

## Line 434

### “Shantih shantih shantih”: Upanishads

*The Waste Land* ends in Sanskrit: “Datta. Dayadhvam. Damyata. / Shantih shantih shantih” (WL 433–44). “Datta. Dayadhvam. Damyata” reprises the legend of the thunder and its splitting of “DA” into “Give sympathise, control” (CP 75), while, as Eliot explains in his note on the poem’s final line, “Repeated as here, [*shantih* is] a formal ending to an Upanishad” (CP 76). “Shantih” is also used to close many mantras, which means that *The Waste Land* ends not just with words written on the page but with a sacred chant. In her elegant analysis of the end of the poem, Kearns observes:

As mantra, *shantih* conveys . . . the peace inherent in its inner sound. . . . As a closing prayer, *shantih* makes of what comes before it a communal as well as a private utterance. . . . And as the “formal ending of an Upanishad” it revises the whole poem from a statement of modern malaise into a sacred and prophetic discourse. (228)

This retroactive revision of the poem into “sacred and prophetic discourse” is not, of course, the only moment when Eliot suggests a way to read the whole. He began *The Waste Land*, after all, with an invitation to read it as the script for an interment: the Part I title, “The Burial of the Dead,” is taken from the section in the Church of England’s *Book of Common Prayer* that supplies the liturgy for ushering a corpse from churchyard to graveyard. Nearly every literary source Eliot cites in the poem may be understood as suggesting a possible recasting of the whole poem: burial rite, revenge play, river song, fertility ritual, prophecy, and prayer are just a few of the available reconstructions.

The end of Eliot’s note on “Shantih” goes on to engage in a last act of superimposition, layering an Upanishad—Hindu sacred text—with the Christian New Testament: “The Peace which passeth understanding,” he writes, “is our equivalent to this word” (CP 76). He refers to Saint Paul’s letter to the Philippians—“And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4.7)—a passage familiar to many Christians as a formula used to conclude a church service. Drawing on both Hindu and Christian sacred texts, then, the poem sends us off into the world with a benediction—the assertion of and wish for peace.