



Buddhism

(sixth century, B.C.E)

Siddhartha Gautama or Shakyamuni, born around 490 B.C.E. to a royal family in Kapilavastu (Himalayas)

Asceticism (six years)

Middle Way

Dharma (धर्म)

The Four Noble Truths

1. Life is suffering
2. Suffering is caused by craving
3. Suffering can have an end
4. There is a path which leads to the end of suffering

Suffering is due to the impermanence

Nirvana (निर्वाण) results from the elimination of all greed, hatred, and ignorance

Wisdom

Right View/Understanding

Right Orientation/Thought

Ethical Conduct

Right Speech

Right Action

Right Livelihood

Mental Discipline

Right Effort

Right Mindfulness

Right Concentration

*Buddha's Noble
Eightfold Path*



Emerson and India

1770s: Works by Sir William Jones, the founder of the Royal Asiatic Society (studies on Sanskrit; translations of Hindu hymns)

April 4, 1820: “All tends to the mysterious East”

1845: *Bhagavadgita*: “much renowned book of Buddhism, extracts of which I have often admired” (*Cours de Philosophie* by Victor Cousin)

श्रीमद्भगवद्गीता: 5th- 2nd century BCE, part of the *Mahabharata*: Lord Krishna’s teachings to Arjuna, an Archer, before the Kurukshetra war

श्रीसंपानि
यस्यपांडवः
शान्तदावा
समाहमहि
उनउवाच



1842: *The Dial* starts the series “Ethnical Scriptures”:

Vishnu Sharma

Henry David Thoreau, “Ethnical Scriptures: Sayings of Confucius”

1844: “The Preaching of the Buddha”, translation from the *Lotus Sutra*
(from Eugène Burnouf, *Introduction à l’histoire du Bouddhisme indien*,
translated by Elizabeth Palmer Peabody)

Emerson’s *Essays*, first series (1841): “Essay III. Compensation”

“Essay IX. The Oversoul”

***The Conduct of Life* (1860): “I. Fate”**

Karma (कर्म; Pali: *kamma*) = action

Present in Buddhism, Hinduism and Jainism

System of cause and effect, a key factor in rebirth.

- Late Vedic period: sacrificial acts which, if correctly performed, would cause a desired result to come into effect
- *Brāhmanas* and *Upaniṣads*: actions performed on a small scale (microcosm) have effect on the macrocosm. Ethical meaning: good and bad actions become a crucial factor in one's rebirth.
- Buddhism: good or bad **intentional** actions performed in mind, body and speech: “It is ‘intention’ that I call *kamma*; having willed or formed the intention, one performs acts by the body, speech and mind” (*Anguttara Nikaya*).

- Actions of body
 - Actions of speech
 - Action of mind
- } have a moral quality

Karma plays an important role in the future rebirth of an individual → *pratityasamutpāda* (प्रतीत्यसमुत्पाद), “dependent origination”

If Buddhism does not theorize a soul or a self, how can karma be transferred from one existence to the next? → Human beings are made up of physical and mental phenomena (5 aggregates, *skandhas*; 12 spheres, *ayatanas*; 18 elements, *dhatus*, etc.). The being who is reborn is neither the same nor different from being who dies (an old person is neither the same nor different from the baby he was).



1875: the American Theosophical Society is founded in New York by Henry Steel Olcott and Madame Helena Blavatsky

1880: Olcott and Blavatsky convert to Buddhism

1891: Dharmapala, a Sri Lankan Buddhist monk, founded the Maha Bodhi Society, which influenced the growth of Theravāda Buddhism in the USA

Magazines: *The Buddhist Ray* (1888-94) and *The Light of Dharma* (1901-07), founded in San Francisco

1894: Paul Carus published *The Gospel of the Buddha*





Wallace Stevens (1879-1955)

Studied law at Harvard University and worked as a lawyer

1923: *Harmonium* (vivid imagery, intricate syntax, and a playful use of language)

Themes: philosophical ideas → the nature of reality, the role of art, and the relationship between imagination and reality

Mythological and religious imagery (Greek mythology and Christianity)

“Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird”:
thirteen short, fragmented poems that offer different perspectives on the same subject.

The Snow Man (*Poetry magazine*, 1921)

One must have a mind of winter
To regard the frost and the boughs
Of the pine-trees crusted with snow;

And have been cold a long time
To behold the junipers shagged with ice,
The spruces rough in the distant glitter

Of the January sun; and not to think
Of any misery in the sound of the wind,
In the sound of a few leaves,

Which is the sound of the land
Full of the same wind
That is blowing in the same bare place

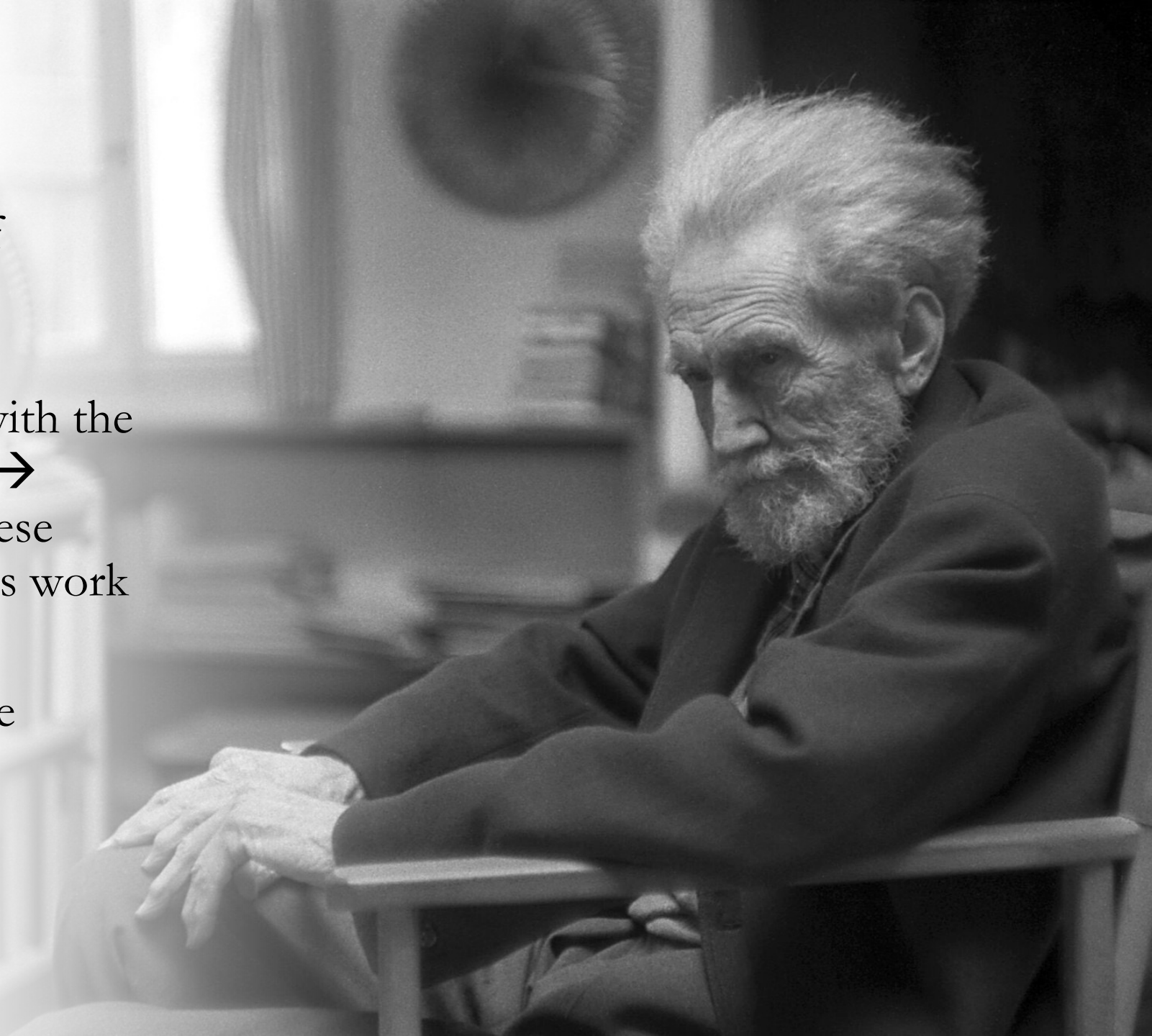
For the listener, who listens in the snow,
And, nothing himself, beholds
Nothing that is not there and the nothing that is.

Ezra Pound (1885-1972)

Studied Chinese literature and philosophy at the University of Pennsylvania.

In London, he got fascinated with the visual arts of China and Japan → incorporated elements of Chinese calligraphy and painting into his work

He drew on themes of Chinese literature and of Taoism and Confucianism



Ernest Fenollosa (1853-1908)

Art historian → pioneering work in the field of Japanese art and culture

1870s: he was a student at Harvard University.


Moved to Japan and became a curator at the Tokyo Imperial Museum

→ Simplicity and directness of Japanese aesthetics

Pound was a student of Fenollosa's at Harvard

After Fenollosa's death, Pound worked to edit and publish his unfinished manuscripts on East Asian aesthetics, including "The Chinese Written Character as a Medium for Poetry"

Importance of the image and the use of language in his work

停川
法非
筆


Thomas Stearns Eliot

(St. Louis, Missouri 1888 - London 1965)

Studied at Harvard University, the Sorbonne in Paris,
and Merton College, Oxford.

“The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock” (1915)

The Waste Land (1922)

Four Quartets (1943)

Essays: “Tradition and the Individual Talent”
(1919) and “The Function of Criticism” (1923)

Nobel Prize in Literature in 1948



“Tradition and the Individual Talent” (1919)

No poet, no artist of any art, has his complete meaning alone. His significance, his appreciation is the appreciation of his relation to the dead poets and artists. You cannot value him alone; you must set him, for contrast and comparison, among the dead. I mean this as a principle of æsthetic, not merely historical, criticism.

The analogy was that of the catalyst. When the two gases previously mentioned are mixed in the presence of a filament of platinum, they form sulphurous acid. This combination takes place only if the platinum is present; nevertheless the newly formed acid contains no trace of platinum, and the platinum itself is apparently unaffected; has remained inert, neutral, and unchanged. The mind of the poet is the shred of platinum. It may partly or exclusively operate upon the experience of the man himself; but, the more perfect the artist, the more completely separate in him will be the man who suffers and the mind which creates; the more perfectly will the mind digest and transmute the passions which are its material.

It is not in his personal emotions, the emotions provoked by particular events in his life, that the poet is in any way remarkable or interesting. [...] The emotion in his poetry will be a very complex thing, but not with the complexity of the emotions of people who have very complex or unusual emotions in life. [...] The business of the poet is not to find new emotions, but to use the ordinary ones and, in working them up into poetry, to express feelings which are not in actual emotions at all. [...] we must believe that “emotion recollected in tranquillity” is an inexact formula. [...] Poetry is not a turning loose of emotion, but an escape from emotion; it is not the expression of personality, but an escape from personality. But, of course, only those who have personality and emotions know what it means to want to escape from these things.

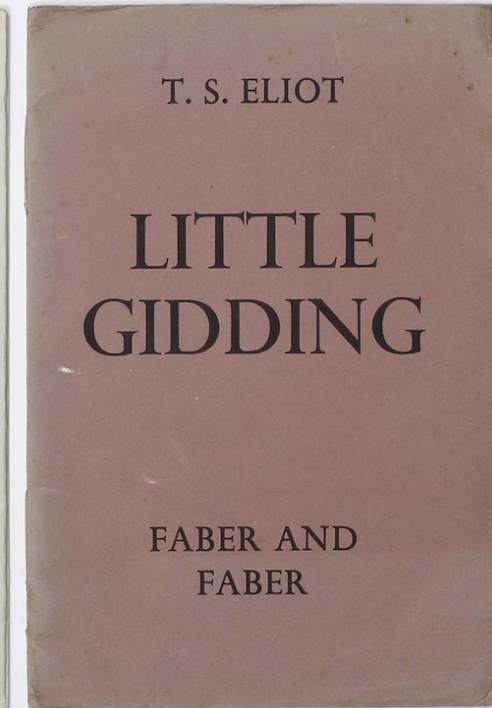
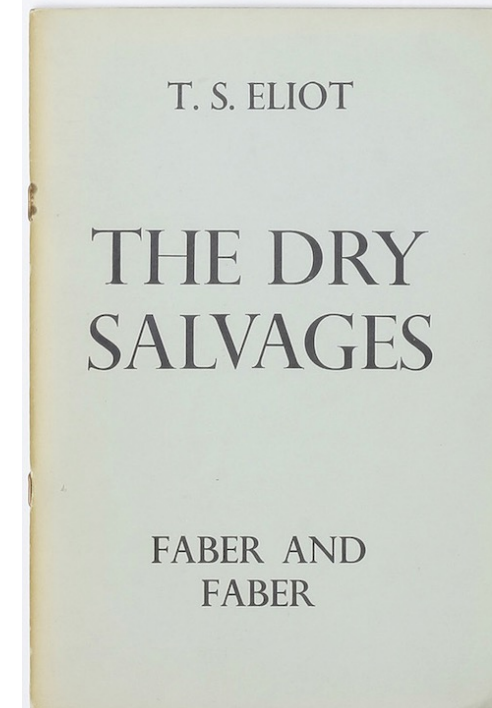
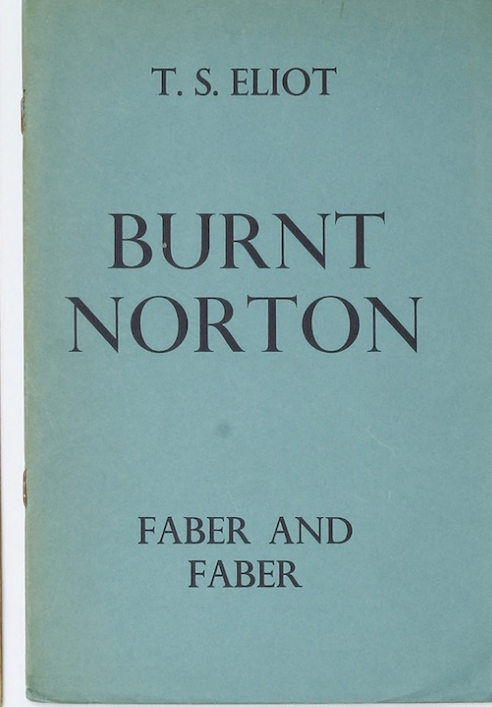
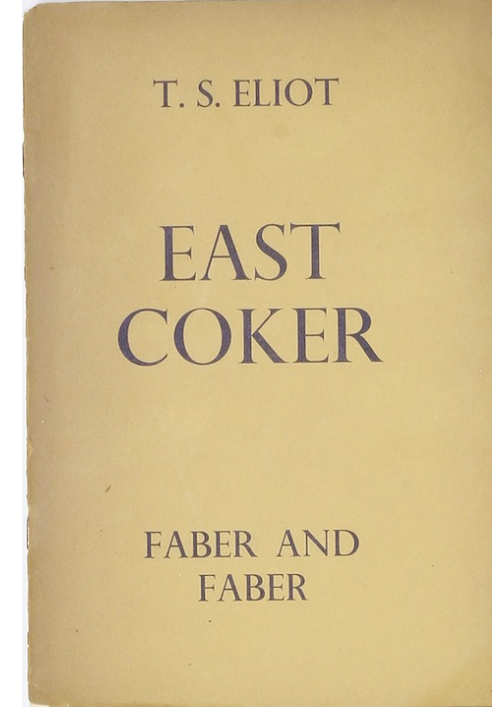
Four Quartets (1935 – 1942)

Christian religion, *Bhagavadgita*, Pre-Socratic philosophers,
St. John of the Cross

“Burnt Norton”	1935	Spring	air
“East Coker”	1940	Summer	earth
“The Dry Salvages”	1941	Fall	water
“Little Gidding”	1942	Winter	fire

Free verse, traditional meter and rhyme, literary and religious
allusions

- “Burnt Nort”: time and human experience. Past, present, and future exist simultaneously
- “East Coker”: the cyclical nature of time and the idea of rebirth
- “The Dry Salvages”: water and its forms, connection between the natural world and the divine
- “Little Gidding”: World War II, forgiveness, redemption, and spiritual growth



Bhagavadgita (“Song of God”)

500-100 BCE

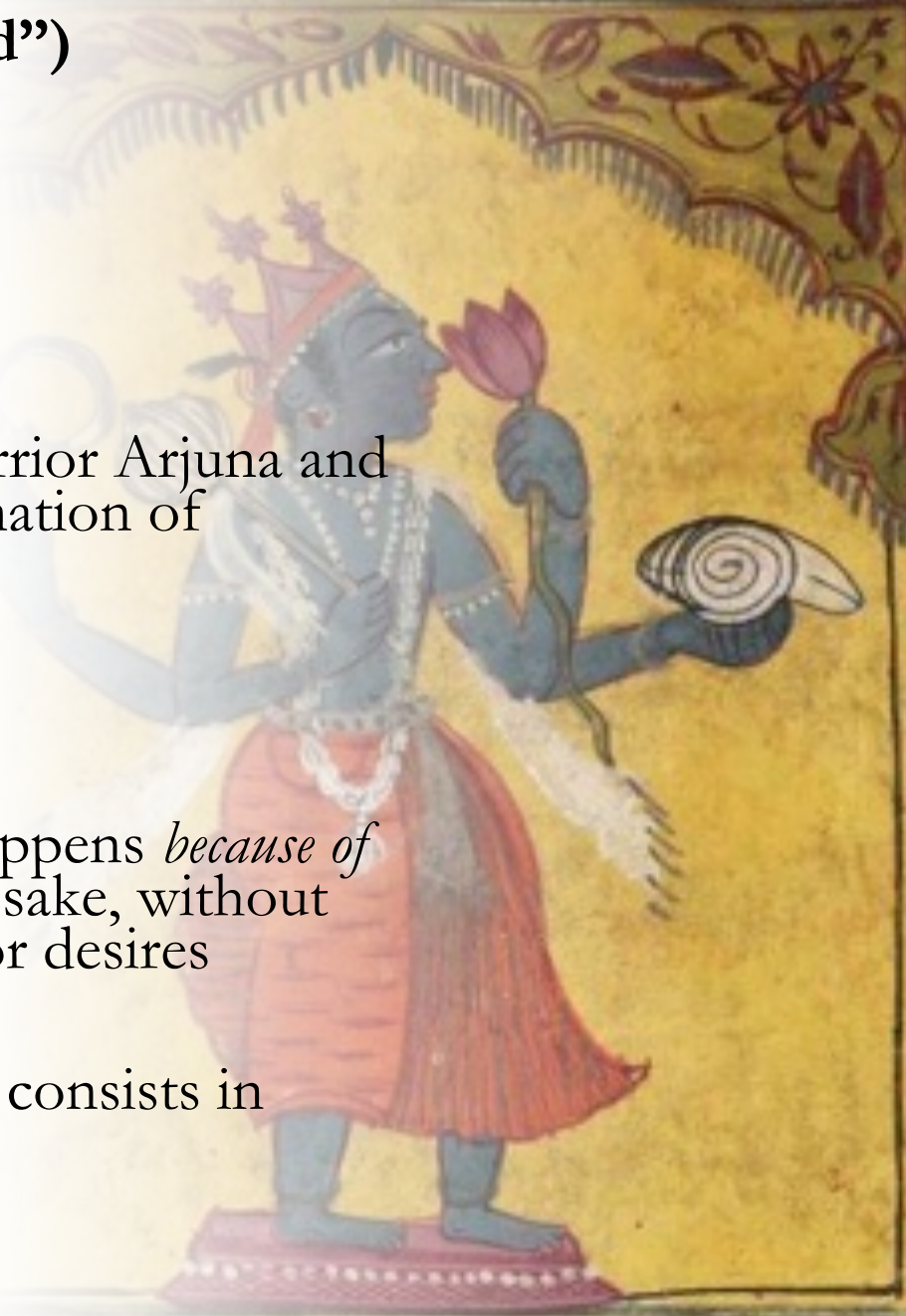
Section of *Mahabharata*

War between the Pandava warrior Arjuna and his charioteer, Krishna (incarnation of Vishnu)

The field of dharma

Renouncing action (which happens *because of* desire) and acting for action’s sake, without attachment to consequences or desires

The moral rightness of action consists in following dharma



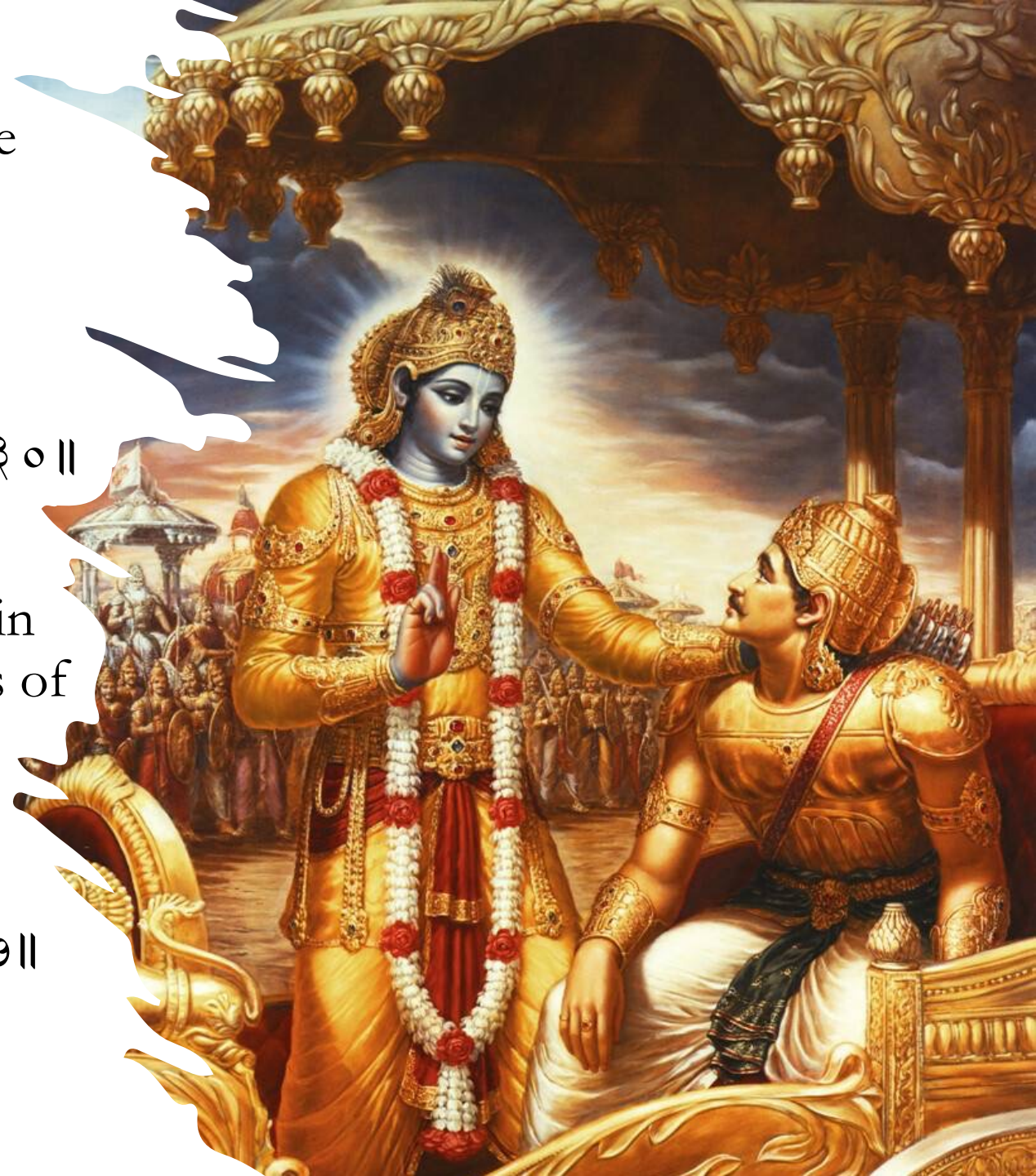
॥ इति श्रीभगव
कीतासूपनिष
सुब्रह्मविद्या
यांयोगशास्त्रे
श्रीकृष्णार्जुनसं
वादे विश्वरूपदृश्य

Son of Bharata, the embodied self which exists in the body of everyone is eternally free from harm; so you should not grieve for any living beings.

देही नित्यमवध्योऽयं देहे सर्वस्य भारत ।
तस्मात्सर्वाणि भूतानि न त्वं शोचितुमर्हसि ॥ २-३० ॥

Your authority is in action alone, and never in its fruits; motive should never be in the fruits of action, nor should you cling to inaction.

कर्मण्येवाधिकारस्ते मा फलेषु कदाचन ।
मा कर्मफलहेतुर्भूमा ते सङ्गोऽस्त्वकर्मणि ॥ २-४७ ॥



The Waste Land, IV. Death by Water

Phlebas the Phoenician, a fortnight dead,
Forgot the cry of gulls, and the deep sea swell
And the profit and loss.

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.

Gentile or Jew
O you who turn the wheel and look to windward,
Consider Phlebas, who was once handsome and tall as you.

यं यं वापि स्मरन्भावं त्यजत्यन्ते कलेवरम् |
तं तमेवैति कौन्तेय सदा तद्भावभावितः
॥ ८ ॥ ६

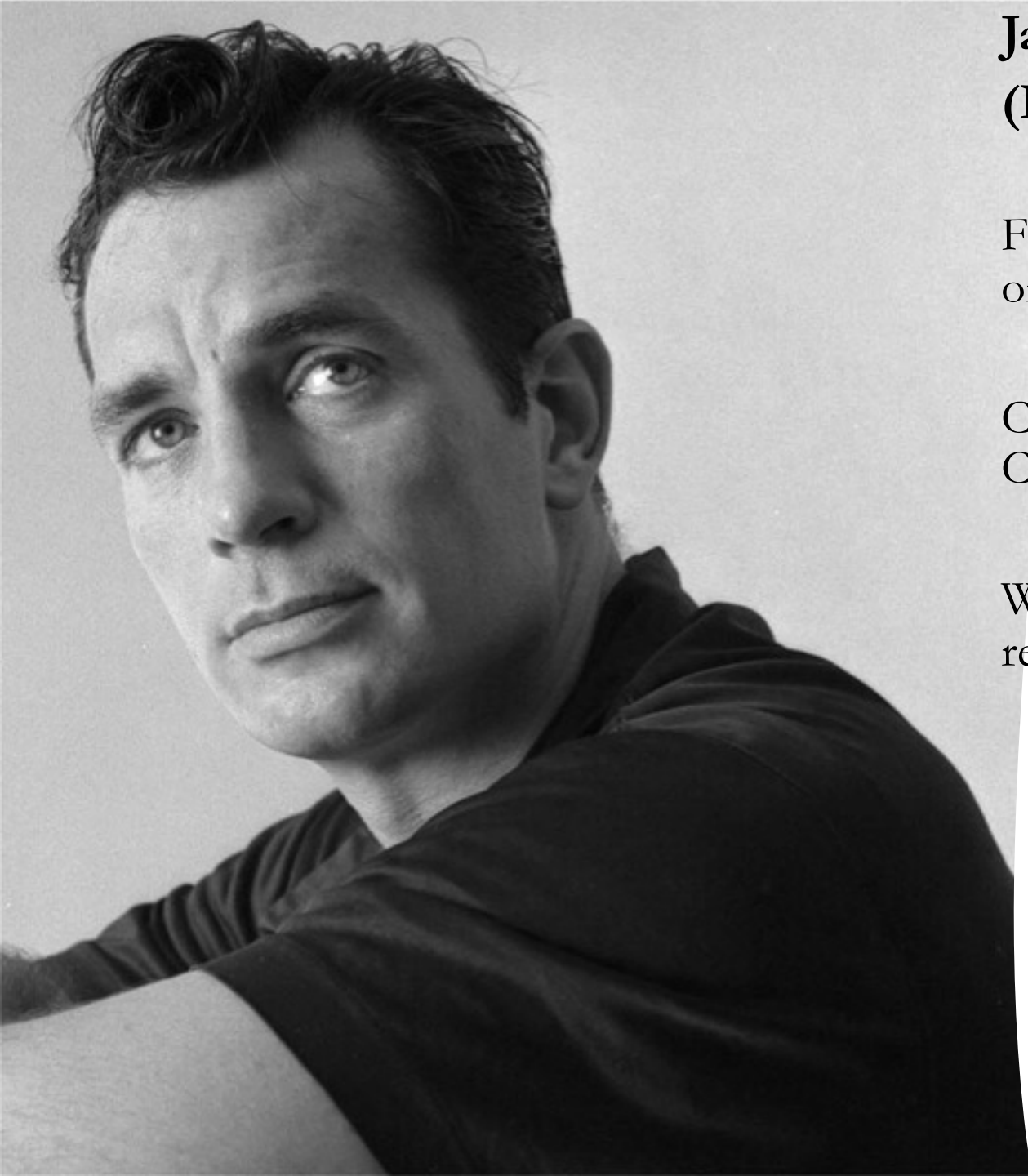
*yaṁ yaṁ vāpi smaran bhāvaṁ tyajatyante
kalevaram
taṁ tam evaiti kaunteya sadā tad-bhāva-
bhāvitaḥ*

**Whatever one remembers upon giving
up the body at the time of death,**
O son of Kunti, one attains that state,
being always absorbed in such
contemplation.

(Bhagavadgita, 8, 6)

**“On whatever sphere of being
The mind of a man may be intent
At the time of death”**

(The Dry Salvages, III, 33-35)



Jack Kerouac

(Lowell, MA, 1922 – St. Petersburg, FL, 1969)

French Canadian family → French mother tongue (his only French book is *La Vie est d'hommage*, 2016)

Columbia University (met Allen Ginsberg and Neal Cassady)

WW2: Joined the Navy – discharged for psychiatric reasons and traveled across the US

1957: *On the Road*

1958: *The Dharma Bums*

Died in 1969

The Dharma Bums

1958, California, North Carolina, US-Mexico border,
Washington State highways and trains

- bhikku (Pali; Sanskrit भिक्षु bhikshu) = monk/vagrant
- Ray Smith = Jack Kerouac
individual understanding of Buddhism
 - Japhy Ryder = Gary Snyder
Buddhism can change the world
 - Alvah Goldbrook = Allen Ginsberg
 - Henry Morley = writer John Montgomery
 - Warren Coughlin = Buddhist poet Philip Whalen
 - Cody Pomeray = Neal Cassady (*On the Road*)
 - Rosie Buchanan = Cody's girlfriend

a novel by
JACK KEROUAC
author of
On the Road



THE
DHARMA
BUMS



Zen Buddhism

Derived from Mahayana Buddhism, influenced by Taoism

Founder: Bodhidharma, China 527 C.E.

Japan: 1191 (Ei-Sai, a Buddhist monk)

- Emphasizes experience over scriptures and prayers
- Going beyond the distinction between Samsara and Nirvana
- Finding Nirvana in daily life
- Satori (Enlightenment, comprehension): understanding of the nature of reality

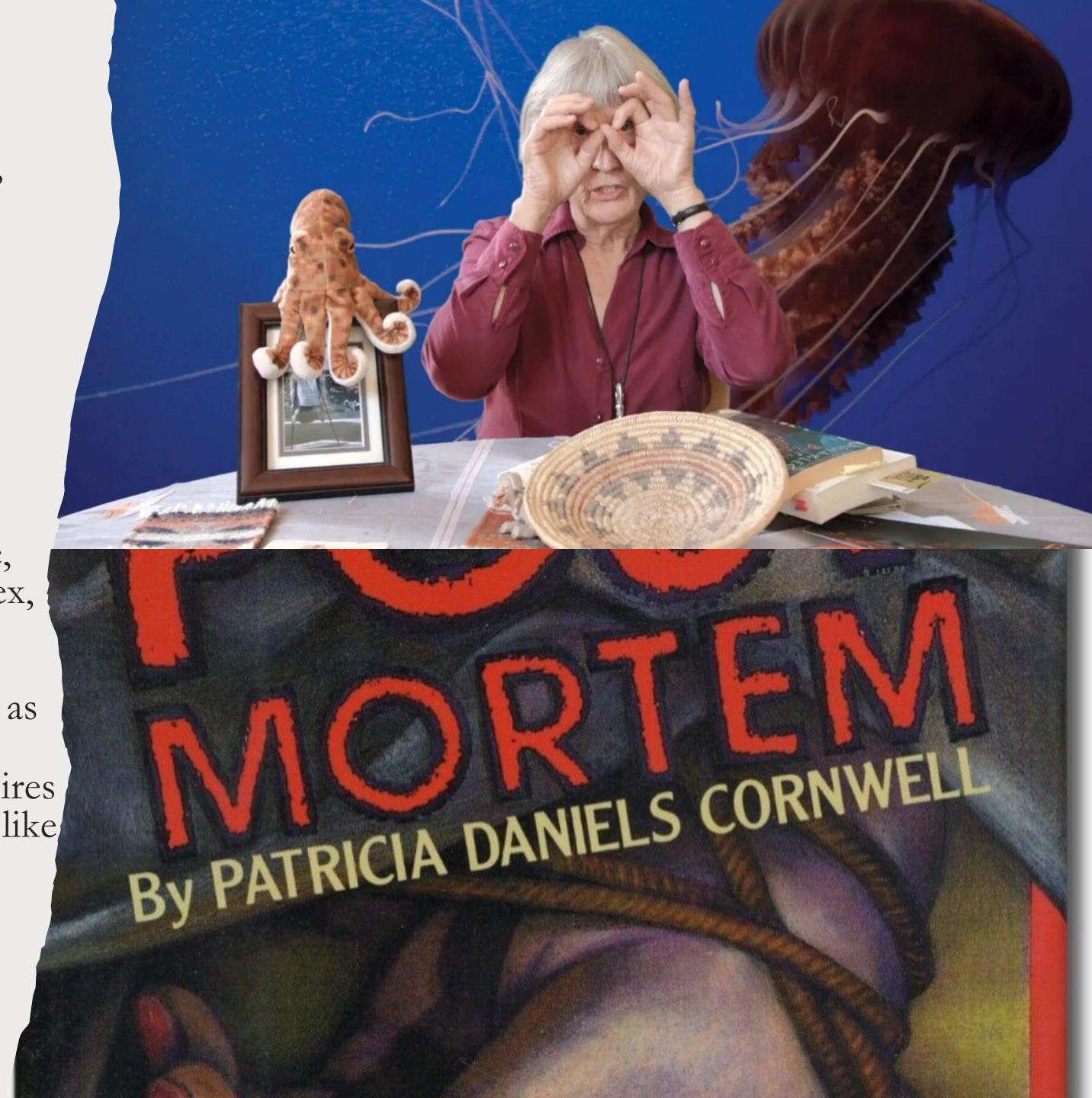
Human Genome Project, Department of Energy and National Institutes of Health (1989)

Visible Human Project, National Library of Medicine, Maryland

Patricia Cornwell, *Postmortem* (1990): DNA profiling

The human is an “information structure” (Donna Haraway, 1997)

The existence of vampires tropes the purity of lineage, certainty of kind, boundary of community, order of sex, closure of race, inertness of objects, liveliness of subjects, and clarity of gender. Desire and fear are the appropriate reactions to vampire. Figures of violation as well as of possibility and of escape from the organic-sacred walls of European Christian community, vampires make categories travel. [...] vampires are ambiguous – like capital, genes, viruses, transsexuals, Jews, gypsies, prostitutes, or anybody else who can figure corporate mixing in a rapidly changing culture that remains obsessed with purity. (Donna Haraway, 1997)





We will see great advances in medical technology. In biotechnology, we will develop reliable artificial human organs for transplants. We will invent ways to regenerate damaged brain and nerve tissue. We will devise substances to lubricate arthritic joints. We will build machines that can scan inside the human body to diagnose problems and illnesses. Through DNA research, we will eradicate scores of disease, perhaps even cancer and AIDS. For our descendants, life spans of 100 years will no longer be unusual.

We will be finally able to solve the problems of world hunger and poverty. We will see DNA researchers create new strains of crops that produce greater yields, that make more efficient use of sunlight, that resist disease and insects, and that thrive in poor soil.

(Richard Nixon, “A New America”, 1988)

Amitav Ghosh (Calcutta, 1956)

MA Delhi School of Economics

Ph.D. in Social Anthropology from Oxford University

Moved to New York City

Novels:

- *The Circle of Reason* (1986)
- ***The Calcutta Chromosome* (1995; Arthur C. Clarke Award in 1997)**
- *The Glass Palace* (2000)
- The Ibis Trilogy: *Sea of Poppies* (2008)
River of Smoke (2011)
Flood of Fire (2015)
- *Jungle Nama* (2021)

Non-fiction:

The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable (2016)

The Nutmeg's Curse: Parables for a Planet in Crisis (2021)



"Mesmerizing ... a mind-boggling conspiracy saga."

—New York Times Book Review

The Calcutta CHROMOSOME

a NOVEL of FEVERS,
DELIRIUM & DISCOVERY

Amitav Ghosh

Author of THE GLASS PALACE

The Calcutta Chromosome (1995)

Setting: Calcutta \approx New York (and forests in Bengal)
1990s \approx 19th century

Characters:

- Antar / AVA
- Murugan (முருகன்: son of Shiva and Parvati, god of war and knowledge)
- Sir Ronald Ross, British physician and scientist
- Mangala
- ... and malaria mosquitoes

“Ghosh projects the possibility of the Hindu doctrine of reincarnation becoming a material reality in the future”

(Claire Chambers, 2003)