# THE DRY SALVAGES

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* the Mississippi (and Missouri) at St. Louis; Eliot said the river made a deeper impression on him than any other place he had ever been

* the Atlantic Ocean out beyond the harbor of Gloucester.

## DS-I: NATURE

**DS-Ia: Riverscape (1-14)**

**Nature**
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* those *mindful* of the river, who see it as "sullen", "untamed", to be respected, and see themselves, with the river, as part of nature. Their attitude is expected, commonplace, supposedly "primitive".

* those "almost" —but not quite— *forgetful* of the river, who think of it only when it thrusts itself into their consciousness by helping or hindering their designs; they see themselves above nature, having to control it when it threatens. Their attitude is sophisticated, "current".

But do we control nature any more than we control our destiny? For the river is always there, biding its time, resisting, ever "watching and waiting" —to overflow its banks, or the sea to rush onshore.

The contrast has a religious dimension:

* natural consciousness is sacramental: the river is "propitiated" as a "strong brown God", "honored", perhaps as owing to God and as a sign of His presence. The Mississippi is "brown", carrying sediment along its 2348 miles.

* current consciousness is more centered upon man, the machine —now electronic intelligence—, more like the waste land, unresponsive to a deeper need to set out for what lies beyond. The Mississippi has carried human goods for centuries with canoes, river boats, barges….

However, natural catastrophe, now "climate change", breaks though our circumscribed awareness; perhaps what the river is "waiting" for is a return to the sacramental.

**Rhythm**

Children have a primitive awareness of nature. Eliot gives us childhood glimpses of "His", the River's, "rhythm". The pronoun "his" personifies the Mississippi, divinizes it (if capitalized); it is the "strong brown god" that goes beyond itself to all of nature, pointing beyond all of nature. The "rhythm" of the seasons, like in the book of Ecclesiastes,[236] marks times for things in our lives: for smelling the flowers of the "ailanthus" tree outside the door in the "spring", for eating "grapes" in the fall, for hearing stories at family gatherings in the "winter".

For Heraclitus the river was a symbol of relentless change, for

> Thou canst not enter the same river twice.

This "dark" philosopher also said

> Nature loveth to hide.[237]

Eliot quoted Heraclitus at the beginning of *Four Quartets:* most people do not realize that *logos*, the word, is "common to everything". Heraclitus' point was that we should see through apparent *chaos* to *kosmos*, through the many things to the word they share, to their coherence, meaningfulness.

Eliot's allusion to childhood recalls the garden-children of *Burnt Norton*, "hidden excitedly, containing laughter", and the simple people of *East Coker*, "keeping the rhythm", whose dance was the dance of the stars.[238] So simplicity, naturalness, depth go together. In the New Testament, Jesus became indignant when His disciples scolded parents for bringing their children to Him; He said:

> Let the children come to Me and do not hinder them
> for of such is God's Kingdom;
> amen I say to you:
> whoever does not receive God's Kingdom as a child shall not enter it;

and on another occasion:

> Amen, amen I say to you:
> whoever is not begotten again from above cannot see God's kingdom.[239]

God's kingdom come is the Eden of the garden-children.[240]

DS-Ib: Seascape (15-48)

**The sea and people**

We are in nature and we are nature. The river and the sea are "within us", as "drift of the stars" and "the dance" along our arteries.[241] The sea reaches into the dry land where we feel safe, wearing down even the granite, casting up "hints" of past "creation", perhaps of the origin of life itself in the waters. Tide pools disclose odd lifeforms, existing away from human beings, show the exuberance of life, Bergson's "surge of life", peaking our "curiosity".

The curiosity is scientific, but it is also theological. God asked Job "out of the whirlwind":

> Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth?
> Tell me, if thou hast understanding.
> Who laid the cornerstone thereof,
> when the morning stars sang together
> and all the sons of God shouted for joy?
> Who shut up the sea with doors as it burst forth from the womb;
> when I made the cloud its garment, thick darkness its swaddling band;
> when I set its limits and fastened the bar of its doors, saying:
> "Thus far shalt thou come but no further;
> here shall thy proud waves be stayed"?
> Hast thou entered into the springs of the sea or walked in the depths of the abyss?[242]

Eliot's description —he seems to be recalling his own experiences— brings out the alienness of the sea: the shore marks the bounds of our habitat, the end of our safety. It casts up "our losses", remainders of our own past and the past of far away peoples whose gods have different names. It encroaches upon us: its salt coats the flowers, its fog penetrates the forest. Its voices threaten and warn us: its "howl" and "yelp", the "whine" of strong wind on our ships, the roar ("rote") of the surf breaking on sharp rocks, the whistling of the "groaner" buoy and the "wailing", mourning, of the foghorn.

**Sea-time**

The swell of the sea clangs the bell of the buoy, a background rhythm marking a time that ran before we could tell it. It is a time "tolling" death and destruction. The "ground swell" is the time of nature which God brings about far from our concerns. It is not the time weighing on the woman waiting at night for her husband to return from sea. If he should not come back —as he will not in the next movement—, the past they shared, with its promise of a future together, was a lie. As she tries to make sense of the possibility, time stops for her "between midnight and dawn". In the search for God, says St. John of the Cross,

> God,… neither more nor less, is a dark night for the soul.[243]

There is paradox. In the Christian liturgy, the *De profundis* psalm is a prayer, full of hope, for the dead before the dawn:

From of the depths I cried to You,
O God, hear my voice...
I wait for God, my soul waits,
and in His word I hope,
my soul awaits the Lord
more than they who watch for the morning,
yea, more than they who watch for the morning.
May Israel hope in the Lord.[244]

Crossing the waters is the great Biblical metaphor of redemption: God brought the people through the Red Sea "dry shod" from Egypt to the Promised Land. St. Paul thought of baptismal waters as the sea, symbolizing danger and death: going down into the waters and coming up again means dying with Christ and rising to life in Him:

by baptism into His death we were buried with Him, so that,
as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of His Father,
we too might walk in newness of life,[245]

The sea means fearing, wondering, waiting, expecting. Once again Eliot mentions the ground swell, marking time, loudly sounding the bell to warn us, to call us back to Timeless, Who "is and was from the beginning", as we pray in the doxology:

as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end.

The river and the sea in *Dry Salvages* are not like the waters in *The Waste Land*. There, the Thames was not sweet but overrun with rats, a place for fornication to roar of traffic, sweating "oil and tar"; and the sea in two weeks' time had "picked the bones" of Phlebas the Phoenician.[246] But now we may see the possibility of sea change.

## DS-II: ANNUNCIATION

**DS-IIa: Announcing (49-84)**

These six-line stanzas linked by rhyme form a crescendo leading to the *Fiat* of Mary, the *Theotokos*, Mother of God: "Let God become man".

### The question

Where is the "end" of death? "End" continues the theme of *East Coker*, where the ending is the beginning, and here also means cessation and purpose. When will the dying stop, when will being dead cease? What is death for? The wife's body heaves with "soundless" sobs, when they announce to her that her husband will never come home from sea. The fall flowers, as the surprising "late roses" full of snow in *East Coker*, themselves stiffen and die "silent". The wreckage floats. What is the point? When does it all, the stillness, the answerlessness, come to an end?

The prayer of the "bone" washed ashore, as we learn from the last stanza of this section, is "prayer to Death its God". In his poem *Three Things* the Irish poet W. B. Yeats wrote of a dead woman praying to get back three things "that women know":

> "O cruel Death, give three things back",
> Sang a bone upon the shore.

They were the three things she once gave: security to her child, pleasure to her husband, and finally, to herself, rest, encountering herself after meeting him "face to face". But now she is

> A bone wave-whitened and dried in the wind.

The "Oh-my-God" the wife cries when she hears the "annunciation" of her husband's death at sea is "unprayable", completely different from her daily prayers. But again, there is paradox: the "annunciation" —which Eliot will spell with a capital A in the last stanza of this section— is the name of the key event in salvation history, when Mary accepted the Angel's word that God would come to her: incarnation.

**An answer**

The answer: "there" is no end to death, "there" or anywhere: it does not stop, it does not mean anything.[247] The death of a husband drags itself out over the hours, days, years, as his widow takes it all in, comes to terms with it, becomes numb to it. The rest of her life will be different from the future she expected. Her "most reliable" belief, her security, has broken apart. Her "Oh-my-God" is ambiguous, combining sorrow for her dead husband with regret for herself and her children. Eliot was writing *Dry Salvages* at the beginning of World War II; many wives would receive the announcement "We regret to inform you...".

But again there is paradox. "Renunciation" might accompany loss but it also might be the detachment which Eliot hinted at in *East Coker* and will treat again in the next movement.[248] St. John of the Cross thought that love causes in the will

> a void of all things, for it forces us to love God above them all. This can come about only by withdrawing desire from them all and putting it fully on God; as Christ says through St. Luke:
>
> > any one of you who foresaketh not all he hath cannot be My disciple.[249]

**Devotion**

In the "final addition" in our lifetime, old age, pride and strength fails. Our life is a leaky boat; most of the time we avoid thinking about the inevitable, but not when the bell sounds —either the bell on the buoy signaling running aground or the church bell tolling dying— the final "annunciation", when we actually begin to slip under the waves before our death-notice comes out in the newspaper.

The elderly "silently listen" for the death they simply can no longer deny. But their silence and apathy are not the stillness and passivity of the saints before God; this is not wisdom, as Eliot has told us in *East Coker*.[250] Nor is their withdrawal into themselves as they become disengaged from their surroundings "renunciation" or "detachment", although as a recognition of their contingency it is a sort of "devotion", perhaps to themselves. Meister Eckhart, the medieval Dominican mystic, explained the paradox of "letting go":

> If one let a kingdom go, or the whole world, but held on to himself,
> he still has left nothing;
> if he lets go of himself and keeps something else, wealth, honor,
> whatever,
> he has left all things.[251]

But even in this depressing picture of the old, the enigmatic "annunciation" signals hope.

**Fishing**

We again ask "where" is the end?, this time referring to the Glouchester fishing fleet. The end of the fishermen is their beginning: they sail for the fishing banks and then dock in port. Their voyages are two-way. We cannot "think" of a time other that our own, "without oceans", nor of a past or future that can have an end, a destination. This view of time is *cyclic*, not eschatological; there may never be an ending, a denouement.[252] But even though to our knowledge the future will remain the same as the past, is it possible to break out of the wheel of time?

We picture fishermen drawing their pay, drying their sails, adjusting their courses ("hauling"), and bailing when the North East darkens ("lowers") with storm over the fishing banks. We do not like to think of the boats returning to Gloucester with a paltry haul of fish that will not even cover the cost of the expedition. Our daily tasks absorb us; we do them over and over, ignoring the end, not asking about the point of it all.

In *The Waste Land* fishing means venturing out in the search for God. In the gospel catching fish leads the disciples to recognize Christ —and one another. When Jesus told Simon Peter

> Put out into the deep and lower your nets,

he protested

> Master, we have toiled all the night
> and have caught nothing.[253]

The disciples cast their nets, but they filled with so many fish that the boats began to sink. Then Peter fell down before Jesus and said,

> Leave me, Oh Lord, for I am a sinful man.

Then Jesus made him a fisher of men. After the Resurrection Peter went fishing with the disciples, but

> all through the night they caught nothing.

At dawn Jesus asked them from the shore if they had anything to eat. They said no, and He told them

> Cast the net on the right and you shall find,

and they caught so many fish that they could not haul in the net. No one had to ask Him "Who art Thou?" Then Jesus told Peter to feed His sheep.

***Fiat***

In the last stanza of this section Eliot repeats images from the first. Again, "there" is no end to it all: the "voiceless", "soundless" mourning, the death of flowers, numbness from suffering, the sea and its wreckage.[254] We learn now that the bone is praying to "Death its God". But another prayer is the antithesis of the annunciation of death: Mary's *fiat* at the "Annunciation" (with a capital "A"). When the angel said,

> Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with you,
> Blessed art thou among women,

the young girl asked why she was graced by God. The Angel explained:

> Fear not, Mary, for thou hast found favor with God;
> and behold,
> thou shalt conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son,
> and shalt call His name "Jesus";
> He shall be great
> and shall be called "Son of the Highest"...
> and of His kingdom there shall be no end.

She asked,

> How shall this be, since I do not know a man?

and the Angel answered,

> The Holy Ghost will come upon thee
> and the power of the Most High will overshadow thee;
> hence also the Holy Being that is born of thee
> shall be called "the Son of God".

Then she pronounced her "unprayable" prayer:

> Behold the handmaid of the Lord,
> let it be done to me
> according to thy word.[255]

Mary's "Let it happen to me", allowing God to come, is the prayer that can "hardly, barely" be prayed. The church has considered her prayer as the ideal openness to God that is the mark of holiness. But her passivity is not the "devotion" of old people; it is not apathy to whatever might happen. Again we have the active-passive theme.[256] Mary yielding to God's will; she is obedient, calling herself His "slave" in the Biblical manner.[257] The "endless" humility of surrender to God is the "only wisdom".[258]

Mary's prayer is unique, the "only" prayer of the "one" Annunciation. Through it something objective comes about: Incarnation, the still point breaking into the cycle of nature.[259] In the *Waste Land* Eliot said the "prudence" of our self-serving designs cannot undo the giving,

> The awful daring of a moment's surrender...
> By this, and this only, we have existed.[260]

In *The Rock* the Incarnation is *the* moment:

> Then came, at a predetermined moment, a moment in time and of time,
> A moment not out of time, but in time, in what we call history:
> transecting, bisecting the world of time, a moment in time
> but not like a moment of time,
> A moment in time but time was made through that moment:
> for without the meaning there is not time, and that moment
> of time gave the meaning.
> Then it seemed as if men must proceed from light to light,
> in the light of the Word,
> Through the Passion and Sacrifice saved in spite of their negative being…[261]

DS-IIb: Surface and depth (85-123)

**Progress**

With time we tend to revise history, our own and our people's. Eliot said in *East Coker* that our experience falsifies the "pattern" that it imposes on the past, since "the pattern is new in every moment".[262] The past is more than a series of "trailing/ Consequences" mentioned in the last section. Nor is it mere "development", "progress", the "popular" notion that things keep getting better. The impression that we are riding some crest leads us to "dis-own" the past.

Scientists have discovered that nature moves toward more highly organized life-forms, but in the face of entropy, "before the ice-cap reigns".[263] Marxists thought to identify a law of history, that there is to be a just society, even a "new man", while other philosophers of history see rises and declines. Hegel thought that the meaning of history is the self-realization, through conflict, of "Spirit" or "reason", but Eliot recalls the unoptimistic view that our world is rushing "to that destructive fire".[264] Recent "development theories" (moral, spiritual, cognitive, psycho-social, "faith", Jungian...) see a person ideally moving through various life-stages to some grand finale (the "cosmic", "integrated", "universalizing", "post-conventional" stage, the "golden years"...). They, too, confuse the future tense with denouement, time with eternity.

Ecclesiastes is more realistic about the "evil days" of old age; youth ought to

> remember the days of darkness: that they will be many; all that is to come is vanity,

and according to the Talmud, in the last stage the oldster lives

> as if he were already dead and has passed away from the world.[265]

For Shakespeare, the

> Last scene of all,
> That ends this strange eventful history,
> Is second childishness, and mere oblivion,
> Sans teeth, sans eyes, sans taste, sans everything.[266]

We expect to gain the "calm" and "wisdom of age" —but our "quiet-voiced elders" may have "bequeathed" us a "receipt for deceit".[267] However, as Eliot says, this fallacy is only "partial". The mistake is shifting to our timeful world or to sinful humanity or to our gullible selves what is really only a hope: another ending beyond the Destructive Fire. Gerontion, the "little old man" in Eliot's poem of the same name, secularized, disillusioned, symbolic of modern decrepitude, confesses:

> I have lost my passion...
> I have lost my sight, smell, hearing, taste and touch.

His words contrast with those of John Henry Cardinal Newman, a leader of the Anglo-Catholic Oxford Movement, who became a Roman Catholic:

> Let us beg and pray Him day by day
> to reveal Himself to our souls more fully,
> to quicken our senses,
> to give us sight and hearing, taste and touch of the world to come.[268]

Traditional spirituality is cautious about describing final "perfection"; St. Teresa associates it with union with God's *will*:

> This is the union I have wanted all my life,
> the union I always ask our Lord for,
> the plainest and safest one....
> Daughters, what do you think is His will?
> That we be quite perfect;....
> For this the Lord need not give us grand delights.
> What He has given us in giving us His Son is enough to show us the way....
> Here the Lord only asks two things of us:
> love of His Majesty and love of our neighbor.
> This is what we are to work on;
> by keeping them with perfection we do His will,
> and in this way we shall be united with Him.
> But how far we are from doing these two things
> as we ought for so great a God![269]

**Experience and Meaning**

Eliot distinguishes "moments of happiness", "the sudden illumination" from feelings of content, safeness, love, enjoyment, success, satiety. Our interpretations of experiences like the moment in the rose-garden and the vision of the rustic village ought to be open to revision.[270] Only after a time may we come to see the "meaning", which we "missed" before. Thinking about the moment brings it back in a different form, beyond what we can take happiness to mean. Eliot wrote in his play *The Family Reunion*

> Everything is true in a different sense,
> A sense that would have seemed meaningless before.[271]

Several "visionary fragments" that Eliot wrote in 1914 reveal a deep religious experience which seemed to unfold fifteen years later in his formal "turning" or conversion; he used this material in the fifth part of *The Waste Land*.[272] Significantly, it took Julian of Norwich two decades to understand some of her "showings". [273]

Saints Teresa and John of the Cross recommend caution in interpreting prayer experiences. St. Teresa gave this counsel to her sisters whenever they felt that God was speaking to them:

> do not think you are better for it;
> for much He spoke to the pharisees, for all the good His words did them.
> And take no more heed of any words not in close accord with Scripture
> than if you heard them from the devil himself.
> Even if they come from your weak imagination,
> you ought to take them as temptations in matters of faith
> and withstand them always, so that they go away,
> since they bring little strength with themselves.[274]

She echoes her confrère St. John of the Cross:

> Wanting to know things by ways above our nature
> I hold to be far worse than wanting spiritual gratifications in the feelings....
> There is no need for any of it, since we have natural reason and the Gospel law and teaching
> which are quite enough to guide ourselves with....

> And so much should we rely on reason and Gospel teaching,
> that even though, whether we wish or not,
> some things were now told us in a way above our nature,
> we should accept only what falls in with much reason and Gospel law,
> and then accept it
> *not because it is revelation but because it is reason*,
> leaving aside any notion of revelation;
> and in this case we had better take an even closer look at that reason
> and examine it much more than if there were no revelation about
> it....[275]

In these extraordinary passages, Teresa and John advise us to subject to reason and Scriptural tradition what we think God is telling us. In fact, they seem to recommend a sort of ongoing skepticism about such spiritual experience. For Eliot, we should be "explorers", "still moving/ Into another intensity", toward "love... most nearly itself".[276]

**Dread and agony**

The experience is "restored" in another sense. Eliot repeats "what he said before" at the end of *East Coker* that the "intense moment" is not an experience "isolated" in time but "revived", relived, in lifetimes now and "of many generations", as those commemorated on the worn tombstones of East Coker. There is a traditional remembrance of "something" that "probably" cannot be told at all, of "what men choose to forget".[277] Scientists confidently describe what happened in human evolution and what happened during the first second after the Big Bang. But at "moments" they, too, find themselves one with the simple folk dancing around the bone-fire at the ancient East Coker or honoring the brown river-god, now "almost", but not quite, "forgotten". A "primitive" attitude toward nature lurks just below the surface, the basic "terror" of its —our— contingency.

Eliot now mentions "moments of agony", not "of happiness"; both are as "permanent" a part of the past as time allows. In *East Coker*, "ecstasy" points to an ambiguous "agony/ Of death and birth", and the soul must "wait", without hoping or caring, "for the wrong thing".[278] Now he says, no matter what may be our "misunderstanding" about the good or ill that the future will bring, the moments of suffering will always be there.

We learn this lesson by identifying with "the agony of others". The saints were ambivalent toward suffering, and Jesus Himself during His "ago-

ny" in the Garden, filled with "anxiety and dread" at His coming "torment", prayed to His Father:

> If it were possible, let this chalice pass from Me, but not My will
> but Yours be done.[279]

Our present activity and our selective memory shunts out past pain, but the memory of others' agony and death remains fresh. The "experience/ Unqualified" perhaps includes the Eucharist, done "in memory of" Christ. St. Paul told the Christians of Corinth:

> as often as ye eat this bread and drink this cup,
> ye do show the Lord's death until He comes.[280]

Agony abides, the river of change carries along what it destroys, like flotsam on the Mississippi.

The "apple" recalls the forbidden fruit. The Serpent, who was very "wise" (*ʿarum*), promised Adam and Eve that if they ate of it they would be like God, "knowing good and evil". They did "bite" it, but the apple bit back:

> and the eyes of them both were opened,
> and they knew that they were naked (*ʿerom*),

not wise.[281] Eating the fruit is the *hybris* of "worshippers of the machine", presuming to control their destiny: original sin, "Adam's curse", the waste land.[282]

**The Dry Salvages**

According to the legend, the "halcyon" or kingfisher kept the waters calm (halcyon days) when it was nesting at sea at the time of the winter solstice. The rock, like the Dry Salvages, juts up as a guide for mariners in good sailing weather but in the stormy season it shows its indifference to the fate of humans. "Rock", an important image in *The Waste Land*, may have a religious meaning here.[283] God is often called "rock" in the Hebrew Scriptures:

> Who is God if not the Lord? Who is Rock but our God?

and St. Paul said the Hebrews

> drank from the spiritual rock following them, and the rock was Christ.[284]

In fair weather, Christ is a remnant of history Whom people look to as a guide, but in storms He is what He was then: crucified.

After Peter identified Jesus as the Christ, the Messiah, Son of the Living God, Jesus said to him:

> Thou art "Rock" and upon this Rock I will build My church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.[285]

And then Jesus foretold His death and resurrection. Most of the time the church is a building and perhaps a guide, but in "somber" times, it is "what it always was": the "dying nurse" whose "care" need not "please/ But remind us... that to be restored, our sickness must grow worse".[286]

## DS-III: DETACHMENT

As in the three other *Quartets*, the third movement concerns detachment, but this time Eliot uses the Hindu tradition to focus upon it. The effect is to stress its universal relevance.

### DS-IIIa: Sameness (124-129)

**Krishna**

Eliot refers to the Sanskrit dialogue-poem, Bhagavad-Gita, "Godsong", which has been called the Gospel of India.[287] Krishna is the main personage. At one level, he is the respected cousin (and charioteer) of Arjuna, the righteous leader of an army about to win a decisive victory over another branch of his princely family. But at another level, Krishna, called the "Christ of India", is an aspect or incarnation of Brahman (ultimate Being) or an embodiment of Arjuna's deity Vishnu.

The scene is the battlefield before the fighting begins. (Eliot was writing these lines when the second World War was beginning). Krishna is explaining to Arjuna how to achieve freedom from the wheel of timeful rebirths through *karma-yoga*, the way of disinterested behavior. According to this teaching, we may carry out a work (*karma*) facing us in one of two ways: either with or without attachment to its outcome. Our performance of a *karma* should be free from the wish for success and from the fear of failure. The

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### DS-IIIa: Sameness (124-129)

**Krishna**

Eliot refers to the Sanskrit dialogue-poem, Bhagavad-Gita, "Godsong", which has been called the Gospel of India.[287] Krishna is the main personage. At one level, he is the respected cousin (and charioteer) of Arjuna, the righteous leader of an army about to win a decisive victory over another branch of his princely family. But at another level, Krishna, called the "Christ of India", is an aspect or incarnation of Brahman (ultimate Being) or an embodiment of Arjuna's deity Vishnu.

The scene is the battlefield before the fighting begins. (Eliot was writing these lines when the second World War was beginning). Krishna is explaining to Arjuna how to achieve freedom from the wheel of timeful rebirths through *karma-yoga*, the way of disinterested behavior. According to this teaching, we may carry out a work (*karma*) facing us in one of two ways: either with or without attachment to its outcome. Our performance of a *karma* should be free from the wish for success and from the fear of failure. The

following passage teaches about the *yoga*, the system or way of knowledge and oneness with God. Later in this movement the "voice descanting" will evoke this passage: "do not think of the fruit of action".

> You have a right to work only for the work's sake,
> never to the fruits of work;
> your motive may never be wanting the fruits of the work,
> nor should you give in to idleness.
> Do every act with your heart fixed on the Highest Lord,
> forgo attachment to the fruits.
> Be even-minded in success and failure, for this evenness is the *yoga*.
> Work done with worry about the outcome is far lower
> than work done without worry in the calm of yielding yourself.
> Seek refuge in the knowledge of Brahman...
> strive to reach oneness with Brahman.
> The secret of unattached work is:
> first uniting your heart with Brahman, then acting.
> Seers, in the calm of self-yielding renounce the fruits of their action
> and thus reach enlightenment;
> they become free from the bondage of rebirth,
> and pass to that state beyond all evil.
> With your mind cleared of delusion
> you will become indifferent to the outcome of all action: present or future.[288]

St. John of the Cross's "nothing/everything" teaching is not unlike this passage, and Eckhart's ethics of "why-lessness" is more radical. From the inner castle of the soul, says the Mystic of the Rhine,

> from this innermost ground, you should do all your work
> without any why....
> If someone working from his own ground were asked:
> "Why do you do your works?"
> he would say, if he answers rightly:
> "I work because I work".

Detachment applies even to religious aims and "methods":

As long as you do your works for the sake of
the kingdom of heaven or God or your eternal salvation,
—hence from the outside in—,
it is not quite right with you.
Anyone who seeks God through a way
takes the way and misses God hidden in the way.
But anyone who seeks God without a way,
takes Him as He is in Himself....

Anyone who thinks he is "spiritually poor" only because he

never does his own will any more in anything,
but strives rather to do God's dearest will, is a donkey,
understanding nothing of divine truth....
So long as he still has *this*:
that it is his will to want to do God's dearest will,
he does not have poverty....

Acting with detachment from purpose imitates God, to Whom

it befits not to have any why or wherefore outside or apart from Himself;
hence any work having a why and wherefore
as such is not a godly work....

The why-lessness of the divine Word is related to His timelessness:

the end is the same as the beginning, having no why,
but is itself the why of all things and for all things.[289]

Eliot puts it like this, in the words spoken by "the Rock", symbol of St. Peter and the church:

I say to you: *make perfect your will*.
I say: take no thought of the harvest,
But only of proper sowing.[290]

**Being in time**

Detachment from future outcome and from past success or failure would mean consciously dwelling in the present or gaining God's viewpoint: timelessness. Ecclesiastes seems to make Eliot's point:

> What has been is what will be,
> and what has been done is what will be done;
> there is nothing new under the sun.
> The thing whereof it is said:
> "Look: this is new!"
> has already been in the ages that went before us.
> There is no remembrance of things past,
> nor of things to come will there be any remembrance
> among those who will come after.[291]

The future, despite evolutionary processes, will bring only variations on the same old "song" of being in time, which will be sung in other ways or gradually forgotten. People yet unborn may open a book pressing the flowers of sad memories of those still to come and feel sorry for them. The remembrance may be of political violence, of religion, or of love (the symbolism of "Roses");[292] all three are appropriate in the context of Arjuna. In *Little Gidding* Eliot will comment on history in the same vein.[293] He paraphrases the saying of Heraclitus which he used as an epigraph of *Burnt Norton*: the ways up and down and forward and back are the same.

We cannot face "this thing", declares Eliot with a Biblical turn of phrase, yet it is "sure": time cures nothing. Eliot has often said we cannot bear too much reality.[294] It is hard to break our expectation that the future will bring relief. Socialists hoped for a new humanity. All those people "healed" by the miracles of medicine or religion are "no longer here". Redemption, if such be, comes not in time.

DS-IIIb: Voyages (130-168)

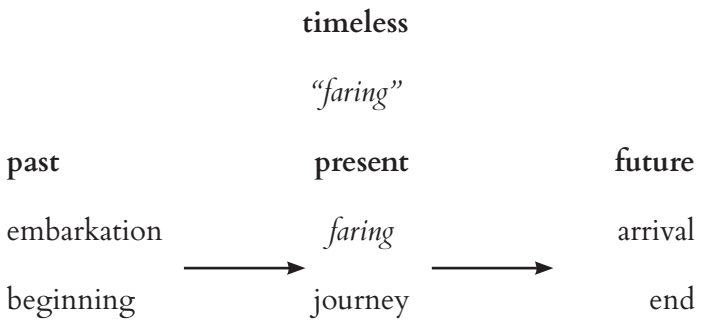
**Faring**

Eliot again pictures life as travel, as he used the image of the Tube in the third movement of *Burnt Norton* and *East Coker*. Taking a trip by train or boat is like detachment, a kind of time-out when the passenger, suspended between departure and arrival, is freed from the need to remember the past and anticipate the future.

When Eliot says "fare forward", "faring" means not only voyaging somewhere but being in a certain condition (as in "How are you faring?") and in the second last line of this movement the word will have still another sense. We do not fare well when we try to flee from our past into a utopian future when things will be "different". We do change, but without clean breaks from the past nor from a future. Detachment means being free of all three tenses, which blur into one. In *Murder in the Cathedral* Thomas à Becket warned:

> We do not know very much of the future
> Except that from generation to generation
> The same things happen again and again.
> Men learn little from others' experience.
> But in the life of one man, never
> The same time returns. Sever
> The cord, shed the scale. Only
> The fool, fixed in his folly, may think
> He can turn the wheel on which he turns.[295]

Faring in time symbolizes moving "forward" in another sense, "being still and still moving" as explorers "into another intensity":[296]




Symbolically, the hopeful person is a "wayfarer", *viator*, on pilgrimage (or, liturgically, in a procession), on the "way" to God. But the hope is for something else, other. St. Paul paraphrased Isaiah:

> eye has not seen nor ear heard neither has entered into man's heart
> what God has prepared for those who love Him.[297]

**Thomas à Becket**

Eliot uses "fare forward" four times in this section and also in *Murder in the Cathedral* and in his poem *Animula*. The ambiguity of "forward" can be seen in the play when the Archbishop, Thomas à Becket, is tempted. It is the *Tempters* who tell him to fare forward. They, like the "Tempter" of Jesus in the wilderness —and also like Job's "Consolers"— have one goal in common: to get us to choose the "obvious", predictable, outside of the divine intentions. Satan offered ordinary bread to One with a deeper hunger, the "power and glory" of earthly lordship to One Who would be God's Slave, the chance to fashion His own destiny, by "casting Himself down" in a mockery of the Passion, to One who would yield totally to God's will.

These are the worldly choices offered by Thomas's first three Tempters:[298]

* to return to the "pleasure" of the past, to a "new season/ Spring... in winter"

* to "fare forward" "for the power and the glory", which "is present", in order to gain

> Temporal power, to build a good world,
> To keep order, as the world knows order

* to form a "happy coalition/ Of intelligent interests", with "a powerful party" of the Barons, "in the fight for liberty", "ending the tyrannous jurisdiction", for a future when:

> ...time past is time forgotten.
> We expect the rise of a new constellation.

Thomas rejected these options as Jesus rejected the usual messianic scenarios— just as Job rejected the conventional theology of his Consolers —and of Satan—, that suffering and guilt must go together.

Then Job had a fourth visitor, Elihu, who sided with Job against the first three Consolers. But he accused Job of the sin typical of one

> blameless and upright, fearing God and shunning evil.

Elihu asked:

Thinkest thou that this is right: thou saidst
"My righteousness is more than God's?"[299]

Thomas à Becket also had an unexpected fourth visitor, who counselled him to

fare forward to the end....
Seek the way of martyrdom, make yourself the lowest
On earth, to be high in heaven.

The temptation was not to follow the vulgar ways of the world, but to choose the very *timeless* end consonant with the divine purpose. He held out to Thomas the "enduring crown" of the

...glory of saints
Dwelling forever in presence of God.

Kings come and go, but "Saint and Martyr rule from the tomb" —with "enemies dismayed" and "pilgrims standing in line... bending the knee"! Thomas admitted that he had indeed "thought of these things"; the fourth visitor tempted him with his very "own desires", urging him on with his own words about following God's will,

...an eternal action, an eternal patience
To which all must consent that they may will it.

Our own spirituality may be the ultimate temptation, complacency, *hybris*, *amour-propre*:

The last temptation is the greatest treason:
To do the right deed for the wrong reason.

But Jesus told his Tempter:

Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God.[300]

**Little soul**

The Latin word "*animula*", "little soul", is the first word of the epitaph that Roman Emperor Hadrian wrote for himself:

> Dear tiny soul, wandering away,
> guest, friend, of my body,
> gone off now, pallid, cheerless, forlorn,
> whither thou shalt jest no more.[301]

French poet Pierre de Ronsard told his own "little soul", *âmelette*, in the epitaph he wrote for himself:

> Follow thine own fortune,
> Trouble not my rest: I sleep.[302]

In Eliot's poem, the "simple soul" issuing "from the hand of God" grows up only to issue unfinished

> ...from the hand of time...
> irresolute and selfish, misshapen, lame,
> unable to fare forward or retreat,

but the ending is not as pessimistic:

> Pray for us now and at the hour of our birth,

although he does not say here "at the hour of our death", words of the Hail Mary which Eliot quotes twice in *Ash Wednesday*, the traditional prayer of the annunciation addressed to the mother of Jesus. Early Christians called the death of martyrs their "birthday" and the word was also used in the liturgy. St. Polycarp, bishop of Smyrna, was burned at the stake in the middle of the second century; his followers reverently gathered up his remains and placed them in a place where, they said,

> the Lord will grant us to come together in joy and gladness
> to celebrate the birthday of his martyrdom.[303]

Eliot will say later in this movement that "the time of death is every moment".

**The voice descanting**

So as, behind us, rails meet at the vanishing point or a wake widens out and is lost, our past is not "finished" nor does there loom "before us" a different —or for that matter "any"— future. Yet through time's sameness we do not stay the same: we are other now than when we departed, and when we arrive at "any" destination we will have become other than we now are. This is true— whether our destiny is the timelessness of death or the timelessness of "another intensity".

A voice is singing an obligato over ("descanting") the theme of timefulness. Our ear is like a seashell that picks up the "murmuring" of everyday events. This static drowns out the voice which is wordless, heard at "night hushed down", as St. John of the Cross put it.[304] The message of the voice runs for the eighteen lines enclosed in quotation marks.

The voice urges us, who only "only think" our predictable ups and downs are "voyaging", to "fare forward" with an "equal mind". This Latin expression, *aequo animo* or *aequa mente*, "with an even mind, calm, patience, resignation", recalls the even-mindedness Krishna advises us to have toward the outcome of our action.

The voice speaks Krishna's words. Arjuna has asked him to explain how he, Krishna as an aspect of the Godhead, is disclosed "at the hour of death" to a person who has become aware of him. Krishna answers:

> Brahman is the most high, unending,
> the Self is eternal nature, causing the being of creatures,
> creating is called "work" [*karma*].
> Physical nature is being coming to an end;
> the highest is called "spirit".
> I am lord in the body....
> And whoever at the end of life,
> remembering me, giving up the body,
> dies, he comes to my being;
> of this there is no doubt:

[here Eliot quotes these three lines:]

> *on whatever sphere of being*
> *the mind of a man may be intent*
> *at the time of death*,

[the text goes on:]

> to that sphere he goes, made always to enter that sphere.
> Hence ever think of me, and go to battle;
> with mind fixed on me you will surely come to me.
> Disciplined by practicing *yoga*, thought not turned aside,
> one comes to the highest divine spirit, by meditating on him....
> Light and dark, these are the two ways deemed eternal for the world:
> by the one he goes not to come back
> by the other he comes back again.[305]

A person's mindset at death, then, is transplanted into what follows: either a new rebirth or union with God; for Christians the spheres are either heaven or hell. But what we are like at death is what we are like in life; Krishna says that to be aware of God at death we must, beforehand, have followed a way of discipline.

We cannot "receive" the signal of Krishna's words when all we detect is background noise, but we may at a "moment", a *kairos* like the "intense moment" in the rose-garden. For Eliot "all time is redeemable" since it is "eternally present":[306] Krishna's "remembering" God constantly, for Christians is the ideal recollection. A happy death recapitulates a happy life. "Every moment" is the hour of death, and there is "a lifetime burning in every moment".[307]

St. Paul, "dying daily" as he faced the disappointments and dangers of his ministry and having "died to sin" and "with Christ" (because "since One died for all, all died"), counselled:

> Be bent upon things above not things of earth,
> for ye have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God.
> When Christ, our life, shall appear,
> then shall ye also appear with Him in glory.[308]

**Acting and refraining**

Krishna urged Arjuna to follow the way of working selflessly. Christians call the way of discipline "asceticism": an active rule of life in preparation for the "mysticism" of receptiveness to God at the "intense moment".

In *Murder in the Cathedral*, Thomas à Becket, returning to Canterbury after seven years exile in France, speaks the following words —which the fourth Tempter will use against him (quoted above)— about the "small folk" who want him to go back to France and avoid a confrontation with the King whose outcome cannot be foreseen:

> They know and do not know, what it is to act or suffer.
> They know and do not know, that acting is suffering
> And suffering is action. Neither does the actor suffer
> Nor the patient act. But both are fixed

in the eternal action-patience they —or anyone— must undergo and respond to in order to will it,

> That the pattern may subsist, for the pattern is the action
> And the suffering, that the wheel may turn and still
> Be forever still.[309]

The doing/undergoing pattern appears throughout *Four Quartets*:

* in Aristotle's philosophy, acting may coincide with undergoing another's acting: my learning what you teach me is your teaching in me[310]

* purgation is active and passive: we both cleanse ourselves and "wait" for God to empty our awareness of and commitment to whatever is not He[311]

* in prayer, active meditation should give way to passive contemplation

* we both accept and are accepted by the garden-people[312]

* "passivity", undergoing, connotes:[313]

  * suffering, not only in our purgation, but especially in the "Passion", of Christ, the "wounded surgeon"[314]

  * being treated for illness: we are patients "beneath the bleeding hands"

  * forbearance: we should be patient awaiting God's "eternal action"; God Himself has "eternal patience" as He awaits our consent "that the pattern may subsist"

  * allowing: Mary consents to being overshadowed by the Holy Spirit at the Annunciation, as we must submit to God's action, "that it may be willed"[315]

* in our exploring "we must be still and still moving".[316]

**The real destination**

Eliot reinterprets here the basic Gita notion of reincarnation or "transmigration of souls", which he does not accept. The "one action" he refers to is the mind's being "intent", as he translates Krishna's phrase. These words are detected, says the voice, only at a timeless "moment", when we neither act nor fail to act, when we remain unmoved. Krishna says that at the time of death this determines the soul's destiny.

In his interpretation, Eliot places the action of being intent at "every moment" of our lives, which is the "time of death", Then he says that this action will bear fruit "in the lives of others". Hence, affecting others comes about now, all along. The "one action" here seems to mean choosing recollection, the habitual intentness of the saints on the same Being, from which a solidarity would come about, an empathy in detachment, joy and suffering. Paul recognized a unity above individuals

> We, being many, are one body in Christ
> and, each one, members of one another.[317]

This teaching on the "Mystical Body of Christ" and the article in the Creed on the "Communion of Saints" affirm a unity reaching beyond time: the "church militant" on earth, the "church suffering" in purgatory, and eschatologically the "church triumphant".

In the first part of this movement, "the bone's prayer to Death its God" was "voiceless", "soundless"; in contrast, one prayer was spoken aloud, the "Prayer of the one Annunciation".[318] Perhaps the voice here is "compound" (as will be the ghost of *Little Gidding*), speaking not only the message of the *Gita* ("so Krishna"), but Mary's "hardly, barely prayable" prayer, her *fiat*, the "one action". This is the pattern, our "real destination", a "love... most nearly itself".[319]

But Eliot immediately cautions us again with the words of the Gita: even in regard to bearing fruit in others "do not think of the fruit of action". The ultimate detachment is from our very spirituality, which should also be just as "why-less", as Eckhart said, as any of our actions.

Still, we *viatores* should "fare forward" with hope. The particular shore we leave behind, as well as the shore we are heading for, do not matter. Our real haven is not the port where we will end our voyage. What matters is the "real destination".

Krishna "admonished" Arjuna to overcome his reluctance to take part in the war, urging him to take the viewpoint of Âtman or *Brahman*, which, like Heralitus's *Logos*, is timeless yet common to everything:

Know that what permeates all of this cannot be done away
with;
none can bring about the destruction of what cannot perish.
These bodies come to an end, it is said, being of
what is undying, embodied,
what cannot be destroyed, measured;
therefore join battle![320]

We should again recall that Eliot was writing during the Second World War.

The "voice descanting" concludes by telling us once again to "fare forward" —until we "come to port" in death, our "real destination", when we shall suffer some "event" such as a "trial and judgment" in the Christian sense. Then the phrase "not fare well,/ But fare forward" hints at another sense of "farewell"— "not goodbye but go on faring"— there may be no goodbye for good.

## DS-IV: OUR LADY (169-183)

The fourth movement is a prayer to Mary, "Our Lady", the mother of Jesus. In *Ash Wednesday* Eliot associated Mary with river and sea, the moment in the rose garden, detachment, and the waste land:

This is the time of tension between dying and birth...
Blessèd sister, holy mother, spirit of the fountain, spirit of the
garden, …
Teach us to care and not to care
Teach us to sit still
Even among these rocks,
Our peace in His will
And even among these rocks
Sister, mother
And spirit of the river, spirit of the sea,
Suffer me not to be separated
And let my cry come unto Thee.[321]

Know that what permeates all of this cannot be done away
with;
none can bring about the destruction of what cannot perish.
These bodies come to an end, it is said, being of
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Suffer me not to be separated
And let my cry come unto Thee.[321]

**The Shrine**

The "shrine... on the promontory" is unknown, but in Gloucester, the Massachusetts seaside town Eliot visited as a boy, the Portuguese fishermen attended the Catholic church of "Our Lady of Good Voyage". *Stella Maris*, "Star of the Sea", is one of the titles in the litany of Our Lady, guide of fishermen and all travelers.

"Who are in ships" echoes the words of a psalm in which the author thanks God not only for bringing His people back from Babylonian Exile but in general for saving all in distress: those lost in the wilderness, imprisoned, sick, and sailing in stormy weather,

> going down to the sea in ships,
> who do business in great waters.[322]

"Conducting" may refer to World War II convoys in which destroyers and other warships screened merchant ships from submarine attack.

**Salvation**

Mary is asked to "repeat" before her Son a prayer offered by the women mentioned in the first two movements, who feared losing or actually did lose their sons and husbands to the sea.[323] Eliot asks Mary to "Pray for us sinners" in *Ash Wednesday*. Intercessory prayer, repeating another's request before God, may be a way of bearing fruit in others in the communion of saints, a unity, active as well as passive, which extends beyond time.

Eliot cites in Italian the beginning of the last canto of Dante's *Divine Comedy*, itself quoting the prayer St. Bernard addressed to the

> Virgin Mother, Daughter of your Son.

The prayer reflects Mary's song, the "Magnificat":

> My soul doth magnify the Lord,
> my spirit rejoices in God my savior,
> for He has looked upon the lowliness of His servant.

The following is Dante's prayer that Eliot was alluding to:

Virgen and mother, daughter of thy son,
lowly yet higher than any creature,
term fixed of timeless plan,
thou art she who human nature so noble
made that its Maker
scorned not to become its issue.
In thy womb love again was lit;
in its warmth this flower
bloomed thus in timeless peace.
Thou art for us the noonday torch
of love, and among mortals below
the living font of hope....
Now, this person [Dante], who from the hollow depths
of the universe has at last seen
spiritual lives one by one,
asketh thee by grace to grant him such virtue
that with his eyes he may rise
higher still toward final salvation....
I pray also, oh Queen, who canst do
what thou willst, to keep in health
the affections of one having seen so much;
overcome his human stirrings.
Behold Beatrice with so many blest—
with my prayers to thee they join their hands. [324]

Mary is called "Queen of Heaven" in the Easter anthem *Regina coeli* bidding her "rejoice" in her Son's Resurrection:

Queen of Heaven, rejoice, alleluia:
For He whom you did merit to bear, alleluia,
Has arisen as He promised, alleluia.
Pray for us to God, alleluia.
Rejoice and be glad, O Virgen Mary, alleluia.
For the Lord has truly risen, alleluia.
Pour out to Him your prayer for us, alleluia.

The *Regina coeli* prayer replaces the *Angelus* (mentioned in the following stanza) at Eastertide.

**Announcement and Annunciation**

Finally Mary is asked to pray to God for those who perished at sea, for all of us, no matter how we die, as in the Ave Maria. The images resemble those in the first two movements of this Quartet: those "ending their voyage on the sand" are like the "bone on the beach", and the sea monster with "granite teeth" swallows its victims with its "lips" down its "dark throat".[325]

The drowned are deaf to the toll of the "clanging bell" in the first movement, and also to the Angelus bell. "*Angelus*" is the first word of a traditional Christian prayer recalling the Annunciation:

> The Angel of the Lord declared unto Mary;
> and she conceived by the Holy Ghost.
> Behold the handmaid of the Lord;
> be it done unto me according to Thy word.
> And the Word was made flesh;
> and dwelt amongst us.

In Christian lands a bell would be —and in some places still is— rung three times a day ("perpetual") to invite people to stop work and pray the above verses along with three Hail Mary's. The Angelus concludes with the prayer from the mass of the Annunciation:

> Pour Thy grace into our hearts,
> that we who have known the incarnation of Thy Son Jesus Christ
> by the message of an angel,
> may by His passion and cross be brought to the glory of His
> resurrection.

Again we have an announcement, not of death but of God coming to us. Eliot's gentle prayer is a far cry from the "death by water" of *The Waste Land*, where Phlebas the Phoenician, in death, no longer remembers the "deep sea swell". Deep-sea fishing is still a metaphor for our search for the timeless; we ask Mary to pray that as we "end our voyage" we may come to God.

## DS-V: INCARNATION

DS-Va: Hints and guesses (184-215)

### The catalogue

Eliot had an aversion for the "usual/ Pastimes and drugs, and features of the press" —we could add of film and the media—, which contrast with the ancient religious traditions that he respects. There are endless ways to predict "the inevitable", "release omens" or make choices by examining animal entrails ("haruspicate"), gazing into crystal balls ("scry"), reading texts at random ("sortilege"), reading palms, "tealeaves" and "playing cards", viewing "horoscopes" —like those of Mme Sosostris in the waste land—,[326] "conversing with spirits" or aliens ("communication with Mars"), drawing "pentagrams", using consciousness-altering chemicals ("barbituric acids"). Eliot saves Freudian psychoanalysis for last. This "dubious and contentious branch of science"[327] trivializes our thinking and choosing by reducing them to "pre-conscious terrors" through consideration of "dreams" and childhood experiences ("womb") or the death-drive ("tomb").

### Pseudo-messiahs

Such things "will always be", says Eliot, but especially whenever, wherever (in "Asia", or "the Edgware Road" in England) "there is distress of nations" —surely he was thinking of the two theaters of World War II. Today he might be thinking of the dissolution of the family, the reinvention of marriage and sexuality, the redefinition and revaluation of human life, all of which have led to social chaos and *anomie* ("perplexity"), and presage an even more disquieting future.[328]

Jesus said of the ending of history that there will be

> signs in the sun and the moon and the stars,
> and on the earth distress of nations
> perplexed by the roar and roll of the sea.[329]

Politicians and philosophers of all sorts emerge at times of social disarray and moral confusion and the church has warned against credulity:

> And then if someone tells you:
> "Here is the Christ!" or "Look, there he is!"
> do not believe it,
> for pseudo-christs and pseudo-prophets will arise
> doing signs and wonders to mislead, if they can, even the chosen;
> therefore beware —I foretold it all.[330]

**Silent music**

Our "curiosity", seeking answers in "past and future", do not transcend the temporal "dimension". But the "saint" does grasp the intersection of time and eternity in "ardor, selflessness and "self-surrender". The spiritual life, said St. Teresa, demands generosity, a "very determined determination"; in fact, it is like a game of chess:

> How quickly we will checkmate this divine King,
> Who cannot, will not want to, escape our hands,...
> But this King will not surrender
> except to him who surrenders himself wholly to Him.[331]

An anonymous 16th-cent. Spanish sonnet reflects a selfless spirituality:

> No heaven held out to me,
> no hell held over me,
> moves me to love Thee,
> leave off wronging Thee;
> Thou, my God, dost move me:
> Thy Body that I watch
> aching there, hung;
> the dying, the mocking.
> Thy love so moves me,
> were there no hell, no heaven,
> I would hold Thee in awe, dear;
> hand me nothing for my love,
> for hoped I no hope,
> I would love as now I love.

St. Teresa also said:

Two hours there are of life,
very great the reward;
and if there were none
but doing what Christ told us to do,
the pay would be great:
to imitate, in some way, our King.[332]

Holiness is no mere "occupation"; saints take no time out to "apprehend" the meeting of time and eternity. When Eliot says it is "something given/ And taken", he again brings out the active and passive aspects of the spiritual life: saints prepare themselves in thought and behavior to undergo God's action, receive His grace.[333] It is the pursuit, "love", of a whole "lifetime", as the Bride of St. John of the Cross's *Spiritual Canticle* searches for her Bridegroom:

Looking for Love
I shall cross crests, banks,
Letting the flowers be,
Unafraid of wildness,
Up past outposts, beyond the bounds.[334]

The rest of us must be content with unexpected intimations of the possibility of the Timeless. Eliot "repeats" examples of these "moments": the "sunlight" filling the pool in *Burnt Norton*, the "requiring" perceptions of *East Coker:*[335] sensing the "wild thyme unseen", seeing the "winter lightning" and hearing the "whisper of running streams" or, in *Little Gidding*, "the voice of the hidden waterfall".[336]

The "music heard so deeply/ That it is not heard at all" is "the unheard music hidden in the shrubbery" at the pool in *Burnt Norton*. The image is akin to a passage in St. John if the Cross's *Spiritual Canticle*. Once the Bride saw the eyes of her Beloved in the "silver spring", she sees him everywhere: in the mountains and lowlands, islands and rushing rivers, at

Night hushed
Down calm at rising dawn,
Silent music,
Sounding solitude…[337]

St. John makes this comment on "silent music":

in that quiet and silence of the night, in her knowing the divine light,
the soul comes to see Wisdom's wonder:
sundry creatures and works fitting together, arranged,
each answering God back, in its own way voicing
what is God in it;
so to her creatures seem a harmony of highest music,
beyond all the world's concerts, melodies;
the music for her is "silent"
since it is understanding,
stilled and quiet, soundless, voiceless,
and she, gladdened by its softness, the hush of its silence,
calls her Love "silent music",
for in Him she hears, is gladdened by,
this spiritual music, its harmony.
He is not only silent music, but
Sounding solitude.

The harmony, more than the music of the spheres of Pythagoras and Plato, is wisdom, the embodiment in nature of the beloved Bridegroom Who brings it all about. And we are all part of it; we are the music, says Eliot, while it is heard.

**The Rest**

These experiences are but "hints followed by guesses", not to be held on to, but reflected on, for "only in time" can we remember the moments: "in the rose garden", "in the arbor, where the rain beat", or "in the drafty church at smokefall".[338] And the hints should be allowed to influence our daily life, "the rest", perhaps in George Herbert's sense,[339] is rule, "discipline": prayer, private and liturgical, thinking and doing.

Krishna said in the Gita:

Whoever forsakes all wants
lives free from desire, from ownership, selfishness,
comes to peace.
This is the state of Brahman;... he comes to the nirvana of Brahman.

Arjuna asks:

> But if thou deemst enlightenment better than work,
> why dost thou urge me to a dreadful work?...
> Tell me the way to reach the highest good.

Krishna answers:

> In this world there are two ways:
> the *yoga* of knowledge...
> and the *yoga* of work [*karma*]....
> One does not gain freedom from work by not beginning the work,
> nor draw near perfection merely by renouncing it.
> Indeed, no one, even for a moment ever exists without doing work.[340]

Christian mystics and theologians have spoken constantly of "Mary and Martha", the contemplative and active lives.[341] Eckhart, unlike Jesus, thought Martha had chosen the better part, the active life, since Mary was still striving for the perfection Martha already had:

> Mary became Martha before she was to become Mary,
> for while she sat at our Lord's feet she was not Mary.[342]

St. Teresa puzzled over whether being a contemplative or doing God's will, especially toward other sisters ("holiness", "perfection"), comes first. She finally decided that the union of wills was the absolute goal. Her reason was that since we are free to do God's will, we are answerable for our choices, but not for our experiences which may come from elsewhere. God demands of us not contemplation but "perfection", meaning that we love Him and our neighbor.

**Incarnation**

The half-guessed hint, the half-understood gift, is what was announced to Mary: *Incarnation*. God is "fleshed" in Christ and present in the moments of time touching timelessness.

The Latin author Pliny wrote at the beginning of the second century that Christians were wont to sing hymns to Christ as God. These early Christ-songs hint, each in its own way, of how timelessness met time in Jesus. In *Burnt Norton*, Eliot alluded to one of these hymns, the one that St. Paul quoted in Philippians.[343] The most famous appears in the first chapter of John's Gospel, on *Logos*: in Word

was Life,
and Life was the Light of men….
To His own He came and His own did not take Him,
but as many as did take Him in He gave them strength
to become God's children…
And Word became flesh and dwelt among us,…
full of grace and truth…
For from His fullness we have all taken, and grace upon grace.

God creates all things as Wisdom and is present to them as Word. This presence is lost on the waste land, as Eliot suggests when he quoted Heraclitus at the beginning of *Four Quartets*:

Word is common [to everything],
yet most live as if they had a wisdom of their own.

The Word became present in a special way by taking "flesh", becoming incarnate.[344] The word "flesh" connotes the "downside" of human nature: not so much temporality and contingency, but being weak, suffering and dying, having guilt and shame, lacking hope —the waste land. Word becomes incarnate in the waste land.

The two aspects of the divine presence, Word bringing about all things and Word coming to human beings who receive Him, are fundamentally one, and wisdom-mysticism blends with redemption-mysticism in Christ. However, Eliot understands Incarnation in a universal sense: all intimations of eternity in the waste land, including and especially those of the Bhagavad-Gita, are in this sense Christ-experiences.

DS-Vb: Reflection (216-233)

**Reconciliation**

Christ is "the still point of the turning world" of *Burnt Norton*.[345] The Incarnation is "actual" yet "impossible" for it is God's gift, grace. Christ,

chosen before the world's foundation, disclosed in the last of the times,

in His Gospel

uncovered the mystery hidden for many ages,[346]

and conquered time, reconciled the tenses.

The "right" action recalls the "one action", the intentness, which the descanting voice mentioned after quoting the words of Krishna.[347] Action is right when it proceeds from an inner source, as free from the tenses, past and future —not when it is mere "movement", "driven" by forces of earth ("chthonic") or mind ("daemonic"). Eliot may be thinking of deterministic theories like Marxism or psychoanalysis. Even the futile attempts to gain control of reality listed at the beginning of the movement are predictable, themselves locked into time.

The inner source, suggested for example by the lotus image from the Chandogya Upanishad,[348] is the eternal Godhead. But it is Eternity in contact with time: Incarnation. And again we have the balance of doing by undergoing, action as passion, patience.[349]

**No Surrender**

"Most of us" aim at this freedom but do not gain it "here" in the waste land. The saints, in contrast, represent an ideal for Eliot: they are "intent" at "every moment".[350] But the failure to reach the goal is no defeat as long as we keep "trying", never give in. Teresa gives this advice to those

> wishing to drink of the water of life
> and walk until they come to the source itself—
> it matters much, everything actually,
> *how they should begin*:
> [I mean:]
> with a great and very determined determination
> of not stopping until they reach [the water of life],
> come what may,
> whatever happens,
> however hard the work,
> no matter who criticizes them—
> whether they arrive there or die along the way.[351]

**Contentment**

When it is time for ("temporal") us to return ("reversion") to dust "under earth/ Nourishing the corn" or as "wastage" on the ocean floor,[352] we shall be "content" to "nourish" the life of others in "significant soil". Eliot again refers here to the Gita. If we shall have achieved some maturity and detach-

ment and “do not think of the fruit of action”, it will be enough for us if our action, our mind’s “intent”, “shall fructify in the lives of others” —if we hand on the yearning for the other “intensity/ For a further union, a deeper communion”.[353]

All this comes to pass “not too far from the yew-tree” in the churchyard, whose roots “curl /Down on us” in the grave.[354] The ambiguity of the symbolism of the tree, death and resurrection, is a hint of hope. “Fare forward”.