, "blank and all pupil" (282; ch. 28) after her perjury at Goodwin's trial. It is Horace who, like Tiresias and the protagonist, is granted insight and is thereby made capable of undertaking a search for meaning.

While Horace Benbow does not experience a failure of sight, he does find, like Eliot's protagonist, his confrontation with fecundity and desire equally debilitating. Just as hyacinths represent sexual desire for the protagonist and lilacs spring from the dead land "mixing/Memory and desire," so Horace finds his sexual desire stirred by the memory of "the reaffirmation of the old ferment...the green snared promise of unease" found in the blossoming grape:

> ...What blossoms grapes have, this is. It's not much: a wild and waxlike bleeding less of bloom than leaf, hiding the hammock until along in late May...Little Belle's...voice would be like the murmur of the wild grape itself. (13; ch. 1)

For Horace the leafy ferment that hides Little Belle's hammock is inexorably linked to "female flesh and female season," the burgeoning of which represents a rite of fecundity designed to kindle cupidity and at once induces fear and titillation in Benbow. Little Belle and the grape clearly suggest the archetypal linkage of feminine and vegetative fertility. In essence, the enormity of the enervation and apprehension that Benbow experiences when faced with the antithesis of his own impotence is no less debilitating than that experienced by Eliot's protagonist. Just as the encounter with the Hyacinth girl only reinforces the physical and spiritual impotence of the protagonist, so the shrimp deliveries to Belle and the ancient vegetative rites of renewal associated with Little Belle and the burgeoning grape only emphasize for Horace his own impotence and the ultimate futility of any search for meaning and satiation in the waste land.

The initial failures both Benbow and Eliot's protagonist encounter lead both to seek assistance in their respective quests. Madame Sosostris becomes for Eliot's protagonist a source of guidance, divining the future through the Tarot pack, which contains images that are ultimately linked to ancient symbology found in The Golden Bough (Vickery 252). Belladonna, the "Lady of the Rocks," is linked to an Asiatic fertility goddess and the name "Belladonna" not only suggests poison but may imply a warning that her worship leads to loss of virility (Vickery 253). Indeed, the appellation "Belladonna" strikingly parallels Belle and Little Belle, whose service similarly emasculates.

While the images of "the man with three staves," "the one-eyed merchant," and the Wheel are also connected with The Golden Bough, the Hanged Man is by Eliot's own admission taken directly from Frazer who documents that the hanged victim represents the dying and reviving deity, Attis (Vickery 254). That Eliot's hanged victim is man and not god links the Tarot figure to the protagonist, underscoring the parallels between the vegetative regeneration suggested in the sacrificial death of the Hanged Man with the death and rebirth which the protagonist must undergo in order to obtain a "renewed sense of life" (Vickery 255). Faulkner's use of the impotent Popeye as hanged man provides an ironic contrast to Eliot's Tarot image of the hanged god. Popeye is not a sacrificial victim but a hardened criminal who will not defend himself and whose final concern is that his hair should be neat, which only compounds the absurdity of his death. There is no vegetative renewal for the waste land or spiritual regeneration for its inhabitants suggested in Faulkner's "hanged man." Rather than the death and rebirth for the protagonist that is foreshadowed in Eliot's Tarot image, Popeye as hanged man embodies the sterility, absurdity, and ultimate hopelessness that Horace views and suffers.

That Eliot's protagonist finds the hanged man and Madame Sosostris ("the wisest woman in Europe") does not, indicates not only "their respective natures," but more significantly, "the extent of their interest in restoring the waste land and its inhabitants to fertility" (Vickery 255). The protagonist as seeker is rewarded with insight beyond that of the clairvoyant Madame Sosostris, marking the first success in his quest for meaning in the waste land (Vickery 255). Ironically, neither Horace nor Miss Reba, owner of the brothel where Popeye kept Temple Drake, is able to locate the escaped Popeye who subsequently becomes the hanged man. Horace is unable to find Popeye or successfully defend Lee Goodwin, providing a commentary on Horace's ineffectuality as savior, as a bringer of justice and, hence, of restoration to the waste land of the novel.

James Miller compares Madame Sosostris ("Sanctuary: Yoknapatawpha's Waste Land") to the half-mad woman Horace consults; both figures, according to Miller, represent "an energy, integrity, and earnestness...that have disappeared from religious belief" (262). Even so, Miller's parallel fails to convince since there is no such energy, integrity, or earnestness found in Faulkner's half-mad woman. A more reasonable parallel might be drawn between Madame Sosostris and Narcissa Benbow. Both serve as advisors who because of their limited vision present obstacles for the protagonist and Horace, respectively, to overcome. Although both offer advice, neither Madame Sosostris nor Narcissa exhibit what Vickery calls a "fully awakened religious consciousness" (255). This is particularly true in the case of Narcissa, whose advice that Horace should leave Jefferson and give up Goodwin to a better criminal lawyer is based solely on her desire that Horace act within the narrow limits of Baptist propriety and so, in turn, preserve her own respectability. Self-absorbed as her name suggests, Narcissa sees Horace's altruism toward Ruby Lamar and Lee Goodwin as potentially destroying her "life of serene vegetation," likened to "perpetual corn or wheat in a sheltered garden instead of a field" (103; ch. 15). While this image links Narcissa, according to McHaney (238), to Frazer's vegetative or fertility goddesses, she is also linked through the sterility of her carefully cultivated existence and her emasculating capacities to other women of the waste land--The Lady of the Rocks and Belladonna--whose worship results in impotence. Narcissa arranges the eviction of Ruby Lamar and betrayal of Horace to the district attorney Eustace Graham out of an earnest desire for self-preservation, her act echoing the sentiment expressed by Madame Sosostris that "one must be so careful these days" (_WL_ 1.59).

The confrontation with Madame Sosostris marks the first stage in realization for Eliot's protagonist; he perceives the connection between the inhabitants of the waste land and death (Vickery 255). This perception of reality is achieved in spite of the limited insight of the seer. It is clear that Horace is defeated, in part, as a consequence of his sister's narrowness of vision and ultimate betrayal, yet he too is brought to a realization. Horace's experience with Narcissa only compounds what Faulkner's protagonist discovers in the course of the novel: the true nature of evil (and in turn the depravity of the inhabitants of the waste land) is intrinsically linked to the discovery of the true nature of women (Brooks 127). Clearly, Narcissa's depravity becomes shockingly evident to Horace; when speaking of the murder, she coldly states "'I don't see that it makes any difference who did it. The question is, are you going to stay mixed up with it?'" (179; ch. 20). Brooks finds Narcissa Benbow, next to Popeye, "the most frightening person in the novel" moving "pitilessly...on to her own ends with no regard for justice and no concern for the claims of truth" (128). The total absence of such ideals in Narcissa not only diametrically opposes Horace's idealism but also serves, in part, as a means of revealing to the protagonist her innate capacity for evil.

Perhaps the most telling depiction of Horace's recognition of the connection between women and evil is found in his violent reaction to Little Belle's photograph following his interview with Temple Drake (Brooks 129). The "she" in this vision is deliberately ambiguous, suggesting a fusion of Little Belle and Temple in the mind of Horace. Having gazed upon the "voluptuous langour....the voluptuous promise of secret affirmation" in Little Bell's face, Horace becomes physically sick and envisions the following:

> Lying with her head lifted slightly, her chin depressed like a figure lifted down from a crucifix, she watched something black and furious go roaring out of her pale body. She

> as bound naked on her back on a flat car moving at a speed through a black tunnel...the darkness overhead now shredded with parallel attenuations of living fire...in nothingness filled with pale, myriad points of light. Far beneath her she could hear the faint, furious uproar of the shucks. (216; ch. 23)

Brooks argues that this passage, rather than evidencing Horace's realization of the evil within himself as some critics suggest, actually marks the protagonist's recognition of "the evil to which each sweet young girl is exposed and, more darkly, the disposition to evil which lurks within such a girl" (129). She (Little Belle/Temple) becomes in Horace's perception a sacrificial victim, the subject of abhorrent abuse, while like the typist after her violation, exhibiting a certain passivity and detachment from the violence done. His idealized perceptions shattered, Horace sees unveiled the mythic, primal darkness at the core of human nature.

Just as myth is clearly central in "The Burial of the Dead" in which Eliot's protagonist is brought to an understanding of the connection between the inhabitants of the waste land and death, so myth is equally significant in "A Game of Chess," and, according to Vickery, this section is "not only an indictment of life in the present but also an elaborate ritual of inversion" (258). The contemporary world is presented as a world incapable of seeing existence as an intermeshing of past, present, and future; rather, "A

Game of Chess" depicts the contemporary mind as one that "reduces existence to a series of self-contained compartments and then limits its focus to one straightened object at a time" (Vickery 258). In the description of the boudoir, the vanity is central, altar-like with its "chair...like a burnished throne" (WL 2.77) and its array of vials of ivory and coloured glass/Unstoppered" filled with "strange synthetic perfumes/Unguent, powdered or liquid" (WL 2.86-88). Not unlike Pope's Belinda who presides at her toilet with "Each silver vase in mystic order laid," preparing to begin "the sacred rites of Pride," the woman of the waste land presides at her vanity like an attending priestess in this parodic enactment of empty ritual (Rape of the Lock 1.121, 127). Similarly, Temple's boudoir at Miss Reba's contains a dressing-table "cluttered with toilet things -- brushes and mirrors...with flasks and jars of delicate and bizarre shapes, bearing French labels" (218; ch. 24). That Temple takes up these items one by one and hurls them into a corner of the room, shattering and splintering the glass into myriad fragments, not only indicates her anger at the imprisonment Popeye has subjected her to but, more significantly, becomes emblematic of the superficiality and fragmentation of her existence.

A further parallel between the woman in "The Game of Chess" and Temple Drake may be found in their limited perceptions of fertility and procreation. Vickery argues that the woman's failure to perceive the connection between the sea-wood burning in the grate and the carved dolphin, which Frazer associates with a sea-god who underwent death by water and fire, "bars her from the true meaning of fertility" (259). The painting above the mantle depicts a sylvan scene, not of the bliss of Adam and Eve in the Garden, but rather of the transformation of Philomel as a result of the advances made by the barbarous king (Vickery 259). Temple Drake is similarly limited in her perception of fecundity and the regenerative potential of the sex act. McHaney characterizes her behavior prior to her rape as that of "an unholy innocent, a tease and a flirt ... evidently chaste, despite efforts to appear otherwise," her barren chastity emphasized in Tommy's observation in viewing her slenderness that no one has "laid no crop by yit" (qtd. in McHaney 229).

Temple's rape is not only intrinsically mythic, but also provides striking commentary on the sterility of sexuality in the waste land. Temple, like Philomel, is brutally violated by a barbarous "king," Popeye, who because of his impotence has already been linked to Frazer's King of the Wood and Weston's Fisher King. In McHaney's view (233), the rape is a clear perversion of the Eleusinian Mysteries, rites that included the ritual copulation of a priest-king and a surrogate Demeter and that concluded with the display of a ripe ear of corn, fruit of the ritual intercourse, a conclusion paralleled in the novel by Eustace Graham's display at Lee Goodwin's trial of the corn cob used in the rape. The display of the corn cob, in effect, brings about Lee Goodwin's death, underscoring the extent to which the "fruit" borne in this perversion of a life-affirming ritual affirms not life and regeneration for the waste land but sterility and death.

Additional evidence for the woman in the boudoir as vitiated fertility figure is found in the references to her hair, "spread out in fiery points," which is the antithesis of the symbolic fecundity of the hair of the Hyacinth girl, the fire suggesting "a need for purgative ritual" (Vickery 259). There can be no association with fertility in the characterization of Temple's hair, her "tight red curls" escaping from beneath her black hat "like clots of resin" (277; ch. 28). The artificiality of her hair only completes her mannequin-like appearance at the trial:

> Her face was quite pale, the two spots of rouge like paper discs pasted on her cheek bones, her mouth painted into a savage and perfect bow, also like something symbolical and cryptic cut carefully from purple paper and pasted there. (277; ch. 28)

While perhaps Horace foresaw Temple's need for purgative ritual in his vision of Temple/Little Belle travelling through a "nothingness filled with pale myriad points of light" (216; ch. 23), nevertheless, no such purging occurs, and Temple in the end is reduced to a hollow, painted puppet easily manipulated by her father and Popeye. Indeed, Popeye, repeatedly compared to a wax doll, is concerned just before his hanging that his Pinaud-laden hair is fixed. If at his execution, Popeye becomes Eliot's Hanged God of Frazer, a fertility avatar, then the trivial concern for his hair only heightens the absurdity and sterility of the restorative ritual associated with his hanging (McHaney 239).

In the contemporary world where "the ritual of sex has become a series of meaningless gestures whose result is destruction rather than the creation of life," the threat of the woman in the boudoir to walk the streets with her hair down conveys for Vickery the "contemporary social repugnance but not the religious awe for the prostitute" (259). Having been initiated into the underworld and having taken residence in Miss Reba's Memphis brothel, Temple finds an affinity for sex and for a lifestyle that she might have formerly considered socially repugnant. For the pariah Ruby Lamar, prostitution is a means to an end; by prostituting herself, she is able to generate money for Goodwin's benefit, as seen in her offer of her body to Horace as payment for legal fees. Brooks notes that Horace's outrage at her offer -- "'O hell! Can you stupid mammals never believe that any man, every man...'" -- indicates the protagonist's frustration that women, "whose function is so invincibly animal," seem incapable of belief in ideals (130).

Both the tavern scene in "A Game of Chess" and the Grotto scenes in Sanctuary depict contemporary society as vulgar and devoid of ideals. Just as Lil's marriage to

Albert becomes a subject for mockery and ridicule, so Red's funeral in the Grotto becomes a raucous carnival paradigmatic of a world where the brutishness of the inhabitants makes them incapable of perceiving the sanctity of ritual.

The indictment and repudiation of the contemporary world complete, Eliot's protagonist undergoes ritual purgation in "The Fire Sermon" and "Death by Water" (Vickery 260). In the opening of "The Fire Sermon" the protagonist, seeking the river's restorative waters, finds the river is "no longer that seat of worship of fertility deities, its banks deserted" (Vickery 260-61). A striking parallel to the protagonist's disillusionment is found in Horace's observation following the devastating interview with Temple at Miss Reba's. Seeking rest and peace at home, Horace "walks quietly up the drive" and notes that the house is still

> ...as though it were marooned in space by the ebb of all time. The insects had fallen to a low monotonous pitch, everywhere nowhere, spent, as though the sound were the chemical agony of a world left stark and dying above the tide-edge of the fluid in which it lived and breathed. (215; ch. 23)

As Fisher King fishing in the dull canal, Eliot's protagonist notes "White bodies naked on the low damp ground," (WL 3.193) which Vickery connects not only to the "death motif surrounding the Fisher King" but also to the traditional sacrifice of virginity made by the nymphs of summer "to the river prior to their marriage" (261). Like Eliot's Fisher King, Horace fishes for answers by the river in Miss Reba Rivers' brothel. Robert Slabey likens Miss Reba's place by the river to Hades, also associated with rivers, and suggests other parallels -- Minnie, like Charon, collects an entrance fee and Miss Reba's dogs represent Cerberus (45n.). Horace, similar to the classical voyager Odysseus, journeys to this underworld seeking answers of the dead and finds Temple, whose death-in-life existence is sustained by the consumption of gin "which brings about the same results as the waters of Lethe--forgetfulness" (Slabey 45n.). Having sacrificed her virginity like a modern Thames nymph to Popeye, a city director and lord of the River, Temple becomes so immersed in the underworld that, as Brooks observes, she finds "she has a positive liking" for the evil perpetuated there (132).

Vickery proposes (262) that the heart of the poem's indictment of contemporary society rests on the failure of the present to "see how such casual promiscuity as that of the nymphs...can be fitted into a religious perspective." Therefore it is necessary that one who would restore the waste land should be able to perceive the interconnection of present action and mythic pattern. While the scene with the typist and "'the young man carbuncular'" clearly represents the "perfunctory vulgarity of contemporary sexual intercourse," the protagonist/Tiresias is able to perceive that the pair, seen as "coiling serpents," embody the paradoxical powers of "the corruption of morality and the fertility of life" (Vickery 262). In viewing the copulation of the "lowest of the dead," (the clerk and typist as coiling serpents), Tiresias witnesses the union of human mortality and the spirit of fertility, in that snakes are mythically connected with phallic ceremonies employed to insure fecundity (Vickery 263).

Strikingly, Temple and Red are described by Minnie as "nekkid as two snakes," their coupling witnessed by the voyeur Popeye, "hanging over the foot of the bed without even his hat off, making a kind of whinnying sound" (Slabey 45n.). Like the typist and the clerk, Temple and Red are the "lowest of the dead," and Popeye, a would-be participant in their coiling, is also "one of the low," described in his jail cell as lying "motionless as a basking snake" (303; ch. 31), and would have coiled with Temple were it not for his impotence. Slabey notes that Temple relates to her friends the "myth of the seducing Snake" in the Garden of Eden, paradigmatic of Popeye's role in her ultimate corruption and fall (45n.).

While he does not actually witness the coiling of Temple and Red, Horace does observe Little Belle and her suitors, and, like Eliot's protagonist/Tiresias, "views and suffers all" (McHaney 239). Horace clearly connects the depraved relations of Popeye and Temple with evil and mortality. After Horace hears Temple's sordid recounting of her relations with Popeye, he desires that "every witness...every one who has heard Temple's story...including himself, should be exterminated, cauterized out of the old and tragic flank of the world" (214; ch. 23). His despairing observation that we die "upon the instant that we realize, admit, that there is a logical pattern to evil" further indicates Horace's perception of the primordial interconnection of death and evil. Although he finds the relationship between mortality and evil glaringly apparent, Horace, unlike Eliot's protagonist, sees no link between death and the promise of fertility; disillusionment and despair prevent any such hope.

The culmination of the purificatory process the protagonist undergoes is found in the conclusion of "The Fire Sermon" in the "Augustinian and Buddhistic purgatorial fires" which are linked to the midsummer bonfires recorded by Frazer (Vickery 263-64). Paralleling the ritual purging by fire Eliot's protagonist suffers is the burning of Lee Goodwin whose immolation occurs on June 22 and the near-burning of Horace who is identified by the crowd as the lawyer who defended Goodwin (McHaney 236, 240). The similarities between Goodwin's sacrifice at the hands of the angry mob and the account of Christ's agony and crucifixion in "What the Thunder Said" are indeed apparent. The "torchlight red on sweaty faces" connotes both the betrayal of Christ in Gethsemane and the pagan fertility/purificatory ceremony of lighting torches in gardens (Vickery 265). Goodwin is taken in the night from his cell beneath the Heaven Tree and dies an agonizing death amid the shouts and cries of a throng whose all-consuming white-hot flames are enkindled by an unquenchable thirst for revenge. Like Christ, whose sacrificial death Vickery connects with the primitive ritual of the scapegoat (266), Goodwin suffers death for Popeye's crime and will do nothing to defend himself. Even so, what separates Christ and the ancient fertility deities from Goodwin is the promise of resurrection and reviviscence. The promise inherent in "reverberation/Of thunder of spring over distant mountains" evidences both the demise and revival of Christ; the foreshadowed resurrection is fulfilled in the road to Emmaus sighting of the crucified deity "Gliding wrapt in a brown mantle" (Vickery 266). There is clearly no such hope of regeneration in Goodwin's immolation. An ironic omen might be found in Ruby's sickly child whose appalling similarity to the infant Popeye suggests a "wretched second coming" (McHaney 239).

Having reached the end of his quest, Eliot's protagonist finds at the Chapel Perilous the connection between sacrificial death seen in the dry bones and the restoration of fertility evidenced by the "damp gust/Bringing rain" (Vickery 266-67). Finally ready for the voice of the thunder, the protagonist finds that the three commands "'Datta, Dayadhvam, Damyata'" indicate "the right way through the maze" and is finally able to grasp that the poetic scenes exhibit the religious consciousness of mankind" (Vickery 267). What distinguishes Horace Benbow from Eliot's protagonist at the end of their respective quests for meaning in the waste land is that Horace is unable to find underlying meaning or significance in the scenes he has witnessed beyond his acknowledgement of the connection between evil and death. While Eliot's protagonist in the end perceives an intrinsic mythic order that leads to the expansion of religious consciousness, Horace can find no positive order to synthesize the fragmentation of his experience. For Horace, law is his ineffectual order. Having failed in his final test at Goodwin's trial, Horace reacts in frustration and despair to the ironic fecundity he views from the car window:

> ..he began to cry, sitting in the car beside his sister. She drove steadily, not fast. Soon they had left town and the stout rows of young cotton swung at either hand in parallel diminishing retrograde. There was a little snow of locust blooms on the mounting drive. 'It does last,' Horace said. 'Spring does. You'd almost think there was some purpose to it.' (285; ch. 29)

Just as the protagonist in "The Fire Sermon" weeps "By the waters of Leman" (WL 3.182), reminiscent of the Babylonian captivity, so Horace weeps out of desolation and despair, captive in Narcissa's car and exiled to Kinston.

That Horace has tried and failed to find purpose and meaning is clear. What drives him to despair is his discovery that ultimately there is no underlying pattern of hope or regeneration in the waste land. Rather than hearing the commands of the thunder or the promise of eternal peace, Horace, having come from idealism to nihilism in the course of his quest, hears and senses nothing in the end, even when he is apprehended by the mob at Goodwin's death:

> He couldn't hear the fire, though it still swirled upward unabated, as though it were living upon itself like in a dream, roaring silently out of a peaceful void. (289; ch. 29)

Having failed in his quest, Horace returns to Kinston and makes one last effort to remedy the hopelessness he feels by phoning Little Belle. Although he repeats the line "'Less oft is peace'" while waiting for her to answer, Horace, in desperation, seeks an affirmation of affection from Little Belle that will finally relieve him of his emptiness and depair; in Little Belle, Horace places his last hope for "Shantih." Even so, there is no such affirmation from his stepdaughter. Little Belle at her house party will become another Temple Drake, and the cycle will go endlessly on. Horace ultimately finds that hope is futile and fruitless in the waste land.

WORKS CITED

Brooks, Cleanth. William Faulkner: The Yoknapatawpha Country. New Haven: Yale UP, 1963.

Eliot, T.S. "Notes on The Waste Land." The Complete Poems and Plays: 1909-1950. New York: Harcourt, 1952. 50-55.

---. The Waste Land. Complete Poems and Plays: 1909-1950. 37-50.

---. "Ulysses, Order and Myth." Dial. Nov. 1923: 480-83.

Faulkner, William. Sanctuary. New York: Random, 1958.

Frazer, James G. The Golden Bough. 1 vol. New York: Macmillan, 1963.

McHaney, Thomas L. "Sanctuary and Frazer's Slain Kings." Mississippi Quarterly 24.3 (1971): 223-45.

Miller, James E. "Sanctuary: Yoknapatawpha's Waste Land." The Twenties: Fiction, Poetry, and Drama. Ed. Warren G. French. Deland: Everett, 1975. 249-67.

Pope, Alexander. "The Rape of the Lock." The Norton Anthology of English Literature. Ed. M. H. Abrams. 3rd ed. New York: Norton, 1974. 2154-73.

Slabey, Robert M. "Faulkner's Sanctuary." The Explicator. 21.5 (1963): 45 note.

Vickery, John. The Literary Impact of the Golden Bough. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1973. 233-67.

Weston, Jesse L. From Ritual to Romance. New York: Doubleday, 1957.

Williamson, George. A Reader's Guide to T. S. Eliot: A Poem by Poem Analysis. New York: Noonday, 1955.

VITA

Mary Katherine Compton

Born Goldsboro, North Carolina, February 18, 1959. Graduated from Goldsboro High School, June 1977, B.A., magna cum laude, Meredith College, 1981. Post-graduate fellowship, University of St. Andrews, Scotland, 1981-82. M.A. candidate, Department of English, College of William and Mary, 1982.