

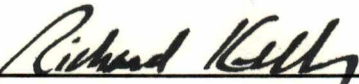
To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a dissertation written by Kwang-Mi Lee entitled "'The Lotos Rose': T. S. Eliot's *Four Quartets* and Eastern Thought." I have examined the final copy of this dissertation for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, with a major in English.


B. J. Leggett, Major Professor

We have read this dissertation
and recommend its acceptance:









Accepted for the Council:


Associate Vice Chancellor
and Dean of the Graduate School

**"THE LOTOS ROSE":
T. S. ELIOT'S *FOUR QUARTETS* AND EASTERN THOUGHT**

A Dissertation

Presented for the

Doctor of Philosophy

Degree

The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Kwang-Mi Lee

December 1991

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To my parents,
who taught me the way of love
and
To my friend
Mr. Scott J. Shirley,
who knows Tao (道) is the unknown, the simple and the small

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The spirit of T. S. Eliot travelled with me to the United States, since in a freshman English class in Korea, my reading of the first line of *The Waste Land* attracted me by its prophetic naming of my birth in April "the cruellest month." However, I did not gain real familiarity with the poet until I took a course in modern poetry under Professor B. J. Leggett, who stimulated my interest in literary modernism. Through Professor Leggett's inspiration and my further reading of the poet, I came to learn that the Eastern allusions in Eliot's poetry pointed to hidden webs of contextual, philosophical meanings. A deeper acquaintanceship with Eliot left me with the strong impression that his cosmic vision and ethical, religio-philosophical concerns share close affinities with the sages of the East — an impression that came even before I learned that the poet was once an ardent student of Eastern philosophy at Harvard. This impression was even deeper after my perusal of *Four Quartets*, where Eastern spiritualism is the very ambiance of the poem. Despite its reputation as the subtlest poem since Dante's *Divine Comedy*, it seemed to me that, understood from the Eastern perspective, *Four Quartets* reveals itself in coherent vignettes which contain esoteric yet very graspable meanings. Hence, for the subject of my dissertation, I determined to interpret *Four Quartets* in the light of Eastern religio-philosophy.

Lao-Tzu said that "All things come back to their roots / To go far is to return." Although I journeyed here to the West, I have come back, through Eliot's poetry, to my cultural roots. Surely this is the fulfillment of Buddha's words on the interconnectedness of things: both East and West are co-extensive.

"To make one chrysanthemum bloom," a modern Korean poet (Seo, Jeong-Ju) observes, "a cuckoo sang the summer long." Indeed, nothing can be done unassisted. I appreciate all the people who have 'sung' for me — have so warmly encouraged the completion of this work. I am deeply grateful for the help and guidance of Professor B. J. Leggett, director of my dissertation, and Professors Norman Sanders, Richard Kelly, Stanley Lusby and Miriam Levering, the members of my dissertation committee. Professor Leggett, who cultivated in me a strong interest in the study of Eliot, offered invaluable criticism on this study as it progressed. Behind the discipline of the scholar I have always felt the encouragement and sympathy of the friend. Professor Sanders provided constructive advice and many valuable suggestions for this work, as he has in all matters relating to my doctoral program. Professor Kelly was prompt and accurate in his critiques and editing. Professor Lusby assisted me with collateral references on Hinduism and Buddhism; I also appreciate his words of concern and understanding during my frequent periods of frustration. Thanks are also due to Professor Levering, who made me reflect on Eliot's concept of salvation in relation to the doctrine of *karma* and who was generous with her time and her critical insights during the many lively discussions we had on Eastern thought. And those insights were essential to disentangling the more cryptic lines of Eliot's poem. I am indebted to all the committee members for their meticulous and critical reading of the manuscript.

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Most of all, I am grateful to my parents, brother and sisters for their unceasing love and support during these years of study. My mother's wisdom and devotion to my spiritual growth have done much to bring me this far. In letters to my parents, I have asked them to hold no great expectation as to what will come of my education, only that in all future activity I will seek to do them honor.

I thank again the team of concerned teachers, friends and family for their song of love,
enabling me the chrysanthemum to take bloom.

ABSTRACT

Along with the strong and continuing interest that the contemporary world evinces in T. S. Eliot is a growing awareness of the extent to which Eastern thought influenced his attitude and thinking. Using a religio-philosophical approach, this study attempts to assess the overall impact of Eastern thought on the aesthetics, insights and wisdom implicit in *Four Quartets*. As a comprehensive attempt to 'give equal weight' in Four Quartet studies to the East Asian and Indic traditions, we will explore Eliot's poem in terms of the world views of Hinduism, Buddhism (including Zen) and Taoism.

The work is composed of three chapters in addition to an introduction and conclusion. Focusing on the existential problems of suffering and impermanence, the first chapter examines the sources of suffering as perceived by the poet, and his responses to the same fundamental perception that moved Buddha. The next chapter deals with the issues of detachment, *askesis* and love — with what Eliot believed to be tentative solutions to the fragmented psyche of modern man and to our disordered modern world. These issues, frequently presented in Eliot's later poems and plays, are the underlying concerns of the Oriental yoga of Buddhism, Hinduism and Taoism. In this chapter is also explored Eliot's idea of the compatibility — synthesis — of divine grace and human effort. The poet's conjectures on ontological issues and on solutions to the problem of the human condition have their epistemological proofs in the Quartets. The last chapter therefore details Eliot's metaphysical resolution of the problem of fragmentation and separateness — and his arrival, thus, at 'salvation' through an epistemological understanding of the nature of reality. As it scrutinizes the function of the Absolute and the nature of reality on the bases of the Yin-Yang relation, this chapter too provides the logic for the poem's conclusion, in

which Eliot's monistic vision culminates in the consummate union of the rose and the fire. Finally in the chapter, Eliot's concept of "the intersection of the timeless with time" as a metaphor for the still point and the 'here and now' is measured against the *Jijimuge* doctrine of the East Asian Buddhist metaphysics.

As is central in Eastern thought, *Four Quartets* consists of diagnoses of spiritual problems and speculation as to how they may be solved. Eliot posits 'non-ego' cultivation and intuitive knowledge as ways to attain to a sense of unity and wholeness; he attempts to supplant ego with a sense of the interrelatedness of one with all being, while suggesting that detachment (from fruits of action), *askesis* (spiritual discipline) and love lead to fulfillment of the promise of enlightenment.

A NOTE ON CITATION

Several different translation texts are employed for citations from the *Bhagavad-Gita*. This was necessary from the standpoint of semantical nuance. For instance, while “detachment” and “indifference” connote disparate meanings in *Four Quartets*, they are used interchangeably by the *Gita*’s different translators. Because no one translator chose English equivalents consistently matching the nuance of Eliot’s own use, I have chosen to quote from a number of different translations. The title of this text is frequently abbreviated as *Gita*. Citations from the *Gita* are identified by the name of the translator and the chapter and verse number.

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Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

A Janus composed of modern Western consciousness and Eastern spiritualism is T. S. Eliot's muse, who, being something of a polymath, took the whole globe and all human culture for her province. Though this is well attested to in Eliot's major poetic works, the truth is particularly relevant to his most accomplished poetry, *Four Quartets*.¹ His majestic creation of a lotus in the pond of the visionary garden at the beginning of "Burnt Norton," the first Quartet, may be taken also, analogously, as a conscious and poetic act of evoking the Eastern spirit into the world of the Quartets — a spirit with which he had long been familiar. And just as he transforms the lotus into the rose as the Quartets progress, Eliot was to attire this invited spirit with considerable Christian and Western dress.

Due to its profundity and complexity in imagery and meaning, explications of *Four Quartets* have become the subject of much literary study. Among the vast range of subjects in Eliot studies, Western and Christian aspects of the poem are the most analyzed and discussed. But this one-sided view of Eliot's poetry has resulted in an incomplete understanding, leaving the reader with still unplumbed mysteries as to the poem's meanings. Indeed, an 'understanding' of Eliot in a Western religio-philosophical perspective is often in conflict with other more mystical, more Oriental qualities of his

¹ *Four Quartets* consists of four consecutive, separate poems published during 1936-1942: "Burnt Norton" (1936), "East Coker" (1940), "The Dry Salvages" (1941), and "Little Gidding" (1942). The four poems were published together as *Four Quartets* in 1943.

thinking and writing. In the expanding industry of Eliot evaluation, therefore, it is not only relevant but also essential to approach the poems from an Eastern angle.

Fortunately, attending the strong and continuing interest in T. S. Eliot is a growing awareness of the extent to which the East influenced his thought. A few pioneering efforts have been made by critics to delineate the role played by Eastern philosophy in Eliot's poetic development. At their best, however, these efforts are the outcome of a tentative or partial understanding. Kristian Smidt, in his meticulously compiled *Poetry and Belief in T. S. Eliot*, devotes part of a chapter to "Oriental mysticism" in Eliot, but does not offer any comprehensive interpretations of the poems in terms of Eastern spiritualism. Staffan Bergsten in his *Time and Eternity* is more interested in the Oriental symbols adapted by Eliot than in any philosophical themes. Amarnath Dwivedi in *Indian Thought and Tradition in T. S. Eliot's Poetry* dwells painstakingly on the explicit references of Eliot to Indian philosophical thought, but pays little attention to the implicit use Eliot makes of Eastern philosophical views. P. S. Sri's *T. S. Eliot, Vedanta and Buddhism* ventures into an 'East-West rapprochement' in Eliot. However, discussions on *Four Quartets* are not fully developed; moreover, Sri makes some questionable assumptions on such crucial issues as *askesis* and the meaning of *via negativa*. Despite the book's ultimate goal, therefore, it fails to capture Eliot's reconciled vision of the conflict between the Christian notion of divine grace and the Eastern notion of human effort. Cleo M. Kearns in *T. S. Eliot and Indic Traditions* thoroughly probes the poet's debt to Eastern ways of thinking, and provides documented connections between Eliot's graduate school experiences and his literary work. However, Kearns finds the influences of Eastern thought upon the poet only in terms of philosophical insights, not religious feelings, and discounts the influence on Eliot of East Asian traditions.

The above are some of the more important observers who have recognized the Eastern face of Eliot. Nevertheless, although Eliot's use of allusions to Hindu-Buddhist ideas has

invited several interesting investigations, the works cited largely limit themselves to the Indic tradition without giving equal weight to East Asia. We are left then with the uneasy feeling that Oriental spiritualism in Eliot has not been quite captured in the interpretations of his major poetic works, and that no significant attempt has been made to relate it to the poet's comprehensive vision of the human condition. However, on the evidence of voluminous graduate notebooks and (unpublished) essays, Eliot's Oriental connection was far deeper and more extensive than has been suspected — thus demanding of observers a broader and larger religio-philosophical frame of reference. In short, Oriental spiritualism in Eliot encompasses both the Indic (Hinduism and early Buddhism) and East Asian (Taoism and Mahayana Buddhism) worlds.

The mature Eliot's adaptation of Eastern spiritualism took place in 'the modern age.' The need for a new system of belief has been the constant of a fractured twentieth century. The years *entre deux guerres* saw a series of stresses and their aftermath. Unemployment and strikes in the 1920s and world depression in the 1930s revealed as much fragmentation and antagonism within English society as in Europe as a whole.² The Great War had not, of course, caused the abrupt collapse of a stable, prosperous world, but had brought to violent, apocalyptic culmination historical forces that had long been developing. Spengler's *Decline of the West* was already completed by 1917, before the war had ended. With the perspective of the mythologist rather than the historian, Eliot traced the "process of disintegration" back to the thirteenth century ("Dante," *Selected Essays* 202). Whatever

² The following remarks by C. G. Jung illustrate the anxiety over the decline in values of Western society — the view which was prevalent among concerned people in the first half of the twentieth century: "Now there is the danger that consciousness of the present may lead to an elation based upon illusion: the illusion, namely, that we are the culmination of the history of mankind, the fulfilment and the end-product of countless centuries. If we grant this, we should understand that it is no more than the proud acknowledgement of our destitution: we are also the disappointment of the hopes and expectations of the ages. Think of nearly two thousand years of Christian ideals followed, instead of by the return of the Messiah and the heavenly millennium, by the World War among Christian nations and its barbed-wire and poison gas. What a catastrophe in heaven and on earth! . . . Europe has nearly gone to rack and ruin. And as for ideals, the Christian church, the brotherhood of man, international social democracy and the 'solidarity' of economic interests have all failed to stand the baptism of fire — the test of reality" (*Modern Man in Search of a Soul* 230).

the etiology of the decline or disintegration, the sense of (Western) civilization's precariousness helps to account for such sweeping historical views as those of Spengler and Toynbee, and helped inspire in sensitive men of letters like Eliot a longing for cosmic systems.

Indeed, to be a poet in modern times was also to be a 'voice' expressing pain, condemning evils, suggesting remedies. "Faith may be preserved alive through the dark ages before us; to renew and rebuild civilization, and save the World from suicide," says Eliot ("Thoughts after Lambeth," *Selected Essays* 342); in numerous essays we find him speaking of "social ailments for which we must continue to seek specific remedies" (*Notes Toward the Definition of Culture* 25). As these words suggest, Eliot was a hauntingly alive and leading spirit in a twentieth century that inspired in art, man, and society a hunger for metaphysical certitude and for the healing of souls. The same impulse that led W. B. Yeats to Plotinus and *A Vision* led Eliot to the Oriental sages, the Upanishads and Buddhist Sutras — for wisdom and for the wherewithal to cure the *malaisé* of the modern human condition. Eliot sought to ground his political, social, and literary judgments in a spiritual foundation. All of Western civilization was his parish, and his mission was to save the collective soul. "What shall we do tomorrow?" Eliot has the rich courtesan cry in *The Waste Land*, that epoch-making poem, "what shall we ever do?" the cry echoing over and over again with the cumulative power of a dirge.³ In this redemptive role, his precursors were the sages and prophets of the East and West, like the Buddha and Ezekiel, whom Eliot echoes in *The Waste Land*, addressing a whole society in strokes of condemnation: "Son of man . . . you know only / A heap of broken images . . ." (61).

The early twentieth-century West had been in the throes of what C. G. Jung calls an 'unbalance' between the material and the spiritual; in the modern Western experience the

³ "A Game of Chess," from *The Waste Land*. In *The Complete Poems and Plays of T. S. Eliot* (London: Faber, 1969) 65. This edition is the source of Eliot's poems and plays as cited in this study. All further quotations will be identified by page number only.

material and the rational had outgrown the spiritual and the intuitive. On the other hand, spiritual traditions have been the force of supreme dynamism in structuring the civilizations of Asia. It is not too difficult, then, to understand why Eliot, knowing both East and West and keenly conscious of the modern *malaisé*, was drawn to an Eastern paradigm of thought. In "Buddhism and Modern Religious Thought," an article in *The Buddhist Review* published by the Buddhist Society in 1915 in London, which Eliot may have read during his visit to the Society about that time, G. G. André points to penetrating answers, holding up the teachings of Buddhism as a system of belief both suitable and necessary for modern times. André begins the article in the following fashion:

Judged by the state of unrest and change in all departments of life, the human world has reached one of those critical points in its history where it has to choose a new line of development. At such a time as the present, when all we have hitherto valued and cherished in our religious consciousness and our social relationships seems about to be cast into the melting-pot, we shall do well to examine afresh the bases of our beliefs, and to revise our concepts of much that pertains to the conduct of life. This is a time of transition; and to shut our eyes to its dangers is to imperil much that is indispensable to a right reconstruction of our beliefs, and to a just remodelling of our social organisation. Nothing perhaps will be so helpful in these circumstances as a comparative study of other forms of religion and other systems of ethics.

It is interesting to note the appreciative and favourable judgment which the Buddhist philosophy receives from advanced thinkers of the present day. This fact, considered in its relation to the changing philosophical and religious thought of these times, is profoundly significant. The modern thinker, trained in the method of science, is casting about for some firm basis of belief in the perfectibility of man. For this question reaches to the root of every proposed form of social reconstruction. And the trend of modern thought in the direction of Buddhist doctrines points to a religious reformation and a social organisation that will embody for modern life much of the older teaching.

And he states further,

The modern mind, profoundly agitated by its many perplexing problems, turns hopefully to a system which, like this, was conceived with clear psychological insight, was built on a rational basis, and was made conformable to the world-order. There is,

then, nothing surprising in the sympathetic response of the modern conscience to this humanistic appeal. It is made to the same principle in man which, six centuries later, the Christ stirred by his preaching.

As a religion, Buddhism is a living power, dominant over a large portion of the Eastern world, and it still exhibits that degree of vitality which manifests itself in growth. As a philosophy, it is profoundly affecting the thought — and particularly religious thought — of the Western world. Much of the literature of the present day bears the mark of its influence. . . . If "*the most intensely intellectual movement the world has ever seen*" finds congenial soil in the modern mind, it is because our stage in evolution has brought us into touch with its spirit and motive. Moreover, the same moral development has forced on the modern world the recognition of the solidarity of humanity, of a brotherhood of mankind, such as the Buddha's great ethical system is built upon. Hence, Buddhism, with its real grasp of life's problems, must have a commanding interest for the thinkers of today who are making the philosophy and shaping the religion of tomorrow.

There is in the Western thought of today a manifest tendency to blend religion with philosophy and to seek in science a sure foundation for its doctrines, but such a basis Buddhism offered some twenty-six centuries ago. As this fact becomes more clearly perceived, through the comparative study of religion, the modern mind is drawn to the older faith, in which it finds so many of its needs anticipated. This tendency of modern liberal thought is a notable feature in the philosophical and religious literature of these times.

(35, 44-45)

In its advocacy of the Eastern spiritual system, the article, while unaware of the future poet of *The Waste Land* and *Four Quartets*, concisely projects the course of the road Eliot was to follow: a poetical blending of "religion with philosophy" — the paradigm that is almost uniquely a feature of Eastern thought.

Eliot's awareness — his embrace — of Eastern thought was not a mindless imitation, however. It came, rather, as a result of critical and systematic study of the East as a parallel to the human experience in the West — a parallel that, once made, has the capacity to reawaken Western man to aspects of his own experiences that in modern times he had lost touch with, namely, the intuitive, the spiritual. And, fortunately, even before his systematic study, the climate of ideas into which Eliot was born was beginning, unmistakably, to take on elements of Eastern thought.

Since the late eighteenth century, the West had been experiencing an Oriental renaissance. In terms of its Eastern points of reference therefore, Eliot's poetry is part of a larger picture: the great influx of Eastern texts and languages into European and American culture that started in the late eighteenth century figured prominently in the discourse of romanticism, and continues to be central to Western culture today. Significantly, during the third quarter of the nineteenth century, post-bellum St. Louis, the poet's birthplace, where New England and Germany had met and ignited in a minor cultural explosion, was a forum of philosophy and the arts, and in 1900 the legacy still endured (Howarth 55). This St. Louis Movement had "explorers of Orientalist theosophy among its members," and amateurs who used Hegel's dialectic as their instrument for interpreting every activity (Howarth 200, 55-59). And though the Movement was but one segment of a larger picture of Oriental renaissance alive in the States, such ferment is the impression to be gathered of what the learned teachers of T. S. Eliot, like Charles R. Lanman, James H. Woods and Irving Babbitt, were attuned to then. This kind of atmosphere, certainly was propitious to future literati growing up in the nineties. For the enthusiastic St. Louis Movement produced a master among critics and a master poet: Paul Elmer More and T. S. Eliot. In 1953, Eliot told a St. Louis audience: "I am very well satisfied with having been born in St. Louis: in fact, I think I was fortunate to have been born here, rather than in Boston, or New York, or London'" (qtd. in Howarth 63).

In the perspective of literary tradition, it may be said that Eliot's indebtedness to Eastern thought has been in the line of many American Transcendentalists — Emerson, Thoreau and Whitman among them — who admired and drew inspiration from the Eastern scriptures. At one point, though indirectly, Eliot considered himself to be related to the American Transcendentalists: in his Introduction to Charlotte Eliot's *Savonarola* (1926), he traced his mother's spiritual descent from Schleiermacher by way of Channing, Emerson, and Herbert Spencer (Smidt 2, 211). However, to the eyes of a student of philosophy like

Eliot, the American Transcendentalists' approach to and their knowledge of Eastern traditions — however substantial the latter may have been — appeared poor and unsystematic. In *After Strange Gods*, Eliot opines that even “the ‘influence’ of Brahmin and Buddhist thought upon Europe as in Schopenhauer, Hartmann, and Deussen, had largely been through romantic misunderstanding” (40-41). According to Kearns (167-68), Eliot distrusted American literary Orientalism partly on the grounds of its epistemological and political naïveté and partly because of his ambivalence about the culture or subcultures from which it came. In many of his official pronouncements, Eliot found Emerson weak and Thoreau negligible. It was in graduate school that Eliot discovered a scholarly East that was far more rigorous and cosmopolitan than any yet revealed to America in the West's literature.

Upon his enrollment at the Harvard Graduate School in 1911, Eliot began the systematic exploration of Eastern religious and philosophical traditions that was to inform much of his later work — exploration under tutelage of the influential Orientalists Lanman, Woods, Babbitt, and Masaharu Anesaki. At Harvard, he found a group of philosopher-teachers “who considered Eastern languages and systems of thought not only a legitimate field of study but an integral part of the graduate curriculum” (Kearns 22). During his residence, Eliot took four courses in Sanskrit and Pali with the leading Sanskrit scholar Charles Lanman, an advanced course called “Philosophical Sanskrit” with James Woods, and attended and took notes on a series of lectures on Buddhism by the visiting Professor Masaharu Anesaki. Indeed then, Eliot was committed to the “effort of understanding what the Indian philosophers were after” (*After Strange Gods* 34). The result of this effort was a deep admiration for Eastern philosophy. In 1933, Eliot wrote that the great philosophers of India “make most of the great European philosophers look like boys” (*After Strange Gods* 40). And the exertions Eliot put into Oriental studies during this period were to lay the basis for a lifelong appreciation of the Buddhist and Hindu classics. This appreciation

— this understanding — though necessarily partial and limited by his own culture and time, contributed to Eliot's poetry a resonance that extends far beyond local allusions and helps to form an original stance toward the Eastern materials of his art.

At this juncture, an element of 'predestination' in the relationship between Eliot and Buddhism must be mentioned. It was through Buddhism that Eliot was first exposed to Eastern thought and effectively acquainted himself with the East Asian tradition. It was Buddhism too which heightened in Eliot a concern with the problem of the universal human condition, and directed his insights to the possibilities of a solution. Eliot's earliest exposure to Buddhism — to the East — was Sir Edwin Arnold's *The Light of Asia*, a poem based on the life of the Buddha, which became a popular classic in England and America soon after its publication in 1879. Eliot read it with pleasure in his boyhood and continued to admire it during his later years. In one place, he remarked: "I must have had a latent sympathy for the subject-matter, for I read it through with gusto, and more than once" (*On Poetry and Poets* 38). In Arnold's book, the figure of Buddha the man made its first appeal to young Eliot's imagination, and here something of Buddha's philosophy, however attenuated, first appeared on the horizon of the youth's understanding.

Arnold's book was criticized at the time both for its oversimplification of Buddhism and its excessive enthusiasm for a non-Christian point of view (Kearns 21). Eliot's affection for it, however, set a tone for his later, more extensive study of Buddhist texts and traditions, a tone reflecting not only respect and admiration but even a curious kind of intimacy. That intimacy was to be reflected even on the young Eliot's constitution. According to his (undergraduate) contemporary at Harvard, William Chase Greene, "he was recognized as able and witty; not influential, at the time, rather aloof and silent; I used to tell him he reminded me of a smiling Buddha" (qtd. in Howarth 95). His Buddhistic dispositions were intensified by exposure to the Buddhist scholars Babbitt and Anesaki.

Irving Babbitt, Eliot's first mentor, for whom Eliot had "the highest respect and admiration" (*After Strange Gods* 39), introduced him to a more sophisticated understanding of Buddhism than Arnold's, as well as to many other Indic and East Asian religions and philosophical positions. Babbitt's approach was to extend the boundaries of the usual undergraduate education — "to put," as he said, "Confucius behind Aristotle, and Buddha behind Christ" (qtd. in Kearns 21).

During the time of Eliot's outreach to Buddhism, the West's Eastern scholarship had become acute enough to recognize a number of important distinctions within and among the complex Buddhist traditions. Increasing work on the Buddhist (Pali) texts had made apparent the differences between the Mahayana, with its expansive idealism, its embracing of exoteric religion, and its wealth of imagery and myth, and the southern or early tradition, with its comparative austerity, rigor, and monastic base. The terms for these traditions are sometimes called Hinayana or Theravada as opposed to Mahayana, early as opposed to late, Pali as opposed to Sanskrit, southern as opposed to northern. The northern and later schools of Mahayana Buddhism are in some respects more affirmative and expansive in their interpretation of the Buddha's teaching, and have been easier for Westerners to assimilate (Kearns 70).

If Irving Babbitt led Eliot to capture the spirit of early Buddhism, it was Masaharu Anesaki who attracted Eliot to later (Mahayana) Buddhism. According to Perl and Tuck, Eliot's course selection showed a marked tendency toward Buddhist studies, as distinct from pure Indology; and, in electing Anesaki's course on schools of religious and philosophical thought in China and Japan, Eliot demonstrated a desire to follow the development of Buddhism outside India (115-16). Anesaki devoted his lectures to an exposition of the *Lotus Sutra*, to a sketch of the tenets of the Madhyamika, the philosophical school to which Eliot, on the evidence of his extensive notes, was particularly attracted, and to a survey of later Japanese developments including the Tendai

philosophy, the nationalists, and the apocalyptic mysticism of Nichiren (Kearns 76-78). Anesaki, a comparatist and art historian thoroughly trained in Western philosophy and art as well as East Asian traditions, presented Mahayana Buddhism as an ethical and philosophical system at once broader and more humane than the narrow monasticism of early Buddhism (Kearns 78). The influence on Eliot of Anesaki's lectures and of the Mahayana in general was extensive: on the surface level, the imagery of *Lotus Sutra*, especially its allegorical exploration of the meaning of the lotus, undoubtedly had an effect on Eliot's imagination. On a deeper level, too, a growing acceptance of the need for a religion replete with myth and symbolism and adapted to the psychological and spiritual needs of lay devotional life rendered Eliot, as time went on, more and more sympathetic to later Buddhism; and, as Kearns agrees, there are many traces of imagery and terminology associated with the Mahayana in *Four Quartets* (78-79).

In 1914 Eliot travelled to Europe on a Sheldon Fellowship from Harvard, going first to Germany and then arriving in London in August 1914 (Ackroyd 54-55); and he continued study in philosophy there until 1916. Eliot never forsook his interest in Oriental traditions, which by this time were etched in his mind and poetic consciousness. What he knew about the East was fortified by his exposure to the European movement, then under way, that was devoted to study of the Eastern spiritual traditions as a way of revitalizing the civilization of the West. There is historical evidence to support this assumption: Eliot made a visit to London's Buddhist Society early in 1915, the year which marked the beginning of his career as a poet. In a letter dated 4 April 1915 to Mrs. Jack Gardner, a prominent Boston art collector, Eliot wrote:

Quite two months ago I think it may have been (or six weeks) I made the acquaintance (at a meeting of the Buddhist Society!) of a

man who attracted me by a certain serenity of manner, and by mentioning Mr. Okakura. His name was Henry Furst. . . .

(93)⁴

Though the Society's records do not show the frequency or dates of his visits, it seems clear that Eliot's interest — almost faith — in Buddhism never wavered. As Stephen Spender observes, rather, "Buddhism remained a lifelong influence in his work" (*T. S. Eliot* 20). At the time he was writing *The Waste Land*, Eliot was firmly in Buddhism's thrall. Spender recounts:

Incidentally, if Eliot's own views are to be considered, I once heard him say to the Chilean poet Gabriela Mistral that at the time when he was writing *The Waste Land*, he seriously considered becoming a Buddhist.

("Remembering Eliot" 60)

The persistence of Eliot's spiritual commitment in Buddhism is reflected in his words spoken prior to the time he embarked upon writing the Quartets: "I am not a Buddhist, but some of the early Buddhist scriptures affect me as parts of the Old Testament do . . ." (*The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism* 91).

Eliot's Oriental interests indicated his dissatisfaction with the modes and methods of Western philosophical discourse (Perl and Tuck 116). Thus his European period was in a sense an eschewal of a promising career in academic philosophy. According to Perl and Tuck, Eliot's parting with philosophy was not only 'personal,' but also because this was "the logical culmination of an anti-philosophical argument he had been constructing for several years" (116) — an argument reflected in and suggested by the characteristics of Eastern thought and by comparative studies of the Eastern and Western traditions.

⁴ Okakura Kakuzo (1862-1913), Japanese scholar and writer, is the author of *The Book of Tea* (1906). From 1906 until his death, he was Curator of the Department of Chinese and Japanese Art at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts. He took Eliot to meet Matisse in 1910 (Notes in *The Letters of T. S. Eliot* 93). Eliot's familiarity with Okakura testifies to the poet's knowledge and understanding of East Asian culture and traditions even before his systematic studies of Mahayana Buddhism under Anesaki.

As Eliot was well aware, Eastern thought is indeed anti-philosophical in its nature and function, seen from the standpoint of the Western understanding of philosophy.⁵ The East's "idea of a philosophy as a way of conduct" is, anti-philosophically in A. N. Whitehead's words, "the critic of abstractions" (129). "None of the Oriental languages has a word which in any way corresponds to our [Western] 'philosophy,'" states H. V. Guenther (42). In Eastern perception, the Real is known not by means of analysis or accumulation of abstract knowledge but by uncovering it; "[Eastern] philosophy performs this uncovering function" (Murti 212). Also in its nature, Eastern thought is not interested in knowledge per se; the theoretical finds its sole justification in its services as a guide for the practical. In other words, in the East, philosophy has never been divorced from the problems of human living.

In his *Indian Philosophy*, S. Radhakrishnan considers spirituality, dominance of interest in the subjective, monistic idealism, and intuition as general characteristics of Eastern thought (24-49). By spirituality he means that there is a strong spiritual motive in Eastern philosophy, and a keen recognition of the close relationship between philosophy, religion, and life. While religion and philosophy in the West are independent systems, all of the systems of classical Oriental philosophy are religious in nature, context, and objective. "All Hindu philosophy," (as manifested in the Vedas, the Upanishads and the *Bhagavad-Gita*), says Franklin Edgerton, "has a practical aim. It seeks the truth but not the truth for its own sake. It is truth as a means of human salvation that is the object." And, he continues, "all Hindu philosophy is religious in basis. To the Hindu mind, 'the truth

⁵ Chuang-Tzu condemns (analytic) philosophy (of the Western type) as the very fountainhead of confusion and disorder. He states: "[The philosophers'] versatility shown in artful deceptions becoming more and more pernicious, . . . is [indeed] great, but the common people are perplexed by all this sophistry. Hence there is great disorder continually in the world, and the guilt of it is due to that fondness for [categorized] knowledge (that is, to philosophy)" (*Chuang Tzu* 10: 4; qtd. in Zaehner, *Concordant Discord* 230). Chuang-Tzu's remarks may be compared with Eliot's similar reaction to the function and methodology of (Western) philosophy: "The True reason, I think, for the failure of all philosophic flights, is not that they venture too far, but that they venture alone. The eye of the honnêt homme on the ground does not follow them" ("The Validity of Artificial Distinctions," qtd. in Perl and Tuck 116-17).

shall make you free.’ Otherwise there is no virtue in it” (“Introductory” in *The Bhagavad-Gita* 109). Such a practical, “soteriological purpose was what Eliot admired most about [Eastern] philosophy, and its absence what he liked least about the Western philosophical tradition” (Perl and Tuck 119).

From the Oriental point of view, philosophy must be intimately related to life and its problems. Determination of the correct way of living constitutes the supreme object underlying — and consciously underlying — the search for truth. Buddhism, which has exerted untold influence upon the East, is an apt illustration. The prevalence of suffering constitutes the starting point and the problem in the Buddhist system of thought. The essence of the remainder of Buddhism involves the psychological, moral, and metaphysical analyses that are designed to provide a solution to the original practical problem of human suffering.

This philosophical motive or interest is the same with Chinese philosophy. Even at the dawn of civilization, according to Hu Shih, Chinese philosophy was “busying herself with the conditions and problems of the age. She was in search of the *tao* . . . which simply means a way or a method; a way of individual life, of social contact, of public activity and government, etc. In short, [Chinese] philosophy had set out in quest of a way or method of ordering the world, of understanding it and bettering it” (17).

As in the Eastern system, Eliot’s philosophical construction is tinged with religiosity or religious experience, especially in his later work. The primary aim of Eliot as a poet-philosopher is not to interpret the world away; he wishes rather to solve the problem of life, its meaning, its values, the destiny of man. Eliot’s Eastern philosophical attitude is well echoed in his famous pronouncement in *The Waste Land*: “Shall I at least set my lands in order?” (74). That is, Eliot in his poetry seems to assume the role of a philosopher-seer of Eastern stripe, one who hungers not after abstract, fragmented knowledge, but spiritual insight, one who is ever trying to reflect his knowledge and

beliefs in life and deeds, and who endeavors to see beyond, to see through, and to penetrate the core of reality.

Within this characteristic frame of Eastern thought, there are other features which are typically Oriental — features that are replete in Eliot's poetry, particularly *Four Quartets*. One of the most prominent of these is a tendency to monism as contrasted with the West's emphasis on the individual.⁶ Unlike Western thought, which in general has been keenly aware of the distinction between man and the universe, Eastern thought does not make such contrast. Rather, the main systems of Eastern religio-philosophy hold to the idea of an "undifferentiated continuum" as the ultimate reality (C. Moore 303). Considering things and the individual from a wider perspective, Oriental attitudes make the individual primarily a part of a larger whole. While not sufficiently appreciating the individual personality, Eastern thought recognizes the other side of man, man the member of family, of society, of the universe. On a religious and experiential level, this monistic outlook helped inculcate in Easterners their sense of relatedness and extensive fellow-feeling and compassion; on an existential and social level it has helped the individual to arrive at a sense of worth and moral responsibility.⁷

A clear predilection for monism is an integral part of Eliot's imagination. A monistic vision (which Eliot was also finding in F. H. Bradley⁸), central throughout to the *weltanschauung* of *Four Quartets*, becomes in the finale to the poem like the stroke of the

⁶ C. Moore points out that the West has its monistic philosophies, from Plato to the present day, but in living and emphasis — especially since Christianity's insistence on the infinite value of the West has tended in the opposite direction (302). On the other hand, according to Smidt, though it is not necessarily hostile to orthodox Christianity, on the whole monism tends to regard the Christian conception of God as falling short of the Absolute, and the teachings of Christianity as failing to give a final interpretation of the universe (212).

⁷ Such an Eastern outlook is exact opposite of the mechanistic Aristotelean-Thomist position, where the exhaustive actualization of all possible being and value is contributed by none of the world's creatures since the forms of reality were given from the first day of creation.

⁸ It is significant to note that by the time Eliot encountered Bradley's *Appearance and Reality* (June, 1913), his knowledge of Eastern religio-philosophy and metaphysics had been well established. Probably it was not coincident then that Eliot came to take the interest in Bradley, for the latter's dialectic and metaphysics share with and are frequently compared with those of Hinduism and Buddhism.

cymbals — the resonance of “one” as a result of bringing together the two sides. Essentially, Eliot believed that “the material and the spiritual world . . . are one world” (“The Significance of Charles Williams” 895). It is this monistic vision that enabled Eliot to conceive of life as a whole and to experience time as an unbroken continuum of the past, present, and future. Adopting the monistic systems, which are in clear contrast to the West’s individualism, Eliot was able to see the individual and the particular in the context of the whole and universal — “of the person in relation to other individuals, to God, and to society” (“Literature and the Modern World” 21).

In Eastern thought, also, the consciousness of self is frequently described as the source of all evil or human predicaments — as is concisely iterated in *Tao Te Ching*: “If we have no self, / We have no distress.”⁹ (Selfishness in any form is rejected universally in the great Oriental religio-philosophies.) Both in Eliot and in Eastern thought, the problem of self (renunciation and annihilation of desire) is the key to salvation. In the ultimate state of salvation not only is the individual (self) transcended but also are all of the ideas and the peripherals of the self. For self and the ideas of self are the very cause of all separateness and fragmentations, which are the opposites of unity, and antithetical to salvation.

A process philosophy, as in Buddhism and Taoism, is in the main stream of Eliot’s system of thought. Reality is ceaseless change. There is nothing permanent; change itself is the ultimate fact of experience. All is becoming. Here we are reminded of the ideas of Heraclitus and Whitehead. “The philosophy of the Buddha,” André notes,

like that of Heracleitus, who was contemporary with him, shows us everywhere unceasing change, a continual flux, an ever coming-to-be. Hence existence is not a state of being, but a process of becoming. All that is, at any time, is the product of this ceaseless

⁹ In *The Way of the Ways: Lao Tzu / Tao Teh Ching*, trans. Herrymon Maurer (New York: Schocken, 1985) 52. Chap. 13. This edition is the source of quotations cited in this study. All further quotations from *Tao Te Ching* are from this edition and will be identified by chapter number only.

flow, the result reached at the present moment, of a perpetual coming-to-be; that which is, being the immediate and necessary outcome of that which was, and that which shall be, in like manner, the outcome of that which is.

(37)

There are other common aspects between Eliot and Eastern thought, including belief in the primacy of intuition over the intellect, of impersonality over personality, of the synthetic over the analytic, and of relative dualism (i.e. the dualistic frame of reference as relative to the single reality) over the Cartesian absolute dualism of matter and mind. However, the preceding discussion will suffice to demonstrate that explicit similarities exist and that these similarities — affinities — are as profound and extensive in Eliot as was his knowledge of Oriental traditions. In his radio talks of 1946 on "The Unity of European Culture," Eliot recalled:

Long ago I studied the ancient Indian languages, and while I was chiefly interested at that time in philosophy, I read a little poetry too; and I know that my own poetry shows the influence of Indian thought and sensibility.

(*Notes Towards the Definition of Culture* 116-17)

Eliot's encounter with Oriental spiritualism, begun with and through the Indic traditions, was pursued no less vigorously in terms of those of East Asia.¹⁰ But more significant than

¹⁰ Eliot's interest in and knowledge of Chinese thought traditions were as considerable as those of his in Indic traditions. Speaking of "the popularity of the philosophy of Confucius" among his contemporaries, Eliot stated: "I have the highest respect for the Chinese mind and for Chinese civilisation; . . . Chinese civilization at its highest has graces and excellences which may make Europe seem crude" (*After Strange Gods* 40). He encouraged E. Pound to examine Chinese philosophy. In his essay on Mang Tzu, Pound states: ". . . the editor of the *Criterion* [Eliot] may for all I know still be waiting for me to review a volume of Chinese philosophy which I found too rancid to mention" (Jul. 1938, *The Criterion* 607). In terms of 'tradition' (Eliot's favorite ideology), Eliot also highly regarded China: "the Chinese mind is very much nearer to the Anglo-Saxon than is the Indian. China is — or was until the missionaries initiated her into Western thought . . . a country of tradition" (*After Strange Gods* 41). Too, it is certain that Eliot knew about Taoism and Zen not only as a student of Eastern philosophy but also through his close contact with intellectuals such as Aldous Huxley who were deeply interested in and informed about the Orient. With reference to the latter's opinion in the Foreword to *The Supreme Wisdom* [*The Supreme Doctrine; Psychological Studies in Zen Thought*], a book by a French psychiatrist, Dr. Hubert Benoit, Eliot has to say the following: "Mr. Huxley's observation responded to the impression which I had myself received from that remarkable book when I read it in French. Huxley is comparing Western psychiatry with the discipline of the East as found in Tao and Zen." And he makes further an analogy of the weakness of Western psychiatry, "from a Zen Buddhist point of view," with that of modern criticism (*On Poetry and Poets* 116).

the direct influence which allusions to the *Bhagavad-Gita*, the life of Buddha, and the Upanishads etc., illustrate, is the generalized affinity to the spirit of Eastern thought which Eliot demonstrates throughout his poetry and especially in *Four Quartets*. Eliot himself admitted the generalized impact of Eastern literature on modern poets:

In the literature of Asia is great poetry. There is also profound wisdom and very difficult metaphysics. . . . That there has been some influence of poetry of the East in the last century and a half is undeniable: to instance only English poetry, and in our own time, the poetical translations from the Chinese made by Ezra Pound, and those made by Arthur Waley, have probably been read by every poet writing in English.

(*Notes Toward the Definition of Culture* 116-17)

To read *Four Quartets* in a broader Eastern perspective is not only to do justice to Eliot's tendency to comprehensiveness and universalism, but also to disentangle the complex webs of metaphysics that Eliot consciously adopted from the philosophical school of Mahayana Buddhism, the form of Buddhism which is in several respects identical with Taoism in ethical and metaphysical credos.

The phrase "Eastern thought" in this study is therefore used to denote traditions as diverse as Hinduism, Buddhism, and Taoism; and the term 'Eastern' is used interchangeably with 'Oriental.' However, the premise of the dissertation is not to determine the authenticity of Eliot's Eastern themes nor to argue against the importance of the poet's Western Christian roots, but to explore the significance of his Eastern perspectives. Focusing on Eliot's overt and covert use of philosophical themes, the study attempts to assess the overall impact of Eastern thought on the aesthetics, insights and wisdom implicit in *Four Quartets*. Concurrently, as it juxtaposes the essential perceptions of Eastern religio-philosophy with those of Eliot's poem, the study gauges the deep influence of Eastern spirituality on Eliot's vision of the human condition.

As in Eastern religio-philosophy, the basis to Eliot's system of thought is the priority of the practical over the theoretical: it begins with diagnosis of the problem inherent in human life, and moves towards the discovery of ways to solve or eliminate the problem, the predicament — it is such approach that is exemplified in Buddhism. *Four Quartets* too consists of the diagnosis (perception) of the problem and speculation about what is necessary for its solution. This study follows the same model.

Chapter one focuses on the existential problems of suffering and impermanence. Eliot's poetry as a whole deals with the perennial problem of human suffering and gropes for a positive way out of suffering to freedom. If Eliot's poetic journey is viewed as a long, purgatorial climb from the depths of agony to the heights of ecstasy, *Four Quartets* represents a culmination of these two emotional poles. The second chapter deals with the issues of *askesis*, detachment, and love (compassion) — with what Eliot believes to be tentative solutions to the fragmented psyche of modern man and the disordered modern world. The third and last chapter describes Eliot's solution, in a highly metaphysical context, to the problem of fragmentation and separateness: this involves practical realization of those truths, through what in Hinduism is called Jnana Yoga (the path of knowledge), which lead to salvation. In this last chapter, all the opposites and conflicts with their attendant tensions are transcended — are perceived as one and the same Reality through intuitive knowledge. Here Eliot, reaching the stage of the absolute, sees life in totality and experiences "a transformation of perspective": the world now appears in a new light. These three categorized 'visions' are closely linked with one another, both ideologically (in doctrines) and contextually (in Eliot's poem); but our study will not extensively chronicle Eliot's development of these visions, since they are ubiquitous throughout the Quartets, though the vision of unity is more strongly revealed in the fourth Quartet than in the others.

In the first chapter, as noted, is a discussion of Eliot's treatment of suffering and impermanence — the universal conditions of all existence — as projected in the images of the eternal flux of becoming and in images of the monotonous, materialistic atmosphere of modern civilization and of human culture in general. The chapter explores, accordingly, the sources of suffering as perceived by the poet, and his responses to the same fundamental perception that so profoundly — to the world's gain — moved Buddha.

Chapter II

IMPERMANENCE AND SUFFERING

“All things are unreal, / Unreal or disappointing,” says T. S. Eliot in *Murder in the Cathedral* (280). Although the “miseries that people suffer are visible on the surface,” he writes further in his Introduction to Djuna Barnes’ *Nightwood*, “the deeper design may be that of human misery and bondage which is universal” (xv). Eliot, as evinced by these words, dwelt frequently on themes of death, despair, night, and the elapse of time. It is probably no exaggeration to say that his whole life and poetic, religio-philosophical outlook were profoundly influenced by his perceptions of impermanence and by what he saw of human suffering. For Eliot made pain, suffering, and his perceptions of the ephemerality of all phenomena an essential part of his poetic province. Indeed, a cognizance of impermanence and suffering is so central to all but a few of Eliot’s poems that it provides a common point of departure to each, and is, in fact, the starting point of his ethical and religio-philosophical system. Eliot’s preoccupation with these ontological issues allies him with religio-philosophy of the Indic tradition, most particularly Buddhism, since the fundamental perceptions of Buddhism and Vedanta are those of impermanence (*anicca*) and of the universality of suffering (*dukkha*). In Buddhism, impermanence and suffering are the bedrock on which entire philosophical systems rest. Thus, the words of the Buddha emphatically echo through the corridors of time:

Whether Buddhas arise, O priests, or whether Buddhas do not arise,
it remains a fact and the fixed and necessary constitution of being,
that all its constituents are transitory. This fact a Buddha discovers

and masters, and when he has discovered and mastered it, he announces, teaches, publishes, proclaims, discloses, minutely explains, and makes it clear, that all the elements of being are transitory.

Whether Buddhas arise, O priests, or whether Buddhas do not arise, it remains a fact and the fixed and necessary constitution of being, that all its constituents are misery. This fact a Buddha discovers and masters, and when he has discovered and mastered it, he announces, teaches, publishes, proclaims, discloses, minutely explains, and makes it clear, that all the constituents of being are misery.

(*Anguttara-nikaya* iii, 134 in Warren xiv)

Suffusion in suffering constituted an essential part of the life-philosophy of Eliot. In an article written in 1928, E. M. Foster makes a significant and perceptive comment that bears on the mature products of Eliot's thinking:

In respect to the horror that they find in life, men can be divided into three classes. In the first class are those who have not suffered often or acutely; in the second, those who have escaped through horror into a further vision; in the third, those who continue to suffer. Most of us belong to the first class, and to the elect outside it our comments must sound shallow; they may feel that we have no right to comment at all. The mystics, such as Dostoevsky and Blake, belong to the second class. Mr. Eliot, their equal in sensitiveness, distinct from them in fate, belongs to the third.

(15-16)

Foster spoke more truly than he realized, as adepts are constantly reminded of Eliot's insistence, both in his prose and his poetry, of the notion of impermanence and suffering.

The origins of the poet's morose world view, which is dominant even in his early poetry, are very difficult to analyze. In part, they were constitutional and possibly strengthened by experiences of a private nature. As telling in this regard as Eliot's own prose, poetry and drama, the Eliot biography is virtually strewn with words related to the pain and suffering Eliot most certainly felt. As one example, sickness often descended on him at points of crisis; he suffered from loneliness in foreign locales, and from chronic emotional instability which may have been a result of his tragic marriage to Vivien Haigh-

Wood, whose periodic illnesses exhausted them both. In poem after poem and other works we find indications of his personal suffering.

Eliot's experiences must have led him very starkly to a realization of the axiomatic truth of human suffering, both personal and universal. It is said that during the early 1920s the poet would wear pale green face powder in the presence of his company "in order to accentuate his look of suffering" (Ackroyd 136). Though this conforms with Eliot's strongly realized sense of drama, and may indeed be labeled an exercise in vanity and pretension, the foible nevertheless provides further insight into his innermost feelings about pain and suffering. It was therefore natural that the poet express in his works the suffering which he personally experienced, somewhat in the manner of what the Buddha advised the enlightened to do: "... he announces, teaches, publishes, proclaims, discloses, minutely explains, [or otherwise] makes clear, that all the elements of being are misery." As K. Smidt argues, therefore, despite Eliot's theory of impersonality in art, the dark mood present in his work is surely personal, and "'the death-wish' in his poetry, especially in *The Waste Land* and 'The Hollow Men,' has been personally experienced" (145). Eliot himself came to believe, at a certain point, that personal suffering must be the true subject-matter of poetry (Smidt 134).

Eliot's distress was not caused by private matters alone; clearly, his despondency had very real causes in the world at large. In a letter to Richard Aldington, written on 7 April 1921, the poet indicated that public events had provoked in him a mood of despair (Ackroyd 109). It is known that Eliot's love of tradition and culture, which meant to him beauty, order, and purposeful living, was at the root of his despairing view of and disappointment with modern civilization. As he experienced firsthand the intense political and economic turmoil which occurred during and between the two world wars, his perception of the human condition must have been intensified to a great degree by the immediate, macroscopic picture of the contemporary Waste Land that confronted him. The civilization

which remained after the Great War was hollow — tottering and bankrupt — within and without. And, as Eliot points out in his Commentary, the post-war period was just as much a period of illusions as of disillusion (Apr. 1933, *The Criterion* 469).

Throughout his life, Eliot's characteristic position about and sense of emptiness concerning all human affairs remained unchanged, albeit they were deepening as time went on. Eliot came to be "preoccupied with Hell — not just the Hell of eternity but that torment to which human beings are sometimes consigned on earth" (Ackroyd 181). Thus in 1931, Eliot wrote "an unusually intimate letter on suffering" to John Hayward (Ackroyd 235). During the 1940s, at the time of the composition of *Four Quartets* and in the spirit of a Romanticist, he would ponder the relationship between illness and creativity and engage in speculation on how physical exhaustion and mental depression may not only precede but be favorable to artistic creation and spiritual illumination (Bergsten 201). Eliot emphasized this belief in such prose writings as *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism* and in his Introduction to Pascal's *Pensées*.

Eliot's temperament and experience, his disappointment with modern civilization, and the literary-creative precepts he was coming to cultivate, broaden into a *pessimisme absolu* or "an all-embracing pessimism," which in his case, in the words of H. W. Häusermann, was "the most absolute and despairing since Swift" (Smidt 146). But while it is easy to see how that impression arises, simply to regard Eliot's world view as darkly, irredeemably pessimistic is a superficial, if not mistaken, assessment. H. Moore states: "Take the Book of Ecclesiastes, remove from it every reference to God, and you have a fair representation of the philosophy which forms the basis of Buddhism. 'All is Vanity'" (27). Eliot's world view — his philosophy — is not simply the outgrowth of gloom or despondency. To be aware of suffering — to experience it — does not lead necessarily to pessimism. It would in fact be more appropriate to describe Eliot's perceptions, or those of the Buddha, as

'realistic' rather than 'pessimistic,' since both begin, quite simply, with the common facts of existence. On this matter Lama Anagarika Gobinda states the following:

Suffering in Buddhism is not the expression of pessimism or of the world-tiredness of an aged civilization: it is the fundamental thesis of a world-embracing thought, because there exists no experience which is equally universal. Not all sentient beings are thinking beings, and not all thinking beings reach the stage in which this faculty conceives its own nature and importance; but all sentient beings endure suffering; because all are subject to old age, decay and death. . . .

(*The Psychological Attitude of Early Buddhist Philosophy* 48)

In underscoring the central importance of suffering in Buddhist thought, Gobinda's observation, with no thought or connection to Eliot, elucidates concisely the poet's Buddha-like sensitivity to and acute insight into this universal experience.

It was the reality — the encountering — of common suffering that caused Gautama Buddha 2,500 years ago to leave his home, his family, his wealth, and to sacrifice his royal position. And, consequently, he took it later as the starting point of his ethical and philosophical system. The Buddha's insight, in its most concentrated form, finds expression in the Four Noble Truths. In general terms, these may be summarized as: 1) that suffering exists, 2) that suffering has causes, 3) that suffering can be stopped, and 4) that there is a path that leads to the cessation of suffering. The way leading to the cessation of suffering is delineated in the Noble Eightfold Path. These insights are revealed in the First Sermon of the Buddha at Benares. The following illustrates the first Noble Truth — the existence of suffering — with which the present chapter, in respect to Eliot's consciousness, is primarily concerned:

The Noble Truth of suffering is this: Birth is suffering; ageing (*sic*) is suffering; sickness is suffering; death is suffering, sorrow and lamentation, pain, grief and despair are suffering; association with the unpleasant is suffering; not to get what one wants is suffering — in brief, the five aggregates of attachment are suffering.

(*Samyutta-nikaya* LVI, ii; trans, Rahula 93)

The word for “suffering,” *dukkha*, in this passage is of far greater depth and complexity than what is implied by the translation. While it has an ordinary allusion to pain, or grief, or misery, and in that sense is the opposite of *sukha*, meaning “happiness” or “contentment,” it also refers to impermanence, emptiness, or lack of wholeness or perfection (Rahula 17). Thus, *dukkha* is expressive more of the general nature of the universe than of particular instances of suffering, i.e. the reference that change and impermanence are characteristic of the universe is implicit. Hence we may say that suffering and impermanence are virtually one and the same: nothing abides forever, so if a person craves what changes and perishes, then that person’s desires are never satisfied, and he or she suffers.

As historical and biographical records attest, Eliot was an ardent student of Indic philosophy and language while at Harvard, and had come under the influence of such eminent Buddhist scholar-thinkers as Irving Babbitt, Charles Lanman, and Masaharu Anesaki (Ackroyd 97). He was plainly well versed in the precepts of Buddhism, and later made them touchstones in the gradual unfolding — the evolution — of his thought; they are reiterated consciously and unconsciously in both his poetry and drama. Indeed, Eliot’s unique province was to give a thoroughgoing, consistent poetic voice to his own awareness of impermanence and suffering — to turn “the soundless wailing”¹ of suffering, a roar of agony, into music, and to transpose the spectacle of “the intolerable wrestle” (EC, II) into beauty.

Eliot’s school-days poetry foreshadowed his lifelong concerns with the problem of time, the evanescence of life, and his preoccupation with universal flux. In a poem (from among the earliest extant examples) entitled “A Lyric” in the Smith Academy Record of

¹ Eliot, “The Dry Salvages,” from *Four Quartets*, in *The Complete Poems and Plays of T. S. Eliot* (London: Faber, 1969) 185. This edition is the source of *Four Quartets* as cited in this study. All further quotations from *Four Quartets* will be identified by abbreviated title and section only.

April 1905, when Eliot was but 16 years old — and which was reprinted with slight alterations as “Song” in the *Harvard Advocate* two years later — the young poet muses:

If space and time, as sages say,
 Are things that cannot be,
 The fly that lives a single day
 Has lived as long as we.
 But let us live while yet we may,
 While love and life are free,
 For time is time, and runs away,
 Though sages disagree.
 (591)

Such concerns were later to be pursued with even greater diligence. In “At Graduation 1905,” a poem written to mark his graduation from Smith Academy, the young Eliot uses his words to refer to both suffering and impermanence. The poem alludes to the “Great duties” of modern man to overcome “pain and misery”:

Great duties call — the twentieth century
 More grandly dowered than those which came before,
 Summons — who knows what time may hold in store,
 Or what great deeds the distant years may see,
 What conquers over pain and misery,
 What heroes greater than were e’er of yore!

And, concerning the evanescence of life, the poet continues:

We go; like flitting faces in a dream;
 Out of thy care and tutelage we pass
 Into the unknown world — class after class,
 O queen of schools — a momentary gleam,
 A bubble on the surface of the stream,
 A drop of dew upon the morning grass.
 (593, 594)

This vague disquiet over “pain and misery” and fleeting time reappears twelve years later in the 1910 and 1920 poems, “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock,” “Portrait of a Lady,” and “Gerontion,” this time with ironic overtones and in sharper outline. In these poems

the hazy feeling of the poet's youth has now crystallized into a deep anxiety over the fathomless flux of life — in which, apparently, there are no stable or reassuring landmarks. The hapless Prufrock feels despondent because of his age; and indeed the idea of the ravages of time constantly crops up in Eliot, echoing through all the poetry down to "Little Gidding," in which the stranger of the blasted London streets discloses "the gifts reserved for age" (LG, II). Prufrock is acutely conscious of time passing — of life slipping through his fingers:

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 yet for a hundred indecisions,
And for a hundred visions and revisions.

(04)

However much Prufrock tries to persuade himself that there is maneuverability for him — time to make the critical decisions which could transform or redeem his life, yet there is no time: old age and death are inexorably creeping up on him.

The poems which follow "The Love Song" exude the same atmosphere of meaninglessness and futility. The speakers of "Portrait of a Lady" and "Gerontion" are aware that life is a dreamlike transience; but they also realize that there is no escape: the flux of existence, however meaningless, must be endured. Some speakers feel that there appears to be no necessary relation among life's phenomena, and no ultimate meaning. There is the obtrusive and disturbing fact of death, the thought of which may bring "whispers of immortality" to some; but the young man in "Portrait of a Lady" is entirely baffled by it. "What if she should die some afternoon?" he asks,

Should die and leave me sitting pen in hand
With the smoke coming down above the housetops;
Doubtful, for a while
Not knowing what to feel or if I understand.

(21)

In "Gerontion," an old man discovers towards the end of his life that the people and events he has assiduously courted are all fleeting, merely part of a gyrating, whirling flux of existence, incapable of affording him any permanent satisfaction or happiness. Gerontion has not even the "ghosts" of his former life — memories — to live on. His youth has fled and his house decayed, so that he faces an empty old age and death, "driven by the Trades / To a sleepy corner" (39).

Thus in the poems Eliot published before *The Waste Land*, suffering is identified with loneliness, frustration, and impotence in the midst of the irresistible cycle of flux and the ephemerality of all phenomena. With the appearance of *The Waste Land* in 1922, however, Eliot's perceptions of time are more metaphysical; and his consciousness of suffering becomes deeper, so that it is seen as universal, prevalent in the lives of all beings — the lives of the ancients as well as moderns, the heroes and saints of yore as well as the typists and clerks of the contemporary world. At the same time, Eliot in *The Waste Land* speaks of "the unchanging predicament of man," and also begins to embody in his poetry his interest in "the unchanging remedy" (Howarth 235) — a poetic and philosophical dialectic that grew to a crescendo, reaching its climax in *Four Quartets*.

The Waste Land is a poem of despair; and the horror of life has its source in this despair. The Waste Landers, beset with spiritual degradation, are forced to confront the doom of the phenomenal world. Facing them is an endless vista of misery and despair. Yet, living in a twilight consciousness, they know neither suffering nor remedy for their predicament, though they are haunted by anxieties of the future and of death. Perceptions of impermanence and suffering are evoked also in "Ash Wednesday" — which fact implies that although the poem was written after Eliot's reception into the Anglican Church, he had not discarded his Hindu-Buddhist orientation toward reality. In "Ash Wednesday," he is subtly blending Christian and Hindu-Buddhist concepts — an experiment he had already attempted in *The Waste Land* and attempts on a deeper level in

Four Quartets. The speaker of "Ash Wednesday" is conscious of "the infirm glory of the positive hour" (89) and of the limitations of the phenomenal world. He is tired of worrying over the problems of time and place and seeks refuge in renouncing ultimate understanding:

Because I know that time is always time
And place is always and only place
And what is actual is actual only for one time.
(89)

The speaker yearns to be free of incertitude and suffering; but the desert air of the Waste Land resounds to cries of self-doubt, agony and despair, despite a gleam of hope in the presence of "the veiled sister" (95).

In *Four Quartets* Eliot poses himself more conspicuously than before as an "Indic philosopher" (Howarth 220). Presented here is a summation of his thinking on impermanence and suffering, as the poet recapitulates various modes of looking upon time and the timeless, permanence and impermanence. And as Harold McCarthy has aptly observed, if, of all Eliot's works, *Four Quartets* is closest to the spirit of Buddhism (39), this is probably because the most conspicuous of the Quartets' philosophical features embrace these two key Buddhistic intuitions. The darkness of the human predicament in *Four Quartets* is as intense as ever despite the spark of light and hope and the possibility of spiritual release; thus, the perception of impermanence and suffering is given even more profound poetic expression.

CHANGE

As has been discussed, the transitoriness of life gives rise to suffering, so that suffering and impermanence become complementary aspects of a single primary perception. There are moments of happiness in life. And yet the very fact that human beings are aware of being happy and at the same time know that happiness does not last

forever is in itself a source of grief. The transitory nature of happiness points directly to the overriding truth of *dukkha*. This perception is rooted in all of our other everyday experiences of the world, in which birth and death, growth and decay, hope and despair are repeated *ad infinitum*, and all combine to produce a spectacle of suffering in which nothing remains stable and everything is in a state of flux. All experiences are ephemeral; even the most exquisite moments are faltering, fragmentary. Even as we look on in wonder, the sunset fades, the lily droops, the crimson leaf drops down to dust.

Reflection lends us the truth that there is no abiding reality beneath the phenomenal world. All things, to the very depth of their being, are in a state of flux. The cyclic process of unending change affects not merely the surface part of being. Transformed is every being in its most elemental structure. Change is relentless, total.

The perception of transience is given profound expression in the opening lines of "East Coker." It is a meditation on the passage of time and on the fact of change and impermanence experienced in individual lives and the world as a whole:

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,
Old fires to ashes, and ashes to the earth
Which is already flesh, fur and faeces,
Bone of man and beast, cornstalk and leaf.
Houses live and die.

(EC, I)

The world continues on its disinterested way in a state of perpetual flux. A sense of overwhelming despair upon realization of the tyranny of time is further conveyed in the final lines of the second movement of "East Coker." Suggesting the ephemerality of both perceiver and the perceived, the subject and the object, the lines read: "The houses are all gone under the sea. / The dancers are all gone under the hill" (EC, II). The poet's

Men and bits of paper, whirled by the cold wind
 That blows before and after time
 Wind in and out of unwholesome lungs
 Time before and time after.

(BN, III)

People, “woven in the weakness of the changing body” (BN, II), are whirled about by circumstance like bits of paper — a symbol of life and time with their emptiness and unreality. Instead of permanence and lucid stillness, their faces reflect “tumid apathy,” are “filled with fancies and empty of meaning.” They are, indeed, like latter-day incarnations of the Hollow Men, whose “unhealthy souls” have shriveled up into sere and empty husks.

Awareness of change and impermanence involves awareness of death. Time forces on man the dreaded thought of his own mortality. With the idea of the transience of physical life effectively suggested by the two isolated lines at the end of the second movement of “East Coker,” the third movement of the same Quartet goes on to develop the theme of physical extinction — its inevitability — and thus the futility of worldly fortune; the vanity of life and every aspiration, from whatever motive, is revealed. The poem sweeps everything away, leaving satisfaction — meaning — nowhere:

O dark dark dark. They all go into the dark,
 The vacant interstellar spaces, the vacant into the vacant,
 The captains, merchant bankers, eminent men of letters,
 The generous patrons of art, the statesmen and the rulers,
 Distinguished civil servants, chairmen of many committees,
 Industrial lords and petty contractors, all go into the dark,
 And dark the Sun and Moon, and the Almanach de Gotha
 And the Stock Exchange Gazette, the Directory of Directors,
 And cold the sense and lost the motive of action.
 And we all go with them, into the silent funeral,
 Nobody’s funeral, for there is no one to bury.

(EC, III)

The darkness into which we all go is death and an affirmation of our nothingness, of the emptiness of our existence. He who enumerates the death of others is himself to die and will take every spectator of death with him: “Nobody’s funeral, for there is no one to

bury.” Darkness indeed. The overtones of irony and pathos reinforce the basic existential fact of impermanence.

If “East Coker” indicated the direction Eliot wished us to consider — a voyage to the “edge of a grimpen, where is no secure foothold” (EC, II) — the next Quartet, “The Dry Salvages,” confronts that edge, in part by ruminating on the abyss of physical death. Death is twice personified in this poem, once as the river god, with his cargo of bodies, crossed but not tamed by the inadequate and all too ephemeral “bridges” of engineered faith, and once as the sea, howling and yelping, swallowing both the good and evil, so that there is no end to the “drifting wreckage” (DS, II).

The theme of impermanence resounds all the more significantly in “Little Gidding.” The first stanza of the second movement, its emphasis on ashes and dust recalling the burial service, is a reminder of the mortality of men and their works:

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.
(LG, II)

The roses are reduced to ash because they are not, after all, enduring; neither are the youth, beauty, love or happiness which they symbolize. Here we are presented with the concrete, indubitable facts of life in the progression of time. They are determined by unalterable laws, at the base of which is change: dust returns to dust, the human body becomes the separate elements of which it was compacted.

All man's constructions are reduced to nothing, are in the end conquered by the elements. Human endeavor has no permanence and no significance in the face of the flux of time and history:

The parched eviscerate soil
Gapes at the vanity of toil,
Laughs without mirth.
(LG, II)

Change then is constant. Not only is it manifested in the objective world of phenomena, but extends also to the subjective world of impressions. Placing absolute emphasis on the impermanency that invests the phenomenal world, Buddhist metaphysicians denied the existence even of any abiding self that is the subject of a continuous presentation of experience. The so-called person is a temporary conglomeration of psychical and material elements that are being renewed each instant (Conze, *Buddhist Thoughts in India* 98-106, 105-12). Not for a single second do these elements remain the same. They pursue their course of birth, decay and death, and carry the individual with them in that process because they are the individual. Here we are reminded of Taoism, or its Greek embodiment in Heraclitus, whose belief in flux and change found such strong echoes in Eliot's mind.

Nothing is immune from the process of bodily decay and death. There is, therefore, nothing that can be called the self, if by that is meant an unchanging, abiding substance. This concept of "no-self" is called *anatta* in Buddhist terminology (in his *Buddhism in Translations*, Warren uses Ego). Along with the concepts of impermanence and suffering, this notion of *anatta* is central to Buddhist philosophy. The "Buddha [himself] was known as the *Anatta-vadi*, or teacher of Impersonality" (Allen 42). In a key passage in the *Anguttara-Nikaya*, a passage that Warren himself chose for the epigraph of *Buddhism in Translations*, the Buddha, speaking of transience and suffering, states,

Whether Buddhas arise, O priests, or whether Buddhas do not arise, it remains a fact and the fixed and necessary constitution of being, that all its elements are lacking in an Ego. This fact a Buddha discovers and masters, and when he has discovered and mastered it, he announces, teaches, publishes, proclaims, discloses, minutely explains, and makes it clear, that all the elements of being are lacking in an Ego.

(xiv)

According to Kearns, Eliot was particularly attracted to this concept of *anatta*, “the denial in Buddhism of the substantive reality” (74); and it seems that this concept provided impetus in Eliot’s mind for his idea of impersonality in art, and of self-annihilation, detachment, and selfless love. In “East Coker,” the notion of the unsubstantiality of reality is directly echoed and resounds rather theoretically. Nothing is certain and stable in a world in which each instant is discrete and subject to change. The poet says:

The knowledge imposes a pattern, and falsifies,
For the pattern is new in every moment
And every moment is a new and shocking
Valuation of all we have been.

(EC, II)

The concept of *anatta* finds its most eloquent expression in the third movement of “The Dry Salvages.” There Eliot reminds us that we are all fishers in an ocean of flux: nothing is stable or permanent, and no individuality or ego can be preserved. Of the illusions of identity, the poet states:

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;

Fare forward, you who think that you are voyaging;
You are not those who saw the harbour
Receding, or those who will disembark.

(DS, III)

In “Little Gidding,” the poet is bewildered, not only by “The eyes of a familiar compound ghost / Both intimate and unidentifiable,” but also by the enigma of “Knowing myself yet being someone other. . .” (LG, II). And when Eliot says “That time is no healer: the patient is no longer here” (DS, III), he is reflecting the famous axiom of Buddhaghosa concerning impermanence and the notion of non-self: ““Suffering as such exists, but no sufferer is found; The deeds are, but no doer is found”” (qtd. in Rahula 26).

In the poetic whole, Eliot presents his belief that all compounded things, from human beings to the entities of their environment, are impermanent in all their parts and circumstances, and therefore are enmeshed in suffering. His denial of the permanence of the individual self most closely approximates the Buddhist assumption of a universal law of change and impermanence.

THE WHEEL OF SAMSARA

According to Buddhism's theory of unsubstantiality, human life consists of a series of individual moments; the sequence is so close that it gives the appearance of continuity. Yet in fact from one moment to another, the elements of existence are changing and shifting, and their association with each other subtly alters. Life being such sequence of moments, these moments come into being and almost instantly expire as each yields to the next. In each moment the individual is born and dies, but continues.

In Indic tradition, phenomenal existence therefore is viewed as an endless cycle of successive births and deaths. Hindu-Buddhism calls this cyclical pattern *samsara*. In the *Bhagavad-Gita*, the idea of rebirth finds concise expression in the lines

For to one that is born death is certain
And birth is certain for one that has died.
(II, 27; trans. Edgerton)

Thus is stated the essential pattern of *samsara*, the doctrine of transmigration of souls which characterizes the world view of both Hinduism and Buddhism.

The frequent equation of life with death in Eliot's poetry is to some extent at least based on this Indic belief in phenomenal existence as a passing sequence of one momentary state — a belief combined with and reinforced by the Heraclitean idea of change and flux. For this reason, to Eliot, as to Hindu-Buddhism, life and death are not much different from

each other; in fact, “the time of death is every moment” (DS, III). For *samsara* held not the inspiring promise of endless living, but the terrible prospect of ceaseless dying. To Eliot then, both life and death — representing the *samsaric* existence — are terrible to one who has not crossed the river to “death’s other kingdom” (“The Hollow Men” 83). Here it must be pointed out that *samsaric* existence is frequently metaphorized as a river or ocean; indeed, imagery of “crossing-over” by raft or boat appears frequently in Buddhism — as it does in Eliot’s work. In this respect, the voyage scene — a major symbol in “The Dry Salvages” — may be looked upon as a Buddhistic allusion to the ocean of *samsara*, this phenomenal world.

Buddhists say that to appreciate properly the *dukkha* or suffering which suffuses all existence, it is not enough to consider one single lifetime, wherein *dukkha* may or may not be immediately apparent. *A Dictionary of Buddhism* has this to say on the matter:

One must have in view the whole frightful unending chain of rebirth and the sum of misery entailed therein. S[amsara] refers not only to round of re-birth in human forms; the whole range of sentient beings is incl[uded], from the tiniest insect to man and forms an unbroken continuum.

(224)

This vast Indic conception of existence as an endless cycle of births and deaths is presented most often in the symbol of an ever-turning wheel. The Buddha expounds upon this Wheel of Existence, which he calls *Samsara*:

The Wheel of Existence is without known beginning . . .
 The Wheel of Existence is empty with a twelvefold emptiness.
 Respecting the Wheel of Existence it is to be understood that
 the two factors ignorance and desire are its roots.
 Ignorance, desire, and attachment form the round of the
 corruptions . . .
 And it is through these three that this Wheel of Existence is
 said to have three rounds . . . it is incessant . . . it revolves.
 (Warren 175-79)

Out of ignorance (*avidya*) or self-delusion, the individual who does not seek a way out of this endless cycle is destined to perpetually suffer — to be blindly caught up in the wheel's revolutions without realizing any transcendence.

Eliot's symbolic use of the wheel as a pattern of existence is found throughout his poems and plays — in "Portrait of a Lady," *The Waste Land*, *Murder in the Cathedral*, and *The Family Reunion*. However, the metaphor of the wheel figures more significantly in *Four Quartets*, as here it creates an invisible tension — the antithesis to the still point. When the poet comparatively infers that this unstilled world is "the turning world," he is directly evoking the image of the wheel of *samsara*. But through sheer craftsmanship, Eliot can create the wheel image solely by structural means, as in "East Coker," in which the cyclic process of birth, growth, decay, and death is emphatically drawn. "East Coker" opens with the words, "In my beginning is my end," and closes with "In my end is my beginning." The circle is complete, the 'end' meaning a coming home to the point of departure. And thus the Quartet as a whole gives form in the reader's mind to a vast *samsaric* circle. Its beginning lines postulate the idea of metempsychosis:

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,
Old fires to ashes, and ashes to the earth
Which is already flesh, fur and faeces,
Bone of man and beast, cornstalk and leaf.
Houses live and die.

(EC, I)

The reader finds another clear example of transmutation of matter and the endless cycle of the temporal process in "Little Gidding." Here, the roses are reduced to ash, and ash to dust, the dust becoming the structure of a house — earth that creates living forms and their environment:

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 wainscot and the mouse.
 (LG, II)

In connection with the notion of *samsara*, Eliot's frequent use of the word 'dust' (i.e. "the dust on a bowl of rose-leaves" [BN, I]) is not accidental. The idea or image of dust, like the symbol of the wheel, is a typical Buddhist allusion suggesting ephemeral and *samsaric* existence.

Closely associated with reincarnation is the Hindu-Buddhist concept of *karma*. (These ideas, integrally connected, have profoundly conditioned the Oriental view of life.) The primary meaning of *karma* is "deed," "action" or "duty"; its applied meaning, popularly known as the law of cause and effect, connotes the cumulative effect of one's past deeds (A *Dictionary of Buddhism* 153-54). Christmas Humphreys explains it as "Newton's third law of motion, that Action and Reaction are equal and opposite, applied to the moral and all other realms of sentient life" (*Buddhism* 100). This principle of causal connectedness is the basis of *karma*: in its simplest formula, good actions have good results, bad ones bad, and these determine the conditions of the soul at (re)birth. The *Shvetashvatara Upanishad* (5. 11-12) describes the process thus:

According unto his deeds (*karman*) the embodied one successfully
 Assumes forms in various conditions
 Coarse and fine, many in number,
 The embodied one chooses forms according to his own qualities.
 [Each] subsequent cause of his union with them is seen to be
 Because of the quality of his acts and of himself.
 (*The Thirteen Principal Upanishads* 407)

The Buddha emphasizes the notion of *karma*: "“Good and bad, every deed a man performs, / . . . follows after him, / And like a shadow ne'er departs”" (Warren 228). Each

deed, in the end, is utterly compounded with every other deed and leads inanelly to repetition unless the spirit is liberated altogether and released into the realm of Moksha (Hinduism) or Nirvana (Buddhism) — the ideal state outside time and suffering.

Eliot has woven the notions of *karma* and *samsara* into the texture of *Four Quartets* — and done so (often through an effort to himself escape the bondage of suffering) in a most subtle and complex manner. A primary concern Eliot relates in terms of *karma* is the issue of time. It is commonly agreed that a dual-edged antithetical concern — in and outside time is a theme of the whole of *Four Quartets* and “Burnt Norton” in particular. However, unlike the near common consent of Eliot scholars that the influence of Western metaphysics is largely responsible for the poet’s theory of time, his conscious penetration into time’s threefold dimension — and effort as well to seek the sphere of the timeless — has probably much to do with Hindu-Buddhist views of the *karmic* workings of the universe. Indeed, the cause and effect determinants of Hindu-Buddhism give one keen awareness of past (motives, choices, deeds), present and future relationships, and lend impetus to the desire for deliverance from the bondage to time and thus from suffering.

Eliot in *Four Quartets* is saying that the past and future are present-day reality and that the present is determined by the past and vice versa, just as much as the future is directed by the present. And thus, in the well-known passage with which “Burnt Norton” begins, the poet posits:

Time present and time past
Are both perhaps present in time future
And time future contained in time past.
(BN, I)

That is, the consequences of past actions follow us into the present and will dog our steps constantly as we go ahead. Eliot further iterates this concept through the illuminating words of Harry in *The Family Reunion*. Harry finds existence to be a nightmare because

he fears that the past is unredeemable. Addressing those whose consciousnesses are still dormant, Harry states:

. . . . You have gone through life in sleep,
 Never woken to the nightmare. I tell you,
 life would be unendurable
 If you were wide awake. . . .
 . . . I am the old house
 With the noxious smell and the sorrow . . . ,
 In which all past is present, all degradation
 Is unredeemable.
 (293-94)

The time-*karma* relationship is elaborated in "Burnt Norton." Eliot therein is speculating on the metaphysical problem of the potential, psychological dimension of time. Though time remains an intellectual "abstraction" which seems to have little to do with reality, both 'real' (actualized reality) and 'unreal' (non-actualized reality, i.e. "what might have been") are ineluctably a contemporary 'presence.' For, like past and present time, the non-actualized "children" of our imagination, in other words, potential actions, exist in our consciousness as a present reality — just as do the psychological antecedents and consequences of such "children." The psychological effects of potential motives or actions, once contemplated in our mind, are powerful and as real as what has been actualized. For *karma* comprehends all influences which the past exercises on the present, whether physical or mental (*A Dictionary of Buddhism* 153-54). This is further illustrated in *The Family Reunion*, where the crisis in the life of Harry centers on his knowledge not only of the nature of time but also of the non-actualized "nightmare." This non-actualized "might have been" is a reality in Harry's consciousness: "what did not happen is as true as what did happen"(335). The play gives us no grounds to suppose that Harry pushed his wife to death; but his contemplated deed, the potentiality of the crime, remains a perpetual, tormenting reality before his eyes: it becomes the essential cause of his suffering.

Likewise, with the idea of the cyclical process of life, the *karmic* notion of the perpetual condition of suffering appears subtly disguised in other concerns in *Four Quartets*. In the second movement of "Burnt Norton," we are reminded of the wheel of earthly existence, the circulation of blood and lymph in the body, the "scars" of past trauma, both public and private, and the great tree of *karma*, extending its many branches of cause and effect above and below:

The trilling wire in the blood
Sings below inveterate scars
Appeasing long forgotten wars.
The dance along the artery
The circulation of the lymph
Are figured in the drift of stars
Ascend to summer in the tree.
(BN, II)

"The dance along the artery" and "the drift of stars" are both contained in the world of time, constituting a circular movement of innumerable repetitions. Thus, this passage may be interpreted as a development of the theme of time and its causal connectedness as introduced in the first part of "Burnt Norton."

Bound to the cycle of births and deaths by the inevitable consequences of previous *karma*, the individual looks upon the realm of *samsara* as a condition of bondage: the chain of continuity is inviolate and there is no way of escape "[u]ntil the chain breaks" (*The Family Reunion* 335). In this realm of the perpetually revolving, both birth and death are pain; for they are simply precursors or indicators of the suffering to come. This idea is concisely expressed in the following lines:

Pain is the opposite of joy
But joy is a kind of pain
I believe the moment of birth
Is when we have knowledge of death
I believe the season of birth
Is the season of sacrifice
For the tree and the beast, and the fish

Thrashing itself upstream:
 And what of the terrified spirit
 Compelled to be reborn.
 (*The Family Reunion* 310)

For the same reason, Eliot perceives spring, the time of birth or rebirth, as a time of pain, as suggested in the beginning lines of *The Waste Land*: "April is the cruellest month . . . mixing / Memory and desire" (61). This view is very poignantly presented in the third movement of "East Coker." Here, exquisite moments of pleasure are only reminders of suffering in the ever-turning wheel of birth and death:

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.

(EC, III)

The pessimism implicit in this view of the human condition perhaps arises from the grim prospect of an almost infinite series of incarnations, with all their attendant suffering and debasement. The endless revolutions of the wheel result in the feeling that there is no advance, nothing new, and that history is a meaningless repetitiveness. "East Coker" establishes a close connection between the infinite cycle of the temporal process in human life and the "perpetual recurrence of determined seasons" (Choruses from *The Rock* 147). The poet intuitively feels an emptiness and *ennui* pervading existence — as well as a sense of entrapment with no room for progress — in the lines, in which the country men and women are dancing,

. . . . Round and round the fire
 Leaping through the flames, or joined in circles,
 Rustically solemn or in rustic laughter
 Lifting heavy feet in clumsy shoes,
 Earth feet, loam feet, lifted in country mirth
 Mirth of those long since under earth
 Nourishing the corn. 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.
 (EC, I)

So the cycle continues. Metaphorically, this dance of the country folk is the dance of Shiva. The “Feet rising and falling” (feet of clay) are those of all humans, all of whom stand on the flaming wheel of the destroyer-god. The phrase evokes images — the sensation — of imprisonment in time, while in terms of *karma* and rebirth it illustrates the fluctuations in an individual’s fortune: the fall from a high to a low estate, and the rise from a low to a higher one. A deep sense of fatalism is suggested in the last lines of the passage where the coupling of man and woman is compared with that of beasts, and the poet equates dung with death, signifying the inanity and degradation of life.

When looked at from the perspective of either the individual or mankind, the prospect of such eternally repeated routine inevitably robs human life of any worthwhile meaning. There is sequential happening but no development of the perpetual flux; any impression or idea of evolutionary progress is largely a fallacy. In this view, then, of an endless “cyclical” process of life, history is reduced to meaningless pattern or Heraclitean flux — history being but the sorry tale of the working out of *karma*: “History has many curving passages, contrived corridors / And issues, deceives with whispering ambitions, / Guides us by vanities” (“Gerontion” 38). In desolation of spirit, without the answer to his hope “for calm, the autumnal serenity” (EC, I), the poet rejects the idea of pattern; and the proverbial notion of the wisdom of age is also dismissed as delusion. For

At best, only a limited value
 In the knowledge derived from experience,
 The knowledge imposes a pattern, and falsifies,
 For the pattern is new in every moment
 And every moment is a new and shocking

Valuation of all we have been. We are
 only undeceived
 Of that which, deceiving, could no longer harm.
 (EC, II)

Neither knowledge nor aged wisdom is of avail, since nothing is substantial or permanent in this world of the flux — while the wheel of *samsara* inexorably revolves on its meaningless, repetitive course.

According to Hindu-Buddhism, the motive factor for riveting men onto “the Wheel of Rebirth” is craving or thirst (*tanha*) (Humphreys, *Buddhism* 91). Craving breeds desire; unsatisfied desire causes suffering — the desire, above all, for continuance of life, which naturally means involvement in the time-process and all that that entails. As to the cause of suffering, the Buddha speaks:

The Noble Truth of the origin of suffering is this: It is this thirst (craving) which produces re-existence and re-becoming, bound up with passionate greed. It finds fresh delight now here and now there, namely, thirst for sense-pleasures; thirst for existence and becoming; and thirst for non-existence.
 (*Samyutta-nikaya* LVI. ii; trans. Rahula 93)

Craving leads to acts that result in *karma*, and *karma* in turn binds one to the cycle of rebirth. For what one sets out to obtain, what one desires, or clings to as being most precious, becomes a particularly important cause in the process of change, and produces its inevitable effect.

Like Indic sages, Eliot well understands that the main cause of the existence of pain and suffering is desire. And he presents us with a wide display of the effects of desiring. In the early poems up to *The Waste Land*, Eliot acquaints us with characters who, like Prufrock, seek sensual and material gratification, which breeds attachment to ephemeral things. They thus are tormented by unsatisfied desires. The majority of the denizens of the early poems seem chained to the *samsaric* wheel, whirled about by shifting desires.

To Eliot, however, desire is (as in Buddhism) something more than 'I want.' In his major poems and plays, desire is seen on a cosmic scale as an inherent characteristic of nature, both animate and inanimate. For, as Eliot indicates in *Four Quartets*, it is indeed the world itself which "moves / In appetency, on its metallated ways" (BN, III). The appetency of clinging to life and material existence — the will to live at all costs — is frequently associated with the approach of spring, which is concurrently an image of pain. Metaphorically, spring signifies the irresistible cyclic return of desire to man and nature. This constant renewal of desire means that no permanent satisfaction is to be achieved in the phenomenal world.

By means of a complex image of joyless spring, the opening lines of *The Waste Land* project flux, suffering, craving, and a state of self-delusion or ignorance (*avidya*):

April is the cruellest month, breeding
Lilacs out of the dead land, mixing
Memory and desire, stirring
Dull roots with spring rain.
Winter kept us warm, covering
Earth in forgetful snow, feeding
A little life with dried tubers.

(61)

On the one hand, April is "the cruellest month" because it awakens ('stirs') human consciousness to universal suffering; but April is also cruel because it mixes "memory" with the "desire" for evanescent things — the "desire" that causes the wheel of *samsara* to revolve, keeping mankind bound to the endless cycle of reincarnation.

In Eliot's hands, spring creates direct images of the painfulness of desire's rebirth. The poet rather explicitly relates desire to suffering in *The Family Reunion*:

The cold spring now is the time
For the ache in the moving root
The agony in the dark
The slow flow throbbing the trunk
The pain of the breaking bud.

These are the ones that suffer least:
 The aconite under the snow
 And the snowdrop crying for a moment
 in the wood.

(310)

In its widest sense, the “snowdrop crying for a moment in the wood” — which according to Humphreys is the “nearest Western equivalent . . . [of] Nietzsche’s Will to Live” (*Buddhism* 91) — stands for the appetency of clinging to life, clinging to present existence which coupled with the incessant longing for future existence, animates all beings.

The metaphors of spring and desire in their causal relation to suffering and pain are brought together once again in “East Coker,” this time through a complex image of spring out of season, wherein birth is aborted and hopes of life are crushed:

What is the late November doing
 With the disturbance of the spring
 And creates 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?

(EC, II)

Here seething desire is suffocatingly suppressed; and the sentiments of hope and joy are twisted off. “Snowdrops” in the passage refers back to the “snowdrop” of *The Family Reunion*. Along with the phrase “the disturbance of the spring,” the line “hollyhocks that aim too high” clearly indicates the negative results of passion, greed, and desire, both in man and nature. This deceptive conduct of the seasons represents the human spiritual disorder that results when earthly desires are given free rein, because “Desire itself is movement / Not in itself desirable” (BN, V), a binding of man down to the flux of the turning world, causing him unending anxiety and misery.

UNIVERSAL SUFFERING

Dukkha is a universal feature of *samsaric* existence. Individual instances of suffering are contained within the general truth of universal *dukkha*. Thus suffering is a problem both in Eliot and Buddhism, not so much in its individual occurrences, but because it is a universal condition which appears to be inescapable and unbreakable. In consonance with the spirit of Buddhism, Eliot reminds the reader that suffering is universal, omnipresent and endless. His portrayal of universal suffering is even more graphic than that of worldly flux.

In both Buddhism and Eliot's poetry, universal suffering finds its despondent expression in metaphors of the human condition as an embodiment of pain and illness. Life is pain or illness; the world, a hospital; the sufferer, a patient. A plausible source for such a perception may be the French symbolists such as Mallarmé, who himself described the world as a hospital (Howarth 282). It seems, however, that the origin of Eliot's use of hospital imagery, strong and more compelling than that of Mallarmé and others, can be traced back to his Harvard days, and indeed as far back as the Age of the Buddha, whose teaching was presented in the form then current for medical diagnosis and remedy.² Kearns believes that the predominant influence on Eliot in terms of use of medical metaphor was Anesaki, the poet's professor of Mahayana Buddhism at Harvard (81). Anesaki began his lectures with reference to or a reminder of the Buddha's own traditional teaching formula, that being exposition of the diagnosis of illness, and then the illness's remedy. A line from the poet's extensive notes of the lectures sums the point up concisely: "'Life is pain' ('dukka,' as Eliot transcribed it)" (Kearns 81).

² In Buddhism, the person who wants to get rid of suffering is compared to the one who has to heal his or her wound. In numerous Buddhist scriptures, according to P. de Silva, the Buddha is compared to a physician. "The philosophy and the psychology of Buddhism are 'therapy oriented'. . . . While its philosophy offers a way out for the intellectually puzzled, its psychology offers therapy for the emotionally disturbed" (de Silva 9).

The idea of the human condition as illness can be traced back to Eliot's early poetry, and is continued in his later poems and plays throughout.³ In "The Love Song," for instance, the poet looks at the evening sky as a patient on the operating table under the 'kill or cure' of the knife. In "East Coker," a mature work of thirty years later, he elaborates the image in the conviction that it is a fitting commentary on human life. Eliot's awareness and diagnosis of the human condition are expressed with language that conjures up images of a stethoscopic examination:

Our only health is the disease
 The whole earth is our hospital
 Endowed by the ruined millionaire
 The chill ascends from feet to knees,
 The fever sings in mental wires.
 (EC, IV)

Again in "The Dry Salvages" (as regards the ephemerality of life), the poet alludes to the sufferer as patient: "This thing is sure, / That time is no healer: the patient is no longer here" (DS, II). The substitution of "patient" for "sufferer," springing as it does from a craftsman's keen attention to language, adds depth of meaning to the universality of suffering, for 'patient' in its Latin root *pati* means 'to suffer' (*OED*).

The pervasiveness of suffering is evoked in the second movement of "The Dry Salvages." Its first three stanzas present a generalized view of impermanence and suffering; the other three localize them through the treating of a fisherman's voyage. In the form of questions posed — about "wailing," "withering" and "drifting" — the poet expresses his keen awareness of a ceaseless suffering. With a heartbreaking cry of agony he asks:

Where is there an end of it, the soundless wailing,
 The silent withering of autumn flowers

³ Diagnosis and remedy constitute the theme and structure of *The Cocktail Party*.

Dropping their petals and remaining motionless;
 Where is there an end to the drifting wreckage,
 The prayer of the bone on the beach, the unprayerable
 Prayer at the calamitous annunciation?

Where is the end of them, the fishermen sailing
 Into the wind's tail, where the fog cowers?
 We cannot think of a time that is oceanless
 Or of an ocean not littered with wastage
 Or of a future that is not liable
 Like the past, to have no destination.

We have to think of them as forever bailing,
 Setting and hauling, while the North East lowers
 Over shallow banks unchanging and erosionless
 Or drawing their money, drying sails at dockage;
 Not as making a trip that will be unpayable
 For a haul that will not bear examination.

(DS, II)

The central metaphor of the quoted stanzas is that of men adrift, desperately toiling to keep chaos at bay — to find a momentary stay against confusion in the ocean of *samsara*, visualized here as the tossing sea (flux) in all its immeasurable terror and despair. There is “no end, but addition” to an endless agony. What is added is “the trailing / consequence of further days and hours,” and “the emotionless / Years of living among the breakage” — which provide, on occasion, “the fittest for renunciation” (DS, II). And the final addition is “the failing / Pride or resentment at failing powers” and “the silent listening” to the sure sound of the tolling bell for the last moment (DS, II) — all humans and their capacity reduced to a bare “bone on the beach.”

Then, in the following lines, the poet says that “the moments of agony,” as well as “the moments of happiness” or “sudden illumination,” are permanent,⁴ with “such permanence as time has.” Again, Eliot echoes Buddhism in holding that suffering is permanent and abiding. The poet says in despair:

⁴ The moments of “happiness” or “sudden illumination” refer to those moments of enlightenment or Nirvana, the experience of which leaves a permanent landmark in the person. Further explanation is provided in the section of the Nirvana-Samsara Equation in the fourth chapter.

Now, we come to discover that moments of agony

... are likewise permanent
With such permanence as time has. We appreciate
this better
In the agony of others, nearly experienced,
Involving ourselves, than in our own.

People change, and smile: but the agony abides.
(DS, II)

The image of the abiding agony is strengthened by the symbol of a rock in the concluding lines of the second movement of "The Dry Salvages":

And the ragged rock in the restless waters,
Waves wash over it, fogs conceal it;
On a halcyon day it is merely a monument,
In navigable weather it is always a seamark
To lay a course by: but in the sombre season
Or the sudden fury, is what it always was.
(DS,II)

The symbol of the rock in this passage has given rise to a wide variety of interpretations. Genesisius Jones, seeing the rock in Christian terms, interprets it as the love of God (136). In Contrast to Jones, but also with a Christian interpretation is Elizabeth Drew, who equates the rock with the Fall (evil), of which she says: “That deed, like all the other moments of terror and agony, is permanent” (182). But their suggestions would limit the meaning to an abstraction or one-sided view without taking account of the tone of the lines which embody it .

Among commentators, Audrey Cahill has most closely approximated the intrinsic meaning when she states that the rock symbolizes an “anguished awareness” of the human predicament (179). If, as Raymond Preston suggests, the quoted lines express the certainty of “a terrifying reality” (43) — if the rock indeed be a reminder of the human predicament (Cahill) — then the rock must signify the abiding agony in all its Buddhist proportions. Moreover, if we trace the idea back through the preceding lines of the second

movement of "The Dry Salvages," it seems that the rock is linked with "moments of agony," the agony devolving from the "primitive terror" of existence. For after mentioning "the backward half-look / Over the shoulder, towards the primitive terror," the poet goes on to state that "the moments of agony / . . . are likewise permanent" (DS, II).

Eliot's use of the rock symbol in *The Waste Land* supports the reading of the lines from "The Dry Salvages" in this same perspective. The apathy, despair, and suffering that characterize the lives of the ancients as well as moderns are mirrored also in the physical condition of the land, particularly through the image of the rock. In the lines concerned, the poet says of the Waste Land: "Here is no water but only rock / Rock and no water and the sandy road" (72).

A penetrating answer to the enigma of the symbol can be found in Eliot's own words. In his Introduction to Djuna Barnes' *Nightwood*, Eliot, speaking of his awareness that the "human misery and bondage . . . is universal," pronounces the deceptiveness of this universal suffering to the sufferers. In language paralleling that of the quoted passage, he says: "In normal lives this misery is mostly concealed; often, what is most wretched of all, concealed from the sufferer more effectively than from the observer" (xv).

To return to "The Dry Salvages," the image of the rock suggests the abiding agony, the pervasiveness of human suffering. The lurking threat, the permanent agony, lies in the ragged rock concealed by fog. The rock, washed by waves, is taken for granted on the halcyon days of fine weather, just as we are forgetful of times of agony in our moments of happiness. However, a full awareness of suffering, as the Buddha postulated, can serve as a seamark on man's navigation toward liberation, or as, metaphorically, "a fever chart" of our illness in the course of treatment or remedy. Yet in "the sombre season" or the "sudden fury," suffering is an ineluctable fact, conspiring by its very existence with the raging elements that wreck the vessels in their midst. In short, it is a warning to those who would cross the ocean of *samsara* in the boats of unsubstantial hope or desire, for this vast ocean

of reality defies human expectation or toil. Only despair keeps a flicker of hope, the flicker of prayer, alive in us.

In "Little Gidding," the Quartet written during the London blitz of World War II, the poet ponders once again the possible meaning or purpose of all this suffering, then revealed in all the horror of global war. Here the suffering and agony prevail "within us" and "all about us" (DS, I). The first three stanzas of the second movement of the Quartet transmit a particularly deep sense of dismay and horror: human life and endeavor are reduced to nothing and must in the end be conquered by the elements:

Dust inbreathed was a house —
The wall, the wainscot and the mouse.
The death of hope and despair,
This is the death of air.

(LG, II)

The first two lines of the quotation are reminiscent of "East Coker," with "the wainscot where the field-mouse trots" (EC, I). But the four lines as a whole have a tone of absolute agony. In "East Coker," the destruction of the houses afforded at least the illusion of a hope of renewal; here however is simply annihilation. Time takes away life and gives no new birth. The roses of "Burnt Norton" are "ash on an old man's sleeve" (LG, II); the dust in these lines is lit by no shaft of sunlight. Houses die, but they do not live; "Old stone to new buildings" (EC, I).

Earth, which figures as the vanquisher of human toil, is not fertile earth, but the earth of *The Waste Land*. There is suspension without transfiguration. All living patterns in nature and those created by man's hand have disintegrated with no hope of resurrection:

There are flood and drouth
Over the eyes and in the mouth
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.
 (LG, II)

By repeating the adjective “dead,” the poet has deliberately stripped the water and sand of any suggestion of the redemption that belongs to the water of *The Waste Land* or to the desert of “Ash Wednesday.” Here is despair and agony more radical than that of “The Hollow Men.” Here we are not far from the blocked struggle of “Ash Wednesday.” This is, indeed, the cosmic picture of universal suffering.

In summary, the true nature of our existence, when fully understood, is that of horror — the horror that Kurtz in Joseph Conrad’s *The Heart of Darkness* grasped before his death, at the moment of a complete knowledge of emptiness, emptiness both of himself and of the world. We human beings have adopted the ever-changing façade and conditions for our environment; in the midst of a conglomeration of ever-changing materials, we are subject to this bridle of change. Suffering must always exist where there is decay and dissolution. To exacerbate the matter, however, we bind ourselves, both voluntarily and involuntarily, to things ever-changing, thus becoming ever more deeply involved in the disintegrating process of time. As the objects of our attachment drop away, we are thrown into the tortures of unappeasable desires, which bind us more insidiously to the wheel. In an acute way, we experience this pain within our own being; change is itself misery and anguish. The sufferings of mortal existence are more keenly felt as we realize that birth or death is not deliverance; it is but a repetition of a grim experience endured numberless times which must be endured again and again without end. Hence human endeavor is but the hope “For a moment of rest on the burning wheel” (*The Family Reunion* 294), but relief is not to be found. There appears to be no escape from this bondage of suffering, from this treacherous ocean of *samsara*, as we remain fixed within the unending cycle of time and its transformations. Agony abides.

Taken in isolation, without the counterbalancing notion of a road to salvation, the awareness of impermanence and suffering constitutes a vision of despair, a vision presented with such skill that even the most enterprising reader of Eliot's poetry might draw back in dismay, overwhelmed by its unrelieved bleakness. Given the fundamental perception of universal change and suffering, there seems to be no escape from the weary wheel of unceasing birth and death. Fortunately, however, this profound despair is offset by an equally profound hope of freedom from the bondage of suffering, and for the 'peace that passeth understanding.' Even in *The Waste Land* there is the *promise* of resuscitating rain.

Dukkha manifestly exists. Suffering is fundamentally an experience, a part of the universe of being, which needs however to be seen in perspective. It may, in fact, be extremely beneficial, particularly if taken as the foundation of something better. That is, the wheel of birth and death involves us in many different lives and causes pain and suffering, but impels us in the end to seek and attain release. And the whole *raison d'être* of both Hinduism and Buddhism is the possibility that the individual self may reach, by following a prescribed discipline, the state of ultimate enlightenment of Nirvana, i.e., final emancipation from the weary cycle of unceasing birth-death. And this is true as well in Eliot's *Four Quartets*; he invites his readers along on the voyage across the stormy ocean of *samsara* towards the quietude of deliverance. The following chapter therefore is concerned with what the Eastern sages and Eliot agreed to be positive steps through which suffering can be transcended or made to cease, thereby creating an avenue to a spiritual center.

Chapter III

DETACHMENT AND LOVE

Eliot's clotted "axle-tree" (BN, II) is a fixable one. In Sanskrit, *dukkha* etymologically refers to an ill-made axle and therefore implies a wheel that is awry (Monier-Williams 334, 482). *Dukkha*, seen as awryness or 'out-of-kilterness,' clearly implies the possibility of correction. The predicament from which man needs deliverance results from a conjunction of an ignorance of the true nature of reality and a bondage to selfish craving and all its effects in frustration, alienation and disappointed desire. Although impermanence and suffering are universal, and though human beings by nature are bound to the wheel of birth and death (*samsara*), once having learned the origin and causes of such we may free ourselves — may find deliverance from suffering and the torments of ego, and freedom from desire and compulsive action: Nirvana, in which isolation, fragmentation, and dividedness are bridged into an unbroken wholeness.

If deliverance from the human predicament and unity and certainty from a "heap of broken images" (*The Waste Land* 61) are Eliot's ultimate concerns, so are they that of the Eastern religio-philosophical tradition. For the latter is grounded in an engulfing moral concern for human wellbeing and is directed toward a profound understanding of the human condition. Yoga systems of Hinduism and the Buddha's Four Noble Truths are elucidating testimonies to the systematic approaches of the East to human problems and ways to their solution. Hinduism provides several paths or yogas by means of which individuals, regardless of background or abilities, may seek release from the world of *karma* and *samsara*. The Buddha's second two Noble Truths aver the possibility of finding

lasting peace in the midst of continuous flux and suffering, as they are concerned with the possibility of destruction of suffering:

The Noble Truth of the Cessation of suffering is this: It is the complete cessation of that very thirst, giving it up, renouncing it, emancipating oneself from it, detaching oneself from it.

The Noble Truth of the Path leading to the Cessation of suffering is this: It is simply the Noble Eightfold Path, namely right view; right thought; right speech, right action; right livelihood; right effort; right mindfulness; right concentration.

(*Samyutta-nikaya*, LVI. ii; trans. Rahula 93)

According to the Buddha, that is, egocentrism and possessiveness — causes of all the universal problems of humankind — can be overcome, rooted out; and this rooting out can be brought about by following a simple, reasonable Eightfold Path of behavior in thought, word, and deed. And the way of this uprooting is the way to salvation as Buddha conceived it.

Although a particular notion is given more stress or less according to a given system, Eastern traditions in general exhort as a way to spiritual liberation the development of compassionate detachment and discernment, of egolessness, and an ever-deepening awareness of the interdependence and relationship of the individual with the cosmos (compassion and complete oneness with reality). At the same time, they lay an essential emphasis on the individual as the instrument of his or her destiny, as the injunction of the dying Buddha, “work out your own salvation with diligence” (Warren 109) indicates. In essence, the Eastern sages contend that the way to release must be correlated with a life of rigorous self-discipline.

In Eastern thought, Eliot finds not only an effective instrument to highlight the human predicament, but also a useful mode of redemption in compliance with the poet's awareness of the universal necessity of spiritual regeneration and deliverance. In its concise form, *Four Quartets* offers a spectrum of essentially Eastern approaches to possible answers for

the spiritual needs of humanity — approaches which include even the Christian ideal of human perfection and are in agreement with the Christian way of Christ-like attainment. Eliot in *Four Quartets* marshals the Eastern principles of detachment, self-discipline, and compassion or spiritual love as an “army of unalterable law” (“Cousin Nancy” 30), that together are an essential part of the human endeavor toward advancement and final liberation. At the same time, since he feels that the ultimate prison for humankind has been the overlay of a permanent self upon experience, Eliot prescribes depersonalization (a reversal of the West’s obsessive self-assertion) as a key process in the curing of individual’s and society’s illness — illness that has been caused by ego-centeredness. The selflessness thus to be attained surfaces throughout the *Quartets* as the only basis for ethical action, providing a conduit into the *summum bonum* of Nirvana and divine grace.

DETACHMENT

The Eastern analysis of suffering shows that attachment is its ultimate cause, breeding all passion — desires and their resultant pains and frustration. In the Eastern philosophical tradition — Hinduism, Buddhism, and Taoism — attachment and ego-desire are shunned as the foremost obstacles to freedom. For as is stated in the *Bhagavad-Gita*, “From attachment springs desire, / From desire wrath arises” (II. 62; trans. Edgerton). And, therefore, the *Gita* continues,

Abandoning all desires, what
Man moves free from longing,
Without self-interest and egotism,
He goes to peace.
(II. 71; trans. Edgerton)

In the *Tao Te Ching* is the admonition to “Diminish the self, / And curb desire” (Chap. 19). Even more emphatically, Buddhism recognizes attachment as the destructive and

disintegrating element bringing about agony and pain in human life. Buddhism asserts that suffering can be ended only by enlightenment and Nirvana; and it is through the elimination of attachment and desire that Nirvana can be reached. The literal meaning of Nirvana is thus “blowing out” or “extinction of desire,” a condition of complete calm and detachment (Rahula 37).

By the time he wrote *The Waste Land*, Eliot had thoroughly digested the Hindu-Buddhist ideas he became acquainted with at Harvard. Like the Indic sages, Eliot understood attachment to be an obstacle to liberation — to the still center, as he expressed in his Introduction to *Nightwood*: “all of us, so far as we attach ourselves to created objects and surrender our wills to temporal evils, are eaten by the same worm” (xv). According to Howarth therefore, Eliot

preached . . . the Buddhist renunciation in Christian guise, in his essays on education in the late twenties and thirties, urged it by the example of Becket and the example of Agatha and Harry, urged in “Little Gidding” the cultivation of “detachment of self from things and persons,” and in *The Cocktail Party* again described the saint’s renunciation of the world.

(204-05)

Many of Eliot’s poems suggest that attachment and desire in their myriad forms hamper one’s way to freedom and only serve to increase doubt and incertitude. With attachment, one stands “Wavering between the profit and the loss / In this brief transit where the dreams cross” (“Ash Wednesday” 98). St. John of the Cross is in accord with the Eastern sages when he says that “the soul cannot be possessed of the divine union, until it has divested itself of the love of created things” (qtd. in Smidt 200). Eliot uses these words as an epigraph to “Sweeney Agonistes.” The necessity of severing attachment and of cultivating detachment, negatively implied in *The Waste Land*, are explicit in “Ash Wednesday,” as this poem represents a spiritual turning point. From mere subjugation to suffering there now is an awakening to its cause, and to efforts to be free from it. “Ash

Wednesday” begins with the speaker’s fervent wish to give up desire and be free of the turning on the wheel of *samsara*:

Because I do not hope to turn again
Because I do not hope
Because I do not hope to turn
Desiring this man’s gift and that man’s scope
I no longer strive towards such things.

(89)

The notion, broached by “Ash Wednesday,” of renunciation of attachment and desire is the textual essence and indeed the major tuition of *Four Quartets*. Attachments confine man to the circumference of the wheel, clot “the bedded axle-tree” (BN, II), and prevent him from attaining the still center, where alone is “The inner freedom from the practical desires, / The release from action and suffering, release from the inner / And the outer compulsion” (BN, II). The second movement of “Burnt Norton” begins by alluding to the temptations of the turning world which cloud human perception and hinder the apprehension of the still center: “Garlic and sapphires in the mud / Clot the bedded axle-tree” (BN, II). If, as Grover Smith states, garlic and sapphires stand for gluttony and avarice while mud suggests filth and the weakness of the flesh (261), these symbols correspond to deep-rooted attachments to things temporal or material, and the inevitable results. When this central axle is clogged by the impurity of flesh, desire and attachment, human life is at cross-purposes to salvation and appears to be meaningless and futile.

The alternative to attachment is not, however, indifference, but rather a detachment of compassion which comes from knowledge, renunciation, and inner control. The third movement of “Little Gidding” opens with a statement on human attitudes and modes of existence within the phenomenal world:

There are three conditions which often look alike
Yet differ completely, flourish in the same hedgerow:
Attachment to self and to things and to persons, detachment

From self and from things and from persons; and, growing
 between them, indifference
 Which resembles the others as death resembles life,
 Being between two lives — unflowering, between
 The live and the dead nettle. 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.

(LG, III)

In his notes on *The Waste Land*, Eliot calls Henry Clarke Warren “one of the greatest pioneers of Buddhist studies in the Occident” (79). Traces of Warren’s *Buddhism in Translations* may be found in *The Waste Land* and elsewhere, and rather strongly in the above passage of “Little Gidding.” The lines recall Warren’s chapter on fruitful and barren *karma*, as translated from the *Anguttara-nikaya*: “There are three conditions, O priests, under which deeds are produced,” the three being freedom from covetousness, freedom from hatred, and freedom from infatuation (Warren 215-16).

The “Little Gidding” passage indicates that the poet’s familiarity with Indic sources goes beyond verbal echo to a very deep and supple habit of thought. Eliot’s “three conditions” appear to be different in words from those of the *Anguttara-nikaya*. But the advice from Eliot and the Buddha is the same, in that both are essentially concerned with the right attitude and mode of life. The Buddha’s admonition against “covetousness,” “hatred,” “infatuation” is, in its final analysis, a warning to eschew selfishness and attachment to objects — attachment that gives rise to egoism, to cravings for pleasure and fame, which in turn lead to human misery. For Eliot too, then, there is limited value in “attachment to self and to things and to persons.”

Eliot, a poet of consummately precise semantics, has taken a further step in clarifying the nature of attachment and detachment; and he does so by comparing the three conditions of existential modes “which often look alike / Yet differ completely” (LG, III). According to Eliot, attachment is an indiscriminate and undisciplined emotion. What turns attachment into true detachment is a positive “expansion” of concern — the “liberation” — from

limited, self-centered attention to self, to things, and to persons. Memory can be dealt with in terms of both attachment and detachment. Memory, properly evoked (for there necessarily is the “evening with the photograph album” [EC, V]), does not pin our affections to the past, thus fostering a servitude of regret and desire. On the contrary, memory, as understood and employed throughout the Quartets, is a liberating exercise in — a cultivation of — detachment.

Between the live and the dead nettle flourishes the “unflowering” indifference. It grows, but does not flower; it strives to create, but is impotent. What turns attachment into indifference is a negative contraction of concern — the turning away from a compassion for others, and focusing on the self. As it originates in a refusal to love rather than an attempt to sanctify love, indifference is thus a callous unconcern for the suffering and welfare of fellow beings.

The essential thing therefore is that attachment be transcended, not by indifference, but by detachment; it must be transmuted into love. An illustration in point is love of a country — which no less than personal love, is but magnified self-aggrandizement. It grows out of “attachment to our own field of action” (LG, III). But love of country can become something so free of self-interest that the attachment — not the identity — gradually loses its importance. Thus concern with history, whether private or public, whether one’s personal past or a nation’s cultural and political heritage, may be a tyranny or liberation, according to whether we allow the concern with the past to fix our attachments or to expand them into disinterested love.

Unlike indifference, detachment is freedom from even receptiveness to what is self-seeking; it is in fact “expanding / Of love beyond desire” (LG, III). Detachment is the disinterested love, hence the “right action” (DS, V), which imparts freedom from the temporal: “so liberation / From the future as well as the past” (LG, III), while attachment

enslaves us to time. In detachment, love is not thwarted or denied, but rather liberated into a larger sphere:

. . . . See, now they vanish,
The faces and places, with the self which, as it could, loved them,
To become renewed, transfigured, in another pattern.
(LG, III)

Eliot's philosophical ponderings on the nature of detachment proceed into another intricately related area of thought — the ethics of action — which includes both physical activity and mental existence. The metaphysics of the relationship between action and detachment thus figures as a prime discourse in *Four Quartets*. At one point, Eliot views the still point as “release from action and suffering” (BN, II) — his affirmation of the penetrating truth asserted in Indic tradition that all (life as well as action) is suffering in this phenomenal world. For life demands action; to live in the world is to be engaged in action. Action with attachment causes bondage and leads to suffering, as desire is the ordinary motive of human actions. In this world in which we inevitably act however, human beings must perform or engage without “attachment to our own field of action” (LG, II). For only detached, egoless action can free us (the doers, actors) from suffering, just as “detachment / From self and from things and from persons” leads to liberation from the temporal.

Eliot's most explicit statement on the relationship between action and detachment appears in direct allusions to the *Bhagavad-Gita* in “The Dry Salvages.” The *Gita*, which as part of his studies of Indic philosophy and philology Eliot “tried to master in the original language,” was for the poet the most important of Indic texts and the one that most deeply and extensively influenced his poetry (Ackroyd 47). It was, he said in his essay on Dante, the “next greatest philosophical poem to the *Divine Comedy* within my experience” (*Selected Essays* 219). And we may surmise the reasons why he felt so. The *Gita* consists of only eighteen short chapters; and with its formal and thematic unity, this Indic epic,

often called "The Song of the Lord," presents to the reader not the challenges of abstruse doctrine but rather a great simplicity (yet depth) of wisdom that is the result of a long tradition of religious thought, discipline, and experience. Woven into the text is what is often viewed as the main thematic structure of the *Gita*, a description of the three yogas or disciplines — action, knowledge, and devotion (love) — by means of which the final goal of salvation may be obtained. These strands combine and are elaborated in the course of the *Gita*'s expositions.

To grasp more clearly the meaning of Eliot's allusions, it is worthwhile to sketch briefly something of the metaphysical complexity of the *Bhagavad-Gita*.¹ Among other things the *Gita* deals with the problem, of great moment to Eliot, of combining action and detachment in the active life. This dealing consists of responses to questions directed by the great warrior Arjuna on the battlefield to Krishna, his divine charioteer, who, in recognition of the disorder of the world, has taken up the role of mankind's savior. The occasion of the questioning is the immediate and agonizing problem of whether Arjuna should engage in battle against his own family and friends. If he does so and kills them, he acquires sin. Slaying one's kinsmen destroys social law (*dharma*); anarchy then prevails, and the end result is social and moral chaos. Arjuna thinks perhaps that it would be better to let himself be killed than to kill these kinsmen — his wicked cousins — for the sake of a mere kingdom.

Arjuna's martial cause is just; the issue is whether the fruits of a just war are worth the anguish of the war's prosecution — not only the anguish caused by inflicting harm on others, but also the threat posed by such action to the salvation of one's soul. In a clarifying moment for Arjuna, Krishna gives him a new perspective on life and a commitment to join in the impending battle. Krishna advises Arjuna to fight, but to fight

¹ My primary authorities in the interpretation of the *Gita* are Sri Aurobindo's *Essays on the Gita* and Radhakrishnan's *Indian Philosophy*, unless otherwise indicated.

“with an equal mind” (DS, III) — a combination of insight and detachment, which will allow him to act selflessly and without enmeshment again in the world of *karma* and illusion.

To impress this upon Arjuna, Krishna must rouse him from dejection and despair, a despair as much of his own motives as of the situation in which he is caught. Krishna does so by a mixture of lecture, demonstration and tenderness. He appeals first to Arjuna’s calling. Arjuna is a warrior by birth and vocation; and thus, Krishna points out, it is better to do “your own task imperfectly / Than do another’s well” (III. 35; trans. Stanford). Next, he appeals to philosophy: Arjuna is wrong to think he can despoil the divinity within another being or change that being’s essential nature. The body alone dies; the spirit is not subject to Arjuna’s dispatch. As for his motives, those must be purified by detachment — the conquering of the passions.

When in “The Dry Salvages” Eliot tentatively embarks on his own interpretation — “I sometimes wonder if that is what Krishna meant” (DS, III) — placing the speaker of the poem in the position of a hindsighted Arjuna, the diffidence expressed is probably the result of long and repeated consideration of Krishna’s counsel, and not of merely casual acquaintance or poetic clumsiness. The *Gita* presents one systematically with a rare combination of emotional and metaphysical exposition. It is an exposition too central to Eliot’s intentions in *Four Quartets* not to have had a profound thematic and structural influence.

At the start of the third movement of “The Dry Salvages,” Eliot’s allusions to the *Gita* are direct and immediate as he ponders upon ethical or moral problems in human attitudes and actions in their relation to time. The Absolute (Brahman in Hinduism) is timeless; those who seek Nirvana must detach themselves from temporal relations. The poet says:

I sometimes wonder if that is what Krishna meant —
Among other things — or one way of putting the same thing:

That the future is a faded song, a Royal Rose or a lavender spray
 Of wistful regret for those who are not yet here to regret,
 Pressed between yellow leaves of a book that has never been opened.
 (DS, III)

If we view the future as but a segment of the temporal, the future already is a faded flower of regret even for those still unborn. But regret for the unborn means little for the Absolute is always present, and human beings roll on in successive births and deaths. The book of yellow leaves is the book not of time but eternity; it is the entity of endlessness within which human lives and modes of time are contained. If we break out of the self-made confines (the two leaves of the book) of ego and limited vision, we may realize that we really are in the larger boundary of the Eternal (the whole book). As Aurobindo observes, "the human mind ordinarily seizes only fragmentary notions and standpoints of a many-sided eternal truth of existence" (553). The enlightened man however looks on time as God sees it. Therefore, the arbitrary fragmentation of time into past, present and future is of no value. What is of value is steadiness of mind and a detached attitude in the face of life and its pitfalls, such as Arjuna experienced. Thus in the *Gita*, Krishna gives to Arjuna a perception of time that should be adopted by the wise:

You grieve for those you should not
 And yet you talk about wisdom.
 The truly taught do not mourn
 For the dead or the living.

Never was a time when I was not
 Nor you, nor any of these kings.
 Never will come a time hereafter
 When all of us shall cease to be.

As to the person in this body
 Come childhood, youth, and age
 So is the coming of another body.
 The wise are not perplexed by that.
 (II. 11-13; trans. Stanford)

Krishna states here that the essence of existence (the divinity or the eternal) is unaffected by the flow of time. The eternal slays not nor can itself be done away with. Nevertheless, out of illusions which “the blind eye creates,” human beings most often fail to penetrate the falsehood of “empty forms” and perceived reality (“Ash Wednesday” 98). We project our inner fragmentation into the world at large — project it into our view of time. But if one could live from moment to moment (be unbound by time), one would have no anxiety about time’s passing. Such freedom is well-nigh essential, for life is a momentary phenomenon. As the Buddha advises us, ““Do not regret the past, do not speculate on the future. Live fully in the present by seeing things as they really are”” (qtd. in Dhiravamsa 34).

In terms of *karma*, a detached view of time is also significant: the *Gita* and Buddhism emphasize the thought and action of the present moment because only these affect the free will to be exercised in the future and determine the future lot which the totality of one’s ethical life, one’s karma, will produce. The right action, an offshoot of the balanced, detached mind, takes no account of the past or future. This message is made clear when Eliot, in the words of the *Gita*, says:

You shall not think ‘the past is finished’
Or ‘the future is before us’
.
While time is withdrawn, consider the time
And the past with an equal mind.
(DS, III)

If one is prepared to regard past and future “with an equal mind” — with detachment from regret and desire, with an absence of all sense of escape or anticipation — and to accept in the present the eternal decisiveness of ‘now,’ then one can receive the truth which validates his or her voyage through time.

Alongside the detached perception of time as a way to be free of its bondage, Eliot sets a similar ethic as regards human actions. In order to grasp the metaphysics of the human action which the *Gita* proposes and Eliot expounds, we must begin with the nature of action itself. One might argue that complete inaction — cessation of existence — is a valid means to the goal of release, but the *Gita* warns us against such delusion, such seeking to gain freedom or perfection merely by rejecting or renouncing action. There is in fact, says the *Gita*, no alternative to action in the world; complete inaction is not a real possibility. Krishna in the *Gita* speaks:

Not by refusing to undertake action does a man enjoy non-action,
nor by mere renunciation does he win success.

For no one ever, even for a moment, remains without doing action;
everyone is made to do action, through the constituents of Nature.

He who controls his organs of action, and sits reflecting in his mind
on the objects of the senses, bewildered in soul, is called one of
false conduct.

But he who restrains his senses by his mind, and undertakes the
Yoga of action by means of the organs of action, being unattached,
excels.

. . .

Except for the action done for the sake of sacrifice, this world is
bound by action. For the sake of that, O son of Kunti, do thou
action, free from attachment.

(III. 4-9; trans. Thomas)

Krishna's statement is a comprehensive avowal of *karma* yoga, the yoga of action, that is appropriate not only for men of action, but indeed for all mankind. The *karma* yoga is the first and the central of the *Gita*'s three ways to salvation, the other two being yogas of knowledge and love or devotion. *Karma*, as previously mentioned, means "act," "work" or "deed" — and stands traditionally for an action which, inevitably producing impressions in the actor, determines future action. We human beings act out of self-interest in order to

attain some end. Such egocentric acting binds us to further acts, thus barring us from liberation; this implies a limitless series of rebirths.

Again therefore it is not action itself which Krishna wants to eliminate, but the *bondage* of action that leads to continuing rebirth. Bondage is not caused by actions per se, but by attachment to the fruits of action, attachment to the enjoyment, power and wealth that may be gained by actions. The attempt to abstain from action is not the solution to bondage; the solution is "the Yoga of intellect" or the kind of discipline in mental attitude that eliminates the attachment (*Gita* II. 49; trans. Thomas). One has a licence to action alone, not to its fruits, Krishna says in the *Gita*:

Thy business should be with action, never with the fruits; let not thy motive be the fruit of action, nor be attached to non-action.

Abiding in Yoga perform actions and abandon attachment, O Dhananjaya, evenly balanced in success or failure. Yoga is called evenness (equanimity).

. . .

For the wise who are trained in intellect renounce the fruit produced by action; they are released from the bonds of birth, ...
(II. 47-51; trans. Thomas)

True detachment is the renunciation not of action but of the *fruits* of action, while acting in accordance with duty. Eliot concurs with the notion that in pursuing action, one ought not to care for its fruits. Here the poet echoes Krishna:

At the moment which is not of action or inaction
You can receive this: "on whatever sphere of being
The mind of a man may be intent
At the time of death" — that is the one action
(And the time of death is every moment)
Which shall fructify in the lives of others:
And do not think of the fruit of action.
Fare forward.

(DS, III)

The first line of the quotation refers to the notion of 'action in inaction and inaction while acting' — an idea that is basic to all Eastern philosophy.² It is this positive neutrality that exempts the actor from the consequences of his acts. Again, it should be stressed that when Eastern sages (from the *Gita* to the Buddha and *Tao Te Ching*) counsel against attachment, they by no means enjoin a retreat from life (Maurer 34). Action is unavoidable in human life, and produces inevitable consequences; but inaction cannot give us release. Even God Himself works actively through Nature; "the whole universe is an act of God" (Aurobindo 100). "The liberated man has nothing to gain by action, but nothing to gain by inaction" (Aurobindo 108). When we are neither acting with self-attachment for our action's own apparent fruits, nor deliberately inacting, "The Dry Salvages" passage says, we can understand the following: our undivided attention to the Absolute not only liberates us from the world of action and its consequences but also benefits "the lives of others." For by paying an undivided attention to God, we are able to perform an action of and for that action alone, that is, an action of complete detachment, giving up all the rest freely as an offering (sacrifice) in the great and beneficent interchange between one's own life and that of the world (Aurobindo 111).

Into this central idea of the ethics of action, the Hindu-Buddhist principle of *karma* is woven. The doctrine enunciated here is that a man at death goes to that sphere of being on which his mind has been intent. According to Buddha, for instance, a cumulative effect of previous psychological states "at the time of the death of any such person" can be viewed "as a starting point for the experience of some other such person." On the matter of *karma* and reincarnation, Stuart C. Hackett provides an analogy in the flame of a candle:

. . . just as the wick of a new candle can be lit from the dying flame of the old without the transfer of any enduring substance, so the

² Eastern thought tradition considers inaction as complete action because it is an action which is performed without attachment to its fruits; inaction, which is free, uncontrived, unconditioned (*akarma*) or spontaneous action, is called *wu-wei* in Chinese and is also an important concept in Chinese philosophy.

moral and spiritual . . . achievement of one person can become the flame from which a new center of personal continuity springs to light.

(82)

In the *Gita*, this same idea is expressed in a slightly different manner. Emphasizing the importance of the psychological and moral state of a human being at the moment of death, Krishna states:

And at the hour of death, on Me alone
Meditating, leaving the body
Whoso dies, to My estate he
Goes; there is no doubt of that.

Whatsoever state (of being) meditating upon
He leaves the body at death,
To just that he goes, son of Kunti,
Always, being made to be in the condition of that.

Therefore at all times
Think of Me, and fight;
With thought-organ and consciousness fixed on Me
Thou shalt go just to Me without a doubt.
(VIII. 5-7; trans. Edgerton)

The individual who performs his duty with a view to beneficial consequence must remain, or return in a future life, to suffer, in the literal sense of continuous bearing or enduring of the consequences of that action. Only action wrought from a sense of detachment is *karma*-less. Hence the perfect act has no 'result' for the actor. It is an act executed not out of self-interest but only in the spirit of sacrifice and dedication.

On one level, as Philip Wheelwright has pointed out, both Eliot and the *Gita* express belief in "a sequence of definite incarnations determined by the law of Karma" (104). On another level, however, the cryptic words of the quoted Eliot and *Gita* passages clearly hint at a dynamic transfer of the unfolding effects of moral and spiritual (personal and psychological) achievement, and therefore stress the necessity of detached action through which an individual may attain freedom from the phenomenal world. That is, our own deeds or *karma* create bondage to the world. In order to be free we must direct ourselves

away from egocentric involvement with the fruits of action, to a loving concentration on the Absolute, the Universal Spirit, which is at once immanent and transcendent, in and out of time. Just as at the moment of death we must will the transformation of our entire being into an instrument of God, so must the fruits of work or action be devoted to the Ultimate Reality. As potentially every moment is “the time of death” (DS, III), we must encounter every moment with the discipline of detachment, the motives of our action being only for and in God. Thus Krishna repeatedly advises Arjuna:

On Me all actions
Casting, with mind on the over-soul,
Be free from longing and free from selfishness,
Fight, casting off thy fever.
(III. 30; trans. Edgerton)

While selfish attachment to the ambitions of the ego causes the *karma* which leads to repeated rebirth, egoless renunciation rids a person of the false view that there is something — his or her particular ego — in whose interests work needs to be done. In a free and detached egoless spirit, work can be done unselfishly; and it follows that the eternal or Nirvana can still be attained through the labors of an active life.

In this did Krishna admonish Arjuna, and so does the poet admonish us in the lines:

O voyagers, O seamen,
You who come to port, and you whose bodies
Will suffer at trial and judgement of the sea
Or whatever event, this is your real destination.
So, Krishna, as when he admonished Arjuna
On the field of battle.

Not fare well,
But fare forward, voyagers.

(DS, III)

We human beings are mere “voyagers” or “seamen” who are destined to “suffer the trial and judgement” of the Eternal, symbolized by “the sea.” For as Eliot says, the law of *karma*, cause and effect, is inexorable: “for every evil, every sacrilege . . . you, and you, /

And you, must all be punished" (*Murder in the Cathedral* 259). But we can leave "behind in this world both good and evil deeds" through right action that can avoid continuing rebirth (*Gita*, II. 50; trans. Edgerton). Through whatever event then, whether or not we are subject to "the trial," the Eternal is our destination. We must move *forward* actively towards this goal, not caring to "fare well," for that implies the value, the fruits of action, and thus the temporal; but we must strive to "fare forward." The eternal is beyond and beckoning; our ultimate aim should not be gain but right action in the present moment.

The distinction between "fare well" and "fare forward" is small to the common reader, and may sound like mere poetic dabbling. To Eliot, however, as with Krishna and the Buddha, this distinction is profound — is critical, in fact, to one's salvation or redemption. For one is ego-centered action and the other ego-less. Ego-centered actions of any kind are a sign of imperfection, in opposition to perfection or Nirvana. Buddhism ruthlessly exposes any desire of enlightenment or of salvation that seeks merely the glorification of the ego — the satisfaction of transcendence. In the strictest sense therefore, as long as Nirvana or redemption is the object of selfish craving, it can never be attained (*A Dictionary of Buddhism* 85). Eliot too is saying that the still point cannot or will not occur until one completely renounces selfish motives in action or work: the still point must not be the end of the desire or hope. In lines from "East Coker" the poet urges us to "wait without hope / For hope would be hope for the wrong thing; wait without love / For love would be love of the wrong thing . . ." (EC, III). The *Gita* also advises to "do thou without hope" (III. 30; trans. Thomas). Indeed, hope can be the most seductive of delusions, while the serene, calm spirit of detachment serves as a bulwark against impure motives in action.

This argument may be seen in the light of Becket's dilemma as to whether one can act without (re)involving oneself in sin. The whole issue of *Murder in the Cathedral* is not the moral victory, but the potential sinfulness of choosing a martyrdom which could not but be animated by pride. The Fourth, the most subtle of his tempters, urges Becket to seek

martyrdom for the sake of glory in heaven and spiritual fame on earth. This is a temptation “to do the right deed for the wrong reason” (258) — to abandon detachment for the sake of the fruit of work. It is not until Becket has rejected the ‘fruits-of-martyrdom’ temptation that he acquires the detachment that Krishna and Buddha speak of, and thus the promise of redemption:

A martyrdom . . . is never the design of man; for the true martyr is he who has become the instrument of God, who has lost his will in the will of God, and who no longer desires anything for himself, not even the glory of being a martyr.

(*Murder in the Cathedral* 261)

Achievement of perfect detachment is necessarily to have attained a complete humility. The realm of Nirvana is accessible only through humility. In Eastern culture, the virtue of humility (which that beacon of the West, Francis Bacon — despite his legion of achievements — frankly admitted he could *not* achieve) is an important ethical habitude required in everyday life and action. Eastern scriptures are profuse with teachings of the virtue of humility. So too is the significance of humility emphasized throughout *Four Quartets*: “The only wisdom we can hope to acquire / Is the wisdom of humility: humility is endless” (EC, II). Humility is endless because it eschews worldly ends. Buddha prefaced the start of his ministry by extinguishing all his princely pride in acts of self-abasement.

Humility is the *via negativa* or ‘self-emptying of oneself’ for replenishment by something higher. This notion of humility was suggested in the epigraph to “Burnt Norton,” adopted from Heraclitus: “‘Although the Word (Logos) is common to all, most people live as if each of them had a private intelligence of his own’” (qtd. in Williamson 208). The epigram admonishes us to give up our private wisdoms — mere egotistical delusions or “fancies” (BN, III) — and to seek the Word which is true precisely because it

is not of our own invention. Humility is the casting off of all pretension to knowledge and possessions, as is emphatically iterated in the following lines of paradox:

. . . . In order to arrive there,
 To arrive where you are, to get from where you are not,
 You must go by a way wherein there is no ecstasy.
 In order to arrive at what you do not know
 You must go by a way which is the way of ignorance.
 In order to possess what you do not possess
 You must go by the way of dispossession.
 In order to arrive at what you are not
 You must go through the way in which you are not.
 And what you do not know is the only thing you know
 And what you own is what you do not own
 And where you are is where you are not.³

(EC, III)

If you wish to have knowledge of the truth, you must *empty your mind of the assertive grasping* after information and things. If you wish to possess what you lack, you must learn to dispossess yourself, for it is the possessive and possessing self which hinders one from the self-emptying and self-opening that is a necessary prelude to the possession of what alone is worth possessing. Likewise, if you wish to become the true *you* that still you fail to be, you must go the way by which the false *you* (the assertive, claiming, knowing, possessive "you") is negated, cast off, and ceases to be.

This is the humility of non-knowledge and of the complete renunciation of the self⁴ which if fully realized enables one to merge with the Infinite. For, as the author of *The*

³ In terms of both content and style, Eliot's counsel is basically similar to that of Lao Tzu, who also speaks the unspeakable by means of paradox, paradox that cuts through the veil of words:

What is going to shrink has first been stretched.
 What is going to weaken has first been made strong.
 What is going to be ruined has first been raised up.
 What is going to be taken away has first been given.
 Call this the subtle truth:
 The soft and weak conquer the hard and strong.

(Chap. 36)

⁴ In "Shakespeare and Stoicism of Seneca," speaking of Othello's self-centeredness, Eliot relates the essence of humility as the renunciation of the self: "Humility is the most difficult of all virtues to achieve; nothing dies harder than the desire to think well of oneself" (*Selected Essays* 111).

Cloud of Unknowing has stated, “renunciation and humility are the conditions that at the last help one knit a ‘knot of burning love’ between one and God” (Drew 199). Perhaps the most powerful (and oldest) advice on the virtue of humility however comes from the *Tao Te Ching*:

Showing yourself, you don’t shine.
Asserting yourself, you don’t show.
Boasting yourself won’t get you credit.
Vaunting yourself won’t let you endure.

Indeed,
The great has its roots in the humble;
The high has its foundations upon the low.
(Chaps. 24, 39)

Humility, though not heavily emphasized in modern Western society (considering the tendency of the latter to esteem and reward egocentricity) is a traditional Christian virtue. Eliot declares in his essay on Baudelaire that humility is “the greatest, the most difficult of the Christian virtues” (*Essays Ancient and Modern* 74). But he was surely convinced of the central importance of humility — of self-emptying — in Eastern thought; and it may accordingly be surmised that Eliot perceived a basic unity in the spirituality of East and West.

ASKESIS (SELF-DISCIPLINE)

The temptation “to do the right deed for the wrong reason” (*Murder in the Cathedral* 258) rather than sever one’s attachments to the fruit of work — the temptation to “fare well” rather than to “fare forward” (DS, III) — is the most difficult to resist; for the external behavior in both cases is the same, while the true difference between them is virtually that of heaven and hell, liberation and damnation. Differentiating them requires mind control and great self-knowledge. The Eightfold Path of Buddhism and other Eastern

yogic practices are devices for developing such discernment — mental and psychological discipline leading to the final state of mind, wisdom, which opens into Nirvana. In essence, in the Eastern religio-philosophical tradition as a whole and in Buddhism in particular, the way to release involves an openness to truth supported by firm resolve, and matched by a balanced style of life that incorporates this seriousness of purpose; discipline of mind and body culminates in liberating enlightenment. This process of individual endeavor or self-discipline may be termed *askesis*.

Askesis as a moral determination and self-control (to attain enlightenment) is distinguished from self-torture or self-mortification, which neither the *Gita* nor Buddha would consider to be a way to freedom. Krishna discourages self-torture in the *Gita*: “The austerity done through a bewildered decision and with self-torture, or for the sake of outdoing another, is declared to be of darkness” (XVII. 19; trans. Thomas). Buddha found the extremes of enslaving indulgence and self-mortification equally unworkable, and thus forged for his followers the famous “Middle Path” which, by cultivating self-control, avoids the extremes. The Buddhistic meaning of “self-discipline” is concisely illustrated in the *Dhammapada* (the verse summary of essential teaching of Buddha):

Not nakedness, nor matted hair, nor dust and dirt, nor sleeping on bare floors, nor squatting on the heels can purify a man who has not solved his doubts. But one who, though beautifully dressed, has a mind that is powerful and restrained, who is chaste and who has abandoned all harm to human beings — he is indeed a Brahmin, ascetic”

(In Walters 25-26)

Askesis or self-discipline for the purposes of purgation is both an Eastern and Western (Christian) concept. The kernel of the Buddhist discipline is expressed in the words, “Not to commit any sin, to do good, to purify one’s own mind, that is the teaching of the Buddha” (qtd. in Ch’en 33). And concentration is an essential part of mental discipline. Concentration, often mentioned or alluded to in the Quartets, is an important tool of

meditation in Buddhist and other yogic traditions of the East — concentration not as an end in itself but as a means to intuitive wisdom (necessary for right views and right intentions) or insight into things as they really are. And it must be pointed out that the idea of *askesis* as a means of enlightenment is more strongly an element of Eastern thought than of the West.

As with Hindu-Buddhism, which stresses the decisive importance of rigorous self-discipline and fully controlled contemplation or concentration, Eliot places considerable emphasis on discipline of the individual as a prerequisite to the achievement of insight leading to spiritual advancement and final liberation. In Eliot's view, man is essentially imperfect; therefore, in the words of T. E. Hume which Eliot quoted in his essay on Baudelaire, "he can only accomplish anything of value by discipline" (*Selected Essays* 381). In temperament, Eliot was naturally inclined toward order, discipline and tradition; and perhaps he was all the more earnest about these ideas because he perceived a great need in the modern world for spiritual awakening. As Howard states, Eliot "preached the Buddhist *askesis*" — its necessity — in his essays and poetry (204). In an essay on "Religion Without Humanism," written in 1930, Eliot states:

I found no discipline in humanism; only a little intellectual discipline from a little study of philosophy. But the difficult discipline is the discipline and training of emotion; this the modern world has great need of; so great need that it hardly understands what the word means; and this I have found is only attainable through dogmatic religion There is much chatter about mysticism: for the modern world the word means some spattering indulgence of emotion, instead of the most terrible concentration and *askesis*. But it takes perhaps a lifetime merely to realise that men like the forest sages, and the desert sages, and finally the Victorines and John of the Cross and (in his fashion) Ignatius really *mean what they say*. Only those have the right to talk of discipline who have looked into the Abyss.

(In *Humanism and America* 110)

Eliot found *askesis* to be “the best way of integrating the personality of an individual” (Smidt 201), and of improving civilization as well. He expresses it as “a lifetime’s march” “across a whole Thibet of broken stones” (*The Family Reunion* 332), but recommends it not only for the individual but for all of mankind: “not the lifetime of one man only / But of old stones that cannot be deciphered” (EC, V). And he prescribes ways to achieve *askesis* in his own kind of fivefold path — Eliot’s version of Buddha’s Eightfold Path and / or eightfold yoga of Patanjali: “prayer, observance, discipline, thought and action” (DS, V).

The idea of *askesis* resounds in virtually all of Eliot’s works, but more prominently in his major poems; indeed the poet has made the idea of the individual struggle toward perfection a central thematic thrust in them. *The Waste Land* for instance, after leading the reader through all the rigor and distress of a modern wilderness, reveals in the last section that it has all been part of a journey to a definite goal, the Chapel Perilous, where the Holy Grail is to be found. In other words, a regeneration can be attained by braving dangers, looking evil in the face and toiling onwards. This message is reinforced by parallel adjurations of the Buddha and St. Augustine — representatives of Eastern and Western asceticism — the collocation of which Eliot says “is not accidental” (*The Waste Land* 79). In the third section of “Ash Wednesday,” the protagonist labors up the stairs of spiritual life. Ugliness, darkness, and terror are there to deter him; and he is tempted by a view of life as an enchanting pastoral. But he goes on climbing the stairs for his spiritual advancement.

In *Four Quartets*, the poet-creator is also portrayed essentially as a man of struggle. (Etymologically, *askesis* is the Greek word for the craftsman’s self-discipline) He is not to rely solely on divine inspiration. For Eliot, a poet must forge his work through the hardships of spiritual questing. Eliot speaks of Shakespeare’s “struggle — which alone constitutes life for a poet — to transmute his personal and private agonies into something rich and strange, something universal and impersonal” (“Shakespeare and the Stoicism of

Seneca," *Selected Essays* 117). It is precisely through this endless process of struggle, according to Eliot, that the poet brings control and order into the forces which stir him.⁵

The poet's medium itself is strife-torn. Like the Word Incarnate, the original of poetic communication, the words of the poet are attacked on all sides by the forces of disintegration: "Words strain" and "Will not stay still," as "Shrieking voices / Scolding, mocking, or merely chattering, / Always assail them" (BN, V). Thus in conditions "that seem unpropitious" (EC, V) the poet must strive and continue his work. The hardships a poet faces and the spiritual disciplinary process he performs undergoes are effectively demonstrated in military imagery:

And so each venture
Is a new beginning, a raid on the inarticulate
With shabby equipment always deteriorating
In the general mess of imprecision of feeling,
Undisciplined squads of emotion. And what there is to conquer
By strength and submission, has already been discovered
Once or twice, or several times, by men whom one cannot hope
To emulate — but there is no competition —
There is only the fight to recover what has been lost
And found and lost again and again: and now, under conditions
That seem unpropitious. But perhaps neither gain nor loss.
For us, there is only the trying. The rest is not our business.
(EC, V; emphasis added)

A sense of struggle colors everything here: "the intolerable wrestle" (EC, II) between the poet and his medium. Every poem is "a raid on the inarticulate," an attack and an invasion of "empty silence" where there is neither speech nor movement. The poet recognizes, however, that the most difficult trial of all is the channeling of emotion: the enemy is not only the negative "inarticulate" but the positive "mess" of emotional and emotive disorder. And conquest too must be wrought over pride, difficult though that may be. For there is

⁵ In his "Remembering Eliot," Spender states that "When Eliot talked about poetry it was the one wholly serious activity to which a poet should devote his life. He didn't speak of it as though it were a kind of by-product of being born with a poetic gift . . . [Eliot] thought that work preceded magic and inspiration" (69).

the way down is one and the same" (Williamson 208). The way up is by ascent and "*Erhebung*" towards the light of the sun:

. . . release from the inner
And the outer compulsion, yet surrounded
By a grace of sense, a white light still and moving,
Erhebung without motion, concentration
Without elimination, both a new world
And the old made explicit, understood
In the completion of its partial ecstasy,
The resolution of its partial horror.

(BN, II)

The way down conversely requiring the solitary hardship of "a lifetime's march" "across a whole Thibet of broken stones," leads to the darkness below ground. "Descend lower," the poem commands,

descend only
Into the world of perpetual solitude,
World not world, but that which is not world,
Internal darkness, deprivation
And destitution of all property.
Desiccation of the world of sense,
Evacuation of the world of fancy,
Inoperancy of the world of spirit.

(BN, III)

This "darkness," however, the poet soon assures us, "shall be the light, and the stillness the dancing" (EC, III). That is, the darkness of the spiritual discipline, like "the light of the sudden illumination" (DS, II), is sought for regeneration and salvation; both the way up (light) and the way down (darkness) converge in the same dynamic revelation of reality.

Eliot's light-darkness symbolism needs to be understood as a metaphor of his views on the modes of existence. Eliot's poetry often explores no-man's land — states that are neither quite of this life nor another but are "Caught in the form of limitation / Between un-being and being" (BN, V). As to the light-dark imagery, "a dim light," being neither the illuminating "daylight" of clarity nor the purgatorial darkness of cleansing and

purifying, is a symbolic reflection — often represented as undesirable in Eliot's poetry — of this undefined and uncertain state of limbo. Light and darkness are equated and contrasted with the "dim light" in the lines:

Here is a place of disaffection
 Time before and time after
 In a dim light: neither daylight
 Investing form with lucid stillness
 Turning shadow into transient beauty
 With slow rotation suggesting permanence
 Nor darkness to purify the soul
 Emptying the sensual with deprivation
 Cleansing affection from the temporal.
 Neither plenitude nor vacancy. 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
 . . .
 . . . not here
 Not here the darkness, in this twittering world.
(BN, III)

This "place of disaffection" with its characteristic "flicker" is explicitly differentiated from light and darkness — the flicker that combines light and darkness in a mechanical way. The line, "Not here / Not here the darkness, in this twittering world" clearly suggests an urgent need — a welcome — of ascetic darkness as a means of redemption in a world of spiritual disorder and disorientation. And later, in the correspondent third movement of "East Coker" (the next Quartet), Eliot parallels the attributes of ascetic darkness with those of the darkness (i.e. severity) of God and the way of humility. The second half of the third movement of "Burnt Norton," the passage presently at issue, is then, in the words of Eliot, "the analogue of the drought, the dark night, which is the essential stage in the progress" of a religious mystic ("The *Pensées* of Pascal," *Selected Essays* 364).

Eliot scholars agree that the last lines of the third movement of "Burnt Norton" have one set of roots in the *via negativa* of several Christian traditions, notably those associated

with the Spanish mystics including and as exemplified by St. John of the Cross, whose way at times led also through “emptiness,” “destitution” and the “abandonment of the spirit in darkness” (Hay 153-56). Such passages, however, can all too easily be seen as an affirmation in another form, or worse, as referring only to those moments of psychological depression and futility that afflict the active as well as the contemplative life. According to Kearns, Eliot, until 1952, preferred “the intellectual rigor of the Indic treatises to the baroque and emotional exponents of the Spanish school” (238). And Eliot in the Clark Lectures warned that “What St. John means by the ‘dark night’ and what Mr. Middleton Murry means by my ‘dark night’ are entirely different things” (qtd. in Kearns 238). The “evacuation of the world of fancy” and the withdrawal of the senses seem to suggest something of yogic practices, such as Patanjali’s yoga⁶ of Hinduism — the eight stages of which represent a movement from external to internal control, detaching the mind from the sense organs (Hopkins 68) — and something more of the “emptiness” of *sunyata* and of Buddhist ascetic meditation both as a technique and as a goal.

Sunyata or Emptiness is a concept of the Middle Way (Madhyamika) school of Mahayana Buddhism, whose leading exponent was Nagarjuna. This philosophy, according to Jeffrey Perl and Andrew Tuck, influenced Eliot’s thought at many points. Etymologically, *sunyata* means “swollen thing that is hollow inside”; thus it refers to a lack of substantiality of the physical— another way of stating the universal phenomena of *anatta* or non-ego (Conze, *Buddhism* 130-31). It is an emptiness, not in the literal sense, but oppositely of the fullness of existence. Emptiness or Void (the state of selflessness) was cultivated and invoked for the purpose of meditation; the Madhyamika concerns a methodic

⁶ Patanjali (2 B.C.) is the author of the *Yoga-sutras*, which illustrates the process of the self-imposed discipline. It is assumed that the original object of the *Yoga-sutras* was “to counteract the distractions of the senses.” The doctrine was influenced by Buddhist asceticism (Müller 119, 311). Eliot spent “a year in the mazes of Patanjali’s metaphysics under the guidance of James Woods, the translator of the *Yoga-sutras*” (*After Strange Gods* 40).

contemplation of the emptiness of things and persons in order that one may realize Nirvana (Conze, *Buddhist Thought in India* 242-49).

That the terms “emptiness,” “vacuity” and “void” appear frequently in Eliot’s Anesaki notes on Mahayana Buddhism (Kearns 83) supports contentions that the poet’s knowledge of the *sunyata* concept was substantial; and Eliot uses the terms in *Four Quartets* to define his own version of the intense mental *askesis* needed to realize any form of religious truth, as in the lines: “Emptying the sensual with deprivation / Cleansing affection from the temporal” (BN, III). Emphasis on the deliberate, willful cultivation of the state of emptiness as a way of realizing the still point is also iterated — emphatically — in the following lines:

We must be still and still moving
 Into another intensity
 For a further union, a deeper communion
Through the dark cold and the empty desolation.
 (EC, V; emphasis added)

These and other passages in *Four Quartets* seem to gain from their Indic and specifically Buddhist origins a special rigor and intensity.

The ‘darkness’ in the Quartets (especially in “Burnt Norton” and “East Coker”) is a symbol of one way to spiritual rebirth. Like the light that invests form “with lucid stillness” and suggests “permanence,” this darkness of *askesis* — “to purify the soul” — equally points to redemption (BN, III). The poet feels, however, that our own lives are passed largely in “a dim light” of undiscipline and distraction (BN, III) — in the pseudo-light and the pseudo-darkness of living and partly living, characteristic of the civilization into which we are born. Having fixed our locus, we must, according to Eliot, move on from our recognition of external emptiness, and do so by means of the traditional emptying of the inner life preceding spiritual regeneration — bringing to bear a great concentration and self-discipline.

Finally, like the Buddha, Eliot firmly believes that though these efforts require a "lifetime's march," they can, in the end, lead us to reality and salvation. And it is in this humanistic emphasis on the individual's responsibility to work out his or her own emancipation that the reader finds Eliot's vision the most Buddhist. In this perspective, Eliot's "way down" as a metaphor for *askesis* is doubly a Buddhist allusion: for Eliot surely, in this Heraclitean phrase, refers not only to the methodology or process of the Buddhist *askesis* but also to the "way" or "path" which the historical Buddha or the *Tathagata*⁷ blazed and which, the Buddha believed, it is possible for any earnest human aspirant to follow. This path that the Buddha walked, a path that can be wended by each individual, is self-discipline in body, word and mind — a self-development and self-purification. It is a path that both Eliot and the Buddha believed would lead to the realization of Ultimate Reality, to the complete freedom of the still point.

UNIVERSAL LOVE

Despite any number of manifestations, love, whether Oriental or Occidental, is at its core an intensive coming together of separate consciousnesses that feel they are or really ought to be one. Essential identity is the foundation of love; existential diversity is its superstructure. In contrast to Western ethical systems which attempt to neutralize selfishness by developing such counterconcepts as morality and fairness, Oriental systems, concertedly viewing ego as the fundamental obstacle to the experience of this non-duality or oneness called 'love,' demand a radical elimination of ego or self. For only if the ego has been extirpated can one achieve a universal love or compassion — *karuna*⁸ — without

⁷The term *Tathagata*, used by the Buddha (after his Awakening) when referring to himself and other Buddhas, means "one who has come and gone this way" (Allen 33).

⁸ Although the Buddhist word *karuna* is usually translated as compassion in English, in this study it is interpretively translated as love because it is similar to the Western concept of *agape* or divine, spiritual love.

distinction. Given then that these complementary principles of egolessness and the essential oneness with others are characteristically Eastern features of love, so too are they in Eliot's ethics of love — love as an outbounding ascent of the individual towards that unity and identity in which he or she is completely selfless. Thus, when Eliot speaks of love in the Quartets, he refers to this selfless, centrifugal love — equating it to the absolute compassion of Buddhism. At the same time, in Eliot as in the Eastern metaphysical tradition, this struggle for a unity and sense of identity clears the way to salvation; for, by destroying the ego, by depersonalizing oneself and by 'giving oneself up' as the Buddhists are enjoined to do, one may enter the timeless bliss of Nirvana.

Although the term Nirvana is not to be conceptualized, the Nirvana experience may, in a restricted sense, be compared with the experience of divine love. In speaking of the relationship between Nirvana and love, however, Thomas Merton warns the reader that in the realm of Nirvana,

"experience of love" must not be understood in terms of emotional fulfillment, of desire and possession, but of full realization, total awakening — a complete realization of love not merely as the emotion of a feeling subject but as the wide openness of Being itself, the realization that Pure Being is Infinite Giving, or that Absolute Emptiness is Absolute Compassion. . . . It is then not simply the awareness of a loving subject that he has love in himself, but the awareness of the Spirit of Love as the source of all that is and of all love.

(86)

Merton says that such love is "beyond all restrictions of a desiring and self-centered self," and can only begin "when the ego renounces its claim to absolute autonomy" and ceases to live in a domain of "desires in which it is its own end and reason for existing" (86).

Perhaps one can best understand the notion of love "beyond desire" in the following verse from "Burnt Norton," in which, as the poet intuitively divine love, he tells us that

Desire itself is movement
 Not in itself desirable;
 Love is itself unmoving,
 Only the cause and end of movement,
 Timeless, and undesiring.

(BN, V)

This concisely states what love means to the Buddhist. The verse is unequivocal in its distinction between desire and love. To Eliot, as with Indic tradition (Buddhism in particular), love as desire⁹ is a great evil because it magnifies the ego, the sense of “I” and “mine.” And ego is the bond of the existent; it perpetuates and sustains *samsara*, the movement of which is opposed to the unmoving stillness of the center. Every desire bears an ultimate fruit of pain rather than joy, hate rather than love, destruction rather than creation. Desire, casting about its grasp, enslaves us to the temporal, while divine, spiritual love directs us to the infinite. Love “beyond desire” (LG, V) is the transcendent Absolute Love of *Nirvana*, which is “Timeless, and undesiring.”

While Buddhism sees negatively the emotion induced by ego-desire, it emphasizes such positive virtues as loving friendship (*metta*) and compassion (*karuna*). The Buddhist clearly differentiates the emotions involved in a loving friendship and those in sexual affection (*pema*), which in essence is a manifestation of ego-desire (Ch'en 34). *Pema* is exclusive whereas the former is inclusive, for it extends to all sentient beings. Looked at in this way, it may be argued that Eliot's negative attitude toward sexuality is rooted in Buddhist perspectives on the centrifugal and inclusive nature of selfless love and the centripetal and exclusive nature of self-centered desire or self-love.

In Buddhism, self-giving love or outgoing concern, which extends itself to the whole of being and indeed to the universe, is the clue to (and itself an expression of) spiritual enlightenment — the Absolute Reality rather than merely the open possibility of such. Particularly in Mahayana Buddhism, keeping in mind that it is the responsibility of each

⁹ Buddhists would deliberately avoid speaking of love as it is associated with desire.

person to seek deliverance, the release that thus comes suddenly broadens one's vision to see that this new state of freedom is precisely a bondage of love, so that one does not regard the promise of Nirvana as an individual goal, but as a destiny that one achieves in loving unity with all suffering beings (Hackett 79). From this perspective, the Nirvana that one enters alone is, in the last analysis, not the true Nirvana. In fact, the notion ultimately dawns that Nirvana is not separation from *samsara* or the cycle of births, but instead a realization of devoted oneness with others in an inclusive outreach for which the ethical difference between Nirvana and *samsara* simply dissolves (Conze, *Buddhism* 125-30). A person of such attainment is called a *bodhisattva* — an individual whose 'enlightenment' is pervaded by a universal and unwavering love.

Universal love or compassion (*karuna*) is the hallmark of the *bodhisattva*. The historical Buddha (Gautama Buddha), it is said, was a *bodhisattva* in his previous lives until he became enlightened, and during those numberless years helped others attain salvation (Conze, *Buddhism* 125). The *bodhisattva*, aware of the bondage and suffering of others, and in full compassion for them, voluntarily turns away from his own imminent realization of Nirvana and returns to help those in the world. He in effect makes a vow, saying:

I take upon myself the burden of all suffering. . . . The whole world of living beings I must rescue, from the terrors of rebirth, of old age, of sickness. . . . I must free them from all calamities, I must ferry them across the stream of *samsara*. . . . And why? Because it is surely better that I alone should be in pain than that all these beings should fall into the states of woe. I must give myself away as a pawn through which the whole world is redeemed from the terrors of the hells . . . and with this my own body I must experience, for the sake of all beings, the whole mass of all painful feelings.

(Conze, *Buddhists Texts* 131-32)

The *bodhisattva* ideal became popular in later Buddhism, and was a motive factor in the understanding of Buddha as a savior.

Biographers record that Eliot was immensely impressed by the noble and compassionate life of the Buddha, whose teachings he gleaned from boyhood readings of *The Light of Asia* by Edwin Arnold — a book which permanently influenced Eliot's philosophical ideas; thenceforth he was to maintain "a respect and admiration and even a curious kind of intimacy" toward the Buddha (Kearns 74). Certainly, the *bodhisattva* ideal would have interested Eliot because of its concern with salvation through selfless love, and partly because of the affinity it has to the Christian ideal of salvation through Christ. We know, moreover, that the poet absorbed a great deal of the living tradition of Eastern thought through the lectures by Anesaki at Harvard, who argued that "Mahayana Buddhism was of value for the sense of importance of the Buddha as savior" (Kearns 78) — the Buddha who did not abandon the suffering world but came to its rescue. Eliot partook of the teachings of Buddha and of the *bodhisattva* ideal through his direct readings of the Jataka tales¹⁰ — and Eliot read them in the original language (Ackroyd 47). Buddha in the Jataka tales is presented as one suffering directly for others and as offering himself, all his possessions, including his own life, for their welfare.

The Eastern ideal of selfless outbounding love enters subtly into *Four Quartets* and often is in Christian disguise, underlining the essential unity between the two. Stated another way, the 'enlightenment' of the *bodhisattva* lies in his discovery that the point toward which he has journeyed is the point from which he departed, and that personal salvation is of no worth while others are in pain and suffering. Significantly, this model of the *bodhisattva* registers in returning motifs throughout the Quartets. The poet frequently tells us that "In my beginning is my end" (EC, I) and "In my end is my beginning" (EC, V). Indeed, the journey from/to home becomes a fixture of Eliot's imagination:

¹⁰ The Jataka tales recount the virtuous deeds of *bodhisattvas*. For instance, in the famous story of the starving tigress and her cubs, the Buddha himself gives of his own substance (body) in that they may have food (cf. Conze, *Buddhist Scriptures* 24-26).

And the end of all our exploring
 Will be to arrive where we started
 And know the place for the first time.
 (LG, V)

The opening lines of the fourth movement of "East Coker" deserve a detailed observation in terms of *bodhisattva*-hood, for they demonstrate the kind of poetic transformations of Eastern sources that Eliot achieved in his later work:

The wounded surgeon plies the steel
 That questions the distempered part;
 Beneath the bleeding hands we feel
 The sharp compassion of the healer's art
 Resolving the enigma of the fever chart.
 (EC, IV)

The wording demonstrates a rich blending of Buddhist imageries and ideal — perhaps especially the apparent explicitness of "sharp compassion." The poet's use of hospital imagery is surely significant, for as mentioned, the idea of the world as hospital is pervasive in Buddhism.

The wounded surgeon, depicted here as both sufferer and healer, is at once a Christ-*bodhisattva* and fellow man, a player in the hospital drama who bonds with "absolute care" to his patients. The sharp compassion — a treatment which "resolves the enigma of the fever chart," is the central emotional paradox of the healing and resolving. "Wounded surgeon" and "bleeding hands" modify the emotive quality still further, with the suggestion that this *bodhisattva* is not merely a detached and efficient surgeon dealing drastically with us for our own good, but one whose own sufferings qualify him in a peculiar way to understand and to heal. In the vision that absorbs all pain into one (un) earthly rose, at the end of "Little Gidding," once again Eliot projects and sweeps this image of Christ-*bodhistva*, a single sufferer who presumably came to this world to take upon himself the pain of all mankind.

The selfless love of “the wounded surgeon” for his fellow human beings has a vertical as well as horizontal dimension. Such a structure of relationship is well delineated in Hinduism. The word *bhakti* (love, devotion) in the *Gita* involves a vertical relationship between man and God: it means not only devotion and loyalty to Krishna, the personal God, trust in and love of Him; it also means God’s love for man (cf. *Gita* 4. 11). And therefore the original meaning of the word “participation” is still retained (Zaehner, Intro. to the *Gita* 24, 26). Similarly in the Quartets, Eliot conceptualizes this vertical relationship in two directions: human devotion to God, and God’s love for human beings. In this context Eliot believes that love among fellow beings and Love between God and His created beings lie behind the suffering inherent in the human situation, and that God’s “participation” in our world of suffering necessitates a choice between self-love and self-sacrifice — sacrifice, an ultimate meaning and means of love apotheosized both in secular and sacred terms.

True (spiritual) selfless love is non-sensual, and therefore must have as its object that which transcends the senses. According to the Indologist Edward Conze, this is God in Christianity, Brahman in Hinduism, and the *dharmas* (Ultimate Reality) in Buddhism (*Buddhist Thought in India* 85). Also, the horizontal dimension of love (love for other created beings) becomes complementary and complete in relation to the true, spiritual reality. For, as Conze points out, the “inherent selfishness of human beings cannot be broken either by cultivating the emotions or by doing good deeds, but only by contact with spiritual reality” or “a supra-individual Reality”; Christianity and Hindu-Buddhism are at one on this point (*Buddhist Thought in India* 84).

Eliot is essentially agreeing with Conze when the former states that “love between two human beings is only made perfect in the love of God” (Jul. 1931, *The Criterion* 773). The timid Prufrock, a tepid libido at best, is actually attracted to something higher than

human love, something of which Eliot in later life had this to say: "The final cause is the attraction towards God" ("Dante," *Selected Essays* 234).

To "love the Lord your God" is not only the first commandment of the Old Testament, but also Krishna's final and most magisterial injunction in the *Gita*. In *Four Quartets*, the destination of the poet's strenuous journey — made in a vessel of detachment, *askesis* and selfless love — is a new relationship with God:

We must be still and still moving
 Into another intensity
 For a further union, a deeper communion.
 (EC, V)

Humankind cannot help loving, Eliot asserts throughout the Quartets, but we have a choice between the conflagration of self-love and the fire of love for God.

As in the horizontal dimension of love, egolessness is the ethical bedrock of one's vertical relationship with the true reality in Buddhism, Brahman in Hinduism, or God in Christianity. Indeed, "if we do not love and worship, we become shut within the prison of our own egoism" (Radhakrishnan 558); and to be so imprisoned means selfless devotion is impossible. In the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* we find an analogue — pointed to by "What the Thunder said" of *The Waste Land* — to this relationship between egolessness and love for others and God: *Datta, Dayadhvam, Damyata* — "give, sympathize, control" (80). The dictum of these words is that one should subdue one's self and give oneself to others and to the Brahman, who is all things; and this is how Eliot uses them in *The Waste Land*. If the voice of God in the thunder is obeyed, it leads to a breaking out of that isolation of ego which prevents a fruitful intercourse and consummation of a final union. Our little egotistic self must die in order to achieve the divine union, which is the final aim of love.

The note of self-surrender or renunciation of ego is heard in almost all of Eliot's work. Lord Claverton in *The Elder Statesman* discovers in the end: "In becoming no one," he

says, "I begin to live" (582). He has renounced his former self and assumed a new one. Thomas Becket in *Murder in the Cathedral*, at last surrendering himself completely to God, has become a will-less instrument in His hands. Becket elaborates on self-surrender in his (Eliot's) sermon: "The true martyr is he who has become the instrument of God, who has lost his will in the will of God" — or rather has not 'lost,' but has found freedom in submission to God (*Murder in the Cathedral* 261). The patient in "East Coker" is called upon to submit to the care of the wounded surgeon and the dying nurse, to "Die of the absolute paternal care" (EC, IV), the death here meaning the death of ego. In "Little Gidding," the poet emphatically iterates that each one of us has a choice between the fires of destructive self-love or the burning away of self-love on the sacrificial pyre whose consuming fires bring the promise of divine union: "The only hope, or else despair / Lies in the choice of pyre or pyre — / To be redeemed from fire by fire" (LG, IV).

In Hinduism, such selfless love or devotion to the Supreme is called *bhakti*. And the *bhakti* yoga (The Way of Love), as it is expounded in the *Gita*, is the path which leads from self-love to concern for other selves as they exist in organic relationship to one's self; to a wider and more enduring appreciation of all selves in the world and a deep affection for the entire created order; and finally, to a selfless devotion to God (Aurobindo 268-71). The *Gita* tells us that the *bhakti* yoga and *karma* yoga constitute the means to spiritual emancipation. Radhakrishnan expresses the efficaciousness of the *bhakti* yoga as follows:

The sacrifice of love is not so difficult as the tuning of the will to the divine purpose or ascetic discipline, or the strenuous effort of thinking. It is quite as efficacious as any other method, and is sometimes said to be greater than others, since it is its own fruition, while others are means to some other end.

(559)

As this passage intimates, Oriental religions such as Hinduism and the later developed Mahayana Buddhist sects, reward selfless love or devotion to the Supreme with the grace

of salvation. Vishnu, speaking through his avatar Krishna, is a god of grace when he says in the *Gita*:

Even if an evil doer
Revers Me with single devotion,
Quickly his soul becomes righteous,
And he goes to eternal peace.
(IX. 30-31; trans. Edgerton)

And Vishnu continues: "Go to me as thy sole refuge: / From all evils I thee / Shall rescue: be not grieved" (XVIII. 66; trans. Edgerton). That is, man's sins can be cancelled by complete love for and surrender to God, for God will extend His grace of absolution. Instead of rebirth, such souls will enter into the Being, abiding in the eternal presence forever.

Obviously, Eliot often juxtaposes the two traditions — Christian and Eastern — for the purposes of contrast and comparison; and in his poetry he does the same with the notion of grace. Eliot's understanding of grace is not completely Christian. In Christianity, grace is generally understood as not a thing to be earned or guaranteed by one's efforts or devotion, but rather a beneficence which comes by and through faith. And grace is rare, unexpected — unconsciously attained. To Eliot, too, grace is rare and unexpected; but he also views it as the end result of egoless devotion (*bhakti* in Hinduism) or self-surrender, the idea of egolessness, as it is derived from Eastern ontology. Towards the end of *The Waste Land*, for example, the way of salvation is vividly stated by Tiresias as a surrender of the individual self or ego to the overwhelming reality of the noumenon: "The awful daring of a moment's surrender / Which an age of prudence can never retract / By this, and this only, we have existed" (*The Waste Land* 74). And the apprehension of the moment of peace occurs suddenly in the hyacinth garden; later, it is referred to as self-surrender. This peace then is a gift, which in Christian terms we know as grace. In "The Dry Salvages" also the poet speaks of the moment when one reaches the still point — of the

‘grace’ that comes as a result of egolessness, self-surrender, and a lifetime’s devotion — all of which realization lies essentially in the hands of the individual human being:

. . . to apprehend
The point of intersection of the timeless
With time, is an occupation for the saint —
No occupation either, but something given
And taken, in a lifetime’s death in love,
Ardour and selflessness and self-surrender.
(DS, V)

And in “Little Gidding” it is because of “the drawing of this love and the voice of this calling” that the poet knows “We shall not cease from exploration” (LG, V). However, the cost of our voyage to salvation is considerable, “Costing not less than everything” (LG, V). But when all has been surrendered and rendered egoless, all is returned, transformed and glorified.

The *bodhisattva* ideal in Buddhism and love or grace in Hinduism and Christianity have important applications to the understanding of suffering, because they imply that God is knowable and accessible in this life. Conversely, the implication is that God (through manifestations of Krishna, Buddha-*bodhisattva*, and Christ) may participate in worldly life to assist and support those in distress. In this divine love, suffering is revealed as potentially meaningful — as related to a pattern and not to chaos; for, in Eliot’s view, Love creates an orderly pattern — provides a cohesive element that binds human beings to each other and to God. Suffering becomes then a metaphysical necessity for love, to be drawn from God the Savior and from fellow created beings. Pondering upon this mysterious suffering-love relationship, the poet asks:

Who then devised the torment? Love
Love is the unfamiliar Name
Behind the hands that wave
The intolerable shirt of flame
Which human power cannot remove.
(LG, IV)

Drew interprets the verb "devised" both as "'devise' and 'divide'" (196). Human suffering may be overcome by love, and one is thus led to redemption, for it is love that 'divides' us from "the torment." Put another way, it is perhaps love that devises suffering to impel us to choose between two divisions of torment, the immediacy of self-love or the purifying and redeeming fire of love of God. Though the individual may, for now, weave the unendurable shirt of flame of his own desires and self-love, this torment is never, by others, forgotten; for behind human hands are those of the wounded surgeon of "sharp compassion" (EC, IV) showing how pain can heal and one can be made healthy again.

HUMAN EFFORT AND DIVINE GRACE

As we have observed, Eliot is in consonance with Hindu-Buddhism in believing that human beings may work effectively toward their salvation by their own action and self-discipline. At the same time, however, the poet also speaks of the possibility of salvation in terms of divine intervention or grace. Although he believes strongly in human effort, Eliot thinks that action is useless unless we submit passively to the will of God and make His will our will and our peace. The action that is required of Becket in *Murder in the Cathedral* and Harry in *The Family Reunion* is very much like inaction (submission to the divine will). In *Four Quartets*, Eliot prescribes apparently contradictory directions almost in the same breath: the poet tells us to "fare forward" (DS, III), and then to "be still, and wait without hope" (EC, III). "East Coker" concludes with the admonition that we must not give up our "raid on the inarticulate" and cease to explore our interior landscape; but soon he joins indissolubly the two ideas of action and passivity: "We must be still and still moving"; we must reach the spiritual summit "By strength and submission" (EC, V). Eliot's belief in the efficacy of human effort as a means to the ultimate salvation is therefore countered and complemented by the notion of grace.

This ambiguous position becomes at times even more confusing and complex, as the poet alternates his emphasis, now placing more on one and then more on the other. Often Eliot places the efficacy of grace over that of effort. In "The Dry Salvages," he sees our only hope in the "Prayer of the one Annunciation" (DS, II), the message of grace to humanity. Because divine grace, in the last extremity, is necessary, the soul must wait — wait without hope so that no thought of our ability to earn salvation shall supervene. At one place, the poet states that intense and isolated moments, with no before and after, are only "hints and guesses / Hints followed by guesses; and the rest / Is prayer, observance, discipline, thought and action" (DS, V). Despite these prescriptions of human action as means to moments of freedom, there are no guarantees to emancipation without divine grace: "The hint half guessed, the gift half understood, is Incarnation" (DS, V). Eliot is quick to point out moreover that total emancipation is at best rare and infrequent: "to apprehend / The point of intersection of the timeless / With time, is an occupation for the saint" (DS, V). An apprehension of the still point, therefore, can only be realized through divine grace, though grace has to be merited first through a "lifetime's death in love, / Ardour and selflessness and self-surrender" (DS, V). To some degree, this is also true in relation to the poet and his salvation as artist. The poet's task is to keep on trying: "The rest is not our business" (EC, V). "The rest" in the line is not only 'what remains' but also rest as opposed to movement or striving. That is to say, the stillness at the center is not our business but God's.

Although Eliot sometimes denies the efficacy of human effort by itself, never does he advocate salvation solely in terms of faith and grace. He maintains rather that human effort and "right action" are necessary grounds for grace — an outlook that differs from much of Christianity: "*it is of faith, that it might be by grace*" (Rom. 4. 16). In "East Coker" for instance the poet says:

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

The conditional clause “if we do well,” particularly the verb “do,” clearly indicates that human action conditions love or divine grace. Indeed, Eliot’s emphasis on the efficacy of human effort runs as a thematic string throughout the *Quartets*; it is as consistently present as his reliance on divine grace, if not more so. The poet constantly reminds us that our duty is “only the trying. / The rest is not our business” (EC, V); and the end of “The Dry Salvages” reiterates the dignity and value of the path of human effort: though “freedom” is “Never here to be realised,” we are still “undefeated / Because we have gone on trying” (DS, V). As a consequence, the Oriental view of spiritual discipline has been given great prominence, and contrasts with the Christian idea of grace as conflict.

However, this is a shallow level of analysis of the human effort and grace (and thus concurrently the action and inaction) relation in *Four Quartets* — at such a level, no reconciliation seems possible. But when one looks deeper, Eliot seems to show that no apparent antagonism exists between the two (human effort and grace) — an attitude which is almost analogous to, if not adopted from, the teachings of the East. The poet’s deep knowledge of religio-philosophies of both East and West provided him with insight into the commonality behind seemingly contradictory viewpoints. From the early Buddhist point of view, the still point is a condition of freedom from craving and suffering which can be attained through the individual effort of detachment, *askesis*, and annihilation of ego. The notion of grace and the idea of incarnation are absent from early Buddhism; however, later-developed Buddhist sects (Eliot was equally familiar with early and later Buddhism) added on the idea of salvation by faith. As mentioned before, Mahayana Buddhism understood the Buddha as a savior; and Pure Land Buddhism, a Mahayana Buddhist sect, emphasizes salvation by faith in the grace of the Buddha Amitaba (Conze, *Buddhism* 152-57).

Therefore, a modified position is to be found in the Buddhist system. A similar but more comprehensive position has been taken by Hinduism. Hindu scriptures such as the Upanishads and the *Gita* stress the necessity of individual effort for attaining Nirvana; they also admit the operation of divine grace in human existence.

To both Eliot and the Eastern tradition, egolessness is a common denominator that bridges these seemingly irreconcilable spheres of human action and grace, action and inaction. What makes the discipline of human effort effective is precisely the aspect of a selflessness that dispenses with ego and thus with illusions of the power, control and dominance it creates. The central task in disciplines of action, devotion, or contemplation is the achieving of this selflessness: as observed in the section on detachment, one must refrain from any action that is taken for the sake of some future benefit to oneself. If one performs an action in the hope of personal gain from it, then one is attached — bound — to the fruit of that action. To be free of this bondage, one must act not for oneself and not for the rewards that action may bring; rather, a person must act for the “world’s sake,” offering his or her action as a sacrifice. An action or deed as a free, willing sacrifice is rewarded by grace, and the cycle of sacrifice and grace turns the eternal wheel of life. For this reason, according to the *Gita*, each mode of salvation, either by individual effort or by faith, is valid, if the motives are pure. And in the *Gita* it is Krishna himself who, significantly, is worshipped in the forms of disciplines of yogas (human effort). Krishna endorses worship as a means of achieving selflessness:

Whatever thou doest, whatever thou eatest,
 Whatever thou offerest in oblation or givest,
 Whatever austerity thou performest, son of Kunti,
 That do as an offering to Me.
 (IX. 27; trans. Edgerton)

Eliot suggests the interrelatedness of these two essential modes of salvation in “Little Gidding.” Sounding an optimistic note, the poet declares his confidence in the ways of salvation:

And all shall be well and
 All manner of thing shall be well
 By the purification of the motive
 In the ground of our beseeching.
 (LG, III)

The “purification of the motive” refers back to the idea of detachment and renunciation of the fruits of action — the egoless action repeatedly echoed in the words of the *Gita* and the Buddha. Therefore, the line concurrently connotes the ideas of making of our actions a sacrifice, and of making God’s will the only motive of our action. The fourth line of the quotation introduces the idea of love, as it is an allusion to the vision of Dame Julian of Norwich, the fourteenth-century mystic, to whom a voice said: “‘I am Ground of thy Beseeching,’ which was interpreted to her to mean Love” (Drew 194). The fourth line suggests then that the motive force in action or spiritual strife must be grounded in love, as we make our action or sacrifice. The quoted lines can thus be simplified as follows: “All shall be made well by egoless action executed in love and devotion.”

Egoless action, being “right action,” is, after all, indistinguishable from selfless devotion to God, which is rewarded in turn by grace. In Christian theology, a mysterious reconciliation is effected — and the individual is considered really free — only when he acts under grace by submitting himself completely to the divine will. And indeed Hindu-Buddhism, for its part, is unequivocal in declaring that annihilation of ego is a prerequisite to freedom, and that self-surrender and right action, ultimately meaning the same thing, unite us with the eternal. Humphreys agrees with this view of the interrelatedness or complementary nature of human effort and grace:

Clearly there is a place in the religious life, and therefore in the Buddhist life, for what Dr. Suzuki calls "passivity," (sic) for this is the "self-surrender" of Islam, the self-abandonment to God of the Christian mystics, the Bhakti Yoga of India, wherein the devotee lays all that he has and is on the altar of the Divine Beloved. But none of these methods of rising above the limitations of personal, selfish self ignores the corresponding value and necessity of "works." All alike assume a close co-operation between the Grace which comes from "God" and the personal effort which clears the way, as it were, for the operation of Grace.

(*Buddhism* 176)

Eliot's mode of salvation as presented in *Four Quartets* seems compatible with that of the Eastern religious tradition, as the philosophical and ethical base of the latter provides, comprehensively, a positive view of life in the world and of the propriety of devotion to the deity while at the same time acknowledging the efficacy of human efforts. This affirmation of the possibility of salvation by human effort, when rightly applied, was of the utmost importance to Eliot's positive view of human life, society and civilization, as well as to his personal life.

Eliot articulates a comprehensive and synthetic view of reality which holds that human endeavor and grace are not distinct and disparate 'paths' but one equivalent way leading to the single goal of salvation. The visionary moment of peace in the hyacinth garden of *The Waste Land* and the moment of ecstasy in "Burnt Norton" are revelations of the Eternal. Yet individual effort is necessary to draw near to these moments — ceaseless endeavor exerted with purified motives and a spirit of selflessness.

Although nowhere in *Four Quartets* does Eliot explicitly reconcile divine grace and individual effort, nevertheless he implicitly captures a sense of the "impossible union" (DS, V) — "impossible" here to be taken as 'difficult but vital.' The final line of "Little Gidding," in which the fire and rose are brought together as "one," makes this point clearer. Fire is, of course, an image associated in Eliot's work — from *The Waste Land* forward — with the Buddhistic emphasis on the mental, psychological *askesis* of the sage, while the rose is, for Eliot as for Dante, the classic symbol of the ardor of the devotee. The

two symbols in the final analysis signify respectively human effort and grace. To invoke them as “one” is to perform an “impossible union” of opposed paths and points of view. In doing so, Eliot, far from violating the Christian concept of grace (salvation only by faith), affirms it on the logical and pragmatic ground that he found in the Eastern scriptures, while maintaining the Hindu-Buddhist view that human effort — when performed egolessly — draws the promise of grace and Nirvana. Indeed, this is an Eliotic kind of canon: as he synthesizes religio-philosophical positions of the East and West into a new vision of truth, Eliot in *Four Quartets* has ‘found’ a faith — virtually fashioning that faith for himself out of all that he has believed in or been attached to.

In sum, the corpus of *Four Quartets* posits a universe of possibilities. In accordance with the teachings of the Eastern sages and his own integrated system of belief, Eliot contends that there is a possibility of salvation — a remedy for our fragmented, vitiated soul. He asserts that the quest for the peace and certitude of the still point is possible only through renunciation of desire for the transient pleasures of the turning world — most of all, renunciation of ego with its insatiable cravings and drives, for ego-desire constitutes itself in opposition to love and whole being. We therefore must develop that spirit of detachment which is “a release from the inner / And the outer compulsion” (BN, II) and an “expanding of love beyond desire” (LG, III). Detachment does not mean cessation of action, however. Bondage and rebirth are not caused by actions per se but by attachment to the enjoyment, power, and wealth that may be gained or lost by them. If the mind is properly disciplined, no attachment to the fruits of our actions — and thus no bondage — results, even if the mechanism of action is engaged. On the other hand, detachment cannot depend on a “distraction fit” (DS, V) or on accidental illuminations, but must be practiced deliberately and wholeheartedly. Self-discipline is the trusted anchor in the otherwise raging sea of life, for it overcomes ego-domination and holds the center of life’s gravity at the center of the flow of reality.

Detachment and *askesis* are offered as solutions to the age-old debate on how to improve the human condition. But we must go further — to love — for a true remedy. By love we may cease our perpetual rounds on the wheel of *samsara*, and move towards the still center. For “Love is unmoving / Only the cause and end of movement” (BN, V). Love is thus the final sanction — the final determinant — for Nirvana:

For liberation — not less of love but expanding
Of love beyond desire, and so liberation
From the future as well as the past
(LG, V)

Love is what is left when the self is abandoned. The whole process of love is indeed nothing less than the transformation of life into a perpetual sacrifice of self for the sake of others and of God. We must transcend ‘desiring’ love, and cultivate rather a love toward the whole world and all created beings, so that we may be awakened to the ontological togetherness of life and may discern life’s mysterious unity. And love, Eliot also contends, must be vertically directed toward God, spiritual reality; for divine union means liberation. But again, it is through self-surrender and the overcoming of the ego that we are able to enter into communion with the whole universe, the Universal Spirit. With egoless devotion and complete surrender of the self, the horizon of our spiritual vision is extended to the very limits of reality, to a completely realized Oneness and unbroken Whole. At the same time it is asserted in the Quartets that this selflessness in devotion and action is an Omega, drawing one toward a future abounding with grace.

That said, we nevertheless seem incessantly to be in the thick of the struggle and doubt between our endeavor and grace. Eliot reminds us, however, that redemption, after all, requires a mutual effort by man and God. When we can act without being interested in only the fruit of our action, when we become egoless and when our motives are pure, we can free ourselves; we then can happily act in a spirit of sacrifice without any hope of

reward, and only out of love for the divine, making God's will the sole motive of our action. Such sacrificial action is rewarded by grace, for God is on the side of the right and the selfless.

In one respect, the seeming discordance between human endeavor and grace that in the *Quartets* appears as a conflict to be reconciled represents the eternal confrontation between man and God; within this pattern, all the symptoms of the *malaisé* of modern man — the quest for certainty and freedom, the desire to love and be loved, the need to work for salvation with diligence, and the longing for grace — assume a heightened significance. They are seen now in the *Quartets* as temporal manifestations of the contrary forces of the cosmos which stand for different levels at which we apprehend the experience of life. The power of *Four Quartets* lies not only in its moral and ethical insight into the human condition, but in its metaphysical assumptions about the nature of existence in the universe where these warring opposites remain in constant conflict and tension, clamoring to be resolved. In the context of the method of dialectics that forms the structural principle of *Four Quartets*, the essential antithetical issues which Eliot attempts to resolve through a profoundly religio-philosophical apprehension of reality are examined in the following chapter.

Chapter IV

ONE AND THE SAME

The soul, Eliot wrote in his doctoral dissertation, does not contemplate a single, consistent world. Instead, it engages in the “painful task of unifying . . . jarring and incompatible ones, and passing, when possible, from two or more discordant viewpoints to a higher which shall somehow include and transmute them” (*Knowledge and Experience* 147-48). A unifying vision of reality — the integral view of life — was Eliot’s most pre-eminent intellectual inquiry, an inquiry which served not only for his dissertation but also predominated in his philosophical writings and literary-theoretical practice. In *Four Quartets*, the task of incorporating diversity into unity is a key element of Eliot’s poetical imagination and methodology; the resolutions of one and many, of unity and multiplicity, constitute the basis on which metaphysical arguments are constructed and solved, doctrines proposed and justified.

Eliot’s preoccupation with the idea of an organic unity underlying the diversity of phenomena and his lifelong endeavor to arrive at an understanding of the absolute spiritual reality — the unifying principle — against which fragments of human experience may be buttressed, closely reflect the typical and characteristic paradigm of Eastern thought. For the latter, too, placing its primary and central concern upon achieving the effective realization of unity in apparent multiplicity, has been for a millennium steeped in meditations on the ontological and epistemological ways of adequately unifying the diverse phenomena of existence. The ideas of unity and of a holistic¹ world-view are indeed the

¹ This word is used to mean an inclusive or interrelated whole, which without any one of its elements becomes imperfect in function and meaning.

whole thrust or the orientation of Eastern thought, an orientation that Eliot whole-heartedly adopted. Fritjof Capra, a modern physicist-thinker, describes the crux of Eastern thought thus:

The most important characteristic of the Eastern world view . . . is the awareness of the unity and mutual interrelation of all things and events, the experience of all phenomena in the world as manifestations of a basic oneness. All things are seen as interdependent and inseparable parts of this cosmic whole; as different manifestations of the same ultimate reality.

(130)

In the Eastern perspective, all things exist interdependently; human life is viewed not as something apart and self-contained, but rather as a vital and inseparable part of the cosmos as a whole. From the Eastern perspective, indeed, the whole universe is charged with relations. And it is upon interdependent relations that the idea of unity and harmony are founded. For all individuals and things, besides their essential substance-less (the Buddhist doctrine of the *anatta*), have interrelatedness of existence as their common ground — a doctrine which Buddhism calls “dependent origination.” Eastern thought holds that interrelatedness is the Absolute itself — ‘Absolute’ connoting or embodying Nirvana, *Sunya* and Tao. As for the ways that one can arrive at this understanding, Eastern thought has brought its epistemology and ethics into full accord with its metaphysics. It has thereby yielded penetrating insights into the nature of reality, and reality’s relation to the phenomenal.

A fundamental premise of Eastern thought (on the nature of reality) is that ultimate reality is non-dual and ineffable (non-symbolic), and that thought-constructions obscure the perception of reality, as the maxim “The Tao that can be spoken is not the Tao” expresses. Eastern thought postulates 1) that multiplicity is or only involves, different manifestations of a single reality, which is in a constant process of change, alternating all things at all times;

2) that the polarities — what we describe as opposites — are interdependent and not mutually exclusive; and 3) that the absolute, when looked at through the thought forms of constructive imagination, is simply the empirical world, whereas, conversely, “the [true] absolute is the world viewed without these distorting media of thought” (Murti 274).

Both Buddhism, through its merciless dialectics, and Taoism, through its discernments on the universal law of relativity, elucidate the nature of reality and its relation to phenomena. Seeing the absolute as the unifying force, Buddhism and Taoism posit the essence of ultimate reality as an absence of “separations,” and by this they mean the absence of the “I.” Duality is inevitable when the self is posited, since the subject “I” presupposes an object — the world of “not I.” Similarly, the medium of thought (conceptualizations and descriptions being the expressions of the self) is dualistic as it too involves the subject-object dichotomy (i.e. involves speaker and auditor). Looking at the self and its assertions as the fundamental cause of “separatedness,” Eastern sages call for the elimination of self — but yet realize the necessity of non-dual, intuitive knowledge. They urge us to replace the ego-sense by relational consciousness or a sense of connectedness.

In the Oriental religio-philosophical tradition, final bliss itself is considered an intellectual awakening from (mind created) illusion to reality, from the experience of multiplicity to that of unity — epistemological salvation. Enlightenment is to be achieved not by transforming the real but rather by our vision — our corrective vision — which derives from wisdom or a transcendent, intuitive knowledge (*prajna*). On the other hand, the Eastern perspective holds that real, advanced freedom is the freedom of actualization: the individual who knows the real is to experience further his or her unity with nature and mankind, and indeed with the whole cosmos in the here and now of everyday existence where we encounter reality face-to-face.

Eliot, as he seeks ways to formulate a comprehensive description of reality that would resolve disturbing contradictions and disparities, recapitulates in *Four Quartets* the essence of Eastern thought and its metaphysics, and consciously models his efforts on those of the Eastern mystical and intellectual edifice. The Buddhist doctrines of *anatta* (non-ego) and “dependent origination,” the Taoist doctrine of the relativity of all things, and the Taoist-Buddhist concept of the absolute as the harmonizing, unifying force are the keys to Eliot’s metaphysical concerns with the problem of opposites and with the nature of reality and experience. They are also crucial to a resolution of some of the most challenging quests in *Four Quartets*: the meanings of enlightenment, of transcendence, and, ultimately, salvation.

Like the Oriental sages, Eliot held that analytical and discursive thinking creates the dualistic world of self and not-self, the knower and the known; and it is that very “self” which becomes preoccupied with analysis and continues to fragment the world of experience. This belief was manifested in the paralyzing condition of Prufrock, trapped by paranoia, complication and isolation. Eliot thus, in concord with Eastern thought, posits the non-ego and intuitive knowledge as the ‘open sesame’ that unlocks doors and enables us to recapture a sense of unity and wholeness — the transcendent knowledge which empowers us to transform chaos and inconsistency to order and pattern. At the same time, as he upholds relation as the very substance of existence, Eliot attempts to supplement the ego sense with the sense of interrelatedness. And he makes the sense of relatedness (along with his monistic vision) the basis of his aesthetics and the notion of tradition. “No poet, no artist of any art,” Eliot writes in “Tradition and the Individual Talent,” “has his complete meaning alone. His significance, his appreciation is the appreciation of his relation to the dead poets and artists. You cannot value him alone; you must set him, for contrast and comparison, among the dead. I mean this,” he says, “as a principle of aesthetic, not merely historical, criticism” (*Selected Essays* 4-5).

Implicit in *Four Quartets* is an Eastern, organic view of the world, where everything complements everything else. Paradoxical formulations of the poems lead insistently to the insight that notions of opposition derive from our limited frame of reference, but that our vision can be enlarged to a point where opposites are comprehended as parts of a whole. Above all, Eliot embraces the Oriental idea that salvation is the experience of unity of one with others. Pondering upon this organic, ineluctable relationship, he expands the mystical insight of the unity of all things within the self, not only to a social and collective level, but also to a space / time-transcending cosmic plane, thereby transforming metaphysical disputations into an inspiring music — such music which draws the heaven and the earth into complete concordance.

In Eliot, a sense of unity and relatedness is paralleled by a degree of understanding of the nature of reality, for the knowledge of reality intuitively has that very sense. Before examining Eliot's metaphysical arguments, it is necessary to take a brief glimpse of the development of his perceptions of reality. As a whole, Eliot's poetry progressively moves away from the vision of disunity and unrelatedness to a cognition and certitude of unity and wholeness — the vision of relations ranging from opposites through the gradations of dissimilarity, similarity, resemblance, equality, and finally to the magic threshold of identity. In Eliot's early poems, the delineation of life is fragmentary and inconsistent, and imperfection is painfully apparent; the sense of the irrelevance and unrelatedness of things is very powerful up to and including "Coriolan." In "The Love Song," there is no essential unity between a suburban evening and the smell of steaks in passageways; the 'togetherness' is merely habitual, perfunctory. The vast jumble of things do make up a 'picture,' and while this picture may be coherent, reality itself is perceived as incoherent. There are samenesses and typicality, but these are not unity. The unity which we feel in Eliot's early poems is one of mood, but there are no unifying ideas. "These fragments I have shored against my ruins," says the "I" of *The Waste Land*. In some of his moments of intense awareness, Eliot must

have seen life as the broken fragments of what once perhaps was a harmonious whole but which is impossible now to piece together.

Human relationships in these early poems are viewed in a similar vein. True friendships are not to be found in this world of imperfection. It is only natural that the relationship between man and woman, in which the closest union between human beings is generally thought to be possible, should be used by Eliot to illustrate the theme of loneliness. Eliot's sense of the fragmentation and isolation that he gleaned from the phenomenal world is complete with the Laforguan trick of a *doublement* of the personality. However, the division of the personality can only mask — it cannot cure the soul's incurable loneliness. The mind perceives, but it feels cut off from what it perceives, and one must go far indeed for a remedy.

However, in the dialectic mind of Eliot, the affirmation of any one category implies also the existence of its opposite. Eliot's poetry shows an awareness of connectedness and wholeness co-existing with feelings of dissolution. As early as in the Prufrock poems, Eliot reaches out for an experience of totality. He seems, on occasion, to make deliberate efforts to fuse disparate impressions, the noise of the typewriter and the smell of cooking, and force them to reveal their occult or twisted relationships. The fact that the objects he describes are often broken may point to an ideal, complete existence in which they are whole, or in Bradley's terms, to a transmutation of the parts in the individuality of total existence (171). Thus, in "The Hollow Men," sunlight falls on a broken column as if to continue it in a world beyond.

Things only appear to be incomplete and imperfect, Eliot seems to suggest, because we usually have no awareness — vision — of totality. And this awareness is what Eliot aims for in his later works, especially *Four Quartets*. In its kaleidoscopic turnings, *Four Quartets* both enacts and describes diversity within unity, leading finally to the ideal expressed at the end of "Little Gidding": "A condition of complete simplicity." In the

Quartets, the smell of wild thyme and the sight of winter lightning have no spatial or temporal connection, but nevertheless are indicative of an ideal unity; the objects do not have just an habitual togetherness or similarity of mood — rather, they seem to transmit an essential oneness of substance and significance:

Old stone to new building, old timber to new fires,
 Old fires to ashes, and ashes to the earth
 Which is already flesh, fur and faeces,
 Bone of man and beast, cornstalk and leaf.
 (EC, I)

The “deep lane” does not exist in its own right, but “insists on the direction / Into the village,” and “the sultry light / Is absorbed, not refracted, by grey stone” (EC, I), making it and the stone as one. That is, in *Four Quartets*, in which the nature of reality and its relation to appearance becomes a subject of sustained meditation, the distinctions and differences which jumped into prominence in Eliot’s early poetry dissolve into a unified vision.

THE EQUATION OF NIRVANA–SAMSA RA

The universal duality of all the phenomena attendant upon human existence conjures up an existential and metaphysical confrontation between appearance and reality, between this world and the next, between “death’s dream kingdom” and “death’s other kingdom” (“The Hollow Men” 84), rendering human life at all times problematic — and this confrontation has created an ever-moving pendulum of tension and choice within the human consciousness. All Buddhist systems, seeking to arrest this sway, postulate a unitary basis for the experience of multiplicity. And it was particularly the Madhyamika of Mahayana Buddhism, the form of Buddhism with which Eliot was most familiar and which deals with the non-dual nature of phenomenal existence and Nirvana, that formulated a

coherent metaphysics and epistemology and came up with a drastic yet effective answer. Eliot in his own quest to resolve the problem of the appearance-reality (Samsara-Nirvana) relationship, wields in *Four Quartets* the principal weapons of the Madhyamika arsenal, all the while transforming the chilling disputations of metaphysics into calm, meditative, gemlike poetic language. Before developing both Eliot's and Buddhism's postulations on the appearance-reality relation, we begin by observing the characteristic orientations of Buddhist philosophy, and Eliot's unisonant opinions on them.

In its assumption that there is a great gulf between reality and the phenomenal world, Western philosophy from Socrates to Russell and even Bradley (strictly speaking), has largely been concerned with discovering the reality, whether metaphysical or logical, that is behind or above the world of appearances; and much of Eliot's own philosophical labor was also aimed at such (Perl and Tuck 116). Many of the Indian philosophical schools² have also centered on the distinction of appearance from reality, and their views have been likened to those found in Plato, Epicurus, Spinoza, Kant, Hegel, Russell, Bradley.

Buddhism, on the other hand, centering its efforts on a demarcation of these two boundaries, is more concerned with the realm of appearance, and posits that "the inherent self-contradiction of appearance . . . leads us to a knowledge of the real" (Murti 309). That is, the Buddhist aim is to place proper emphasis on the body as not only a transitory instrument inseparable from the mind but also as the means — because of this very mind-body inseparability — of bringing about man's eventual release from crippling delusion. The Buddhist emphasis on appearance is also consistent with its metaphysic: while Hinduist philosophers took only the changing and the relative as appearance, the Buddhists

² Purva Mimamsa, Sankhya, Nyaya, the Vedanta schools (Advaita, Vishishtadvaita, and Dvaita) (cf. Müller 449-55).

relegated substance, the permanent, the whole, and the universal to the realm of the unreal.³

At this juncture, the feasibility of the Eliot-Bradley-Buddhism triangulation must be made clear. On metaphysical issues, on logic and on methodology, Eliot must have freely been crossing amongst Bradley and Eastern thought, since the latter two share great affinities. Nevertheless, it is on the very metaphysical issue of the real versus appearance that Eliot is at variance with Bradley. Like the Western and Hindu tradition, Bradley sees a gulf between reality and appearance; above all, he posits that appearances are as real as what lies behind them, and this contrasts strongly with the "Unreal City" in *The Waste Land*, a contrast which suggests that the origin of the poem's philosophical implications is imbedded in Buddhist rather than Bradlian thinking. Significantly, it was Eliot himself who aligned Bradley's position with that of Hindu philosophy. As early as 1912, dealing with a Hindu text (Mahasangika) which, he noted, makes "an 'uncompromising antithesis' of appearance and reality, Eliot added the parenthetical comment: '(Bradley)'" (Perl 50). Unlike Buddhism moreover, Bradley, in his *Reality and Appearance*, adorns reality with only a positive content, and appearance with a negative. As Murti correctly points out, "this failure to appreciate the true nature of the conflict [the inherent feature of appearance] constitutes" not only "a fundamental weakness in Bradley as a philosopher" (309) but also a plausible reason perhaps for Eliot's eventual discontent with Bradley's philosophy.

To Eliot, as to the Buddhist, adequate understanding — appreciation — of appearance was of great importance as a way to reach the realm of the real and as a place for the real to be realized. His Buddhist conviction is epitomized in the incarnational emphasis in *Four Quartets*: the way to those things that are beyond the material world is through the material

³ In the Hindu philosophy, the Sankhya, for instance, both the changing and the unchanging substances are considered equally real; without evaluating whether the changing or the unchanging is real, Vedanta accepts the unchanging alone as real and rejects the other as unreal (Murti 58).

world. Our cosmic insights begin with “[g]arlic and sapphires in the mud.” And “only in time can the moment in the rose-garden . . . [b]e remembered”— the way to the invisible is through the visible.

Like the Buddhist, too, Eliot held the view that the world of ultimate reality and the world of appearance are not as distinct as has traditionally been held in the West. Perl and Tuck call the reader’s attention to undated notes by Eliot:

lokadhatu [the world of parts]

The world in which we live is the result of our
common dhatus [elements, parts] and efforts.
(This is neglected in Western philosophy.)
(118)

The first sentence denotes a holistic world view — that the world is the sum of the parts which compose it. His play with etymology (dhatus / lokadhatu) suggests another reading: the world in which we live is that world because we live in it. As is clearly indicated in his parenthetical remark, Eliot thought that this formulation was worth saying because Western philosophy has been dedicated to demonstrating the opposite conclusion, that the Real World is something utterly apart from the shared world of human existence. That is, what Eliot felt the West lacks is an appreciation of appearance — such appearance comprising experience, social convention, and common sense (Perl and Tuck 118).

Eliot found in a single ‘grouping’ of Buddhist schools an option that he believed was unavailable elsewhere — the Madhyamika of Mahayana Buddhism, to which Eliot was introduced during his studies in East Asian Buddhism under Anesaki. According to Perl, Eliot took extraordinarily thorough notes in an Anesaki lecture course (Schools of Religious and Philosophical Thought in Japan) on the development of Buddhist thought in the East Asia (49). The particular forms of East Asian Buddhism that Eliot was then exposed to — the Kegon, Shingon, and Tendai — were characterized by Anesaki, so

Eliot's notes state, as descendants of Madhyamika, a name which means Middle Way (Perl 52). The founder of Madhyamika was Nagarjuna (second century A.D.), who, it is generally agreed, had one of the most acute intellects in Buddhist history. And Hay sees a reflection of Nagarjuna's philosophy in Eliot's major poems including *The Waste Land*, "Ash Wednesday," and *Four Quartets* (66, 93, 166, 173).

Nagarjuna's arguments all converge in the inclusive concept of *sunyata* (emptiness), otherwise known as the Madhyamika, the Middle Way, because it refutes — taking the middle position between dual opposites — all metaphysical propositions by demonstrating their relativity. It is a word which has two basic meanings: first, it connotes the relativity of all things, and second, it is whatever remains when all things, and especially conceptions of reality, are removed. Alan Watts states that conceptions here include not only metaphysical views but also ideals, beliefs, ultimate hopes and ambitions of every kind (63). Thus, living without reliance on conceptualization — on the icons which substitute for "immediate experience" — is, for the Madhyamika school, Nirvana. According to a standard text on the subject, Nagarjuna's method was

to show the self-contradictory nature of every concept and doctrine about reality. . . . The aim of Nagarjuna is to show that nothing positive or negative can be asserted of reality. It is therefore Sunya (Vacuity, Emptiness). Even to think of it as Sunya is a mistake, because the concepts, vacuity and emptiness, are understood with reference to fullness. . . . Nothing determinate could be true and could express the nature of reality. Reality is unique, and even the concept of uniqueness can be understood only with reference to the non-unique. . . . It is beyond concepts, and beyond speech also, if speech represents concepts.

(Raju 127-28)

Before a contextual analysis of Nagarjuna's metaphysical contention is considered, it is necessary to take a look at Eliot's use of Nagarjuna's methodology. In order to prove his point, Nagarjuna seeks to explain by means of negation, using the same relentless dialectic that Eliot was finding in Bradley. Nagarjuna negates every concept and viewpoint

to show their self-contradictory nature. No opinions are upheld, but instead are reduced to absurdity, leaving only a middle ground between affirmation and negation; and the revelation of truth then is left to intuitive insight. Nagarjuna paraphrases the doctrine of dependent origination by means of his eightfold negation:

Nothing comes into being, nor does anything disappear.
 Nothing is eternal nor has anything an end.
 Nothing is identical nor differentiated,
 Nothing moves hither, nor moves anything thither.
 (Qtd. in Ch'en 73)

Though here Nagarjuna's primary purpose is to demonstrate the dialectics of negation, in the quoted passage the truth of the Middle Way is also alluded to. For Nagarjuna, the ultimate, highest truth lies in the middle, which avoids one-sidedness. In a similar vein, Eliot defines the still point by negation, while suggesting too that the still point comprehends the middle-way truth, and he concurrently evokes the reader's intuitive knowledge:

At the still point of the turning world. Neither flesh nor fleshless;
 Neither from nor towards; at the still point, there the dance is,
 But neither arrest nor movement. And do not call it fixity,
 Where past and future are gathered. Neither movement from nor towards,
 Neither ascent nor decline

(BN, II)

Later Eliot explicitly declares himself a follower of the middle-way Truth: "So here I am, in the middle way, having had twenty years —" (EC,V); he states further, "In the middle, not only in the middle of the way / But all the way . . ." (EC, II).

Nagarjuna postulates that whatever is relational existence is *sunya*. All things are *sunya*, empty to the extent that they have no being of their 'own' and no existence independent of causes and surrounding conditions; but it is only because things exist in a "relational" way that they exist at all. Reality, too, is *sunya*, for it is dependent on

appearance for meaning: without appearance, reality lacks all definite significance. To put it differently, if everything in the world is essentially empty, the world itself is emptiness; if there is nothing that is not empty, then absolute reality is empty also.

This drastic position leaves no place for any fundamental differentiation between the world of phenomenality and the realm of the absolute truth, since both these terms are conceptual fabrications of the mind. That is, there is no specific difference between Samsara and Nirvana, in that both coincide in *sunyata*. There is no separation, no distinction, no obstacle or barrier, between Noumenon and Phenomenon. Thus, Nagarjuna's most cryptic and bewildering assertion in *Madhyamikarika*, his seminal text, are the verses:

Samsara is nothing essentially different from Nirvana.
Nirvana is nothing essentially different from Samsara.

The limits of Nirvana are the limits of Samsara.
Between the two, also, there is not the slightest difference whatsoever.
(Verses 19, 20; trans. Inada 158)

This aphorism points to Nagarjuna's (and Eliot's for that matter) strict monism, which insists that appearance and reality are the same, only seen in two different ways.⁴ The corollary is that ignorance at one end of the spectrum of our consciousness and enlightenment at the other are not unlike; both involve an immersion in and acceptance of the world of consensual reality, which is not diminished but enhanced by the recognition of its ontological non-being, or what Buddhism and Taoism call its 'Nothingness.' Perl and Tuck call attention to remarks in Eliot's student essays expressing something of the same idea:

⁴ *Tao Te Ching* pronounces the same monistic credo in the lines:

How much difference is there
Between ah and oh?
How much difference is there
Between good and evil?
(Chap. 20)

What is here germane, is the fact that in whichever direction you go . . . [t]he crudest experience and the abstrusest theory end in identity, and this identity I call the absolute. If you choose to call it nothing, I will not dispute the point. But whichever it is, it is both beginning and end.
(120)

The first and final cause is both nothing and absolute: with his equation of ontological plenitude and ontological vacancy, we have, here in Eliot's developing philosophical position, a virtually certain case of East Asian Buddhist influence (Taoism posits the same notion in this regard).

But the equation "Nirvana is Samsara" is true in another sense as well; namely, that which appears to us to be Samsara is really Nirvana, and that which appears to be the world of form (*rupa*) is really void (*sunya*). Hence the famous saying:

Form is not different from emptiness; emptiness is not different from form. Form is precisely emptiness; emptiness is precisely form.

(*Prajna-paramita-hridaya Sutra*, qtd. in Watts 64)

Once again, this does not mean that awakening will cause the world of form to vanish, for Nirvana is not to be sought as "the future annihilation of the senses and their fields." (*Lankavatara Sutra* II. 18. qtd. in Watts 61). But what the *Sutra* means is that form is void just as it is, in all its prickly uniqueness.

The Madhyamika doctrine of the Nirvana-Samsara equation is a controlling thesis of the Quartets as a whole — indeed, it is the central motif particularly in "Burnt Norton" and "Little Gidding" — and has spawned several philosophically and metaphysically associated ideas. In the first Quartet, we are invited to a "door," which opens on what Bradley refers to as "immediate experience," the experience of children, of people in simple societies, of mystics and visionaries. There is, as Eliot was well aware, a profound human nostalgia for this experience — its state of unity and simplicity — which time, age, sophistication, social

complexities and even perhaps excessive philosophizing have closed to us. The poet leads us thus,

Down the passage which we did not take
Towards the door we never opened
Into the rose-garden

. . . . Through the gate,
Into our first world, shall we follow
The deception of the thrush? Into our first
world
There they were, dignified, invisible,
Moving without pressure

And the bird called, in response to
The unheard music hidden in the shrubbery . . .⁵
(BN, I)

However, this is the hypothetical ground of omniscience, and it is not a ground on which philosophical stands may be taken, for it disappears as we examine and analyze it. As soon as it is put into words, this moment of vision becomes nothing but an illusion — at best what is for the Buddhist deceptive reality, for the Hinduist an aspect of *maya*, and for Bradley “appearance.”

The vision in the rose garden is both illusion and “real,” or in Nagarjuna’s terms, Samsara is not different from Nirvana. The vision transforms the physical reality of natural objects into the eerily unreal in order to present a higher dimension of reality; the impression (illusion) of water that fills the empty pool is made of “real” light. In this visionary garden of our first world, the poet recalls,

⁵ This “Burnt Norton” passage, which initiates the reader into a mystical experience of reality, may be compared with the following lines from *Tao Te Ching*:

In maintaining the vital spirit,
Can you hold to oneness
And not come apart?
In developing the vital senses,
Can you be like an infant child?
In clearing the inward vision

Can you be without guilt?
. . . .
In opening and closing heaven’s gate,
Can you act like a mother bird?
While seeing clearly in the four directions,
Can you hold to nothing-doing?
(Chap. 10)

So we moved, . . .
 Along the empty alley, into the box circle,
 To look down into the drained pool.
 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.
 Then a cloud passed, and the pool was empty.
 (BN, I)

What is real appears unreal; what is unreal appears real. The limits of the one are the limits of the other, and between Nirvana and Samsara, also, there is not the slightest difference. There is only illusion produced by mind, the mind creating false bifurcation. (This visit to the rose garden is itself created by the “deceptions” of a bird.)

Making use throughout of the language of metaphysics as well as of meditation, this “pool” passage from “Burnt Norton” draws deeply on the Buddhist grasp of *sunyata* as a process of “emptying,” essential not only to the purification of the soul but to a grasp of the nature of reality — the transitory non-ego (*anatta*) or non-existence of all apparently stable objects of thought — including the thought of mystical immediacy or Nirvana itself. Indian philosophy thinks of form (*rupa*) as *maya*, having no “own being” or “self-nature.” The world of form becomes the real world at the moment when it is no longer clutched, when it is understood that form is ultimately empty (Watts 41). Thus, according to Lama Tenzin Gyatso, “a [normal] visual consciousness perceiving a form is indeed a mistaken consciousness, because the form appears to it as inherently existent”; however, to the extent that visual consciousness perceives the form as form and does not conceive the form to exist inherently, “it is a valid cogniser” (63). In this regard, it is worth comparing some lines from Nagarjuna with the “pool” passage of “Burnt Norton”:

A form seen from a distance
 Is seen clearly by those nearby.
 If a mirage were water, why
 Is water not seen by those nearby?

The way this world is seen
 As real by those afar
 Is not so seen by those nearby,
 [For whom it is] signless like a mirage.
 (qtd. in Gyatso 64)

Nagarjuna's argument is that our sense of perception or our conceptual analysis of reality is not a straightforward reflection of the way the reality is directly experienced. Read in this respect, Eliot's passage seems to point to the 'unreality' of the form or idea of reality; in other words, Eliot is equating form with emptiness. The reader is urged to be "a valid cogniser": all is *sunya*. Mirages are short-lived, and Eliot returns the reader firmly to the first and ultimate sight of the emptiness of the pool.

"Little Gidding" resumes the same concern, which in great detail penetrates much of the poem's content. Intensifying the vision of cosmic unity, the scene in the first movement of "Little Gidding" objectifies the moment of consciousness in "Burnt Norton." The movement's magical midwinter flowers are "really" present; they are a literal effect of climate and time. Yet they give an illusion (or is it illusion?) of an alternate, eternal world. These flowers are a "transitory blossom / Of snow," but one "neither budding nor fading, / Not in the scheme of generation" (LG, I). The break in line between "blossom" and "Of snow" allows us a pause, a stop in time, to contemplate this conundrum and to 'read' the flowers either way, as illusion or reality:

Midwinter spring is its own season
 Sempiternal though sodden towards sundown,
 Suspended in time, between pole and tropic.
 When the short day is brightest, with frost and fire,
 The brief sun flames the ice, on pond and ditches,
 In windless cold that is the heart's heat,
 Reflecting in a watery mirror
 A glare that is blindness in the early afternoon.
 And glow more intense than blaze of branch, or
 brazier,
 Stirs the dumb spirit . . .

 . . . This is the spring time
 But not in time's covenant. Now the hedgerow

Is blanched for an hour with transitory blossom
 Of snow, a bloom more sudden
 Than that of summer, neither budding nor fading,
 Not in the scheme of generation.
 Where is the summer, the unimaginable
 Zero summer?

(LG, I)

Like the mirage of water "Burnt Norton," these flowers are both Nirvana and Samsara, both projection and perception; and they create a multivalent paradox — a paradox that has been introduced by the oxymoron, "a glare that is blindness in the early afternoon," and which persists throughout the Quartet. The "Zero summer" is here a metaphor for *sunyata*, the Absolute, as was the emptiness of the "Burnt Norton" pool.

In the "intersection time" of the second movement of "Little Gidding" — an apocalyptic "passage . . . / Between two worlds become much like each other" — the theoretical distinction between appearance and reality no longer functions. The compound ghost who, as *The Waste Land* puts it, "was living" and "is now dead" (72) is both illusion and reality. The narrator enters into conversation with a "compound ghost" but the apparition fades at daybreak. It is "intimate and unidentifiable," "one" yet "many" — both identical with and distinct from the narrator (LG, II). These pseudo distinctions — appearance and reality, this world and the next — are "United in the strife which divided them" (LG, II).

In "The Dry Salvages," Nirvana and Samsara are equated explicitly in terms of time: "The moments of happiness — not the sense of well-being, / Fruition, fulfillment, security or affection, / Or even a very good dinner, but the sudden illumination" and "the moments of agony" "are . . . permanent" (DS, II). "Sudden illumination" is the common rendering for *satori*, which refers to 'enlightenment' in Zen Buddhism. This demonstration evinces yet again the firm conviction of Eliot that whichever observation we make concerning the Samsara-Nirvana relation, these seemingly opposite realms are, after all, one and the same.

It is stated in the *Lankavatara Sutra* that “all things are non-dual as are Nirvana and Samsara” (Watts 64), and this is true of all the antinomies and distinctions which abound in *Four Quartets*. Individuals and societies alike, death and birth, the subject and the object are now seen as woven together — as inseparable aspects of a single reality. “The Dry Salvages” assumes a oneness of the one who experiences and the experience: “the music heard so deeply / That is not heard at all, but you are the music” (DS, V). It is implied in the passage that such result is achieved by a lively attention to one’s direct experience, to the world as immediately sensed, before any misguidance by conceptions. And in this immediate experience there is no longer the dualism of the knower and the known, between “me” and “my experience.” For the individual on one hand and the world on the other are simply the abstract limits or terms of a concrete reality which is “between” (LG, V), as the tangible coin is “between” the abstract, Euclidean surface of its two sides.

In this sacred design of all equanimity and unity, the realities of life and death — “The moment of the rose and the moment of the yew-tree” (the latter a symbol of immortality) — both have their place, and finally are “of equal duration” (LG, V), because both are implicit in “every moment” of our experience in time:

We die with the dying:
See, they depart, and we go with them.
We are born with the dead:
See, they return, and bring us with them.
(LG, V)

A similar recognition of this oneness lies behind Harry’s indifference to death in *The Family Reunion*, and his comments about time. He warns his family that they are incapable of understanding him because they “isolate the single event,” and when the doctor broaches the subject of past and future, Harry declaims:

Oh, is there any difference
How can we be concerned with the past

And not with the future? or with the future
And not with the past? . . .

(318)

Once more then we must point out that Eliot's insistence on the birth-death equation is not the product of mere pessimism but the reflection of his view that reality is non-dual, that Nirvana is not different from Samsara, from the very world of birth and death. According to *Lankavatara Sutra*,

Those who, afraid of the sufferings arising from the discrimination of birth-and-death (*samsara*), seek for Nirvana, do not know that birth-and-death and Nirvana are not to be separated from one another; and, seeing that all things subject to discrimination have no reality, [they] imagine that Nirvana consists in the future annihilation of the senses and their fields.

(II. 18, qtd. in Watts 61)

The point of the Nirvana-Samsara equation — the metaphysical conclusion reached by Nagarjuna and which found its utmost poetic expression in *Four Quartets* — is not to assert a metaphysical proposition but to assist the process of awakening.⁶ According to Buddhism, there can be no causal relationship between Samsara and Nirvana; Nirvana has no other ontic range than that of the everyday world (Sprung 19-20). Therefore, the movement from Samsara to Nirvana is epistemological and not ontological. For Nagarjuna, the goal is a complex of subtle and dramatically psychological changes, changes that result in 'seeing' the world afresh. The end of the journey finds one either in a familiar landscape that appears to be utterly new, or in a foreign landscape that seems strangely familiar: "Home is where one starts from. As we grow older / The world becomes stranger . . ." (EC, V). The logic of this position is implicit in the *bodhisattva* ideal: the *bodhisattva*'s enlightenment consists precisely in his discovery that he has come

⁶ "In India, philosophy is commonly supposed to be a soteriological enterprise. It is an attempt to attain enlightenment, or epistemological salvation: release from an imagined world of pain and suffering. . . . This epistemological sense of salvation was characteristic of many forms of Buddhism" (Perl and Tuck 119). See also Murti 141.

full circle. The end of the journey offers not the knowledge of 'conclusion,' but a renewed vision which enables us to see that the beginning and the end are one (reality):

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.

(LG, V)

Nevertheless, we will have gained such wisdom as connects us to the whole truth of reality. For, although "the journey brings us to the exact point from which we started," says Eliot in the essay "Degrees of Reality,"

We shall be enriched, I trust, by our experiences on the Grand Tour, but we shall not have been allowed to convey any material treasures through the Custom House. And the wisdom which we shall have acquired will not be part of the argument which brings us to the conclusion; it is not part of the books, but is written in pencil on the fly-leaf.

(Qtd. in Perl and Tuck 119)

Eliot thus concludes the last Quartet where he began the first, with the voices of unseen children which point the way beyond all antinomies — a way that not only transcends the dichotomy between appearance and reality, this world and the next, but also encompasses every different view and belief — towards "the impossible union" of all distinctions and differences. For Eliot, just as for the Madhyamika, the multiple, "different voices" or viewpoints are induced into and melded with the source of the real "voice" of wisdom. "At the source of the long river," the river that runs through the end of "Little Gidding," taking up, among other allusions, the river metaphors⁷ of the Upanishadic and

⁷ As was mentioned in the second chapter of this study, the river is a favorite metaphor in Buddhism: a *bodhisattva* resolves, "I must rescue all these beings from the stream of Samsara . . . I must ferry them across the stream of Samsara" (Conze, *Buddhist Texts Through the Ages* 131). In the Upanishads, rivers are used as symbols of as yet unmerged individuality. "'These rivers, my dear, flow, . . . go just from the ocean to the ocean. They become the ocean itself. As there they know not 'I am this one,' 'I am that one'" (*Chandogya Upanishad* 6. 10. 1); "As the flowing rivers in the ocean / Disappear, quitting name and form [individuality], / So the knower, being liberated from name and form, / Goes unto the Heavenly Person, higher than the high" (*Mundaka Upanishad* 3. 2. 8). In *Thirteen Principal Upanishads* 246, 376.

Buddhist classics, we find the “voice of the hidden waterfall / and the children in the apple tree” and rediscover between two waves of the sea “[a] condition of complete simplicity” and unity — the reality of all inseparable opposites.

YIN-YANG AND THE HIGHER THIRD

Throughout *Four Quartets* Eliot consistently treats reality in terms of opposites and a third mediating force or center, from which emanates revelations of truth and visions of reality. The antithetical mode of thought and the principle of antithetical rotation in the workings of the universe are as central to Eliot as they were to Lao-Tzu in terms of philosophical orientation and an understanding of the nature of reality. Remarkable similarities in Eliot — his language, methodology and semantics — to Taoist mysticism and philosophy, and, indeed, in the Quartets, the dialectics, the relativistic and yet all-inclusive point of view, the principle of circularity, and perceptions of the absolute as the representation of the harmonious co-existence of opposites — all relentlessly sensitize the reader to Taoist ways of thinking. Moreover, the relative synchronistic principle⁸ as a means of understanding reality is as much a key to *Four Quartets* as it is to the ancient Chinese classics of *I Ching* and *Tao Te Ching*.⁹ Most of all, just as Taoism posits the essence of Tao as the absolute union of all opposites, for Eliot, too, such union is of divine intention; when, through striving, he ‘houses’ his opposites harmoniously at the still point (the third, all-embracing and transcending force), they merge into unity in a manner which

⁸ The term is used to connote simultaneous acceptance of both opposites — the “both-and” vision of perceiving things or events in their totalistic terms; i.e., while experiencing the dark, one sees or comprehends light behind dark. It is not to be confused with the Jungian term “synchronicity,” the concurrence of events, thoughts, symbols or psychic states in time.

⁹ The poetic language and structure of the *Tao Te Ching*, together with its mind-stretching qualities, are remarkably similar to what is to be found in *Four Quartets*. *Tao Te Ching* exhibits a rush of language and a boldness and exuberance of expression for which paradox is the only adequate form. Its elusiveness has earned it renown as one of the most difficult of the world’s religio-philosophical treatises.

reveals that they are not opposites at all, but dual aspects of the same reality. In relation then to these themes of unity, the present section will pursue, from Taoist perspectives, Eliot's manner of resolving the problem of opposites, and explore the philosophical implications of the third force that reconciles them into a harmonious "co-existence" (BN, V).

Before the discussion commences however, the validity of the Taoist approach to Eliot, especially in relation to his concepts of the still point and transcendence, needs to be made clear. According to C. G. Jung, the idea of the mediating "third" is unique to Asia. Jung states:

Unfortunately, our Western mind, lacking all culture in this respect, has never yet devised a concept, not even a name, for *the union of opposites through the middle path*, that most fundamental item of inward experience which could respectably be set against the Chinese concept of Tao.

(7: 203)

Elizabeth Drew, though unaware of Jung's remark, essentially (yet indirectly) agrees with him when she makes an apt observation on the origin of Eliot's still point. According to Drew, Heraclitus (although he, like the Taoist, interpreted reality in terms of opposites) had no concept of a still point where all the emotional oppositions are "gathered" and "conquered" and "reconciled" — given new meaning — in terms of resolution (148). Drew further states, "[Heraclitus'] concept of reconciliation is that of perpetual sustaining tension between opposites and not of a center of resolution" (155).

Complementary to Heraclitus' position, but perhaps more limiting, is the Hindu notion of opposites. In Hinduism, Brahman is the union and dissolution of all opposites, and yet, at the same time, Brahman stands outside all opposites (Jung 6: 197). To the orthodox Hindu, *moksa* means a complete freedom from or transcendence of the tensions of opposite pairs. However, as Chinese sages discovered a millennium ago (a discovery with

which modern physics and Jungian psychology now agree), there is no life without the “burden” of gravity — the dynamic “tension” (BN,V) between opposing forces. A complete transcendence (as in Hinduism) could therefore mean death, non-existence. As for Bradley, although his concept of the Absolute most closely resembles that of the Taoist-Buddhist understanding (Tao, the Middle Way), his Absolute, being a purely philosophical abstraction, lacks religious significance — a religious significance which is essential in the meaning of Eliot’s still point.

At one point, this Eastern concept of the absolute as the inclusive, reconciling ‘third,’¹⁰ cryptically enters in Eliot’s poetry as Incarnation in the Christian context. Eliot’s adoption of this idea is clearly and significantly illuminated in the following passage from *The Waste Land*:

Who is *the third* who walks always beside you?
 When I count, there are only you and I together
 But when I look ahead up the white road
 There is always another one walking beside you
 Gliding wrapt in a brown mantle, hooded
 I do not know whether a man or a woman
 — But who is that on the other side of you?
 (73; emphasis added)

As noted, Eliot’s Taoist affinities are unmistakable. The key concept in Taoist philosophy is that of Tao. Though Tao is often translated ‘the Way,’ it is, in its transcendental aspects, the Undivided Unity which lies behind all phenomena. The phenomenal world that we know is seen as a coming-out of Tao — a breaking up of the Undivided Unity into the polar opposites of Yin and Yang, which dominate and determine all human perception. These polar opposites, however, exist only in the phenomenal world. They do not exist in Tao, to which the spiritual man longs to return. As some ‘thing’ which functions to heterogeneously form one entity (cf. Chap. 25), Tao has the

¹⁰ The metaphysics of the higher third is explained in Benoît’s book, and is called the Superior or Conciliatory Principle (See Benoît 6-7).

power of unifying opposites and of bringing them into harmonious co-existence. In terms of meaning, Tao refers to a metaphysical reality, a natural law, and to a principle or pattern for human life (Ch'en Ku-ying 2).

The concept of Yin and Yang, the origin of which is found in *I Ching*, constitutes one of the basic and pervasive themes in Taoist thought. It is used to describe all manner of oppositions and complementarities in the physical and metaphysical worlds. Yin and Yang are universal counterparts: Yin is the universal symbol of the female, of tenderness, responsiveness, earth, coolness, while Yang is the counterpart of Yin, representing the universal symbol of male, of firmness, creativity, heaven, heat. Yin and Yang, being the two inseparable, complementary, interdependent poles of cosmic energy alternating in space and time, are also emblems evoking the balance and harmonious interplay of all pairs of opposites in the universe. They establish a dual thrust similar to the attraction and repulsion of magnetic fields, and are comparable in cosmic scope to the tiger and lamb of Blake. As Watts observes, "The Yin-Yang principle is not . . . what we would ordinarily call a dualism, but rather an explicit duality expressing an implicit unity" (26). And the metaphor Watts uses to explain the yin-yang relation illuminates Eliot's central intent in *Four Quartets*: "the different, but inseparable, sides of the same coin" (23).

Significantly, Yin and Yang are not substance in themselves, but descriptive symbols of a relationship, the relationship of opposites. If Yin were to have a substantial being, it could exist by itself. However, it exists only in its relation to Yang; likewise, Yang exists only in its relation to Yin. It is *relation* that defines the existence of Yin and Yang. Indeed, in our phenomenal world, nothing is realized except in relation to an opposite. One cannot realize light except in relation to dark, nor masculine except in relation to feminine, or 'before' except in relation to 'after,' good except in relation to evil. The complementary interdependent nature of all phenomena — the interrelatedness of existence — which Buddhism calls "dependent origination" — is concisely stated in *Tao Te Ching*:

For what is and what is not beget each other;
 Difficult and easy complete each other;
 Long and short show each other;
 High and low place each other;
 Noise and sound harmonize each other;
 Before and behind follow each other.
 (Chap. 2)

Such 'laws' of relativity and of the complementariness of phenomena are indispensable to Eliot's convictions. In the method of Taoist dialectic that Eliot employs, affirmation of the reality of any one category implies also the existence of its opposite. In poet's own words, "... you cannot even say it changes except in reference to something which does not change; the idea of change is impossible without the idea of permanence" (qtd. in Dobrée 75).

Eliot assiduously applies this principle of complementariness to both the structure and content of the Quartets. In "East Coker," evocation of the whole rose garden scene is done with the recognition that its reality involves its opposite. The ecstasy is "not lost, but requiring, pointing to the agony / Of death and birth" (EC, III). The ecstasy requires the agony; that is, it exacts it, and also, paradoxically, it requests it. According to Eliot, since the one presupposes existence of the other, we cannot speak of the one without the other. The two aspects are counterparts, but they are complementary for the completion of the whole.

This dynamic interplay can be further understood by examining the image and functions of the still point in terms of its Eastern counterpart, *T'ai-ki*, the Chinese symbol representing the complementary relationship of the archetypal opposites Yin and Yang. By means of the still point, Eliot presents the poetic emblem that is the most precise equivalent of his central concern with unity and reintegration, not only of the shattered psyche of the individual and of the separated fragments of the larger body politic, but also of the structure of history, vision and poetry itself. Eliot describes the still point synchronistically: a living

center in which, as the opposites co-exist together, “the impossible / Of spheres of existence is actual” (DS, V). Both the image and function of the still point resemble those of *T'ai-ki*, the Great Ultimate that perpetuates itself by the ‘action’ of opposite pairs producing both movement and harmony — the force that reconciles “the boarhound and the boar” and holds them together (BN, II).

T'ai-ki is the source and union of the two primary aspects (Yin-Yang) of the cosmos. As we see from the diagram,¹¹ it is a perfect symmetricalness of Change or Tao in which both Yin and Yang or darkness and light are harmoniously intertwined.



This diagram illustrates the fact that light is not absolutely light but is also dark — notice the dark dot; and darkness is not absolutely dark, as signified by the dot of light. Just as the light principle presupposes the existence of the dark in it, the dark principle presupposes the existence of light in it. In other words, in Yang, Yin is hidden but manifest; and vice versa: “So the darkness shall be the light, and the stillness the dancing” (EC, III). This concept and logic explain Eliot’s paradoxical definition of the still point as containing both stillness and movement:

At the still point of the turning world. Neither flesh nor fleshless;
Neither from nor towards; at the still point, there the dance is,
But neither arrest nor movement. And do not call it fixity,
Where past and future are gathered. Neither movement from nor
towards,
Neither ascent nor decline. Except for the point, the still point,
There would be no dance, and there is only the dance.

(BN, II)

¹¹ Eliot was well informed of the meaning of this symbol as it appears in the book he read (See Benoît 7). This diagram is ubiquitous in East Asia — in temple decorations, in artwork, etc. — as it represents the balance and harmony of the universe. The diagram also appears in and is the name of the Korean flag.

The passage creates a mental picture that this dance of harmony "at the still point" is that of the swirl of Yin and Yang linked to a circle.

Again, it is characteristic of the thought of the Quartets that destructive or chaotic forces are presented as containing the seeds of their opposites. Thus darkness produces light, chaos produces order, and death gives rise to life. In the Quartets, these opposites of light and darkness, life and death, heat and cold, sound and silence do not follow one another in any time-sequence; they are together and inseparable, like the rose's blossoms and thorns. The difference between opposites is none other than a degree of intensification: darkness is light de-intensified, and light is darkness de-intensified.

Eliot follows the same line of reasoning in his understanding of the life (birth)-death relationship. Just as the day is born out of night, life arises from death. Death is the background of life and life is the foreground of death. They are counterparts but never in conflict. Just as the moon appears when the sun is hidden, life withdraws itself within death. Since one arises from the other, there is no way to describe one without the other. Both are always together, keeping balance and harmony: "And the end and the beginning were always there" (BN, V). Death is always with life; "the time of death is every moment" (DS, III), states Eliot.

Just as when we observe the day as a whole we can notice the co-existence of both the light and darkness, from the synchronistic viewpoint of Tao, so there is no clear distinction between death and life: "In my beginning is my end" and "In my end is my beginning" (EC, I & V). Illustrating the same principle, Eliot at another point says, "And where you are is where you are not" (EC, III). These opposites then are the phenomenal distinctions of one reality.

One of the most obvious of life's experiences deals with the 'dichotomy' of silence and sound. Since most of our thinking process is based on "either-or" ways of classification, we do not have the capacity to recognize both sound and silence at the same

time. When we hear music, for example, we do not notice the presence of silence in the background. When the music stops, silence is recognized. But silence has existed all along as the music was played. Whenever there is silence, there is also sound, and whenever there is sound, there is silence as its background. Though existentially different, the two are essentially united. Sound and silence are simply the 'unmanifestation' of each. They cannot be separated, because one is not possible without the other: their existence is "but the co-existence" (BN, V). In such regard, the beginning lines of the fifth movement of "Burnt Norton" are a profound statement on the relative simultaneity of opposites — opposites which are resolved into a harmonious "pattern":

Words move, music moves
 Only in time; but that which is only living
 Can only die. Words, after speech, reach
 Into the silence. Only by the form, the pattern,
 Can words or music reach
 The stillness, as a Chinese jar still
 Moves perpetually in its stillness.
 Not the stillness of the violin, while the note lasts,
 Not that only, but the co-existence,
 Or say that the end precedes the beginning,
 And the end and the beginning were always there
 Before the beginning and after the end.
 And all is always now.

(BN, V)

Virtually, every line of the passage exhibits opposites, and points to their unity. This is basically the "both-and" or synchronistic approach to the understanding of reality; as such, in Eliot's view, it must also be the approach to an understanding of art.

This synchronistic vision of reality gave Eliot a different view from the one which holds that a poet should deal only with the world of the beautiful.

We mean all sorts of things, I know, by Beauty. But the essential advantage for a poet is not to have a beautiful world with which to deal: it is to be able to see beneath both beauty and ugliness; to see the boredom, and the horror, and the glory.

(*The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism* 98)

By "Beauty," Eliot is alluding to the synchronistic principle of unity, or what is known as the "higher third" in the East. According to Humphreys,

As Truth makes a higher third of truth and untruth, the Good above both good and evil, and Beauty above the ugly and beautiful, so above every one of the pairs of opposites is, on the plane of Non-duality, in raised consciousness a vision of that which unites the two.

(*The Searches Within* 76)

The synchronistic principle does not separate Yin from Yang, the 'one' from the 'other'; rather, it affirms the simultaneous acceptance of both opposites or counterparts. Eliot does not therefore separate beauty and ugliness, light and dark, heat and cold, life and death, the parts and the whole. (Also notice Eliot's frequent use of the phrase "both-and" as in "Both one and many" and "Both bad and good" [LG, II]) Instead, keeping within the controlling metaphors of these opposites, he points in the Quartets to their resolution and reconciliation of them. The apparently conflicting are all essential parts of an eternal moving pattern or *T'ai-ki*, existing simultaneously in all the elements in nature and linking conflicts in a dynamic unity and whole. From under the "sodden floor" on up to the stars, connected through the cosmic tree,¹² there streams, back and forth, this uninterrupted cosmic energy, forming itself into harmonious living patterns:

Garlic and sapphires in the mud
Clot the bedded axle-tree.
The trilling wire in the blood
Sings below inveterate scars
Appeasing long forgotten wars.
The dance along the artery
The circulation of the lymph
Are figured in the drift of stars
Ascend to summer in the tree
We move above the moving tree
In light upon the figured leaf

¹² According to M. Eliade, "[t]he most widely distributed variant of the symbolism of the Center is the Cosmic Tree, situated in the middle of the Universe," and upholding Heaven and Earth as "upon one axis" (44).

And hear upon the sodden floor
 Below, the boarhound and the boar
 Pursue their pattern as before
 But reconciled among the stars.
 (BN, II)

Since the quoted passage, the beginning two lines in particular, has intrigued and perplexed a number of Eliot scholars, further clarification here is necessary. Structurally, the first two lines represent the human (the earthly), and are juxtaposed to the remainder of the passage in which the rhythm of Heaven or the cosmos is suggested. Within these two lines, the garlic and sapphire constitute another set of antithetical elements — the former connoting the human realm and the latter the celestial. Garlic is perishable and is subject to cyclic seasonal change, while sapphire stands for permanence — for heaven, even in its color.¹³ The beginning two lines are an expression of the general unsatisfactoriness of ordinary empirical existence, the sense that things are not as they should be — that is, life is *dukkha*, the state of conflict and disharmony. Stated differently, the ostensible disharmony and disunity between “Garlic and sapphires” represents the *existential* level of seeing or experiencing Yin-Yang opposites. The poet seems to be saying that the conflict and imperfection inherent in human existence should be projected into a larger frame of reference — the rhythm of the cosmos, which, according to Eliot, is consistent and harmonious.¹⁴ Soon, in a moment of reality, all these oppositions of the phenomenal world are united and “reconciled.” The discord on the earth is now seen as inseparably united with the larger cosmic rhythms — an involvement in a pattern of harmony. The “[s]inging” and “dancing” — words associated with rhythm and harmony — are for Eliot,

¹³ Mythologically, garlic is also closely tied with human existence. According to Korean creation myth, for instance, the son of Heaven, Hwan-Ung, descended to Earth and married a bear-turned-girl, who had lived on garlic for 100 days until was transformed into a human being.

¹⁴ In Taoism, as Zaehner aptly points out, “Heaven represents the regularity of natural law, earth the flux of life and death.” The heaven-earth relationship (reconciliation) is suggested in the following passage from *Chuang Tzu*: “the earth, the Great Clod [that] burdens me with form, labours me with life, eases me in old age, and rests me in death. . . .” (6: 6, qtd. in *Concordant Discord* 226). Eliot’s passage as a whole seems to suggest a similar line of thought.

as for the Taoist, images of that proper harmonious interplay of Yin-Yang opposites that is the basic movement of the universe, a movement which is mirrored in the life of any who may be made new by affirming this cosmic harmony. In this respect, the last two lines of the passage may be compared to the line from *Tao Te Ching*: "He who follows Tao is one with Tao" (Chap. 23).

In "Little Gidding," the sun and frost blend in perfect harmony "in windless cold that is the heart's heat" (LG, I). The snow itself is "blossom." Depicting such moments of bliss brought about through unity among disparities and opposites, Eliot seems to be posing this question: if the union of spring and winter has this glory, what then is the potential for the full consciousness and complete union of opposites? And his implied answer is that this union or perfect blending of Yin and Yang constitutes the state of Tao, the absolute. In Taoism, in terms of season, Yin represents winter and Yang the summer. By "the unimaginable / Zero summer" — the imagery that reminds the reader of the summit of Himalaya, where the ice and the sun literally "co-exist" — Eliot draws in precise poetic language a metaphysical — indeed mathematical — picture of the absolute as the complete union of the great Yin (the high winter, represented in the poem as "Zero") and the great Yang (the high summer).

By the end of "Little Gidding" all conflicts and opposites are conquered by the crowned kingship of love, the primary orientation of which is union. All the "tongues" which have spoken for the spirit of man are merged into "a single party" (LG, III). The rose (Yin) mates with fire (Yang), becoming "one," and thereby earth and heaven coalesce at one center — the still point, the living reality of unity and harmony. In this realm of the spiritual center, a condition of simplicity is recovered and reigns. Here we are utterly empty, still, and sincerely as "intent" as at "the moment of death" (DS, III).

Lao-Tzu observes that in the workings of nature there exists a constant principle of antithetical rotation. All phenomena are in a state of flux, and this flux follows a "pattern"

of moving in one direction until an extreme is reached; the phenomena thereupon begins moving in the opposite direction to the antithetical extreme. From observing this developmental process of the phenomenal world, Lao-Tzu discovers that there is a principle of circularity which underlies all natural growth and which ultimately leads things back to their original state. Lao-Tzu declares: "Returning is the motion of Tao" and "To be far is to return" (Chaps. 40, 25). "Returning" refers here to the circular, developmental process which leads back to the point of origin.

In his awareness of the principle of circular movement of phenomena, Eliot too adopts a circle as his designate or favorite symbol, and projects an imaginative picture of all of his movements on it. The circle is perfect for this metaphysical symbolism, as its configuration makes "going far" synonymous with coming back. Understood in this light, the circular motion of "returning" in the last strophe of "Little Gidding" is close to the supreme essence of Taoist philosophy. The ending lines set a final seal upon the overarching, symbolic mating of Yin the rose and Yang the fire:

*We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time.
Through the unknown, remembered gate
When the last of earth left to discover
Is that which was the beginning;
At the source of the longest river
The voice of the hidden waterfall
And the children in the apple-tree
Not known, because not looked for
But heard, half-heard, in the stillness
Between two waves of the sea.
Quick now, here, now, always—
A condition of complete simplicity
(Costing not less than everything)*

...
And the fire and the rose are one.
(LG, V; emphasis added)

The first three lines of the passage are very much like Lao-Tzu's counsel when he states,

To be great is to go on.
 To go on is to be far.
 To be far is to return.
 (Chap. 25)

"We shall not cease" to explore, for "if there is no going, there can be no returning"; according to *I Ching*, "this is the fixed relationship between Heaven and Earth" (Ch'en Ku-yin 42). Eliot in "East Coker" avows that "As we grow older / . . . the pattern [becomes] more complicated / Of dead and living" (EC, V) — a complication caused by separation (moving far away) from the state of Tao. He thus charges us to return to the state of primeval origin, committing ourselves to the original childlike state of simplicity¹⁵ and genuineness where we experience once again the wholeness of the vision.

However, to transcend the subject-object dichotomy and reach such condition of simplicity requires *ipso facto* that one transcend the subject; one must thoroughly abandon the self and the ideas of it as well: "Costing not less than everything." For the Tao is that state of complete simplicity that exists in the absence of the "I" (Allison 149). Like Eliot, Lao-Tzu too refers repeatedly to a state of simplicity, encouraging human beings to return to their original and natural genuineness and to preserve their childlike mentality; at the same time, Lao-Tzu qualifies the self-abandonment he advocates:

Keep to simplicity.
 Grasp the primal
 Reduce the self
 And curb desire.
 (Chap. 19)

¹⁵ Simplicity — the "uncarved (block)" and "unstained" (Pu) as it is called in Taoist texts — was the ideal. The ultimate reality of an undifferentiation is formless and abodeless, but since it cannot be expressed without some form, the simplest possible as the nearest approximation to the state of the Ultimate is the most appreciated in East Asian culture. As in Lao Tzu's concept, simplicity in Eliot refers to the primal, the state of "nothing-wanting, which is neither an action nor a non-action but a state of being"; this state of wholeness (the union with the primal) is possible when self-attachment (self-interest) is eliminated (Maurer 34).

Again, Eliot's "complete simplicity," like Lao-Tzu's, refers to wholeness, nothing-wanting, which involves neither action nor non-action but is a state of being (Maurer 34) — a unified state of Tao. In this state of simplicity, the Yin-Yang forces are blended in perfect harmony and balance. On the other hand, 'the source of the river' is where we find the mind of Tao or Undivided Unity. That is to say, something "not known, because not looked for" is the homeland of Tao. "At the source of the longest river" there subsists a point of primordial, real, unified living potential. And the mind of Tao is to be found "in the stillness" of equanimity (a balanced way of living), "Between two waves of the sea." On this idea of unity between waves, N. J. Girardot offers a pertinent and valuable observation:

It can be said that the mystical return to an experience of primal unity implies a necessary cosmological interrelation of body and spirit, the reunion or marriage of yin and yang, the co-existence and co-penetration of the one and the two, nonbeing and being, the uncreated and the created, egg and chicken. All of this in the early Taoist texts is rooted metaphysically in the cosmogonic mystery of the third term or central gap — the "betwixt and between" — of chaos.

(43)

In our empirical existence we draw innumerable distinctions that result in a dualistic view of the universe. There are high and low, great and small, this and that, — an infinite number of dualities. Eliot, like the Taoist, asks whether within these dualities any real distinctions exist. One stick may be shorter than another and yet longer than a third. Consequently, the stick embraces the apparently opposing qualities of longness and shortness; duality exists no longer in its highest aspect. To realize the "suchness" of the stick is the essence of the higher third, the absolute. Taken at the level of human experience, the understanding of this absolute is an inner experience in which distinction between subject and object vanishes — through intuitive and immediate awareness. The way to resolution of value conflicts, however, is through the elimination of the subject "I."

Eliot wishes us to break the shackle of the self, to see ourselves as an integral part of the cosmic whole — to enter the realm of Tao — and become as “the uncarved block” in all our original simplicity. In *Four Quartets* it is urged that, to sublimate ourselves to this level of mind, we model ourselves on the “pattern” of the universe; and we realize thus the highest potential of human existence.

HERE - NOW: THE INTERSECTION

Life — its evolution — must be envisaged in the space-time totality which envelops it, dominates it. To Eliot (who, like Eastern mystics, holds a dynamic, organic view of the world), time and space — like all the elements and relations of the universe — are no longer a priori categories of existence, but are mutually interdependent and together constitute a continuum. It is the absolute “now” or the passing moment of the present where, Eliot observes, space and time are coalesced and yet begin to differentiate. Space and time, rolled up at the “now” with all their past achievements, lie there dormant, as it were, with all their possible futurities. For Eliot, as for the Taoist and Buddhist, experiencing the fullness of the immediacy of the present is (in a respect) to exist in the undifferentiated whole. And as liberation to both Eliot and Oriental sages is the experience of this undifferentiation, to be in space-time continuum means to transcend our birth-and-death existence; for “a space-time continuum” is after all that “in which space is no longer space, nor time time” (Jung 8: 481). However, the “mixed” experiences of the past are chaos unless arranged in an orderly pattern. According to Eliot, it is essential that the past be examined and ordered prior to being transcended. Significantly, moreover, knowing and arranging the past is to be connected to it; it is an exercise necessary to awareness of the timeless bond and inseparable unity between the living and the dead, between the

present and the past — and awareness also of the unity between the particular and the universal, between one and all.

A primary aim of Eliot in *Four Quartets* is to find a way to achieve “through time” liberation from time-bound existence. Speaking of the meaning of liberation, Eliot posits the following:

Time past and time future
 Allow but a little consciousness.
 To be conscious is not to be in time
 But only in time can the moment in the rose garden,
 The moment in the draughty church at smokefall,
 Be remembered; involved with past and future,
 Only through time time is conquered.

(BN, II)

The philosophical inference here is that time (past and time future) offers one scant awareness of existence; in fact, it offers none except when apprehended in the present. While liberation consists of ‘lifting’ consciousness out of time, our efforts to achieve illumination must take place in time. The experience of the moment of illumination is meaningful only within the context of temporal relations. But to be liberated from time through time is a difficult task for the ordinary person to actualize; and perhaps, as Smidt points out (216), this sense of difficulty is responsible for the pessimistic note of the last two lines of “Burnt Norton,” in which time is portrayed merely as “Ridiculous . . . / Stretching before and after” (BN, V). The solution which Eliot conceived, as suggested in the passage above, is that (in order to be truly liberated from time) experiences be understood in terms of the unity of past, present and future, since all things, though apparently divided, constitute one reality and correlate closely with each other; we must “consider the past and the future with an equal mind” (DS, III).

Indeed, existence, as Eliot and Buddhism perceive it, is a chain of causation. It is impossible for an individual to avoid being the consequence of what has gone before — that is to say, it is impossible to stand apart from the chain of cause and effect — since that

chain is precisely what it means to exist. Life is cumulative, with a chaotic jumble of events and a rapidly moving sequence of cause and effect. Likewise, the true nature of time, being a reflection of human existence, is meaningless, empty, chaotic unless patterned into an orderly, ideal arrangement in human consciousness, i.e., the harmonious co-existence of all time — at the moment of intense concentration.

There are in Eliot's work several illustrations of the concept that the past, present and future are continually merged in the most disconcerting ways. "April is the cruellest month . . . mixing / Memory and desire" (*The Waste Land* 61). The "reminiscent bells" of Part V in *The Waste Land*, tolling upside down, toll for the future as well as the past. Golgotha and the Thunder of the Upanishads belong to the past, yet are brought into the present, and we already hear the rain which may fall in the future, and which therefore falls and does not fall. In *Four Quartets*, disordered time is metaphorized as bits of paper — as refuse. Indeed, Eliot says,

We cannot think of a time that is oceanless
Or of an ocean not littered with wastage
Or of a future that is not liable,
Like the past, to have no destination.
(DS, II)

The above is also illustrative of the relentless workings of *karma* — the consequences of the past 'manifesting' in the present and bearing their fruits on into the future; at the same time thereby, relatedness of the divisions of time is implied. What Eliot suggests through these illustrations is that neither the rejection of time (which is not possible, anyway, despite our abiding instinct to escape from it) nor the acceptance of the human predicament is a genuine, final means of liberation from the time-bound human condition. Rather, in order to achieve 'liberation,' we must arrange time — or our experience of it — into a meaningful, ordered unity in our consciousness and focus on the fullness of experiencing the momentary *now*. Eliot, in *The Family Reunion*, cryptically addresses this

idea in connection with Harry's way of achieving a possible salvation. In the play, Agatha articulates the problem to Harry:

What is in your mind, Harry?
I can guess about the past and what you mean about the future:
But a present is missing, needed to connect them.

(330)

And, indeed, in one reality, nothing is isolated. "To connect them" is to be aware of their co-relatedness and to "piece together the past and the future" (DS, I) into an orderly pattern through the meaningful bond of the present — into a unity of one reality to which past, present and future all belong. By doing so, according to Eliot, Harry may yet achieve freedom from *karma*. And freedom from *karma*, after all, means freedom not only from the actions one performs but also from any responsibility for them.

In *Four Quartets*, through "the use of memory" (LG, III), Eliot attempts to set "littered" time in order (DS, II). Past and future are seen as apprehensions — through the mode of memory — of a continuing present; and understanding memory — the mnemonical concept — enables us to understand and appreciate the redemption of time. Buddhist historian A. B. Keith considers the role of memory central in a world ever coming to be — the world which is a dynamic succession of events in the extensive togetherness of all that is occurring. He writes, "Memory turns the wheel of life" (160). For our existence is cumulative, and memory, operating behind the curtain of linguistic form, binds past events into new integrations in an instant and self-surpassing flow. However, we must not, retrace, relish, relive or "revive" the past per se. It is not recollection of the past — its 'reenactment' — that is our bondage, but rather our efforts to cling "to that dimension" (DS, V). Eliot counsels us:

This is the use of memory:
For liberation . . .

. . .

From the future as well as the past.
 . . . History may be servitude.
 History may be freedom. See, now they vanish,
 The traces and places, with the self . . .
 To become renewed, transfigured, in another pattern.
 (LG, III)

Like the Buddha, Eliot perceives reality as a social process, each immediate present inheriting and synthesizing the past into novel form, this process expressing itself as memory on the individual level, giving us directly a personal past, and on the collective level expressing itself as history. The fact that all events are caused must not be construed to mean that they bear within themselves their fully determined future. Each present event, on the contrary, is an addition to the old; each unifies itself with the past and passes beyond it into something new.

That is, reality is a transition; the moment is on the move. The past is previous events in present ones, and each passing moment contributes its concrete quality to — remains an element in — the undivided wholeness of what is constantly coming to be. The experience of life's dynamic flow is found thus in the concrete immediacy of the present — in comparison with which, all else is a pale abstraction. Eliot iterates this Buddhist perception of reality in the opening lines of "Burnt Norton":

Time present and time past
 Are both perhaps present in time future,
 And time future contained in time past.
 If all time is eternally present
 All time is unredeemable.
 What might have been is an abstraction
 Remaining a perpetual possibility
 Only in a world of speculation.
 What might have been and what has been
 Point to one end, which is always present.
 (BN, I)

The fourth and fifth lines bespeak Eliot's and the Taoist-Buddhist world-view — their view of time as a spontaneous and dynamic process, not as something "eternally present." Read

closely from this perspective, these two lines suggest the possibility of redemption of time:¹⁶ since time is not a constant or permanent entity (to think of it as permanent is indeed an illusion, says the Buddhist), “some” time, though not “all time,” may be redeemable. And this “some” time is the present and the future, which can be redeemed by concentrating on or experiencing the fullness of the momentary “now,” and thus redirecting the chain of causation into ways which lead to release. For this reason, though memory plays a considerable part in “Burnt Norton,” Eliot does not allow nostalgia or evasion to dominate the poem. He achieves this ‘disallowance’ in the only way possible, by returning the reader firmly to the “here and now” in which, alone, both positive and negative possibilities can be realized: “What might have been and what has been,” he insists, “Point to one end, which is always present” (BN, I).

The second movement of “Burnt Norton” speaks of something apprehensible, a “grace of sense, a white light still and moving.” Eliot’s comment on this light stresses not its “out of time” dimension, though that is affirmed, but its reinscription back into time. Mystical ecstasy is valuable but not ultimate; the “fall” back into natural life is both a form of protection for those who “cannot bear too much reality” (BN, I) and a necessary return to a medium, a body, in and through which that ecstasy is again brought into relation with history, community, and the world of sensual experience. This “returning” involves knowing, nondiscursively, that ““there is Bodhi [awakening, enlightenment] even in depravities and Nirvana even in life and death,”” as Eliot had noted during one of Anesaki’s lectures (qtd. in Kearns 83), and that the reality, as opposed to the thought, of mystical liberation comes into full play only when it infuses the present (earthly experience) and informs one’s ongoing sense of community and history through faith. ““Vain is the holding the Lotus of the Truth without this heritage of faith,”” Eliot’s notes on Nichiren read (qtd. in Kearns 83). The point is as relevant to Christian tradition as to East Asian

¹⁶ The majority of Eliot scholars have interpreted these lines literally, and thus ‘negatively.’

Buddhism from which it comes. Only in the "here and now," and not in a nostalgic dream of lost vision, can there rise the hidden laughter of children in which knowledge and experience, essence and existence, are one:

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—
 (BN, V)

The momentary "now" is the absolute. As does the Buddhist, Eliot equates "here-now" with the Middle Way and locates it at a point of "intersection" between time and the timeless. That is, "now" is where eternity (the universal) and time (the particular) intersect. Eliot's "intersection" concept is remarkably similar to the *Rijimuge* and *Jijimuge* doctrines of the Tendai (T'ien-t'ai) and Kegon (Hua-yen) schools of East Asian Buddhism,¹⁷ where *Ji* refers to things, events, the concrete and the particular, while *Ri* is the principle, the abstract, the totality, the universal. *Rijimuge* refers to the interdiffusion of all *Ji* and *Ri*, the notion that *Ri-Ji* is a mode or aspect of an undivided unity; *Rijimuge* seeks the Buddha (the Universal) in the individual mind (Humphreys, *Buddhism* 151). On the other hand, *Jijimuge* refers to the "unimpeded interdiffusion" of Absolute Reality and each individual "thing"—the doctrine meaning that the Universal (Buddha) is to be found in every particular thing: "All things are *directly* each other, completely, and altogether" (Humphreys, *Buddhism* 171). Understood like the *Sunyata* (the Middle Way, Emptiness), Zen Buddhists claim that the *Jijimuge* philosophy brings one the insight that the world of

¹⁷ These Buddhist sects were founded in China. The Tendai (T'ien-t'ai in Chinese) school closely follows the Middle Way philosophy of Nagarjuna. The Kegon (Hua-yen in Chinese and Hwa-um in Korean) sect advocates the fusion between the Buddha mind and the phenomenal world; it also emphasizes the doctrine of inclusion of the whole in the part, as well as the reciprocal immanence of things. As a philosophy, the Hua-yen represented organismic thought, which later influenced neo-Confucian Philosophy; as a religion, it held, through the doctrine of interfusion, universal salvation: every human being can attain Buddhahood, for the Buddha mind is present in each thing. *Jijimuge* is called *shih-shih-wu-ai* in Chinese. Cf. S. V. McCasland, et al., *Religions of the World* 585-590.

distinction is false; thus discrimination falls away. In application, "there is nothing infinite apart from finite things, naught holy or profane." Humphreys offers us the further illustration that, in the state of *Jijimuge*, "There is neither here nor there, for all is always Here; there is neither now nor then, for all is Now; there is neither this nor that, . . . [but] there is only This, in a here and now" (*Buddhism* 17).

In Eliot's frame of thought on the *Jijimuge* doctrine, Now is the intersection, and intersection is that which strikes the still point in the "here and now." This Now intersection — the still-point relation — may be examined in and compared with the following remarks by D. T. Suzuki:

Satori obtains when eternity cuts into time or impinges upon time, or . . . when time emerges itself into eternity. . . . Eternity impinging upon time will then mean that . . . to use Kegon terminology, the interfusion of *ri* (the universal) and *ji* (the individual). . . . *When time is reduced to a point with no durability, it is "absolute present" or "eternal now."* From the point of view of existential thinking, this "absolute present" is no abstraction, no logical nothingness; it is, on the contrary, alive with creative vitality. . . . Eternity to be alive must come down into the order of time where it can work out all its possibilities, whereas time left to itself has no field of operation. Time must be merged into eternity, when it gains its meaning. Time by itself is non-existent very much in the way that eternity is impotent without time. It is in our actual living of eternity that the notion of time is possible. Each moment of living marks the steps of eternity. To take hold of eternity, therefore, consciousness must be awakened just at the very moment when eternity lifts its feet to step into time. This moment is what is known as the "absolute present" or "eternal now." *It is an absolute point of time where there is no past left behind, no future waiting ahead. Satori stands at this moment, where potentialities are about to actualize themselves.* Satori does not come out of death; it is at the very moment of actualization. It is in fact the moment itself, which means that it is life as it lives itself.¹⁸

(*Living by Zen* 53-55; emphasis added)

¹⁸ The striking parallels between Eliot's concepts of the still point and the intersection and Suzuki's concept of *satori* are another vivid testimony to how firmly Buddhist philosophy and metaphysics shaped Eliot's mind. There can be no doubt that Eliot through the Anesaki lectures, in which all major East Asian Buddhist philosophies were dealt with, acquainted himself with the *Jijimuge* and *Rijimuge* doctrines.

In short, *satori* or the still point is imminent at every moment; and, indeed, enlightenment is not an intellectual condition, but a free and fulfilling involvement in the life of the world, a direct experiencing of, without abstractions, its uninterrupted flow — so that within the particularity of place and time Nirvana can be realized.

The dogmatic content of the intersection idea is stated clearly in the following passage from *The Rock*:

In every moment of time you live where two worlds cross,
In every moment you live at the point of intersection,
Remember, living in time, you must live also now in Eternity.
(52)

However, realization of the intersection of time and the timeless is by no means an easy task:

But to apprehend
The point of intersection of the timeless
With time, is an occupation for the saint—

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

Like the *Jijimuge* doctrine of the Kegon (Hua-yen) school of East Asian Buddhism, Eliot's formula of "the intersection," in its final analysis, is a space-time transcending vision. By this formula, Eliot attempts to suggest that in the mind of an individual experiencing the fullness of existence, the fullness of existence that necessitates both concentration on the here-now and a consciousness of the intersection, all divisions between self and others fall away. For the space-time transcending vision equates and cancels out all false antitheses and disparities at the point of intersection — the vision thus enabling one to see the past and present, the dead and the living, the individual and community, as being one and the same. It is this vision of space-time transcendence that restores "the historical sense" of a person, and actualizes his or her communion with, and

between the living and dead. "The communication / Of the dead" with "the living" is made "Here in the intersection" (LG, I).

"Little Gidding" is a poetic revelation of this space-time transcending vision. It gives example of how a harmonious living unity of all time, and of one with others, is possible. In this final Quartet, we are invited onto the actual road to Little Gidding. The words "If you came this way" (LG, I) gather in all that "the way" has meant during the course of the Quartets. At the end of our 'village' journey, we are adjured:

You are not here to verify,
Instruct yourself, or inform curiosity
Or carry report. You are here to kneel
Where prayer has been valid. And prayer is more
Than an order of words, the conscious occupation
Of the praying mind, or the sound of the voice praying.
And what the dead had no speech for, when living,
They can tell you, being dead: the communication
Of the dead is tongued with fire beyond the language of the living.
Here the intersection of the timeless moment
Is England and nowhere. Never and always.

(LG, I)

"Prayer" suggests a sense of living relationship with the timeless reality which drew together the original community at Little Gidding. And it means, too, a sense of relationship with the community's men and women, for "the communication / Of the dead is tongued with fire beyond the language of the living." The reaching of "the point of intersection" is "Now and in England," but it is also nowhere, never and always — both the particular and the general.

Indeed, completeness of life requires full fellowship. (And fellowship implies compassion — *feeling with* others.) The artist, for instance, needs community to 'feed' his creation, and then to appreciate it. But fellowship does not necessarily mean that we associate with persons at hand. Rather, fellowship can extend over centuries, millennia. We may reach back untold years and there find a stimulating relationship — a fellowship

— by means of which satisfaction can be gained, a given perplexity resolved. Like the speakers of “East Coker” and “Little Gidding,” Confucius, during the time of his greatest seclusion, lived in just such fellowship with the Duke of Chou, although he was separated from him by five centuries (Wilhelm 18). In these ‘living’ fellowships, community is communion; history is “the timeless moments.” And this is what Eliot meant by “the historical sense” and “The communion / Of the dead” with “the living” (LG, I).

Transcending the space-time boundary means liberation from the uneasy sense of confinement to a little, limited self that feels separate from other selves and from the world at large. Contrary to what in ordinary affairs is taken for granted, the distinction between the self and the community is artificial — a reflection of the self-centered, bifurcating ego and the encapsulated culture-world in which men and women are reared. For this reason, in order to understand Eliot’s allusions to Little Gidding in depth, the historicity of Little Gidding is noteworthy.

According to Cahill, Little Gidding was a family community consisting of Nicholas Ferrar, his mother, brother, sister, nephews and nieces, who, without renouncing normal marriage and family relations, were dedicated to a life of devotion and service (188). The Ferrars were renowned for their poverty and abstinence, for their service to the poor, and for their religious faith; and they cultivated these virtues in their daily lives. Little Gidding then, when the implications of what the community ‘stood for’ are fully appreciated, implies the *Jijimuge* ideal — the unity between one and all, and between Nirvana and Samsara, the ideal that a family is a community and a community a family.

Like Eastern thought, *Four Quartets* calls our attention to the here-now, where we focus on the fullness of concrete immediacy, quietly surveying the past and contemplating the future. The poem has the ultimate aim of returning us to the dynamics of our own spontaneous becoming, constituted as forms of togetherness continually emerging, social creatures in every aspect, inheriting from preceding *nows* the characteristics that give us

our identity in the social milieu. Eliot's essential thesis, in connection with the idea of the transcendence of space, begins with the Oriental view of reality as a social process, no element of which is either separate or of a self-established nature. As we become aware of all the rapidly moving phenomena around us, we must organize our awareness into pictures of reality in order that we may, to some extent, direct and modify the process of change. By so doing, we cannot halt such process, but we may alter the course it takes; the aim is not to accept the human condition blindly but to "control" it. In other words, instead of being carried with the flood, we can confidently ride upon it because now we are aware of what is happening: this is the use of the knowledge of the past and the reason for the necessity of concentrating on the present. We thereby are able to make every moment as nearly absolute and pure as the innocent "laughter of children," without the present moment's being overlaid by the past:

There rises the hidden laughter
Of children in the foliage
Quick now, here, now, always—
(BN, V)

When the transcendence of time and the transcendence of space ("I am here / Or there, or elsewhere" [EC, I]) combine, that combination results in yet another experience: that of absolute oneness; and since this is the ultimate liberation of the spirit, we see ourselves as identical with the whole universe — everything is now present in the here and now. We are interfused with the flow of reality, and exist in "[a] condition of complete simplicity" and unity — a condition that renders us utterly free and spontaneous, unified in ourselves and united to all things, blessedly released from ego, the source of self-love and attachment.

In connection with both the subject of this section and the thesis of the present chapter, however, the meanings of transcendent unity between the one and the all need to be further

explored. Eliot acquainted himself with this dynamic unity, the Unity that transcends even duality and non-duality, through Anesaki's lectures on the Tendai school. "Tendai," Anesaki argued, "wishes to keep both diversity and unity, explaining the latter by the former" (qtd. in Perl and Tuck 121). Anesaki's Harvard lectures of 1913-14 convinced Eliot that the distinction between unity and diversity is a Western conceit; Eliot's notebooks record Anesaki's contention, derived from Madhyamika sources, that diversity is "not the opposite, but the necessary concomitant, of unity" (Perl 101). Eliot remembered the same argument in two chapters entitled "Unity and Diversity" (1948) in *Notes towards the Definition of Culture*, and applied the notion to his literary belief as in *On Poetry and Poets* when he says, "[t]he variety is as essential as the unity" (13). It may also be surmised that a similar logic and argument influenced his understanding of "the variety and uniqueness of persons" and of the relationship between the individual and community ("Literature and the Modern World" 20). Again, this inseparability of one and the all can be explained by the Taoist concept of the Yin-Yang relation: what is Yang is also Yin. The complementariness of Yin and Yang is based precisely on the relationship between one (unity) and two (diversity). One and two are not separable, as they are essentially united. 'One' represents the ultimate reality (Tao), and 'two' represents Yin and Yang. Because one is none other than two, the latter is always inclusive.

To underscore such multifoliate unity (unity in interrelated diversity), both the Buddha and Eliot employ the metaphor of a flower. In Zen Buddhism, for instance, a single flower is used to illustrate the totality of the universe in time and space. A single flower was once held up to view by the preaching Buddha as a wordless message to his listeners, the message of the Whole — that single unity or totality which silently expresses itself and may be fully comprehended in any of its, or the flower's, diverse parts. Such a historical episode considered (and this is, in Eliot's own words, the use of "the tradition which involves a historical sense"), together with other implications which the image of the flower

carries, it cannot be coincident that Eliot, who probably learned about the Buddha's flower episode during one of Anesaki's lectures (since the analogy of a single flower is the most significant symbolism in Zen Buddhism) as well as through his own reading, makes the metaphor of "a Multifoliate rose" counterposed to the chaos and disharmony among the "hollow men," central to "The Hollow Men" (85), and closes *Four Quartets* with the enriched metaphor of a flower. The "lotos" transformed rose at poem's end, inviting and betokening the ecstasy of the still point, at the end of the poem is a compact literary luminary expressing the Buddha's single flower metaphor — the metaphor which symbolizes life's infinite diversity and all-embracing unity: "And the fire and the rose are one" (LG, V).

Eliot's message of a multifoliate unity, unlike the West's exclusive concept of the One as opposed to the many, is very much of Eastern origin; his "one" is inclusive and dynamic, thus inviting the language of "all." In Eliot's frame of reference, that is, the last word of the poem — "one" — involves the meaning of Ultimate Reality. In the Eastern perspective, again, the Ultimate is non-dual, is of an undifferentiated whole; it is that which keeps a higher 'third' unity that embraces both one and all. For "[t]he Tao is both one *and* many" (Zaehner, *Concordant Discord* 234). Beyond any literal meaning, the union of the rose and fire into "one" demands of or intuitively into the reader's consciousness a further sense of unity between one and all, a unity in which the part and the whole are utterly interfused while yet the parts retain their individuality in a whole which ever remains 'the whole.'

Still, in another perspective, the union between the rose and the fire suggests another dimension to the meaning of unity: it signifies not only the unity of one with all things but also that of the yin and the yang, as the rose and the fire represent the earth and heaven, respectively. This insight may be explained in Taoist terms. In Taoism, one of the basic equivalents of Yin and Yang is the pair of "heaven" and "earth." At one level of

interpretation, "heaven" refers to a world-transcending higher consciousness; earth refers to the experience of the everyday world. The complete or perfect human being is considered a balanced combination of these two levels of experience, as the Taoist formula "being beyond the world while living in the world" expresses. Thus to be attuned to the higher, vaster dimension of "celestial" consciousness while at the same time living effectively in the "earthly" domain is one meaning of blending or uniting Yin and Yang, the two primal cosmic forces. One need hardly point to Eliot's insistence upon liberation through harmonious interaction of opposite spheres, rather than by a complete transcendence of the lower. For only beings that enjoy a measure of dual existence, having one foot in phenomena and the other in the Absolute, can possibly know the Absolute and reveal it to others. Viewed in this perspective, the union of the rose and the fire implies a balanced, harmonious blending — the requirement of both earthly and celestial consciousnesses. This is also the Buddhist meaning of the unity of Samsara and Nirvana. In accord with Eastern sages, then, Eliot has brought even earth (the finite) and heaven (the infinite) into dynamic and inseparable unity.

Four Quartets, as it envisages a non-fragmented vision of totality, calls for awareness of the subtle interaction and interpenetration of all things, one with another, in complete harmony, and for the sense as well of an ever self-creating, infinite life, a "universal communion" without beginning or end. In these poems, Eliot is much concerned with developing an all-embracing world view and evolving a deeper, wider, more universal consciousness which comprises both sides of 'perception,' i.e., appearance and reality, Samsara and Nirvana, finite and the infinite, the mutable and the eternal. Eliot's essential argument is that all different things — all life — are one. He urges us to recognize the inherent oneness of things and to strive for an art, society and individual existence which are a reflection of, and in harmony with, that oneness. In order to approach this new dimension of ideal unity and harmony, we must, according to Eliot, give up egocentric,

discriminating, and dissecting postures of intellect and seek to enter "the immediate experience" through intuitive knowledge, which sees clearly the non-duality whose 'severed parts' have never ceased to be one. Most of all, to retrieve lost sight of the still existing unity, Eliot (in agreement with the East) posits that we must eliminate the ego sense (the "I"), the ultimate cause of differentiation and complication.

Eliot's perception parallels the Buddhist doctrines of *anatta* (non-ego) and dependent origination, and the Taoist doctrines of *coincidentia oppositorum* and relative synchronism. His Oriental perceptivity enables him to see that although all reality is built upon Yin-Yang polarity, this polarity does not in any way deny a primordial unity. On the contrary, in his view, "it presupposes an underlying unity, because unity in the spiritual and actual sense is not mere uniformity but the perfect cooperation of different qualities and forces" (Govinda, *Creative Meditation* 38). Eliot will not, therefore, separate Nirvana and Samsara, life and death, beauty and ugliness or past and future, since for him, as for the Buddha and Lao-Tzu, pairs of opposites are but two sides of one and the same reality — phenomenal manifestations which may be compared to "two waves of the sea" (LG, V). They come and go, but the elemental reality (of water) does not change. With the experience of all-embracing universality, limitations of time and space are transcended, as are illusions of the substantiality of our separate egohood:

See, now they vanish,
The faces and places, with the self, . . .
To become renewed, transfigured, in another pattern.
(LG, III)

Eliot is aligned with Eastern thought in his insistence that thought must take place in time, but that vision can transcend it. Prior to transcending space-time bound existence, however, chaotic lingerings of the past should be examined and put into orderly pattern. Knowing the past is essential both in terms of *karma* (the consequences of the past are still

within and around us) and the dynamic interrelations of things. But like most Buddhist teachings, *Four Quartets* emphasizes the importance of the here and now. To Eliot, as to the Zen Buddhist, the momentary "now" is the point of "the intersection" into which time and eternity, the particular and the universal, have coalesced and unified. In other words, the intersection is that which strikes the still point in here-now. Implied in the concept of "the intersection" is that enlightenment is imminent to every individual at each moment — entailing, as both do, the double-edged possibilities of Nirvana and Samsara. To realize the moment of the intersection is, finally, to experience the unity not only of the particular with the universal but also of the particular with the particular: at the point of "the intersection," "I" and my neighbor as well as "I" and "my community" become identical — are equated with one with the other.

According to Eliot, the complete human being is he (she) who unites the universal with the individual, the uniqueness of the moment with the eternity of the cyclic recurrence of constellation and other existential situations. The intersection at which the absolute "now" is located is also the locus of the still point. And by locating the still point at the middle of polar opposites, Eliot suggests that we can narrow the ambit of our voyage along the Middle Way, that moving center between all extremes. No longer in tension between opposites and swinging freely on the pendulum of choice, we view the revolving rim of the wheel from the center, the still center of "the turning world" (BN, II). Serene of mind, freed largely from the tyranny of abstract concept, we can "live life as life lives itself," to use the famous Zen and Taoist phrase. And wisdom is the harmony between our mind and the laws of reality.

Again in Eliot as in Eastern thought, the concept, significantly, of the one and the same Reality is to be understood not as uniformity or typicality, but as a dynamic and multifoliate unity, the unity which a multifoliate flower silently represents. By making the rose and fire

“one,” Eliot does not mean the annihilation of their identities or the complete dissolution of the two. Indeed, in the words of Govinda,

to become one does not mean to dissolve into each other or to annihilate the polarity on which knowledge, like love, is based. It [union] is the overcoming of duality in favor of polarity, in which unity and differentiation are equally present. Lovers are not annihilated in the act of ‘becoming one’; they lose only their ego-sense, not their individuality.

(*Creative Meditation* 41)

On the other hand, the corrective vision becomes a devouring “fire” which volatilizes the last vestiges of our dissecting attitudes and notions (“the tongues of flame”) of things, objects, and entities. Whatever the two entities of rose and fire count for, they must, according to Eliot, be forged into a harmonious unity, like that of the Yin and Yang, through the holistic, all-embracing, and yet purifying vision of fire if we are to achieve salvation, which is the ultimate goal of human destiny:

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.

(LG, V)

Ultimately, the metaphysical arguments proposed and expounded in *Four Quartets* converge into ontological insights in which Eliot found, it seems, the forms of the possible answers to the pathological condition of modern man — the truth of interdependence and interrelatedness in the world of the living organism endowing the individual with a sense of humility, compassion and responsibility, and a sense too of the value of one’s existence and thereby of a luminous certitude. Emptiness in Buddhism means the emptiness of anything that exists in itself. If we speak of the totality of the world or the universe, we are speaking of a totality of relations, of unity in the totality of interrelated diversity. Such

meaning is implicit in Eliot's "lokadhatu" notes: the world is the sum of the parts of which we together have composed it.

Eliot once argued, "A man is both an individual and a member. Instead of 'individual' I shall use the word 'person,'" and he stated further,

the person is no longer a person if wholly isolated from community; and the community is no longer a community if it does not consist of persons. A man is not himself unless he is a member; and he cannot be a member unless he is also something alone. Man's membership and his solitude must be taken together. There are moments, perhaps not known to everyone, when a man may be nearly crushed by the terrible awareness of his isolation from every other human being; and I pity him if he finds himself only alone with himself

("Literature and Modern World" 20)

To Eliot, such "relational consciousness was so indispensable" that, like the Buddha, he saw "relation" as the very substance of existence (Sigg 50). And by "community" Eliot did not mean a part of the world or the round orb of the astronomers; he meant the global community and indeed the universe, both in physical and psychological terms.

The possibility of anyone or anything living out a private existence is an egocentric illusion. To be is to be related, and everything is a set of relationships reaching out to other things. Life, as Eliot perceived it, connoted an infinite relationship, depending on the totality of all that exists or ever had existed. Apart however from the waking up to this encompassing matrix of relational consciousness, one's life is implicated in some sort of aboriginal calamity, out of step with the rhythm of the living, spontaneous, close, direct, free, and aesthetically moving world.

The more we become conscious of this infinite relationship constituting a dynamic inseparable unity, the freer we are because we liberate ourselves from ego-sense and thus the illusion of separateness — and learn instead to experience ourselves as a true center or conscious focus of an infinite universe. At the same time, awareness of the inseparable relationship teaches us the "humility" of our mutual dependence, as well as the universality

of our true nature as a manifestation of the totality of the universe in the unique form of our time-space conditioned individuality. And since all things are interdependent and interrelated, what we do in the here and now will affect, as it were, other parts of the universe. Seen from the vision of the unbroken wholeness in which our lives are embedded, every throb of existence has some value not only for itself, but for others — for the rest of nature. We now become so responsive to our new vision that we begin to live the social nature of reality and to internalize it in a higher state of awareness. As noted throughout his prose and poetry, for Eliot, as for the Buddhist, enlightenment, the prelude to liberation, is this transformation process within human consciousness — the transformation that the rose and fire, two heterogeneous, antithetical elements, apotheosize in their sacred union, and that we too as individuals must actualize at every moment of existence. For, in Eliot's own words, "reality is here and now; and the true nature of mind is found in the activity which it exercises" (*Monist* 26: 554).

Chapter V

CONCLUSION

Our exploration into the religious and philosophical dimensions of *Four Quartets* has brought into reach the initial premise of this study that Eliot's philosophical and spiritual orientation is essentially in accordance with the basic tenets of Eastern thought. In Eastern thought, Eliot found not only a philosophical vocabulary with which to think and write about self, society and metaphysics, but also a set of answers to his concern with the idea of salvation — the set of answers in which, as in the paradigm of Oriental spiritual traditions, there is a merging of ontology and epistemology. In *Four Quartets* consequently, Eliot overcomes the schism in soul and finds a solution for the modern crisis.

Paralleling the precepts of Buddhism, *Four Quartets* constitutes a succinct yet profound poetic representation of the Four Noble Truths and a kind of empirically realized Eightfold Path. There is the characteristic Eastern preoccupation with the problem of the human condition — specifically the penetrating awareness of the pervasiveness of suffering and impermanence, the tragic cognizance that “the deeper design is that of human misery and bondage which is universal” (Introduction to *Nightwood* xv). Eliot's initial and primary perception is that all things and beings are ephemeral and that everything is becoming: there is no abiding reality beneath the phenomenal world. Like the Indic religio-philosophical tradition, Eliot believes that human beings and their environment are impermanent in all their parts, and therefore are enmeshed in and replete with suffering. The universal suffering of all phenomenal existence is typically presented in the symbol of

an ever-turning wheel. The revolving is endless, and represents a perpetual suffering. As in Buddhism, Eliot holds that suffering is ever-present and permanent.

On the other hand, everywhere we find mankind's refusal to face up to these dark realities — the facing up, the recognition of which is, in Eliot's words, "the human responsibility" ("Literature and the Modern World" 21). Due partly to a desire to avoid grim reality and partly to an unawareness of the depth and scope of universal suffering that is "within" and "all about us"(DS, I), the most highly developed of today's societies are insensitive to the great need to free themselves from the hedonism which in one form or another has captured the lives of so many of their people. Eliot has the Buddhist confidence that "[t]he condition is curable" (*The Cocktail Party* 417): through disciplined analysis and broad empirical probing of our entanglements we can uproot the sources of suffering and overcome the compulsive confinements that resist all modification by evidence or reason.

Next, there is the recognition that the root-cause of all suffering is desire, which breeds attachment that, in turn, impels us to cling to the transient, the material. Desire, craving and thirst magnify the ego, the sense of 'I' and 'mine,' producing the suffering that perpetuates *samsara*. In accord with the Oriental sages, Eliot understood that the primary cause of fragmentation and separateness is the illusion of permanence of egohood or self-centeredness — the illusion that one is the center of the universe and a separate entity apart from the rest of existence. Upon exposition of the causes of suffering, Eliot in *Four Quartets* marshals the Eastern principles of detachment, *askesis*, and compassion — the essential parts of the human striving toward liberation — so that change and suffering can be transcended, though not negated, in the apprehension of the timeless in time.

Eliot's meditation upon the nature of detachment is forged into a metaphysics of the relationship between action and stasis; and in the *Bhagavad-Gita* the poet gains the lesson that human anguish is caused not by actions per se but by attachment to the fruits of action.

As with Hindu-Buddhism, which emphasizes the decisive importance of rigorous self-discipline as the means of achieving enlightenment, Eliot lays responsibility on the individual to attain the insight that leads to spiritual advancement and final freedom. He thus finds *askesis* to be a way of integrating the personality of an individual, and of lending greater perfection to mankind as a whole. In addition, for Eliot, as the Eastern systems affirm, spiritual or divine love originates in egolessness and the sense of essential oneness with others: "The pain of another is one's own; his troubles are mine" (Murti 259). Love to Eliot is a perpetual migration or ascent of the individual soul towards unity and identity. Therefore, love must be transcendent — must go "beyond desire" (LG, III), for desire is a manifestation of the ego, the cause of all movement which sustains *samsara*. But this selfless outbounding love has also a vertical dimension; not only does it embrace the earthly world below, but must be directed toward God or spiritual reality: true liberation is the union divine.

Importantly, the substance of spiritual love to Eliot, whether it be divine or human, is self-sacrifice. In Eliot's view, the problem with modern man is that he is unwilling to sacrifice until forced to do so. Thus "[t]he sacrifice we denied" is not just the Eucharistic, but that love which we denied 'giving.' Here then is the warning that the consequences of this denial lead only to destruction:

Water and fire deride
The sacrifice that we denied
Water and fire shall rot
The marred foundations we forgot.
(LG, II)

This message of love was explicitly suggested in the voice (instruction) of Thunder in *The Waste Land*: Datta, "give" and Dayadhvam, "sympathise" (74). In "Literature and the Modern World," Eliot states that "we only remain human because of the continual vicarious sacrifice of a few dedicated lives" (21). The rest of the world, in its pursuit of selfish ends,

has fallen prey to a sense of isolation and of loss of compassion: "each in his prison / Thinking of the key . . ." (*The Waste Land* 74). Like Celia in *The Cocktail Party*, Eliot asks, rhetorically:

. . . Can we only love
 Something created by our own imagination?
 Are we all in fact unloving and unlovable?
 Then one is alone, and if one is alone
 Then lover and beloved are equally unreal
 And the dreamer is no more real than his dreams.
 (416)

In the lines which follow the above, an 'answer' to this question is provided in the words of Reilly, a psychologist in the play, in whom Eliot seems to have projected a role for both himself and Buddha: "Compassion can be already a clue" (416). And self-sacrifice is necessary to break through isolation and compassionlessness — the (spiritual) sacrifice that is personified in the death (bodily sacrifice) of Celia.

Eliot's belief in the efficacy of human effort as a means to ultimate salvation is countered and complemented by the notion of grace. Eliot gives us the apparently contradictory prescriptions of human effort (action) and grace (inaction, passivity) in almost the same breath, as with the phrase, "be still and still moving" (EC,V). However, understood on a subtler level, there is no dichotomy between these two notions. The poet finds them interrelated, especially as concerns egolessness. For selflessness or self-surrender is what makes the discipline of human effort effective and what in the end draws divine grace. To Eliot, then, redemption is the result of a mutual effort by man and God.

Finally, the ontological definition of love as a sense of unity and of essential oneness with others has its epistemological proofs in the Quartets. We must mend our fragmented vision and make it whole, just as Love strives to piece 'two' together into a wholesome unity. As long as we live in a relative world, beholding things in dualistic vision, we are 'attached'; however, we must realize that beneath or beyond this world we have another,

transcendent world in which there is no attachment to anything and thus no distinction between the subject and object. In fact, what we think of as bi-polar experiences, i.e., pleasure and pain, and the chasm between Nirvana and Samsara, may be nothing but conceptual, mental creations. The *bodhisattva* does not go off to Nirvana in an ecstasy of withdrawal: he comes back because the two worlds are one and the same.

The ultimate meaning of the Nirvana-Samsara equation (the unity of polarities) involves a non-discursive cognition that seemingly opposed realms are very much connected. Man has dual citizenship in time (the relative, the human) and eternity (the absolute, the divine), and is capable of 'arriving' at a points of timelessness. As Eliot superbly demonstrates in his subtle poetic interplay of appearance and reality with "the lotos" and the water in the pond in "Burnt Norton," reality is, after all, a combined whole of the Yin and Yang, the soft and the hard. We must be able to see that beyond the beatific vision there are harsh realities of everyday life, just as beyond the everyday world there is "the moment in the rose-garden" (BN, II) — so that we may become a living Buddha or *bodhisattva*, who regards these two worlds as one and the same reality and who thus is not afraid of being human, not afraid of responding to and participating in pain. It is not for us to idle precious moments away dreaming of withdrawn ecstasy, but to live actively in the 'here and now.' According to Eliot in *Four Quartets*, spiritual salvation (enlightenment) is the realization of *unity* — to see the co-existence of parts (all) and the whole (one), the ineffable One in the many, the eternal Now in the fleeting flux of time, to see the continuum, the discordant concord, where dichotomy and diversity are overcome.

All these religio-philosophical notions and spiritual remedies orbit around the still point. And with 'still point' Eliot has created a poetic emblem that is the most precise equivalent of his central concern with unity and reintegration, not only of the disintegrated psyche of the individual and of the shattered fragments of the larger body politic, but also of the structure of history. The still point is "a liberation / From the future as well as the

past”; it does not, however, negate time, for when we are liberated, we consider “the future / And the past with an equal mind” (DS, III). In other words, the still point is the place of unity where past and future are gathered and reconciled in an eternal Now, the now which is also “the intersection” of the timeless with time. The still point spells “inner freedom from the practical desire” and is “release from the inner and outer compulsion” (BN, II) through detachment.

The still point is not freedom from space and time, but freedom from the feeling — the thoughts — of space and time confinement; not freedom from want, but freedom from the slavery to shifting desires; not freedom from death, for “the time of death is every moment” (DS, III), but freedom from the fear of death; not freedom from suffering per se, but freedom from thought-creations of suffering — the freedom that may be achieved through the ontological means of detachment and compassion, and the epistemological understanding of the nature of reality. Most of all, the still point is the point of “the intersection” where all warring opposites resolve themselves into a harmonious pattern “and there is only the dance” (BN, II): it is the unifying principle of *Sunya* (the Middle Way) or Tao which yokes the oscillations of the extreme opposites that result in conflict and confusion. Here “at the still point of the turning world” (BN, II), we live unattached, transcending, not denying, the human condition of impermanence and suffering. Or, as Iqbal Singh expresses,

Here we are in a universe which is devoid of tension — not because contraries and conflicts have ceased to operate, but because they have somehow become intelligible. Here in the very contemplation of transiency, we receive a measure of eternity. . . . Here the wheel turns and does not turn.

(qtd. in Humphreys, *Buddhism* 215)

Here we live in time but live beyond the limits of time. For, though thought must take place in time, vision can transcend it — the vision that beholds THAT, where there is no more otherness and selfness.

“The grand work of literary genius,” Matthew Arnold observes, “is a work of synthesis and exposition, not of analysis and discovery; its gift lies in the faculty of being happily inspired by a certain intellectual and spiritual atmosphere, by a certain order of ideas; of dealing divinely with these ideas, presenting them in the most effective and attractive combination” (10-11). Whether or not he took cue from Arnold, Eliot’s work is a good illustration of Arnold’s view. Eliot achieves a comprehensive and happy synthesis of East and West in *Four Quartets*. Despite the fact that it was written almost a decade after the poet’s reception into the Anglican Church, *Four Quartets*, forming a unified outlook, comprehends more than the Christian view, at the same time that it refines Christianity. Smidt argues that, in general, the Quartets are “less specifically Christian than ‘Ash Wednesday’ or *Murder in the Cathedral*” (213). Richard Lea in his review of the poem found that, “[c]ompared with *Murder in the Cathedral*, there is greater depth, greater intensity, and greater beauty in these quartets but less Christianity. Is it possible,” he asked, “that the level reached here is beyond Christianity? A non-Christian mystic can feel just as much at home as a Christian” (187).

Among a number of related perspectives, three in particular — Eliot’s eclectic tendency and inclusive attitude, the conscious effort he makes toward East-West rapprochement, and the universal nature of his poetic theme — may be reasoned to be the grounds for Eliot’s East-West synthesis, the synthesis which is suggested when Eliot simultaneously employs the Oriental and Occidental symbols of the ultimate reality in “Burnt Norton” to indicate a

momentary experience of enlightenment: the "lotos" rising in the rose garden.¹

Eliot's method is both eclectic and synthetic in spite of what he says, in his discursive writings, about his Christian faith. It is the poetry of Eliot, *Four Quartets* foremost, where his eclectic temperament coincides with the all-embracing attitude of Eastern thought. His 'inclusiveness' he himself underscores: "fully to understand one you have to understand all," for "things all act upon each other" (*Notes Toward the Definition of Culture* 124). Eliot's poetic treatment of the vision of reality and "the still point" is remarkably similar to the tolerant and pragmatic approach of the Eastern thinkers. Indeed, to readers familiar with Eastern philosophy, there is no contradiction in Eliot's synthesis of East and West. His synthetic outlook — his eclecticism — is partly explainable in terms of a saliency of Eastern thought, namely, the inclusive quality of its general attitude. Certainly the East has had its share of individual dogmatists who claimed exclusive truth for their own positions; but the intensity of such claims has usually been tempered by a prevailing openness, a tolerance, to other views, and even by a tendency for viewpoints originally very different to merge in many of their finer points (Hackett 14-15). Partly for this reason, even the Christian truth-claim is often equanimously received by Oriental philosophers, so that Jesus Christ is welcomed as an incarnation of the Hindu Brahman or one of the human manifestations of the Buddhist Dharma-Kaya (the Buddha's body of pure being).² It may be that this openness to various perspectives reflects a pervasive Oriental thinking that no one viewpoint, projected as it is by individual thinkers, however capable, can do more than approximate an understanding of (limited aspects of) the ultimate truth. In other words, according to the non-dualistic view of the major systems of Eastern thought, Truth or

¹ In "The Hollow Men" Eliot had already attempted an East-West ideosynthesis of symbols by fusing Dante's single rose (the single rose figures prominently in Western mystical literature as an image of unity and the Godhead) and the "thousand-petalled lotus" of Eastern mysticism, thus creating a particularly arresting symbol in the "Multifoliate rose" (85).

² It should be pointed out that in *Four Quartets* Eliot speaks merely of "Incarnation" instead of "the Incarnation"; in doing so, he asks us to interpret the meaning of "Incarnation" in both (either-or) historical and general sense.

Absolute Reality is unknowable by human reason, so that all speculations and practice are merely a “minimum working hypothesis” (Huxley 34). From the Eastern perspective, a “quasi-synthetic non-position” is considered a sort of intellectual humility and almost a prerequisite to enlightenment (Perl and Tuck 122). Eliot adopted and held the same position; his skepticism is a reservation about opinion, since any, if valid, would be nothing but a partial expression of the whole truth. And according to Perl and Tuck, it was from Eastern thought (Mahayana Buddhism in particular) that Eliot learned that philosophical skepticism is not incompatible with religion — that skepticism rather is the threshold foundation for religious faith (118). It was from skepticism that Buddha swept aside his two million gods that he might arrive at and imbibe of the pristine experience which alone is convincing. In a similar vein, Eliot at one point declaims that “scepticism is a highly civilised trait,” a “strength” and wisdom (*Notes Toward the Definition of Culture* 28), and that ““all faith should be seasoned with a skillful sauce of scepticism. And scepticism too is a faith — a high and difficult one””³ (qtd. in Hay 77).

Though by nature and temperament a synthesist who was inclined to be receptive of different ideas and views, Eliot was strengthened in these ‘Oriental’ attributes through his formal training in Oriental studies, especially by Anesaki’s lectures on the Tendai school, in which Anesaki dealt specifically with reconciliation of the diversity of views within Buddhism (Perl and Tuck 123). Eliot’s notes to the Anesaki lectures observe that ““Tendai’s ambition was a synthesis to embrace all views by elevation to the one standpoint”” (qtd. in Perl and Tuck 123). In Tendai, for Eliot, that one standpoint was not a (Hegelian) synthesis of all possible views (a new thesis derived from different ideas)⁴ but

³ Eliot credits Bradley as a skeptic when he observes in his essay on the latter: “wisdom consists largely of scepticism and uncynical disillusion,” and both “are a useful equipment for religious understanding; and of that Bradley had a share too” (*Selected Essays* 399). Though skepticism is also found in some Western thought (such as Unitarianism and Empiricism of Hume and Locke), skepticism as a means of arriving at religious faith is not a common Western, particularly Christian, notion.

⁴ In Buddhism, salvation is a negative not synthetic process. According to Murti, “Non-duality, for the Madhyamika, is not attained, as in Hegel, by the synthesis of particular points of view, but their negation” (214). For a comparison of the Madhyamika and the Hegelian dialectic, see Murti 230-31, 301-06.

a complex interrelation of all views — of those perspectives which have occupied a significant place in cultural tradition. Eliot applied this “perspectivist” argument to the field of comparative religion — the argument which, significantly, explains why Eastern thought and Christianity were simultaneously acceptable to Eliot, and why it was possible for him to retain his Christian bond while avidly “to venture further than a narrow Christian tradition”:

There are some readers who . . . regard Asiatic literature as the sole repository of religious understanding; there are others who . . . refuse to venture further than a narrow Christian tradition. For both kinds of reader, it is salutary to learn that the Truth . . . is not wholly confined to their own religious tradition, or on the other hand to an alien culture and religion. . . . I am aware also that there are readers who persuade themselves that there is an ‘essence’ in all religions which is the same, and that this essence can be conveniently distilled and preserved. . . . Such readers may perhaps be reminded that no man has ever climbed to the higher stages of the spiritual life, who has not been a believer in a particular religion or at least a particular philosophy. . . . It was only in relation to his own religion that the insights of any one of these men had its significance to him, and what they say can only reveal its meaning to the reader who has his own religion of dogma and doctrine in which he believes.

(Preface to *Thoughts for Meditation* 13-14)

From this vantage point it may safely be argued that Eliot’s interest in Eastern spiritualism and mysticism contains no element of, or bent for, deracination. In connection with his eclectic and inclusive attitude, we must recall Eliot’s words about Christianity having to be constantly adapted into something that can be believed (which, he said, had nothing to do with liberal theology). By his own work he has contributed immensely to the adaptation of Christianity to the consciousness of the modern age. To illustrate this we need only consider the way in which Eliot repeatedly suggests the redemption of mankind, not by “the blood of the Lamb,” but through the realization of timelessness, the timeless fulfillment of the temporal, and the way he manages to illustrate the compatibility of human

endeavor and divine grace. He has successfully bridged the East's formulation of "the higher third" to the Christian notion of Incarnation.

Eliot in his poetry is deliberately reaching out beyond the confines of his Anglo-Catholicism and Occidental personality in a genuine attempt at an East-West ideosynthesis. In terms of the Yin-Yang concept, the view, in a sense, that East and West are opposites is false. Rather, they are complements. Compared with the dualistic, divisive character of opposites, that of complements is of a polar, unifying nature. Like C. G. Jung, a leading twentieth-century psychologist, who investigated Eastern thought as an important source of insight and wisdom, Eliot understood that East and West each represent half of the one spiritual universe and that each different standpoint, though perhaps at variance with another, has its psychological justification. We are constantly reminded, in Eliot's literary theory, poetry and prose, of his embrace of wholeness, and his insistence on its necessity. In his *Notes Toward the Definition of Culture*, Eliot avers, "I refused to separate the world into quite unrelated cultural groups; I refused to draw any absolute line between East and West, between Europe and Asia" (125).

Beneath his deep sense of respect for tradition lies this insistence on the wholeness of vision, for tradition is the totality of human experience moving dynamically through history. It is obvious then why Eliot gave serious attention to the other, enigmatic hemisphere — the East. By "tradition," Eliot did not mean the Western past only, but also that of East, the Indic and East Asian culture with their different concepts and modes from those of the Westerner's perspective. Eliot's conviction on this matter is well evinced by his scholarship in the literature and literary systems of the world. These different systems are part of the Tradition, the central stream of human experience, however much and wherever, that stream may have been diverted. Thus, in his Introduction to N. Gangulee's *The Testament of Immortality* (1940), Eliot commends "the fusion of Eastern and Western culture in the anthologist's mind and heart" (10). In his Preface to the same writer's

Thoughts for Meditation, he states, "I attach a special value to an anthology which places side by side passages from Christian, Jewish, Moslem, Hindu and Buddhist scriptures and devotional writing" (14).

These literary and philosophical beliefs of Eliot were put into practise in his poetry. In the *Waste Land* scene, for instance, of the entire world burning as the result of lust and greed Eliot collocates Buddha and St. Augustine, and later notes that "[t]he collocation of these two representatives of eastern and western asceticism, as the culmination of this part of the poem, is not an accident" (79). This gives clear indication of the poet's wish to knit the globe together in the pursuit of spirituality. No doubt, the world is or ought to be a single unit in such matters. And we see the same wish — the same intention — revealed throughout *Four Quartets*.

There is probably no other major poet in English literature (apart from Milton) who had such a broad, informed view of the humanities as Eliot. In this respect, the overriding impression of *Four Quartets* as a poem "beyond Christianity" most often refers to its universalism and internationality. The great poet's mission, in Eliot's own words, is "to express the permanent and the universal . . . in verse" (*Selected Essays* 34). Eliot's poetic "raids on the inarticulate" (EC,V) — the awareness of the fact of human bondage and the possibility of human freedom — are universal and may well be called the *philosophia perennis* that variously surfaces time and again in the religious and philosophical traditions of the East and West. Thus the same awareness of human frailty and strength that are at the core of *Four Quartets* (and *The Waste Land* as well) is found in *The Bhagavad-Gita*, the Buddha's Fire Sermon, the Sermon on the Mount, and *Tao Te Ching* — the scriptures of East and West — separated though they are by space and time. Herein lies further justification for reading Eliot's poetry as much in the light of Eastern thought as in the light of Christian outlook: not only do these readings from different perspectives enable us to grasp the keen perceptions underlying his poetry, but they also impart an unearthly radiance

to his vision that elevates us into the realm of the eternal. In an essay called "The Minimum Working Hypothesis," Aldous Huxley has outlined the fundamental intuitions of the perennial philosophy:

That there is a Godhead, Ground, Brahman, Clear Light of the Void,
which is the unmanifested principle of the universe.

That the Ground is at once transcendent and immanent.

That it is possible for human beings to love, know and, from virtually,
to become actually identical with the divine Ground.

That to achieve this unitive knowledge of the Godhead is the final end
and purpose of human existence.

That there is a Law or Dharma which must be obeyed, a Tao or a Way
which must be followed, if men are to achieve this final end.

That the more there is of self, the less there is of the Godhead; and
that the Tao is therefore a way of humility and love, the Dharma a living
law of mortification and self-transcending awareness.

(34)

This passage quite accurately pinpoints the essence and spirit of the Quartets. In basically agreeing with Huxley's exposition, Eliot states that "frequently contemplatives of religions and civilizations remote from each other are saying the same thing . . . in their various idioms, in whatever language . . ." (Preface in *Thoughts for Meditation* 13).

Beyond the abstractions of philosophy and theology, poetry by its emotional quality has the power to fuse even logically inconsistent elements into a measure of synthesis; and poetry is the most suitable medium for perennial philosophy, the philosophy that gives rise to mysticism in literature. (Early in the autobiographical sketch "Eldrop and Appleplex," Eliot characterizes himself as "a sceptic, with a taste for mysticism" [8].) Eliot's opinion on mystical literature illuminates something of the quality of, and way to approach, *Four Quartets*: "Philosophy is difficult, unless we discipline our minds for it; the full appreciation of poetry is difficult for those who have not trained their sensibility by years of attentive reading"; but the reading of mystical poetry "is the most difficult of all, because it requires an application, not only of the mind, not only of the sensibility, but of the whole being." Nevertheless, "[t]o be wholly ignorant of this [mystical] literature," Eliot

continues, "to be unacquainted with examples of it from several languages and civilizations . . . is to lack some vital information about Man" (Preface in *Thoughts for Meditation* 12).

Seen in terms of the ideas of unity, the inclusive whole, and universal philosophy, the East that Eliot evokes in his poetry is also an emblem for mind and spirit. This East, as Eliot perceived it, is not in the image of a Tibetan monastery or a temple of quietude in the hemisphere beyond, but is buried and neglected within the human consciousness. Just as in the first Quartet a lotus rises in the heart of an English garden, the East is something immanent that, from the depths of our own psychic life, new spiritual forms can summon. To encounter the East, to know the spiritual world beyond the perception of our senses, we must journey inward — after the long but perpetual outward movement in which we have been blindly directed by our senses and by the material. For the world is more than what we know through sense and more than that with which we identify in intellectual and materialistic terms. As echoed in the finale of *Four Quartets*, Eliot is optimistic as to the promise of a far-reaching spiritual change in humankind (for spiritual transformation is a privilege available only to human beings⁵) and in the envisioned world of dynamic unity of the East and West — an East-West rapprochement which lends insights into philosophical, psychological, social and even political truths, and into global harmony in general.

In sum, Eliot's poetry deals with the totality of human experience. In his awareness of the universal spiritual oneness of humanity that exists within, across and beyond all cultures, Eliot very discretely assumed the role of a visionary, a universalist. And the inclusion of Eastern spiritual elements in his poetry puts a seal on his being a poet of universal appeal and international status. Ultimately, what gives Eliot's poetry a penetrating power and an enduring beauty is the fact that he has perceived the perennial and

⁵ In his essay on Baudelaire, Eliot states that "the glory of man is his capacity for salvation" (*Selected Essays* 380); according to Buddhism, it is only at the stage of human existence among the whole range of sentient beings, i.e. from the tiniest insect to man that *samsara* can be transcended, and release or Nirvana can be attained (*A Dictionary of Buddhism* 224).

most fundamental truth of humanity and invoked that which is universal and eternal, common to both East and West. Having dealt with a subject of permanent interest, the concern of no single generation but of all ages, having touched our common humanity, which the changing years cannot touch, Eliot in the *Quartets* has unrolled a carpet of music upon which we are enticed to tread on our inward journey to the still point, where all conflicts are terminated in a harmonious unity of relations and where "all shall be well" (LG, V) as the human and the divine expand in a sphere of love.

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