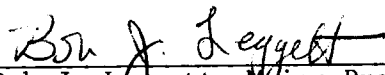


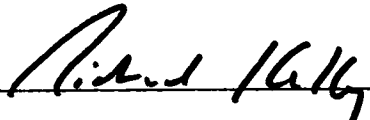
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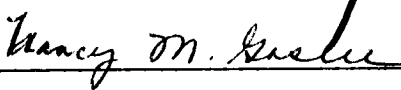
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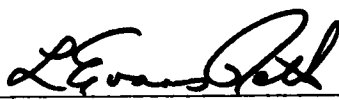
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We have read this thesis and
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Vice Chancellor
Graduate Studies and Research

A QUESTION OF BALANCE:
T. S. ELIOT'S
ACCEPTANCE OF CYCLICAL TIME

A Thesis
Presented for the
Master of Arts
Degree
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Francine Linda Doloboff

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to show how T. S. Eliot's gradual acceptance of cyclical time is revealed in his poetry. Eliot's poetry seems to fall naturally into two distinct periods: the first is before his conversion to Anglo-Catholicism, the second after his conversion. Most of the temporal criticism focuses on poetry in only one of the two groups, usually the latter since it contains the most philosophical verse. Because most of the criticism written about Eliot's concept of time is based upon his post-conversion stage, the general critical consensus is that Eliot's view of time is Christian, or linear. This conclusion, however, is not founded on a comprehensive study of time in Eliot's poetry.

Eliot's early verse presents a negative attitude toward cyclical time, and poems such as "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," and "Rhapsody on a Windy Night" present personae who are obsessed with the passage of time. Eliot cannot come to terms with his fear of death, nor can he accept the human situation in time, and as a result, the early poems fail to present a positive attitude toward cyclical time and its implications.

The poems immediately following Eliot's conversion contain the most explicitly Christian images and terminology. The hope of immortality, promised by the Christian faith, provides Eliot with an alternative to his fear of death, and *Ash-Wednesday* is Eliot's record of the struggle between Christian asceticism, which promises immortality,

and a sensual, fulfilling life within the world of time, which promises the certainty of death. "Marina," another poem of this same period, becomes a link between optimistic Christian spiritualism and the rewarding contact with humanity in the world of time.

Thus Eliot gradually comes to accept cyclical time with the help of a Christianity and the achievement, presented in *Four Quartets*, of a proper balance between sense and spirit, love and desire, and past and present. Eliot comes to the realization that even though we are a part of a natural cyclic process, of which death is an element, we can find meaning in life through the memory of personal experiences as well as through those of previous generations.

Time is an important concept in the Twentieth Century, and Eliot's poetry presents one modern man's attempt to come to terms with the implications and meaning of the fascinating idea of time.

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INTRODUCTION

Our universe has changed. We are no longer comfortable in Time between the limits of the Creation and the Day of Judgement. Every man carries his own time system about with him. Again and again writers and thinkers remind us that "the demand that time shall be taken seriously is one of the fundamental notes of modernism."¹

Philosophers, scientists, writers, and a host of twentieth-century thinkers have not only complied with the demand that time be taken seriously; they have become virtually obsessed with conceptualizing time. Thomas Stearns Eliot, as a prominent modern poet, reflects in the body of his poetry modern man's struggle to understand the meaning of time, and thus his poetry bears what has become a hallmark of modern literature. From Eliot's first book of poetry, *Prufrock and Other Observations*, through the *Four Quartets*, his canon is concerned with aspects of time. Kristian Smidt in *Poetry and Belief in the Works of T. S. Eliot* has pointed out that "from first to last the sense of time is almost obtrusive in Eliot's poetry. Even in his young days he was constantly preoccupied with the passing of years, the withering of flowers, the coming of age."² Therefore, any comprehensive critical

¹A. A. Mendilow, "The Time Obsession of the Twentieth Century," in *Aspects of Time*, ed. C. A. Patrides (Manchester University Press, 1976), p. 74.

²Kristian Smidt, *Poetry and Belief in the Work of T. S. Eliot* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1949), p. 142.

study of Eliot's work must include an analysis of this fundamental aspect of the poetry.

Although most critics of Eliot's works have established their own opinions of the nature of time as revealed in his poetry, finding a simple definition of Eliot's concept of time is virtually impossible. This thesis proposes that Eliot's view of time is basically cyclical as opposed to linear. A cyclical concept of time implies that a repeatable pattern of time is present, and the pattern can be discerned because of the repetition. The cycles of time are viewed in Eliot's poetry from several perspectives: the movement from day to day, season to season, year to year, and generation to generation. Eliot perceives these cyclical patterns as a negative phenomenon in his early verse, but when he composes his last poems, the cyclical process takes on a positive meaning. Thus in his development as a poet, Eliot progresses from rejection of cyclical time and its implications to an acceptance of cyclical time.

Temporal criticism has focused predominantly upon Eliot's later poetry and has failed to place very much value on the ideas contained in his earlier verse. A biographical fact is partly responsible for the lopsided temporal criticism. Eliot converted to Anglo-Catholicism midway through his poetic career, and because this conversion was such a pronounced turning point in Eliot's life, his poetry is often divided into two distinct groups. Once a critic draws a line between these two phases of Eliot's life (and a majority of them have done so), his ability to perceive a pattern in the whole of Eliot's poetry becomes impaired,

and the more overtly Christian poems receive most of the critical attention. Examining only the second half of Eliot's poems in search of a temporal theory has led most critics to assert that Eliot's conception of time is basically Christian. For example, Staffan Bergsten, who has examined in depth the temporal concepts in *Four Quartets*, concludes that Eliot's poetry expresses an essentially Christian idea of time. C. A. Patrides asserts that linear time is the ultimately positive time concept in Eliot's verse. Even Kristian Smidt, who noticed Eliot's preoccupation with time throughout his poetry, attributes Eliot's acceptance of time to his acceptance of Christianity.

Even though it is logical to assume that Eliot would write from a totally Christian viewpoint after his conversion, this assertion places a limitation on Eliot's concept of time which simply does not appear in the poetry itself. By imposing a Christian time concept on Eliot's verse, the critics have narrowed Eliot's conception of time to a specifically linear one. Traditional Christian time theory based upon Augustine, on the other hand, is a linear concept which does not involve repeated cycles. Vincent Miller, In "Eliot's Submission to Time" cites Augustine as Eliot's "primary Guide,"³ and C. A. Patrides notes that Eliot's philosophy of time is "within the context of the Augustinian pattern (who) argued in *The City of God* that the history of the universe is 'single irreversible, unrepeatable, recti-linear . . .')." ⁴ Because the coming

³Vincent Miller, "Eliot's Submission to Time," *Sewanee Review*, 84 (1976), 453.

⁴C. A. Patrides, "The Renaissance of the Renaissance: T. S. Eliot and the Pattern of Time," *Michigan Quarterly Review*, 12 (1973), 186.

of Christ is an event which is not a part of a repeatable pattern, Staffan Bergsten explains that "a cyclic theory of time cannot be reconciled with the unique mission of Christ."⁵

Cyclical time is generally associated with pre-Christian fertility cults whose worship centered around the natural crop-growing cycles, and is to the Christian a "pagan" idea. Thus there is a conflict inherent in the cyclical and linear concepts of time. Because of biographical information, and the fact that most critics only focus on the latter half of Eliot's poetry, the general critical consensus is that Eliot maintains a Christian, therefore linear, view of time.

Eliot, however, frequently discusses and employs a cyclical time theory not only in negative early poems such as "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," "Rhapsody on a Windy Night," and "Preludes," but also in the affirmative later poems which make up *Four Quartets*. Of course many critics have noted the appearance of cyclical time in both the early and late poetry, but they have been reluctant to account for the cyclical theory in a plausible manner. That Eliot includes cyclical time for the purpose of soundly rejecting it is the most common explanation for its presence. At the very least, C. A. Patrides consents to dismiss the appearance of cyclical time as simply "a mystery" with which Eliot has left us.⁶

To conclude, as Patrides does, that the presence of cyclical time in Eliot's later poetry is a mystery, never to be reconciled, is to regard the matter too lightly. The following chapters will show how a

⁵Staffan Bergsten, "Time and Eternity: A Study of the Structure and Symbolism of T. S. Elliot's *Four Quartets*" (London: William Heinemann Ltd., 1960), p. 117.

⁶C. A. Patrides, "The Renaissance of the Renaissance," 190.

Christian theory of time and a cyclical theory of time can be reconciled. The Christian idea of life, death, and rebirth (a cyclical process) can allow for the positive cyclical concept of time which Eliot affirms in his last poems: "The ways through death to new life is the fundamental pattern of Eliot's poetry from 'Prufrock' to the *Four Quartets*."⁷

In order to trace the development of Eliot's time theory, and his acceptance of cyclical time, it will be necessary to examine poetry from the beginning, middle, and late phases of Eliot's poetic career. Chapter I will consider the early poems "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" (1910), "Rhapsody on a Windy Night" (1914), and "Preludes" (1909-11), all of which appeared in *Prufrock and Other Observations* published in 1917. Although these poems project a negative view of cyclical time, they contain the background of Eliot's thoughts on time necessary to show how the acceptance of cyclical time is possible. *The Waste Land* (1921) could, of course, serve as a further example of the early poetry; however, this celebrated "piece of rhythmical grumbling" has been too often the center of the critic's attention in the past few decades, and the three poems previously mentioned are adequate as examples of Eliot's early views.

Chapter II will focus on the period immediately following Eliot's conversion to Christianity. This phase naturally contains Eliot's most overtly Christian poetry, and the focus will be on *Ash-Wednesday* (1930), acknowledged as Eliot's most Christian poem. Although *Ash-Wednesday's*

⁷Bergsten, p. 112.

Christian philosophy is undeniable, a new stage in Eliot's development of temporal theory is revealed in the poem, and the study of *Ash-Wednesday* provides the basis for a reconciliation of Christian doctrine and cyclical time. "Marina" (1930), the last of Eliot's "Ariel Poems," will also be considered in this chapter as a supplement to the new stage revealed in *Ash-Wednesday*, and as a link to the last stage of temporal development.

Finally, "Marina" will lead to the analysis in Chapter III of each of the *Four Quartets*: *Burnt Norton* (1935), *East Coker* (1940), *The Dry Salvages* (1941), and *Little Gidding* (1942). The *Quartets* are a synthesis of Eliot's entire canon of poetry which includes both preconversion and postconversion stages of his life. Thus each *Quartet* reveals Eliot's acceptance of the cyclical time concept, and its reconciliation with Christian theology. Chapter III presents the final stage in Eliot's acceptance of cyclical time.

Eliot answers the call of modernism to consider time seriously and ultimately discovers that a cyclical concept of time can have positive meaning in the lives of modern men. Eliot's perception of the unchanging fact that we must live within time's boundaries progresses from negative to positive because, "It is in the power of man not to change time, but to change the meaning of time."⁸

⁸George Poulet, *Studies in Human Time* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1965), p. 357.

CHAPTER I

TIME AS TYRRANY

Any significant desire to escape from time's wheel comes only to those who most intensely experience time's emptiness.¹

The inhabitants of the foggy, rather dirty cities of Eliot's early poems roam the streets in search of alleviation from the emptiness of their existence. S. T. Sullivan observes that both Prufrock and the narrator of "Rhapsody on a Windy Night" have a strong desire to rid themselves of "their inner fragmentation and general sense of purposelessness through a renewed understanding of the presence of meaning in all things."² However, the personae of "Prufrock," "Rhapsody," and "Preludes" have difficulty in perceiving positive meaning in the passage of time; and although they are constantly preoccupied with their condition in time, they refuse to acknowledge any positive possibilities within the limitations of time.

Time's most stringent limitation is its continual movement, for time allows nothing to stand still. One critic notes that Eliot seems most unhappy with time's relentless passage and seems certain that "Eliot is attracted above all by the image and goal of immobility, and that in

¹Vincent Miller, "Eliot's Submission to Time," *Sewanee Review*, 84 (1976), 451.

²Z. T. Sullivan, "Memory and Meditative Structure in T. S. Eliot's Early Poetry," *Renascence*, 29 (1976-7), 97.

everything he seeks for approximations to this goal in the human order."³ However, an illusion of immobility as an aspect of time created in Eliot's early poetry "becomes the ineluctable agent of destruction,"⁴ extinguishing the vitality of the characters rather than granting them meaningful life. Eliot's struggle to find a positive force within the restrictions of temporal order begins in his early poetry, and by looking closely at "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," "Rhapsody on a Windy Night," and "Preludes" one can attain a clearer understanding of Eliot's time obsession.

The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock

J. Alfred Prufrock is a character who is always at the mercy of time,⁵ and views time as a "wearisome burden":⁶

And indeed there will be time
 For the yellow smoke that slides along the street
 Rubbing its back upon the window-panes;
 There will be time, there will be time
 To prepare a face to meet the faces that you meet;
 There will be time to murder and create,
 And time for all the work and days of hands
 That lift and drop a question on your plate;
 Time for you and time for me,
 And time yet for a hundred indecisions,

³William F. Lynch, "Dissociation in Time," in *T. S. Eliot Four Quartets: A Casebook*, ed. Bernard Bergonzi (London: Macmillan, 1967), p. 251.

⁴David Hirsch, "T. S. Eliot and the Vexation of Time," *Southern Review*, No. 3-4 (1967), p. 611.

⁵*Ibid.*, p. 611.

⁶Staffan Bergsten, *Time and Eternity: A Study of the Structure and Symbolism in T. S. Eliot's Four Quartets* (London: William Heinemann Ltd., 1960), p. 21.

And for a hundred visions and revisions,
 Before the taking of a toast and tea.
 (11. 49-51)

The continuous cycle of days, weeks, and years is, for Prufrock, only as stimulating as the women's inane and repetitive discussions of Michelangelo. Indeed, as Vincent Miller declares, "Prufrock speaks to his listeners as if they had come to visit him in some circle of unchanging hell where time has stopped and all action has become theoretical."⁷ Cyclical time, when viewed through Prufrock's eyes, is the same as no movement at all, and this stagnation is the cause of Prufrock's boredom:

For I have known them all already, known them all—
 Have known the evenings, mornings, afternoons,
 I have measured out my life with coffee spoons. . . .
 (11. 49-51)

As Prufrock walks through the half-deserted streets, he already knows what will happen to him in the present as well as the future because present and future are the same as the past; Prufrock is stuck in a cyclic eternity.⁸ There is then truth in Sullivan's observation that Eliot's early poems present personae who "cannot sustain a sense of meaning and purpose in the past."⁹

As long as the past holds no meaning and cannot be differentiated from the present or future, cyclical time remains a negative concept,

⁷ Miller, 451.

⁸ Hugh Kenner, *The Invisible Poet: T. S. Eliot* (New York: McDowell, Obolensky, 1959), p. 24.

⁹ Sullivan, 99.

and the more Prufrock meditates on the negative aspects of time, the more ardently he wishes to escape from the tyranny of his concept of time. What must be examined is the cause of Prufrock's pessimistic interpretation of cyclical time.

Day to day ennui is not the product of cyclical time, but the overly self-conscious Prufrock interprets the meaning of cyclical time on the basis of his narrow personal view. Cycles need not be repetitive to such a degree that they produce intense boredom; for instance, the cyclical pattern is revealed in the various change of seasons. The idea of change itself is one of the keys to understanding Prufrock's problem of accepting time. Prufrock wishes for change, but at the same time he resists it. The horror with which Prufrock notes changes in his physical appearance attests to his reluctance to see change as positive:

And indeed there will be time
 To wonder, "Do I dare?" and, "Do I dare?"
 Time to turn back and descend the stair,
 With a bald spot in the middle of my hair—
 (They will say: "How his hair is growing thin!")
 My morning coat, my collar mounting firmly to the chin,
 My necktie rich and modest, but asserted by a simple pin—
 (They will say: "But how his arms and legs are thin!")
 (ll. 37-44)

Obviously, the changes in Prufrock's physical appearance are the result of the aging process, and change for Prufrock implies death. David Hirsch in "T. S. Eliot and the Vexation of Time" concludes that Prufrock cannot come to terms with his own mortality,¹⁰ and this is again evident when Prufrock laments,

¹⁰Hirsch, p. 618.

I grow old . . . I grow old . . .
 I shall wear the bottoms of my trousers rolled.
 (ll. 120-21)

The fear of death is also very hauntingly expressed in these lines:

I have seen the moment of my greatness flicker,
 And I have seen the eternal Footman hold my coat, and snicker,
 And in short, I was afraid.
 (ll. 84-6)

If the acceptance of cyclical time requires the acknowledgment and acceptance of mortality, Prufrock, it seems, would rather remain in his stagnant boredom.

In lacking the courage to accept death as a part of the life process, Prufrock also lacks the courage to peer through the yellow fog and see the reality of the human condition in time.¹¹ However, Prufrock, at times, seems to be aware of the human contact he is missing by refusing to peer through the fog at humanity. He continually asks himself if it "would have been worth it after all" to suffer the certainty of death in order to face humanity in the form of the "arms that are braceleted and white and bare" (l.63) that so attract him, rather than remain in the cyclical trap which lacks emotion. Eliot's allusion to Marvell's "To His Coy Mistress" clarifies Prufrock's choice:

And would it have been worth it, after all,
 After the cups, the marmalade, the tea,
 Among the porcelain, among some talk of you and me,
 Would it have been worthwhile,
 To have bitten off the matter with a smile,
 To have squeezed the universe into a ball
 To roll it towards some overwhelming question, . . .
 (ll. 87-93)

¹¹Joyce Rochat, "T. S. Eliot's 'Companion' Poems: Eternal Question, Temporal Response," *Contemporary Review*, 222 (1975), 78.

The round ball and rolling motion, although primarily a sexual image, imply the cyclical movement of time and the overwhelming question of mortality, but Marvell accepts the condition in time, and thus chooses to make the limitation itself productive and meaningful. Marvell asserts that though he cannot make the sun stand still, by becoming conscious of life rather than death he can escape the obsession of time's rule. Nevertheless, Prufrock cannot accomplish what Marvell has; he never did squeeze the universe into a ball, and thus he is destined to remain trapped in his private circle of unchanging time. Ironically, Prufrock's life, because of impotent stagnation, lacks vitality and enthusiasm and is ultimately death-like. By refusing to accept humanity's mortality, Prufrock denies himself the opportunity to live within the time he does possess, and cyclical time remains a negative concept. For Prufrock states at the end of his monologue that if we do become aware of the human situation in time, if we choose to listen to the human voices, the result is death:

We have lingered in the chambers of the sea
 By sea girls wreathed with seaweed red and brown
 Till human voices wake us, and we drown.
 (ll. 129-132)

Rhapsody on a Windy Night

The midnight wanderer in "Rhapsody on a Windy Night" is as obsessed with the passage of time as J. Alfred Prufrock, and shares Prufrock's pessimistic view of cyclical time. The same fears which Prufrock feels plague the narrator of "Rhapsody." The presence of death lurks in each passing hour of the night, marked for the loiterer by a street lamp whose light sputters in the wind:

Every street lamp that I pass
 Beats like a fatalistic drum. . . .
 (11. 8-9)

Despite the narrator's painfully acute awareness of time's progression, which brings him closer to death, he feels the same sense of stagnation which Prufrock feels because of his repetitive daily existence; he is unable to distinguish his past from his present. Therefore, for the narrator, "objects remembered slide into each other"¹² as he wanders through the streets:

Twelve o'clock.
 Along the reaches of the street
 Held in a lunar synthesis,
 Whispering lunar incantations
 Dissolve the floors of memory
 And all its clear relations,
 Its divisions and precisions.
 (11. 1-7)

The moonlight, like his distorted sense of cyclical time, confuses all the divisions and precisions of his memory. On his nocturnal stroll, the speaker of "Rhapsody," like his counterpart Prufrock, is searching for some sense of meaning, some reason for the human existence within time. However, his view of humanity is tainted by his pessimistic attitude, and what he sees and remembers simply reaffirms his sense of futility. The images he sees are twisted by his distorted perception:

'Regard that woman
 Who hesitates toward you in the light of the door
 Which opens on her like a grin.
 You see the border of her dress
 Is torn and stained with sand,

¹²Elisabeth Schneider, *T. S. Eliot: The Pattern in the Carpet* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975), p. 17.

And you see the corner of her eye
Twists like a crooked pin."

(11. 16-22)

This common prostitute is seen in the light of a door, not the moon, and thus she belongs to the world of reality. But reality is not attractive to the narrator. Although he looks into the woman's eyes, he does not see emotion or meaning in them. He looks elsewhere and finds the same blankness:

Half-past two,
The street-lamp said,
'Remark the cat which flattens itself in the gutter,
Slips out its tongue
And devours a morsel of rancid butter.'
So the hand of the child, automatic,
Slipped out and pocketed a toy that was running along the quay.
I could see nothing behind that child's eye.
I have seen eyes in the street
Trying to peer through lighted shutters, . . .
(11. 33-42)

The automatic motion of the child and the feeble attempt of the eyes to see through the shutters into the light are indicative of the narrator's own automatic, meaningless actions, and his attempt to see the reality of life, and as a result, find meaning.

The inability of the narrator to find and maintain a sense of meaning, particularly in the past, is the main cause of his sense of futility. If the narrator's past held any points in time that could be distinguished from the rest, and therefore contain meaning, the cyclical boredom could be overcome. As Hugh Kenner points out, in Eliot's poetry memory, which occurs in time, is the weapon against time.¹³

¹³ Hugh Kenner, "Into our First World," in *T. S. Eliot Four Quartets: A Casebook*, ed. Bernard Bergonzu (London: Macmillan, 1967), p. 175.

Sullivan also asserts that memory serves a crucial function for Eliot's personae: "it can liberate them or damn them."¹⁴ However, memory is essentially lost for the narrator, and its images are scattered randomly about by the wind:

The moon has lost her memory.
 A washed-out smallpox cracks her face,
 Her hand twists a paper rose,
 That smells of dust and eau de Cologne,
 She is alone
 With all the old nocturnal smells
 That cross and cross across her brain.
 (11. 55-61)

The narrator's memory can only recall things as unpleasant as those he actually sees in his wanderings, and he makes little distinction between memory and reality:

The memory throws up high and dry
 A crowd of twisted things;
 A twisted branch upon the beach

 A broken spring in a factory yard,

 The reminiscence comes
 Of sunless dry geraniums
 And dust in crevices,
 Smells of chestnuts in the streets,
 And female smells in shuttered rooms,
 And cigarettes in corridors
 And cocktail smells in bars.
 (11. 23-30, 62-68)

His attempt to recall anything meaningful is useless. The midnight shakes his memory "as a madman shakes a dead geranium" (1.12), but his past and present are inseparable, the narrator's life, like Prufrock's, more closely resembles death.

¹⁴Sullivan, p. 97.

The same idea expressed in the last passage of "Prufrock" is found essentially in the final passage of "Rhapsody":

The lamp said,
 "Four o'clock,
 Here is the number on the door.
 Memory!
 You have the key,
 The little lamp spreads a ring on the stair
 Mount.
 The bed is open; the tooth-brush hangs on the wall,
 Put your shoes at the door, sleep, prepare for life."

The last twist of the knife.

Memory holds the key that would open the door to meaning, allowing the narrator to accept, as positive, the human condition in time because life is meaningful. The light suggests the reality of the human condition, and the circle formed by the light reveals the reality of cyclical time. Because the circle of light shines on a set of stairs leading toward the door, the implication is that within a positive view of cyclical time forward progress can be possible. The street-lamp orders the narrator to mount into the circle of light and prepare for life, thus accepting the human condition within cyclical time. However, the narrator rejects the invitation and joins Prufrock in his reluctance to be awakened by the "human voices." To the narrator, the final ironic twist of the knife lies in the temporal fact that in order to accept life, one must also accept death.

Preludes

The grim irony of the concluding line of "Rhapsody" also appears in the title "Preludes." Eliot seems to give the knife another painful

twist by ironically suggesting that within a negative view of cyclical time, a prelude, or introduction to something new, is possible. The poem itself gives scant hope of a new beginning. While both "Prufrock" and "Rhapsody" are poems narrated from the personal view of one character, "Preludes" contemplates the problem of time from a wider, shifting point of view. The repetitive progression from morning to afternoon to evening in the poem becomes a metaphor for the cyclical pattern on a much larger, historic scale. Elizabeth Drew suggests that in the line "The burnt-out ends of smoky days" Eliot is not merely speaking about dusk falling in the city, "but the twilight of an epoch."¹⁵ Mendilow comes to the same conclusion in stating that "Preludes" "describes the end of a culture cycle, and raises the question of whether the end is a prelude to a new beginning, or whether it is another turn in the everlasting merry-go-round, a purposeless circling that leads nowhere."¹⁶ The question Mendilow raises is answered by the negative conclusion of the poem.

Eliot does consider the individual implications of cyclical time as well as its universal consequences. "Preludes" portrays the daily routine which numbs one's sense of time and blurs the distinction between past and present. Marion Montgomery in "Memory and Desire in Eliot's 'Preludes'" states that in the poem "The time is present, and if there is

¹⁵Elizabeth Drew, T. S. Eliot: *The Design of His Poetry* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1959), p. 33.

¹⁶A. A. Mendilow, "T. S. Eliot's Long Unlovely Street," *Modern Language Review*, 63 (1968), 321.

a past for memory to reflect upon, it is indistinguishable from the present. Indeed time present, time past, and time future are emptily included in the singular 'Six o'clock.'¹⁷ Therefore, as in "Prufrock" and "Rhapsody," time seems to stand still, and from the point of view of the poem it is simply a delusion to believe that the cyclical motion can be positive advancement in time:

The winter evening settles down
With smell of steaks in passageways.
Six o'clock.
The burnt-out ends of smoky days. . . .

II

The morning comes to consciousness
On faint stale smells of beer
From the sawdust-trampled street
With all its muddy feet that press
To early coffee-stands.

With the other masquerades
That time resumes,
one thinks of all the hands
That are raising dingy shades
In a thousand furnished rooms.
(11. 1-4, 14-23)

As Eliot has emphasized, time seems to have stopped, so the movement from morning to evening is simply a masquerade. The four sections of "Preludes" form a circle which reinforces the illusion of stagnation. The first time of day, mentioned in Section I, is six o'clock in the evening. Sections II and III present one complete revolution from morning to morning, and Section IV finally ends again at six o'clock in the evening. In addition, Section I contains images of withered leaves

¹⁷ Marion Montgomery, "Memory and Desire in Eliot's 'Preludes'," *South Atlantic Bulletin*, 38, ii (1973), 61-62.

and newspapers whirling around vacant lots, and the last section echoes the first by presenting ancient women gathering fuel in the vacant lots. As Mendilow suggests, the ancient women are gathering newspapers to refuel the burnt-out day;¹⁸ therefore, the days are not new at all, but made up of the same past events recorded in the newspapers.

Amidst the unrelenting boredom of the "smoky days," the personae attempt to find meaning, but, as in "Rhapsody," what is seen is not pleasant. Reality within time is ugly, constituted of raunchy smells of stale beer, muddy feet, broken blinds, and dingy furnished rooms. The persona in Section III, although contemplative and searching, cannot find a positive image:

You tossed a blanket from the bed,
 You lay upon your back, and waited;
 You dozed, and watched the night revealing
 The thousand sordid images
 Of which your soul was constituted
 (11. 24-28)

Although "Preludes" is ultimately a negative statement on the nature of time, the poem does serve as a prelude to an acceptance of time as a positive force. In Section IV, the poem shifts into the first person, and the speaker makes a more ardent attempt than either Prufrock or the narrator of "Rhapsody" to accept the human condition in time; for the moment, the fears of death and sense of futility are absent. Montgomery points out that there is in "Preludes" "a *desire* that will not be stilled. . . . There is a momentary movement as if the

¹⁸Mendilow, 322.

key is about to be turned in the lock. Then fear-haunted desire succumbs to fear."¹⁹ The sordid images in the poem actually bring the persona to an awareness of the human condition in time, and this sudden realization produces an emotional response. Throughout the first three sections the sordid, temporal world is presented with a detached disgust, but the personal perspective brings with it a sense of pity. For one instant in the poem, the persona is awakened by the "human voices":

I am moved by fancies that are curled
Around these images, and cling:
The notion of some infinitely gentle
Infinitely suffering thing.
(11. 48-51)

However, he immediately rejects the image of the infinitely suffering, gentle humanity, which would be the key to finding meaning in his life. The notion is dismissed as a false epiphany, and the persona reassumes the negative, self-defeating attitude of cyclical time. He remains firm in his belief that "the revolutions of day and night, and of the year are mechanical and meaningless, a monotonous going round and round in circles":²⁰

Wipe your hand across your mouth, and laugh;
The worlds revolve like ancient women
Gathering fuel in vacant lots.
(11. 52-54)

The three poems just discussed present similar personae who are vexed at their entrapment within time. Each persona searches for meaning in his existence and the existence of humanity, but to no avail.

¹⁹Montgomery, 63.

²⁰Mendilow, 322.

Although the personae are, indeed, unsuccessful in their quest, the poems make clear that the key to dissolving the sense of futility is acceptance of the temporal situation. Eliot himself seems unwilling to accept the consequences of time, and the poems are indicative of his rebellion against time's rule. The groundwork for a shift in his attitude has been laid in these early poems; there is a glimpse of the liberation that an acceptance of humanity's inseparable link with cyclical time can afford, but Eliot must first encounter the positive force of Christianity and contemplate more deeply the philosophical implications of time.

CHAPTER II

THE SPIRITUAL AWAKENING

. . . what we must do is go along with the time-ridden faces. For they are at least on the right track and dealing with the right fact. We are constitutionally committed to the structures of temporality. . . . Jumping out of our human facts will not help at all, and will produce nothing but further strains.¹

Until the publication of *Ash-Wednesday* in 1930, Eliot's poetry continued to reflect a fruitless quest for meaning in temporal existence. Indeed, Eliot's poetry moved from expressing boredom to what could be called terror,² and his bleak pessimism culminated in "The Hollow Men" (1925), Eliot's darkest poem. Eliot sifted through many philosophical theories for answers to his existential questions but did not find a doctrine capable of dispelling his negative outlook until he embraced Christianity. In 1928 Eliot publically declared himself "a royalist in politics, a classicist in literature, and an Anglo-Catholic in religion."³

This chapter will examine two poems, *Ash-Wednesday*, written during Eliot's process of conversion, and "Marina," written shortly thereafter. *Ash-Wednesday* will be considered as the poetic expression

¹William F. Lynch, "Dissociation in Time," in *T. S. Eliot Four Quartets: A Casebook*, ed. Bernard Bergonzi (London: Macmillan, 1967), p. 253.

²Helen Gardner, *The Art of T. S. Eliot* (London: The Cresset Press, 1949), p. 80.

³"Thomas Stearns Eliot," in *The American Tradition in Literature* 4th ed., ed. Sculley Bradley et al. (n.p.: Grosset and Dunlap, 1977), II, p. 1165.

of Eliot's journey from doubt towards the reassurance provided by the positive outlook of the Christian faith. "Instead of the sense of complete exhaustion and defeat" portrayed in the poems of Chapter I and continuing through "The Hollow Men" there is in *Ash-Wednesday*, as Elizabeth Drew says, a sense "of gradual spiritual clarification, process and progress, though within that, there is still both progression and regression."⁴ The persona rejects temporal, earthly existence in favor of a spiritual existence, but since the Christian faith provides him with a positive view of the human situation, the persona remains in a state of tension over his choice to abandon the world of the senses. His vacillation is indicative of Eliot's reluctance to accept all of Christian dogma into his own philosophy. The later poem "Marina" offers the first example of the manner in which Eliot incorporated the optimism gained through Christianity into a modified philosophy of his own. "Marina" is successful in retaining the calm optimism which Christianity affords without the heaviness of Christian spiritualism.

Ash-Wednesday

Scholarly interpretations of *Ash-Wednesday* abound,⁵ and critics have been diligent in identifying sources, influences, and symbols in

⁴Elizabeth Drew, *T. S. Eliot: The Design of His Poetry* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1949), p. 99.

⁵See the following for particularly complete readings: Elizabeth Drew, *T. S. Eliot: The Design of His Poetry* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1949). Helen Gardner, *The Art of T. S. Eliot* (London: The Cresset Press, 1949). A. J. Moody, *Thomas Stearns Eliot: Poet* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1979). Grover Smith, *T. S. Eliot's Poetry and Plays: A Study in Sources and Meaning* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1956).

the poem. Dante and St. John of the Cross have been most often cited as strongly influential writers. My primary concern, however, is not to reiterate what has been said, but to examine the place of *Ash-Wednesday* in Eliot's gradual process of accepting cyclical time.

The persona in *Ash-Wednesday* wrestles with many of the same problems with which Prufrock, the narrator of "Rhapsody," and the personae in "Preludes" contended. The grim fact of mortality is again a central issue; Ash Wednesday is a religious day set aside to remind man of death, for the formula of the imposition of the ashes is "Remember, man, that thou art dust and unto dust thou shalt return."⁶ The persona of *Ash-Wednesday* has turned to an extreme form of Christian asceticism in hopes of gaining immortality; however, he questions his choice. Despite the alleviation from the fear of death which his spiritualism affords, the speaker finds it difficult to give up temporal pleasures. Thus the speaker asks: "(Why should the aged eagle spread its wings?)" (1.6). Grover Smith identifies the appearance of the eagle as "reminiscent of the fable in the bestiaries which says that in old age the eagle flies upward toward the sun and then plunges into a well which renews its vigor."⁷ The eagle suggests immortality, and the speaker is wondering why he should seek immortality if he must sacrifice his temporal existence to attain it. Like the lives of the early personae, death, his life has become death-like because of his struggle to avoid death.

⁶Grover Smith, *T. S. Eliot's Poetry and Plays: A Study in Sources and Meaning* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1956), p. 143.

⁷*Ibid.*, p. 141.

The speaker seems surprised that the absence of temporality is so keenly felt; he never before had a positive feeling about life within time, and he asks:

Why should I mourn
The vanished power of the usual reign?
(11. 7-8)

He answers his own question in the next verse:

Because I do not hope to know again
The infirm glory of the positive hour
Because I do not think
Because I know I shall not know
The one veritable transitory power
Because I cannot drink
There, where trees flower, and springs flow, for there
is nothing again. . . .
(11. 9-15)

He mourns his vanished connections with the temporal world because the physical world appears positive. The allusion to Wordsworth's "Intimations of Immortality" further illuminates the speaker's reply to his own question. Wordsworth too is contemplating death and immortality; as a Romantic poet he places ultimate value upon nature and consequently the natural cyclic process. He accepts death as a part of life, and insists that "Though nothing can bring back the hour/Of splendour in the grass, of glory in the flower,"⁸ the splendour and glory of temporal existence are worth the price of death. The speaker in *Ash-Wednesday* acknowledges temporal reality as the one true, if transitory, power although he is unwilling to accept death.

⁸William Wordsworth, "Ode: Intimations of Immortality From Recollections of Early Childhood," in *English Romantic Writers*, ed. David Perkins (New York: Harcourt, Brace, & World, Inc., 1967), p. 282.

The persona's overpowering fear of death spurs him on in his spiritual quest, and he remembers that "Time is always time," and that he cannot escape the temporal fact. Thus he cajoles himself into accepting spiritual asceticism as a way out of temporality:

Because I cannot hope to turn again
Consequently I rejoice, having to construct something
Upon which to rejoice
And pray to God to have mercy upon us
And I pray that I may forget
These matters that with myself I too much discuss.
(11. 23-38)

Once he has made his choice, he has secured the promise of rebirth after death and asks to be prayed for at the hour of his death.

Throughout the rest of the poem, death becomes a positive, at times beautiful image, often associated with symbols of rebirth. In Section II the persona is devoured by three white leopards, and his bones become scattered in the desert. The parallel to the Book of Ezekial is obvious:

And God said
Shall these bones live? shall these
Bones live?
(11. 45-47)

According to Ezekial, "The breath came into them [the bones], and they lived."⁹ Therefore the bones hold the promise of rebirth. In Section IV the image of death is beautiful, not frightening, "jewelled unicorns draw by the guilded hearse" (1.140). Thus the persona's total spirituality eliminates his fear of death and promises future blessings, but it does not provide a fulfilling present life in its place. Denying the pleasure

⁹Ezekial, 37:3, Revised Standard, 1973.

of the physical senses suppresses a vital function which has been identified earlier as a key to positive existence within time — the memory.

In order to become totally spiritual, the persona must give up his temporal memories as well as his present sensual experience. Section III of *Ash-Wednesday* consists of a series of memories from which the speaker is trying to free himself. The memories occur as he is climbing a circular staircase, suggesting that the memories were drawn from experience within cyclical time. The early memories are similar to the "twisted" ones which haunted the narrator of "Rhapsody"; they suggest the persona's negative, pre-Christian view of temporal existence:

At the first turning of the second stair
I turned and saw below
The same shape twisted on the banister
Under the vapor in the fetid air
Struggling with the devil of the stairs who wears
The deceitful face of hope and of despair.

At the second turning of the second stair
I left them twisting, turning below;
There were no more faces and the stair was dark,
Damp, jagged, like an old man's mouth drivelling, beyond
repair,
Or the toothed gullet of an aged shark.
(ll. 96-106)

When the persona reaches the third stair, he has wrestled successfully with his pessimism and gained the positive outlook of Christianity; he then remembers beautiful images:

At the first turning of the third stair
Was a slotted window bellied like the fig's fruit
And beyond the hawthorn blossom and a pasture scene
The broadbacked figure drest in blue and green
Enchanted the maytime with an antique flute.
Blown hair is sweet, brown hair over the mouth blown,

Lilac and brown hair;
 Distraction, music of the flute, stops and steps of the mind
 over the third stair,
 Fading, fading; strength beyond hope and despair
 Climbing the third stair.

(11.107-116)

He views these memories as a distraction from his spirituality, and he forces the memories to fade, for they are seen as a threat to his asceticism. He is more concerned with his reward of immortality, and fears that because of his temptation to go back to the physical, temporal world, his spirituality is a mere facade, and he is not worthy of receiving the gift:

Lord, I am not worthy
 Lord, I am not worthy

but speak the word only.

(11. 117-119)

The persona's struggle to resist the temptation of temporal pleasures, which have become attractive to him despite the certainty of death they bring, continues throughout the poem. His life seems empty and he is constantly "wavering between the profit and the loss" (l.188) of accepting the positive aspects of cyclical time or remaining in his spiritual vacuum which destroys the present, but promises an everlasting future. Even in the final section of the poem, the speaker yearns for the beauty and fulfillment of earthly existence:

And the lost heart stiffens and rejoices
 In the lost lilac and the lost sea voices
 And the weak spirit quickens to rebel
 For the bent golden-rod and the lost sea smell
 Quickens to recover
 The cry of the quail and the whirling plover
 And the blind eye creates

The empty forms between the ivory gates
 And smell renews the salt savour of the sandy earth.
 (11. 195-203)

The speaker's desire for "the broadbacked figure drest in green and blue" surrounded by hawthorns in Section II and for the "lost lilac" in Section IV is indicative of the need for human love and compassion, which were missing from the tormented lives of Eliot's early personae. However, the speaker in *Ash-Wednesday* must give up human love and worship the spiritual image of the "Lady." This Lady, most often associated with the Virgin Mary and Dante's Beatrice, is untouchable, mystical, and often appears veiled. Although she is portrayed as an object of love, she is love that can never be fulfilled through human contact; but by worshipping the Lady, the speaker can

Terminate torment
 Of love unsatisfied
 (11. 76-77)

and avoid the frustration that Prufrock feels in his impotence. However, his worship does not satisfy his physical desire, and the spiritual love of the Lady which is successful becomes

The greater torment
 Of love satisfied. . . .
 (11. 77-78)

The Lady is a paradox; she is both a source of calm and a source of tension. She is indeed a desert in the garden of physical pleasure, but also a garden in the desert of pessimism. Her spirituality cannot successfully replace the need of the human senses; and although the Lady is a positive symbol, she cannot fill "The years that walk between" (1.121) birth and death; she can only bring hope of renewal in a future life.

The persona's attitude in *Ash-Wednesday* has progressed far beyond the negativism found in the early characters, and the speaker consequently prays for the people still trapped within time:

Will the veiled sister pray for
Those who walk in darkness, who chose thee and oppose thee,
Those who are torn on the horn between season and season,
time and time, . . .

(11. 168-170)

The speaker insists that "The right place and the right time are not here" (1.165). The rebirth his spiritualism will afford him cannot take place within time; however, it seems that Eliot does not want his readers to accept his persona's opinion as the final word, for the persona remains in a state of tension. The speaker has yet to realize the Word (Christianity) is "within/the world and for the world," and that Christianity must incorporate an awareness of cyclic order:

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

(11. 156-57)

Since Christian dogma does not allow for a cyclical view of time, some modifications must be made to allow for indisputable temporal fact.

If the persona could view cyclical time from the positive perspective provided by Christianity, he would indeed be able to "redeem the time," and eliminate the tension of choosing *between* the temporal world and the spiritual world. In the final section, the persona's last cry is "Suffer me not to be separated"; he is searching for a union of his sense and his spirit. Thus, *Ash-Wednesday* reveals a new stage in the search for meaning within temporal existence. The realization and acceptance of death alone cannot provide a positive outlook. Life itself must seem appealing and meaningful, not simply rejected for a future spiritual life.

Marina

"Marina" is the last, and often considered the best, of the "Ariel Poems." The situation suggested by the title is found in Act V, scene I of Shakespeare's *Pericles*, acknowledged by Eliot in an address given at Edinburgh University in 1937 as "the finest of all recognition scenes."¹⁰ The speaker in the poem is presumably Pericles at the moment he recognizes his long lost daughter Marina. Pericles has ceased to attend to his physical needs, like the speaker in *Ash-Wednesday*. His reunion with Marina recalls him to the world of the senses. Thus the poem works on two levels, for the speaker, in more general terms, recognizes a new way of life, symbolized by Marina. Although the new life incorporates Christian ideals, it is quite different from the spiritual life the speaker in *Ash-Wednesday* is contemplating.

Most critics agree that "Marina" is more closely related to *Ash-Wednesday* than any of the other three poems with which it is grouped, but some critics hasten to make an important distinction between the two poems. A. D. Moody says that "Marina" is closely related to *Ash-Wednesday*, "though it has not the explicitly Christian element"¹¹ found in *Ash-Wednesday*, and Elizabeth Drew is certain that "it is the release from the *confinement* of the religious context which creates the new world of the poem."¹² The Christian asceticism is no longer a consideration of

¹⁰Drew, p. 127.

¹¹A. J. Moody, *Thomas Stearns Eliot: Poet* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1979), p. 157.

¹²Drew, p. 128.

the speaker in "Marina." As Elizabeth Drew goes on to say, in "Marina" "the worlds of the sense and spirit are one; 'the time of tension' is transformed into a moment of complete release."¹³

The speaker in "Marina" recognizes a new and satisfying life which he is not at all hesitant to accept. He is awakened from his reverie not by a veiled, intangible spirit, as in *Ash-Wednesday*, but by a recognizable, human part of himself — his daughter. Grover Smith points out the importance of this fundamental difference in the two poems, and states that Marina is a "symbol of vital restoration," like the Lady in *Ash-Wednesday*, but a union with Marina is not the "impossible transcendent act"¹⁴ that it is in *Ash-Wednesday*. The poem presents "the benign and even triumphant realization of joy in a human relationship."¹⁵ The speaker, uncertain at first, assures himself that Marina is no spirit:

What is this face, less clear and clearer
The pulse in the arm, less strong and stronger—
Given or lent?

(11. 13-14)

Marina is human, and because the speaker acknowledges humanity, represented by Marina as the revitalizing force, he is on the way to acceptance of the human condition within time.

Once the speaker has recognized his daughter, and therefore his potential for revitalization on earth, he is not haunted by the fear of death as punishment for enjoying sensual pleasures. The negative images of earthly pleasures, presented as sinful, fade and

¹³ Ibid., p. 131.

¹⁴ Smith, p. 130.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 130.

Are become unsubstantial, reduced by a wind,
 A breath of pine, and the woodsong fog
 By this grace dissolved in place.

(11. 10-13)

The recognition of humanity incarnate in Marina becomes the grace which redeems the speaker from his negative view. His memory also becomes liberated, and instead of "a crowd of twisted things," the speaker recalls a pleasant memory of "Whispers and small laughter between leaves and hurrying feet" (1.16).

The speaker's new awareness suddenly focuses on the condition of his life before the appearance of Marina, represented in the poem by his ship:

Bowsprit cracked with ice and paint cracked with heat.

 The rigging weak and the canvas rotten

 The garboard strake leaks, the seams need caulking.

(11. 18,21,24)

However the speaker is willing, even glad, to give up the old pessimism, and inspired by Marina, "This form, this face, this life," the speaker declares:

let me
 Resign my life for this life, my speech for that unspoken
 The awakened, lips parted, the hope, the new ships.

(11. 26-28)

Rebirth is a central issue in both *Ash-Wednesday* and "Marina," but the latter poem is concerned with the rebirth of life in the temporal world rather than with the promise of rebirth after death. However, death still casts a shadow over "Marina," although the poem is ultimately joyous. The epigraph of the poem is line 1138 of Seneca's *Hercules*

Furens: "What place is this, what land, what quarter of the globe?" Hercules, in a mad frenzy induced by jealous gods, has killed his wife and children, and is awakening from his slumber to recognize his atrocity. The situation in the epigraph is, then, the opposite of the joyous discovery in the poem itself. Eliot, it seems, still cannot accept the temporal limits placed upon even the most joyous occasions. Indeed, Hercules' joy at completing his labours was short-lived, and the reader must wonder if Pericles' joy will be equally brief. Eliot's persona has come very close to acceptance, but Eliot himself cannot forget the pain of death.

The speaker of *Ash-Wednesday* has accepted Christianity and progressed to a denial of sense in favor of spiritualism. While achieving Christian optimism, he still rejects the temporal world. The speaker in "Marina" has come closer to achieving the state of mind which would allow him to accept the human condition within time as positive. He not only possesses the optimistic force of Christianity, but he also recognizes humanity in Marina and recognizes and wishes to improve his pessimistic condition. His memory is no longer suppressed, and thus he holds many of the keys to accepting the human condition within time.

Both poems discussed in this chapter show a progression from the pessimistic darkness of the early poems towards a more positive outlook on life. However, Eliot's defeat of the fear of death, and the development of his positive philosophy which allows for acceptance of cyclical time remain to be seen in the culmination of his poetic career, *Four Quartets*.

CHAPTER III

THE STILL POINT: THE QUESTION RESOLVED

Why, for all of us, out of all that we have heard, seen, felt, in a lifetime, do certain images recur, charged with emotion, rather than others? The song of one bird, the leap of one fish, the scent of one flower. . . .¹

Four Quartets are acclaimed by the majority of critics as the crowning achievement of Eliot's poetic career. Indeed, the four poems which make up the *Quartets* contain superb examples of the artistic heights poetry can attain. The *Quartets* are in yet another sense, the culmination of Eliot's career, for they are the synthesis of the concerns, images, symbols, and conflicts which are woven throughout the fabric of his poetry. Since the *Quartets* are a resolution of the themes in Eliot's canon, they present, at long last, a reconciliation with the fact of temporality. As David Hirsh states, "In the *Four Quartets* . . . the poet at the height of his power achieves victory over time and language, time and world. What for Prufrock had been the path toward destruction in the *Quartets* has become the way of salvation."²

As shown in the previous chapters, acceptance of cyclical time for Eliot requires that one maintain a balance between past and present,

¹T. S. Eliot, from "The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism," in *Selected Prose of T. S. Eliot*, ed. Frank Kermode (London: Faber and Faber, 1975), p. 91.

²David Hirsch, "T. S. Eliot and the Vexation of Time," *Southern Review* No. 3-4 (1967), p. 622.

love and desire, and sense and spirit. One must also come to terms with mortality. Once the thought of death, resulting from brooding over time's passage, is usurped by a well-balanced attitude toward existence, death ceases to be the central focus, thus allowing for a positive philosophy. Eliot had to work through the time conflict which had been prominent in his thought since he began writing poetry, and he found certain keys which could unlock the door to positive acceptance of time through a gradual understanding of the experiences recorded in his poetry. As Helen Gardner notes, "The source of his poetry does not change, though his attitude towards it alters."³

Four Quartets look at human experience presented in Eliot's early poems and finally achieve the balance which is necessary for temporal acceptance. Elizabeth Drew observes that the *Four Quartets* are "enclosed within an image of human experience as 'the turning world.' But the image of the turning world is two-fold. . . . One is the physical external world of temporal and spatial manifestations, the world of perpetual change. The other is the unseen world of inner unchanging pattern, whose centre is 'the still point.' Man is 'involved' with both and is part of the pattern of both."⁴

Although many critics have provided an overall structural analysis of the poetry, fitting all of *Four Quartets* into an imposed pattern has

³Helen Gardner, *The Art of T. S. Eliot* (London: The Cresset Press, 1949), p. 78.

⁴Elizabeth Drew, *T. S. Eliot: The Design of His Poetry* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1949), p. 147.

proven to be virtually impossible. Each poem goes about synthesizing the themes in its own way, and although many similarities are evident because the poems are concerned with the same themes, it will be necessary to examine each *Quartet* as a separate poem, united with the others by ideas, images, and only in some cases by structure. In order to see how Eliot arrives at the positive philosophy towards which his poetry leads, it will also be necessary to examine and interpret each of the *Quartets* in the light of the previous chapters' discussions. The final stage in Eliot's acceptance of cyclical time will then be apparent.

Burnt Norton

Burnt Norton was originally published as the conclusion to Eliot's *Collected Poems 1909-1935*, and was written in 1935, five years earlier than the second of the *Quartets*. Often considered the most difficult of the *Quartets* because of its overtly philosophical nature, *Burnt Norton* has received widespread critical attention. Again, as with *Ash-Wednesday*, it is not the intention of this discussion to repeat what has been said, but to demonstrate how *Burnt Norton* affirms the nature of cyclical time. Each section presents the attainment of the various steps necessary for temporal acceptance.

Section I of *Burnt Norton* presents the reader with a philosophical discourse on the nature of time. Memory, which is an important element in temporal acceptance, is the central focus of the speculations:

Time present and time past
Are both perhaps present in time future,
And time future contained in time past.
(11. 1-3)

Present and past experience will be contained through the memory in all future experience; and because of the cyclical nature of time, the future is also contained within the past. Eliot suggests that we must recognize the structure of temporality, and as Elisabeth Schneider confirms, "The unbreakable linkage of time is accepted, and there is no doom about it here";⁵ the facts are simply stated. By accepting the great influence that time consciousness has upon not only the present, but also the future, it is possible to dispel the feeling of entrapment within time. Kristian Smidt points out:

Because our concept of the past is modified by subsequent events, the future also in a sense determines the past. Thus we cannot in the ordinary course of things rid ourselves of anything that is, has been, or will be. We cannot leave anything behind. . . . by recognizing the past in the present, the imprisoning cycle of time may yet be broken.⁶

Eliot continues his speculations with another hypothesis:

If all time is eternally present
All time is unredeemable.
(ll. 4-5)

At first glance, it seems as if Eliot has contradicted himself, but the interpretation depends upon his dual use of the word "present." Eternally present time is what we have seen in "Prufrock," "Rhapsody," and "Preludes." The stagnation from dwelling upon the fact that time moves in cycles and that every day is the same results from a lack of memory of past meaningful experience. Thus there is only the present, the "six o'clock" found

⁵Elisabeth Schneider, *T. S. Eliot: The Pattern in the Carpet* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975), p. 176.

⁶Kristian Smidt, *Poetry and Belief in the Work of T. S. Eliot* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1961), p. 145.

in "Preludes," with no past or future. Thus time becomes unredeemable. The other interpretation of the word "present" considers the over-awareness of time which was also a source of frustration for the early personae. If the thought of time is eternally present, that is, always within one's awareness, the result is the same negative conclusion that time is unredeemable. Both interpretations show a lack of memory, for within the concept of memory, time can be redeemed.

Eliot then illustrates what he has just proposed; a memory is brought into the present:

Footfalls echo in the memory
Down the passage which we did not take
Towards the door we never opened
Into the rose-garden.

(11. 11-14)

The suggestion that the rose-garden experience is only one that "might have been" is a false one, for it has been established that memory occurs within time. We are entering the previously unopened door of meaning applied to actual experience. As Eliot expresses later in *The Dry Salvages*, this is an experience that we have had, but "we missed the meaning" of it. A thrush is urging the speaker to find the memory by following him "through the first gate." Although the speaker is wary of a possible deception, warranted by the earlier unpleasant encounters with memory presented in "Rhapsody," *Ash-Wednesday*, and even "Marina," the thrush itself is a positive sign. He has appeared before in Eliot's poetry; he calls to the speaker in *Ash-Wednesday* to "redeem the time," and he appears "calling through the fog" in "Marina." The bird in *Burnt*

Norton seems to be asking the speaker to "redeem the time through memory."⁷

The actual memory is a synthesis of a variety of the speaker's experiences:

There they were as our guests, accepted and accepting
So we moved, and they, in a formal pattern,
Along the empty alley, into the box circle,
To look down into the drained pool.

(11. 30-33)

The guests, the personae of the memory, are accepted by the speaker and are accepting of the temporal world, so they begin to move in the formal pattern of time which takes them through an empty alley, suggesting the pessimism of the early personae, and into the "box circle," therefore into the pattern of cyclical time. Once they have accepted cyclical time, the guests, the speaker, and his companion then look down into the drained pool, reminiscent of the dark empty stair down which the speaker of *Ash-Wednesday* peers. Because they accept time a transformation takes place:

Dry the pool, dry concrete, brown edged,
And the pool was filled with water out of sunlight,
And the lotos rose, quietly, quietly,
The surface glittered out of heart of light,
And they were behind us, reflected in the pool.

(11. 34-38)

The speaker and his companions have dared to look at the "dry" memories; and once they have accepted the reality of the experience of the past, the experience gives meaning to the present. The final part of the memory does, as Moody points out, occur in the present tense. "The leaves were full of children,/ Hidden excitedly *containing* laughter" (11. 41-42).

⁷A. J. Moody, *Thomas Stearns, Eliot: Poet* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1979), p. 186.

This memory, which has so modified the present and brought about a recognition of the human condition within time, is the same one inspired by the appearance of Marina: "Whispers and small laughter between leaves and hurrying feet" (l. 16).

The nature of the memory, or "vision" as it is sometimes referred to by critics, is a point of some controversy. Critics interpret the vision in a variety of contexts, not all of which seem appropriate for the direction this thesis has taken. For instance, Louis Martz suggests that "the deception . . . is chiefly the illusion that peace and vitality and fruition can be fully realized and sustained on this earth." He goes on to suggest that the vision "signifies an intense feeling of need" and that it is illusory because it can only be remembered under the insubstantial forms of time."⁸ The vision is seen by Derek Traversi as "a moment of ecstasy" which seems to take us outside of the the temporal world, and he feels that the prolongation of such a moment "would cost a man nothing less than his life."⁹ Hugh Kenner suggests that we have almost stepped into the actual world of reality, and the vision is "a concession to our weakness that we are shut up in the present moment."¹⁰ These interpretations do not seem appropriate at all within the

⁸Louis L. Martz, "The Wheel and the Point: Aspects of Imagery and Theme In Eliot's Later Poetry," *Sewanee Review*, 55 (1947), 136.

⁹Derek Traversi, *T. S. Eliot: The Longer Poems* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanich, 1976), p. 114.

¹⁰Hugh Kenner, "Into Our First World," in *T. S. Eliot Four Quartets: A Casebook*, ed. Bernard Bergonzi (London: Macmillan, 1967), p. 173.

interpretation of Eliot's poetry that this thesis has proposed. Moody's interpretation comes the closest to providing a link in the development of temporal acceptance. He sees the vision as "the permanent and ultimate truth of experience. . . . We have been brought to the limit of natural experience, just as far as sense and memory and imagination can reach."¹¹ Thus he views the memory as "a very complex moment of truth: a mixing of memory and desire which reaches toward their final resolution."¹² The thrush then hurries the speaker and his companion away, because human kind cannot sustain the moments of pure observation. The moment *has* occurred in memory, and thus within the limitations of time.

Eliot himself gives the rose-garden memory a name, and further defines and develops the concept of such an experience which provides one with the basis for accepting life within time. He calls this moment of awareness "The still point of the turning world." The idea is a common one, as Hugh Kenner explains: "The still point is the philosopher's paradox of the wheel, the exact center of which is precisely motionless. . . . Aristotle presented it [the center] as the energizing point."¹³ Because of its fleeting nature, the still point is described by Eliot in terms of what it is not:

At the still point of the turning world. Neither flesh nor
fleshless;
Neither from nor towards; at the still point, there the dance
is,

¹¹Moody, pp. 186-187.

¹²Ibid., p. 187.

¹³Kenner, "First World," p. 175.

And the outer compulsion, yet surrounded
By a grace of sense, . . .

(11. 70-73)

The still point is a release from both spiritual and physical overindulgence, and thus the discovery of the still point, the fully actualized present moment, gives a positive outlook to both past and future, as illustrated in the rose-garden. The moments become past and are maintained in the memory. They are the manifestation of the present, and the hope for the future. Therefore the still points of time are

. . . both a new world
And the old made explicit, understood
In the completion of its partial ecstasy,
The resolution of its partial horror.

(11. 75-78)

The past and the future are made explicit, and we are allowed to see both the joy of the world, such as laughing children and the filled pool, but we also come to terms with the horror of the world as we pass through empty alleys and peer into a dry empty pool, or as we experience both Hercules' pain and Pericles' joy in "Marina."

Eliot continues to emphasize through example that still points, are not mystical "esoteric illuminations given to chosen spirits,"¹⁶ but exist within the temporal world in the structure of ordinary life. Paradoxically, one must accept the ordinary life within time, but avoid becoming overly conscious of time in order to experience the fully actualized moment, the still point within time, and of the turning world:

¹⁶Grover Smith, *T. S. Eliot's Poetry and Plays: A Study in Sources and Meanings* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1956), p. 130.

To be conscious is not to be in time
 But only in time can the moment in the rose-garden,
 The moment in the arbour where the rain beat,
 The moment in the draughty church at smokefall
 Be remembered; involved with past and future.
 Only through time time is conquered.

(ll. 84-89)

Time has almost been overthrown, but Eliot has yet to come to terms with temporality's strongest adversary, death.

Section III of *Burnt Norton* is set in "a place of disaffection: appropriate for a confrontation with death. The dimly lit world presented in the section has been identified as the London Underground, specifically the "circle line," and therefore suggests both the classic underworld and the world of cyclical time. Existence within the limitations of cyclical order is for Prufrock and the early personae the same as death, and therefore the juxtaposition of these two ideas, death and life within time, is by no means a new parallel. The familiar images, apathy, and the death-like state resulting from a pessimistic attitude toward cyclical time have resurfaced in the midst of a winning battle against the dominance of time:

Here is a place of disaffection
 Time before and time after

 . . . Only a flicker
 Over the strained time-ridden faces
 Distracted from distraction by distraction
 Filled with fancies and empty of meaning
 Tumid apathy with no concentration
 Men and bits of paper, whirled by the cold wind
 That blows before and after time. . . .

(ll. 90-91, 99-105)

The time-ridden humanity inhabiting this underworld need a still-point experience to rescue them from their death-in-life state; as Moody

suggests, "This twittering world is in every way opposite to the rose garden. Its inhabitants have no history or potentiality; they are whirled in an endless passive present, never stilled by consciousness."¹⁷ The speaker of *Burnt Norton*, presumably Eliot, observes this pessimistic world as a memory, but he does not consider himself a part of it. In the second verse he is commanded to descend into this vision, into the "world which is not world," and accept this aspect of temporality. Helen Gardner proposes that the speaker is asked to accept what lies behind the pessimistic vision: "The Mind, instead of disregarding the desert, is asked to accept it: to recognize its destitution and enter the present."¹⁸ The cause of the pessimism of the early personae is the idea of death, and by devoting a section of *Burnt Norton* to presenting humanity as the "infinitely gentle, infinitely suffering thing," Eliot has finally forced his persona, and consequently himself, to look at the human situation and accept it as the "partial horror." With the strength afforded by the still point of time, even death can be successfully confronted.

Section IV, and the final verse of Section II, remind the reader of man's inseparable link with nature, and thus with death. Section II focuses on the human body's correspondance with nature:

The dance along the artery
The circulation of the lymph
Are figured in the drift of stars
Ascend to summer in the tree

¹⁷Moody, p. 191.

¹⁸Gardner, p. 162.

We move above the moving tree
 In light upon the figured leaf
 And hear upon the sodden floor
 Below, the boarhound and the boar
 Pursue their pattern as before
 But reconciled among the stars.
 (ll. 47-61)

In comparing the human body with the "drift of stars" Eliot, as Bergston notes, "alluded to the old notion of the correspondance between microcosm and macrocosm. He particularly emphasizes the correspondance between the circular movement of the heavens, traditionally associated with the idea of time, and the movement of blood and lymph within the body, constituting the essence of temporal life."¹⁹ Within the pattern of temporality, which is moving cyclically, the boarhound is chasing its prey, and thus we have an image of death. However, this image is "reconciled among the stars," and thus reconciled within the pattern of time.

Section IV seems to be a recognition of death in all of nature, and the speaker is asking if humanity, too, will truly be a part of nature, and thus die. The dying of each day is noted:

Time and the bell have buried the day,
 The black cloud carries the sun away.
 (ll. 127-128)

Night has moved in, and we see the cycle of time manifested in each passing day. But the speaker then asks if he and humanity will be included within the pattern of nature:

¹⁹Staffan Bergsten, *Time and Eternity: A Study of the Structure and Symbolism of T. S. Eliot's Four Quartets* (London: William Heinemann Ltd., 1960), p. 173.

Will the sunflower turn to us, will the clematis
 Stray down, bend to us; tendril and spray
 Clutch and cling?
 Chill
 Fingers of yew be curled
 Down on us?

(11. 129-134)

The sunflower and clematis are positive images; the speaker wants to be included within the natural, temporal world, but in order to feel the tendril and spray of the clematis and feel the warmth of the sunflower, he must also experience the chill of death, represented by the yew tree, a traditional image of death. He is reminded then that the light within the darkness "is still at the still point of the turning world" (l. 136).

The speaker has at last accepted the notion of death, and once he has acknowledged the full force of death, the fifth and final section of *Burnt Norton* offers a compensation for it. The speaker reasons that everything within time must die, and he applies his newly recognized and accepted fact to artistic creations:

Words move, music moves
 Only in time; but that which is only living
 Can only die. Words, after speech, reach
 Into the silence.

(11. 137-140)

However, the poet then comes to the realization that words and music written within a pattern can be repeated perpetually, and thus the art form is presented as the everlasting compensation for a dying, changing world:

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

(11. 140-143)

Art itself is seen as a type of still point, which adds to the fulfillment of the present moment. However Eliot points out that the artist, like a person of faith, can be tempted into the pessimism of temporality:

. . . . The Word in the desert
Is most attacked by voices of temptation,
The crying shadow in the funeral dance,
The loud lament of the disconsolate chimera.
(11. 155-158)

The temptation is "to become again the crying shadow who refuses after all fully and serenely to accept 'time present'," ²⁰ and the ultimate funeral dance. Eliot's early poetry had indeed succumbed to this temptation. However, because of the still point, it is a temptation that will not take precedence over the positive words.

There remains one reconciliation which will make temporal acceptance within *Burnt Norton* complete, a balance of love and desire, and consequently a balance of the sensual and spiritual aspects of human love. Desire is the movement; love is the still point:

Desire itself is movement
Not in itself desirable;
Love is itself unmoving,
Only the cause and end of movement,
Timeless, and undesiring
Except in the aspect of time
Caught in the form of limitation
Between un-being and being.
(11. 161-168)

Physical desire alone is not meaningful, but the still point, or fully realized love, gives meaning and direction to desire within the limits of time. The attainment of the proper balance in human relationships

²⁰Schneider, p. 186.

promises more of the fully realized moments, both from the store of memory and in the present: the moments will "take us unawares, coming from over the shoulder to evoke fleeting moments of intense life":²¹

Sudden in a shaft of sunlight
 Even while the dust moves
 There rises the hidden laughter
 Of children in the foliage
 Quick now, here, now, always—
 (ll. 169-173)

Here, now, and always, as long as we accept time, we can conquer the meaninglessness with which time threatens us, and so Eliot dismisses as ridiculous the idea of "waste sad time" which stretches before and after an unfulfilled present.

East Coker

East Coker, more than any of the *Quartets*, affirms man's link with the natural order and thus the link with cyclical time. The poem echoes the themes and rhythms of the Book of Ecclesiastes, which Patrides sees as particularly significant because "the author of Ecclesiastes alone among Biblical writers had departed from the commonly held views. His quest had led him to a vision not of any linear progress but of endless recurring cycles."²² Although some critics interpret Eliot's statement about cycles in *East Coker* as negative, the poem suggests that Eliot is indeed speaking favorably about the cycles. Indeed, the

²¹Traversi, p. 102.

²²C. A. Patrides, "The Renaissance of the Renaissance: T. S. Eliot and the Pattern of Time," *Michigan Quarterly Review*, 12 (1973), 188.

first and last lines of the poem are an affirmation of the cyclical process; for although Eliot states, "In my beginning is my end," he concludes by asserting that "In my end is my beginning."

The focus of the poem shifts from the personal view found throughout *Burnt Norton* to a broader consideration of all of mankind, in much the same way that "Preludes" considered time on a historic scale larger than the individual dilemma found in "Prufrock" or "Rhapsody." The opening of Section I presents the cycles of time as they apply to generations, not just to a single life:

In my beginning is my end. In succession
Houses rise and fall, crumble, are extended,
Are removed, destroyed, restored, or in their place
Is an open field, or a factory, or a by-pass.
Old stone to new building, old timber to new fires,
.
Houses live and die: there is a time for building
And a time for living and for generation. . . .
(ll. 1-5, 9-10)

As the echoes of Ecclesiastes suggest, there is a time for each generation, and old stones create new buildings, old timber kindles new fires. Therefore, within a cyclical time system, rebirth and even immortality are possible if one looks beyond the personal level. Derek Traversi discusses this point at length:

Beneath the whole "movement" as we now begin to see, we are made aware of a contrast between two possible attitudes to the circular procession of life leading, for each successive generation, to its inevitable death in time. The first of these is finally pessimistic in what it seems to imply for each individual life. The second points to an acceptance of temporal design which prevails in each individual generation and each single life as belonging to a significant and living rhythm. . . .²³

²³Traversi, p. 131.

Eliot presents in Section I not a moment from his personal memory, but a memory of an ancestor, Sir Thomas Elyot, who wrote in 1531 of:

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

(11. 28-33)

We are told that if we "do not come too close," we can share this recollection which is a celebration of marriage and the rhythms of nature. The ancestors are

. . . . Keeping time,
 Keeping the rhythm in their dancing
 As in their living in the living seasons
 The time of the seasons and the constellations
 The time of milking and the time of harvest
 The time of the coupling of man and woman
 And that of beasts. Feet rising and falling.
 Eating and drinking. Dung and death.

(11. 39-46)

This vision is similar to the one in the rose-garden, for it is a fully acknowledged moment. However, it ends with the inevitability of death. The "guests" are at home within the natural order, and they are reconciled with seasons and constellations, just as we were "reconciled among the stars" in *Burnt Norton*.

Section II suggests the turmoil which would occur if the cycles of temporal order were not present. Everything has become confused:

What is the late November doing
 With the disturbance of the spring
 And creatures of the summer heat,
 And snowdrops writhing under feet
 And hollyhocks that aim too high

Red into grey and tumble down
 Late roses filled with early snow?
 (11. 51-57)

The images presented are disconcerting because nature is meant to follow a certain pattern, and everything is wrong; "comets weep and Leonids fly" (l. 63) until the pattern is reinstated. After a sudden change in tone, the second verse is concerned with poetical technique and how one is influenced by the experience of his elders. Experience, it seems, has a limited value, for it is constantly in danger of seeming to be merely a repeatable pattern. However, the pattern of individual experiences becomes "new in every moment/ And every moment is a new and shocking/ Valuation of all we have been" (11. 85-87). Thus, Eliot does not wish to hear about the wisdom, or patterned experience of old men, but of their emotions. The moment in the rose-garden and the moment around the bon-fire are charged with emotion, not wisdom, and the acknowledgment of death as a universal experience makes us all equal and therefore, humble. Thus,

The only wisdom we can hope to acquire
 Is the wisdom of humility: humility is endless.
 (11. 97-98)

The poem then presents the universal unchanging fact of death:

The houses are all gone under the sea.
 The dancers are all gone under the hill.
 (11. 99-100)

Section III picks up the idea of death, and once more (as in *Burnt Norton*) the poem wrestles with the idea of mortality.

O dark dark dark. They all go into the dark,
 The vacant interstellar spaces, the vacant into the vacant,
 The captains, merchant brokers, eminent men of letters,

 . . . all go into the dark
 (11. 101-103, 106)

The speaker in Section III must face again an existential crisis, a pessimistic view of everything caused by the thought of death. He is forced to face the darkness; but in the midst of the emptiness, a fleeting memory, reminiscent of the rose-garden, assures him that the positive view is not lost:

Whisper of running streams, and winter lightning.
 The wild thyme unseen and the wild strawberry,
 The laughter in the garden, echoed ecstasy
 Not lost, but requiring, pointing to the agony
 Of death and birth.

(11. 129-133)

Like the other personae, he too must face "partial horror" and "partial ecstasy." The key, however, to overcoming the negative force of death has again been a still point of experience, a fully lived moment brought out of the past, to give meaning to the temporarily dark present.

Section IV continues the discussion of death by again associating man with nature:

The whole earth is our hospital
 Endowed by the ruined millionaire,
 Wherein, if we do well, we shall
 Die of the absolute paternal care
 That will not leave us, but prevents us everywhere.

(11. 157-161)

The symbols in this section are unmistakably Christian, but they are also unmistakably negative symbols. The ruined millionaire is Christ, and the Church is referred to as the "dying nurse." This section seems to be renouncing the idea of total spirituality, and although *East Coker*

was written for Good Friday, the statement in Section IV does not affirm the idea of spiritual rebirth which is the promise of the crucifixion. Instead, it focuses on death which is the result of man's unbreakable link with the natural order. By acknowledging man as a definite part of the natural order, and with the help of the still point, Eliot once again comes through a momentary setback, and the final section of *East Coker* presents a positive theory.

Section V reaffirms the value of the memory and of the fulfilled present. Eliot looks, not for the isolated moment of intensity, "but a lifetime burning in every moment" (l. 194), both through memory "(The evening with the photograph album)" (l. 199) and present experience. Eliot goes on to add that the positive attitude within the historical pattern of time cannot depend upon one personal life:

And not the lifetime of one man only
But of old stones that cannot be deciphered.
(ll. 195-196)

Generations share and benefit from the cyclical process, and in this way, we are constantly reborn. The last statement of *East Coker* demands that we maintain a union of sense and spirit, past and present, and love and desire, although we must first pass through "the dark cold and empty desolation" to appreciate fully the joyous moments, and it looks forward to the *Dry Salvages* with its image of the water:

The wave cry, the wind cry, the vast water
Of the petrel and the porpoise. In my end is my beginning.
(ll. 208-209)

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The Dry Salvages

The Dry Salvages has often been criticized as the weakest of the *Four Quartets*. Hugh Kenner and Donald Davie are in agreement that *The Dry Salvages* is the "parody" *Quartet*, a false reconciliation of the themes presented in the first two poems. Other critics such as Derek Traversi and Denis Donoghue acknowledge some weaknesses in the poem, but ultimately suggest that *The Dry Salvages* works as well as the other *Quartets*, and reveals a true, positive outlook. The poem's dominant image is water, both the river and the sea, whose union reconciles man's place in the vast history of human events. The poem encounters death, and is also a reconciliation of religious views with temporal fact, therefore accepting man's link with temporal nature.

Section I establishes the metaphor of the river, representing the progression within cyclical time, and man's link with the natural process because "The river is within us" (l. 15). The river is acknowledged as a "strong brown god" who is often forgotten by civilized man, the "city dwellers," who disregard their link with nature and worship instead the machine, an unnatural creation which does not die. However, we are reminded that we cannot escape time, and that only within the structure of time do memories occur, for the rhythm of nature, signified by the river, must be present in order to create the memories:

His rhythm was present in the nursery bedroom,
 In the rank ailanthus of the April dooryard,
 In the smell of grapes on the autumn table,
 And the evening circle in the winter gaslight.
 (11. 11-14)

The river represents personal progression through time, and therefore presents personal memories; the sea, into which all rivers flow, represents the vast experience of all mankind within time. Thus as in *East Coker*, Eliot has moved "notably beyond any merely individual experience."²⁴ The memories which the sea tosses onto the beach emphasize man's link with nature through the process of evolution, and reflect the "partial ecstasy" and the "partial horror" of human experience:

The river is within us, the sea is all about us
The sea is the land's edge also, the granite
Into which it reaches, the beaches where it tosses
Its hints of earlier and other creation:
The starfish, the horseshoe crab, the whale's backbone;
The pools where it offers to our curiosity
The more delicate algae and the sea anemone.
It tosses up our losses, the torn seine,
The shattered lobster pot, the broken oar
And the gear of foreign dead men.

(11. 15-24)

The image of death in the above passage is in reference to the Second World War, which was in full force at the time Eliot composed *The Dry Salvages*. Thus one of the many "sea voices" of human experience which stands out is the voice of death in war. The final image in Section I is the tolling bell for the war dead, a human experience very difficult to accept.

Section II continues the lament over death, the natural process of aging and dying as well as the premature death caused by war:

Where is there an end of it, the soundless wailing,
The silent withering of autumn flowers
Dropping their petals and remaining motionless:

²⁴Ibid., p. 167.

Where is there an end to the drifting wreckage,
 The prayer of the bone on the beach, the unprayerable
 Prayer at the calamitous annunciation?

(11. 49-54)

This is indeed a dark passage, for spirituality is totally denied in the first five verses. The bone on the beach recalls the singing, chirping bones of *Ash-Wednesday*, but this bone is praying an "unprayerable prayer." The bone in itself is a denial of the annunciation in Christian terms, which promises a miraculous birth, for the bone is dead. The gloomy attitude has returned, and the continual progression of mankind's struggle seems as unrelenting as the waves that break persistently against the shore. But at last there is a glimmer of hope. The bone prays to "Death its God," and what the bone prays has become at last a "barely/prayerable/ Prayer of the one Annunciation" (11. 83-84). Once the idea of death is accepted, the positive influence of Christianity can then give hope and strength.

The discussion turns, once the crisis is over, to the discovery of what gives life its hope and meaning. As suggested in *Burnt Norton* and affirmed in *East Coker*, meaning is found in past experience; not only in personal experience, but in that of generations. In this way we can go back to our own past and the past of humanity to find new meaning in the present:

It seems, as one becomes older,
 That the past has another pattern, and ceases to be a mere
 sequence—

.
 . . . the sudden illumination—
 We had the experience but missed the meaning,
 And approach to the meaning restores the experience

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

(11. 85-6, 92-94, 96-99)

The early personae searched through their store of experience, but to no avail; the meaning was never derived from their past. At long last, the sudden illumination of meaning has occurred, and Eliot discovers that even the "moments of agony" reveal worthwhile experience, and are as permanent as the moments in the rose-garden:

Now, we come to discover that the moments of agony

 . . . are likewise permanent
 With such permanence as time has.

(11. 104, 106-7)

Like Section III of both *Burnt Norton* and *East Coker*, the third section of *The Dry Salvages* finds the poet amidst a moment of agony; the past, present, and future contain no meaning, and the future becomes a "faded song . . . / of wistful regret" (11. 126-7). The idea of purposeless circling brings the poet to contemplate a "place of disaffection" similar to the one in *Burnt Norton*, and Eliot again describes the weariness of the passengers on the "circle line":

Fare forward, travellers! not escaping from the past
 Into different lives, or into any future;
 You are not the same people who left that station
 Or who will arrive at any terminus,
 While the narrowing rails slide together behind you. . . .

(11. 137-141)

These people have no destination, therefore no meaning. Generation replaces generation, and there is no promise of arrival even in the suggestion of a terminus, for the only termination is death.

Section IV turns from the contemplation of life and death to an appeal for spiritual help, addressed to a "Lady," recalling the "veiled Sister" of *Ash-Wednesday*, who was also asked to pray for the people distracted by time. However, this request is different, for the Lady is asked to pray for people already dead, who cannot hear "the sound of the sea bell's / perpetual angelus" (ll. 181-2). The bell, unlike the funeral bell of Section I, is ringing the perpetual promise of the annunciation, the promise of a miraculous birth. However, the annunciation is a comfort to the living; the dead cannot hear it. One can then see the role of spirituality: that of lending positive strength to "those who are in ships," not those who have ended their voyage. By praying "for the dead," we pray for the living.

Section V clarifies the limits that temporality places upon the aspiring spirit. It is useless for man to try "to converse with spirits," or to "evoke/ biography from the wrinkles of the palm." These are mere "pastimes," but it is equally out of man's reach "to apprehend/ The point of intersection of the timeless/ with time" (ll. 200-201), for that is reserved for the saint and achieved only through a "lifetime's death." The persona of *Ash-Wednesday* ultimately gave up his quest for total spirituality and asked, instead, to remain in the world that incorporates both sense and spirit, the realm of experience, where one can perceive

. . . lost in a shaft of sunlight,
The wild thyme unseen, or the winter lightning
Or the waterfall. . . .

(ll. 208-210)

These experiences, we are told, become "hints" and "guesses" leading to the discovery of the "gift half understood" which is "Incarnation."

Eliot does not use this term solely in its religious sense. He is referring to what D. H. Lawrence described as "the incandescence . . . of the incarnate moment . . . the moment, the immediate present, the now now."²⁵ The present moment fully realized, as the vision in the rose-garden presents, is the gift; humanity incarnate within a personal moment of complete understanding provides meaning in our lives within time. The conclusion of *The Dry Salvages* leaves us

. . . content at the last
If our temporal reversion nourish
(Not too far from the yew-tree)
The life of significant soil.

The meaning of the last lines is two-fold; a reaffirmation of the temporal facts assures us of a life that will seem significant, and our return to earth at death will nourish the soil and promise rebirth with each returning spring.

Little Gidding

The final *Quartet*, *Little Gidding*, combines the ideas expressed in the previous poems and forms the unifying element of the *Quartets*. *Little Gidding* willingly accepts death by achieving the proper balance of all the elements toward which Eliot's poetry has been aspiring. *Burnt Norton*, *East Coker*, and *The Dry Salvages*, despite their ultimately positive acceptance of cyclical time's pattern, present a lapse in hope, and a despondency caused by contemplating death. In each poem, the positive attitude is victorious because a fully actualized moment, a

²⁵Patrides, "The Renaissance of the Renaissance," 183.

still point, and the realization of the value of all human experience, provide renewed meaning to a life within time. *Little Gidding* contains a similar successful struggle; Eliot comes to terms with his own aging and finds a proper place for the faith which has encouraged him to seek a final resolution of his conflicts at the chapel, the only remains of the religious settlement of *Little Gidding*.

Section I opens with a description of a season that is "not in time's covenant," and is therefore "unimaginable." The scene described is reminiscent of a similar one in Section II of *East Coker*, where "late November" is "disturbed" by springlike weather, an indication of a world not ordered by time; the effect is disconcerting:

Midwinter spring is its own season
 Sempiternal though sodden towards sundown,
 Suspended in time, between pole and tropic.

 . . . There is no earth smell
 Or smell of living thing. This is the spring time
 But not in time's covenant. . . .

 . . . Not in the scheme of generation.
 Where is the summer, the unimaginable
 Zero summer?

(11. 1-3, 12-14, 18-20)

The transitory, cold blossoms of snow, not to be appreciated by any living thing, seem to be the opposite of the rose-garden experience in Section I of *Burnt Norton*. Since Eliot has conjured an impossibility, not in the realm of experience, he begins a journey to Little Gidding where he will be "Now and in England," within the world of time in the Chapel. Eliot informs us that we are not entering the chapel in order to "verify," instruct," or "inform," but we are here to pray and commune with the dead; we are here to look at the past. The moment of

prayer is "timeless" because we are kneeling in a place where people have always knelt and prayer has always been valid.

The ruins of the village of Little Gidding and the memory of the dead who once occupied it prompt a deliberation on death, and once again Eliot must overcome the wave of pessimism which threatens to engulf him. His negative thoughts systematically destroy the foundations built by the previous *Quartets*. The first verse of Section II dissipates the memories of the rose-garden of *Burnt Norton* and the rebuilt houses of *East Coker*:

Ash on an old man's sleeve
Is all the ash the burnt roses leave.
Dust in the air suspended
Marks the place where a story ended.
Dust inbreathed was a house—
The wall, the waicot and the mouse.
The death of hope and despair,
This is the death of air.
(11. 54-61)

The memories of the "still points" are destroyed, and with them both hope and despair; the only emotion left is passive indifference. Dust is seen as the only product of the "temporal reversion" which in *The Dry Salvages* produced a feeling of significance. Verse two, "the death of earth," presents time, the river of *The Dry Salvages*, as a destructive force which ravages the earth:

Dead water and dead sand
Contending for the upper hand.
The parched eviscerate soil
Gapes at the vanity of toil,
Laughs without mirth.
This is the death of earth.
(11. 64-69)

Neither the water nor the earth seems very desirable, and since each is a reflection of temporal order, Eliot is again expressing despair at the thought of time's movement. The third verse presents the death of water and fire, and thus the elements, with which man has an undeniable link, have been "woven into a pattern of doom,"²⁶ and links with Nature have fallen apart. Indeed, it seems as if the natural order itself has collapsed, but as in the previous *Quartets*, this is a temporary state of desolation. Once again, through an encounter with the past, Eliot will come to terms with mortality; only this time he comes to terms with his personal process of aging.

The Second World War is the backdrop for the vision in *Little Gidding*. The ghost from the past, whom the poet meets, assumes the role of an airraid patrolman. Eliot describes the ghost:

I caught the sudden look of some dead master
Whom I had known, forgotten, half recalled
Both one and many; in the brown baked features
The eyes of a familiar compound ghost
Both intimate and unidentifiable.

(11. 93-96)

This "compound ghost" has been a source of fascination for many critics, and has been identified as almost every literary figure whom Eliot has known, or alluded to in his work. The exact identity of the ghost is unimportant; he is of prime interest because he is a memory which will provide meaning for the present moment with "no before and no after." The Ghost discloses for Eliot "the gifts reserved for age," and thus forces Eliot to come to terms with the process of life:

²⁶Traversi, p. 188

"Let me disclose the gifts reserved for age
 To set a crown upon your lifetime's effort.
 First, the cold friction of expiring sense
 Without enchantment, offering no promise
 But bitter tastelessness of shadow fruit
 As body and soul begin to fall asunder.
 Second, the conscious impotence of rage
 At human folly, and the laceration
 Of laughter at what ceases to amuse.
 And last, the rending pain of re-enactment
 Of all that you have done, and been"
 (11. 129-139)

To simply lament "I grow old, I grow old" was Prufrock's response to the pain of aging, and because he feared the natural aging process, Prufrock never really lived. But the Ghost tells the poet what he must do, and what Eliot knows he must do, because he has advanced far beyond the bored distraction of Prufrock:

"From wrong to wrong the exasperated spirit
 Proceeds, unless restored by that refining fire
 Where you must move in measure, like a dancer."

The poet must accept the reality of his torment; he must step into the fires of purgatory on earth, and "dance" as the villagers of *East Coker*, within the rhythms of nature. Because he realizes that the moments of agony are as permanent as the moments in the rose-garden, Eliot can find meaning in each type of experience.

The memory has once again filled the void with meaning; and Section III continues to discuss the value of memory. The assertion made in "Rhapsody on a Windy Night" again proves true; "Memory!/ You have the key" (11. 72-73):

. . . This is the use of memory:
 For liberation—not less of love but expanding
 Of love beyond desire, and so liberation
 From the future as well as the past.
 (11. 156-159)

Memory is a liberation from the entrapment of time, for a meaningful memory is always present, always enduring, and can manifest itself when we become too obsessed with past future. Eliot remembers other men who have travelled to the chapel at *Little Gidding*, and when he muses,

Why should we celebrate
These dead men more than the dying?
(11. 180-181)

he has acknowledged the fact of death by referring to the living as the "dying." He answers his own question with a further qualification of memory:

It is not to ring the bell backward
Nor is it an incantation
To summon the spectre of a Rose.
(11. 182-184)

The memory does not take us backwards in time; it becomes the present. Nor does the memory summon a mere spectre of emotion. The rose-garden experience was real. The memory is the present moment incarnate, and thus it is a liberation.

Section III clarifies the role of memory in accepting time; Section IV presents the roles of love and desire. We are again presented with the fact that we must accept the reality of "torment,"²⁷ and experience a type of purgatory on earth which will "discharge us from sin and error." As Derek Traversi tells us, "from the experience of 'fire' as such, with all its unmitigated pain, there is indeed no escape. A true recognition of the human dilemma, and of its possible resolution, starts from this point."²⁸ The key is to see the infinitely suffering,

²⁷Ibid., p. 205.

²⁸Ibid., p. 204.

gentle humanity and love it, something the pessimistic speaker of "Preludes" could not bring himself to do. We have a choice to "be redeemed from fire by fire." The fire of passion and emotion and the fire of our self-induced purgatory can both be a redeeming factor. Love itself will necessarily be composed of both elements, pain and ecstasy:

Who then devised the torment? Love.
 Love is the unfamiliar Name
 Behind the hands that wove
 The intolerable shirt of flame
 Which human power cannot remove.
 We only live, only suspire
 Consumed by either fire or fire.
 (11. 207-213)

The shirt of flame cannot be removed because love itself is one of the keys to human power, and we can only live if we experience both love and pain. Love in its Christian context also means acceptance of human pain by God Incarnate, and thus *Little Gidding* is a reaffirmation of both human and spiritual love, necessary for acceptance of time.

Section V recalls the positive aspects of cyclical time found in *East Coker*:

What we call the beginning is often the end
 And to make an end is to make a beginning.
 The end is where we start from.
 (11. 214-216)

The pattern of cyclical time is discussed without the slightest inclination towards the negative; as long as time moves cyclically, every end is continually a new beginning. Eliot aptly clarifies his point by analogy, using poetry, presented in *Burnt Norton* as a compensation for death, as an illustration of how cyclical time functions. The past, present, and future blend into "an easy commerce

of the old and the new"; thus poetry, like life within time becomes

(. . . The complete consort dancing together)
Every phrase and every sentence is an end and a beginning,
Every poem an epitaph.

(11. 223-225)

There is no reluctance to accept the implications of death, and the final section of the final *Quartet* is thus an affirmation that the "moment of the rose and the moment of the yew-tree/are of equal duration," agony and ecstasy of equal importance. The pattern of cyclic time is composed of timeless moments, for the moments recur, continually charged with meaning, and history becomes "now."

The moments of memory are "unknown" because they bring a new meaning with each recollection; thus time is not necessarily repetitive. The moments are "remembered" because they are indeed drawn from past experience. We are left, at the close of *Little Gidding*, with the assurance that still points of time, "The voice of the hidden waterfall/ And the children in the apple-tree," will be "here," "now," and "always," as stated in *Burnt Norton*, as long as we accept time. The balance of past and present, love and desire, and sense and spirit have at long last been attained. The final unifying image of the fire of both passion and purgatory and the rose of both love and faith assures us that within temporal limits acceptance of life is possible, and Eliot has indeed succeeded in verifying the possibility:

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

(11. 255-259)

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