The Spirituality of T. S. Elliot

Four Quartets

INTRODUCTION

Four Quartets (1935-42) is T.S. Eliot's last and most important work; it has been deemed the greatest poem written in English during the last century. After its publication he received the Nobel prize in 1948. He brings in ordinary things into these four poems: a stay in the countryside, dancing, music, birds, flowers, riding the underground, going for a sail, even air-raid duty during the London *blitz*. He reflects on his own life and his family, on our age and its history, but also on the "world" in the twofold sense of the reality created by God and of a godless waste land. In fact, *Four Quartets* is his "answer" to *The Waste Land*. In this work he wished to "retune" —as he said each age must do— "the delicate relation of the Eternal to the transient".[1]

Eliot suggests how the timeless may break into our own time, as it split the life of St. Augustine or of the Buddha into a before and after. Eliot will tell us about a similar experience in a rose garden.[2] For within the ordinary the extraordinary may appear at disconcerting "moments",[3] signaling certain truths, perhaps initiating a "conversion", which Eliot thought of as a t*urning*—a turning both *away, from* and *toward, beyond*. He was curious about what these moments mean in themselves and especially what they imply for the rest of life: what do converts do after their conversion?

Eliot's interpretation of spiritual experience is traditional. The canon of the Christian Scriptures and liturgy is foundational as well as the theology behind the mysticism of St. Augustine, Dionysius, Dame Julian of Norwich, the author of *The Cloud of Unknowing*, and above all St. John of the Cross. He thought that timelessness touches time objectively in Christ. But as in *The Waste Land*, the religious heritage of India is essential: the Bhagavad-Gita, the Upanishads, and Buddhist writings.

Literary echoes reverberate throughout the quartets from Dante to Tennyson, from Milton to Mallarmé —even *Alice in Wonderland* and Sherlock Holmes![4] Philosophy, his major subject at Harvard University, is also present. He begins *Burnt Norton* with a quotation from the Greek philosopher Heraclitus which sets the tone for all four *Quartets*. Each Quartet is marked by

one of the four "elements" of Greek philosophy: air, earth, water, and fire.[5] The elements bind the four poems into a universe, and, since for the Greeks they were linked to gods, they hint at a divine presence. Traces of Aristotle, especially his *Metaphysics,* of American idealist F. H. Bradley, topic of Eliot's dissertation, of Henri Bergson, metaphysician of the "surge of life" whom Eliot heard lecture in Paris, and of other philosophers appear in the work. The combination of philosophy, poetry, and mysticism is uncommon today; but in this, too, Eliot was traditional: early Greek philosophy was written in verse. Actually, philosophy has always been a "servant" of theology and theology an inspiration for philosophy.

Eliot thought of his poetry as music. Each poem is like a Beethoven string quartet, and just as its musical counterpart, is "scored" into five "movements" having various "tempos": lyric, colloquial, reflective, academic.... As in music, "themes" are developed and woven together, both within one quartet and, with increasing complexity, in later ones.

The first movement of each quartet sets the scene at the place named in the title. These places were of great personal significance to Eliot; in *Burnt Norton*, for example, he describes his own surprising "moment" in the rose-garden. In the second movements he reflects on time, change and decay.

In the third movements he ponders detachment, purification, especially, but not exclusively, from the viewpoint of St. John of the Cross.[6] They reflect the intense mood of the long third movement of the quartet in A minor by Beethoven, of which Eliot was especially fond. The composer called the slow part of this movement a "holy song of thanksgiving to the Divinity by a convalescent, in the Lydian mode" of medieval Gregorian chant.[7] The composer entitled the second, livelier, part "feeling new strength". The development in the movement suggests "recovery", going from illness to health— and this is the basic theme of *Four Quartets*: healing and deliverance, asceticism and mysticism.

The short fourth movements are lyrical, sometimes prayerlike. And, again as in music, there is resolution, not only in the fifth movement of each poem, but in the *Four Quartets* as a whole. The turning point of the work is found in the fifth movement of *Dry Salvages*:

> The hint half guessed, the gift half understood, is Incarnation.

The final movement of the last quartet, *Little Gidding*, sums up —eschatologically— a number of strands developed in the four quartets: when

> …the fire and the rose are one.

THE EPIGRAPHS

At the beginning of *Burnt Norton* Eliot quotes two sayings of Heraclitus, the Greek philosopher called "dark" or the "riddler".[8] As young man, Eliot was influenced by him and at the end of his life avowed that "this influence was a permanent one".[9] The many-layered meanings of these short phrases (some are Christian interpretations) will run through all four quartets, not only the first.

THE WORD

The first quotation suggests a paradox reminiscent of the waste land: the "logos" or

> Word is common [to everything],
> yet most live as if they had a wisdom of their own.[10]

Heraclitus contrasts two basic facts here, one about the world and the other about people. In the first place, reality has a surface and a depth:

> * Seen on the outside, things are in constant change, at "war"
> with one another, for
> war is father of all, king of all,
> and the world is like a stream where
> different waters flow around those wading into the
> same rivers.[11]

* Things are ultimately penetrated by *logos*: word, reason. *Logos* keeps all things together, keeps them in balance. It is their underlying coherence, meaningfulness, understandability. It is the logic behind things in change.

On the other hand, *logos*, depth, is lost on most people. Heraclitus introduced the passage that Eliot quoted with the phrase:

> what is common ought to be followed.

But most people live on the surface, caught up in, bound by, the goings-on in their lives, always changing, yet staying ever the same. They may take becoming, "dialectic", for reality, forgetting what is common: *logos*, meaning.

Heraclitus's word suggests the Christian Word of God. In the prologue of St. John's Gospel, Christ is called the "*Logos*" of God. The passage was influenced by Jewish wisdom literature: Christ is the Wisdom of God as He brings the world about:

> In the beginning Word was,
> and Word was ever with God, and Word was God;
> by Word all came about, was made,
> but without Word nothing that was made came to be.

Word is the source of all meaningfulness.

THE WAYS UP AND DOWN

The second saying from Heraclitus is:

> The way up and down is one and the same.[12]

Eliot will repeat this saying in *Dry Salvages*:

> And the way up is the way down, the way forward is the way back.[13]

Clash

The saying in general suggests that coherence underlies the clash of things changing. Heraclitus's distinction between surface and depth reflects the Greek understanding of reality as a tangle of "world" and "chaos". "Fire" symbolizes both.

* *Kosmos* (like "*mundus*" in Latin) is the "world" of things that are as they mean: orderly, meaningful, "formed", adorned, beautiful. World is timeless and spaceless; it is is still and unchanging. This is the *logos* of Heraclitus, the "measure", balance, behind change. *Kosmos* is fire:

> this world, selfsame in all things,
> neither by gods made nor men,
> but ever was, is, shall be:
> everliving fire,
> kindling in measure, burning out in measure.[14]

Kosmos is as it *means*. It is open to our understanding, because our understanding is itself *logos*, word, reason. Plato spoke of a world of "forms", the "contents" of things, their patterns or meanings— their "truth", which we reach through our mind without "feeling" them in sensation or imagination.

* *Chaos* is things *becoming* through time and space, things betwixt meanings, going from one form to another, fleeting, perhaps "deformed", unlovely. Change is fire. The comings and goings of things and in ourselves are flames, flickering up and down. Our minds cannot lock into things as they are becoming, yet to be, but we see, hear, picture them as they share meaning.

Heraclitus tells us we ought to hold for his *logos* (= his saying and what it means) because it is *objective*:

> It is wise to hearing not me but my word —that all things are one.[15]

The Fathers of the Church interpreted this Greek world-view in accordance with the Christian Scriptures. God is Alpha, Source, beyond "this world" that He brings about, grounding its meaningfulness. But God, in Christ, is also Omega, the ending of history in the "world-to-come". This is the setting for *Four Quartets*: Eliot speaks of reconciling the before and after, the here and there, at the still point.

The Christ-song

The "ways up and down" was one of the first images Christians used to profess their understand of Jesus Christ. *Burnt Norton* will echo the Christ-song, an early creed in Aramaic quoted by St. Paul in Greek:

* *down* —lowering, "emptying" (*kenōsis*)

> Christ, being in the form of God… emptied himself,
> taking the form of a slave, coming to be in the likeness of men,
> he lowered Himself, becoming obedient until death, even the death of the cross

"therefore"

* *up*— raising (*hypsōsis*)

God raised Christ up
giving Him the name above any name: "Lord".[16]

The Jesuit poet Gerard Manley Hopkins expressed this faith in his sonnet "That Nature is a Heraclitean Fire and of the Comfort of the Resurrection":

...nature's bonfire burns on,
But… her clearest-selvèd spark
Man… how fast his mark on mind, is gone!...
Enough! The Resurrection…
In a flash, at a trumpet's clash
I am all at once what what Christ is, since He was what I am…[17]

In Dark of Night

For St. John of the Cross, the way up and the way down have another sense found in *Four Quartets*: they are "the same steps to go up and to go down" in the contemplation of the Godhead. His background here was "Jacob's ladder". Jacob, we read in Genesis, had a dream:

a stairway rested on the ground, its top reaching to the sky,
and on it angels were going up and down.
And behold God stood above it and said:
"I am the Lord God; …behold, I am with thee,
wherever thou goest...".[18]

The mystical doctor mentions the ladder or stair in his most famous poem, *Dark Night*. He describes how the "soul", the bride burning with love for God, leaves her home "in dark of night" to be with her Beloved;

in dark, but safe,
down the secret stair, in disguise,
oh blessed grace,
in darkness, lurking,
my home stilled at last.

In his prose commentary on this passage, John explains why he calls the contemplation of God, a "secret" stair.

the same steps lead up and down;
so also this secret contemplation,
by bringing to the soul the same communications,
lifts her up into God, yet brings her down.
For the communications that are really from God have this characteristic:
at the same time they both raise and lower the soul,
because along this way, coming down is going up:
for whoever raises himself shall be humbled,
and whoever lowers himself shall be exalted….
God often has the soul go up on this stair
that she come down, and come down that she go up;
and so fulfilling the words of Wisdom:
high is the heart before its downfall,
but humility goes before honor.[19]

Rising to the dark of silence

Apophatic or negative theology is an important key to understanding *Four Quartets*.[20] John of the Cross was following Dionysius the Areopagite,[21] who in his *Mystical Theology* ("Hidden Godword") stressed that in reference to the Divine

> we should sing of what we affirm and what we deny in different ways:
>
> * we *affirm* by beginning with first things and going *down* through mid to last things,
>
> * then, by going *up* from the last things to the highest, we *deny* them all,…

in order to see that dark above being, hidden away from all light in beings.

Dionysius adds:

> my word, after rising above, beyond, all ascent, will be all voiceless and all made one with the Unspoken.[22]

We go down, away, from God by attributing to him less and less appropriate features, and we go back up, nearer, to God by denying of him more and more appropriate features, until we see him above all attribution and denial.

The *Mystical Theology* inspired a long tradition about "progress" in the changing "ways" (stages) of thinking and speaking of God:

> * The *affirmative* (*kataphasis*) way; when we say that God is "good", "wise", "just".
>
> * The *negative* (*apophasis*) way; when we take back these affirmations in a sense, realizing that God's goodness, wisdom, and justice are other than these traits in things that are familiar to us.
>
> * Both yield to a *higher* way, ("*hyper*"), when we disclaim both the statements and their denials, because we recognize that God is above all affirmation and negation.

The ways are one, then, in the beyondness of God. St. Thomas Aquinas, thought that we come to see in God

> not what is but what is not;
> and the more maturely we know God in this life
> the more we understand Him to lie beyond all our mind grasps.[23]

The search for God, then, demands that our thought and language be "cleansed" more and more.

Asceticism, what the "soul" does, is traditionally connected with the affirmative way, and what it undergoes (in mystical contemplation) is connected with the higher ways. Eliot says that the way we take when we "descend lower" though asceticism

> ...is the one way, and the other
> Is the same, not in movement
> But abstention from movement
> by which we "ascend" to God.[24]

Ultimately it is Christ`s way and our way that is "one and the same". Jesus said:

> I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life.[25]

BURNT NORTON

1935. AIR is the symbol of the first quartet. Greek philosopher Anaximines took air to be the basic stuff of the universe and held that

> air is god, the forces pervading elements or bodies.[26]

In *Burnt Norton* air is ambiguous. "Cold" air blows trash and fills the "unwholesome" lungs of passengers in the Tube, but "vibrant" air disturbs the rose-petals in the garden and moves the dust while the garden children laugh.[27]

Burnt Norton is the name of a manor house in the Cotswold Hills, county of the south west of England, where Eliot stayed in 1934. There, by an empty, rather ugly, pool in a formal garden, the normal flow of his life suddenly stopped, and he became aware of timelessness. In the poem he reflects on this "moment" and at the end hints that Christ may be associated with such experiences.

"Spiritual" events are not uncommon. These "surprises" are pleasurable, even powerful, and they often follow upon a painful crisis. Some, Eliot suggests, have such an experience but do not follow it up, thus leaving a religious dimension a might-have-been in their lives. For others they awaken a commitment marking a new direction in their lives. Christian traditions have taught that "consolations" are good and may be welcomed, but since they are ambiguous they should be evaluated and acted upon with caution. Also, those who have enjoyed these strong feelings may become anxious when they fade and try to hold on to them or get them back. St. John of the Cross recommends a *turning*: turn around and face an unknown spiritual future; Eliot would say "fare forward".

BN-I: THE MOMENT

The first movement states the theme of all four Quartets: the possibility, from time, to glimpse the timeless. Henri Bergson saw a difference between a clock-time, the *chronology* of our lives, an abstraction studied in science, and *duration*, the lastingness of life. Greeks spoke of temporality as:

* *chronos*: the moving "now", the succession of the tenses, the cycle of seasons, our daily schedules, our resumes; the rhythm of life that Ecclesiastes will describe, quoted in *East Coker*. [28] *Chronos*, clock-time, is the sameness in change, Heraclitus's ups-and-downs, Eliot's "timekept" waste land.

* *kairos*: a time-for, an opportunity, a chance-to, a moment for breaking through time to sense Heraclitus's *logos*, Word.

In the New Testament "*kairos*" may have an eschatological sense:[29] the "last hour", the ending of history, the *parousia* when Christ comes again. The book of Revelation speaks, in a time of persecution, of the words of Christ:

> Blessed are they... who hear, heed, the words,
> for *kairos* is near.[30]

St. Paul had told the Thessalonians:

> as to *chronoi* and *kairoi*, brothers, ye have no need for me to write unto you, for ye know very well that the Lord's day is coming like a thief in the night.[31]

Eliot says any *chronos* may be a *kairos* to espy timelessness. Every moment may be "redeemed". Twice, at the end of *Burnt Norton* and at the end of *Four Quartets*, he urges us

> quick now, here, now, always—

not to waste our "sad time", which, theoretically, is for the Timeless.[32]

BN-Ia: Collapse of the tenses (lines 1-10)

It seems that now is the only real time. The philosopher F. H. Bradley, subject of Eliot's dissertation at Harvard, asked how the past and future, since they are not now, can be real. But it is with St. Augustine —who said about time that he knew what time is as long as you don't ask him what it is— that Eliot ponders the question. The saint addressed these words to God, his "Hope":

> If things future and things past *are*, I should like to know "where"
> they are.
> But if I still cannot do this, at least I know that, wherever they are,
> things to be are not "there" in the future
> and things having been are not "there" in the past;
> they are present.
> For even if things to be are "there" in the future, they are not yet
> there,
> and if things having been are "there" in the past, they are there no
> more.
> So wherever they are, whatever they are, they are but present.
> Although we speak of true things past, we take them from memory:
> not the same things which happened before,
> but words recalled from their pictures coming through
> the senses,
> left behind as footprints upon our mind.[33]

From the very beginning of *Burnt Norton*, then, we are left with puzzlement yet expectation. How is time "redeemable"? At every now in our lives, possibilities fan out into the future. We must choose one of them, but as one becomes actualized, the others become "possible worlds", counterfactual, frozen in the past, kindling our curiosity and inviting our speculation: "what if I...?" But what was and what could have been are linked to "one end... always present". In the next movement Eliot will speak more of the "there".[34] Beatriz, Dante's guide in paradise, sees God

> *...there*
> Where ends every where and when,

and Augustine himself was thinking of a time when

I shall flow, refined and melted in the fire of Your love,
mingling, into You.[35]

BN-Ib: The rose-garden (11-46)

Down the passage

Eliot's mirage-like experience at the pool in the rose-garden at Burnt Norton is a paradigm of a chance encounter with the timeless. Roses in *Four Quartets*, he explained, symbolize three things:

* the sensuous (rose is a traditional metaphor of love and sex)
* the socio-political (as in the War of the Roses)[36]
* the spiritual (the human spirit, the eternal Spirit),

but the word here seems rather to suggest the Garden of Eden come back — the great white rose of the empyrean heaven, the eternal abode of the blessed in God described by Dante in the last three cantos of his *Paradiso*. The last words of *Four Quartets* will relate the rose to the Spirit:

And the fire and the rose are one.

Recalling moments "in times past" makes us think, at times with regret, about the possibilities we never actualized. Eliot is not speaking here of just any possibility, for the "passage we did not take" and the "door we never opened" may have led us into the rose-garden. Phrases like these are reminiscent of the Sermon on the Mount:

small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and there
are few who find it,

as well as of Robert Frost's poem:

I shall be telling this with a sigh
Somewhere ages and ages hence:
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference.

Or for that matter of Alice in Wonderland who could not fit through the narrow passage leading to "the loveliest garden you ever saw", and oh,

> how she longed to get out of that dark hall and wander about among those beds of bright flowers and those cool fountains![37]

This chance we missed, our lost opportunity —was it for an insight like the one Eliot is about to describe? Does the fact that we must first go "down a passage" hint that we can prepare ourselves for "the door" opening to us? And as he recounts this strange happening, his words are "footfalls" in our mind— they will be there from now on, "always present", reminding us.

Eliot does not know "to what purpose" the event occurred, and he will say more about doubting in the final movement of the quartet. The experience itself is a contrast between:

> * *Time*: "dust" for the Ash Wednesday liturgy recalls our mortality,
>
> unto dust thou shalt return;
>
> time as the "fear in a handful of dust" that we were shown from the rock in the waste land.[38]
>
> * *Timelessness* symbolized by the "rose-leaves".

"Other echoes" in the garden may be naturalistic explanations of religious experience as psychological states induced by events in our life. Is the incident Eliot is reporting wishful thinking, a Wonderland we create to escape our waste lands? Alice wept when she could not fit into the passage, but later, after the "stupidest tea party", she did finally manage to go

> down the little passage; and *then* —she found herself at last in the beautiful garden among the bright flower beds and the cool fountains.[39]

In any case it is *we* who are invited to "follow" into the garden of roses. We must say for ourselves what the moment was or where it came from, but especially, from Eliot's point of view, what it was, is, will be, *for*, to see if it points "to one end". We should put moments aside for reflection. Dame Julian of Norwich, whom Eliot will quote in the last *Quartet*, spent twenty years thinking about her "showings".[40]

Into our first world

The thrush urges us to find "them" quickly, since "they" are near, "round the corner". "They" are the garden-people, whom Eliot will call "children" later in the movement and "children in the apple-tree" at the very end of *Four Quartets*.[41] "Our first world" suggests the Garden of Eden. Eliot repeats the phrase "into our first world". This is our key choice: will we stay back in our world or follow the thrush into our first world? Genesis gives an "etiological" explanation of guilt, suffering and death: it is the aftermath of a "fall" shutting Adam and Eve out of a garden of goodness and happiness. Entering the Garden of Eden, then, is like entering the paradise described by Dante.

To enter the garden we must pass through "the door" and "through the first gate", the gate through which Adam and Eve were expelled from Eden and through which we may return to the innocence and simplicity of the children hiding in the rose garden, to our "first world". And Eliot's words, as he speaks them, echo in my, our, mind.[42]

Deception

We follow the thrush's "deception"; he leads us to something that we only *seem* to see and hear — actually the perception is on a level much deeper than our senses. Spiritual *kairoi* may not be what they seem. Not only might they be naturally explainable occurrences, but, wherever they come from, even their spiritual dimension is dark, ambiguous, paradoxical.

The music "hidden" in the bushes which the bird answers is "unheard" and the looks, "eyebeams", of the garden-people are "unseen". Seeing without looking recalls the words of Jesus to the "doubting Thomas"

> Blessed are they who see not yet have believed.[43]

St. John of the Cross speaks of the music that is not heard in his *Spiritual Canticle*. The Bride, the soul, is seeking her beloved, the divine Bridegroom, at

> night hushed
> down calm at rising dawn,
> silent music,
> sounding solitude.[44]

In *Dry Salvages* Eliot, who himself had an experience of quietude at the time of his graduation from Harvard, will speak of a "music heard so deeply/ That it is not heard at all".[45]

Active – passive

The garden-people, through their "eyebeams", look at, commune with, the roses. The 17th-century "mystical" poet John Donne spoke of two lovers, whose

> ...hands were firmly cemented
> With a fast balm, which thence did spring.
> Our eyebeams twisted, and did thread
> Our eyes upon one double string;
> So to intergraft our hands, as yet
> Was all our means to make us one;
> And pictures in our eyes to get
> Was all our propagation.[46]

The love is still unconsummated.

Eliot uses the word "look" three times; the roses look and are looked at and he will look down into the pool. The Bride in St. John of the Cross, as we will notice below, also looks into a pool and is looked at by her Beloved reflected in the water. In another sense all things have the "look" of contingency about them: they are "looked at" by God, Who after bringing them into being

> saw that they were good.[47]

Timebound things are but need not be, they exist only owing to the Eternal.

The readers are involved in what will happen at the pool. We are not only accepted by the garden-people as their guests, we also accept them; both they and we are hosts as well as guests. They receive us as we receive them into ourselves. Traditionally, God is met in mutuality: we both undergo and act, we are both passive and active; Eliot comments on this paradox in *Four Quartets* and in *Murder in the Cathedral* as well.

Pattern

The garden-people move "without pressure", willingly, knowingly, calmly. There is expectation in the "vibrant" air; in these banal surroundings that something odd is about to take place. We now join with them and move together "in a formal pattern", Traditionally, enlightenment assumes community, discipline and regularity: liturgy. Eliot will say that besides the "hints" and "guesses" about "moments", there is "prayer, observance, discipline,

thought and action".[48] Spirituality is more living than experiencing; it a rule for life, with intellectual, esthetic, and ethical dimensions —a central concept of monasticism.[49] The "pattern" will appear again at the end of the quartet.[50]

The moment by the pool

The experience at the pool, which Eliot now briefly describes, is important for understanding *Four Quartets* as a whole, since it is the prototype —Eliot's personal paradigm— of "moments" pointing to eternity from within the transient.

The setting is humdrum, even unpleasant. We approach along an "empty alley", unsuspecting, and come upon an ugly "concrete" pool, "drained" and "brown edged". Suddenly time stands still, *chronos* becomes *kairos*. Water of light fills the pool and a lotus-flower softly, quietly, rises in its midst. The garden children behind us are reflected in the water, looking at us, containing laughter.

The lotus

The lotus flower is a Hindu symbol showing the universality, the objectiveness, of the pool experience. In *The Waste Land*, Eliot quoted the voice in the thunder from the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad;[51] now he evokes images from another Upanishad, the Chandogya. In this work, our body is pictured as Brahmapuram, the walled city of Brahman. Brahman is deep Reality, the unlimited and eternal Ground of all being. Our heart is the lotus flower in the center of the city, the heavenly shrine enclosing *ākāśa*: "inner space", ether, air, sky. There Brahman dwells; indeed, Brahman *is ākāśa*:

> in this walled city of Brahman
> is an abode shaped like a small lotus,
> containing a tiny inner space.

There we are to seek Brahman, disclosing itself in its own selfhood and as the foundation of all "outer space".

If the disciples ask the master:
"what lies there, in this city of Brahman
—with its small abode shaped like a lotus,
enclosing a tiny space within—
that one should seek and wish to understand?"
he would reply:
"that space in the heart is as great as this space
which holds heaven and earth, fire and air, sun and
moon, lightning and stars;
it contains all: whatever is, is not, of it in this world;
it embraces all within it".[52]

The lotus-flower spans all the elements: it has its root in earth, its stem in water, its leaves in air, its flower turned toward the fire of the sun. The pool in the garden itself embodies the four elements: "brown", "water", "dry", "sunlight". It sums up all things, all time; the whole *kosmos* is present. The pool, the flower, is the whole world, and we go beyond the world, leave it behind as a unit, to timelessness.

At a deeper level the city of Brahman is not merely the body but Brahman as Self, Âtman:

this is the Âtman, free from evil, old age, death, sorrow, hunger and thirst;
its want is for the truth, its commitment is to the truth.[53]

This again is paradise, the Garden of Eden. Knowing this Reality is the only way to freedom:

all who leave [this world] without understanding the Âtman and these true wishes,
will lack the freedom to do as they wish in all the worlds,
but those who leave, having understood the Âtman and the true wishes,
will have the freedom to do as they wish in all the worlds.[54]

These passages recall similar Christian imagery. St. Teresa of Avila, the great Spanish mystic of the 16th century, friend of John of the Cross, describes the soul as an "interior castle":

> our soul is like a castle, all of diamond or very clear crystal,
> where there are many abodes, as in heaven there are many dwellings:...
> some above, others below, others to the sides;
> but at the center, in the midst of them all, is the main dwelling
> where things of great secret go on between God and soul.[55]

Meister Eckhart, the central figure in medieval German mysticism, had also spoken of the "little walled town or castle in the soul":

> God comes into this one thing that I call "a little hamlet in the soul"....
> Therein He comes and ever remains,
> and the soul, with *this* part, not others, is like unto God....
> May God help us to become a little town like this that Jesus went up into,
> and to welcome Him into it, so that He remain in us eternally.[56]

The directive to seek God within ourselves is common in Christian mysticism; the "*Sero te amavi*" of St. Augustine is an example:

> Late I loved Thee,
> Beauty, old yet new,
> late I loved Thee.
> Behold, Thou wert within
> but I without, out where I sought Thee.[57]

Eliot may have been aware that St. John of the Cross in his *Spiritual Canticle* also described a "pool experience" with the "looks" between Bride and Bridegroom; in fact, the stanza about "silent music" quoted above follow and comment on it. In the poem the soul, the Bride, goes about searching for her divine Bridegroom:

> Where hidest thou,
> Love, leaving me breathless?

She asks all creatures if they have seen her Love; they reply that He did indeed hurry by "leaving them lovely". But she complains that creatures only wound her the more with their "babbling".[58] The Bride then chances upon a spring; she looks down into the water and exclaims:

Silver spring,
oh, if on thy face flashed
just, all at once,
the eyes I wish for,
hold deep inside!

The eyes of her Bridegroom suddenly look up at her from the water, but she cries in astonishment:

turn them away, Love.[59]

In another poem John of the Cross places "knowing" the spring in the context of apophatic theology:

Oh, well I know Wellspring,
pooling, running,
although by night.[60]

Eliot saw the surface of the pool glittering "out of heart of light". In *The Waste Land* Eliot mentioned a heart of light which seemed rather to be a heart of darkness, "the horror".[61] The phrase also recalls the words of Jesus:

I am the light of the world.[62]

Laughter

Now a cloud overshadows the pool —as the "black cloud" in the fourth movement, suggesting the cloud covering the theophany on Mount Sinai or the "black clouds" of the Himalayas. The vision of the lotus flower vanishes as quickly as it appeared, the pool is again empty and we return to "normality". The moment, however leaves "footprints [that] echo in the memory".

The garden children "behind us" are excited and seeing our surprise can barely contain their laughter. For in their innocence, goodness, joy, they *know*. Knowing timelessness they know what suddenly encountering its possibility can do to a person taken unaware. We will see the same simplicity and amusement in Beatrice, Dante's young guide in paradise, when she observes his reaction to the still point.[63]

But the bird tells us to "go" four times. It is useless to try to hang on to the moment, since

...human kind
Cannot bear very much reality.

In *Murder in the Cathedral*, which Eliot was working on when writing *Burnt Norton*, St. Thomas à Becket spoke the same words to the women of Canterbury, who asked his forgiveness for any "consent" they might have given to his martyrdom. He bade them "be at peace with their thoughts and visions", because another "moment"

Shall pierce you with a sudden painful joy
When the figure of God's purpose is made complete.

With time even the pain would be forgotten and the joy remembered:

When age and forgetfulness sweeten memory
Only like a dream that has often been told
And often been changed in the telling. They will seem unreal.
Human kind cannot bear very much reality.

Is this true of moments like the one at the pool?

You shall forget these things, toiling in the household,
You shall remember them, droning by the fire.[64]

Jesus told His disciples at the Last Supper:

many things yet I have to say to you, but you cannot bear them now.
But when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will teach you all the truth.[65]

Eliot is especially interested in what comes after spiritual experiences.

So the experience in the rose-garden, which really "has been", as well as the events which might have been, everything, all the worlds, actual and possible, point to the one end, the purpose, which is always present: Eternity.

BN-II: THE STILL HUB

In the second movement Eliot reflects on, responds to, the experience in the rose garden.

BN-IIa: Reconciliation (47-61)

War

The world and our history within it are at the edge of the wheel of time revolving endlessly around a stationary pivot. For Eliot this center point accounts for the wheel existing and, as for Heraclitus, reconciles its changes and clashes.

"Garlic and sapphires in the mud" may refer to lust and greed, the two great drives leading to terror and war,[66] concretely to the battlefields of World War I, which ended four years before the publication of *The Waste Land*: axles of ammunition carts, pieces of howitzers, sticking out of the mixture of slime and human remains, the sound of the wind on the tangle of stripped trees and barbed wire. The "inveterate scars" are of guilt,[67] the mindless brutality of the waste land. But there is a force for peace in war, and time mends, a point Eliot will make especially in *Little Gidding*.[68]

The whole

The "dance" of our metabolism, "along the artery", is part of nature, along with the rise of the sap in trees and the wheeling, "the drift", of stars in the sky. Milton spoke of the dance of planets and angels. The Greeks saw musical harmony in nature: *chaos* and *kosmos*, change and *logos*, Word, discord and resolution, woven together as time goes on.[69] Tennyson also spoke of how the human soul is one with the leaves, how human beings, all life, will have formed a whole throughout time:

> So that still garden of the souls
> In many a figured leaf enrolls
> The total world since life began.[70]

Even the savagery of dogs tearing boars apart has its lasting counterpart frozen in the sky, the constellation of the Hunting Hounds.

BN-IIb: On the moment (62-89)

The Still Point

The following passage from *The Rock* links the two parts of this movement:

> The Eagle soars in the summit of Heaven,
> The Hunter with his dogs pursues his circuit.
> O perpetual revolution of configured stars,
> O perpetual recurrence of determined seasons,
>
> O world of spring and autumn, birth and dying!
> The endless cycle of idea and action,
> Endless invention, endless experiment,
> Brings knowledge of motion, but not of stillness;
> Knowledge of speech but not of silence;
> Knowledge of words, and ignorance of the Word.[71]

The still point is God, and the allusion is to Dante's *Divine Comedy*, an account of his visit to hell, purgatory, and paradise. Dante's guide was Beatrice, the young girl whose beauty and innocence inspired his work. Paradise is the finale, the garden of Eden come back, come true.

When she saw his astonishment at the sight of the Divine Point, Beatrice reacted in the same way as the children in the rose-garden, "containing laughter" at our surprise:

> … Her face painted with laughter,
> Beatrice kept still, gazing at,
> caught on, the Point which overcame me.
> She then began:
> 'What thou wouldst hear, I tell you,
> not ask, since I myself have seen it *there*
> where ends every where and when.
> Not to gain more goodness for Himself,
> which cannot be, but that His brightness
> could state, by shining back, 'I am',
> in His eternity outside time,
> beyond all inclusion, as He wished,
> eternal Love opened up to new love'

by creating the world.[72] The stillness is the soul's silence, described by St. John of the Cross:

In dark of night,
longing with love, burning,
oh blessed grace,
I left unseen,
my home stilled at last.[73]

Being there

Eliot speaks in paradoxes found in the New Testament and the philosophy of Aristotle.[74] God is not flesh since He is immaterial, nor fleshless, since

Word was made flesh and dwelt amongst us.

God is transcendent yet immanent, also incarnate in the world by bringing it about. He is neither from nor for anything but Himself. The quiet Point is neither resting nor moving, there are no Heraclitean ways up and down, nor is it, but brings about, the dance of nature.

St. Augustine did not know "where" the "there" of the tenses is, Beatrice saw God "there" where "there" is no when and where, and Eliot said he was "there" at the "moment" without knowing "where" or "how long".[75] This incomprehension is not the ignorance of the waste land but the unknowing of John of the Cross or the author of the *Cloud of Unknowing* or of Dionysius who thought

Source above all sayings and denyings.[76]

Freedom to understand

The "moment" in the rose-garden "gathered", concentrated, our outlook at the still Point, giving a perspective from which we see all else. As this refocusing takes place outside of time, we feel no longer bound to the stimuli acting upon us and to our own drives, environment and genes. "Suffering" here means having pain, but also "undergoing". "Action and passion" are two of the "categories" which Aristotle suggested we use to describe an object: what it does and what is done to it. The gathering of outlook frees us both from our wanting to do things and from our wanting to have things done to us, from whatever lies outside the still Point.

This "inner freedom" applies not only to the "realization", the sudden awareness, at the pool but to any awareness in the framework of asceticism (to be fleshed out in the next movement), indeed to a "beatific" awareness

beyond death. "Gathered", "concentration", also connote the spiritual practice of "recollection", which Eliot will explain.[77]

Liberation comes with "a grace of sense": we feel blest with the common sense of seeing everything falling into place, of recognizing Heraclitus's word, the Word of St. John's Gospel. But the paradox is more. "Sense" is at once *emotion* and *meaning*: the experience in the rose garden is vivid sensation yet somehow makes sense. The "white light" "glittered" but was "still", "quiet" like the Lotus. We rise and are uplifted, elated —the meaning of the German word "*Erhebung*"—[78] but without stirring; Eliot will allude at the end of this quartet to the raising of Christ. The soul "rises", said St. John of the Cross, when the Bridegroom suddenly looks upon her from the "silver spring".[79]

The Light includes and concentrates everything in itself, from stars to war matériel, "ecstasy" and the "horror" of heart of darkness,[80] *kosmos* and *chaos*, the worlds "new" and "old". Early Christians and the Jews of the Second Temple recognized a moral tension between two "worlds" or "ages":[81]

* *This* world: our daily world of suffering and death, injustice, guilt, ugliness. It is the *kosmos* of St. John's Gospel. But the "horror" is only one aspect; there is also "ecstasy", seeing the possibility of something different.

* The world *to come*: "the answer", denouement, Eden having come again with joy and life, innocence and beauty. God's reign whose coming Jesus preached and prayed for to His Father.

However, our consciousness, being locked into time, limits and actually "protects" us from recognizing either world to the full: our hell and our heaven. Our "flesh" —the word retains the traditional connotation of weakness and mortality— "cannot endure" realities like this.[82]

Time for thinking

Since things future "are still not there" and things past "are there no more", explained St. Augustine, "they are but present" by being recalled and foretold. Consciousness lies not in time if the present itself is the borderline between past and future. When Eliot says we are "a little" conscious but not in time, he may also be thinking of Plato's "forms" which the Greek Christian theologians interpreted as "divine ideas". Plato said the meanings that we understand about things in time (being-just, being-lovely, being-a-flow-

er…) are themselves timeless and spaceless; our understanding raises us above, beyond, space-time. For Christian theology, this meaningfulness is rooted in Word, the still Point, Whom we are able to recognize "but a little".

However, only in time can we remember moments like at the pool and others that Eliot will bring into *Four Quartets*. In his French poem *Dans le Restaurant* Eliot described an encounter with a little girl under an "arbor", where they had sought refuge from a spring downpour:

> I was seven, she was smaller,
> she was soaked through, I gave her primroses,…
> I tickled her to make her laugh.
> I felt a moment of power and delirium.[83]

Eliot continued to ponder the meaning of these feelings. In an essay he wrote six years before *Burnt Norton*, he commented on the event that changed Dante's life: his meeting with Beatrice when he was a nine-year-old boy. Such moments are better understood not by "what [is] consciously felt" at the time they occur, he says, but "what it meant on mature reflection upon it". He tells us we must "find meaning in the *final causes* rather than in the origins" of these moments. "Final cause" is Aristotle's expression for purpose, what something is *for*; he thought that the goal of natural things is to grow up over time into their unique "perfection", fulfillment.

So we should worry not so much about what our spiritual moments were but where they were going then and are going now. What is to come is more important than what has been. This "faring forward", "advancing", is important not only for Eliot but especially for St. John of the Cross. The Mystical Doctor wrote, surprisingly perhaps, that of spiritual experiences which

> fall within our feelings beyond our control, I say: the soul
> —in whatever time or season, in whatever state it is in,
> whether mature or not so mature—
> *should not wish to welcome them,*
> *even though they come from God..*

And he gives two reasons for treating them "with misgivings":

* we become attached to the experiences and think we "own" them
* we waste our time trying to tell if they are authentic or not.[84]

Spiritual beginners, he says, are infants who must eventually be weaned, since God,

> when He sees them a bit more grown up, removes them His sweet breast, so that they may become strong and take off their baby clothes,
> and He puts them down from His arms, so that they get used to walking by themselves.
> To them it feels as if this is all new, since everything seems to be going backward.[85]

From earliest times, both in the east and in the west, "discernment of spirits" (*discretio spirituum*) was considered essential to survival in the monastery and it remains a crucial guide to spiritual maturity today.

BN-III: THE PROVEN WAY

Eliot was aware of St. John of the Cross's teaching that spiritual maturing supposes freedom from created things for the love of God. And he knew that "freedom" is ambiguous: being freed from human affection, he wrote in a letter, is "only to become rather more a completely living corpse than most people are".[86]

BN-IIIa: The Tube (90-113)

Surface and depth

The waste land, as we have pointed out, possesses certain traits literally that have had important metaphorical meanings in traditional spiritual lore. The hyacinth girl's friend and the rich woman's husband "knew nothing" and kept "silence", the landscape was "dry", cisterns and chapel were "empty".[87]

Now Eliot contrasts experiences like that in the rose-garden with day-to-day situations, with our "place of disaffection" in the blur of time. The commuters in the London Tube are "unhealthy souls" with "strained, time-ridden faces", perhaps fleeing from one distraction to another to escape tedium. Religion itself can offer an escape from reality. Theoretically, saints deal with the same humdrum reality as everyone else, and if they do not flee from it it is because for them it is not quite the same reality.

Light and dark
The "dim light" in the subway car and the "flicker" of passing lights on the faces of the commuters contrasts light and darkness.

* The lighting in the subway is not the "daylight" that anchors all the "forms" or the features of changing things in their ultimate "permanence" at the still Point, "turning shadow" into beauty, *kosmos*. Eliot's images recall Aristotle and Plato, but he is thinking especially of a phrase from the Epistle of James about God at the still hub:

> every good gift, every perfect present, is from above,
> coming down from the Father of lights,
> at Whom there is no *variation*, no shadow due to *turning*.

"Variation" and "turning" are astronomical terms referring to the change in the position of heavenly bodies and their fluctuation in brilliance at different positions in the sky.[88]

* The subway darkness is not Dionysius's "beam of divine dark". It is not St. John of the Cross's "night of the senses" which cleanses feelings and "affections" from the "temporal" things that stand in our way to God.[89] John explains:

> here we call "night" the lack of all things,
> for just as night is but lack of light and hence of all objects
> seeable in light, and thus our sight stays in darkness, with
> nothing, so too, the deadening of our wants for all things may
> be called "night", since, by taking away from the soul the taste
> of our wants in all things, it is like staying in darkness with
> nothing.[90]

Full and empty
The passengers are "full" and "empty"— but not in the spiritual sense. They are "filled with fancies", but lack the "plenitude" that St. Paul's wished for us:

> that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith,
> that ye, being rooted and grounded in love,
> be able to grasp, with all the saints,
> the breadth and length, the depth and height,
> and to know the love of Christ
> which passeth all knowledge
> that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God.[91]

They are "empty of meaning", but they do not empty themselves as Christ "emptied Himself", to do God's will.[92] Their mind, memory, and will are not emptied as they must be in the "night of the spirit"; these functions, says St. John of the Cross,

> are as deep as the great goods of which they are capable,
> for they are not filled with anything less than the boundless;
> from how they suffer when empty
> we can somehow glimpse how they delight, are joyous, when
> full of God. [93]

The "apathy" of the "torpid" commuters is pathological, "tumid", not the holy detachment that comes from the "concentration", "gathering", of outlook, from undergoing God's unifying presence and from living according to this unity.

The subway air is "faded… torpid", not "vibrant" like the air in the rose-garden. The "cold wind" that "unwholesome lungs" breathe in and belch out ("eructation") whirls around the people and their trash over time through the "gloomy hills" of London, the "unreal city" of the waste land.[94] For in London there are no "lovely hills" any more, like once Hampstead and Highgate, upon which William Blake saw the heavenly Jerusalem being built —in contrast with the vile factories which caused such human suffering. He asked, thinking of the legend that Jesus, after the resurrection, travelled to England with Joseph of Arimathea to build the new Jerusalem,

> And did those feet in ancient time
> Walk upon England's mountains green?
> And was the holy Lamb of God
> On England's pleasant pastures seen?

> And did the Countenance Divine
> Shine forth upon our clouded hills?
> And was Jerusalem builded here
> Among these dark Satanic Mills?[95]

In London

> There shall be one cigarette to two men,
> To two women one half pint of bitter
> Ale. In this land
> No man has hired us.
> Our life is unwelcome, our death
> Unmentioned in "The Times".[96]

In this waste land of our "twittering world", there is "no darkness" of the encounter with God.

BN-IIIb: The world (114-126)

In the third movement of all four quartets Eliot comments on *detachment*, an important teaching of Western and Eastern religion. It is John of the Cross's "nothing-all" paradox: to find the Divine we must renounce all things, to gain all we must own nothing. This axiom of asceticism is suggested in the epigraph from Heraclitus: "the ways up and down are one and the same". One commentator gives this interpretation: "different aspects of the same thing may justify opposite descriptions", and he quotes another of Heraclitus's sayings that cutting and burning, normally harmful for a person, "call for a fee" when done by a doctor.[97]

Doing and undergoing

Eliot's "ways" echo the two aspects of purgation mentioned by St. John of the Cross: we must actively do something and passively let something be done to us.

> From these imperfections the soul cannot purify herself wholly,
> until God puts her into the passive purgation of that dark night; …
> the soul should strive by herself to do all she can to mature; …
> but help herself as she may,
> she cannot actively cleanse herself to become in the least readied
> for the divine oneness of the perfection of love,
> if God does not take her hand and cleanse her in that fire,
> which for her is dark.[98]

Each stage in the maturing pattern is marked by an active and a passive "purification", and the purification affects functions, both cognitive (knowing) and affective (wanting, willing). As the soul endeavors to purify her desires and to meditate on the mystery of God she prepares herself for allowing grace to purify her faculties and to enlighten her mind through contemplation in faith.

The descent into the worlds

Eliot has spoken of "old" and "new" *worlds*.[99] He now urges us to "descend" into the world of "solitude" at the still Point. It is and is not, he says, the world. Christ prayed that his disciples remain both inside and outside "this" world, the *kosmos* of St. John's gospel, the waste land:

> I gave them Thy Word for they are not of the world as I am
> not of the world.
> I pray not that Thou shouldest take them out of the world
> but that Thou shouldest keep them from evil;
> they are not of the world as I am not of the world.
> Make them holy through thy truth; Thy Word is truth.
> As Thou hast sent Me into the World,
> even so have I also have sent them into the world,
> and for them I make Myself holy,
> that they also might be made holy through the truth.[100]

The "new" world "to come", the "world not world", is God's reign coming and having. This is the world —God reigning— we should "descend into".

But the descent is in "internal darkness". Eliot here repeats the traditional teaching on becoming spiritually mature. Rather than biography, it is an anthropological schema about what, theoretically, will have had to happen for coming to the Divine. Entering the timeless world means going into

the night. "This world", the one to be renounced, Eliot subdivides into two sub-worlds:

* The world *outside* of us, material goods. We must in some sense forego "all property" ("deprivation and destitution").

* The world which each of us *is*. According to a theory of man common in Christendom,[101] human beings have two kinds of functions: "sense and notion" (as Eliot will say in *Little Gidding*):[102]

1) sensory *feelings*, which include:
* "the world of *sense*", which must be dried up ("desiccation"): seeing, hearing, touching…
* "the world of *fancy*", which must be emptied ("evacuation"): instinct, imagination…

2) "the world of *spirit*" (functions going beyond the purely physiological). According to St. John of the Cross, following St. Augustine, "spirit" comprises mind, memory, and will. These functions must cease ("inoperancy") in the sense that they should open up to God's action through the three "theological" virtues: faith, hope, and love.

The two ways are "the same" (as Heraclitus would say), because they are but the same movement toward the goal of union with God. They differ in that the first is active and the second passive. In the passive way, we must avoid "movement" in several senses:

* Life should not run on rails, the predictable "metalled ways" of the crowd (even the spiritual crowd), timeful, driven by the usual wants ("appetency"). It is better to live, not on the outer edge of the wheeling universe, but at its still Center where no motion offsets freedom.

* Feelings and spirit, to be open to God, should be stilled.

Cleansing for enlightening

St. John of the Cross describes the "three ways", the order in which the soul, from the time

she begins to serve God until she reaches the last state of maturity,
the spiritual marriage;… until she reaches it,
there are three states or ways of spiritual exercise that she passes through:

* purgative,
* illuminative,
* unitive…[103]

and he explains the "features and effects" of each.

Between these ways lie two "dark nights", corresponding to two kinds of darkness or purgations, according to the two parts of the soul:

feelings and *spirit*:

* One night or purgation is sensory, when the soul is cleansed in her feelings by having them yield to the spirit.

* The other night or purgation is spiritual, whereby the soul is cleansed and stripped in her spirit by having it yield to, readying it for, oneness in love with God.[104]

These are Eliot´s "worlds of sense, fancy and spirit.

The purgative way calls for active cleansing (renunciation) and thinking (meditation); the night of the senses marks a transition to passivity, when feeling and thinking give way to contemplation bestowed by God.

Renunciation

Eliot's worlds here are related to the three monastic vows.[105] They are also called "counsels of the Gospel", for they are intended to help anyone whatsoever to become free for God. They are according to Eliot:

* poverty: "destitution of all property"
* chastity: "desiccation of the world of sense" and "evacuation of the world of fancy"
* obedience: "inoperancy of the world of spirit".

St. John of the Cross is careful to point out that freedom is more not wanting than not having; when he says the night "strips" the soul,

> I do not mean lacking things,
> since if she has wants for them, lacking them does not strip her.
> I mean being stripped of the tastes and wants for things;
> this is what leaves the soul free and empty of things even though
> she has them.
> For the things of this world do not beset or harm the soul,
> since they do not get inside her;
> rather the willing and wanting them that dwell in the soul itself.[106]

This is the meaning of *detachment*, "letting go".

BN-IV: NIGHT AND FAITH (127-136)

The short lyric contrasts day and night. The "bell" of the clock rings the end of day, and its tolling marks the end of us, our burial. The "black cloud" blots out the sun —as the "cloud passed" cutting short the "moment" in the rose-garden. St. John of the Cross says that the "drying up" of spiritual feelings is the first sign that the soul may be entering the night of the senses:

> As she finds no taste or consolation in the things of God
> neither does she find them in any created thing,
> since God places the soul in this dark night
> to make her dry and cleanse her sensory wants,
> letting her find sweetness and satisfaction in nothing.[107]

God spoke to Moses in a "black cloud" on Mount Sinai, and in the waste land Prajâpati spoke in the thunder from the "black clouds" over Mt. Himavant.[108] The Biblical cloud of theophany, the

> gloom of secret stillness… above understanding,

was a basic symbol in Dionysius's apophatic theology.[109] His anonymous 14th-century English disciple spoke of a "cloud of unknowing" that ever remains between God and us; Eliot will quote him in *Little Gidding*.[110]

Will the overcast vanish, will the sunflower "turn to us" that we may see? Christ appears as the *Sol justitiae* in a Lenten hymn for lauds:

> Now, Christ, Thou sun of justice,
> may the darkness of our mind break open,
> so that the light of virtue come to us again
> as again Thou to our lands leadest back the day.[111]

The "clematis" vine —perhaps signifying Mary, the mother of Jesus— may enfold us even when we lie in the grave. The yew-tree, an evergreen often planted in churchyards, symbolizes life after death; its "chill" roots may reach down into our coffin. At the end of *Dry Salvages* Eliot will mention the yew again in the context of a search for freedom.[112]

At the approach of night, the kingfisher, as it hovers far above before swooping down out of sight, catches the light of the sun which for us has already set. But we do see the sunlight if only reflected. Just as the thrush in the rose-garden, the kingfisher is telling us something, leading us somewhere. Sunlight is "still" at the still hub, even if we cannot see it directly. "Still" is a pun meaning both *endless* and *motionless*, and it may have a third meaning here: *despite* —the Redeemer is there even though I do not "know" that He is. In Christian tradition, faith entails unknowing.[113]

This fourth movement has been seen as a pattern poem (like George Herbert's *Easter Wings*), where the printed form resembles the wings of the kingfisher.

BN-V: STILLNESS

In the last movement Eliot comments on the timelessness of art, music and literature, complains how hard it is to manage words, fits a Christian "exception" into a reasoned view of God and the universe, and like John of the Cross encourages haste in the search for God.

BN-Va: literature, art, music (137-158)

Form

Eliot speaks here in Greek fashion, of two aspects of literature, art, and music:

> * their *matter*, concrete *things*: in music, the air molecules made to vibrate by vocal chords or violin strings "while the music lasts". or the ceramic molecules of a Chinese urn. Things move and exist "only in time" and space, and so cease: sound dies out, vases break, people die. This is Aristotle's world of sense: listening to things, looking at them, feeling them. It is the rim of the cosmic wheel.

* their *form*, the meaning of a poem, the structure of a string quartet, the look of a "jar". The forms exist together with the things: the poem spoken, the music played, the jar standing there. Actually, form heralds the things which embody them and outlasts them. This is Plato's world of forms, "ideas", outside of space-time, which the church Fathers identified with the *Logos*, Godword, the world of "stillness" at the hub of the wheel of the universe.

Eliot is recalling the *Ode on a Grecian Urn* by John Keats. An eternity is present in the woman painted on the vase:

> Thou still unravished bride of quietness,
> Thou foster child of silence and slow time…

and, as the soundless music of John of the Cross,[114]

> Heard melodies are sweet, but those unheard
> Are sweeter; therefore, ye soft pipes, play on;
> Not to the sensual ear, but, more endeared,
> Pipe to the spirit ditties of no tone…

Things should lead us to their deep meaningfulness:

> Thou, silent form, dost tease us out of thought
> As doth eternity!

On the Greek contrast between the two "worlds",

* the timeful, material
* the timeless, immaterial,

with which the human being makes contact through his "sense and fancy" and "spirit", Christians and Jews have overlaid the tension between the two worlds or ages:

* *this* world, the waste land
* the *coming* world.

Eliot insists that the world to come has come already; it is the still world toward which the garden-people "moved" "in formal pattern". The ascent of Mount Carmel is also an ascent to truth and beauty:

> Beauty is truth, truth beauty….

Words

But there is a "division",[115] a barrier, between the two worlds, and we must *struggle* for form in our speech, music and art. It takes discipline to get words to signal our meaning. They never stand still for us; there are always "voices" co-opting them, scolding, shrieking, mocking. Who of a certain age can hear the *William Tell Overture* without thinking of the Lone Ranger?

Religious terminology is especially vulnerable to being coopted. "Contemplation" is a coping strategy, "mystics" charge for online chats, businessmen plan "retreats" to build community, addicts need "spirituality" to get off drugs. "Spirit" no longer means understanding of mind and commitment of will, the opposite of "feeling".

Words, especially sacred words, should "reach into the silence", "reach the stillness"—or "tease us out of thought/ As doth eternity".

Temptation

Voices attacked the written word, even "Word in the desert". After Jesus was led by the Holy Spirit into the waste land and had fasted forty days and nights,

> The Tempter came to Him and said,
> "If thou art the Son of God, tell these stones to turn into loaves".
> Jesus answered him:
> "Not on bread alone will people live, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God".[116]

There is no escaping temptation in the waste land. The final two lines of this section seem to refer to St. Anthony of the Desert, the founder of Christian monasticism. St. Athanasius wrote in his biography that Anthony went into the desert after reading Jesus's words:

> If thou willst be perfect go,
> sell all thou ownest and give it to the poor,
> and thou shalt have treasure in heaven;
> and come, follow Me.[117]

Athanasius described how the saint resisted the frightening, bizarre temptations of the demons in the desert. After twenty years living as a hermit, he emerged

> as a person guided by reason and standing in his natural state,

an ideal of Greek *logos*, reason —virtue, honor—, and of the *Logos*, Word, leading back to the innocence of Eden.

BN-Vb: Approaching God (159-175)

Maturing in love

Religious lore describes in "detail" now holy people have approached the Divine through a foreseeable "pattern", in a "movement" structured, even disciplined. Eliot has already outlined the "three ways" and now he notices a second "progress theme" of St. John of the Cross: the "ten stairs" or "steps" in the love of God.[118] In his poem *Dark Night*, the saint, thinking of "Jacob's ladder", recounted how he left his home unseen,

> In darkness, but safe,
> Down the secret stair, in disguise,
> Oh blessed grace!
> In darkness, lurking,
> My home stilled at last.

In his prose commentary on this curious stanza, he explains "more substantially" why this "secret wisdom" or

> secret contemplation is called a "ladder":
> Contemplation is a science of love, an infused loving knowledge,
> both enlightening the soul more and making her love more,
> raising her rung by rung unto God, her Creator.[119]

Then, following St. Bernard and St. Thomas Aquinas, he describes the effects of each step, so that the soul may have some "inkling" where she is, even though

> knowing these steps in themselves is impossible naturally; since the ladder of love is so secret, God alone measures and weighs it.[120]

In the first step, the soul becomes ill with the love of God "for her own good"; John quotes the *Song of Songs*:

> Daughters of Jerusalem,
> if thou findest my love, tell Him I am sick with love,

a verse that recalls his own *Spiritual Canticle*

> Shepherds! climbing there
> through fields, if you chance to see
> the Love I love most,
> tell Him how I pine for Him,
> how I suffer and die.[121]

The soul then searches more deeply for the Beloved. In the fourth step, she accepts suffering for His sake, especially by foregoing spiritual selfishness.

> Oh God, my Lord! How many there are who go looking for consolation and pleasure in Thee, wanting Thee to grant them favors and gifts;
> but those out for giving *Thee* pleasure, something that costs them, putting aside their own ends —
> they are few indeed![122]

In the next stages, the soul longs ever more for God, becomes more daring in seeking Him, becomes united with Him, burns with love, is likened to Him.

Love

Eliot now uses theological terms borrowed from Aristotle to restate his world view. God is, without becoming. He is still, "unmoving", changeless, as He is both the *efficient* "cause" of all becoming (the "unmoved Mover") and its *final* cause or "end", goal, "love". Aristotle wrote:

> there is something ever moved with motion ceaseless and…
> circular; …
> hence there is also something moving it… moving without being
> moved,
> something eternal, …substance and actuality, …bound to be; …
> just as what is desired and thought moves our want and will
> without being moved….
> The Final Cause is the beautiful, the good…
> and it causes motion as being an object of love….
>
> Life belongs to God,
> for the actuality of thought is life, and God is that actuality;
> the actuality of God is life: the best, eternal….
> Living, then, and eon, ceaseless and endless, belong to God;
> for that is what God is.[123]

Being the Source of all is the same as being the Goal of all, since God moves by drawing all things to Himself. All things "desire" Him in their own ways, and desiring is "movement" toward Him. But God as loving does not desire anything outside of His own Self.

Our "desire" is not "desirable", since wanting implies that we still lack the good we are after. On the cosmic scale, the desire for God means we are still moving, yet to be "at rest", united to Him; as St. Augustine said:

> Thou hast made us for Thyself and Our heart shall not rest until it rests in Thee.[124]

Nearing to God through love is basic to spiritual anthropology. As sense yields to mind, so mind, understanding, must yield to will, loving. St. Thomas Aquinas thought that when we know God we draw Him down to our level, but when we love Him we are drawn up to Him as He is. Eliot will speak more of love in *Little Gidding*.[125]

The exception

"Philosophically", in Aristotle and his Christian followers, God as Love is "unmoving" and "timeless" but God is the first "cause" and the "end" or final cause of motion. Also in itself, timelessly, love is "undesiring". But there is a Christian "exception" here: God as Love is indeed *desiring* "in the aspect of time". Eliot seems to be referring to the movement in the Christ-song: *down*

by *kenosis*, self-emptying (in the incarnation and crucifixion), and *up* by being raised (in the resurrection and exaltation). God was "between:

* *un-being*", "unmaking-himself": descending, "in an aspect of time" from being

in the form of God, not holding on to being equal to God,

but "caught in the form of limitation" by

taking the form of slave,
coming to be in the likeness of men, in shape found to be like a man,
humbled Himself, obedient to death

* and *being*": "turning back", being lifted up by God to be "Lord of all".[126]

Why wait?

Eliot ends *Burnt Norton* by returning to the rose-garden, "while dust moves" and is "disturbed on the bowl of rose-leaves". Suddenly startled by "a shaft of sunlight", we heard the children in the foliage laughing at us. "To what purpose" we do not know; nevertheless we should always be "quick" to follow the thrush into the garden, for *chronos*, "stretching" to past and future, may become *kairos*.

St. John of the Cross was also in a hurry. Eliot agrees that it is "ridiculous" to" waste our "sad time". John introduces his *Spiritual Canticle*, the poem he wrote "in the love of abundant mystical understanding", in this way, speaking to the soul:

knowing what she ought to do,

seeing that life is short, world things vain and beguiling,
that everything comes to an end, runs out like water spilt,[127]

knowing the great debt she owes God for creating and
redeeming her for Himself alone,…
and so owing Him answer to His love,

seeing that much of her life has already gone up into the air,
that it is now toward evening, the day far spent,[128]

giving all things up, deeming all business unworthy,
without waiting even for one day, one hour,

yearning with all her heart, now wounded with God's love,
she begins to call out to her Beloved:

Where hidest Thou,
Love, leaving me breathless?
Thou hurtest me,
then ran like a deer,
I called after, but Thou wast away.[129]

We, caught in the midst of the flow of our "sad time" wasted, of our "waste" land, are invited,

Quick now, here, now, always,

to listen to "the hidden laughter"

EAST COKER

1940. EARTH is the second quartet. For the Greeks it was one of the four elements of nature and it was the earth-god Gaia, who like the sea-god Oceanus, was born of the night. At death we return to the earth; it buries us and our civilizations.[130] But the earth nourishes us as it did the simple people of the past and promises the renewal of life.

Eliot saw East Coker, a small village in the county of Somerset in south-west England, as his beginning and his end.

* It was his beginning, since the village was his ancestral home. His forbearer Andrew Elliot emigrated to America from East Coker in the 17th century. Another ancestor, Sir Thomas Elyot, had published in 1531 *The Book Named the Governor* on the humanistic ideals of the Renaissance. Eliot quotes from the book in this quartet.[131]

* It was his end and the end of his family. Eliot, who had no children, is buried in East Coker. The hour of our death is "the hour of our birth".[132]

He visited East Coker in 1937 when he was 50, in mid-life, "the middle of the way", as he will say, quoting Dante.[133] It was about ten years since his acceptance of Christianity.

Eliot took *The Governor*, the first printed work in English on education (1531), to represent the Renaissance, the beginning of the modern period which he thought was coming to an end in the waste land of the 20th century.[134] His ancestor had stressed just what he himself was not so sure about: that the human being as his own "governor" can create a "harmonious" society. Recently influential educators assume that we are already living in a "postmodern" age, questioning not only the utopian expectations of modernity but the very canons of rationality that it retained.

So in *East Coker* several time-strands, which begin and end, are mixed together:

* our modern age
* the Eliot family
* Eliot as a person.

With the help of the Biblical book of Ecclesiastes Eliot will take a closer look at the idea of cyclical time —that seasons, lifetimes, and histories repeat themselves endlessly—, and he will contrast it with a *linear*, straight-line, view of time: that things are going *somewhere*, generally "better" than the present. In the 19th century, Marx saw history, Bergson or Darwin saw life, Hegel saw everything, advancing. For Eliot, all these "ends" —of ourselves, our kin and culture— are figures of *the* ending: dénouement, the finale (the "*eschaton*"), Eden come back. Time points elsewhere, outside of time.[135]

East Coker begins and ends with beginnings and endings. The final words of the poem, "in my end is my beginning" (in French *en ma fin est mon commencement*) was the motto of Mary Queen of Scots, who lived during the Renaissance in the 16th century and was beheaded for political and religious reasons. The words were embroidered on her chair and are now inscribed on Eliot's tombstone in East Coker. But the poem begins with a reversal of the motto: "in my beginning is my end". So the movement of the quartet is:

beginning ⟶ end ⟶ beginning.

The second beginning differs from the first in that it is the *last one*, the "at-last"; *East Coker*, then, moves toward hope.

EC-I: BOUND TO THE EARTH

The first movement shows time moving in a circle: everything —people, history, nature— are earthbound, crude, fleeting, apparently senseless.

EC-Ia: Sameness (1-13)

To dust

The motto "In my beginning is my end" introduces East Coker "materially". "The word "house" includes the Biblical meanings of household, dynasty, and temple. Houses —buildings, families, churches— come and go, may even come back. Solomon's temple was destroyed, later rebuilt, and destroyed again for good. Buildings are torn down to make way for expressways. Their timber is burned as firewood and their stones reused. According

to the story of the Garden of Eden, toil and death are the result of eating the forbidden fruit, perhaps symbolizing the attempt to decide for ourselves, in humanistic fashion, what is objectively good and bad:

> in the sweat of thy brow shalt thou eat thy bread until thou
> return to the ground,
> for from it wast thou taken;
> for dust thou art and unto dust shalt thou return.[136]

Eliot's family came to an end when he did. The remains of "man and beast", of our artifacts sacred and profane, mingle together in the earth, with the war materiél mentioned in *Burnt Norton*.[137] Eliot's lines here echo the pessimism —rather the realism— of the Book of Ecclesiastes:

> The lot of man and the lot of beast is but one lot:
> one dies, the other dies, they breathe the same breath;
> man has no advantage, but all is vanity.
> All go to a single place, all are dust and to dust all return.
> Who knows whether
> the breath of the children of man goes upward
> and the breath of the beast goes downward to the
> earth?[138]

Vanity

"Time" here is routine, the seasons of ordinary time, *chronos*, repeating itself over and over. It is, further, a token of *kairos* in the sense, say, of the chance, at some "moment", to become aware of the possibility of timelessness. We are bound to the wheel of life and death, determined by the rhythm of nature. Eliot now imitates Ecclesiastes:

> For every thing there is a time, a season for every purpose
> under the sky:
> a time to be born and a time to die,
> a time to plant and a time to uproot;
> a time to kill and a time to heal,
> a time to tear down and a time to build;
> a time to weep and a time to laugh,
> a time to mourn and a time to dance;
> a time to cast stones away and a time to gather them,

a time to embrace and a time to be far from embracing;
a time to seek and a time to lose,
a time to keep and a time to throw away;
a time to tear and a time to sew,
a time to be still and a time to speak;
a time to love and a time to hate,
a time for war and a time for peace.[139]

Time comes for the "wind" to "shake" the empty house, like the manor house of Eliot's forbearers at East Coker, with its ancient windows, woodwork, and tapestry ("arras"). The "silent motto" recalls not only Mary Queen of Scots "My end is my beginning", but more particularly Eliot's family motto, which with him was to die out: "Be silent and do" (in Latin, *Tace et Fac*). The phrase evokes Eliot's active-passive theme, and he will comment on it in this Quartet.[140]

These "times" are "wind", futility, a puff of breath wasted on the air:

vanity of vanities, says Ecclesiastes,
vanity of vanities, all is vanity…
I have seen all things done under the sun,
and behold, all is vanity and a chase after wind.[141]

In *Dry Salvages* Eliot will say that we "cannot face… steadily" the fact that "time is no healer".[142]

EC-Ib: The Lost Village (14-50)

Eliot now repeats the motto "In my beginning is my end", this time to introduce a kind of daydream of the people who dwelt in East Coker centuries ago. The vision parallels the experience in the rose-garden in the first movement of *Burnt Norton*.

The approach

Eliot addresses the reader personally as "you". "*I*", then, am walking along a road toward his family homestead on an ordinary lazy summer afternoon, "still" and "sultry". The "open field" is sunlit but I am walking in a lane shaded by rows of trees and cut deep by years of traffic. I press close to the bank to let a truck go by. There is a certain passivity in my walking: the lane hems me in and forces me toward the village where it leads.

The setting, like the garden in *Burnt Norton*, is humdrum, ordinary; the lane is dark, hazy, grey. The flowers are asleep; I feel "hypnotized". But there

is suspense; something is going to happen. The air is "electric", as before a storm, just as in the rose-garden the air was "vibrant" with expectation. Then we were told to follow the thrush quickly; now I am invited to "wait for" a bird that will usher in another vision. This time the bird is an owl, symbolizing wisdom —and the night. Eliot will dwell on the ambiguity of wisdom and darkness.[143]

The vision

As long as I do "not come too close" and remain detached both from the ordinariness of the experience and from the experience itself, accepting but not probing it, the scene becomes darker still; it is midnight. I hear music and see common folk from the past playing and dancing on the "open field" around a bonfire, the "bone-fire" of a midsummer feast of ancient nature religion, the fire which for Heraclitus symbolized the flux of reality and its coherence in *logos*. Their dance blends with the dance "along the artery" and "in the drift of stars" in *Burnt Norton*;[144] their music is also the music of the spheres. They are one with earth and sky.

Eliot lifts a section here from *The Governor*, the book written by his 16th-century ancestor. Man and woman dancing together, touching each other, conveys peace, friendship. Their marriage is a "sacrament", for religion is fused into their natural "coupling". They are "dignified", as the garden-people in *Burnt Norton*. The beat of the dance marks the cycle of their lives reflected in the starry sky and in the routines listed in Ecclesiastes: sowing, milking, reaping, mating, voiding. "Dung" and "death", are the end of the digested and of the digester. Eliot displays the closed natural circle of birth, life with its "rustic" solemnity or mirth, and death.

Elsewhere (47-50)

Dawn points toward, begins, "another" day "here" in East Coker with the same "heat" and "silence", as it points out "there" toward the wind ruffling the sea. It is the dust and breath of Ecclesiastes, the same "vanity". Eliot is now "here", but also "there", anywhere, as individual, as kin, as age. And he is "elsewhere". In *Burnt Norton* he said we have been "*there*" but "cannot say where".[145] What is the "silence" for? Eliot mentions only beginnings here, not endings, but in the fifth movement he will speak of a search for "another intensity". In *Little Gidding* Eliot will reflect on the Breath of God.[146]

EC-II: ENDINGS

Eliot now does consider *ends*: of the seasons, of the sky, of the world, of old ages and old people. Is there an ending that is a beginning?

EC-IIa: Denouement (51-67)

Disturbances

Snowdrops bloom in the spring and hollyhocks and roses in the summer. We are surprised if they bloom in late November when winter is coming. Even though they turn "grey" and die quickly, they cause a "disturbance" jarring our perception of the turnover of seasons, the cycle of warmth and cold, life and death. Does this odd "November" in our lives, our families, and in our modernity hint at another sort of spring coming? What kind of spring?

Entropy

The second movement of *Burnt Norton*[147] showed reconciliation both in human history and in the *kosmos*. Now we see nature at war again: "thunder" is also cannonfire, stars are "deployed" as battle chariots, constellations "fight" the sun. But the late autumn sky is all defeat: the sun goes down to the equinox, the moon wanes, stars ("Leonids") fall, fly, in November, hunt the heavens; comets are tears running down the face of the firmament.

Eliot sees not only himself, his family, the modern age, but all nature, the whole universe, reality, as losing the battle, rushing toward its last end. Four endings converge here:

* the entropy of the universe
* the conflagration of Greek philosophy
* the Christian *Eschaton*
* the destiny of each "little soul" at the *Eschaton*.[148]

If *entropy*, the third law of thermodynamics, is right, the world is winding down, cooling off, scattering outward. Its organization is unravelling, evolving toward an Aristotelian "rest", the absence of motion, toward a time when "the ice-cap reigns".

Conflagration

The "vortex" bringing about the "destructive fire" before the entropic chill is like the a "whirl" or "eddy" (*dinē*) that according to early Greek philosopher Democrituas causes the universe to unfold necessarily:

> everything comes about since it is bound to,
> for vortex is its cause, called "Must".[149]

For Heraclitus, unfolding takes place through "war":

> war is common [to all things] and right is strife;
> all things come about through strife and need;
> war is father, king, of all.[150]

Things clash in a huge bonfire: the *kosmos*

> ever was, is, shall be —is everliving fire,
> kindling in measure, burning out in measure,[151]

even as the villagers danced around their own bonfire at home.

The Stoics (and perhaps Heraclitus himself) believed in the *universal conflagration* (*ekpurōsis*). The primeval fire, driven by fate or internal law (*heimarmenē*, *logos*) will eventually consume all of reality.

Still, for Heraclitus the world is from ever and forever, and for Stoics even the *end* of the world is cyclic: there is a never-ending series of worlds ending in conflagration. Some Stoics conceived of the conflagration as a cleansing process; Eliot will speak of the purification of the soul in the next two movements.

The very last thing

Christians held for a linear, straight-line history with a single ending: "the very last thing" (*eschaton*). The early theologian Origin saw it as a "rectification" or "restoration" (*epanorthosis*, *apokatastasis*), a denouement when all people, purified, indeed all things, would return to oneness in God. Greek theologians also saw the end as St. Paul's goal of bringing everything together under Christ (*anakephalaiōsis*):

Then the end,
when [Christ] hands the kingdom over to God the Father; …
when all is put under Him,
then the Son Himself will also be under Him Who put all under Him,
so God may be all in all.[152]

The the once-and-for-all ending of history and nature, has an ethical dimension for Christians: time runs straight to "God's Day", doomsday, when we shall all be judged —justice-at-last. The second book of Peter speaks of the end as a conflagration, as do the Greek philosophers:

God's day will come as a thief in the night,
when the skies shall pass away with a roar,
the elements burn up, melt away,
and the earth and all its deeds shall be burned up.[153]

Jesus quoted the Hebrew prophets when He spoke of the end of the world in the "Synoptic Apocalypse" (in the gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke): after the "tribulation", the destruction of the Jewish Temple in 70 AD by the Romans,

in those days the sun shall be darkened,
and the moon shall not give its light;
the stars shall fall from the sky
and the powers in the heavens will be shaken.[154]

So Eliot's images, then, are both philosophical biblical and recall the apocalypse in *The Waste Land*.[155] But unlike this earlier poem, in *East Coker* there is optimism: that strange hope of "late roses filled with early snow". Jesus —and the author of II Peter— took the cataclysms in the sky as *signs* of the return of the Son of Man. Conflagration means the "arrival + presence" (*parousia*) of Christ, His coming back and staying, Eden come back, God's reigning having come.

EC-IIb: Humility (68-100)

Eliot, then, was ambivalent about social meliorism, the belief in built-in betterments in the history of society. Progressive educators revive the conviction that history of itself head toward a just society, even a "new man". These seem to be religious hopes secularized, the Christian *eschaton* brought down

from the timeless to future time: from the elsewhere and elsewhen to the here and later. Religious hope is based upon "faith", but any secular forecast demands "reasons". Eliot recommends humility in our readings of history, in the understandings of our faith.

Words and revision

Eliot complains again, as in the last movement of *Burnt Norton*, about wrestling "with words and meanings", referring now to the preceding passage, which is complex, roundabout ("periphrastic") and "worn-out". Actually, he says, the "poetry" matters less than the value of our changing expectations that it portrayed.

Did our "elders", forbearers, speaking with such quiet self-assurance —perhaps Sir Thomas in *The Governor*— "deceive" us by letting us expect "serenity" and "wisdom" in history, its old age, our own old age, our family's? Did they believe it themselves? Actually the "calm" they "looked forward to" and "hoped for" was but a "wisdom" only about "dead secrets". Their knowledge is "useless" for the mystery, the "darkness" that they tried to "peer" into or refused to face.

Worse, their dullness, "hebitude", is "deliberate", as if truth were secondary. *Hebitudo mentis*, said St. John of the Cross, affects even the mature and must be dealt with in the darkness of the night:

> dullness of mind,
> and the natural coarseness we all come by through sin,
> and our distracted spirit,
> must be enlightened, taught, and focused
> by the hardship and stress of the night.[156]

As we get older our past folly embarrasses us. The patterns we have imposed on history and on our personal stories get "falsified" as we get older and wiser, and hindsight makes us humbler in their regard. This humility is "endless" not in the sense of a constant futile dialectic but as deepening realization of what must be true. In the waste land, then, a healthy revisionism is appropriate: a *turning*, ongoing *metanoia*, "repentance" in the sense of altering how we think in order to alter what we do.

The "darkness" we try —or do not try— to penetrate is the theme of the first part of the next movement.

The dark wood

Eliot now quotes from the beginning of Dante's *The Divine Comedy*:

> In the middle of the way of our life,
> I found myself in dark wood,
> for the straight way was gone astray.[157]

Eliot stresses that we wander astray in the "dark wood" during our *whole* life, not only in the "middle". St. John of the Cross, besides his doctrine of three nights, saw the soul´s movement toward union with God as a single night having three phases, all dark:

> * the *beginning* —*twilight*—,
> dark because the soul must lack more and more the desires she had for all things of the world,
>
> * the *middle* of the the way —*midnight*—,
> that is, faith, which for her understanding is dark as night,
>
> * the *end* —the *dawn* before daylight—
> God, Who, neither more nor less, is a dark night for the soul in this life.[158]

Eliot takes us with Sherlock Holmes, Arthur Conan Doyle's rationalist detective, "all the way" into the trackless "Grimpen" Mire, where lurks the terrifying Hound of the Baskervilles. It is not a real monster, since its "fancy lights" are only phosphorus paint. But losing our "foothold" in the "little green patches" of quicksand is a real threat. There are dangers and enchantments, real and imagined, all along our dark way —even at the end.

The wisdom of the old

Eliot was questioning the "value" of the "wisdom of age"; now he speaks of "old men", not only of the "wise" men of the past but of the elderly today. Ecclesiastes had posed the problem:

> I said, "I shall be wise", but wisdom was far off;
> And what is far off, what is deep, deep—
> who shall find it?[159]

Theirs is not wisdom but "folly": they are afraid of fear, of their final "frenzy" of death, of losing control, being owned by, belonging to others, to God. There is no more resolution at the end of our ages, personal or historical, than at the beginning. He will bring up the paradoxes of old age again in *Dry Salvages*.[160]

Humility is the only wisdom open to the old, but only as long as they become "explorers", as Eliot will say at the end of the quartet.[161] For St. Benedict humility sums up the spiritual life and for St. Bernard, the "grades of humility" structure its development. St. Paul told the Philippians that they should have a "mind that is also in Christ Jesus, who humbled himself… to the death on the cross".[162] Humility is Heraclitus's "down is up" and John of the Cross's having "nothing" yet having "everything". Eliot will quote him in the next movement on detachment, the need to be stripped of everything on the way "up" to God.[163]

Earthbound

At the end of the movement Eliot uses phrases from Robert Louis Stevenson's *Requiem*. The "houses" —homes, clans, temples— and peasant "dancers" of the past, which he spoke of in the first movement are now "all gone". In *The Waste Land* the clerk visits the secretary as a "sailor home from sea" and Phlebas the Phoenician is submerged in the sea.[164] We all end up underwater or underground. But may our end also be, as Stevenson's epitaph suggests, a homecoming?

> Hear he lies where he longed to be;
> Home is the sailor, home from the sea,
> And the hunter home from the hill.[165]

EC-III: DARKNESS

Eliot now focuses more explicitly on the ambiguity of the "dark", symbol of the purgation antecedent to the encounter with the Eternal.

EC-IIIa: Two kinds of darkness (101-111)

Modernity

The first half of the first line of this movement is a quote from Milton's *Samson Agonistes*. Samson, after allowing himself —rather stupidly— to be betrayed by Delilah, was blinded by the Philistines; he laments:

> O dark, dark, dark, amid the blaze of noon,
>
> Irrecoverably dark, total eclipse
> Without all hope of day!
> O first-created beam, and thou great Word,
> "Let there be light, and light was over all".
> The sun to me is dark
> And silent is the moon,
> When she deserts the night,
> Hid in her vacant interlunar cave.[166]

Later Eliot will speak of the sun and moon. The second half of the first line is the beginning of a poem by poet Henry Vaughan, referring to dead friends; Eliot reverses the intent by changing "light" to "dark":

> They have all gone into the world of light!...
> O holy hope, and high humility;
> High as the heavens above!...
> Dear, beauteous death! the jewel of the just,
> Shining nowhere but in the dark;
> What mysteries do lie beyond thy dust,
> Could man outlook that mark [limit]!...
> O Father of eternal life…
> remove me hence unto that hill[167]

of the heavenly Zion. The dark, death, life, hope; all is now *paradox*.

Earlier, in the second movement, Eliot saw everything heading down into a dark, cold vacuum among the stars, like the commuters going down into the Tube in *Burnt Norton* or crossing the bridge into the "unreal city" in *The Waste Land*, as the dead go down into Dante's hell.[168] The dark claims everybody: bankers, *littérateurs* and *artistes*, politicians, bureaucrats, big and small business hustlers, stockbrokers, captains of industry ("Gazette"), nobles ("Almanach de Gotha"). And "we all go with them". Nor do we understand why we are doing all this, why this is happening; our knowledge has "only a limited value".

Eliot in *Four Quartets* has not become more optimistic about the waste land. The culture of capitalism and socialism contrasts with the ideals, worldly and religious, of *Re*-naissance and *Re*-formation; we have not, in fact, been born or formed *again*. We all attend the funeral but, since our death is spiritual, if there is any corpse to bury it is our own.

EC-IIIb Waiting (112-146)

Tace, anima

Eliot tells his soul to accept another kind of darkness: "the darkness of God". The context again is apophatic theology. St. John of the Cross spoke of the "blessed adventure" of meeting God when our "home is stilled at last", when the soul is like the weaned baby of the psalm, making no more demands:

> I have stilled and quieted my soul;
> as a weaned child upon its mother's breast,
> like a child weaned, so is my soul upon me;
> O Israel, hope in the Lord,
> now and forever.[169]

John speaks of the darkness of passive purification; we must "still" our house to let God act upon it.

The next three images show how the flow of our lives is suddenly broken by unforeseen or uncontrolled happenings, perhaps by *kairoi*, when our mind is emptied of the humdrum, yet with uncanny expectation:

* we lose the thread of the play when the performance pauses for a set change

* our uneasiness grows as we run out of small talk when the train in the Tube —in the "dim light" in Burnt Norton—[170] unexpectedly halts in the tunnel,

* our consciousness is interrupted when we are anesthetized for an operation.

This last image recalls the middle-aged anti-hero of Eliot's *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*:

> Let us go then, you and I,
> When the evening is spread out against the sky
> Like a patient etherized upon a table;

and we are lead:

> ...to an overwhelming question…
> Oh, do not ask, "What is it?"

French philosopher Henri Bergson defined living as growing old, and Prufrock muses:

> I grow old… I grow old…
> I shall wear the bottoms of my trousers rolled,

with the anxiety of social survival.

The theological virtues

St. John of the Cross taught that to purify the soul for union with Him, God fills its three non-material functions ("powers", "faculties") with the "theological virtues", faith, hope, and charity. This divine initiative takes place during the second night, the night of the "spirit" or of "faith", when

* faith in the intellect
brings about an emptiness and darkness of understanding,

* hope in the memory
brings about an emptiness of all owning,

* love in the will
brings about an emptiness and a bareness of all liking and gladness
in whatever is not God…

and so these three virtues put the soul into a darkness in all things into a void.[171]

Eliot wished his soul to "be still" and to "wait". For faith, hope, and love "are all in the waiting": we must await, *undergo*, God's emptying action. To gain this passivity, says John of the Cross, the soul must as far as possible stop filling the faculties with its own content, which would be "the wrong thing"; we must rather wait for God:

* without our own thought, since we are not "ready" for the "thought" of faith
* without hope for the wrong thing, our own goals
* without love for the wrong thing, what is beloved to us.

Bright darkness

Eliot speaks of paradoxes of motion and light. The "stillness" is "dancing", not the dance of the blood and the stars nor the villagers' dance around the bonfire, but the dance "at the still point" of *Burnt Norton*.[172] And when he says that darkness is somehow "the light", he is using a key image in the mystical theology of Dionysius, who wished God to draw his disciple up

> to where secrets of Godword,
> plain, alone, unchanging,
> lurk in the shining dark of silence,
> outshining in deepest darkness
> the brightest glare…
> to the ray of divine darkness…[173]

St. John of the Cross used this passage to explain why God "infuses" contemplation into the soul only "in dark of night":

> when this divine light of contemplation strikes a soul not yet
> fully enlightened,
> it brings spiritual darkness to her, since not only is it beyond her,
> but it takes from her, darkens, the act of her natural
> understanding.

St. Dionysius and other mystical theologians call this infused contemplation "a ray of darkness"; as David also said,

> near God, about Him, is darkness and clouds—

dark not in Himself, but for our weak understandings….
This is why God,

> sending this bright ray of His secret wisdom
> from Himself to the soul not yet transformed,

brings thick darkness to her understanding.[174]

Caution

"Running streams" again recalls the *Spiritual Canticle* of St. John of the Cross; here the verse following the stanza on Bride's "pool experience":

My Love the mountains,
wild lowlands wooded,
odd islands,
rushing rivers,
breaths of love whispering.[175]

Hearing the stream, seeing the lightning, smelling the thyme, listening to the laughter of the garden-children at the pool in *Burnt Norton*, are *kairoi*, unexpected, given, moments. They are sensual, powerful, "ecstatic", but they may "echo" a deeper Reality. They are also ambiguous and John of the Cross advises reserve. He comments on the beginning of the *Spiritual Canticle*,

Where hidest Thou,
Love, leaving me breathless…?

in this way:

No matter how grand the communications and feelings of His presence,
no matter how high and lofty the notions about God
that the soul may have in this life—
all this is not God essentially, nor does it have anything to do with Him,
since in truth He is still hidden to the soul,
and she always had better think Him hidden above all those grand experiences
and seek Him hidden, asking

Where hidest Thou?

For neither a lofty communication nor His felt presence is a sure sign of His presence through grace,
nor is dryness and a lack of all that in the soul a sure sign of His absence in it.[176]

However, neither should these moments be "lost" as isolated happenings. They should "echo" later in our lives and be "requiring", making demands on us. They "point" away from themselves to "agony". The word refers especially to the suffering before death, but here, paradoxically, it is

the pangs "of death and birth", the end which is the beginning. The ecstasy points to the darkness: dying to self and letting God bring to life again:

> Unless the grain of wheat falling to the ground dies, itself
> remains alone.[177]

The ascent

"Ecstasy", then does not continue; we rather find "ignorance", "dispossession" along the way. St. Teresa of Avila was surprised that when the soul enters the innermost chamber of the inner castle wherein God dwells

> all ecstasies are taken from her,
> unless it be just once,
> and then without those raptures and flight of spirit.[178]

Eliot repeats what he has said on detachment in the third movement of *Burnt Norton*, but this time his words are almost a translation of the nothing-all paradoxes that St. John of the Cross wrote under his well-known drawing of Mount Carmel. For him, spiritual maturing is like climbing a mountain; on the way up more and more is let go of (he wrote "*nada*" seven times on the ascending path), for God alone is at the summit.

> To come to taste all,
> wish to taste nothing;
> to come to know all,
> wish to know nothing of anything;
> to come to own all,
> wish to own nothing in anything;
> to come to be all,
> wish to be nothing in anything.
> to come to what you taste not,
> you must go through where you taste not;
> to come to what you know not,
> you must go through where you know not;
> to come to what you own not,
> you must go through where you own not;
> to come to what you are not
> you must go through where you are not.[179]

EC-IV: HEALING (147-171)

In these five stanzas of regular rhythm and rhyme, Eliot describes the paradox that it is painful to heal pain. Restoring health is a metaphor for God's love for man; others are buying back ("redemption"), rescuing ("salvation"), and freeing ("deliverance"). The Old English word for savior was "healer", and "salvation" and "health" are the same word in Latin, French and other languages. Eliot stresses the painful healing in the life of Christ Himself.

The wounded doctor

The surgery which cures the "enigma" of our "fever" is painful, "sharp". St. Ignatius, the bishop of Antioch, martyred in Rome at the beginning of the second century, said that Christ is our doctor —a paradox:

> There is but one Physician,
> both flesh and spirit, born yet unborn,
> who is God in man, in death true life,
> both of Mary and of God,
> first undergoing pain, then freed from pain:
> Jesus Christ our Lord.[180]

The "surgeon" is "compassionate"; He is himself is "wounded" and has "bleeding hands". Christ was identified with God's slave in the Servant Songs of Isaiah,

> spurned, shunned,
> a Man of sorrows, knowing illness;
> we turned our gaze from Him,
> did not watch Him scorned;
> yet He was bearing our griefs,
> undergoing our sorrows,
> while we thought Him hurt,
> struck, brought low, by God;
> He was wounded, pierced, for our wrongs,
> crushed for our sins,
> on Him was the punishment giving us peace,
> by His stripes we are healed;

we were straying like sheep,
each turning his own way,
yet God laid upon Him
the guilt of us all.[181]

The dying nurse

The "disease", "Adam's curse", is original sin: misery and mortality, proneness to dishonor and folly, ignorance and arrogance. The "sickness" is "flesh" in the Biblical sense. St. Paul's personified "Sin" (*hamartia*): it defines "this world", the waste land. But "health" is itself an aspect of the sickness, because gaining it makes demands. Poet Andrew Marvell said the soul is forced to bear the body's grief,

And all my care itself employs,
That to preserve which me destroys;
Constrained not only to endure
Diseases, but, what's worse, the cure;
And ready oft the port to gain,
Am shipwrecked into health again.[182]

"Obeying" the "nurse" means following Christ and His church; "dying" because, as Paul said,

since One died for all, all died.[183]

The "constant care" of the church holds out hope for health. But it recognizes the "disease", and so does not affirm us in what we are, aiming "to please" us, but insists upon aggressive treatment, for to get better we must get "worse".

St. John of the Cross said that the soul is "safe" setting out in search of God

in dark of night,…
I left unseen,…

in darkness, but *safe*,
oh blessed grace,
in darkness, lurking,
my home stilled at last.

The chief reason why the soul is safe, he explained, is that

> this dark night of contemplation
> so engulfs, folds her into itself, and draws her so close to God,
> that it shelters and frees her from all that is not God.
> For, as the soul is placed under care here to regain her *Health*,
> —which is God Himself—,
> His Majesty keeps her on a diet and in abstinence from all things,
> spoiling her taste for everything;
> just as the family of a beloved sick person, in order to cure him,
> keeps him indoors, lets him feel no air and enjoy no light,
> and makes sure that he hears no footsteps,
> even the murmur of those in the house,
> and that his food is very bland, chosen more for substance than flavor.[184]

The hospital

For Sir Thomas Browne, called "the metaphysical poet in prose", this world is

> not an inn but an hospital
> a place not to live in but to die in.[185]

The Anglican divine Lancelot Andrewes said that God visits the sinner

> as a great prince should go into an hospital
> to visit and look on a loathsome diseased creature;
> not only to visit him,
> but to look to his "purging" from that his uncleanness.[186]

Adam is the "millionaire" to whose "ruin" God our Father responded. Paradoxically, the best we can do in the hospital is allow ourselves to "die" of His "care". The dying has St. Paul's sense: Christ's

> death was death to Sin once for all, His life is life for God;
> likewise think yourselves dead to Sin and living to God
> in Christ Jesus.[187]

But death in the literal sense is not excluded. St. John and St. Teresa both wrote poems having the same refrain:

Teresa:

> I live, now not in me,
> and my high hope is that
> *I die, for I do not die*,

John:

> I live, now not in me,
> And such is my hope that
> *I die, for I do not die*,

reflecting the Pauline theme "death, where is thy sting?"[188]

The word "prevents" suggests a limitation on our range of action, but it is also a theological term retaining its literal sense of grace "coming before". "Care", then, is "prevenient grace", God's "absolute" help, which precedes all that we "do" and follows it, never leaving us. St. Augustine said that grace:

> comes before to heal us, follows after to quicken us once healed;
> it comes before to call us, follows after to glorify us.[189]

This is the sense of the collect from *The Book of Common Prayer*:

> Prevent us, O Lord, in all our doings
> with Thy most gracious favor,
> and further us with Thy continual help.[190]

William Byrd, Catholic convert of the 16th century, composed an anthem with this text.

Purgatory

Eliot uses another pair of contrasting metaphors to illustrate the paradoxical nature of spiritual maturing: chilling and burning, warming and freezing, shivering in "purgatorial fires". He may associate cold with the purgation of feelings and heat with "mental" purgation, that is, of the spirit.[191]

Purgatory belongs to Catholic eschatological belief, along with heaven and hell. The duality of heaven and hell also assumes an ethical ideal: honor and happiness ought to come together and so dishonor and affliction.[192] Job presented himself as a living, "logically valid", counterexample to the theory of his "Consolers" that those who suffer are sinners, since he suffered even

though he was "blameless and upright". And God declared him right and his Consolers wrong.[193]

For the philosopher Kant, the prospect of happiness and goodness coming together "postulates" not only that human beings are free and survive death, but also that God exists to join them. The beatitudes affirm that this ethical expectation will somehow find fulfillment:

> blessed are ye poor, for yours is the kingdom of God
> blessed are ye who hunger now, for ye shall be filled,
> blessed are ye who weep now, for ye shall laugh;
>
> but woe unto you who are rich, for ye have received your
> consolation,
> woe unto ye who are full, for ye shall hunger,
> woe unto you who laugh now, for ye shall mourn and weep.[194]

If heaven and hell are eschatological absolutes of right and wrong, "purgatorial fires" mark a movement from wrong to right, from suffering to joy. Purgatory is the continuation in the world to come of the spiritual "purgation" that Eliot has been stressing. Dante's purgatory will be an important theme in *Little Gidding*.[195]

Purgation is "flame", "roses", love. And it is "smoke", destruction, as it will be in *Little Gidding*, and unknowing, as the smoke that hid God from Moses on Mount Sinai.[196] "Briars" may imply that what goes up in smoke is, after all, something that had choked off growth. If the word hints at the crown of thorns the soldiers placed on the head of Jesus in mockery, the allusion would introduce the final stanza of this movement.

For St. John of the Cross too, the burning of love is ambiguous:

> Oh living Flame of Love,
> meek, yet hurting me
> deep at midsoul;
> Thou so art unwilling no longer,
> and if willing now, consummate,
> tear through the veil to make us one.

Oh cautery, searing cool,
wounding kindly,
oh soft hand, gentle stroke,
tasting of lasting life,
settling all I owe,
putting death to life.

Oh lamps of fire,
in thy flarings
deep hollows of feeling,
once black and blind,
now odd, lovely,
yield warmth and light to their Beloved.

How gentle, loving,
Thou com'st awake in my heart,
where in secret Thou dwellest alone,
and breathing delight,
full of good and glory,
Thou quietly win'st my love away.

Eucharist

The "bloody flesh" of Jesus on Good Friday provided the "only" medicine for the human disease. In his sermon Lancelot Andrewes went on to say: God comes to heal

by His own Self in Person,...
Himself to minister and make the medicine,
to make it Himself, and make it of Himself,
to make the medicine, and be the medicine....
Spots will out with water; some will not with anything but with blood;
...and not every blood will serve, but it must be lamb's blood,...
and not every lamb neither, but "the Lamb of God":
...and of... His best, most precious, His heart-blood,
which bringeth certain death with it;

with that blood He was to make the medicine....
by Himself, His own self, and by Himself slain;
by His death, and by His Blood-shedding, and by no other means;
who ever heard of such a thing?
The physician slain,
and of His Flesh and Blood a receipt made,
that the patient might recover.

Andrewes refers to the book of *Revelation*, where Christ,

Who loves and washes us from our sins by His own blood,

is the Lamb praised in a "new hymn":

with Thy blood Thou hast purchased us for God
those of every kindred, tongue, every people and nation.[197]

Andrewes is speaking of the Eucharist, sacramentally (symbolically yet somehow really) making us present now at Jesus's death; St. Paul passed on this tradition:

For I took from the Lord what I also hand on to you:
on the night He was handed over,
the lord Jesus took bread, gave thanks, broke it, and said:
This is My body which is for you;
do this in remembrance of Me;
also after supper He took the cup, saying:
This cup is the new covenant in My Blood;
whenever you drink it,
do this in remembrance of Me.[198]

Eliot speaks of our "only" drink and food, thinking perhaps of Jesus's words in St. John's Gospel:

Amen, amen, I say to you,
unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood,
ye shall have no life in you;
who eateth my flesh and drinketh My blood hath life everlasting,
and I shall raise him up on the last day.[199]

Dwellers in the waste land do not aspire to Christian eschatology. Jesus asked His Father to give us our substantial[200] bread, but our own flesh and blood, we think, is "substantial" enough, actually quite "sound". Even religious people are like Eliot's "broad-backed hippopotamus", which

> rests on his belly in the mud;
> although he seems so firm to us
> he is merely flesh and blood;

or French poet Théophile Gautier's "big-bellied hippopotamus":

> I am like the hippopotamus:
> by my conviction covered,
> thick armor nothing pierces,
> I fearless go through the waste land.[201]

The waste land does not understand the final paradox of "*Good* Friday"

EC-V: STRIVING

EC-Va: Attempts (172-189)

Words

Eliot continues his remarks on writing from the last movement of *Burnt Norton*. Now, in 1940, he finds himself, with Dante, in the "middle" of his way, having "largely wasted", he says, the twenty years in the lull "between two wars".[202] He sees these lost years not only as a political and ethical failure, but as a losing battle on words.

But what can the poet do with massive linguistic trauma, with the "mess" of language "deteriorating" from advertising, political spin, ideological manipulation? Today when "conditions seem unpropitious", we must at least "try" to win back, with creativity but within tradition ("by strength and submission, past discoveries, "now lost", by those whom we "cannot hope to imitate". Eliot had written:

> there can be no art *greater* than the art which has already been created: only... necessarily different combinations of the eternal and the changing in the forms of art.[203]

The religious wording of the previous movement may sound off-putting. Indeed, the times are especially "unpropitious" for "getting the better of" *sacred* words, in the midst "squads of emotion" that no longer "reach into the silence,… reach the stillness".[204] If "new beginnings" include the spiritual "ventures" of saints in the past, the phrase "by strength and submission" suggests that the religious poet today may defend and credit their experiences, perhaps adjoining a "moment" of his or her own.

The rest

Eliot invites us to try, to do what we can, and the "rest", success or failure in several senses, is out of our hands. In *Dry Salvages* he will say "do not think of the fruit of action" from the viewpoints of the Hindu karma and also from that of Christian detachment —say, of Meister Eckhart, who went so far as to recommend that we do "all our works without asking why".[205]

The "rest" recalls "The Pulley", a poem by George Herbert, "the holy" Anglican divine.[206] After giving the human being "strength" and other blessings, God withheld the last: *rest*, since

> He would adore My gifts instead of Me,
> And rest in Nature, not the God of Nature;
> So both should losers be.

He should not rest in his own wealth, he says, but seek rest. God did give him rest, but

> ...with repining restlessness.
> Let him be rich and weary, that at least,
> If goodness lead him not, yet weariness
> May toss him to My breast.

Eliot's mother used the word in another sense:

> Purge from thy heart all sensual desire,
> Let low ambitions perish in the fire
> Of higher aims. Then, as the transient dies,
> The eternal shall unfold before thine eyes,
> The fleeting hours will grant thee thy request:
> Take thou immortal gifts and leave the rest.[207]

EC-Vb: Home and beyond (190-209)

Leaving home

Robert Louis Stevenson spoke of coming home in death, St. John of the Cross of leaving his home, now stilled, for God.[208] Eliot "started from" the home of his birth and the home of his ancestors, and he now leaves home in an end which is his "new beginning"— the final line of *East Coker* reverses the first. And he expects the elderly to go on setting out.

It has been noticed how old people, before dying, become more and more disengaged from the "the world". Eliot said the world becomes "stranger" for us "as we grow older", perhaps more mysterious, because the ideas that used to go without saying for us may now seem naive. It takes "endless humility" to try to understand life and death[209] and even, especially, those uncanny "sudden illuminations",[210] like the "intense moment" at the pool that Eliot described in *Burnt Norton*. It was a gap of a few seconds with "no before and after", empty of time and so intimating timelessness. Eliot was particularly interested making sense of these experiences that "tease us out of thought".

But now he contrasts the "isolated" timeless moment with *lifetime*, ongoing *kairos*, burning at "every moment" of our life and of the lives of others, even of the dead whose names (Eliot's as well) have worn away on their tombstones in East Coker.[211] Eliot has just outlined the teaching of St. John of the Cross on the night of the spirit, when God replaces the contents of the faculties with the theological virtues: the mind with faith, the memory with hope and the will with love;[212] now he fills the moment with life.

He seems to see "lifetime burning" as recollection, gathering our faculties on God. "Praying always", " night and day", "at every moment", "without ceasing" has been a central spiritual ideal:[213] The context here is eschatological. To show that

> we ought always to pray and not lose heart,

Jesus told the parable of the widow who wrested justice from the wicked judge just by tiring him out— all the more speedily, He added, will the just Judge take the part of

> those crying out day and night to Him;
> but the Son of Man, when He comes, will He actually find faith
> on the earth?[214]

John of the Cross described the "highest" recollection as

> placing the soul in all its faculties only in the Good that we cannot understand and withdrawing it from all things that we grasp because they are not [goods which] we cannot understand.[215]

Love most nearly itself

There are "times for" family memories recorded in albums, like getting together under the stars. But the "vanity" of the "here and now" that so struck Ecclesiastes fades "when love is most nearly itself". Love, God, "is itself" *tout court*, for He "is love".[216] But Jesus prayed

> that the love with which Thou hast loved Me may be in them and I in them.[217]

Love is "*nearly* itself" is the human being who is united with God through *theōsis*, "divinization" after *katharsis*, "purification", in Eastern tradition, or through "transformation" in the night, in St. John of the Cross:

> Oh night, leading,
> Night lovelier than the dawn,
> Oh night forming
> Love with Lover,
> Lover one with Lover.[218]

He comments that he is speaking here of "secret contemplation":

> contemplation is love-science,
> knowledge of a loving God
> poured into the soul,
> giving her light and love together,
> raising her level by level
> up to God, her Maker,
> for love alone joins and ones the soul with God.[219]

Ulysses

"Old men", Eliot explained, have no special wisdom; on the contrary, they should be endlessly humble about what they think.[220] Still, he supposes, they should never give up, but go on exploring, like Ulysses, the hero of the *Odyssey*,

...the man,
from the time of the fall of Troy,
who saw the manners and cities of many men,[221]

quoted by Dante as telling about his final adventure:

neither tenderness for my son, nor honor
for my aged father, nor the love I owed
Penelope, which should have made her happy,
could overcome the passion I had in myself
to become experienced in the world
and about human vices and worth.[222]

So the old king set sail toward the Straight of Gibraltar, the "Pillars of Hercules" that warned

man not to fare beyond

out into the Atlantic, and urged his companions not to deny to

the little waking time left to your senses
an experience beyond the sun of a world unpeopled;
ponder your origin:
you were made not to live like animals
but to follow virtue and knowledge.

Tennyson had Ulysses say:

Much have I seen and known —cities of men
And manners...
Yet all experience is an arch wherethrough
Gleams that untraveled world whose margin fades
forever and forever when I move….
Little remains: but every hour is saved
From that eternal silence, something more,
A bringer of new things; and vile it were
For some three suns to store and hoard myself,
And this gray spirit yearning in desire
To follow knowledge like a sinking star,

> Beyond the utmost bound of human thought.
> ... my purpose holds
> To sail beyond the sunset...
> To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield.[223]

But there is an ambiguity here. Tennyson may have thought that Ulysses was more foolhardy than heroic,[224] and Dante places him in hell for giving irresponsible advice. In the *Divine Comedy* Ulysses tells Dante how his company sallied into the Atlantic, far south, but after sighting a huge mountain, the Mount of Purgatory, they were swallowed up by the sea.[225]

Purgatory is like St. Paul's "not yet":

> not that I have already gained it or have already become perfect,
> but I strain after it to see if I can win it,
> since I have been won by Christ;
> brothers,
> I do not yet think I have won it, but one thing I do know:
> forgetting what is behind,
> stretching out for what is ahead,
> I strive after the goal, for the prize of the upward calling of God
> in Christ Jesus.[226]

The last two "purifications" are the night of the spirit and purgatory for St. John of the Cross. He thought that before even the hardiest soul is united with God in a "spiritual marriage", she must pass through a second night,

> a purgation darker, gloomier, more dreadful[227]

than the first. But the spiritual marriage is consummated only in heaven. In his *Spiritual Canticle*, which would chronicle the history of the soul's advance in love to God, the last stanzas refer to "the beatific state, which is the only thing that the soul in perfection aspires to",[228] for

> the Son of God wished to take her from the spiritual marriage…
> to the glorious marriage of the church triumphant.[229]

Of this heavenly marriage he wrote:

The breath of wind,
The nightingale, its song,
The grace of trees,
Night hushed down,
The blaze, not harming but burning.[230]

Eliot may refer to this second purification, purgatory, as

the dark cold and the empty desolation

through which we must remain quiet and at rest ("still"), yet keep "moving into another intensity", for a "further union" and a "deeper communion" —go on "exploring" as we grow old. "Here or there", Ithaca, the "home" of Ulysses, or the South Atlantic, it is all the same. The word "still", like the "rest" of George Herbert, encodes the ideal: we must be still to perceive but still strive to go beyond. This is the humility of the old.

The waters

In an earlier version of the fifth movement of *Burnt Norton,* Eliot included a reference to the Hindu holy books *Aranyaka*, "of the wilderness". The work was intended to be read by hermits, especially older men who after an active life withdrew to the solitude of the forest.[231] This custom is known in the Russian church (the *pust'inya*, "desert") and goes back to the Bible, where the waste land is the place of encounter with God. The "Desert Fathers" also followed this tradition when they retired to the waste land, and also the Irish hermits who sought God at the barren seaside.[232]

The Hebrew Scriptures see God as rescuing us from "vast waters". He saved Noah from the flood, He brought the Hebrews through the Red Sea "dry shod", and if it had not been for Him, says the psalmist,

then had the waters overwhelmed us, the torrent swept over our soul,
then the raging waters had poured over our soul.[233]

Eliot links the waters —ambiguous, since they purify as well as drown— to the "dark cold" and "empty desolation". He is anticipating *The Dry Salvages*, where water will be the basic symbol. But here the first words of *East Coker* are reversed: now the ending is the beginning —there is hope for that "further union, deeper communication".

THE DRY SALVAGES

1941. WATER, symbol of the third quartet, is the basic stuff of nature according to Thales, traditionally "the first philosopher". For the Greeks Oceanus, god of the waters, and his wife Tethys, mother of the river-gods, were "parents of all creation", even of the gods themselves, who swore by the waters.[234] Modern city-dwellers are forgetful of the river and sea, but they are out there, threatening to catch us unawares, encroach and destroy. Yet the ocean, as we venture out into it, has always held out promise and elicited our prayer.[235]

Eliot tells us the Dry Salvages (in French, *les trois sauvages*, "the three wild ones") are "a small group of rocks, with a beacon, off Cape Anne, Massachusetts", rising 15 feet above high water in the middle of a reef 500 yards long. The Eliot family owned a home at the nearby fishing port of Gloucester, not far from Boston, where his ancestors had settled before moving west to St. Louis. Riverscape and a seascape were important parts of his boyhood experience:

* 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
Eliot divides people into two sorts:

* 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

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)

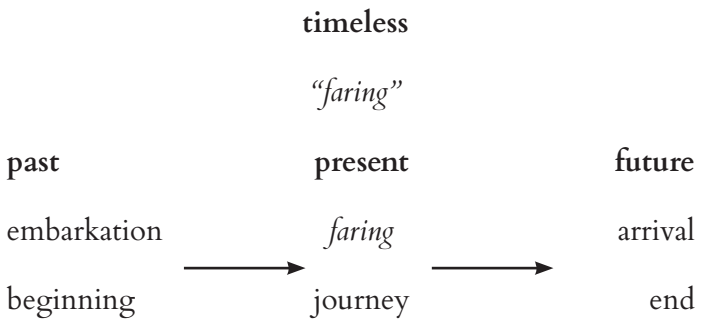
Faring

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]

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”.

LITTLE GIDDING

1942. FIRE is the symbol of the fourth quartet. For Heraclitus is was the basic stuff of the universe and has divine qualities: the *kosmos*,

> … selfsame in all things,
> neither by gods made nor men,
> but ever was, is, shall be:
> everliving fire…[355]

The fire of war destroys our cities, but fire is the Holy Spirit, and the fire of purgatory refines us to "fold" us into the "knot of fire" that is the rose, eternal oneness in God.[356]

Little Gidding is a village north of London. There in 1626 Nicolás Ferrar (1591-1637), businessman, Member of Parliament, and friend of poet George Herbert, founded an Anglican religious community of thirty-five or forty members for the purpose of "waiting upon God". The "Household", as it was called, was a combination of family, monastery, and commune. The Puritans destroyed it in 1647, and although its small chapel was rebuilt in the 19th century, the experiment was never followed up.

King Charles I paid the Community a secret visit after his defeat by the Puritans at the battle of Naseby in 1645. He was executed by the Puritans four years later. Eliot visited the chapel in 1936 and reviewed two books on Ferrar's Household for *The Criterion*. It was his conviction that certain persons and groups —such as Ferrar's Community— had a special mission to relate the eternal to the transient; he will speak about them —and also about the conflict between Royalists and Puritans— in this quartet.

Monasticism forms part of the background of *Four Quartets*.[357] Hermits, monks and nuns, friars and sisters, have played a key role in the history of Christianity and in Anglo-Catholicism, Eliot's spiritual home, although largely ignored or opposed in Protestantism. On the other hand, a renewed interest in and revival of religious orders accompanied the 19th-century Ox-

ford Movement, which lay at the heart of the Catholic renewal within Anglicanism. St. John of the Cross, whose pervasive influence on Eliot has been noticed, was St. Teresa's right-hand man in founding the order of Discalced Carmelites.

Eliot begins *Little Gidding* by recalling his visit to Ferrar's religious community, and later in the poem he will quote two 14th-century English contemplatives: the village hermit Dame or Mother Julian of Norwich and the author of *The Cloud of Unknowing*, who seems to have been a member of the Carthusian order of hermits living within a monastic enclosure. Mother Julian and the author of *The Cloud*, along with the hermits Richard Rolle (died in 1349), Walter Hilton (later an Augustinian friar, died in 1396), as well as Margery Kempe (died after 1438) are grouped together as the "14th-Century English Mystics".

For Heraclitus all is fire. In *East Coker*, fire is "destructive" and will bring the world to an end in the universal conflagration of the Stoics or of the author of II Peter.[358] Eliot had firsthand acquaintance with destruction by fire in the fall of 1940 when he was writing *Little Gidding*. He was an air-raid warden, charged with spotting fires caused by incendiary bombs during the *Blitz*, the German air raids over London.

Fire, like water, not only destroys; it purifies. The second movement of *Little Gidding* is partially set in Dante's "purgatory", where souls are "refined" by fire before they can be united with God. Fire is a symbol of God Himself, of His love, of the coming of His Spirit. As *The Dry Salvages* is about the Annunciation and Incarnation, *Little Gidding* is about Pentecost and the love of God.

LG-I: THE HOUSEHOLD

The time is early afternoon, cold yet bright, in mid-winter, "the dark time of the year". The sun reflects off the ice in the "pond and ditches" near the chapel of the Ferrar Household. The approach is like a passage through a landscape of the waste land —or of our age and of our soul. The cold, dark season contrasts with the sun burning high above us, hot and bright. The whole passage is full of paradox and ambiguity: frost/fire, flame/ice, cold/heat, glare/blindness.

LG-Ia: (1-20) Holy fire

The Season

Spring in winter, as, in *East Coker*, the "disturbance of spring" coming in "late November", is "sempiternal", ever pointing outside time.[359] The winter solstice is an especially powerful reminder of timelessness, when the "brief" sun, now "suspended" at its lowest point in the sky, refuses, as *Sol Invictus*, to be overcome, and begins to ascend again, promising a new spring.

Many peoples celebrate hope in new life on this "short day" of the year, as did the Romans in their cult of the "Unconquered" Sun-God. There is an unclear relation between this feast and the Christian celebration of Christmas. In his "A Christmas Carol", a contemporary of Ferrar, the poet-priest Robert Herrick, saw spring in winter as Christ gives life to the world:

> Dark and dull night, fly hence away,
> And give the honor to this day,
> That sees December turned to May.
> If we may ask the reason, say,
> The why, and wherefore all things here
> Seem like the springtime of the year?
> Why does the chilling winter's morn
> Smile, like a field beset with corn?
> Or smell, like to a mead new-shorn,
> Thus, on the sudden? Come and see
> The cause why things thus fragrant be:
> 'Tis He is born, whose quickning birth
> Gives life and luster, public mirth,
> To heaven and the under-earth....
> And fit it is we find a room
> To welcome Him. The nobler part
> Of all the house here, is the heart.[360]

But there is no security in the temporal cycle. The tempters in *Murder in the Cathedral* try to persuade St. Thomas to take a commonplace way out. The First Tempter speaks to him —using images similar to this part of *Little Gidding*— of a return to "all the good time past".

Fire devouring the winter season,
Eating up the darkness....
And the new season.
Spring has come in the winter. Snow in the branches
Shall float as sweet as blossoms. Ice along the ditches
Mirror the sunlight. Love in the orchard
Send the sap shooting.

But the Saint warns him that we do not know very much about the future nor do we learn from the experience of others —indeed only the fool thinks that

He can turn the wheel on which he turns.[361]

Saul

"Midwinter spring" is lasting, hung amid the sun's wanderings "between pole and tropic", in our age, our life. But the warmth will turn the earth to mud "before sundown". The sun flashes on the "watery mirror", but the heat of our heart is "windless cold". The sun's glare is "blindness". This is a "moment", as when St. Paul was converted. Saul, as he had been called, was on his way to Damascus, "breathing threats and murder" against the followers of Jesus and armed with the written permission of the high priest to bring them back bound to Jerusalem. Then

suddenly there shined round about him a light from heaven,
and he fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him:
"Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?"…
And Saul arose from the earth;
and when his eyes were opened, he saw no one.[362]

The "glare that is blindness", this unseeing seeing, is reminiscent of negative theology.[363] In the fifth movement Eliot will quote from *The Cloud of Unknowing*, whose title corresponds to the phrase "dark of silence" from Dionysius's *Mystical Theology*,[364] which the author of *The Cloud* translated into Middle English. The metaphor, as Eliot's "darkness of God" in *East Coker*, is ultimately Biblical. God speaks to Moses on Mount Sinai:

> Behold, I come unto thee in a thick cloud,
> that the people may hear when I speak with thee and believe
> there forever,

and then, leaving the people behind,

> Moses drew near junto the thick darkness where God was.[365]

However, God in this tradition is a secret not to be kept but told, a mystery to be pondered. In the final blessing of his letter to the Romans, St. Paul links the Gospel to

> the disclosure of the mystery kept secret since the world began,
> but now told.[366]

But God may not be so easily found. John of the Cross echoes the words of Isaiah,

> truly Thou art a hidden God, oh God of Israel, Savior,[367]

and begins his *Canticle* with this words:

> Where hidest Thou,
> Love, leaving me breathless?

Of "seeking God in faith", he says,

> Oh soul, seek Him ever as hidden,
> for thou draw very close to Him
> when thou dost think Him higher and deeper
> than anything thou canst reach;
> ...be ever content not with what thou dost understand of God
> but in what thou dost not understand….
> for the less sharp [thy] understanding of Him,
> the closer [dost thou] come to Him, since… as the
> prophet Davis says,
> "Darkness He made His hide-away".[368]

Eliot speaks of "a glare that is blindness". Dionysius advises anyone wishing to "behold":

bent upon blind beholdings,
forsake all things, ...things both felt and understood,
strain up unknowingly to oneness with Him,
...raised to that supernatural
ray of divine darkness.[369]

The author of *The Cloud of Unknowing* describes the "work" of contemplation:

at the first time when thou dost it,
thou findest but a darkness
and as it were a cloud of unknowing,
...a naked intent unto God;
this darkness and this cloud is, howsoever thou dost,
betwixt thee and thy God.[370]

Perhaps this "intent" lies behind the other ways Eliot uses the word.[371]

Blaze in darkness

Now our "spirit" is touched by the "glow" of a fire brighter than the "blaze of branch", the golden bough from the *Aeneid* of the Latin poet Virgil, who led Dante through hell and purgatory. The hero of the epic, Aeneas, wished to speak with his beloved father Anchises in the abode of the dead, but he was told by the prophetess Sibyl that he must first offer a gold branch to Proserpine, queen of the underworld. This "golden bough" would allow him to visit Anchises and then return to the land of the living.[372] In the account (the first line is famous) the sybil speaks to Aeneas:

Easy is the descent into hell:
night and day dark Pluto's gate stands open;
but retracing thy steps, coming back to light above:
that is the task, that is the deed.
A few, born of the gods, have done it,
favored kindly by Jupiter or lifted to heaven by their
burning valor.
Woods shroud the center,
the black river Cocytus rings it around.
But if such love is in thy mind, such passion,

twice to cross the waters of the Styx,
twice to see the gloom of hell,
if thou art bent on this mad deed,
hear what thou must first do.
Hidden in a shadowy tree is a golden bough,
its leaves and supple stem of gold,
held holy to Proserpine,
screened by the grove, closed off by dark ravines.
Only after plucking its golden leaved fruit
May one go down to the hidden places of the earth....
So let thine eyes search above,
and when thou findest it, let thy hand pluck it off.
For if the fates are calling thee,
it will break off freely and easily;
otherwise no force can overcome it,
no hard steel cut it away.[373]

The passage previews the descent into Dante's purgatory in the second movement of this quartet.

Pentecost

The "glow more intense" is "pentecostal fire". Jesus's apostles were together after the resurrection when their "moment" came:

all at once from the sky came a noise, like a rush of strong wind,
filling the whole house where they sat.
And there appeared to them tongues like fire,
parting, then alighting on each,
and all were filled with the Holy Ghost,
and began speaking in other tongues, speaking out
as the Holy Ghost gave them to speak.[374]

The story weaves three metaphors together: wind, tongue, and fire. In the Old Testament God's "wind" is His breath, symbolizing that He, in contrast to false gods, is alive and gives life. His "Holy Breath" ("Spirit". "Ghost") speaks a word which, unlike our words, always comes true: when He said "Let there be light", light came about. He breathed into the prophets that they might with His Breath speak His word to the people. The "strong wind" rushing at Pentecost is the Breath of Christ breathing life into the

small community. Traditionally the Holy Ghost is seen as sanctifying the members of the church by having them share in the life and love of Christ.

In Genesis, sharing the same word, having a single tongue, symbolized covenant, the oneness of God and man. At one time

> the whole earth had one speech, the same words.

But human beings, wishing to boast of their unity and dominion apart from God, built a city, Babel, with a towering ziggurat that reached the sky. And God

> confused the speech of the whole earth,
> and from there scattered them abroad over the face of the whole earth.[375]

At Pentecost, the whole earth ideally had a single word, Word, again. The "Holy Breath" brings about understanding and fellowship from confusion and division.

Eliot downplays the image of wind ("no wind") and tongue ("dumb spirit") in favor of the "glow" of fire. In fact, the three elements air, earth ("no earth smell"), and water ("freezing") give way to the fourth, the fire lying above them, beyond all of nature and beyond the senses we use to apprehend nature ("blindness", "dumb", "no... smell"). The light is not "absorbed" by the earth as in *East Coker*[376] but "reflecting" as on a "mirror", pointing away, upwards.

Lightening in the storm is a basic image of the theophany. In *The Waste Land* the thunder spoke three words in the "black cloud" over Mount Himavant.[377] On Mount Sinai God, hidden in a cloud, wrapped in smoke and darkness, came in fire to make His "covenant". After the people were purified, there came

> peals of thunder, bolts of lightening,
> a heavy cloud on the mountain,
> a very loud trumpet noise...
> all Mount Sinai was in smoke,
> for God came down upon it in fire.[378]

Moses climbed to the top of the mountain to meet God.

Spring of the Soul

The Holy Ghost, then, is the spring sun melting the lifeless wintry landscape of our soul, breathing Word into our "dumb spirit" at this meeting of fire and frost, and our "sap quivers" with life. This spring is not the usual yearly "time-for" of Ecclesiastes, the cycle of seasons promised by God when He made His first covenant with Noah:

> while the earth lasts,
> seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night,
> shall not cease.[379]

Snow covers the hedges with white ("blanched") in an instant, quicker than summer flowers. This is a new covenant, a springtime out of time, "neither budding nor fading", without beginning, "generation", or end. This is an inner season, Whitsuntide, the time of White Sunday, Pentecost. It is a "moment" as in the rose-garden.

Does suddenly feeling fire in mid-winter point to an "unimaginable" summer solstice?

LG-Ib: Monasticism (20-39)

In the three previous quartets Eliot spoke of approaching the rose garden, the village of the past, and river and seascapes; now he describes a pilgrimage to the Household.

Surprise

King Charles I visited Ferrar's Community at Little Gidding twice by day, but Eliot refers to his secret pilgrimage "at night", when he was "broken" after his defeat by the Puritans. We too, in "may time" —in "sempiternal" spring, where every moment is *kairos*, whatever season it "may" be— "may" travel there. Our pilgrimage may be at night, as the king's, or in the daytime. Where we come from and how we get there make no difference; "at the end" we would find the same "hedges/ white" and sweet. The "end" to which the rough road now leads is the Household's erstwhile manor, now a hog farm, with the chapel "dully" restored in the 19th century, and Ferrar's tombstone in the path at the entry.

Our visit may have different sorts of "purpose": pastime, curiosity, looking for answers, devotion, tourism —and Eliot will mention four false mo-

tives (below). But these ends are but a "husk of meaning", and really amount to no purpose or "end" at all, since in any case the real "purpose" is other, unforeseeable, "beyond the end" that we "figured", altered in its fulfillment. And even a lack of purpose is less important than that *the* "purpose" be "fulfilled". And the fulfillment will always be a surprise. The "unknowing" tradition cautions against taking spiritual experience at first glance.[380]

But the "end" toward which we are "faring forward", as in *East Coker*, is always "the same".[381] The symbolism here is pilgrimage: consciously moving out of timeful routine toward a timeless destination.

Finisterrae

The particular goal of pilgrimage does not matter, since it is ultimately leads to "the world's end", and all pilgrims have taken basically the same path to get there. Ferrar's Household, is "the nearest" shrine, but it is not the only one; Eliot lists four others from the history of Christian monasticism. Several Irish monasteries were built "at sea jaws". St. Colm Cille, the first great "exile for Christ", founded a community of monks on Iona, an island off Scotland; it is still a popular place of pilgrimage.[382] Another monastery, Lindisfarne, famous for its illuminated manuscript of the Gospels, was founded by St. Cuthbert on the north-east coast of England. The hermitage of St. Kevin was built "over a dark lake" in Glendalough, Ireland.

On the other pole of Christendom, St. Anthony of Egypt, greatest of the Desert Fathers, lived "in a desert", the Egyptian Thebaid.[383] "A city" refers to Padua, that is to St. Anthony of Padua, a 13th-century Franciscan mystic, who lived in the hermitage of St. Anthony in Portugal and later in a cave in Italy. The desert, the seaside, the forest, Little Gidding, the city —the South Atlantic, "here or there", as Eliot said in *East Coker*—,[384] all are the world's end, the "good" waste land, where God has been sought.[385]

Little Gidding was the destination "nearest, in place and time" to Eliot, but, as he had written,

> perfection is as nearly attainable for any man here and now
> as it will ever will be in any future place.[386]

Actually, we need not travel to any place or wait for any time. All we have to do is redeem the *kairos* which is offered always and everywhere, say, "now and in England". Eliot said that we

...neglect and belittle the desert.
The desert is not remote in southern tropics,
The desert is not only around the corner,
The desert is squeezed in the tube-train next to you,
The desert is in the heart of your brother.[387]

LG-Ic: Change (39-53)

Outgrowing

No matter whence or when we set off for the world's end, the way is "always the same", for we all must "put off/ Sense and notion". It has been the custom for the newly baptized to put on a new robe to symbolize their new life. The "putting on and off" metaphor is from the letter to the Ephesians, where the author assumes that the way to "learn Christ… as is the truth in Jesus" is

to put off the old man…
and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds,
and to put on the new man created after the likeness of God
in the justice and holiness of truth.[388]

A. similar saying of St. Paul, "put on the Lord Jesus Christ", moved St. Augustine to his *aversio-conversio*, to Eliot's *turning*, the conversion, *metanoia*, that Jesus preached:

The *kairos* has been fulfilled and God's kingdom has drawn near;
be converted and believe in the gospel![389]

Eliot gave a spiritual turn to this *metanoia*. The distinction between "sense and notion" or, in *Burnt Norton*, between the "worlds" of sense and fancy, lies behind the traditional teaching on spiritual maturing, which Eliot has been assuming.[390] It is based upon this anthropological "duality", found not only in Christianity (for example, in the New Testament) but also in Hindu religion, perhaps in most cultures.[391]

The following version of St. Thomas Aquinas was familiar to St. John of the Cross and to the author of *The Cloud of Unknowing*.[392] A person in this view is a living unit (or "soul"), and living is carried out on several levels. There are two types of functions open to significant conscious control, each with a cognitive and affective side:

1) neurological functions:
    * cognitive: "sense", "fancy"
    * affective: instinct and emotion
2) "transcendent" functions (not completely accounted for by the physiological): "spirit":
    * cognitive: "notion", understanding (mind, *logos*)
    * affective; freedom, commitment, love (will).

St. John of the Cross, following St. Augustine, added memory to the functions of spirit.

The human being is a rational animal; it is his reason, *logos* —mind + will—, that distinguishes him from other animals. It is his spirit, then, that makes man unique, and this is why the human spirit has been so highly valued and considered a key aspect of the maturing process. People "grow", become more "human", when their behavior is not driven by raw passion and instinct, but is reasonable and honorable in regard to others, "virtuous".

This yielding of sense to spirit calls for self-discipline. In a religious context, growing includes *outgrowing*. Not only must sense yield to spirit; spirit itself must yield to God Himself; sense gives way to spirit and spirit gives way to God. Dionysius told his disciple to forsake things "felt and understood" in order to be united with God, and St. Anthony of Padua taught the traditional three-step pattern:

1) purgative way (cleansing)
2) illuminative way (contemplation, virtue)
3) unitive way (oneness with God).

The famous metaphor of St. John of the Cross is "going into the night": the two nights, which can be active or passive, mark two yieldings:

1) *senses* (purgative way)
    — the *night of the senses* (cleansing the senses), *gives way to*:
2) *spirit* (illuminative way)
    |— the *night of the spirit* (cleansing the spirit), or the night of faith (and hope and love), *gives way to*:
3) *God* (unitive way).[393]

Eliot's point is that what is "put off" in sense and notion is emotionalism and ideology that keep us away from God, and that this pattern is "always the same" whoever we are, wherever and whenever we live.

Waiting upon God

Eliot specifies four false motives of travelers bound for Little Gidding: to "verify", "instruct yourself", "inform curiosity", and "carry report". In *The Waste Land* Eliot also alluded to the misuse of sacred lore[394] and saints have warned of the false motivation affecting how we move toward our common "end".

The proper attitude toward the community of Little Gidding is humble respect for their prayer; Ferrar wrote that

> they ceased not from contemplation...
> every hour seemed short for waiting upon God.

Eliot stresses the *contemplative* aspect of their recollection. Prayer, like the cleansing he mentions in the third part of the previous *Quartets*, is both

* active: saying "an order of words" or practicing the meditation "of the praying mind"
* passive: undergoing the Holy Ghost's "fire", the especially "valid" prayer of contemplation arising from timelessness.

Ferrar and his companions can communicate with us even now that they are dead. After St. Thomas à Becket's martyrdom at the end of *Murder in the Cathedral*, the Chorus thanks God

> for Thy redemption
> by blood. For the blood of Thy martyrs and saints
> Shall enrich the earth, shall create the holy places.
> For wherever a saint has dwelt, wherever a martyr has given
> his blood for the blood of Christ,
> There is holy ground, and the sanctity shall not depart from it
> Though armies trample over it, though sightseers come with
> guidebooks, looking over it;
> From where the western seas gnaw at the coast of Iona,
> To the death in the desert, the prayer in forgotten places by
> the broken imperial column,
> From such ground springs that which forever renews the earth
> Though it is forever denied.

Prayer was valid in hermitage, monastery, and Household, as well as in places of martyrdom, such as the cathedral in Canterbury where St. Thomas was murdered in 1170 and whither, as Chaucer said,

...from every shire's end
Of England... they wend,
The holy blissful martyr for to seek
That them hath helped when that they were sick.[395]

The change

The dead can "tell you" what, when alive, they could not. Eliot may be thinking of Christ, when He said at the Last Supper:

It is better for you that I go away;
for if I do not go away, the Paraclete will not come unto you....
I still have yet many things to say to you, but ye cannot bear them now.
But when [the Paraclete] come, the Spirit of Truth,
He will lead you to all Truth.[396]

His telling, "tongued with fire", will inspire the disciples at Pentecost.

But the context here is rather eschatological; in heaven there will be, not unknowing, but a knowing "beyond the language of the living". St. Paul showed us "a mystery":

we shall all be changed,
in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump,
for the trumpet shall sound,
and the dead shall be raised incorruptible
and we shall be changed.[397]

This is the definitive *turning*, what the dead, when living, "had no speech for":

a wisdom in the mature, a wisdom not of this world...
but God's wisdom hidden in mystery,...
of which it is written:
Eye has not seen nor hear heard nor has it entered human heart
what God has prepared or those who love Him.[398]

The Holy Ghost is to bring about the communion of the saints, the oneness of all, beyond the grave, in Christ, Who prayed, in contrast to "the bone's prayer to Death its God", to His Father, not only for His disciples, but

> for all those who shall believe in Me through their word,
> that they all may be one
> as Thou, Father, art in Me, and I in Thee;
> I pray that they may be one in us.[399]

Prayer is "the intersection of the timeless moment": the theme of *Four Quartets*. The "moment" will come anywhere: in Little Gidding, Burnt Norton, Canterbury, Iona, the Egyptian Thebaid, and at any time, over and over, "always". But God, as Dante said, "is where ends every where and when",[400] beyond space-time, "nowhere" and "never". Hope involves negative theology.

LG-II: UNREDEEMEDNESS

The second movement begins pessimistically, realistically perhaps, with destruction and forgetfulness, and then goes on to speak of the purgation that hope entails.

LG-IIa: Death of the elements (54-77)

Eliot shows in these three stanzas how all four elements die in the passage of time —and kill. In a way they sum up the *Four Quartets*, each of which emphasizes one element.

Air and earth

Ash is the Biblical image of the transitory but here as in *East Coker*[401] it specifically symbolizes destruction by fire. Dust "on a bowl of rose-leaves" in *Burnt Norton*[402] was full of expectation, but now the roses are "burnt", having become the vaguely depressing cigarette "ash on an old man's sleeve". And the "dust in the air suspended" we breath in is all that is left of the home burnt by enemy bombers or of the manor burnt by Puritan troops —and of the people whose "story" ended there. It was, is, "time-for" the wind to "break" the walls, its wainscot with the mouse, as in *East Coker*, where "house" means building, church, family, age —and now the Household of Nicholas Ferrar.

"Death of air" is not only the cessation of breathing, but also death caused by the blast of bombs dropped from enemy aircraft. In this part of the poem we are left with an indifference to extinction, neither hoping nor despairing.

"Water and sand" contend over a corpse, perhaps like the "bone on the beach" of *Dry Salvages*.[403] The sea disembowels the dry shore, scooping out mouths in a mindless smile. And the "soil" which we are and to which, according to Ecclesiastes, we shall return, our corpse, laughs at the "vanity" of our "toil". But the soil is not "significant" as it was in *Dry Salvages*, nor is there any "fructifying" in others.[404] Eliot may be hinting here at bomb craters in London and the ruins of the Household.

Water and Fire

What we build gets burnt down, what we sow has washed away. Oblivion mocks our sacrifice more than any derision by others. The destruction by fire and flood of the Household's "sanctuary and choir" seems to trivialize their life more than our indifference can. Time annuls the "sacrifice" of the saints which we have "denied". Again, fire and water recall the incendiary bombs and fire fighting equipment of World War II.

There is an allusion to Heraclitus who thought that "war is the father of all"; reality unravels through strife, and

> fire lives in the death of air,
> air lives in the death of earth,
> water lives in the death of earth,
> and earth lives in the death of water.[405]

Does the "death" of the elements in these three stanzas refer to the universal conflagration (*ekpurōsis*) attributed to Heraclitus, or to the Christian *eschaton*, when "the elements shall burn up and melt away"?[406] Fire may also hint at a finality of love; if so, there is neither hope nor despair but ambiguity.

LG-IIb: Purgatorio (78-149)

The scene

In the second section of this movement Eliot says he is imitating the *terza rima* verse form (but without the rhyme) which Dante used throughout his *Divine Comedy*. He called it "the nearest equivalent to a Canto of the *Inferno* or *Purgatorio*" that he could produce and "wished the effect of the whole to be Purgatorial". The scene is London during the Second World War, at

dawn, an "uncertain hour" after the enemy aircraft have returned to base but before the all-clear sounds (the "blowing of the horn").[407] Eliot presents himself as a fire-watcher on patrol, when he happens to meet the ghost of poets whom he admired, just as in hell Dante met the ghost of a teacher who to him was as a father: *Ser* Brunetto.

The air-raids, "recurrent" and "unending", are seen as a caricature of Pentecost. The "dove" is symbol of the Holy Ghost coming down from heaven on the apostles, but here it is a "dark" warplane, its "tongue" not the Spirit's tongues of fire, but "flickering" machine guns "homing" in on targets and then "homing" back to airfields "below the horizon". The smoke is not the storm cloud and lightening of theophany; it billows out from burning buildings. The wind that blows "the metal leaves" like shrapnel is not God's Holy Breath. Still, the scene maintains ambiguity, expectation, a "moment" of intersection of time and eternity.

The "dead leaves" blown toward the warden, Eliot, bring to mind the *Ode to the West Wind*, which Shelley composed in Florence, Dante's birthplace, and whose verse form is also a variation of Dante's *terza rima*:

> O wild West Wind, thou breath of Autumn's being,
> Thou, from whose unseen presence the leaves dead
> Are driven, like ghosts from an enchanter fleeing.

Fall winds usher in the weather of winter, and the human soul comes to death. But the spirit of nature revolves and so the wind is

> The trumpet of a prophecy! O Wind,
> If Winter comes, can Spring be far behind?

But for Eliot, cycles are no solution; the wheel of time must be broken to attain the eternal.

Ser Brunetto

In *The Waste Land*, Eliot alluded to Dante's surprise meeting with his teacher, *Ser* Brunetto ("*You* here?"), in the person of Stetson the businessman.[408] Actually, Dante met with Brunetto in hell, not in purgatory, but Eliot said the location is irrelevant. Purgatory, in fact, fit in better with the dynamic conception of the quartet. This company of souls, says Dante, were

coming along the embankment, and each
eyed us, as people are wont at dusk
under a new moon to stare at one another,
as an old tailor squints
to thread.
One of them recognized me and he grasped me
by the hem and cried: "What wonder!"
As he stretched out his arm to me,
on his baked features I fixed my eye,
and his scorched face did not hinder
my mind's recognition;
turning my face down toward his
I replied: "*You* here, *Ser* Brunetto?"[409]

Brunetto Latini was a writer and chancellor of Florence (hence the title "*Sere*"). Dante later says to him:

...thy dear good fatherly likeness
is fixed in my mind and now aggrieves me,
when in the world, from time to time
thou did teach me how man becomes timeless.[410]

Becoming immortal refers here to literary fame, but "*eternarsi*" could be taken as the whole theme of *Four Quartets*.

The compound ghost

Before Eliot gusts of wind blow the "stranger", "unresisting", "loitering" but "hurried", with a sort of inevitability. Eliot, like Dante, "fixed" upon the ghost, and was likewise surprised at recognizing "some dead master" in his "brown baked features". The conversation with the ghost begins with the same "What wonder!" that affected Dante.

Eliot's ghost is "both one and many", his eyes "both intimate and unidentifiable"; he is a "compound ghost", the ghost of his many teachers. The Irish poet Yeats holds a special place in this company; in his poem *Sailing to Byzantium* he prayed to the "sages standing in God's holy fire":

Consume my heart away; sick with desire
And fastened to a dying animal
It knows not what it is; and gather me
Into the artifice of eternity.

From allusions in the dialogue between Eliot and the ghost we can glimpse other poets: Mallarmé, Milton, Swift, John Ford, Johnson, and Shakespeare. In a draft of *Little Gidding* Eliot added "*Ser* Brunetto" to the words "*You* here?"; cutting it opens up the reference. The "compound ghost", then, is the humanistic tradition which Eliot absorbed and then portrayed eschatologically in *The Waste Land* more as a purgatory than a hell, suggesting that history will end not in a Heraclitean conflagration but in a Christian denouement.

Eliot takes on a "double part" in the conversation, his other self, the ghost, speaking as Dante. As he relived Dante's experience, he knew himself as "still the same" yet was "someone other". Again, there are obscure hints of Pentecost. The ghost is parallel to the Holy Ghost, the "common wind" to which the speakers are "compliant", allowing unity. Although they are "too strange to each other", so distinct that they cannot mistake the experience, they are "in concord" at this time of "intersection", communicate, as sharing in the fellowship of the Holy Ghost. The "meeting" is spaceless, "nowhere", and timeless, without any "before and after". The encounter of those who "were not", and walked together "in a dead patrol" recalls the "communication/ Of the dead" at the end of the first movement.

The dialectic

Eliot feels Dante's wonder, but it is "easy", not upsetting, and this itself is surprising. He is eager, perhaps as a disciple, to hear the ghost, but afraid he may not understand or remember the lesson.

The ghost, the teacher, does not want to go back over the "thought and theory" which he proposed when alive and which Eliot has forgotten or never learned. Nor should Eliot, he adds, wish to "rehearse" his own ideas, both "bad and good". Eliot's disciples should "forgive" his ideas as the Ghost "prays" Eliot to forgive his own. The word recalls the reciprocity "forgive us - we forgive") in the Lord's prayer and injects an element of reconciliation to be brought out in the next movement.

The communication is now not about "these things", and Eliot should "let them be" in the timeflow where "they have served their purpose". From the moment's timeless perspective it does not matter whether they hit the

mark or not. Literary and philosophic fashions come and go; a new vogue feeds on the last one and kicks it over like an "empty pail". We have already rejected "last year's words" and "next year's words" will replace our own and be replaced in turn by others. This is a literary dialectic: one idea supersedes another and is then superseded itself, over and over again —this Hegelian turnover is the process of history, of all of reality.

The ghost ("spirit") has yet to find peace, and still strays as a wandering pilgrim ("peregrine") between two worlds, purgatory and London, which now, during the Second World War, resemble each other. He is surprised to find himself speaking again in London, Florence, Paris or wherever he (or they) lived when in the flesh. Using new speech is the "concern" of innovating poets such as *Ser* Brunetto himself in Italian, Yeats, who with Pound and Eliot changed the course of English poetry, and Mallarmé, who launched the French Symbolist movement. When the ghost says speech "impelled us/ To purify the dialect of the tribe", he is repeating a line from a sonnet by Mallarmé, where the angel

> gave a purer meaning to the words of the tribe.[411]

"Gifts" to the old

Speech also impels the poet —all of us, actually— to "urge the mind to aftersight and foresight", to reflect on our timebound experience. Seeing what went before from the viewpoint of what comes after tells us something about our life's work. In our old age we receive a "crown" for our best "effort", three "gifts" —the words are ironic.

The first gift is the failure of our "expiring sense". As "body and soul begin to fall asunder" the senses wear out ("friction"). Two passages of Milton's *Paradise Lost* place these lines in the context of the Fall of Adam and Eve. Michael the Archangel tells Adam that eating the forbidden fruit has led to

> ... old age; but then thou must outlive
> Thy youth, thy strength, thy beauty, which will change
> To withered, weak, and grey; thy senses then,
> Obtuse, all taste of pleasure must forgo
> To what thou hast; and, for the air of youth,
> Hopeful and cheerful, in thy blood will reign
> A melancholy damp of cold and dry,
> To weigh thy spirits down, and last consume
> The balm of life.[412]

In Genesis, God said to the serpent

> on your belly shalt thou crawl,
> and dust shalt thou eat all the days of thy life.

Milton pictured Satan and his devils turned into snakes, hungry and thirsty, amid a "multitude" of trees of knowledge. They climbed the trees to eat the fruit, but found only "bitter tastelessness", since the fruit,

> ...more delusive, not the touch, but taste
> Deceived; they, fondly thinking to allay
> Their appetite with gust, instead of fruit
> Chewed bitter ashes, which th' offended taste
> With spattering noise rejected. Oft they assayed,
> Hunger and thirst constraining; drugged as oft,
> With hatefullest disrelish writhed their jaws
> With soot and cinders filled; so oft they fell
> Into the same illusion, not as Man
> Whom they triumphed once lapsed.[413]

Sense, understanding, offers "no promise" any more, no "enchantment", only disappointment in "shadow fruit". The other two "gifts" bring tearing pain ("rending", "laceration"). The second is anger at our helplessness to mitigate, or even be amused by, human madness. The third is the reliving our hypocrisy with regret and shame for everything we "have done, and been", the evil and harm to others that we took as virtue,

> ...a lamentable tale of things
> Done long ago and ill done,

words of John Ford, a dramatist at the time of King Charles I.[414] It now "stings" us to remember how fools —or we ourselves— approved of our actions and our so-called "honor" now "stains" us.

A caricature of holiness

These gifts seem to be a caricature of spiritual maturing: our "exasperated spirit/ Proceeds" "from wrong to wrong" instead of proceeding from deception to truth, from selfishness to virtue. The end is "ash on [the] sleeve", not "endless humility".[415] In traditional spirituality, our "lifetime's effort" does

indeed promise to be crowned with "gifts" —of passive contemplation, but here the reference is to the "gifts of the Holy Ghost". This teaching goes back to a text of Isaiah, where the prophet promises that from the stump of Jesse, David's father, a shoot will come forth: the Anointed One ("Messiah", the "Christ"):

> And the spirit of the Lord hall rest upon him,
> the spirit of wisdom and understanding,
> the spirit of counsel and might,
> the spirit of knowledge and piety
> and his delight shall be the fear of the Lord.[416]

St. Thomas Aquinas related the seven gifts of the Holy Ghost to our passiveness before God. The Holy Ghost sensitizes us, he said, in our faith through the gifts of understanding (to grasp the content disclosed) and knowledge (to judge of its truth), in our hope through fear of the Lord, and in our love through wisdom.[417] For St. John of the Cross, it is just these three theological virtues which refill the "empty" person in the night of the spirit.[418]

The suffering of the old that Eliot describes here, as in *Dry Salvages*,[419] seems pointless, sterile, rather than cleansing, preparing, promising. The senses just become deadened, but are not raised to any higher union with God. The mind recognizes stupidity, but it is not led to understanding. Serving self and hurting others, not virtue, dominates behavior.

"Unless"

The "unless" ("the exasperated spirit" is "restored by that refining fire") is a stunning word; it separates this depressing meaninglessness from a flood of words inspiring hope, the expectation of redemption. For we may be "re-stored" in our sufferings, which are no longer barren but "refining" in the "fire" of the Holy Spirit in which we "move" toward God. We advance "in measure, like a dancer", as in the garden we moved "dignified", "in formal pattern", "without pressure" before seeing the pool filling with light.[420] Our moving ahead fits into a wider purposefulness embracing the dance of our metabolism, of society, of the stars, but with hope for breaking out of the cycle of time: "at the still point".[421]

"The refining fire" is the purgation of the Holy Ghost. The phrase is from Dante's *Purgatorio* and refers to the troubadour poet Arnaut Daniel, whom Dante called "the better craftsman", the words Eliot quoted in his

dedication of *The Waste Land* to Ezra Pound. Daniel speaks in Provençal, language of southeast France used by the medieval poets"

> "I am Arnaut, who weeps yet singing goes.
> My past folly I see with pain,
> but joyous I behold before me the joy I hope for.
> Now I pray thee, by the Power
> guiding thee to the top of the stairway,
> remember in due time my pain!"
> Then he hid in the fire which refines them.[422]

In *The Waste Land* Eliot quotes this last line in Italian: holy fire gives hope, since God, as St. Augustine said, plucks us out of the "burning" of lust.[423] Daniel sees not only his folly but his promised joy.

Farewell

The ghost, like that of Hamlet's father, fades at daybreak, and for Eliot when the all-clear sounded ("the blowing of the horn"). He parted with "a kind of valediction". "*Valedicere*" means "to say *vale*" in Latin and "*vale*" means "be strong", and especially "farewell", and Eliot's phrase "a kind of" suggests ambiguity: the "Not fare well/ But fare forward" of *The Dry Salvages*,[424] not "good-bye" but "Godspeed". "The day was breaking" amid the "disfigured street" of the broken and burning city. Could the "horn" also be the trumpet blown by the seventh angel of the Apocalypse, when loud voices cried out:

> the kingdom of the world
> has become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ,
> and he shall reign forever and ever?[425]

LG-III: RELEASE

Eliot returns again to detachment as the condition of freedom. The theme is a basic human experience. Jesus told us:

> Take no thought for your soul, what you are to eat,
> nor for your body, what you are to put on.
> Is not the soul more than food and the body more than clothes?
> Behold the birds of the sky:
> they do not sow, nor reap, nor gather into barns,
> yet your heavenly father feeds them.
> Are you not of more worth than they?...
>
> Learn from the lilies of the field, how they grow;
> they toil not, neither do they spin,
> but I say to you that even Solomon in all his glory
> was arrayed like one of these....
> Seek first the kingdom and His righteousness,
> and all these things will be given you besides;
> Therefore have no worry for tomorrow.[426]

St. Paul recommended an "as-if" detachment:

> Let those who have wives be as if they had none,
> those weeping, as if not weeping,
> rejoicing, as if not rejoicing,
> those buying, as if owning nothing,
> using the world, as if not using it,
> for the shape of the world is passing away;
> I want you to be free of worry.[427]

St. Teresa of Ávila spoke about "releasing" things, St. John of the Cross about becoming "unfastened" from everything, Meister Eckhart about being "calm" and "secluded", the author of *The Cloud of Unknowing* about "heedlessness", Dionysius the Areopagite about being "withdrawn" from everything, Jewish mystics about "cleaving" to God rather than to things, Buddhists about "renunciation" (second of the eight ways), Stoics about remaining "unshaken", "Twelve-Steppers" about "serenity" —Eliot about "detachment" and "liberation".[428]

The detaching movement is turning away from something and toward something; freedom is freedom from and freedom for, both forsaking and stretching ahead for (Paul) or straining upwards for (Dionysius).[429] St. Augustine spoke of *aversio*, turning away from the City of Man for *conversio*, turning back to the City of God. For St. John of the Cross, there is *nada* and *todo*, nothing for the sake of everything.

LG-IIIa: The hedgerow (150-165)

The conditions

Three "conditions" or kinds of life flourish in the same "hedgerow", recalling, in the first movement, the "hedgerow... blanched" of springtime outside "time's covenant" and the "hedges white and sweet" of Ferrar's Community:[430] They are three attitudes, each one of persons toward themselves, toward other persons and toward things. They look alike but are completely different.

Two conditions are *alive* and flowering:

1) The attitude of "*attachment*" to self, others and things. It is like a "live", or stinging, nettle, which pricks and causes irritation. This is the wrong kind of commitment where fear of its outcome stings.

2) The attitude of "*detachment*" to them. It is like a "dead nettle", the kind that does not sting. It is the right kind of commitment when freed from the "desire" regarding its outcome, as with Arjuna or Eckhart.

3) The third condition, lying "between the two", is *dead*, "unflowering". It is the "death" that is "*indifference*" to self, others and things. It contrasts with the first two conditions as "death resembles life". It is an avoidance of commitment, not caring about the outcome.

The book of Revelation records Christ's judgment on the Laodicean Christians:

> I know thy works, that thou art neither hot nor cold;
> I would thou wert cold or hot,
> but since thou art lukewarm, neither cold nor hot,
> I will spew thee out of my mouth![431]

Eliot had said of "hollow men":

> Shape without form, shade without color,
> Paralyzed force, gesture without motion.[432]

Memory

"Liberation" here means becoming free for love and from "desire". It "expands" love, "beyond desire" in another, timeless, dimension, toward God, and comes back to envelop everything. In the context of the Bhagavad-Gita Eliot spoke of disinterested action in warfare.[433] Now he says that memory liberates us because we can think of past conflict without its result being at stake for us today and because we see the same sort of conflict repeating itself down to our day. Since history, presumably, will go on being the same as it has been, we should maintain the same detached attitude toward the future. Standing away from the tenses —past, present, and future— gives us the freedom to show our love, respect and compassion for all. This in no way implies a relativistic indifference as if every side, every person, were equally guilty or guiltless. Detachment is a tough, all-embracing realism, a balanced maturity.

St. John of the Cross explained how passive purification brings about a deep spiritual detachment: in the night of the spirit the three theological virtues empty and darken the three functions of the spirit.[434] Charity empties the will by "stripping away" desire and faith empties the understanding of spiritual ideology. Hope darkens the memory by detaching us from the past and from all ownership. It does not turn us toward a future in time but toward the *eschaton* of oneness with God.

Love, then, is what remains after emotion and understanding give way in the ascent of Mt. Carmel. The reason that Aquinas gave for this triumph of love is that the mind brings God down to us and love brings us up to God outside the self. It is not the experience, emotional or intellectual, of God that is sought, but God Himself. The author of *The Cloud of Unknowing*, whom Eliot will quote in the fifth movement of this quartet, said of knowing and loving, the two "principle mights" or functions of rational creatures, parallel to mind and will:

> to the first, which is the *knowing* power... God is evermore incomprehensible,
> and to the second, which is the *loving* power...
> in each one diversely He is all comprehensible at the full,
> insomuch that one loving soul, alone in itself,
> by virtue of love may comprehend in it
> Him that is sufficient to the full, and much more...
> And this is the endless marvelous miracle of love which shall never take end;
> for ever shall he do it and never shall he cease to do it.[435]

The author goes on to say that we should be cautious about our thinking about God in prayer,

> be it never so holy,
> for love may reach to God in this life, but not knowing.
> And all the while that the soul dwells in this deadly body,
> evermore is the sharpness of our understanding
> in beholding of all ghostly things, but most specially of God,
> mixed with some manner of fancy
> for the which our work should be unclean...[436]

Eliot was "attached" to his own "field of action" when, after he left Germany at the outbreak of war in 1915, he began to send down roots in England through his marriage, social life, and employment. He came to consider these accidental circumstances "of little importance" —but obviously significant for his life—, when twelve years later and from different motives, he became a British citizen and received confirmation in the Church of England.

History

Our memory of and attitude to the past is ambivalent. Memories enslave us when we continue to fight battles long gone, attached to one side or the other. The context suggest the religious and political conflict between the Royalists supporting King Charles and the Parliamentarians opposing him, but it includes all conflict in centuries of history and of its violence.

Detachment from history is not ignorance of history; philosopher George Santayana said if we do not know history, we shall unknowingly relive it. Nor is it "neutrality" meaning indifference; it is rather like the nettle that does not sting. Detachment does not stand still; it keeps seeing historical situations "in another pattern". The word recalls not only Eliot's "revisionism" of "new" patterns in *East Coker* but the movement "in formal pattern" of the garden-people toward the pool.[437] My "self" vanishes with the "faces and places" I have loved, but we shall all be "renewed, transfigured" somehow in a timeless pattern. History as a "pattern/ Of timeless moments", Eliot will intimate in the fifth movement, is what redeems from time.[438]

LG-IIIb: Sin and love (166-199)

Julian of Norwich

Eliot now states this hope explicitly in the words of Dame Julian of Norwich. He quotes from her *Showings of Divine Love* twice in this movement and once again in the fifth (where he will also quote from *The Cloud of Unknowing*), and he will allude to her in the fourth movement. He said that the reason why he incorporated these English medieval mystics is because he wished to offset "so much 17th century in the poem" (Ferrar's Household and the English Civil War), and to "give greater historical depth to [it] by allusions to the other great period, which included Chaucer".[439] The five ascetics, Richard Rolle, the author of *The Cloud*, Walter Hilton, Margery Kempe, and Julian, are indeed some of the most profound and original representatives of the contemplative ideal in the history of the church. They all wrote in Middle English, and Rolle and Hilton also wrote in Latin.

Mother Julian lived as an anchoress (the word means "withdrawn" from the world), in a cell adjoining the parish church of St. Julian and St. Edward in Norwich in east central England. This church was destroyed by bombs in 1942, the same year that Eliot served as an air-raid warden in London. From her hermitage she acted as counsellor and spiritual director of the townspeople. She she was probably educated in a convent; she could read Latin, knew the Bible and the Fathers of the church (Dionysius, for example), and was at home in the contemplative monastic tradition.

In 1373 Julian was healed from a serious illness after experiencing sixteen revelations or "showings". She wrote them down soon afterwards as *Showings of Divine Love* and spent the next two decades thinking about what they meant. She then composed a longer account of the showings. Reflecting on previous "moments" is important for Eliot, and represents a traditional form of detachment from spiritual experience.[440] In her writings Julian spoke of God as "Mother" and "courteous Lord". She insisted, in this tradition of detachment, that "seeking is as good as contemplating". The primary theme of this joyous mystic is the love of God. And like Eliot, she thought of these things in the context of time and eternity.

The solution

A good argument against the existence of God, many philosophers have claimed including St. Thomas Aquinas, is based on the fact of evil.[441] If God is almighty and good, why the waste land of suffering, hatred, sin, which God could prevent? Julian saw the problem as one of reconciling sin with grace, God's love. She thought it would have been "well" for God not to allow sin,

and methought if sin had not been,
we should all have been clean and like our Lord as He made us.
And thus in my folly before this time often I wondered why,
by the great foreseeing wisdom of God,
the beginning of sin was not prevented,
for then, thought me, that all should have been well.[442]

But she said that Jesus conveyed to her "all that was needful for her", and Eliot quoted the *answer* she received

Sin is *behovely*,[443] but
all shall be well, and
all shall be well, and
all manner of thing shall be well.[444]

She understood "sin", however, in a very wide sense, as what keeps us from God:

In this naked word "sin" our Lord brought to my mind generally
all that is not good,
and the shameful scorn and the uttermost tribulation
that He bore for us in this life,
and His dying and all His pains,
and the passions of all His creatures, ghostly and bodily.
For we be all in part troubled, and we shall be troubled,
following our Master Jesus…

Sin for her is somewhat like St. Paul's *hamartia*: "original sin", death and pain, blameworthiness, helplessness. It is the destruction of Ferrar's chapel and of Julian´s church in Norwich. For Julian, the key fact is that *God Himself, in Christ, is involved in sin*. We should follow Jesus, she goes on to say,

until we be fully purged
of our mortal flesh
and of all our inward affections which be not very good.
And with the beholding of this,
with all the pains that ever were or ever shall be,
I understood the passion of Christ
for the most and surpassing pain.

But her dreadful "beholding" was "quickly turned into consolation" for her. She shared St. Augustine's conception of sin as a lack of something that should be there:

> But I saw not sin,
> for I believe it had no manner of substance, no part of being,
> nor might it be known
> but by the pain that is caused by it.

Evil is part of the process of reality that God chose to be:

> And in my view
> this pain is something for a time,
> for it purgeth
> and maketh us to know ourself and ask mercy;
> for the passion of our Lord is comfort to us against all this,
> and that is His blessed will.

She then puts God's love into the picture, and Eliot will quote her again on this point at the end of the movement.

> And for the tender love
> that our good Lord hath for all that shall be saved,
> He comforteth readily and sweetly.

To explain what this means, she now repeats Jesus's "answer":

> it is true that sin is cause of all this pain, but
> all shall be well,
> and all manner of thing shall be well.

St. Augustine called sin the *felix culpa*, the "fortunate fall", as Milton translated the phrase, since it is somehow presupposed to the telling of God's secret: Christ. The thought is echoed in the epistle to the Ephesians:

We have redemption in His blood,
forgiveness of sins, in the wealth of His grace,
wherein He abounded towards us, in all wisdom and insight,
making known to us the mystery of His will
according to His good pleasure which He decreed in Christ,
His plan in the fullness of time:
to gather together all things in heaven and on earth in Him.[445]

The English Civil War

"This place" to which Eliot refers after quoting Julian is Little Gidding, and more generally England in 17th century, at the time of the Civil War between Royalists and Parliamentarians. The strife was to a large extent religious: the supporters of King Charles I were Anglicans and general Cromwell's followers were Puritans who would oppose the beliefs and monastic lifestyle of Ferrar's Community. Eliot does not seem to take sides between these "people, not wholly commendable", although his preference is obvious. The two sides held widely different attitudes toward Christianity and were hostile to one another (without "immediate kin or kindness"), yet in a larger sense they shared a "common genius" and a history which both divided and united them. Some were "of peculiar genius" like John Milton, the poet "who died blind and quiet", not violently, and was sympathetic to the Puritan cause, or Ferrar himself, who was an Anglican.

The "king at nightfall" is Charles I, who visited Little Gidding at night after his defeat by the Puritans in the battle of Naseby. He, together with "three men", his advisors William Laud, Archbishop of Canterbury, and Thomas Wentworth, Earl of Strafford, were executed by the Parliamentarian forces. The "forgotten" were those silenced or exiled to the Continent by the Puritans. A Catholic exile, Richard Crashaw, "metaphysical" poet and a friend of the Ferrar Community, addressed this plea for detachment to St.Teresa of Avila:

Take away from me myself and sin...
Leave nothing of myself in me;
Let me so read thy life that I
Unto all life of mine may die![446]

Incidentally, we owe the long text of Julian's *Showings* to English Benedictine monks and nuns who had been exiled to the Low Countries and France in the previous century.

Release from the past

Eliot's ambivalence regarding the English Civil War is an example of the detachment from history, mentioned in the first part of this third movement. If he does "celebrate/ These dead men", he does not relive the wars of the past —when church bells were rung backwards to call people to battle— nor advocate groups like the "Society of King Charles the Martyr", who belonged to the Stuart family— the "rose" in the War of the Roses over a hundred years before. We cannot turn the clock back, follow the "antique drum"— nor (in *East Coker*) the "weak pipe and the little drum" —of circumstances long-gone.[447]

History is freedom, not servitude, for a person detached from the ambiguity of its dialectic. But the present is like the past, and we celebrate "the dying" as well as "these dead men". Eliot also said:

> However you disguise it, this thing does not change:
> The perpetual struggle of Good and Evil

in the name of the church, which

> Must be forever building, and always decaying,
> And always being restored.[448]

Learning detachment from the past makes it easier to disengage from present conflicts. How to be detached without losing commitment, without becoming "indifferent" or cynical; this is "what Krishna meant".[449]

The ground of beseeching

At any rate those divided by "policies" into "factions" are now, or will shortly be, in silence, "folded into a single party", shepherded into one fold, "in death". Eliot will mention the in-folding at the end of *Four Quartets*: the ending, denouement; Jesus said:

> I have other sheep not belonging to this flock;
> them too I must herd, and they shall hear My voice;
> then there shall be one fold, one Shepherd.[450]

We "inherit" the result of the victories and defeats of the past. What the winners and losers leave us is the "symbol perfected in death", "in another pattern",[451] their death incorporated into Christ's death, divine love.

Dame Julian's answer to the problem of evil is the finality of Christ's love —actually, that it has penetrated all of time from the beginning. Eliot refers to her words again:

> All manner of thing shall be well
> By the purification of the motive
> In the ground of thy beseeching.[452]

This stunning idea emerges in a passage where Julian expresses her puzzlement that God seems not to hear our prayer. She was shown that for our prayer to be answered it must be "rightful", in accordance with God's will and for His glory, and trusting as well. But

> often our trust is not full,
> for we be not sure that God heareth us, as we think,
> because of our unworthiness
> and because we feel nothing at all,
> for we were as barren and as dry oft times after our prayers as we
> were before.
> And thus, when feeling so, our folly is the cause of our weakness,
> for thus have I felt myself. [453]

Then she gives her answer: God *stands behind* our praying:

> And all this Our Lord brought suddenly to my mind,
> and showed these words and said:
> I am Ground of thy beseeching:
> first it is My will that thou have it,
> and then I make thee to will it,
> and then I make thee to beseech it.[454]

God gives us the mercy and grace that we seek, if He has willed it from all eternity:

> Here may we then see that our *beseeching*
> is not the cause of the goodness and grace that He giveth to us,
> but His *own goodness*.
> And that showed He verily in all these sweet words where He said:
> I am *Ground*.
> And our good Lord will that this be known by His lovers on earth,
> and the more that we know, the more shall we beseech, if it be
> wisely taken,
> and so is our Lord's meaning.
> Beseeching is a true and gracious lasting will of the soul,
> united and fastened into the will of our Lord
> by the sweet secret working of the Holy Ghost.

Her thought echoes St. Paul:

> The Spirit also helps our weakness,
> for we know not what we should pray for as we ought;
> but the Spirit Himself beseeches for us over and above
> with groanings unutterable....
> And we know that for those who love God
> all things work together for good.[455]

Prayer has a two dimensions: *impetratio*, God acquiesces to the pray-er, and *contemplatio*, the pray-er beholds Him. Still, the "purification of the motive", detachment, is central. Mother Julian's love is tough.

LG-IV: FIRE AND FIRE (200-213)

The dove

In the fourth movement we find double meaning again. The "dove descending", like the "dark dove with flickering tongue" of the second movement, is a bomber which "breaks the air/ With flame of incandescent terror" and with "discharge" of its weapons. But the Dove is also the Holy Ghost, and the fire is His purgation through the "terror" of release from "sin and error". There is one death to oneself for spiritual motives and a death through enemy action. Actually, the fire which consumes and the fire that purges is one and the same, and death, ascetic and physical, is one death, all unified in Christ and brought to fulfillment by His Spirit when His Kingdom has come.

Jesus at His baptism saw "the dove descending, break[ing] the air",

the sky splitting,
and the Spirit coming down upon Him like a dove.[456]

The sky opening symbolizes the communion between heaven and earth as God's Breath breaks through and hovers, as once over the waters of creation, over Jesus, creating anew. God's voice said:

Thou art My beloved Son in Whom I am pleased.

Jesus Himself will suffer as the "wounded Surgeon" of *East Coker* and "God's Servant" in Isaiah:[457]

See my Servant Whom I shall uphold,
My Choice in Whom My soul is pleased.

Jesus will baptize "in the Holy Ghost and fire"— for the coming of the Kingdom.[458]

The choice

Hence the "terror" is *behovely*; unavoidable. But we do have a choice of the pyres on which we are burnt:

* attachment to things— the fires of "despair"
* release, redemption "from fire by fire", giving "hope" —the fires of Pentecost.

Jesus spoke the paradox:

who loves his life shall lose it,
and who hates his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal.[459]

Eliot uses a classical myth, combining metaphors of blood and fire, to show how "love" can trick us and how one fire can redeem us from another. The Greek hero Hercules wounded the Centaur, who before dying sought revenge by giving of his own poisonous blood to Hercules's wife Deianira as a "love potion" to insure her husband's undying love. Later, when Hercules was straying, Deianira soaked a shirt she had woven for him with the Centaurus's blood. The wish for eternal love, then, lay in "the hands that wove". But once donned, the garment turned into an "intolerable shirt of flame/

Which human power [could not] remove", and Hercules found relief only by by throwing himself upon a funeral pyre.

Love, says Eliot, "devised the torment". The blood of Passover lambs sprinkled on the lintel and doorposts saved the Hebrews from the plague of the death of the firstborn before God led them out of Egypt, as Christians gained victory through sharing in the death of Jesus,

> through the Blood of the Lamb and through the word of their
> witness,
> and they did not love their life unto death.[460]

The 18th-cent. English mystic William Law spoke thus of the Blood of the Lamb:

> dark, disordered fire of our soul… can as well be made
> the foundation of heaven as it is of hell.
> For when the fire and strength of the soul
> is sprinkled with the Blood of the Lamb,
> then its fire becomes a fire of light
> and its strength is changed into a strength of triumphing love.[461]

"Love" is "the unfamiliar Name" (capitalized) because it is rarely understood in this paradoxical sense. For Love is what God is and our love for Him is the same as our love for our neighbor:

> Beloved, let us love one another,
> for love is of God;
> and whoever loveth is born of God and knoweth God;
> whoever loveth not, knoweth not God,
> for God is love.[462]

Eliot's question here, "Who... devised the torment?", and the answer, "Love", go back again, paradoxically, to Dame Julian of Norwich. In the last chapter of her *Showings* she says that God had spoken to her many years ago

> the sweet words where He said full merrily:
> I am the Ground of thy beseeching,[463]

but she never quite understood what He meant by them.

And from the time that it was shown,
I desired oft times to know
in what was our Lord's meaning.
And fifteen years after and more
I was answered in ghostly understanding saying thus:
What? Wouldst thou know thy Lord's meaning in this thing?
Know it well: *Love was His meaning.*
Who showed it thee? Love.
What showed He thee? Love.
Wherefore showed He it thee? For love.
Hold thee therein and thou shalt know more in the same.
But thou shalt never know therein other, without end.
Thus was I taught that love is our Lord's meaning.
And I saw full surely in this and in all,
that before God made us He loved us,
which love was never slacked and never shall.
And in this love He hath done all His works,
and in this love He hath made all things profitable to us,
and in this love our life is everlasting.
In our making we had beginning,
but the love wherein He made us
was in Him from without beginning.
In which love we have our beginning,
and all this shall we see in God without end.
Deo gratias.

Julian speaks here of love in a context dear to Eliot's heart: beginnings and endings but also the timeless.

LG-V: SUMMARY

Start
The last movement recapitulates the quartet and indeed all *Four Quartets*, drawing together their many motifs.

LG-Va: The calling (214-238)

Conversion
The "end", death, is the "beginning", rising again; Eliot alludes to the motto of Mary Queen of Scots that he quoted at the end of *East Coker*. He also is thinking of a *turning*, an *aversio*, turning away from an old life with a *conversio*, turning toward a new life.[464] It is a "moment", a *kairos*, a time-for being uprooted, going on pilgrimage, starting all over again. Saints Paul, Augustine and Francis had "moments" of turning, and for centuries donning the habit of a monk and taking a "religious" name signified the *conversio vitae*, a permanent state of humility, a holy self-discontent, an ongoing rebeginning.

Poetry and endings
Eliot has spoken in *Four Quartets* about the problems facing an author, especially the religious poet, and here, in a parenthesis apart, he describes the ideal structure of a sentence of poetry.[465] A poem is an "epitaph" where every component begins and ends within a "consort" or harmony of the whole, where each word fits in, is sealed off, finalized. He sees the poet going through a kind of artistic *conversio*,

> a continual surrender of himself as he is at the moment to something... more valuable;
> [his] progress is a continual self-sacrifice, a continual extinction of personality.[466]

Our lives are poems with a beginning and an end. Our society, our modern age, are also poems, which Eliot saw coming to an end. Our "actions", like the works Krishna spoke of, lead to our endings: King Charles's to the beheading "block", Hercules's to the pyre, the sailors' "down the sea's throat", our ancestors' to graves beneath worn tombstones.[467] But he adds that ends are beginnings "where we start" from. There is hope for history, for living again. Although we are all dying together "with the dying", still, we are "born with the dead"; Heraclitus stated the paradox:

> immortal mortals, mortal immortals,
> living others' death, dying their life.[468]

We are communities sharing traditions who "fructify in the lives of others" as the "communion of the saints".[469]

History

The "rose" —life and love, glimpses of timelessness— blends in time with the "yew-tree"— death and hope for rising again.[470] "History" is more than a temporal sequence of events, their causation and aftermath, but "timeless moments", themselves a "pattern", "another pattern", which give meaning to events themselves. Eliot's paradigm is the Incarnation:

> A moment not out of time, but in time, in what we call history...
> A moment in time but time was made through that moment;
> for without the meaning there is no time,
> and that moment of time gave the meaning.[471]

And history understood from this communal timeless perspective is what redeems "a people" from time. The history of a people has meaning beyond the turnover of events.

As pilgrims we return to Little Gidding at dusk, to the "secluded chapel" where Ferrar and his friends sought the eternal, just as now we revisit the timeless history of the monastics Columba, Cuthbert, Kevin and Anthony, "now and in England".

The Cloud

When Eliot recorded *The Four Quartets*, he paused before speaking the last verse of this section (line 238). These words are a direct quotation from the 14th-century spiritual classic written in Middle English, *The Cloud of Unknowing*. In his work the anonymous author was instructing his disciple who was to follow the vocation of a recluse. He described "four degrees and forms" of Christian living in the first chapter:

> 1) *common*: the practice of good Christians
>
> 2) *special*: of those having a conscious spiritual life, especially monks and nuns but motivated laypeople as well, when God

> kindled [their] desire full graciously
> and fastened to it a leash of loving longing

3) *singular*: of solitary contemplatives, presumably Carthusian hermits

4) *perfect*: of the spiritually mature —the definitive form, the only one that will survive death.

The disciple was probably entering the Carthusians from a Benedictine or Cistercian monastery, and so passing from the second to the third life-form:

> Seest thou not how readily and how graciously
> He hath pulled thee to the third degree and manner of living,
> the which is called "singular"...
> in the which thou mayst learn
> to lift up the foot of thy love
> and step toward that state and degree of living
> that is perfect and the last of all?[472]

Eliot's quotation is found in the following passage:

> Look up now, weak wretch, and see what thou art!
> What art thou and what hast thou deserved thus to be called by Our Lord?
> What weary wretched heart and asleep in sloth is that the which is not wakened
> *with the drawing of this Love and the voice of this Calling*?[473]

Eliot placed no punctuation after this quotation and he capitalized "Love" and "Calling". Did he mean to leave the calling open for the reader, drawn by God's love?

The author of *The Cloud* followed the tradition that the soul becomes passive, "drawn", as it is detached from its own feelings and thinkings about the world and God. His last three "degrees and forms" to some extent parallel St. John of the Cross's stages:

* *purgative*: when the soul places all created *things* below the cloud of *forgetting*, pictured below the soul