PATTERNS OF RELIGIOUS THOUGHT IN ELIOT'S *FOUR QUARTETS*

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SCOPE AND CONTENTS: Relying extensively on the poet's own critical writing as a means of interpreting techniques used in his poetry, this thesis explores the development of Eliot's maturing religious thought and its expression as pattern and form in Four Quartets.

CONTENTS

The only wisdom we can hope to acquire
Is the wisdom of humility: humility is endless.

-- "East Coker" II.

INTRODUCTION

By his own admission, Eliot looked to Dante as a master craftsman and as a spiritual mentor. His numerous allusions to Dante's pilgrimage point to a parallel between the three books of the Divine Comedy and the three phases of his own poetry. Eliot's Inferno is expressed in the concern of "The Waste Land" (1922) for alienated contemporary man. Desperate shades fill "The Hollow Men" (1925) and it is not until "Ash Wednesday" (1927-1930) that the hell-like imagery of the London underground and the dry cellar of the hollow men is abandoned. His subsequent Purgatorio phase centres around the struggle against doubt and a precarious grasping towards a tentative faith. F.O.Matthiessen has remarked that Eliot's poems are

> scarcely poems of easy faith; they mark rather the direction in which the poet's experience is leading him, that he has ascended step by step from the pit of his Inferno. They voice the desire for belief, the understanding of its importance to the human spirit, the impalpable movements of the poet's mind from doubt towards acceptance, his gradual comprehension of what, encountering it in Baudelaire, he has called 'the greatest, the most difficult of the Christian virtues, the virtue of humility.' [1]

As Dante in the Paradiso, Eliot finally attains the level of divine vision or enlightenment in Four Quartets. The form

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[1] The Achievement of T.S.Eliot, pp. 99-100.

of these poems, published between 1936 and 1942, becomes the expression of a pattern of unity and completion discerned as the ordering principle of all creation.

By focusing attention principally on thematic patterning in the Quartets, it has been possible to delineate a more general pattern running through Eliot's poetry as a whole. If he is to be regarded as a writer of religious verse, the relation between his constantly modifying religious position and the technical expression of changing ideas is of considerable consequence. The integration of thought over his entire writing career makes the application of his criticism to his own poetry a rewarding method of approaching his work. Eliot's influence has already been felt more widely in the field of literary criticism than that of any other critic in this century. Frequently it is a key to understanding Eliot's choice of a particular technique. Yet it is necessary to recognize from the start that Eliot's critical pronouncements have been partly to blame for the overrated attention and misguided interpretation that has been directed towards some of his poems. His theoretical statements cannot be substituted for an objective assessment of the real function of technique in a poem. Eliot admitted in 1961:

> in my earlier criticism, both in my general affirmation about poetry and in writing about authors who had influenced me, I was implicitly defending

the sort of poetry that I and my friends wrote. [2] Indeed, so confident is his assurance for what approaches an ontological basis for his theoretical principles that some poems seem to have been assembled merely to illustrate a critical principle.

In the course of examining the poems within the context of Eliot's critical writing, speculation inevitably arises from the poet's careful concealment of his own personality. Is Eliot's "impersonal theory" no more than an elaborate apologia for emotional and imaginative deficiencies in his poems? What is to be made of the preoccupation with tradition which affected his poetry, his religious beliefs, and even his personal life?[3] Two years before he had published "The Waste Land" he wrote in the essay on "Tradition and the Individual Talent":

> 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 . . . . The existing order is complete before the new work arrives; for order to persist after the supervention of novelty, the whole existing order must be, if ever so slightly, altered; and so the relations, proportions, values of each work of art toward the whole are read-

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[2] To Criticize the Critic. p. 16.

[3] Ezra Pound's disarming Americanism must at times have unnerved his fellow expatriot, Eliot, who wore the uniform of a City banker and defined himself as a Royalist, an Anglo-Catholic and a British subject.

> justed; and this is conformity between the old and the new. [4]

Was this the mark of a classicist as Eliot would have us believe, or was it more compatible with twentieth-century neo-Romanticism? Finally, to what extent was Eliot's religious synthesis the conclusion of a man unable to come to terms with the chaos of his own time?

By way of prefacing the discussion of the Quartets, I will examine, in the following chapter, the religious development in three earlier poems: "The Hollow Men", "Journey of the Magi", and "Ash Wednesday". The remaining two chapters are devoted to Four Quartets: "Burnt Norton" and "East Coker" considered in Chapter II and "The Dry Salvages" and "Little Gidding" in Chapter III.

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[4] "Tradition and the Individual Talent", The Sacred Wood, pp. 49-50.

I

THE TIME OF TENSION BETWEEN DYING AND BIRTH

> The great danger, for the poet who would write religious verse, is that of setting down what he would like to feel rather than be faithful to the expression of what he feels.
>
> -- T.S.Eliot, on George Herbert.

The significance of Valerie Eliot's publication in 1971 of the Facsimile and Transcript of the Original Drafts of "The Waste Land" lies chiefly in the fact that for the first time we have been given an opportunity to assess Eliot's early poetry quite apart from the drastic editing carried out by Ezra Pound. It is evident from the manuscript that before 1922 Eliot was uncertain about the quality of his own verse. What Pound was finally able to salvage from the one hundred and twenty-three page draft is less an integrated poem than a selection of better lines. The finished poem remains an awkwardly fragmented agglomeration of obscure references and impressionistic sketches.

Nevertheless, Eliot must be given credit for the daring of his project. The attempt to structure ideas and feelings on the basis of recurrent themes rather than by following a superimposed narrative was the beginning of a technique which finally succeeded in Four Quartets. He called it his "mythic method":

> It is simply a way of controlling, of ordering, of giving shape and significance to the intense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history . . . . It is a method for which the horoscope is auspicious. Psychology. . . ethnology, and The Golden Bough have concurred to make possible what was impossible even a few years ago. Instead of narrative method we may now use the mythical method. It is, I seriously believe, a step towards making the modern world possible for art, towards. . . order and form. 1

However, despite recurrent allusions to the vegetation myths and juxtaposed encounters with the "living-dead" inhabitants of the modern urban waste land, the poem singularly lacks coherence and unity. As if aware of this failure, Eliot tried rather unconvincingly in the notes to pull together the fragmenting structure by nominating Tiresias as

> the most important personage in the poem, uniting all the rest. . . . What Tiresias sees, in fact, is the substance of the poem. 2

Perhaps for this reason "The Waste Land" was misinterpreted as a further confession of despair and of the cynicism that had characterized the 1917 and 1920 poems. Eliot was forced to contradict this attitude in 1931 when he wrote:

> when I wrote a poem called The Waste Land some of the more approving critics said that I had expressed the 'disillusionment of a generation', which is nonsense. I may have expressed for them their own illusion of being

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1 From a review of James Joyce's Ulysses which appeared in The Dial in 1923, quoted by Jay Martin in "T.S.Eliot's The Waste Land", Jay Martin ed., A Collection of Critical Essays on "The Waste Land", p. 7.

2 Notes on the Waste Land, n. 218.

disillusioned, but that did not form part of my intention. [3] In the light of the poems that followed, the intention of "The Waste Land" seems to have been far from a negative one. Its thought initiated a gradual development of religious thinking which culminated in the synthesis of Four Quartets. The drowned vegetation god and the crucified Christ are identified (at least in the notes) as an inseparable entity. Similarly, the Sermon on the Mount is associated with the Fire Sermon of the Buddha. The characters of the poem are involved with the vegetation myths on an ethical level and, as Northrop Frye has observed, their

> world is physically above ground but spiritually subterranean, a world of shadows, corpses, and buried seeds. The inhabitants lead the "buried life" (a phrase from "Portrait of a Lady") of seeds in winter: they await spring rains resentfully, for real life would be their death. Human beings who live like seeds, ego-centrically, cannot form a community but only an aggregate. [4]

Just as the possibility of transition is implicit in each of the images of death in the poem (a corpse which may sprout, the ablutionary power of the sea on the drowned Phoenician Sailor, the purgative "burning" of St. Augustine, the transcendence of the ego in the Tarot symbol of the falling Tower, and the appearance of Christ on the road to Emmaus subsequent to the Crucifixion), so also is salvation from ego-imprisonment implied for each of the characters who is willing

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[3] "Thoughts After Lambeth", Selected Essays, p. 368.

[4] T.S.Eliot, p. 64.

to "give, sympathize and control".

By 1925, Eliot had greatly narrowed his poetic interests and was completely occupied with the representation of a single state of spiritual development: an awareness of the possibility of belief combined with an inability to make, what Kierkegaard called, the "leap of faith". In the writings of the sixteenth-century Spanish mystic, St. John of the Cross, Eliot found a ready articulation of this phenomenon and he patterned "The Hollow Men" and "Ash Wednesday" largely on St. John's concepts.

In keeping with a much more limited theme, Eliot abandoned the personae with which "The Waste Land" abounded and shifted his attention from the discrepancies of individual personality to a shared or common spiritual state abstracted from those elements. Many of the wastelanders can be seen in the composite persona of "The Hollow Men". Their voices "Are quiet and meaningless" like the chatter of the women in "A Game of Chess". The Fisher King was haunted by rats' feet rattling dry bones. In the subterranean cellar of the hollow men, there echoes the sound of "rats' feet over broken glass". With Gerontion's detachment, the hollow men listen to the desiccating "wind in dry grass" (an image that also recalls Belladonna's mental vacancy).

In terms of St. John's Dark Night of the Soul, the situation of the hollow men can be interpreted as that of a transitional phase in the course of spiritual development.

A denial of the world of sense has been carried out as the first stage of an attempt to find absolute meaning through union with the Divine. Hence, the hollow men are "sightless":

> The eyes are not here
> There are no eyes here
> In this valley of dying stars.

Their environment is remarkable for its absence of colour. A uniform tone merges all objects: "Shape without form, shade without colour". Another of Eliot's characters who longed for Faith was also stricken with the loss of his senses. Gerontion laments: "I have lost my sight, smell, hearing, taste and touch:/ How should I use them for your closer contact?"[5] Although purgation has left the senses of the hollow men in a state of "aridity and emptiness", none of the positive effects of "direct vision" or enlightenment are yet available to them. In his description of this sightless limbo which he calls the "dark night", St. John comments:

> This night, which as we say, is contemplation, produces in spiritual persons two kinds of darkness or purgation, corresponding to the two parts of man's nature-- namely, the sensual and the spiritual. And thus the one night or purgation will be sensual, wherein the soul is purged according to sense, which is subdued to the spirit; and the other is a night or purgation which is spiritual; wherein the soul is purged and stripped according to the spirit, and subdued and made ready for the union of love with God.[6]

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[5] The tone of "Gerontion" is an exception to the 1920 volume.

[6] Dark Night of the Soul, p. 371.

He advises the soul which has entered the dark night to remain without thought or motion. Accordingly, the hollow men are no more than "stuffed men/ Leaning together"; "Paralysed force, gesture without motion".

In F.H.Bradley's philosophical idealism (the subject of Eliot's doctoral thesis), the contradiction between "appearance" and "reality" is resolved only in positing a third category, the "Absolute". A division between the "here" of "death's dream kingdom", and the "there" of "death's other Kingdom", establishes a similar dichotomy in Eliot's poems. Death's dream kingdom is the "catcus land" or the "Unreal City" of the living-dead wastelanders. It is a dream kingdom in so far as it is a world of appearances. Yet in rejecting the world of the senses, the hollow men have already gone part way toward validating "reality" in the Absolute. The other half of the dichotomy is the "there" of "death's other Kingdom". But the desperation of the hollow men springs from their inability to make the transition, and thus to resolve the dichotomy between appearance and reality in the Absolute, symbolized in Dante's image of the "Multifoliate rose":

> In this last of meeting places
> We grope together
> And avoid speech
> Gathered on this beach of the tumid river
>
> Sightless, unless
> The eyes reappear
> As the perpetual star
> Multifoliate rose
> Of death's twilight kingdom.

Unlike the sightlessness of "death's dream kingdom", clarity of vision is associated with "death's other Kingdom":

> There, the eyes are broken
> Sunlight on a broken column
> There, is a tree swinging
> And voices are
> In the wind's singing
> More distant and more solemn
> Than a fading star.

Sound and light bursts in upon the poem which, except with reference to "death's other Kingdom", is totally lacking in sensuous imagery. The "tree swinging", visible in "death's other Kingdom", can be interpreted as the Christ of St. John of the Cross, a crucifix drawn by the mystic and celebrated in the twentieth-century painting by Salvador Dali. The image of the wind, which stood as a symbol of emptiness in "Gerontion" and "The Waste Land" is, in its transposition to the other Kingdom, suddenly filled with richness of meaning, establishing a mood of awesome hesitance at the approach to union with the Absolute, "that final meeting/ In the twilight kingdom".

On the subject of disguise, St. John writes:

> to disguise oneself is naught else but to hide and cover oneself beneath another garb and figure than one's own--sometimes in order to show forth, under that garb or figure, the will and purpose which is in the heart to gain the grace and will of one who is greatly loved; thus to accomplish one's object better. At such times a man assumes the garments and livery which best represent and indicate the affection of his heart and which best conceal him from his rivals. 7

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7 Ibid., 470.

Besides this reason for the disguise, the contradiction between appearance and reality is further stressed in the lines:

> Let me be no nearer
> In death's dream kingdom
> Let me also wear
> Such deliberate disguises
> Rat's coat, crowskin, crossed staves
> In a field
> Behaving as the wind behaves
> No nearer.

Because of their "paralysed force", the hollow men are unable to make the transition to death's other Kingdom as "Those who have crossed/ With direct eyes".

> Here the stone images
> Are raised, here they receive
> The supplication of a dead man's hand
> Under the twinkle of a fading star.
>
> Is it like this
> In death's other kingdom
> Waking alone
> At the hour when we are
> Trembling with tenderness
> Lips that would kiss
> Form prayers to broken stone.

The question is a reflection on the meaningless whispers with which the poem began. (We remember another meaningless ceremony in "Gerontion" carried out "By Madame de Tornquist, in the dark room/ Shifting the candles".) But more so, it is a statement of the lamentable ineffectualness of prayer at this stage. Prayer is not considered a plausible act until the end of "Ash Wednesday".

A curious paradox is contained in the second section of Part IV. The hollow men, because they have emptied themselves of worldly perception and thought and are there-

fore sightless, neverthless may entertain the possibility of renewed vision in ultimate union with the Absolute.[8] The appearance of the "Multifoliate rose" is "The hope only/ Of empty men." Eliot has purposely left the syntax of this phrase ambiguous and without punctuation so that "only" can be taken to modify either "hope" or "of empty men" or both.

But the stagnation of the hollow men is not the result of an external factor, as was the despair of the waste-landers which sprang from the aridity of the land. On the contrary it is attributed to an extension of the self, a "shadow".

> Between the idea
> And the reality
> Between the motion
> And the act
> Falls the Shadow.

The fifth section of the poem marks the commencement of a new tendency towards abstraction of thought. The Shadow is responsible for bringing about the utter intellectual, emotional and physical stasis. It stands between "conception" and "creation"; "emotion" and "response"; "desire" and "spasm"; "potency" and "existence". In short, it creates indifference. The hollow men are stifled by self-fear and the meaningless appearance of things. Elizabeth Drew has suggested Carl Jung's "shadow" as a useful amplification of Eliot's term. Jung describes an honest confrontation with

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[8] The metaphor of emptying the mind of all thought and perception is not exclusive to Christian mysticism but is an exigence frequently demanded by ancient Oriental philosophies, especially Taoism and Buddhism.

the shadow as the initial step in coming to terms with the dark forces of one's unconscious.

> The shadow is a moral problem that challenges the whole ego-personality, for no one can become conscious of the shadow without considerable moral effort. To become conscious of it involves recognizing the dark aspects of the personality as present and real. This act is the essential condition for any kind of self-knowledge, and it therefore, as a rule, meets with considerable resistance. [9]

In the shadow, Eliot comes closest ever to positing an evil force or devil. But, in distinct contrast with Christian doctrine, that force is not anthropomorphized like Milton's Satan but remains entirely negative, ineffable, rising from within the individual psyche. Like the emptiness of Eliot's hell, it is rather a vacancy than a destructive force; for Eliot believes that before man can come to a realization of God, he must first recognize the absence of God.[10]

In turning to a single, extremely simple verse structure in "The Hollow Men", Eliot not only overcame the spraw-

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[9] Carl Jung, Aion: Researches into the Phenomenology of the Self, p. 8.

[10] C.f. his description of hell in Murder in the Cathedral:

> Emptiness, absence, separation from God;
> The horror of the effortless journey, to the empty land
> Which is no land, only emptiness, absence, the Void,
> Where those who were men can no longer turn the mind
> To distraction, delusion, escape into dreams, pretence,
> Where the soul is no longer deceived, for there are no objects, no tones,
> No colours, no forms to distract, to divert the soul
> From seeing itself, foully united forever, nothing with nothing.

ling incohesive collection of styles of "The Waste Land" but also was able to magnify the frustrated symptoms of the hollow men in the simplicity of the verse itself. The short end-stopped lines, many with a repeating rhyme, contribute to inducing in the reader a similar state of lethargy. As if Eliot's style had been purged too, the multitude of obscure quotations in several languages that encumbered "The Waste Land" has disappeared. Fragmentary quotations are still used in "The Hollow Men", but they work directly toward the meaning of the poem. The adapted nursery rhyme, "Here we go round the prickly pear" at first appears to be simply a further comment on the childish absurdity of the hollow men themselves. But when the same rhyme concludes the poem, "This is the way the world ends/ Not with a bang but a whimper", it hints at the unspectacular nature of spiritual "death to the world" and also the unsuccessful Guy Fawkes plot (the stuffed "guy" being the model for the hollow men).[11] Fragments from the Lord's Prayer interspersed throughout the closing section of the poem not only emphasize the inability of the hollow men to pray but also make a direct connection between the capitalized "other Kingdom" and the Kingdom of God: "For thine is the Kingdom".

In "The Hollow Men". Eliot demonstrated what he had learned from Pound's editing of "The Waste Land". The reduc-

[11] Grover Smith suggests the parallel between "burning in effigy the bearer of local guilt" on Guy Fawkes Day (Nov. 5). (Grover Smith, T.S.Eliot's Poetry and Plays, p. 105.)

tion of the 1925 poem must have taken place at a very early stage of its creation in that the poem concentrated on a single aspect of religious development, integrating content and form for the first time. Certainly the integrity of the poem, illustrated in "the shadow" and its theme of stasis, lies in its refusal to set down what the poet "would like to feel rather than be faithful to the expression of what he feels". A tendency towards abstraction of thought and symbolic use of imagery distinguishes Eliot's work in 1925 from anything he had written earlier.

"Journey of the Magi" dates from 1927, the year Eliot acquired British citizenship and was confirmed into the Anglican Church. One year earlier, he had published his essay on Lancelot Andrewes (1926) and the following year, 1928, he prefaced the collection of essays For Lancelot Andrewes (which included a reprint of the original essy) with the famous statement of his tenets-- his royalism, classicism, and Anglo-Catholicism. The 1926 essay on Andrewes indicates that Eliot may have been considering the theme of a Magi poem only a year after "The Hollow Men" had appeared. Remarking on Andrewes's devices for "seizing attention and impressing the memory", he writes:

> before extracting all the spiritual meaning of a text, Andrewes forces a concrete presence upon us.
> Of the wise men come from the East:
>
> 'It was no summer progress. A cold coming they had of it at this time of year, just the worst time of the year to take a journey, and specially a long journey in.

> The ways deep, the weather sharp, the days short, the sun farthest off, in solstitio brumali, "the very dead of winter". 12

A further remark in the Andrewes essay is also of interest:

> his sermons, one feels, are a 'means of self-expression'. He is constantly finding an object which shall be adequate to his feelings; Andrewes is wholly absorbed in the object and therefore responds with the adequate emotion. 13

The similarity to Eliot's 1920 definition of the "objective correlative" gives us some hint as to his intention in "Journey of the Magi":

> The only way of expressing emotion in the form of art is by finding an "objective correlative"; in other words, a set of objects. a situation, a chain of events which shall be the formula of that particular emotion; such that when the external facts, which must terminate in sensory experience, are given, the emotion is immediately evoked. 14

"Journey of the Magi" shows Eliot translating limitingly personal religious experience into the more universal proportions of poetry. Following closely the technique he admired in Lancelot Andrewes 's work, Eliot too forces the "presence" of the Magi upon us from the outset. The most realistic and ordinary terms describe the hardships of the journey:

> And the night-fires going out, and the lack of shelter,
> And the cities hostile and the towns unfriendly
> And the villages dirty and charging high prices:
> A hard time we had of it.

But soon it becomes evident that the difficulties of the three wise men on their quest for the infant deity are the "chain of events" used by the poet as a formula for his own particu-

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12 "Lancelot Andrewes", Selected Essays, p. 350.

13 Ibid., p. 351.

14 "Hamlet and His Problems", The Sacred Wood, p. 100.

lar emotions arising from the spiritual quest. For both the poet, now a professor of Anglo-Catholicism, and for the Magi, "All this was a long time ago". Because the struggle which dominated "The Hollow Men" has for the most part ceased, it can now be considered more accurately in retrospect.

For the poet as for the Magi, the greatest difficulty to be overcome must have been the nagging threat of self-doubt, "the voices singing in our ears, saying/ That this was all folly." Yet even the achievement of belief in the new "dispensation" has not been completely satisfying. The first two thirds of the poem ~~is~~ are spent preparing emotionally for a climactic encounter with the Christ child. But the actual moment of encounter with the deity is mentioned only as an off-hand, almost disinterested remark:"'It was (you may say) satisfactory.'" And the remainder of the poem sets about to consider the long-range implications of spiritual enlightenment.

Not long before reaching the birthplace, the travellers witness a series of prophetic flashes ahead, surrealistic images depicting the later years of Christ's life and the ultimate implications of the nativity. A momentary glimpse of "three trees on the low sky" is a portent of the crucifixion; Christ's betrayal by man is foreshadowed in "Six hands at an open door dicing for pieces of silver". Christ's birth leads to his death which opens the possibility of rebirth and redemption for mankind. A similar birth-

death paradox is the outcome of the reflexion of the Magi on their own lives.

> This set down
> This: were we led all that way for
> Birth or Death? There was a Birth, certainly,
> We had evidence and no doubt. I had seen birth and death,
> But had thought they were different; this Birth was
> Hard and bitter agony for us, like Death, our death.
> We returned to our places, these Kingdoms,
> But no longer at ease here, in the old dispensation,
> With an alien people clutching their gods.
> I should be glad of another death.

As for one who must return to the world of appearances-- "death's dream kingdom"-- there can be little joyousness, but at best resignation.

Two assertions follow from the poem. The ultimate result of the spiritual quest is not "sudden illumination" but a gradual realization of what has already come into existence. Spiritual enlightenment is, by its very nature, undramatic, unsensational. ("This is the way the world ends/ Not with a bang but a whimper.") But more importantly, the spiritual quest is the "journey to no end". What counts is the journey itself, the possibilities for learning in the course of the quest rather than any ultimate goal. In Four Quartets just before the approach to the chapel of Little Gidding, Eliot's rather stern pronouncement warns us:

> And what you thought you came for
> Is only a shell, a husk of meaning
> From which the purpose breaks only when it is fulfilled
> If at all. Either you had no purpose
> Or the purpose is beyond the end you figured
> And is altered in fulfilment.

Unlike any of Eliot's earlier work, the five poems which make up "Ash Wednesday" explore changing processes involved in the actual struggle for faith and the overcoming of doubt. Kristian Smidt has said that Eliot

> has found means of intensifying both form and content simultaneously, so that their fusion in his poetry approaches identification of one with the other. His later poetry employs a mystique of form which assumes that formal pattern may be used as a road to absolute knowledge. [15]

A number of transitional patterns link theme and structure in "Ash Wednesday". The first poem, originally published in 1928 under the title, "Perch'io non spero", recounts a turning movement related to an uncertain vacillation between newfound faith and re-encroaching doubt. It involves denial of the world; turning away from the "blessed face" in a moment of renunciation; and turning once again to God. This turning theme becomes the pattern of movement throughout "Ash Wednesday". The second poem employs the image of the revival of the bones after purgation. The central axis of this poem is the song of the dried bones, or the hymn to the Virgin , its original title being "Salutation" (December 1927). The third poem, first published as "Som de l'Escalina" in 1929, adopts as its central image the "figure of the ten stairs", a metaphor used by St. John of the Cross. In its adaptation by Eliot, ascent of the circular stair necessitates turning in much the same vacillating manner as the first poem. But as the climber

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[15] Poetry and Belief in the Work of T.S.Eliot, p. 113.

ascends, the level of consciousness of the poem is elevated and moves out of the world of ordinary experience into an Eden-like state of spiritual enlightenment. The lady of the fourth poem (1930) facilitates movement from corporeal love through redemption and renewal towards divine love. The fifth poem places "the Word" at the "still point of the turning world", initiating the theme which later becomes the motif of "Burnt Norton". The turning movement is finally brought to a standstill with a limited degree of resolution and increased faith in the final poem (1930).

The stasis of Part I of "Ash Wednesday" differs from that of "The Hollow Men" only in its maturity. It is the symptom of a later stage of development experienced by one who has already known the "infirm glory of the positive hour" yet has recognized initial enlightenment to be fleeting and transitory. The protagonist has made the crossing to "death's other Kingdom"; he has encountered the "Absolute" of the Magi.[16] But the awareness of the "There, where trees flower, and springs flow" leads, for the present, only to greater dissatisfaction. Like the Magi who were forced to return to their kingdoms "no longer at ease. . . in the old dispensation", the protagonist of the "Ash Wednesday" poems is faced with a new kind of vacancy, an inability to partake of the waters of renewed life, a condition of incomplete

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[16] "There" consistently refers to "death's other Kingdom" in "The Hollow Men".

faith:

> Because I know I shall not know
> The one veritable transitory power
> Because I cannot drink
> There, where trees flower, and springs flow, for
> there is nothing again.

The temptations of worldly accomplishment, the desire for political power ("Why should I mourn/ The vanished power of the usual reign?"), and the envy of the attainment of others ("this man's gift and that man's scope") have been largely overcome. ("I no longer strive to strive towards such things"). But partial faith falters and there is a sinking back to acceptance of the appearance of things and a rejection of the possibility of transcendence of time and space through the Absolute.

> Because I know that time is always time
> And place is always and only place
> And what is actual is actual only for one time
> And only for one place
> I rejoice that things are as they are and
> I renounce the blessed face
> And renounce the voice.

A spiral movement is established in the verse by the repetition of the single line of the original title "Perch'io non spero". Each repetition discloses a new idea so that a progression of thought winds constantly upwards like the ribwork of a shell. In the attempt to find grounds for belief and assurance, a series of "because" clauses builds up to a single hesitant resolution in a prayer for acceptance. The struggle to carry out the instructions of St. John to refrain from hope, thought, and the security of "knowing", is part of

this progression:[17]

Because I do not hope to turn again
Because I do not hope
Because I do not hope to turn
. . . . . .
Because I do not hope to know again
. . . . . .
Because I do not think
. . . . . .
Because I cannot drink
. . . . . .
Because I know that time is always time
. . . . . .
Because I cannot hope to turn again
Consequently I rejoice. . .
. . . . . .
And I pray that I may forget
These matters that with myself I too much discuss
Too much explain.

The poet petitions for a detachment distinguished from indifference. His demand, "Teach us to care and not to care/ Teach us to sit still", is not only a desire for the passive acceptance required by St. John, but also a prayer to be released from the inability to substitute faith for reason.

In the second poem, the image of the revival of life in a heap of bones in the desert, taken from the Old Testament vision of Ezekiel,[18] shows Eliot's ability to extend the

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[17] One of the most demanding of St. John's requirements is the relinquishing of hope and of thought, a similar requirement being made also in Oriental mysticism. St. John writes: "The way in which they are to conduct themselves in this night of sense is to devote themselves not at all to reasoning and meditation, since it is not the time for this, but to allow the soul to remain in peace and quietness. . . they will be doing quite sufficient if they have patience and persevere in prayer. . . troubling not themselves, in that state, about what they shall think or meditate,. . . and in being without anxiety". (Dark Night, pp. 379-380.)

[18] Ezekiel, 37.

scope of an image he has used in his earlier poetry by providing it with a new context of associations. The new use is initially dependent upon the earlier one but its extension not only expands the possibilities of the original meaning, but forces the reader to reconsider its use in the earlier poem in the light of the new poem. In much the same way Eliot contended that every new work of literature changed, if ever so slightly, the significance of the whole tradition of literature that had gone before it. This building on images for which definite symbolic connotations have already been established contributes to the continuity of his total poetic output.

Northrop Frye has designated the experience of the poem as taking place on the level of ascesis or self-denial.[19] This category might be extended to cover "The Waste Land" and "The Hollow Men" with their ascetic pre-occupation with purgation. The image of the bones allows the poet to allude to the paradoxical death theme of the two earlier poems; to extend the idea of purgation to its necessary conclusion in renewed life; and to refer back to the 1922 and 1925 poems, evoking a wider range of connotations in the earlier uses of the image. Physically and spiritually impotent, the Fisher King sat surrounded in "The Waste Land" by "White bodies naked on the low damp ground/ And bones cast in a little low

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[19] T.S.Eliot, p. 72.

dry garret".[20] There the image represented only death and decay. But, in much the same way as "A current under sea/ Picked" the bones of Phlebas the Phoenician, the bones of the protagonist of "Ash Wednesday" have been purged of their lust by the leopards.

> Lady, three white leopards sat under a juniper-tree
> In the cool of the day, having fed to satiety
> On my legs my heart my liver and that which had been contained
> In the hollow round of my skull. [21]

Eliot employs the vision of the prophet Ezekiel to facilitate further progression beyond the death resulting from purgation. In the Old Testament account, God predicts the revival of the waste land and its replenishment with new life.

> The land now desolate shall be tilled, instead of lying waste for every passer-by to see. Men will say that this same land which was waste has become like a garden of Eden. [22]

This renewal of life is demonstrated when God subsequently presents Ezekiel with a vision of dried bones on the plain and asks whether such bones can live. At God's bidding, Ezekiel prophesies to the bones, infusing them with breath and

[20] "The Waste Land", Poems, p. 67.

[21] George Williamson notes: "the leopards no doubt are appropriate to the desert, but they are more than a substitute for rats as images of destruction; they represent the attraction of death, not the horror but the peace of dissolution. As in Dante (Inferno I) they are not agents of destruction but salutary. Here they have fed on the organs to which the lusts of life are related, and by their colour assume the aspect of a purifying release." A Reader's Guide to T.S.Eliot, p. 173.

[22] Ezekiel 36: 33-35 (The New English Bible).

surrounding them with flesh so that life once again returns.

The bones of "Ash Wednesday" remain in the desert. Only their song or "Salutation" in praise of the Lady presages the renewal of life and ascent to the Eden-like garden of the "higher dream" of Part IV. Nevertheless, a certain degree of transformation can be seen taking effect in this poem. Eliot's solution for the wastelanders was liberation from the imprisonment of self: "We think of the key, each in his prison/ Thinking of the key, each confirms a prison". The transcendence of the protagonist of "Ash Wednesday" represents the transcendence of self or personal ego. The speaker in Part I is forced to vacillate between the attraction of the world and the struggle for devotion. Yet now the protagonist whose very dismemberment we have witnessed, can say with complete detachment,

> And I who am here dissembled
> Proffer my deeds to oblivion, and my love
> To the posterity of the desert and the fruit of the gourd.

This utter oblivion leaves him with no trace of interest in the affairs of the world.

> As I am forgotten
> And would be forgotten, so I would forget
> Thus devoted, concentrated in purpose.

The dessication of purgation has changed the waste land setting from one of hostile desolation to one that imparts a "blessing". Self-forgetfulness gives over to calm acceptance.

> Under a juniper-tree the bones sang, scattered and shining

> We are glad to be scattered, we did little good to each other,
> Under a tree in the cool of the day, with the blessing of sand,
> Forgetting themselves and each other, united
> In the quiet of the desert. 23

Eliot's conscious awareness of literary tradition has inspired the pertinent image of the stairway as a symbol of transition in the third poem. Common to both medieval Christianity and the legends of courtly love, the stair facilitates the elevation of the poem from the level of common experience to that of the "higher dream" or vision.[24] In Tennyson's Holy Grail Sir Lancelot climbs "a thousand steps" to a vision. Likewise, Dante is led up a series of stairs by Beatrice towards the "river of light" or vision of the Absolute. In "Ash Wednesday" the stairway can be thought of as an adaptation of the ten steps of purgation described by St. John of the Cross. In the course of his turning ascent, the climber must overcome a series of distractions similar to those described by St. John in The Ascent of Mount Carmel.

The first level threatens with "the devil of the stairs who wears/ The deceitful face of hope and of despair." It is as though the protagonist turns and sees himself en-

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[23] Compare the juniper-tree to the "dead tree" which, in "The Waste Land" "gives no shelter". In I Kings 19, God provides nourishment for Elijah who prays that he might die after sitting down under a juniper-tree.

[24] This parallels the transition of the lady in the second and fourth poems from corporeal or courtly love to divine love.

gaged in a struggle from which he has only recently been released.

> At the first turning of the second stair
> I turned and saw below
> The same shape twisted on the banister
> Under the vapour in the fetid air.

"The deceitful face of hope and of despair" hints at the difficulty already mentioned in the first poem, of going beyond hope. In order to be free of this devil one must overcome the extremes of hope and despair through remaining detached emotionally. In his fuller discussion of the concept of detachment in Four Quartets, Eliot alludes to the teachings of Krishna in the Bhagavad-Gita.

> The world is imprisoned in its own activity, except when actions are performed as worship of God. Therefore you must perform every action sacramentally, and be free from all attachment to results. 25

All the feelings of disgust and repulsion warned of by St. John at the most trying period, immediately upon entry into the "dark night", are captured in the fragmented quality of the images of the second turning. The flow of the poem is broken with the assonance of the lines:

> There were no more faces and the stair was dark,
> Damp, jagged, like an old man's mouth drivelling beyond repair,
> Or the toothed gullet of an aged shark.

"Old Man" is a term applied by St. John to the worn-out soul which must be cast off subsequent to purgation.

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25 Bhagavad-Gita, (trans. Swami Prabhavanda and Christopher Isherwood) III, p. 45 (Mentor).

Also consistent with St. John's work is the renewed intrusion of longing for the world of sensuous experience at a point when its absence has not yet been replaced by anything else. By contrast to the preceding section, diction becomes exotic and images sensuous. "Lilac and brown hair" recalls temptations of physical desire in Eliot's earlier poems. "A slotted window bellied like the fig's fruit" suggests the female sexual organ. And the appearance of "The broadbacked figure drest in blue and green" who "Enchanted the maytime with an antique flute" suggests the pastoral satyr. All this "distraction", however, fades as the climber gains "strength beyond hope and despair". With genuine humility and awe at the anticipated apprehension of the "higher dream" and entry into the garden, the poet utters the words of the Act of Humility in the Mass:

> Lord, I am not worthy
> Lord, I am not worthy
> but speak the word only. 26

The Lady is another major image of transition in "Ash Wednesday". Her dual nature integrates the sources of artistic and spiritual inspiration. A progression from temporal earthly love towards eternal divine love takes place as she is transformed in the course of the poem from the lady of courtly love to the embodiment of the Incarnate Word, as a type of the Mother of God. As the Virgin Mary, her divine

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26 This line anticipates the presentation of "the Word" in Part V.

Grace intercedes on behalf of man before God. At the same time, she epitomizes the principle of renewal and restoration in the poem and provides for spiritual rebirth following purgation,[27] and artistic renaissance in her restoration of the "ancient rhyme".

It is not surprising that Eliot should follow so closely the model of Dante's Beatrice who also leads the way up the stairway to the divine light. Beatrice is for Dante both a source of creative inspiration and a spiritual guide. But Eliot has made this feminine symbol his own by relating it to a diversity of sources. On one level, "Ash Wednesday" is a song of courtly love in the medieval tradition of Arnault or Cavalcanti. On another, it is a hymn to the Virgin after the style of the Salve Regina. The Lady's identity as the object of courtly love, is established at the outset of the poem with its opening lines echoing the words of Cavalcanti's Ballada:

> Because no hope is left me, Balatetta,
> Of return to Tuscany,
> Light-foot go thou some fleet way
> Unto my Lady straightway,
> And out of her courtesy
> Great honour will she do thee. [28]

The allusion to Shakespeare's Sonnet XXIX follows in the same tradition. The Lady in the courtly love ballads was worshipped with religious devotion. She was a constant

[27] Represented in her revival of the bones.

[28] Ezra Pound's translation quoted by Hugh Kenner in The Invisible Poet: T.S.Eliot, p. 229.

source of inspiration for her lover.

> She is for him the embodiment of perfection, physical, intellectual, and moral, and his dominating desire is to be worthy of her. . . . To win a smile or a word from her is for him an untold happiness, and even without them he counts himself fortunate if she takes any notice of him or marks his presence by the smallest sign. . . . This love is a philosophy, a religion, a code of manners. 29

Towards the end of the poem we are told that the Lady "bent her head and signed but spoke no word". But like Beatrice too, she is type of the Virgin Mary. She "honours the Virgin in meditation" and wears the ecclesiastical colours of white and blue, "Mary's colours". The renewal of the dried bones after purgation is attributed to her:

> And that which had been contained
> In the bones (which were already dry) said chirping:
> Because of the goodness of this Lady
> And because of her loveliness, and because
> She honours the Virgin in meditation,
> We shine with brightness.

Both aspects of her nature overlap in the song of the bones. As the lady of courtly love, the "Lady of silences", she is calm. But as she assumes the identity of Mary in the symbol of the rose, she becomes distressed. Her concern is for the well-being of man. Thus, she can be at once "Worried-repose-ful", for as the two aspects of her personality merge, she takes on once again the absolute calm of the Virgin in the midst of human turmoil. Nevertheless, like a pietà figure, she is exhausted in her human incarnation. Her function as the transition into corporeal love can be seen as the single

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29 Maurice Bowra, Medieval Love-Song, p. 7.

rose becomes the garden "Where all loves end". She is the means by which man can recapture once again his primeval innocence. It is she who can "Terminate torment/ Of love unsatisfied", the awful nature of divine love.

A further development of Eliot's mythic method is at work in another aspect of her nature: the archetypal earth-mother or vegetation goddess. Jung made the connection between the cult of the Virgin and primitive vegetation rituals. "Even the Christians", he says, "could not refrain from reuniting their Mother of God with the water: 'Ave Maris stella' are the opening words of a hymn to Mary."[30] Her central position in "Ash Wednesday" is the reverse of that of the Fisher King in "The Waste Land". The Lady is the symbol of fertility and rebirth rather than impotence. She walks between "The various ranks of varied green" and it is on her account that the fountain springs up. By the end of the poem, the Lady is addressed as "Sister, mother/ And spirit of the river, spirit of the sea", words that look forward to the "strong brown god" of the river in "The Dry Salvages".

The importance of the Lady as a transitional symbol is stressed in her intermediary position. In her divine omniscience of past and future, she bridges the gap between ignorance and knowledge ("Talking of trivial things/ In ignorance and in knowledge of eternal dolour"). She is able to

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[30] Symbols of Transformation, p. 251.

"Redeem/ The time", to transcend the limitations of past and future as she "moves in the time between sleep and waking", or between the death-like sleep of purgation and the renewal of life in the higher dream or vision. "The years that walk between" are, according to Elizabeth Drew, "both the years between his [the poet's] own present and his first meeting with the Lady, and the years between his own poem and the poetry of the Middle Ages".[31] Thus, her inspiration is also an artistic one, like that of Beatrice for Dante, and she can restore "With a new verse the ancient rhyme". Her position between the yews is significant in that the yew tree is traditionally both a symbol of death and of immortality.[32] And so she becomes the means of overcoming death and attaining everlasting life: "Till the wind shake a thousand whispers from the yew". Her capacity to bear "Away the fiddles and the flutes" brings about the transition from "Distraction", or the "music of the flute", encountered on the third stair (or corporeal love), to spiritual love.

With Gerontion and Belladonna, Eliot used images describing the surroundings of his characters as projections of their personality and feelings. The same method is at work in the garden imagery of the fourth poem. It is related to the medieval garden of the Romance of the Rose, the retreat

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[31] T.S.Eliot: The Design of his Poetry, p. 111.

[32] By contrast, the dead tree which gave "no shelter" in "The Waste Land" was limited to a symbol of death only.

of seventeenth-century poetry, Dante's Purgatorio and the archetypal Eden of man's first innocence in Genesis: "And after this our exile". The contrast with the desert of bones in Part II could not be greater. Colour, water and life are all present. But the garden exists less in its own right than as a direct extension of the Lady. The fountains and springs are attributed to her strengthening and freshening powers. The blue larkspur seems less an actual flower than a reflexion of the Lady's "blue, in Mary's colour". It is she who makes "cool the dry rock" and "firm the sand". Even the bird that "sang down" is her mouth-piece as it urges:

> Redeem the time, redeem the dream:
> The token of the word unheard, unspoken.

"The single rose is now the garden".

Eliot's first succinct statement of the doctrine of the Incarnation is made in Part V. Borrowing his alliterative phrasing from one of the sermons of Lancelot Andrewes, he posits the divine "Word" or Logos as extant in the world but without expression. In the "Word", the spiritual movement of all of the "Ash Wednesday" poems finds a central axis:

> Against the Word the unstilled world still whirled
> About the centre of the silent Word.

"Where shall the word be found?" the poet asks, and concludes that due to the Lady's failure to speak any word, it is not available for those who "avoid the face" as he has done in

the first poem. Worldly distractions cause too much noise for the meditative silence of the "Word" and he turns again to the Lady for her intercession on behalf of those who cannot pray:

> Will the veiled sister pray
> For children at the gate
> Who will not go away and cannot pray:
> Pray for those who chose and oppose.

Her prayers are desired especially for those who are caught in the exile of the hollow men, and those who are making a renunciation of worldly knowledge ("apple-seed") for greater wisdom:

> In the last desert between the last blue rocks
> The desert in the garden the garden in the desert
> Of drouth, spitting from the mouth in the withered
> apple-seed.

This collusion of desert and garden speaks of partial faith.

Nostalgic vision is the theme of the final poem of the series and it is dominated by a reserved acceptance of faith. "Because I do not hope to turn again" has changed to "Although I do not hope to turn again". "Wavering between the profit and the loss/ In this dream crossed twilight where the dreams cross" has been resolved in "though I do not wish to see these things". The window of sensuous temptation has opened up into a "wide window towards the granite shore". A reason to rejoice has been discovered at last and the loss of the full range of sensuous delights is itself cause for rejoicing and no longer a source of temptation.

And the lost heart stiffens and rejoices

In the lost lilac and the lost sea voices.

The plea, "Suffer us not to mock ourselves with falsehood" is again, evidence of the poet's integrity. The versicles which end the poem,

> Teach us to care and not to care
> Teach us to sit still
> Even among these rocks,
> Our peace in His will
> . . . . . .
> Suffer me not to be separated
>
> And let my cry come unto thee

attest to the new validity found in prayer.

By the end of 1930, it was evident that Eliot's poetic interest lay in the area of religious verse. He had moved steadily from the rather self-conscious and tentative religious implications of "Gerontion" and "The Waste Land" (with its juxtaposition of Buddhist and Christian thought), towards a carefully objectified expression of spiritual frustration in "The Hollow Men". The "Ash Wednesday" poems mark the extreme of Eliot's openly Christian poetry, dominated by his preoccupation with the cult of the Virgin Mary. Their lack of popularity may be attributed to what many readers have considered a limitingly Anglo-Catholic view-point. The first -person narrator dissolves at once behind a framework of medieval imagery and symbolism leaving the poet's personal experience disguised or, as Eliot would have preferred, universalized. The asceticism and imagery of the <u>In-</u>

ferno are left behind in "Ash Wednesday" although its final resolution is inconclusive. Just as so many of the images are transitional ones, the poems themselves provide the elevation to the final Paradiso phase of Eliot's work.

But an article contributed in 1935 to the symposium, Faith that Illuminates, indicates the direction the subsequent poems were to take. Speaking of religion and literature, he wrote: "What I want is a literature which should be unconsciously, rather than deliberately and defiantly, Christian".[33] "Burnt Norton", published one year later, followed this directive.

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[33] "Religion and Literature", Selected Prose, p. 34.

II

DEATH'S OTHER KINGDOM

Agatha:

> There are hours when there seems to be no past or future
> Only a present moment of pointed light
> When you want to burn.
>
> -- The Family Reunion.

The "ordering of sentiment" which took place in Four Quartets, the four poems published between 1936 and 1942, was the culminating achievement of Eliot's poetic career. Of the religious experience he has stated:

> Rational assent may arrive late, intellectual conviction may come slowly, but they come inevitably without violence to honesty and nature. To put the sentiments in order is a later, and an immensely difficult task: intellectual freedom is earlier and easier than complete spiritual freedom. 1

In the Quartets Eliot formulated a pattern of existence, one that summarized and concluded his earlier religious thought and, at the same time, placed his ideas on the writing of poetry firmly within his religious schemata, creating a poetic meaningfully integrated within the framework of his general thought. But above all, in Four Quartets he crafted a poem of intrinsic beauty and universal significance. As the ultimate reconciliation of his earlier struggle for faith, Four Quartets imposes a pattern on his earlier explorations,

1 "Second Thoughts about Humanism", Selected Essays, p. 491.

each of which now seems to point steadily towards this synthesis of thought and perfection of craftsmanship. There remains no trace of the desperate vacillation of "Ash Wednesday" or of the stagnation of "The Hollow Men". Confidence and assurance of faith are reflected in the imagery of integration which expresses unity and completion. The Quartets comprehend and extend Eliot's earlier collocation of Christian and Oriental ethics, Heraclitan and pre-Socratic metaphysics, primitive ethnology and myth as well as twentieth-century speculations into the relativity of time and space. The pattern which emerges in the structure of themes and imagery becomes an expression of the total pattern of existence discerned in the thought of the poem itself.

Yet, at the same time, the "meaning" of the Quartets is evasive. Because much of their power is embodied in the beauty and form of the poetic statement itself, initial appreciation is forthcoming on a level that might be termed "unconscious". The meditative tone and the musical quality of "auditory imagination" in the work exert a considerable influence even on the reader who has not yet penetrated its complexities of thought and structure. In 1933 Eliot described this quality as capable of

> penetrating far below the conscious levels of thought and feeling, invigorating every word; sinking to the most primitive and forgotten, returning to the origin and bringing something back, seeking the beginning and the end. It works through meaning certainly, or not without meanings in the ordinary sense, and fuses the old and obliterated, and the trite, the current, and the new and

surprising, the most ancient and the most civilised mentality. 2

Eliot's training as a systematic philosopher is more evident in Four Quartets than in any of his earlier poems and there, abstract thought is most intense. Yet to regard the poem as a philosophical treatise in poetic form would be to misunderstand the poet's intention and the work's actual effect. "The principal quality which drew Eliot to the symbolists", remarks F.O.Matthiessen, "is one they possess in common with the metaphysicals, 'the same quality of transmuting ideas into sensations, of transmuting an observation into a state of mind.' This quality might be defined more technically as ' the presence of the idea in the image'". 3 Eliot's primary concern is the feeling associated with certain concepts, not the statement of dogma or doctrine.

In his use of imagery the poet achieves a thematic structure in the poem that perfects his initial experimentation in "The Waste Land". In his 1942 essay on "The Music of Poetry", Eliot remarked that one of the properties in which music concerned the poet was in the "sense of structure", and especially the structuring of recurrent themes.

> The use of reccurent themes is as natural to poetry as to music. There are possibilities for verse which bear some analogy to the development of a theme by different groups of instruments; there are possibilities of transitions in a poem comparable to the different movements

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2 Eliot's 1933 description of the "auditory imagination" in The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism, p. 118-119.

3 The Achievement of T.S.Eliot, p. 28.

> of a symphony or a quartet; there are possibilities of contrapuntal arrangement of subject matter. [4]

Inherent in musical structure is a sense of unity and a sense of balance. A quartet or a sonata often begins with a simple motif which is expanded, repeated, enhanced with contrapuntal embellishments, and finally broken down at last into its original simplicity. Much of the balance of the form depends on the satisfaction provided by this cyclical pattern. A "home" key usually runs throughout the piece and no matter how far the music may wander from its original key, a feeling of completion is established once it has finally returned to the key with which it began.

Northrop Frye has outlined the five-part concentric thematic structure common to each of Eliot's Four Quartets.

> We begin (Ia) on the horizontal line of time, in a mood and with imagery that set the tonality for the poem. Then we go to a vision of plenitude (Ib) which in three of the Quartets is reached through a "loop in time" (a phrase from The Family Reunion), and is associated with the past. There follows (IIa) a lyric which brings the emotional impact of this vision into focus. Then we come to the awareness of the present moment (IIb), the centre of our diagram [the still point], thence to ordinary experience (IIIa), thence to a withdrawal from ordinary experience (IIIb), which takes us into a lyrical "dark night" vision (IV). Then comes a passage dealing with or alluding to the relation of art to human experience (Va) and a final resolution in the tonality with which we began (Vb). [5]

In the discussion of images used by Eliot in the thematic structuring of the Quartets, Kristian Smidt has

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[4] The Music of Poetry, p. 28.

[5] T.S.Eliot, p. 78.

made an astute observation on the development of Eliot's imagery over his entire poetic career. At first, he says, an image is used in a comparatively "naturalistic" way. But "as time goes on there is some shuffling and constant new assignments and differentiation" enabling the poet "to operate very freely, exploring spiritual life by means of the evocative symbols he has evolved.... Relevant thoughts are attracted and arranged in a pattern which the intellect alone would hardly have been able to produce."[6] The main concern of this discussion of Four Quartets will be Eliot's discernment of this pattern through the use of recurrent images and the integration of symbols of unity and completion into the fabric of the verse.

The Incarnation is the unifying theme for the Quartets. In "Journey of the Magi" and in "Ash Wednesday" encounter with the Absolute is proposed as the desired attainment of the spiritual quest. But in Four Quartets the implications of the apprehension of God-in-man or God-incarnate are developed with reference to human time, history, death and art. Eliot's doctrine of the Incarnation is by no means an orthodox Christian one. Albeit, it does embrace the word of the Evangelist which posits God as first mover:

In the beginning was the Word; and the Word was with

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[6] Poetry and Belief in the Work of T.S.Eliot, p. 112.

God; and the Word was God. [7]

And each poem as Grover Smith has said,[8] contains a manifestation of the Christian God Incarnate. In "Burnt Norton" it is God the Father as the unmoved Mover; in "East Coker", God the Son as Redeemer; in "The Dry Salvages", the Virgin as Intercessor; and in "Little Gidding", God the Holy Ghost as the power of Love. As an eternally recurrent event which takes place outside human delimitations of time and space, the Incarnation is described in a series of paradoxes according to its ability to transcend these limitations. The "Word" is "the still point of the turning world"; "the intersection of the timeless with time"; "neither flesh nor fleshless"; "neither arrest nor movement"; "neither ascent nor decline" ("Burnt Norton", II).

But Eliot's "Word" is also the "Logos" of Heraclitus, the all-pervasive flux mentioned in the epigraph to "Burnt Norton": "Whereas the Word is common, most men live as having their own way of thinking".[9] Heraclitus described a constant flux perceivable in all things in terms of a transmutation of the elements, an eternal cycle upwards, from earth to fire, and down, from fire to earth. He believed this process to be motivated by the primary element, fire. Hence, "The

[7] John I:1.

[8] In his T.S.Eliot's Poetry and Plays, p.253.

[9] C.f. the "lost" word, "unheard, unspoken" of "Ash Wednesday" or the "voice of one crying in the wilderness"of St. John's Gospel.

way up and the way down are one and the same". A further movement is seen in all things upward towards light and unity and down towards darkness and dissolution. Direct references to the Heraclitan elements and their transmutation as well as the final consumption of all things by fire (which becomes the symbol of the Holy Spirit) superimposes a unifying framework on Eliot's imagery.

But Eliot extends the significance of his Incarnation even further until it embraces something that lies much deeper within the human psyche: an archetypal life-rhythm closely related to the vegetation myths, the seasonal cycles and the universal cycle of life, death and rebirth itself.

Finally, the relation between the poetic "word" and the divine "Word" of the Incarnation merits consideration. For in the course of the Quartets, the poem's awareness of itself, the attempt to relate the activity of writing poetry to the implications of the Incarnation, results in the formulation of a poetic compatible with Eliot's fully developed religious tenets.

By its very nature, apprehension of the Incarnation on a human level must take place in a temporary relinquishing of the restrictions of human measurement of time. Complete perception is reserved for "the saint",

> something given
> And taken, in a lifetime's death in love,
> Ardour and selflessness and self-surrender.

More commonly it is experienced only in partial form.

> For most of us, there is only the unattended
> Moment, the moment in and out of time,
> The distraction fit, lost in a shaft of sunlight.

("The Dry Salvages", V). The subject of Four Quartets is this "unattended moment". In his attempt to give poetic form to feelings of an intensely personal and mystical nature, the poet is essaying the "articulation of the inarticulate". Three distinct visionary experiences are related in the course of the poem. The "moment in the rose garden" occurs in "Burnt Norton". In "East Coker" a mysteriously archaic group of dancers appears on a hillside outside the village of the poet's ancestry. And in "Little Gidding", a pilgrimage to the chapel of Nicholas Ferrar produces a similar "unattended moment". From each of these the poet attempts to articulate feelings and thoughts through images which "put the sentiments in order".

At least one critic[10] has discerned a parallel between Eliot's discovering a total "pattern" in all existence in Four Quartets and the pattern of the mandala. Not only is there a similarity of structure between the two; but the intended purpose is roughly the same. The mandala is a descriptive diagram or map of existence based on the principle of the fundamental unity of all things or the "one in the many". Such a principle is common to Platonism, Hinduism, Taoism, and Buddhism. And the mandala is found equally in

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[10] See Elizabeth Drew, T.S.Eliot: The Design of his Poetry, p. 145 and ff.

the monasteries of Tibet as well as the medieval cathedrals of Europe. According to Giuseppe Tucci, the mandala represents

> the whole universe in its essential plan, in its process of emanation and of reabsorption. The universe not only in its inert spacial expanse, but as a temporal revolution and both as a vital process which develops from an essential Principle and rotates round a central axis. 11

The mandala often takes the form of a flower, cross, or wheel. About the circumference are four distinct areas radiating from a fifth central one. In this way everything peripheral is subordinated to the command of the centre. The rotation of the whole, imitating the circular movement seen in all creation, provides for the constant change of the multiplicity of phenomena represented about the circumference. Deities symbolizing good give place to those of evil, darkness to light, and so on. In Taoist terms, the opposites, Yin and Yang are dissolved into the Tao, the source and end of all things. In Platonism, the "many" gives place to the "One".

Through contemplation of the mandala, the meditator is able to realize a correspondence between the microcosm and the macrocosm. By beholding an eternal process of birth, decay, and death, he is able to relate this inevitablity of death and regeneration to all things. The mandala is assumed to arouse liberating cognition. For, once released

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11 The Theory and Practice of the Mandala, p. 23.

from the boundaries of ego, he is able to identify with the Absolute force at the centre of the mandala and so with all being.

The ontology developed by Eliot in Four Quartets has as its centre the "still point" or the Word Incarnate, from which all existence emanates. Cyclical alteration between a series of quaternities (the seasons and the elements) and pairs of opposites (light and dark, up and down) is explained in terms of a never-ending circular rotation. This "vital process" or flux develops from the essential principle of the "Word" at its central axis. In this central position the "still point of the turning world" is both movement and "abstention from movement" ("Burnt Norton", III). It is at once the source and end of all movement. In symbolic form as a flower, it appears in "Burnt Norton" as the "lotos" rising from the pool in the rose garden. A cross is described by the meeting of its eternal nature with human time: "the point of intersection of the timeless/ With time" ("The Dry Salvages", V). Eliot rejects a fixed pattern as only partially valid for one that is "new in every moment" ("East Coker", II).

The pattern of circular rotation which Eliot used in "Ash Wednesday" becomes in Four Quartets a spiral movement spanning the microcosm and the macrocosm. In a series of gyre-like passages (such as the lyric second movement of "Burnt Norton", the vision of discord in "East Coker", or the

"dance") the natural universe is associated with the cycles of the lives of men. A similar association is established through the cycles of the changing seasons, with the dancers at East Coker "Keeping the rhythm in their dancing/ As in their living in the living seasons". A contravention of the seasonal rhythm or temporal revolution serves as an example of transcendence of time as in "East Coker" (II). In the "Dry Salvages" the rhythm of the river is seen as penetrating the lives of men.

By restricting each quartet to a single element, Eliot is able to establish the same Heraclitan process of emanation and reabsorption. But he extends the associations of the Heraclitan elements to suit his more eclectic pattern. In "Burnt Norton" the "faded air" becomes a symbol of "time before and time after", the "cold wind/ That blows before and after time". In "East Coker" the earth has its own cycle of birth, death, burial and rebirth:

> ashes to the earth
> Which is already flesh, fur and faeces,
> Bone of man and beast, cornstalk and leaf.

The element of "The Dry Salvages" is water, represented by the river and the sea. As the river flows into the sea, the microcosm and the macrocosm are once more united. In the image of the sea the poet exploits its archetypal symbolism as both a source of birth and death common to all creatures. "Little Gidding" centres around the image of fire; but its supra-importance is no longer simply that of the Heraclitan

primary substance. It recalls also the "burning, burning" of St. Augustine's purgation in "The Waste Land" and, as the symbol of the purifying pentecostal fire of the Holy Spirit, presents "the choice of pyre or pyre--/ To be redeemed from fire by fire." ("Little Gidding", IV). As Four Quartets proceeds there is a transmutation from one element to another until the final apocalyptic dissolution by fire takes place in "Little Gidding". In Heraclitan terms:

> Fire lives in the death of air;
> Air lives in the death of fire;
> Water lives in the death of earth;
> Earth lives in the death of fire. 12

The same is true of Eliot's alternation of light and dark, height and depth. Light is consistently a symbol of the presence of the Absolute as in Dante's "river of light". The vision in "Burnt Norton" bursts upon us "sudden in a shaft of sunlight" as the pool is "filled with water out of sunlight". At the end of the fourth movement, the kingfisher's wing answers "light to light, and is silent, the light is still/ At the still point of the turning world"; there takes place a dissolving of the transient light of the material world into the divine light of the Absolute. In the description of the dance in "East Coker" a complete cycle of light and dark takes place: beginning with the light which "falls/ Across the open field" in the afternoon; the coming

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12 See Peter Milward's Commentary on T.S.Eliot's "Four Quartets" for a discussion of the Heraclitan elements in this context.

of the "violet hour" as the "sultry light is absorbed"; the artificial light of the bonfire at midnight; and the return once again of the natural light as "Dawn points, and another day/ Prepares for heat and silence." Yet darkness is equally important, usually introduced by descent. We were told "the way up and the way down are one and the same". And so "internal darkness" can mean enlightenment and yet still carries the connotations established in "The Hollow Men" and "Ash Wednesday" as the purgative "dark night of the soul".

Because of the complex structure and varied levels of interpretation, approach to the meaning of the Quartets must itself be a cumulative process. Any detailed reading of the text is necessarily partial and incomplete pending consideration of the poem as a whole. Accordingly, the outline of this general pattern must be kept in mind as we turn to a detailed explication of thought and imagery in the poetry.

The first movement of "Burnt Norton" explores the concept of the eternal presence of all time. It is initially presented in abstract terms. Past time is seen to be a present which is no longer alive. Future time is a present which has not yet come into being. Similarly, the element of futurity contained within past time, "What might have been", can be seen only as speculation upon memory. Hence, "all time is eternally present". But this concept is a difficult one and even if we are able to grasp it with the faculty of

reason, we do not necessarily understand its implications in terms of feelings. The rest of the poem explores this theme in a series of images, at once immediate and tactile, presenting the pattern of feelings which follows from such a point of view.

The first image is the archetypal garden first encountered in "Ash Wednesday". There it represented the reviving, life-giving power of the Lady. Here it serves to illustrate a time-space or physical metaphor in which the abstract concept of eternal presence of all time prevails. It is our first glimpse of a pattern,

> the kind of pattern which we perceive in our own lives only at rare moments of inattention and detachment, drowsing in sunlight. It is the pattern drawn by what the ancient world called Fate; subtilized by Christianity into mazes of delicate theology; and reduced again by the modern world into crudities of psychological or economic necessity. 13

The laughter of children "Hidden excitedly" reminds us that our own innocence, before "The heavy burden of the growing soul/ Perplexes and offends more, day by day" ("Animula") was akin to the general state of mankind before expulsion from Eden. For a moment the poetry gives us a return to lost innocence, a re-entry into the lost garden. And there, with the suspension of time, we experience the vision of the "lotos". But with passing of a cloud, clarity of perception is reduced to obscurity and the bird's urging changes to a

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13 "John Marston", Selected Essays, p. 32.

warning to depart: "Go, go go, said the bird: human kind/ Cannot bear very much reality" (Burnt Norton", I). For, as Eliot has remarked in his criticism, "our lives are mostly a constant evasion of ourselves, and an evasion of the visible and sensible world."[14] In this manner we are initiated into a highly personal religious experience at the outset of the poem without yet being able to understand all of its ramifications. Nevertheless, the opening words are repeated as if firmly establishing the fact before we venture on to the next movement:

> Time past and time future
> What might have been and what has been
> Point to one end, which is always present.

With the second movement, the focus shifts from the microcosm to the macrocosm. We are reminded of the general observation of Heraclitus, "All things flow", and the specific epigraph of the poem, "The way up and the way down are one and the same." A continual movement can be observed in natural phenomena-- a striving upward to light and unity and downward to darkness and dissolution. In a tightly woven lyric movement fortified by distinct rhythm and regular rhyme, the poet discovers the latent order in the movement of all things around the "still point". The passage is a fine example of Eliot's adaptation of verse for his own special purpose. Attention is arrested by the initial con-

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[14] The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism, p. 155.

trast of "garlic" and "sapphires"- words of different connotative values, brought together in a common element, the "mud", and serving a similar purpose to "Clot the bedded axle-tree". The word "clot" with its emphatic position at the head of the line, is particularly decisive and definite, almost mechanical. It provides a transition from solid objects revolving in a semi-liquid base to the liquid matter of the blood and lymph as it sings through the arteries of the human body. A comparison is implied between the natural world, the microcosm of the human body, and the macrocosm of the "drift of stars" which immediately follows. The gradual flowing of all things is intrinsic to the verse itself as it slowly proceeds through alliterative word groups, repeated adverbs and internal half-rhymes.

The remaining section of this movement returns to a more prosaic style with an exposition of this moving pattern in terms of the "still point". A subtle shift is made from a physical concept of the centre of the revolving movement seen in all things, to a spiritual centre. And so the poem passes freely once more out of the concrete physical world into the abstract philosophical dimension with which it began. Because the still point is beyond the physical realm, it cannot be known in terms of substance, position, or movement. Paradoxically, it is "Neither flesh nor fleshless;/ Neither from nor towards"; "neither arrest nor movement". Just as it is not restricted by the dimension of space,

similarly, it is beyond time also-- or rather, comprehends all time: for in it "past and future are gathered". To describe the still point at this juncture is to enter into a series of "hints and promises", which must of necessity remain as vague as "Burnt Norton" itself without the illumination of the other three quartets. The still point can be described only as a state in which there exists

> The inner freedom from the practical desire,
> The release from action and suffering, release from the inner
> And the outer compulsion.

To perceive the still point, which later is defined as the Incarnation, is like the experience of the Magi, to come across a new world and yet to retain "the old made explicit". Such understanding involves both ecstasy and horror. Because man is limited by his enchainment to a pattern of thinking which imposes artificial categories of past and future upon experience, he is at the same time protected from the extremes of heaven and hell. Northrop Frye's summary of this idea describes the concept as it might be applied to the wastelanders.

> The ego lives in a world of illusion in which the primary categories are those of time and space. Time as we ordinarily experience it has three dimensions, past, present, and future. None of these dimensions exists: the past is no longer, the future not yet, the present never quite. The centre of time is now, but there is no such time as now. Similarly, the centre of space is "here", but there is no such place as here. All places are "there": the best we can do is to draw a circle around ourselves and say that here is inside of it. The

> result of the egocentric view is loneliness, a sense of alienation from a world that keeps running away from it. 15

The solution to the wastelanders' alienation would be the transcendence of the limitations of perception of time in terms of past and future, something that can be accomplished only through the intersection of the timeless with time which takes place, according to Eliot, in the Incarnation. The last section of this movement returns briefly with concrete images once more. In order to be "conscious" of the still point we must step out of the limitations of time. Eliot names two other situations representative of human transcendence of time: "The moment in the arbour where the rain beat" and "The moment in the draughty church at smoke fall", both momentary and ephemeral. But they are, nevertheless, common and equally valid to the visionary experience in the rose garden.

In contrast to the moment which transcends time in the experience in the rose garden of the first movement, the third movement presents the underground world of the London tube, the world of "Time before and time after". For the inhabitants of this world, there is no present. Their minds, like those of the wastelanders, are "Filled with fancies and empty of meaning". They are classified with bits of paper "whirled by the cold wind/ That blows before and after time".

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15 T.S.Eliot, p. 42.

The peculiar quality of the half-light of the tube becomes an extended metaphor for the half-enlightenment of these people. It is "a dim light":

> neither daylight
> Investing form with lucid stillness
> Turning shadow into transient beauty
> With slow rotation suggesting permanence,
> Nor darkness to purify the soul
> Emptying the sensual with deprivation
> Cleansing affection from the temporal.

Unlike the situation in "The Waste Land" in which there seemed to be little hope, the direction to be taken is now unmistakably clear. We must

> Descend lower, descend only
> Into the world of perpetual solitude,
> World not world, but that which is not world,
> Internal darkness.

A disciplined "via negativa" borrowed from St. John of the Cross is posited against the "distraction" of the underground world, the "dark night of the soul" ("internal darkness") against the "twittering world". But according to Heraclitus, "the way up and the way down are one and the same". The way down is also movement into the depth of the soul, the same "turning from the world" that was already accomplished at the outset of "Ash Wednesday". Hence, property, sense, fancy, and spirit must be denied. The other way is simply "abstention from movement", the answer to "Ash Wednesday's" petition, "Teach us to sit still", or the inevitable cosmic ascent towards light seen in the second movement of "Burnt Norton". The underground metaphor provides an example drawn from

common experience in which human beings are seen as trapped by past and future time. As they move between the tube stations, there is no meaning for them in present time. (Eliot uses the metaphor of being between two points on a journey again in the third quartet, "The Dry Salvages", endowing it there with an even subtler meaning.) The poet has carefully tied together the second section with the first by a recurring reference to the contrasting movement of the world "In appetency on its metalled ways/ Of time past and time future".

Leonard Unger's interpretation of the fourth movement is intelligent and one consistent with my own reading. He considers it "a symbolic expression of St. John's Dark Night":

> the day has been buried and the sun obscured. There follows then an eager questioning, "Will the sunflower turn to us", asking in effect whether life, rebirth, will come to one who waits in the prescribed passivity of purgation. And the section ends with an answer:
>
> . . . After the kingfisher's wing
> Has answered light to light and is silent, the light is still
> At the still point of the turning world.
>
> The "kingfisher" I associate with the Fisher King of the waste land, which will be redeemed by a divine act. The passage thus means that there will be a rebirth when, through grace, the world is restored to contact with the "still point". 16

The allusive short lyric movement brings in all the force of Gray's Elegy, Shakespeare's "Sonnet XII", and Donne's Meditation XVII. Again the yew carries a double symbolism as it

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16 T.S.Eliot: A Selected Critique, p. 385.

did in "Ash Wednesday" where it meant both death and immortality.

The fifth movement provides a key to understanding the form of Four Quartets. The form or pattern created in music and poetry contains both movement (a sequence of notes or a progression of words) and stillness (found in the unity of the work as a whole). "The temporal sequence is co-existent with the unchanging pattern, all held together in a vital tension of sound and meaning".[17] Their pattern transcends time, as does the moving stillness of the pattern of a Chinese jar or the still point of the turning world. In art, as in the Incarnation, "All is always now". But the word of poetry is subject to constant decay, unlike the divine, eternal Word.

> Words strain,
> Crack and sometimes break, under the burden,
> Under the tension, slip, slide, perish,
> Decay with imprecision, will not stay in place,
> Will not stay still.

The final section provides a summary for the whole quartet. What appears to be a moving pattern when seen in detail (as in the "circulation of the lymph" or the "drift of stars"), can be seen in terms of the total pattern of creation, not as movement at all, but as focusing ultimately on the still point. The concept of love is put forward as a similar "cause and end" of movement. It transcends time and desire,

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[17] Elizabeth Drew, T.S.Eliot: The Design of His Poetry, p. 160.

being itself, timeless and undesiring. The poem is completed with a return to the opening garden vision. The image of innocent sunlight and the sound of the hidden "laughter/ Of children in the foliage" re-introduces the initial vision with even greater impact. For now, all time which is not "present" can be seen as "ridiculous" and "sad", in the light of the experience of eternity.

"Burnt Norton" is the most difficult of the quartets because of its preponderantly abstract thought. Although it does not lack completeness by itself, many of the ideas put forward in the poem are developed more fully in the remaining quartets and they are more dependent upon "Burnt Norton" for their completeness.

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"East Coker" considers the passage of time both in the life of the individual and in the life of mankind in general. The poem embodies less a definite "meaning" than a series of subtly modulating feelings. They are intensely personal yet written with the impersonality of

> the poet who, out of intense and personal experience, is able to express a general truth; retaining all the particularity of his experience, to make of it a general symbol. 18

This is the wisdom of humility known to man not on a philosophical or reasoning level, but much more deeply, in the

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18 On Poetry and Poets, p. 255.

patterns of human life. If "Burnt Norton" looked regretfully at the past-future enchainment of human perception as a "waste sad time", "East Coker" points towards acceptance of the changes of time upon human life.

The poem opens with an inversion of Mary Stuart's motto, "In my beginning is my end" and closes with its restoration, "In my end is my beginning", essentially a movement from despair to hope. The pattern of life on earth is seen as a recurrent succession of birth, growth, decay and death. Eliot has already explored the paradoxical nature of birth and death in "Journey of the Magi" and the nature of mystic death in "The Waste Land" and "The Hollow Men". Now, the whole process is seen as unrelinquishing and inevitable. The evolution of stone from crumbling or destroyed houses is traced to its place in new buildings and the destructive regenerative cycle of

> Old stone to new buildings, old timber to new fires,
> Old fires to ashes, and ashes to the earth
> Which is already flesh, fur and faeces,
> Bone of man and beast, cornstalk and leaf.

("East Coker", I). The imagery links the macrocosm and the microcosm; man's life is seen as a small part of the natural order. There follows a passage reminiscent of the wisdom of Ecclesiastes, asserting the necessity of a time in human life for creation and equally a time for destruction.

Repetition of the opening phrase, "In my beginning is my end", indicates the specific focus the next section

will take-- the personal "beginning" or origins of the poet himself. The Somerset countryside near the village of East Coker is the first extended image in the poem. And although we know that East Coker has a special significance for the poet, it takes its place at this point in the poem not so much because of its personal associations, but for the universal quality of the poet's personal pilgrimage to the family seat. In other words, we may be aware of the inspiration behind the experience but we are left in the poetry with the experience of the poetry itself, the patterns of feelings evoked in an objectified image.

The light is remarked upon for its outstanding quality. This is the way upwards, the antithesis of the underground world. In the open field "the sultry light/ Is absorbed not refracted". The warm haze gives one the feeling that outlines are blurred. The poet experiences a strange sensation of being hypnotized "in the electric heat". An all-embracing calm spreads over the scene. Sentences are broken off, bringing the verse almost to a stand-still:

> The dahlias sleep in the empty silence.
> Wait for the early owl.

It is as if we too are made to wait. We are warned not to "come too close" in anticipation as we hear first the music "Of the weak pipe and little drum"; it is ancient music, rustic. And then pairs of figures appear dancing around the bonfire,

> The association of man and woman
> In daunsinge, signifying matrimonie--
> A dignified and commodious sacrament.
> Two and two, necessarye coniunction,
> Holding eche other by the hand or the arm
> Whiche betokeneth concorde.

The dance, a symbol for the universal cyclical pattern of all things, is reflected in human movement too. The poet has used the archaic diction of his ancestor, Sir Thomas Elyot, to emphasize the timelessness of the ceremony. Unlike the people in the London underground train or the crowd which flows over London Bridge, these humble country people are still in contact with the natural rhythm of the earth. They are "Keeping time",

> Keeping the rhythm in their dancing
> As in their living in the living seasons
> The time of the seasons and the constellations
> The time of milking and the time of harvest
> The time of coupling of man and woman
> And that of beasts. . . .

Like the humble women of Canterbury in Murder in the Cathedral, they are aware of the pattern:

> What is woven in the councils of princes
> Is woven also in our veins, our brains,
> Is woven like a pattern of living worms
> In the guts of the women of Canterbury.

The dance and the still point were equated in "Burnt Norton": "At the still point, there the dance is"; "Except for the point, the still point,/ There would be no dance". The image is not unlike Yeats's in which the dancer becomes one with the dance. Many of the qualities of the dance are captured in the verse itself. The inclusion of a large number

of verbs and gradually increasing strength of rhythm give it a feeling of action. An excessive number of participles creates a sense of immediateness, the whole action taking place now, before our very eyes; and at the same time, there is an intimation of eternity, a timeless process that has been happening since archaic ages. By repeating the words "feet" and "time", Eliot has lent a syncopation to the regularity of the rhythm imitating the repetitiousness of the dance. The cosmic cycle is reflected again at the end of the section as "the coupling of man and woman/ And that of beasts" which ultimately leads to "Dung and death"-- once more becoming part of the earth "Which is already flesh, fur, and faeces".

In a sudden shift of perspective from the countryside to the sea following the dance, the element of earth dissolves into that of water. The poet's experience has not only taken him out of time, but also into a relativity of space. "I am here/ Or there, or elsewhere. In my beginning".

An apocalyptic vision or the vision of discord which forms the substance of the first section of the second movements, contrasts strikingly with the harmony and calm of the village of East Coker. The poet turns once more from the visionary world to the world of contemporary experience. The first section of the movement is a fine example of tension created in art. Almost every line contains diction suggesting conflict: "disturbance", "writhing", "tumble",

"rolling", "wars", "fights", "weep", "hunt", "whirled", "destructive", and "burns". Within the tradition of pathetic fallacy and the medieval "order of being", the poet has established a series of contraventions of the natural order: the unnatural occurrences of fruition and blossoming out of season; the portentous disorder among the planets. The passage concludes with a vision of cosmic annihilation:

> Whirled in a vortex that shall bring
> The world to that destructive fire
> Which burns before the ice-cap reigns.

It parallels the end of man whose life inevitably leads to dung and death. And this lyric passage counters markedly the second lyric movement of "Burnt Norton". The political turmoil raging in Europe in 1938 is felt behind both the destructive imagery of the first section and the bitterness and ~~and~~ angry disgust with society reflected in the tone of the subsequent prose section. "The quiet-voiced elders" are questioned for their motives and mocked for their folly and fear. The invective of the poem is powerful. Eliot has been strongly influenced by contemporary events; yet his poetry is never limited by that awareness. It is simply a point of reference with contemporary reality. With humility the poet recognizes his attempt to articulate these feelings as an "intolerable wrestle/ With words and meanings." Yet he will not be daunted by the struggle. "The poetry", he says "does not matter." His critical view turns to the leaders of his own society and the deception with which they

have promised the "autumnal serenity" and also the generally held view that wisdom is acquired with age. Their wisdom is not wisdom at all, but only knowledge; the knowledge of "dead secrets". Eliot contends that man learns little from his past:

> There is, it seems to us,
> At best, only a limited value
> In the knowledge derived from experience.

Such knowledge prompts the mind to think in terms of a fixed pattern which is necessarily false because of the constantly changing flux of phenomena. The only valid wisdom to be acquired in life is the "wisdom of humility: humility is endless" or at one with the eternal flow of all things. The "wisdom of old men," on the other hand is the wisdom of experience and is mere folly. For old men are motivated by fear. The two lines that conclude the movement remind us once again of the inevitable cycle of decay and destruction outlined in the first movement and indicate the dissolution of the element of earth into that of water:

> The houses are all gone under the sea.
> The dancers are all gone under the hill.

In the third movement, another contrast is made between the void and darkness which confronts men who have spent their lives in pursuit of worldly riches and power, as opposed to the "darkness of God." Those who sought worldy gain "go into the dark,/ The vacant interstellar space, the vacant into the vacant". The worldly achievement of "cap-

tains, merchant bankers" and the whole catalogue of hollow men who have spent their lives acquiring wealth is seen as futile. These are the "quiet-voiced elders" whose leadership the poet protested in the previous movement. Referring to the events of September, 1938 in his essay on "The Idea of a Christian Society" (1939), Eliot spoke out:

> Was our society, which had always been so assured of its superiority and rectitude, so confident of its unexamined premises, assembled round anything more permanent than a congeries of banks, insurance companies and industries, and had it any beliefs more essential than a belief in compound interest and the maintenance of dividends? 19

Although he is outraged by contemporary society (for he speaks, in the same essay, of a "feeling of humiliation, which seemed to demand an act of personal contrition, of humility, repentance and amendment"), yet he does not lose track of the dark night of the soul and the purgative way that can be followed only through detachment.

> I said to my soul, be still, and let the dark come upon you
> Which shall be the darkness of God.

Three similes are introduced which give examples from ordinary experience through which we might understand the ordeal of the "dark night". The first demonstrates the sensation of "the distant panorama/ And the bold imposing facade" being rolled away during the change of scenery in a darkened theatre, connoting the unreality of what we habitually be-

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19 The Idea of a Christian Society, p. 64.

lieve in as the real world of sensual experience-- the "appearance" of Bradley. The terror at the vanishing security of "time before and time after" is illustrated in the reuse of the underground train metaphor. The necessity of going beyond thought causes "the mental emptiness" to "deepen" "Leaving only the growing terror of nothing to think about". There is a conscious unconsciousness similar to that produced upon the mind by ether. St. John's advice to one who is about to enter such a state is to "wait passively with detachment":

> Advice must be given to learn to abide attentively and to pay no heed either to the imagination or to its workings, for here, as we may say, the faculties are at rest, and are working not actively but passively, by receiving that which God works in them. 20

The goal of spiritual enlightenment must not be sought, just as the end of action is not the reason for action in the Gita. "But the faith and the love and the hope are all in the waiting." The spiritual exercise itself is its own reward. As the darkness eventually turns to light and the stillness to dancing, images of the natural world flood into the poem: the sounds of running streams, the sight of winter lightning and the smell of wild thyme and the taste of wild strawberry. The context is still that of the vision in the rose garden. The ecstasy of the moment of "Burnt Norton" has not been lost but is now understood more fully, similar

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[20] St. John of the Cross, Dark Night of the Soul, p. 442.

to the experience of the Magi, in terms of the agony of spiritual death and birth following the "dark night". This idea anticipates the final paradoxical line of the poem, "In my end is my beginning." It modifies the endless cycle of birth, disintegration and death which is the rhythm of the earth in the first movement.

The "via negativa" is repeated once more with an emphatic terminal position in the movement. Here Eliot largely paraphrases the words of St. John of the Cross in The Ascent of Mount Carmel. His is a paradoxical way and demands that the mystic go beyond self. "In order to arrive at what you are not/ You must go through the way in which you are not". This is not the path of sudden revelation and ecstasy but requires the slow dawning of the wisdom of humility. "In order to arrive at what you do not know/ You must go by a way which is the way of ignorance." It requires a turning from the possessions of the world and a recognition of the necessity of detachment from worldly location (i.e. "Old men ought to be explorers/ Here and there does not matter"; "And where you are is where you are not".) The journey, as in the theme of "Journey of the Magi", is its own end.

The imperative of death to the world is also the subject of the fourth movement. Taking Sir Thomas Browne's words in Religio Medici, "For this world I count it not an inn but a hospital: a place not to live but to die in", Eliot attempts to relate the Passion of Christ in terms of modern

medical terminology introducing a stark clinical realism complete with steel instruments and fever chart.[21] "The whole earth is our hospital", he says, and worldly success means "the silent funeral" of the "industrial lords and petty contractors".

> if we do well, we shall
> Die of the absolute paternal care
> That will not leave us, but prevents us everywhere.

The "bleeding hands" of Christ who is the "wounded surgeon", on the other hand, are full of "sharp compassion". The dying nurse, the Church, does not console us but reminds us of the curse of Adam "And that, to be restored, our sickness must grow worse". As death approaches, in the fourth stanza, and "The chill ascends from feet to knees," we are reminded of the "purgatorial fires/ Of which the flame is roses and the smoke is briars", anticipating the final apocalyptic vision of the union of the fire and the rose in "Little Gidding". The final stanza symbolizing the Eucharist as the means of redemption, mocks man's pride in his body and his flippant observance of Good Friday.[22]

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[21] A traditional Christian passion hymn might have been more effective here. But the poet's intention was to contrast the emotional content of the previous moment with more "objective" poetry. One feels that one is having Christian doctrine forced upon one almost subversively as a result of Eliot's insistence on appearing "unconsciously Christian".

[22] The incongruity of this passage with the rest of the poem may be accounted for by the fact that the movement was originally composed as a separate poem for the Good Friday of 1940.

The poetic function and reflexion upon the struggle with words is the theme of the last movement. Eliot looks at his own career as "Twenty years largely wasted". Each attempt to learn how to use words has been "a different kind of failure" because the original idea they were intended to express no longer seems important. Characteristically, Eliot also rates "imprecision of feeling" and "Undisciplined squads of emotion" as part of this failure. In keeping with his sense of tradition he sees that nothing new can be said, nothing "discovered". There is only the task of recovering what has been lost countless times, of "restoring/ With a new verse the ancient rhyme".

> And what there is to conquer
> By strength and submission, has already been discovered
> Once or twice, or several times, by men whom one cannot hope
> To emulate--but there is no competition--
> There is only the fight to recover what has been lost
> And found and lost again and again: and now, under conditions
> That seem unpropitious.

Eliot's religious humility has already been witnessed in "Ash Wednesday". Here he confronts the whole tradition and sees his own work as a very small part.

The second section of the movement returns to the theme of the opening of the quartet with the statement: "Home is where one starts from." With maturity the pattern of life and death becomes more complicated. When we were young it was possible to experience "the intense moment/ Isolated, with no before and after". There is in the innocence of

childhood, freedom from past and future. But "As we grow older" our life takes on the influences of our cultural surroundings and the traditions of our civilization and is no longer "the lifetime of one man only/ But of old stones that cannot be deciphered". With age, such moments of joy are seen as a connected pattern or "a lifetime burning in every moment". From these intense moments in our memory, we see that our lives are, like Eliot's explanation of history in "Little Gidding", V, "a pattern/ Of timeless moments."

Two moments in which there is a lifetime burning are given as examples-- both moments of human love. The first, "a time for the evening under starlight" conjures up the young love of Romeo and Juliet; the second, the love of old couples, is spoken of as the "evening under lamplight/ (The evening with the photograph album)", a turning to the past. Love, like the Incarnation, transcends space and time. Hence "Love is most nearly itself/ When here and now cease to matter." In this respect, it is akin to spiritual exploration. "Old men" (and Eliot is possibly thinking of Ulysses in Tennyson's poem or in Dante's Inferno xxvi) "ought to be explorers/ Here and there does not matter". Spiritual exploration, similarly, transcends the restrictions of this world and that is the poet's real interest.

> We must be still and still moving
> Into another intensity
> For a further union, a deeper communion.

The movement ends with a restoration of the initial motto,

indicating a new expression of Christian hope: "In my end is my beginning." With the final destruction of earth by water, the poem moves into another intensity in "The wave cry, the wind cry, the vast water/ Of the petrel and the porpoise" of "The Dry Salvages".

III

THE DEATH OF WATER AND FIRE

The dominant water imagery of "The Dry Salvages" further establishes the theme of the Heraclitan flow of all things. At the same time it carried some of the purgative connotations of "Death by Water" in "The Waste Land". The dual image of the river and the sea links the microcosm and the macrocosm.

In the first stanza, the river in its ceaseless flow through human history reflects primitive man's early settlement and the establishment of fixed territory. Early trade begins and its centre is the river. In modern times the river is only a problem to be solved by engineers constructing bridges; "The problem once solved, the brown god is almost forgotten/ By the dwellers in the cities". Yet we are reminded of the anthropomorphic qualities that have been attributed to the river and that, although this spiritual force is not recognized by the "worshippers of the machine", it is nevertheless "watching and waiting." A natural rhythmical flow continues to assert itself in the cycles of the seasons. It is like a pulse within man which links us to the greater pattern: "The river is within us, the sea is all about us". The sea, as the macrocosmic symbol, is particularly well

suited as an image of unity, embracing all forms of life from the most minute to the largest. Like the river, the sea also comprehends a span of time much older than human history. On the beaches "it tosses/ Its hints of earlier and other creation"-- the "delicate algae" and the "whale's backbone". But the sea is indifferent to man.

> It tosses up our losses, the torn seine,
> The shattered lobsterpot, the broken oar
> And the gear of foreign dead men.

("The Dry Salvages", I) A hint of the meaning the image will soon acquire is contained in its association with the effect of the sea on one such foreign dead man, Phlebas the Phoenician who appeared in "The Waste Land". In two beautiful lines, Eliot establishes the interrelation between the sea and the earth:

> The salt is on the briar rose,
> The fog is in the fir trees.

The remainder of this movement deals with the sounds of the sea. They are compared to the sounds of animals: "The sea howl", "the sea yelp", "the whine in the rigging", "The distant rote in the granite teeth": the sea voices are threatening. There is both "menace and caress" in the wave. The "heaving groaner" becomes an image for the ageless quality of the sea.

> The tolling bell
> Measures not our time, rung by the unhurried
> Ground swell.

It contrasts with the human "time of chronometers" or the

time calculated in anxiety by women whose sons or husbands are at sea. Human time is limited by its clinging to the dimension of past and future. Elizabeth Drew's observation illustrates the "presence of the idea in the image":

> In the image of the woman, Eliot manages to make us experience all those sensations of fragmentariness, misdirection, disorder and confusion which were present in the parallel suggestions in the earlier Quartets. But here there is a more purely human note, 'a deeper communion' with life-torn humanity spending its time in such futile calculations. 1

The dissonance of this passage with the cutting clash of "Clangs/ The bell" is made effective because of its placement amid the more melodious verse portraying the peaceful rhythm of the ground swell.

In the sestina the threat of the bell is continued as the "Clamour of the bell of the last annunciation." The sea is pictured as forever strewn with wreckage. A cyclical structure in the poem subtly changes the implications of the bell's symbolism from destructive to redemptive. It opens with images of endlessly repeated destruction: "The silent withering of autumn flowers", "the drifting wreckage" and the "bone on the beach". "Where is there an end of this?", the poet asks. And he answers in the second stanza, "There is no end, but addition": the drifting wreckage on the sea's surface, the disillusionment with life as one becomes indifferent, withdrawn, "While emotion takes to itself the emo-

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1 T.S.Eliot: The Design of his Poetry, p. 179.

tionless/ Years of living among the breakage". To this is added the failure of pride and strength and the accumulation of past attachments which have been broken in time although perfunctory devotion to them still remains. All these are summed up in the image of "a drifting boat with a slow leakage"-- waiting for death. Human action seen in the occupation of the fishermen "sailing/ Into the wind's tail" seems "to have no destination." We cannot think of them as continually engaged in futile pursuit. For although there is no end of the accumulation of destruction and pain, there is still the "hardly, barely prayable/ Prayer of the one Annunciation." The prayer of Mary at the Annunciation, "Be it unto me according to thy word", suggests the necessity of acceptance of the whole cyclical process. The first stanza and the last are almost identical, except for the subtle shift from death to birth. A formal pattern of six-line stanza and regular rhythm adds to the relentless inevetability of the theme. Once again Eliot uses natural images to convey human emotions. The tone of the passage is oppressively pessimistic. Wreckage becomes a metaphor for doubt:

> Years of living among the breakage
> Of what was believed in as the most reliable--
> And therefore the fittest for renunciation.

In the face of all this disillusionment, prayer is virtually impossible. An unusually lengthened line, "The bones prayer to Death its God. Only the hardly, barely prayable/ Prayer of the one Annunciation", emphasizes the uneasiness with

which prayer, faith and acceptance are attained. The prose-like passage which follows considers the thought of the sestina in connection with personal emotion. It is concerned particularly with the effect of the past on human feelings. The idea of endless destruction of the cosmos and its inextricable influence on the lives of men was established in the sestina. The poet now turns his attention to our personal reaction to the inevitable wasting of time in our lives. With maturity, we discover that what may have seemed to be sequence or development is partially fallacious. "Notions of evolution" are "superficial" because they consider only a partial pattern. To think about the past as evolution is a popular method of disowning "motives late revealed" and "things ill done and done to others' harm" ("Little Gidding", II). The new pattern that the past acquires as one becomes distanced from it is the pattern of "moments of happiness" and "moments of agony". The meaning of an experience is seldom apparent at the time of its occurrence. Often it is true to say, "We had the experience but missed the meaning". Approach to the meaning, however, restores the past experience in a different form, be it "Fruition, fulfilment, security or affection/ Or even a very good dinner". Each of these events, when recalled in the present, takes on a different meaning, one "beyond any meaning/ We can assign to happiness." Moreover, the new meaning is further altered by the whole experience of the race:

> I have said before
> That the past experience revived in the meaning
> Is not the experience of one life only
> But of many generations.

It extends back as far in our collective history even to the "primitive terror" behind "the assurance/ Of recorded history". We are constantly reflecting upon our lives in terns of meaning of the experience of others. Like the "ragged rock in the restless waters", the "moments of agony" are also permanent although they may be obscured by the washing of waves (of time) or concealed by fog. We can observe this better in the agony of others with whom we have been involved than in our own past which is obscured "by the currents of action". We observe the changes in people. We see that they even smile again. Yet we are aware that under the surface "the agony abides." Like the sea with its "hints of earlier and other creation", time is both destroyer and preserver.

"Burnt Norton" opened with an abstract statement of the eternal presence of all time and specifically, of "time future contained in time past." In the third movement of "The Dry Salvages", Eliot uses Krishna's image for the pastness of future:

> the future is a faded song, a Royal rose or a Lavender spray
> Of wistful regret for those who are not yet here to regret,
> Pressed between yellow leaves of a book that has never been opened.

We are only under the delusion that we are travelling into

a future "escaping from the past/ Into different lives" when we fail to consider this eternal presence of all time. "Time is no healer" as has already been suggested. The statement of Heraclitus that the way up is also the way down which was explored in the imagery of space in "Burnt Norton" is now interpreted with respect to time: "the way forward is the way back". The two metaphors of timelessness experienced on a journey bring in the idea of the spiritual journey of "the way". The experiences of train passengers and voyagers on an ocean liner are similar suspensions of time to that witnessed in the example of the travellers on the underground in "Burnt Norton". But there are greater implications to be drawn from this new image. The passengers must, like Dante's pilgrims, "Fare forward". "There is no end, but addition: the trailing/ Consequence of further days and hours". Eliot warns again: "Fare forward, you who think that you are voyaging". The journey itself in its detachment from time and place, like the moment in the rose garden or the experience at Little Gidding, affords an opportunity to "consider the future/ And the past with an equal mind." The teaching of Krishna is relevant and timely. In Krishna's dialoque with Arjuna on the battlefield, he stressed the necessity of remaining detached from the fruit of action (as was referred to in the discussion of "Ash Wednesday"). Moreover, "At the moment which is not of action or inaction", another of Krishna's teachings can be received:

"on whatever sphere of being
The mind of man may be intent
At the time of death"- that is the one action
(And the time of death is every moment)
Which shall fructify in the lives of others.

In the Bhagavad-Gita Krishna says:

> Your motive in working should be to set others, by your example, on the path of duty. 2

And further:

> At the hour of death, when a man leaves his body, he must depart with his consciousness absorbed in me. Then he will be united with me. Be certain of that. Whatever a man remembers at the last, when he is leaving the body, will be realized by him in the hereafter; because that will be what his mind has most constantly dwelt on . . . . Therefore you must remember me at all times, and do your duty. . . . Make a habit of practising meditation, and do not let your mind be distracted. 3

Eliot has combined the idea of meditation on God at the time of death with the concept of the eternal presence of all time: "(And the time of death is every moment)" he says. And so to "'suffer the trial and judgement of the sea,/ Or whatever event'", is "'your real destination'". To fare well would be a mockery when the fruit of action is not to be considered. One may say simply, "Fare forward".

If our final destination is death, it is fitting that the "last annunciation" should be accompanied by a prayer. It brings to mind the prayers of "Ash Wednesday" with its Salve Regina theme: "Pray for us now and at the hour of our death". As a manifestation of the Virgin as Intercessor, it

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2 Bhagavad-Gita, III, p. 47.

3 Ibid., VIII, p. 75.

continues the sea imagery of the first and second movements showing sympathy and compassion to men and women who may "suffer the trial and judgement of the sea": the fishermen who are "forever bailing" and the "anxious worried women" "who have seen their sons or husbands/ Setting forth, and not returning" and

> those who were in ships, and
> Ended their voyage on the sand, in the sea's lips
> Or in the dark throat which will not reject them
> Or wherever cannot reach them the sound of the sea
> bell's
> Perpetual angelus.

The prayer brings together the human illustrations of the earlier parts of the poem, uniting them within the context of the "Perpetual angelus".

In the fifth movement, the Incarnation is contrasted with the dimension of past and future. Popular interest in the occult-- from astrology, spiritualism and fortune telling to the interpretation of dreams-- all these are dismissed as

> usual
> Pastimes and drugs, and features of the press:
> And always will be. . . . . .
> . . . . . .
> Men's curiosity searches past and future
> And clings to that dimension.

Common speculation differs from the apprehension of the "point of intersection of the timeless/ With time", which is "an occupation for the saint", in its delimitation by the restrictions of past and future. Yet apprehension of the Incarnation is not simply guaranteed as the product of medi-

tation, but rather is

> something given
> And taken, in a lifetime's death in love,
> Ardour and selflessness and self-surrender.

Here the accumulative effect of the repeated "and" stresses the devotion and discipline required in the pursuit of "prayer, observance, discipline, thought and action". Complete "apprehension" of the Incarnation or total union with the Absolute is possible for only a few. "For most of us, there is only the unattended/ Moment, the moment in and out of time". Such images as "The distraction fit, lost in a shaft of sunlight", "The wild thyme unseen, or the winter lightning", and "the waterfall" all relate to earlier momentary experiences in "Burnt Norton" and "East Coker". Music that is

> heard so deeply
> That it is not heard at all, but you are the music
> While the music lasts,

reminds us of "The unheard music hidden in the shrubbery" of the rose garden. But it is also a metaphor for the process of self-transcendence Eliot saw in art.

> Only by the form, the pattern,
> Can words or music reach
> The stillness, as a Chinese jar still
> Moves perpetually in its stillness.

By becoming completely involved in an aesthetic experience, one transcends both the limitations of past and future and also the barriers of personal ego. Yet all these experiences are only "hints and guesses".

> The hint half guessed, the gift half understood,
> is Incarnation.
> Here the impossible union
> Of spheres is actual,
> Here the past and future
> Are conquered, and reconciled.

The Incarnation is the source of all movement. Freedom from past and future can also be attained through "right action". But for most of us this will never be realized "Who are only undefeated/ Because we have gone on trying".

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In much the same manner as the introduction of the dancers in "East Coker", the fourth quartet approaches its moment out of time by means of a description of the countryside. This time a pilgrimage is made to the chapel of Little Gidding, the location of a seventeenth-century religious community established by Nicholas Ferrar. To indicate the timeless element of the experience, Eliot defines a season "not in time's covenant": "Midwinter spring". Because it contains "neither budding nor fading" and is "Not in the scheme of generation", it remains outside the seasonal cycle of birth, death, and disintegration.[4] Midwinter spring (or, as Donne called "S. Lucies day", "the yeares midnight",[5] when "The worlds whole sap is sunke") is "Suspended in time, between pole and tropic", approaching the eternal quality of

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[4] C.f. "Burnt Norton", V, "but that which is only living/ Can only die."

[5] John Donne, "Nocturnall upon S. Lucies day".

the "intersection of the timeless/ With time". Such a season, when the "brief sun flames the ice" immediately brings to mind a series of paradoxical contrasts between hot and cold: "When the short day is brightest, with frost and fire"; "In windless cold that is the heart's heat," all pointing toward the paradoxical attributes of "pentecostal fire"; "that refining fire" which is at once the all-dissolving element of Heraclitus and the symbol of redemption by the Holy Spirit. As a further comparison with "East Coker" we are prompted to observe the quality of the light at Little Gidding. The "sultry light" and haziness of the second quartet has given place to a "glow more intense than blaze of branch, or brazier" with the growing illumination of the enkindled soul. The soul itself stands as did the tree in "Burnt Norton", reflecting the cosmic flow of all things: "The soul's sap quivers".

In anticipation of the sub-theme of the quartet, the discernement of a meaningful "pattern" in history, the pilgrimage to the chapel at Little Gidding is associated with a similar pilgrimage made by a historical figure. Charles I also came to the chapel "at night like a broken king" following the defeat of his forces in the Battle of Naseby. But a more general meaning is contained in the pilgrimage theme, for it recalls the journey of the Magi whose expedition proved to have quite a different purpose once it had been accomplished. The strange exigence of spiritual exploration

insists on the necessity of making the journey for its own sake rather than for the pursuit of any previously determined goal. If the pattern of life is a constantly changing one, the meaning the future may once have held, changes once it has become part of the present or past. Hence the object of the quest remains forever elusive, unknown and requiring faith.

> And what you thought you came for
> Is only a shell, a husk of meaning
> From which the purpose breaks only when it is fulfilled
> If at all. Either you had no purpose
> Or the purpose is beyond the end you figured
> And is altered in fulfilment.

But the experience at Little Gidding not only takes place out of human time, but also transcends the delimitations of space. The poet nominates four other such locations, sanctified by their associations with various saints, as the "world's end".[6] But Little Gidding is for the poet "the nearest, in place and time,/ Now and in England."

A sudden shift of tone marks the poet's firm conviction as he issues a stern warning to visitors who would "verify", "Instruct" themselves, "inform curiosity", "Or carry report". Nor need the seeker after sensation approach for here "you would have to put off/ Sense and notion". Whether believer or non-believer, "You are here to kneel/ Where

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[6] Grover Smith establishes "the sea's jaws" as St. Columba and St. Cuthbert's Iona; "over a dark lake" as St. Kevin's hermitage in Ireland; "in a desert": St. Antony in Egypt; "in a city": the city of Padua of St. Antony of Padua. (T.S.Eliot's Poetry and Plays, p. 287 n.)

prayer has been valid." By prayer, however, Eliot makes it clear that he is not thinking of the "sound of voices praying" or of "an order of words" such as the meaningless whispers of the hollow men. On the contrary, according to Eliot, prayer facilitates communion with the dead and is "tongued with fire beyond the language of the living."

An apocalyptic disintegration of the four elements takes place in the lyric second movement. Imagery of the London blitz is extended over "death of air", "the death of earth", "The death of water and fire." Yet this destruction is only physical or material, unlike the dissolution by the redemptive fire of the Holy Spirit which occurs in the fourth movement. Images from the earlier quartets are recalled in the roses of "Burnt Norton" which leave nothing but "Ash on an old man's sleeve"; and the houses which in "East Coker" were observed to "rise and fall" are reduced to "dust inbreathed". Likewise, "hope and despair", a threat to the climber of the stairs in "Ash Wednesday" are consumed in "the death of air". "Flood and drouth" are equally destructive of the earth and the blitz is considered due punishment for man's neglect of religious observance:

> Water and fire deride
> The sacrifice that we denied.
> Water and fire shall rot
> The marred foundations we forgot,
> Of sanctuary and choir.

The air raid setting, and specifically the poet's fire-watching duties in Kensington, is extended over the remainder

of the movement. The inevitable cycle of destruction which was seen as an equally important part of the natural pattern and the life of man in "East Coker" and "The Dry Salvages" is now the subject of reflexion with regard to poetry and poetic accomplishment. Even here the evanescence of all things takes its toll and time is equally destructive of literature.

> 'For last year's words belong to last year's language
> And next year's words await another voice.'

As the pretext for this discussion, Eliot recalls an eerie conversation with a "familiar compound ghost" whose characteristics resemble those of his acknowledged master, Dante. In a passage of utter disillusionment with personal artistic accomplishment, the stranger reveals "the gifts reserved for age". First is the expiring of the senses lamented by Gerontion. Then follows "'conscious impotence of rage/ At human folly'". And finally a sense of "re-enactment" overtakes one:

> 'the shame
> Of motives late revealed, and the awareness
> Of things ill done and done to others' harm,
> Which once you took for exercise of virtue.'

Retrospection leads to nothing but exasperation: "'From wrong to wrong the exasperated spirit/ Proceeds'". Nonetheless an alternative remains accesible for the artist as for the religious man in restoration "'by that refining fire/ Where you must move in measure, like a dancer.'" Only in the relation of literature to the total pattern, the "dance",

is there meaningful fulfilment and redemption for the artist. Eliot's contention that "Literary criticism should be completed by criticism from a definite ethical and theological standpoint"[7] would seem to apply also to the writing of poetry.

Reflexions on the past and liberation from the past through the use of memory are the subject of the third movement. Eliot continues his distinction between detachment and indifference, citing, "Attachment to self and to things and to persons" as the beginning of love. But as love grows, attachment must turn to "detachment/ From self and from things and from persons". He calls this the

> expanding
> Of love beyond desire, and so liberation
> From the future as well as the past.

Yet anithetical to both attachment and detachment is indifference

> Which resembles the others as death resembles life,
> Being between two lives- unflowering, between
> The live and the dead nettle.

Indifference is the lamentable shortcoming of the hollow men. But now Eliot extends the idea to a political context:

> Thus, love of a country
> Begins as attachment to our own field of action
> And comes to find that action of little importance
> Though never indifferent.

The generalization can be expanded to include the "pattern" of history. "History may be freedom" if we regard the pat-

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[7] "Religion and Literature", Selected Essays, p. 388.

tern of the present. For with the passing of time opposite political factions are resolved. Cavalier and Roundhead become "United in the strife which divided them". From the detached perspective of time, even Milton's controversy with the Royalists and the Wars of the Roses become part of a single pattern imposed upon the past.

> These men, and those who opposed them
> And those whom they opposed
> Accept the constitution of silence
> And are folded into a single party.

In celebrating "These dead men" the intention is to recognize the legacy inherited "from the defeated" as well as "from the fortunate". From a distant perspective in time no victory appears to be entirely conclusive and no defeat completey in vain. The words of Dame Julian of Norwich provide a comforting conclusion applicable no less to the present as to the past:

> And all shall be well and
> All manner of thing shall be well.

But "purification of the motive" can be brought about only "In the ground of our beseeching" or within the spirit of faith.

With the fourth movement, the poet returns once more to the image of fire and the setting of the London blitz. But now "fire" is thought of as the "pentecostal fire" of the Holy Spirit. "the dove descending" which "breaks the air/ With flame of incandescent terror" is both the dive bomber with its cargo of incendiary bombs representing material

destruction, and at the same time, the "dove" which descended at Pentecost carrying with it the redemptive fire of the Holy Ghost. Thus "the tongues declare/ The one discharge from sin and error." In the "choice of pyre or pyre" lies hope of redemption through the sacrificial love exemplified by Christ and its alternative, the fire of eternal damnation. The choice is a tormenting one devised by "Love", "the unfamiliar Name" of God in the New Testament. For the protagonist of "Ash Wednesday" also, Divine love involved torment: "The greater torment/ Of love satisfied". The choice between the fire of Heaven, love, and the fire of Hell, hatred, is an inescapable one; just as it was impossible for Heracles to escape from the shirt poisoned with Nessus' blood so that he flung himself on a pyre and was ultimately carried up to heaven.

The final movement of "Little Gidding" serves as the conclusion to that poem and as the resolution of Four Quartets as a whole. Its division into two parts is linked rather loosely by a quotation from the anonymous fourteenth-century mystical treatise, The Cloud of Unknowing: "With the drawing of this Love and the voice of this Calling", epitomizing the bridge between the spiritual quest and the creative quest-- the love of God and the present work of the poet. In the first passage, the poet assesses the meaning of his poetry in terms of the revelation of the Incarnation. As in "East Coker", "In my beginning is my end", so, in art,

"The end is where we start from."

> Every phrase and every sentence is an end and a beginning,
> Every poem an epitaph.

The poem itself is seen as a dance, a reflexion of the whole universal rhythm, "The complete consort dancing together". Death in poetry is as requisite as death in life, for according to the value Eliot puts on tradition, a poem's death is only a step towards its rebirth in the new work.

> Every poem is an epitaph. And any action
> Is a step to the block, to the fire, down the sea's throat
> Or to an illegible stone: and that is where we start.
> We die with the dying:
> See, they depart, and we go with them.
> We are born with the dead:
> See, they return, and bring us with them. 8

The only meaningful interpretation of the concept of history in terms of the Incarnation is as "a pattern/ Of timeless moments", and we are reminded once again of the eternal presence of all time:

> So, while the light fails
> On a winter's afternoon, in a secluded chapel
> History is now and England.

In the last section, major themes from the earlier quartets are touched on once more by way of summary. The overlapping and interconnection of images weaves together the complete range of discussion in Four Quartets within a per-

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8 An artist's significance, according to "Tradition and the Individual Talent" lies in his "appreciation of his relation to the dead poets and artists." (The Sacred Wood, p. 49.)

vading tone of calm and fulfilment. The spiritual quest is resolved in a repetition of the motto from "East Coker": "In my beginning is my end." Images similar to those used in "Burnt Norton" lead to the Eden of man's origin:

> At the source of the longest river
> The voice of the hidden waterfall
> And the children in the apple-tree.

The recurrence of images from the first quartet reminds us of our inital experience in the rose garden and the knowledge that was available but

> Not known, because not looked for
> But heard, half-heard, in the stillness
> Between two waves of the sea.

Similarly in "Ash Wednesday" the "Word" was "unheard, unspoken" remaining "without a word" but nevertheless "within/ The world and for the world". Thus our own experience of the poem proves to be similar to that of the spiritual quest, the journey of the Magi, the poet's pilgrimage to his origins in East Coker, and the cyclical pattern discerned in all life:

> We shall not cease from exploration
> And the end of all our exploring
> Will be to arrive where we started
> And know the place for the first time.
> Through the unknown, remembered gate
> When the last of earth left to discover
> Is that which was the beginning.

Apprehension of the eternal presence of all time ("here, now, always") is "A condition of complete simplicity/ (Costing not less than everything)". A final dissolution of the elements is presented in the union of the symbols of the Absolute, the Holy Ghost (fire) and the Virgin (rose) in a Trinity-

knot:

> And all shall be well and
> All manner of thing shall be well
> When the tongues of flame are in-folded
> Into the crowned knot of fire
> And the fire and the rose are one.

However limited it may be, Eliot's poetic emerges consistently from his efforts to articulate the inarticulate. In the writing of literature as in criticism, Eliot has stressed the necessity of an all-directive moral or religious principle. The poet's function is then, not unlike that of the evangelist, the task of redeeming "the unread vision in the higher dream". The poet's struggle runs parallel to that of the spiritual quest. Through repeated attempts at "Trying to use words", the poet learns humility. For "every attempt/ Is a wholly new start, and a different kind of failure". The same liberation from ego attained in the spiritual quest is forthcoming also from the poetic struggle which demands "a continual self-sacrifice, a continual extinction of the personality". In purifying "the dialect of the tribe", poetry reflects the dance of the cosmos, the harmony of the universe: "The complete consort dancing together". At the same time it becomes an act of spiritual death, not unlike that experienced in the purgation of the dark night.

> Every phrase and every sentence is an end and a beginning
> Every poem an epitaph.

Four Quartets is Eliot's most nearly complete and unified poem. In terms of religious conviction it abounds

in confidence of faith, hope, assurance and a pervading tone of calm acceptance. Kristian Smidt has remarked of Eliot's work: "the poet found a pattern when the man found a faith".[9] The pattern of Four Quartets is the result of the poet's integration of imagery with substance of thought in the poem-- the form of the poem itself becoming its meaning. We have traced the transmutation of the elements, the seasons, the microcosm and the macrocosm. The constant alternation between the natural rhythm of the universe with its endless cycle of birth, life, death and rebirth was, through imagery, related directly to the lives of man. As the unifying principle for this ceaseless flux, Eliot constructs the pattern of his poem around the verbal icon, the divine "Word" of the Incarnation. The "Word" becomes the unifying principle for the entire poem. And if "The Waste Land" has no point of focus, the Quartets are completely integrated around this concept-- a principle from which the ideas of the poem seem to emanate and in turn be absorbed. Each time we would attempt to grasp the "still point" in concrete terms, we find that it is, as the ancient Oriental concept of the "void", without substance, beyond definition; and we then realize that its definition in fact depends upon the whole manifold of experience which emanates from it and to which it returns. Accordingly the pattern or the form of the poem

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[9] Poetry and Belief in the Work of T.S.Eliot, p. 191.

is its meaning.

Considerable development can be seen over the use of imagery in "Ash Wednesday". That poem initiates the use of symbols of transformation: the stair, the Lady, etc. Each image is repeated a number of times until some development of thought has taken place (e.g. the movement from corporeal love to divine love in the Lady). In the Quartets we have seen Eliot going one step further in this direction. Instead of a single image or symbol used to delineate transition or transformation, a whole series of related images perform this function. For example, all the images connected with the earth in "East Coker" contain its rhythm, its cycles of birth and death, etc. From the interaction between these categories of images emerges an integrated pattern for the poem as a whole.

It is worth noting once again that in his attempt to articulate mystical experience Eliot has relied extensively on concrete, sensuous imagery. Even when he desired the reader's perception to extend beyond the limitations of time and space, he chose to refer to images which contained aspects of ordinary experience which closely paralleled the purer religious experience. In this alone perhaps lies the integrity of his attempt to communicate.

Finally, at the conclusion of the Quartets one is left not with a complicated mass of philosophical theories, dogmatic principles or definitions of doctrine. What lingers

on in our experience is the pattern of feelings related to the growth of religious conviction. Eliot makes no request that we accept his religious point of view. Because of its eclecticism, Four Quartets can probably be appreciated better by someone who does not profess Anglo-Catholicism. Yet the ultimate experience of the Quartets is a poetic one. And in this, the understanding of the "word", approach to the apprehension of the "Word" may take place. For as Eliot has stated of the experience of poetry,

> The experience of a poem is the experience both of a moment and of a lifetime. It is very much like our intenser experiences of other human beings. There is a first, or an early moment which is unique, of shock and surprise, even terror (Ego dominus tuus); a moment which can never be forgotten, but which is never repeated integrally; and yet would become destitute of significance if it did not survive a larger whole of experience; which survives inside a deeper and a calmer feeling. 10

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10 "Dante" (1929), Selected Prose, p.46.

V

CONCLUSION

In the 1970's Eliot's synthesis seems like an anachronism, a stubborn attempt by a romantic (who denied his romanticism) to impose, somewhat nostalgically, a sense of stability and order upon the modern experience. Eliot's synthesis, as he was too apologetically aware during his lifetime, depends heavily on a rather "unfashionable" Christian conviction. Yet it was by no means exclusively Christian. It attempts what may forever remain impossible: to bridge the gap between Western and Eastern religious thought. Kristian Smidt has remarked that:

> Altogether, Eliot's synthesis may not be very original in in its details, as some critics have pointed out. But it is original and great in the final combination which it effects. There are inconsistencies, but they appear rather as different facets of one body of philosophy than as contradictory fragments of various philosophies. This combination has been possible because the thoughts of the age have been deeply experienced by a poet who has not been deterred by doctrines or prejudices from creating a unity of his experiences. Perhaps it was a boon that Eliot came late to Christianity: he had assimilated more ideas than he might have done if he had come to anchor at an earlier date. 1

Unlike the work of Hopkins or even Yeats, Eliot's religious poetry remains distanced from its experience. The poet is much more concerned with <u>reflecting</u> upon his reli-

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1 <u>Poetry and Belief in the Work of T.S.Eliot</u>, p. 235.

gious exploration than with creating such experience in his poems. Eliot never allows himself to participate wholly but prefers to remain aloof from the experience and the poem. He constantly evades the appearance of personal disclosure, substituting traditional references and images for a more personal imaginative expression. As a result his images sometimes appear contrived or wooden substitutes- not limping from any technical fault, but clumsy with the author's embarrassment at his own emotions. Eliot's insistence on an "impersonal theory" of poetry, the contention that poetry should not be a "turning loose of emotions", does little to persuade us that we have not missed something in his work— perhaps that essential personal ingredient upon which the universal can only be based. To what degree this impersonal tone is an extension of his religious ideal of transcendence of personal ego and to what degree it remains a theoretical justification for imaginative deficiencies, is open to dispute.

At the same time, ironically, the experience of Eliot's poetry and his plays is extremely limited. They fail to move outside the area of the author's personal religious quest. In many ways Eliot's poetry reflects very much "the lifetime of one man only". Neither in his poems nor in his plays is he able to create a single character wholly independent of his own personality. And this factor

is largely responsible for his failure as a dramatist.

In 1920 Eliot attributed Blake's imaginative genius to his lack of formal education. The educational process, he contended, consists

> largely in the acquisition of impersonal ideas which obscure what we really are and feel, what we really want, and what really excites our interest. It is of course not the actual information acquired, but the conformity which the accumulation of knowledge is apt to impose that is harmful. 2

His own erudition undoubtedly contributed far more towards the success of his criticism than to his poetry. And ultimately, his critical essays may be valued more highly than his poems. For he carried out the same kind of synthesis in his perception of literature as he accomplished in his religious thought. He has been instrumental in breaking down the compartmentalization established by nineteenth-century literary fashion and has attempted to see society, literature and religion as a whole, not only in his own era, but throughout history. His re-evaluation of the Elizabethan dramatists and of the metaphysical poets has contributed to our own century's awareness of itself within a relevant tradition.

But if one is to accuse Eliot of inconsistencies, anachronisms, or imaginative inadequacies, one cannot deny the integrity with which he faced his struggle. For if he failed to express what we expected of him, he admitted that failure from the start: "and every attempt/ Is a wholly new

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2 "William Blake" (1920), Selected Prose, p. 161.

start, and a different kind of failure". If nothing else, he has made us more aware of the struggle, the possibilities of of poetry and of art.

> Poetry is of course, not to be defined by its uses. . . . It may effect revolutions in sensibility such as are periodically needed; may help to break up the conventional modes of perception and valuation which are perpetually forming, and make people see the world afresh, or some new part of it. It may make us from time to time a little more aware of the deeper unnamed feelings which form the substratum of our being, to which we rarely penetrate; for our lives are mostly a constant evasion of ourselves, and an evasion of the visible and sensible world. But to say all this is only to say what you know already, if you have felt poetry and thought about your feelings. 3

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3 The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism, p. 155.

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