A CRITICAL COMMENTARY

ON THE

FOUR QUARTETS OF T.S. ELIOT

by

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ABSTRACT

This sequential reading of *Four Quartets* attends closely to form, rhythm, image, idea, syntax, tone, and mood, examining the relations of one to another and of one part of the cycle to another. It draws on earlier studies which are mainly thematic, but it concentrates primarily on analysis of the poetry itself.

Such a commentary does not set out to prove a single hypothesis, and therefore does not lend itself to simple summary. But it emphasises, *inter alia*, these features.

1. The Quartets are rightly read as a unified cycle. The first three, though relatively complete in themselves, are built upon and retrospectively modified by their successors in a complex pattern; and the recurring and developing themes are not fully resolved until the end of *Little Gidding*. On the other hand, the five individual parts that go to make up each Quartet are not self-contained, and cannot properly be read in isolation. (Such readings fail especially to make sense of the Part IV lyrics.)

2. The poetry is meditative lyric, or lyric meditation, rather than personal confession or philosophic statement. The poet's voice often speaks generically. The whole cycle - like each Quartet itself - begins with individual perception or experience and, through meditation upon it, broadens into universal statement at the end. The point of departure is generally some time-transcending experience; the concluding meditation generally relates the perceptions of the timeless to perceptions about the nature of art and the nature of love, both human and divine.

3. Despite occasional lapses, usually in Part II or Part III, assertions of large-scale failure (in *The Dry Salvages* especially) are not justified by close scrutiny of the poetic texture. Analysis of structural, tonal, metrical and syntactic features vindicates even the alleged prosaically flat passages.

4. The poetry works largely with traditional imagery, plain diction, orthodox syntax and pervasive four-stress rhythm. There are several departures from all these, yet a right reading will see them as deliberate variations, for specific purposes, on the given norms.

The general aim of the thesis is to demonstrate that the poems are less difficult in thought and peculiar in method than has often been supposed.

Especially pertinent for the reader of poetry - and for the critic of poetry - is [Valéry's] repeated insistence that poetry must first of all be *enjoyed*, if it is to be of any use at all; and that most of the rest of what is written, talked, and taught is philology, history, biography, sociology, psychology.

T.S. Eliot: Introduction to Paul Valéry's *The Art of Poetry* (xvii)

* * * * *

Each of us brings to the poem his own experiences, which need not be - indeed, cannot be - the same as the poet's, and there finds these private experiences more or less, depending on the effective power of the motif, conformed to the motif and so expressed in it.

James Olney: *Metaphors of Self* (267)

* * * * *

Knowing, we have found, is only part of a larger process of experience, and the point at which we have real knowing is never precisely determinable.

T.S. Eliot: *Knowledge and Experience* (139)

CONTENTS

Acknowledgments 1

References and Abbreviations 2

Introduction 3

Burnt Norton

Part I 21
Part II 44
Part III 66
Part IV 86
Part V 102

East Coker

Part I 124
Part II 143
Part III 165
Part IV 188
Part V 212

The Dry Salvages

Part I 231
Part II 252
Part III 280
Part IV 301
Part V 312

Little Gidding

Part I 339
Part II 361
Part III 404
Part IV 429
Part V 442

Notes 472

Selective Bibliography 484

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Since, as I have been reminded, a thesis in submission is really an examination script, my personal expressions of thanks due to colleagues, friends and family are best reserved for another time and another place.

* * * * *

I hereby formally declare that this thesis is entirely my own original work.

REFERENCES AND ABBREVIATIONS

I have avoided footnotes, appending at the end of this study only a few longer notes which would otherwise have delayed the forward movement of the commentary. References are incorporated briefly in the text without publication details, which may be found in the bibliography. In cases of more than one item by the same writer, ambiguity has been eliminated by context, date of publication, editor of the volume concerned, or abbreviation.

The few abbreviations used to simplify references in the text are as follows:

Works of T.S. Eliot

OPP: *On Poetry and Poets*

Plays: *Collected Plays*

SE: *Selected Essays*

TCC: *To Criticize the Critic*

UPUC: *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism*

Specific page or line numbers for poems in the *Collected Poems* are avoided as unnecessary and therefore distracting. Other quotations from Eliot are generally identified by the sources from which they are quoted, most frequently in Helen Gardner's *The Composition of Four Quartets*.

Other Works

ATSE: Helen Gardner: *The Art of T.S. Eliot*

CFQ: Helen Gardner: *The Composition of Four Quartets*

Casebook: Bernard Bergonzi, ed. *Four Quartets: A Casebook*.

Inf., *Purg.*, *Para.*: the Dorothy Sayers translations of Dante's *La Divina Commedia* as *Hell*, *Purgatory* and *Paradise* respectively.

Peers: *The Complete Works of Saint John of the Cross*, ed. E. Allison Peers

Quotations from the *Bhagavad-Gita* are taken from the Penguin translation by Juan Mascaró.

INTRODUCTION

Nearly fifty years after its completion, the poem-cycle *Four Quartets* is an established though by no means unassailed monument of modern poetry. Reactions to the poems range from the reverential, as if they were virtually holy writ, to the dismissive on the grounds that they are poetically clumsy, or psychologically morbid, or ideologically sterile.

Stan Smith, in his book *The Inviolable Voice* - which clearly does not refer to Eliot's - finds them ideologically inadequate, an elegant symptom of a dying culture:

> Contempt for the specific leaves the poem always on the point of action, never actually soiled by commitment. (92)
>
> A deliberate abstractive movement evacuates the human from a reality which is on the one hand focused in moments of privileged ecstasy and, on the other, a series of massed, generalised, impersonal processes. (93)
>
> Eliot's poetry expresses, with great beauty and precision, a profound crisis in the bourgeois soul in this century, a crisis as yet still unresolved.... It is in the abdication of the *agent*, the contemplative abstraction of the subject, that Eliot's poetry finds its representative power, as the expression of an age when bourgeois culture entered into what looked like a terminal paralysis. (97)

C.K. Stead has recently remarked that Eliot

> had stolen from his own nature all - or very nearly all - the natural man; there was little capacity left for an open receiving of the phenomenal world, little trust in his fellow creatures or willingness to give and receive love. And in addition there was a belief in a particularly life-denying form of Christian asceticism which could only add to his poetic deficiencies. (1986, 229)

This is clearly psychological and religious antipathy rather than literary analysis; and Stead's often witty exercise in

deflation relies more heavily on the life and "ideas" than on analysis of the poetry. It is not the aim of this study to answer such allegations directly, though my commentary will certainly make my disagreement plain; it will also, I hope, vindicate the poetry against Stead's astonishing remark in the same essay that whatever the Quartets have been admired for, it is not for their "technique" (200).

F.R. Leavis, towards the end of his career, came to see the Quartets as characterized, and damaged, by personal desperation and "the Eliotic fear of life" (261). I must own that his long essay in *The Living Principle*, despite its air of intellectual rigour, strikes me more as the lament of an acolyte betrayed than as a clear account of the poetry.

In plainer terms, and addressing himself to questions of style, Donald Davie has seen the cycle as

> on the one hand poetry at its most private, on the other hand poetry at its most public, prepared to dispense with most of its customary ornaments and splendors.
>
> It is small wonder if the product of such extreme tension is a poem remarkably uneven in tone if not in quality; a poem which has to make a formal virtue out of its own disparities.... (Litz 195)

I would agree with Davie - and intend to demonstrate - that there are patches of unevenness; but these are not frequent or grave enough to warrant the generalisations he makes, nor do they proceed from the cause he alleges. We cannot, in any case, derive automatic consequences from the co-presence of the "most private" and the "most public" in poetry; if we could, Dante would have been consigned long ago to the critical equivalent of his own Inferno.

It has long been obvious that major stumbling-blocks to many readers have been the fact, or the nature, of Eliot's Christianity, or the alleged peculiarities of his temperament or his political and social beliefs. The latter have been analysed with persuasive sympathy by Roger Kojecky and to some extent by John Margolis; my concern in what follows is a far more limited one, not attempting to engage in apologetics or ideological vindication. Readers are of course free to dislike the poems, the poet and his beliefs, as they are free to dislike Milton or Lucretius; though it is hard to avoid the suspicion that Eliot's religion, in particular, would have been less problematic in the assessment of his work had he not been a contemporary and, especially before his conversion, a leading spirit in the genesis of modernism. The future may well change all this.

Adverse response to the later Eliot is of course not uniformly religious in origin; nor, happily, are his admirers confined to the ambience of the cathedral close. The cycle exerts a wide appeal and clearly means many things to many people; the bewildering range of responses often suggests that equally enthusiastic readers are encountering quite different poems.

The commentary that follows represents one reading and does not, needless to say, claim to be definitive. What it does claim is to offer one reading in some detail and in sequence, providing a step-by-step basis for comparison of responses, and attempting to justify by analysis the responses that it offers. It is not polemical in intent, though it is fair to say that it arises from profound admiration of the poetry and from the urge to share this with others; also that I am largely in sympathy

with Eliot's religious viewpoint. The question remains, why a commentary of this kind? Are there not enough of them?

The justification of fresh work in a well-ploughed field is a starting-point for many literary studies, and this is no exception. A commentary at this stage, on a work as widely known and studied as *Four Quartets*, runs two risks: either of tiresome reporting of the obvious and of what many others have already said, or of assuming a startling (and so predictably, to many readers, irresponsible) "originality" of approach. Yet between the two still lies, I believe, a considerable space in which useful work may be done - a larger space than the volume of existing studies might lead us to expect.

A great deal of illuminating work has indeed been done on the cycle as well as on individual Quartets: most notably, in my opinion, by the late Helen Gardner in *The Art of T.S. Eliot* (1949) and *The Composition of Four Quartets* (1978) - each, in its way, a pioneering study. Dozens of critics and commentators have helped to clarify details, identify influences, trace allusions and assess Eliot's artistry; and few have written without making some real contribution. In spite of all this, surprisingly little has been written in the way of sustained *book*-length commentary on the cycle as a whole and as, primarily, *poetry* (Julia Reibetanz's helpful work[1] being one of the few exceptions). Most of the existing commentaries are valuable in identifying sources and interpreting ideas at various points, but lack sequential continuity of attention to the texture of the verse in relation to the ideas as they unfold.

Notable among accounts of the cycle during the past ten years - extended ones, though not of book length - are those by A.D. Moody and Ronald Bush. Each is carefully researched and documented. Moody's is meticulous and often helpful. Bush's, often illuminating and sympathetic on Eliot's earlier career, seems less concerned with the poetry of the Quartets than with using them, together with biographical detail, to present a picture of inner conflict and personal failure in the poet. Lyndall Gordon's brilliant and moving *Eliot's New Life*, though biographical and not offered as a commentary, details the personal relationships and conflicts with far more information and insight. It could perhaps be argued that it encourages a more biographical reading of the Quartets (and of *Ash-Wednesday*) than they really warrant: the presence of Emily Hale in Burnt Norton's garden being, for instance, a detail to be valued yet not an essential key to the opening movement of the poem. But the tasks of biographers and commentators necessarily differ in emphasis; and the first responsibility of a sustained commentary is to the details of the text as we have it.

A student long ago remarked to me how often the available "guides" to Eliot's poetry tended to pass over in silence just those passages that puzzled him most, as if the authors were reluctant to admit "I don't know what lines *x* to *y* could possibly be taken to mean, and would appreciate suggestions". This is still true of parts of "Gerontion", *The Waste Land* and *Ash-Wednesday*, and arguably even more so of the Quartets. Granted that accounts of "meaning" are not necessarily definitive, attempts to offer them remain worthwhile.

But it is not only at the level of "explication of meaning" that the well-scarred field invites further ploughing. Eliot remarked in "From Poe to Valéry" that "The subject exists for the poem, not the poem for the subject" (*TCC* 39); and unless we detach from its context and wilfully misread the famous statement in *East Coker*, it is not true that "The poetry does not matter". The mysterious connection between subject and poetry - hazy as the terms and artificial as the distinction may be - warrants close scrutiny, and here lies plenty of scope for further investigation (far more than will be undertaken here).

It is perhaps excusable for the average student of Eliot to suspect that there are two main approaches to commentary on the cycle: that of the expert image-, allusion- and source-hunter (such as Grover Smith, Peter Milward or Harry Blamires) who provides an *embarras de richesse* of suggestions and parallels yet often leaves us with the difficulty of fitting them coherently together; and that of the sophisticated expositor of influences (Hugh Kenner or Derek Traversi) who ranges over a wide field of religious and philosophical thought from Heraclitus to Bradley or the *Bhagavad-Gita* to Bergson, yet leaves us still wondering what, in the plain old-fashioned sense, lines *x* to *y* may mean, why they take the form that they do, and how they connect with the rest of the poem. The occupational hazards of commentary on the Quartets are such that they too easily, and dauntingly, begin to sound like textbooks of metaphysics or collections of sermons or, worse still, a fiendish literary quiz or set of crossword-puzzle clues.

The aim of this study has been to do reasonable justice to the Quartets as, above and before anything else, poetry. And far from dismissing the kinds of expertise I have mentioned, I am deeply indebted to them, as the following pages will amply demonstrate. My point is that the very wealth of scholarship often tends to leave the poetry itself on the sidelines, and that there remains plenty of scope for a line-by-line critical reading of the whole. I have tried to offer a plain but full account, ignoring neither the puzzling nor the more familiar, bearing in mind the likely responses of the literate and well-informed but non-specialist reader, as well as drawing fairly selectively on the insights afforded by the work of specialist scholars. My study is a sequential reading of *Four Quartets* as an unfolding experience involving simultaneous response to form, rhythm, image, idea, syntax, tone, and mood, attending to the interrelationships of one to another and of one part of the cycle to another; and avoiding the distractions of extended and inconclusive debates over religion or philosophy or mysticism or Eliot's personal temperament and problems. These all have their relevance to the cycle, but the experience of reading it is the chief object of my attention.

While debates over critical theory are not my concern here, it will be apparent that my preferred method of approach can be called "close reading" (though I trust not of the myopic kind) and that it is not unlike the methods of the New Critics of the mid-century. Not long ago Sanford Schwartz wrote:

> After several decades of dramatic change, New Criticism now seems as quaint as the tradition it replaced.... Many now look back upon their New

> Critical heritage as a kind of provincial embarrassment, a reminder of the humble origins they have left behind. (213)

Many will doubtless agree with him; at all events, in my firm conviction that the efficacy of the method is more important than its provenance, I am gratified to find him adding that

> the tradition we are leaving behind should be treated as seriously as the tradition we are now assimilating.... (215)

(It is a question, of course, whether we *are* leaving that tradition behind.) Every method carries its dangers, and our business is as far as possible to avoid the dangers rather than to spurn the methods. Since Eliot's well-known comments in "The Frontiers of Criticism" on "the lemon-squeezer school of criticism" (*OPP* 113), a certain defensive self-consciousness has sometimes attended and bedevilled exercises in the close reading of texts. Russell Kirk has offered a severe warning:

> The "lemon-squeezer school of criticism", disliked by Eliot, is too fond of lengthy indolent quoting from the poet, extracting drops of juice that these drops may be inspected briefly through the critic's microscope. Carried to excess, this technique bewilders the common reader and bores the man who has read Eliot several times over. (285)

The problem is, of course, to identify the nature and limits of "indolence" and "excess". More to our purpose, however, is the context in which Eliot made his remarks. Discussing a volume of close readings, he claimed to find the method rather "tiring", yet added that the analysis of "Prufrock" in that volume, ignoring the darker recesses of his own private life,

> was an attempt to find out what the poem really meant - whether that was what I had meant it to mean or not. And for that I was grateful. (*OPP* 113)

Going on to the dangers of the method, he listed them as: the

assumptions that one and only one interpretation is right and that it is *necessarily* an account of the author's conscious or unconscious intentions; and the damage that can be done to the reader's personal enjoyment of a poem. These cautions, though salutary, are equally applicable to many other methods of analysis and interpretation. The term "lemon-squeezer" itself is of course tendentious; the close reader would prefer to see him- or herself as a reasonably informed, helpful and tactful tour guide, blending factual information with personal responses, alerting the hearers to details that might be overlooked, and finally leaving them to explore further for themselves, refining their own evaluations and enlarging their capacity to understand and enjoy the work before them.

Two frequently recurring emphases perhaps warrant preliminary comment: those on syntax and on metrics. Believing that Eliot departed from normal syntax, word order or idiom only for specific effects, I have often looked at the structure of the sentences, the patterning of phrases, clausal relationships or significant conjunction-links, shifts in tense or grammatical mood, the varying choice of generic pronouns, or the functions of syntactical ambiguities. I have also scanned selected sections of the text as the commentary proceeds. The verse, I find, has a dominant pattern - more dominant than is usually recognized - of four main stresses to the line, often with a number of secondary stresses. Doubtless many readers would hear the rhythms somewhat differently; but a fairly frequent emphasis on hearing them at all, and on noticing variations from the

basic pattern, is an essential part of my aim to examine the verse as vehicle for the images and ideas, without with they would remain images and ideas but would not be poetry. Harvey Gross, in his rewarding study of Eliot's prosody, has argued with some persuasiveness that the syntax is in fact closely related to prosodic form and musical effect:

> Eliot, through prosody, and a syntax so intricately patterned that it must be reckoned a part of Eliot's prosody, evokes a complexity of feeling in ways that music evokes comparable states in the minds of sensitive listeners. (175)

Amidst a rich welter of literary-theoretical propositions I have adhered to a few simple assumptions, the defence of which would doubtless be inconclusive and would leave no space for the commentary itself. (In this respect the study must justify its method through its practice.) These assumptions are: that a poem must not only "be" but "mean", and, conversely, that meaning is affected by the manner of its "being" in the poetry; that the author's intended meaning, if detectable from extra-textual sources (here, above all, the drafts of the Quartets), is worth taking into account though by no means final; that the poetry matters more as an experience for the reader than as a revelation of the author - who is, after all, only an object of interest by virtue of what he or she has given us to read; and finally that, while no assessment or interpretation can ever be taken as definitive, personal responses (whether of enthusiasm or of distaste) are not out of place - it is the commentator's right to be evaluative as well as expository.

* * * * *

It is not accidental that the title *Four Quartets* draws analogies with musical composition. In reading the work we soon realise the value of alertness to features which musical metaphors help to describe - to the patterns of repetition, development, recapitulation, variation, to which themes and statements are subjected. In "The Music of Poetry", often quoted in this connection, Eliot observed that

> The use of recurrent themes is as natural to poetry as to music. There are possibilities for verse which bear some analogy to the development of a theme by different groups of instruments; there are possibilities of transitions in a poem comparable to the different movements of a symphony or a quartet; there are possibilities of contrapuntal arrangement of subject-matter. (*OPP* 38)

Earlier in the same lecture he had said:

> Dissonance, even cacophony, has its place: just as, in a poem of any length, there must be transitions between passages of greater and less intensity, to give a rhythm of fluctuating emotion essential to the musical structure of the whole; and the passages of less intensity will be, in relation to the level on which the total poem operates, prosaic - so that, in the sense implied by that context, it may be said that no poet can write a poem of amplitude unless he is a master of the prosaic. (*OPP* 32)

These analogies can be applied to *Four Quartets*, though not systematically pursued. There are senses in which they simply cannot be pressed: nothing in the use of language can really correspond to the varying harmonic possibilities offered by four instruments,[2] and we can stretch the comparison no further than saying that the texture of Eliot's language sometimes undergoes changes faintly suggesting the different blends of instrumental sound. That Eliot himself was more concerned with structural analogies and the weaving of themes than with blends of instru-

mental texture, is clear from a letter he wrote to John Hayward, the friend whose advice and comment he sought while composing the last three Quartets.

> I should like to indicate that these poems are all in a particular set form which I have elaborated, and the word "quartet" does seem to me to start people on the right tack for understanding them ("sonata" in any case is *too* musical). It suggests to me the notion of making a poem by weaving in together three or four superficially unrelated themes: the "poem" being the degree of success in making a new whole out of them. (*CFQ* 26)

We may, too, have a general impression that after the large dramatic and "symphonic" range of *The Waste Land*, the Quartets have the more intimate and austere poise of chamber music; but this does not carry us very far. Herbert Howarth, discussing the alleged links between the poem-cycle and the late string quartets of Beethoven (277-289), built on the hint in one of Eliot's lectures that he aimed to "get *beyond poetry*, as Beethoven, in his later works, strove to get *beyond music*" (Matthiessen 90). Howarth goes on, but with a noticeable wrenching of parallels, to draw structural analogies between each of the four poems and Beethoven's Opus 132 in A minor.

Poetry, however, stubbornly lacks the abstraction of music ("I gotta use words when I talk to you", as Sweeney says); and although much of *Four Quartets* may look like the product of ineffably private experience, the poems do communicate, and we both must and can "use words" to talk about subject and theme.

If forced to answer in one word the question "What are the Quartets about?", most of us would probably reply (with all the inevitable frustrations and reservations) "Time". *Past, future, before, after, beginning* and *end* together appear over 100 times,

and the word *time* itself about 70 times in the 876 lines; and almost every conceivable meaning of the word *time* is brought into play: occasion, opportunity, moment, continuum, age, rhythm and so on. If allowed a few more words, we might name as some leading themes the relation between certain haunting individual experiences (initially the poet's own) and the nature of time itself; and the relation between the limitations of temporality and human intimations of perfection and eternity.

The Quartets are, then, in a limited sense religious or philosophical poetry; but I believe it is preferable to speak of them as poetry of meditation. Eliot often deliberately creates the sense of a mind turning upon itself in meditation; but this mode periodically gives way to passages of heightened lyric intensity and vision.

To classify the Quartets precisely is certainly difficult. They contain episodes of narrative and near-narrative; emotion recollected in tranquillity; experiences of visionary intensity; lyricism that approaches incantation; the occasional brief symbolist structure; verbal landscape-painting; and one elaborately designed modification of the sestina. Taking each poem as a whole, perhaps their nearest - though very approximate - formal and generic affinity with any traditional poetic kind is with the capacious adaptations, over the last three centuries, of the irregular Pindaric ode. And if we think for a moment of Wordsworth, it would not be too fanciful to see them as Eliot's intimations of immortality, dominated by, and exploring answers to, the question "Whither is fled the visionary gleam?" We

would, no doubt, hasten to add that Eliot's visionary gleam and his answers were very different from Wordsworth's.[3]

Attempts to describe in general terms the nature of the Quartets sometimes take undue account of the circumstances of their composition. *Burnt Norton* (1936), as a single poem and not part of a cycle, began with pieces rejected from the recent writing of *Murder in the Cathedral* (1935); Eliot has, indeed, something of a reputation as an economical user of poetic left-overs. And *The Family Reunion* (1939) may well have used some passages earlier considered for *Burnt Norton*: motifs of the door, the passage, the rose-garden, and "what might have been" appear in both. The idea of a cycle and the name *Quartets* - at one stage proposed as *Kensington Quartets* (*CFQ* 26) - came several years later when Eliot began *East Coker*; and even then he seemed to envisage a series of only three poems, not four (*CFQ* 16-18), which shows that the eventual quaternities of symbols recognized in the cycle - of the elements, for instance - were stumbled upon almost by chance when he was nearly half-way through. In the course of the commentary I hope to show, however, that this need not discourage us from responding to the cycle as genuinely one work in its final form. It is worth remembering at this point that *The Waste Land*, *The Hollow Men* and *Ash-Wednesday* all grew from earlier separate poems.

Nor, I think, need we be deterred by the time-gap between the pre-war first quartet and the other three, all composed during the war. True, there is a limited sense in which the last three may be called war poems, unlike *Burnt Norton*; but to question the unity of the cycle on such grounds is to be wise -

or unwise - after the event. A reader uninformed about the dating is not likely to question the unity of the series as it now stands; and it is in any case the poet's own prerogative - indeed a part of the process of composition - to determine the final order and grouping of the works he wishes to be read as totalities. Our critical judgment may question the *wisdom* of his decision, yet we are formally obliged to regard as whole works what he has identified as whole works, regardless of the events and changes of mind that have intervened in the process of their composition. An analogous case is that of Rilke's *Duino Elegies*, begun in 1912, variously continued, abandoned and re-ordered, and not finished until 1922; yet Rilke finally regarded them as one work and intended them to be read as such.

The plural noun in the title *Four Quartets* invites us to see each one as in some sense a separate poem, yet the title itself identifies them as one *work*; and it is legitimate as well as rhetorically convenient to refer sometimes to "them" and sometimes to "it". I have observed the distinction by using italics for the group title (as for each individual poem), but not when mentioning "the Quartets" less formally.

On the question of "them" and "it", one other subject needs brief attention: ought we to regard the two epigraphs from Heraclitus as applying to the cycle or to *Burnt Norton* alone? Originally they applied only to *Burnt Norton*; since then they have led a curious double life. Helen Gardner summarises thus:

> The Greek epigraphs were omitted when *Burnt Norton* was published in pamphlet form. In *Four Quartets* they appear on the reverse of the table of Contents, as if they were epigraphs to all four poems. In

> *The Complete Poems and Plays* (New York, 1952) and *Collected Poems 1909-1962* they appear, as in the draft, below the title of *Burnt Norton*. (*CFQ* 82)

The facts here are quite correct, as far as they go; but the implications are not. To say "as if they were epigraphs to all four poems" is to suggest that they ought not to be; and the phrase "as in the draft" implies that they are now rightly printed as epigraphs to *Burnt Norton* alone. The evidence is nevertheless that Eliot intended their transfer from the first individual poem to the status of epigraphs to the whole cycle.

In the Hayward Bequest in King's College, Cambridge, is the poet's own proof copy of *Four Quartets* (1944). In it the epigraphs appear under the title of *Burnt Norton*, but Eliot has ringed them in blue pencil, adding an arrow directing the printing-house in future editions to transfer them to the left-hand page (the verso of the Contents page). He added a note: "and put in smaller type, as in American edition". These two changes were duly made in subsequent issues of *Four Quartets*, where they appear separately from *Burnt Norton* not "as if" but *because* they were finally intended as epigraphs to all four.

The fact that Eliot allowed issues of the *Collected Poems*, unlike those of *Four Quartets*, to retain the "*Burnt Norton* only" layout - as they have done right up to the 1980's - is irrelevant. In later life he did not carefully check each new printing of his work. Moreover, the same blue-pencilled proof copy contains two minor punctuation changes and one verbal change (from "And reconciles forgotten wars" to "Appeasing long forgotten wars" in *Burnt Norton* II) which are now part of the universally accepted text. The epigraphs ought therefore to be

printed consistently, in accordance with his wishes, as applying to the entire cycle.

Eliot quoted the Heraclitean fragments from Hermann Diels' collection of the Pre-Socratic philosophers, *Fragmente der Vorsokratiker*. The standard English version of the first (from Fragment 2) is:

> But although the Law is universal, the majority live as if they had understanding peculiar to themselves. (Freeman 24-25)

Grover Smith offers three useful paraphrases:

> Though the law of things is universal in scope, the average man makes up the rules for himself.
>
> Though the Word governs everything, most people trust in their own wisdom.
>
> Although there is but one Center, most men live in centers of their own. (255)

Noticeable is the variety of paraphrase which the term *logos* allows, indeed seems to demand. On a more literal level, and without translating the key word, we may read "While the *logos* is common, most live as if having their own purpose" - or, again more idiomatically, "according to their own devices". Much of the cycle addresses itself in one way or another to the problem of this disjunction between the universal or eternal One and the diverse or temporal Many, the *logos* (in one of its senses *Word*) assuming various guises as we move through the poems.

The second epigraph (Fragment 60) is less variable in the translations it invites, but its oracular paradox is multivalent in thought:

> The way up and down is one and the same. (Freeman 29)

In its original form it may be associated with the Heraclitean

doctrine of the flux of all material things; but in the course of the Quartets it acquires further resonance as an echo of the idea that the affirmative ("up") and the negative ("down") ways of spiritual experience lead to the same point of fulfilment in the apprehension of the eternal.

Since Eliot was simply "attracted by the *poetic suggestiveness*" (Preston viii) of these fragments without specifying what they meant to him, they are better read in the light of the work than vice versa, and cannot be used as skeleton keys to interpretation. It is, indeed, in retrospect that they assume the thematic values outlined above. As we proceed to examine *Four Quartets* in detail, a number of the poet's recurring preoccupations will carry our minds back to the Heraclitean fragments: the oppositions - yet ultimately the reconciliations - of the individual and the universal, the many and the one, flux and stasis, time and eternity, the way up and the way down, words and the Word.

BURNT NORTON

Part I

In his 1942 essay *The Music of Poetry* Eliot remarked that the poet is sometimes "occupied with frontiers of consciousness beyond which words fail, though meanings still exist" (*OPP* 30). This is true of himself in *Four Quartets*, and we feel it most acutely at the opening of *Burnt Norton*, which possesses a higher degree of impersonality and abstraction than the other three.

As we begin, we seem to be travelling through regions of an unspecified mind pondering a subject which at first is not precisely clear to us, except that it is a meditation on time.

> Tíme présent/and tíme pást
> Are bóth perhaps présent/in tíme fúture,
> And tíme fúture/contàined in tíme pást.
> If áll tíme/is etérnally présent
> Áll tíme/is únredéemable.

Whatever the nature of the subject-matter, one or two things are immediately apparent about the verse which is its vehicle. The basic line - of *Burnt Norton* and of *Four Quartets* as a whole - is a four-stress line of varying syllabic length. (Sometimes three, five or six stresses may be necessary or preferable, but the norm is four, regardless of the typographical spread.) These four stresses, with a fairly insistent caesura between pairs - as in much medieval verse - function variously. At the beginning of *Burnt Norton* they reinforce the sense of a musing mind weaving abstract thoughts in and out of each other in a kind of intellectual cat's-cradle.

We begin with a slow, deliberate meditation on the nature of time, and the possibility that all time is eternally present -

actually simultaneous, despite the appearance of causality - and therefore "unredeemable". This implies that our timebound existence is an imprisonment in an inexorable determinism, that choice is an illusion, and that no future act can undo anything in the past; that the present moment (including the moment in which we read these lines) is merely an illusory bridge between a fixed past and a fixed future, an everlasting "now" that we cannot make significant and cannot escape or transcend. The poet repetitiously circles about a few words in a tone of constantly weighing up possibilities that lead nowhere. The diction, syntax and movement - abstract and dry, convoluted and constricted - combine to reinforce the idea itself.

And yet, these lines are couched in the form not of statement but of tentative speculation: the words "perhaps" (line 2) and "If" (line 4) are crucial. The poet does not commit himself. He seems to be saying, "Let *x* equal so-and-so, then *y* must follow" - but allowing for the possibility that *x* does not equal so-and-so after all. Yet, granting for the moment that it may do, it follows that

> What might have been is an abstraction
> Remaining a perpetual possibility
> Only in a world of speculation.

Our habit of thinking in terms of what-might-have-been is one which proceeds from the assumption that choice is real, that things could have been otherwise - and, moreover, that various possibilities remain open in the future: what-might-come-to-be is a cohabitant in the mind that entertains what-might-have-been. But, say lines 6-8, if we accept the opening assumptions, it follows logically that the what-might-have-been concept

should itself be relegated to the status of a mere might-have-been, not an actuality. The notion of possibility is, in fact, itself negated in a world where all-that-could-be and all-that-is are eternally synonymous and coexistent. A sad and sombre thought, we might say, except that the verse remains poised in virtual tonelessness.

In lines 7-8 occurs a syntactical ambiguity half obscured by the lineation. What-might-have-been, we are told (or rather overhear, since we have no sense of being addressed), remains a possibility in a world of speculation only, and in no other world; or is it, rather, that it remains a possibility only, a mere possibility - if we run line 7 into line 8 without pausing? Eliot's penchant for ambiguity should be enough to persuade us that the implications are richer if we allow also the secondary meaning in which the "Only" of line 8 is syntactically assimilated to the line that precedes it.

Of course, a perpetual possibility is by definition one that remains forever in a state of potential, lacking realisation. Paradoxically, what remains forever possible but no more, also remains forever *im*possible in the sense of being denied the opportunity of realisation demonstrating that possibility. A permanently hypothetical state of potential is a self-negating entity. It is as if we were trying to conceive of a looking-glass world where the square roots of minus numbers could be found.

Indeed, "a world of speculation" sounds like one of those phrases in which, with solemn verbal playfulness, Eliot may be

hinting at more than straight abstractions. A *speculum* is a mirror, and a world of "speculation" can be taken in more than one sense: as a world of philosophical logic in which hypothetical states are entertained; as the familiar world of profit-and-loss investment (profit and loss appear frequently in combination as a motif in Eliot's poetry); and as the world into which we step through Alice's looking-glass, where things work weirdly and backwards - a world, too, of enchanted gardens in which possibilities may be perpetually realised. In this world of might-have-been, and only in it, exists the opportunity of really experiencing something which in the inferior profit-and-loss world is never more than hypothetical.

If this is so, lines 6-8 are making two contrasting statements simultaneously, rather in the manner in which a Moebius strip presents one continuous surface yet possesses two opposed sides at any given point. They are saying, of what-might-have-been, (a) that it is never more than hypothetical, and (b) that only in a looking-glass world can that perpetual possibility become "genuinely" capable of realisation. In the visionary sequence that is about to follow, we step into that strange world, out of our timebound one, and the experience takes place.

Certainly lines 6-8 cannot, on a first reading, be expected to carry this weight of ambiguity; but that is no reason to discount it. Eliot's poem, like its subject, is not limited to a linear sequential movement - it is clearly part of its aim to transcend such limitations. As we keep on rereading, the "future" of the poem (a passage we have not yet arrived at) is able to modify, inform and enrich the meaning of its "past" (a

passage we have just read) or its "present" (the passage we are reading in the fleeting moment of here and now). The Quartets begin with the problem of imprisoning simultaneity, and move to the solution of liberating simultaneity; and the more we read them, the more the solution becomes, in retrospect, inherent and implicit in the statement of the problem itself.

Up to this point, the seesaw rhythmic movement of the verse, with its pair of stresses on either side of the caesura, has conveyed the impression of a mind either circling hesitantly around its own thought, or swinging tentatively, in pendulum fashion, between speculation and conclusion. An occasional secondary stress (marked with the ` instead of the ´ accent) quietly highlights a moment of extra deliberation, as in line 3:

And tíme fúture/contàined in tíme pást.

And when we arrive at lines 9-10, the four-stress pattern is overlaid with the hints of a six-stress one, making (especially in the word "Point") for a slower and more deliberate concluding cadence:

Whàt míght have béen/and whàt hás béen
Pòint to óne énd,/whìch is álways présent.

The slight stress on "Point" itself points to the ambiguity of "end", hinting at purpose as well as conclusion or cessation. We are not yet clear about the nature of the "one end" pointed to, but there is at least the ghost of a direction: the point of arrival, or the everlasting purpose, is always present, always potentially "there". "Present" in these lines often means more than simply present tense: it carries connotations of "present and ready for inspection" (line 2), or "permanently

unavoidable" (line 4), or "permanently available" (here in line 10). That emphatically repeated phrase "What might have been", although it is only an abstraction, begins to be focussed together with "what has been" as if they had equal validity. As the anonymous author (now identified as Constance de Masirevich) puts it in a 1953 study *On the Four Quartets of T.S. Eliot*: "Not only are past and future co-existent with the present; equally existent in some unknown mode are the non-actualised possibilities of each moment" (Anon 14). The solution, in fact, is implicit, though not yet spelt out, in the statement of the problem.

We now modulate from the abstract into the concrete, with a delicate sensory balance between the two: "Footfalls echo in the memory". To conceive of the memory in quasi-spatial terms, as of an indoor passage in which footfalls may be heard, is to prepare us for a sense of escape from the confinement of a building into the relative freedom and openness of a sunlit garden, enclosed though that in its turn may be. (It resembles the *hortus conclusus* of a long literary tradition.)

> Fóotfálls/écho in the mémory
> Dówn the pássage/which we díd not táke
> Towárds the dóor/we néver ópened
> Ínto the róse-gàrden./Mỳ wórds écho
> Thús, in yòur mínd./
> Bùt to whát púrpose
> Distúrbing the dúst/on a bówl of róse-leaves
> I dó not knów.

Lines 11-17 provide a subtle, evocative bridge-passage into the rose-garden experience. The first ten lines, as Julia Reibetanz says,

> are intended to create a rather unattractive and

> difficult barrier, which is to fall away...when the sensuous imagery of the rose-garden floods our awareness and animates our poetic experience. The world of the rose-garden, dreamlike and elusive as it is, will thus seem to us more real and more compelling than the grim chain of experience argued in these first ten lines. (22)

The images that take over are, first of all, images suggesting a movement into an experience of what-might-have-been, evoking that experience as if it might have happened, and thereby, in our minds, creating the sense that it could be happening now. The effect is created partly by the notion of an echo, with its blurring of the time-continuum; and the present tense of "echo/ Thus" (the immediacy of "Thus" poised carefully at the enjambement) contrasts with the preceding clauses which momentarily slid into the past tense ("which we did not take", "we never opened"). These things, the taking and the opening, did not occur, yet their very past-tense forms compel us, as we read, to imagine them occurring. The *words* echo like footfalls, not merely in our imagination but in our *memory*, which is hypnotised at this point into including what-might-have-been together with what-has-been. The poetry makes the experience happen as we read so that, as in the *déjà vu* state, we have the illusion that we can remember what is *about* to happen in the moment that it begins. The purposeful regularity of the footfalls (or their echoes) is implicit in the continued rhythmic beat of the pairs of stresses on either side of each caesura. In fact, the metrical pattern which earlier reinforced the hesitancy of speculation, now reinforces the purposefulness of imagined movement, yet without any startling rhythmic shift, so that the one appears to grow naturally and easily out of the

other. The relationship between the speaking voice ("My words") and the reader's response ("your mind"), together with the "we" of lines 12 and 13, gently incorporates the reader's own consciousness into a shared experience. We are no longer merely overhearing a hesitant mind communing with itself. We are now becoming implied participants in an event.

> Mỳ wórds écho
> Thús, in yòur mínd.

The tentative extra stresses on the pronouns confirm this new communality, and we are encouraged to accept it passively. The imminent experience resembles a light breath of air disturbing a pot-pourri of old memories, giving off a scent of what seems past and yet has power to impinge upon the immediate senses. (A pot-pourri might be described, somewhat quaintly perhaps, as offering the olfactory analogue of an echo; and "rose-leaves", as the Oxford Dictionary confirms, may mean rose-petals.)

> But to what purpose
> Disturbing the dust on a bowl of rose-leaves
> I do not know.

No more than the poet are we inclined, at this stage, to ask "Why?". We do not even need the Prufrockian warning, "Oh, do not ask, 'What is it?'"; we simply accept: "Let us go and make our visit". The sense of (at least momentarily) unquestioning acceptance is appropriate: this door, says Cleo Kearns,

> opens on what Bradley and Eliot alike referred to as immediate experience, the experience often predicated of children, of mystics and visionaries, of people in simple societies, and, at times, of poets. (232)

And as we emerge in imagination from the echoing corridor into the sunlight of the enclosed garden, we are being reborn, as it

were, into a world rich with archetypes, are sharing in the evocation of a lost opportunity regained.

Although the title points us to the country-house and garden of Burnt Norton in Gloucestershire, which Eliot visited with Emily Hale in the 1930's, he emphasised to Helen Gardner the importance to him of

> the feeling that it should be merely a deserted house and garden wandered into without knowing anything whatsoever about the history of the house or who had lived in it. (*CFQ* 37)

Clearly he was anxious not to limit the resonances of the garden: by avoiding biographical red herrings in this, the most *un*biographical of the Quartets, he wished to leave the garden free to acquire, in the reader's mind, the full range of suggestive possibility of which the *hortus conclusus* is capable, with its multiplicity of variations and adaptations through centuries of literary and visual art. As has rightly been said, Eliot

> is attempting to evoke experiences which are latent in the reader's mind, not primarily to convey experiences of his own, and so the images are allowed to have multiple and variable values. (Ward 230)

We should not draw rigid parallels between Eliot's garden and any single other garden; yet it would be perverse not to list some of those that come to mind: the gardens of *Genesis*, of the *Song of Solomon*, of the Hesperides; of Dante's Earthly Paradise and the *Roman de la Rose*; gardens in mediaeval painting, in Andrew Marvell's poetry, in Tennyson's *Maud*; the gardens of Lewis Carroll's *Alice* books; *The Secret Garden* of Frances Hodgson Burnett; and the orchard of Eliot's own poem "New Hampshire". (More prosaically, it has also been linked

biographically to the garden of the Mary Institute girls' school neighbouring the Eliots' house in St Louis (Bush 189).) To say that it is reminiscent of any or all of these, yet different from all of them, is to be precise rather than vague. It is also reminiscent of, yet other than, the garden of the country-house in Rudyard Kipling's story "They", where the narrator discovers, buried in the heart of the English countryside, a manor-house and formal garden complete with box-hedge, fountain and topiary, presided over by a blind woman and inhabited by the laughing ghosts of dead children whom she loves and hears yet never sees, and who seem to represent the might-have-beens of her life. Added to the range of suggestions offered by Western art and tradition is a further range (with at least some of which Eliot must have been familiar) from Indic and Persian traditions: it has been pointed out, for instance, that "The Rose Garden was, in the Persian convention, an image of the one-ness of God, and of the consummation of the mystical experience" (Ward 231).

In its long and varied traditions the *hortus conclusus* often contains at its centre an object or experience of great value or significance - sometimes good, sometimes evil. It is of the stuff that dreams and myths are made of. It carries its own curious authority in our primordial memories, and we can generally respond to it imaginatively even when we are not at all sure what it signifies; the sense of a special meaning is clear although its exact nature is not.

The rose-garden experience of *Burnt Norton* is of a moment

of illumination outside time, yet also a moment at which time and the timeless fuse together, an experience of what-might-have-been as what-is, of primal innocence (or something very like it) as not mere dim memory but fleeting actuality. It is ushered in by echoes and by birdcall. It begins as the search for "Other echoes" which inhabit the garden. Like Ferdinand in *The Tempest*, we follow the beckoning music as if under a spell, yet conscious of the urgency of the summons.

> Óther échoes
> Inhábit the gárden. Shàll we fóllow?
> Quíck, said the bírd, fínd them, fínd them,
> Ròund the córner. Thròugh the fírst gáte,
> Ìnto our fírst wórld, shàll we fóllow
> The decéption of the thrúsh? Ìnto our fírst wórld.

The lines describing the bird's call enact the eager, darting movement of the bird itself, then broaden out into the calmer rhythms of wondering arrival in that world, an arrival quietly reinforced by the tentative stress on "Into". This sense of arrival prevents us from taking too literally the momentary impression of the birdcall as deceptive: elusive, rather, we might call it - we are being ushered into a world potentially of illusion, but potentially also of a higher reality.

Although the garden is, on the face of it, so un-Dantesque, it does share some of the qualities of his Earthly Paradise at the summit of Mount Purgatory. Dorothy Sayers has evoked these qualities of Dante's landscape in haunting terms:

> holding fast its secret of repatriation and renewal, this is the place that all mankind remembers. This is the forgotten innocence, thrust back by the trauma of Adam's guilt into the unconsciousness of all his seed, the image of which troubles the imagination of some children and all poets with intimations of immortality. (*Purg.* Introduction 18-19)

It is the place of lost opportunity, of what-might-have-been, realised astonishingly in the realm of sudden spiritual illumination. Both the lost opportunity and the sudden realisation are movingly imaged at the climax of Eliot's play *The Family Reunion*. Agatha has spoken to Harry of her memory of her unfulfilled love for his father:

> I only looked through the little door
> When the sun was shining on the rose-garden:
> And heard in the distance tiny voices
> And then a black raven flew over.
> And then I was only my own feet walking
> Away, down a concrete corridor
> In a dead air. (*Plays* 106-107)

This is the lost opportunity, its loss characterised by the preventive presence of the black raven - "Until the chain breaks", the chain of our temporal limitation. Harry, finding sudden release from the alienating guilt of his past, answers:

> I was not there, you were not there, only our phantasms
> And what did not happen is as true as what did happen
> O my dear, and you walked through the little door
> And I ran to meet you in the rose-garden. (*Plays* 107)

Helen Gardner's comment on this point in the drama is eloquent:

> As Agatha speaks of that moment of ecstasy she had experienced as a girl, and of the long years of discipline and duty that followed, waiting for the moment when "the chain breaks", and he tells of his own existence among shadows, till the moment when he found himself alone, his excitement mounts. It is not only a mother he finds. In a flash he becomes his father, on that summer day years ago, looking up to see Agatha enter through the little door of the rose-garden. Just as for a moment he has been the child he might have been, he becomes for a moment the lover he never was, freely encountering love with love. (*ATSE* 152-153)

The moment in the rose-garden is one of "free encounter" with what-might-have-been as what-is. The echoes, like the children of Kipling's story, are "not there" in the ordinary sense, yet

at the same time they are present to the heightened consciousness. And they represent the momentary recovery of what in our timebound existence we have lost or missed. Northrop Frye calls this passage the "most concentrated of all visions of a lost or transitory state of innocence" (55), adding that "innocence becomes, for an instant, an epiphany of paradise" (57).

Bodelsen in his commentary suggests that the children in the garden are the children the poet might have fathered on the woman he is addressing (41-43 & 45). No doubt they do represent the full range of joyous might-have-beens (potentially including children), but I see no reason to take them as specifically or biographically as this; and there is no evidence at all that the poet is addressing a specific person other than the reader. True, he visited Burnt Norton with Emily Hale (Gordon 1988, 45), one of the might-have-beens of his life; but if he was writing in intimate riddles, they are too intimate and too riddling for the meaning to depend on them. To make it do so would be an injustice to the generality of his mode of address, which is not confessional, but rather designed to carry the reader - any reader - into an imaginative realisation of his or her *own* might-have-beens. The poet's images help to evoke this experience, yet do not prescribe the particularities of each individual reader's memories.

> There they were, dignified, invisible,
> Moving without pressure, over the dead leaves,
> In the autumn heat, through the vibrant air,
> And the bird called, in response to
> The unheard music hidden in the shrubbery,
> And the unseen eyebeam crossed, for the roses
> Had the look of flowers that are looked at.

"There they were", as if expected, though they were not -

the blend of the expected and unexpected resembling that of a dream-vision encountered without surprise by the dreamer. In the evoked experience, a sense beyond the normal five comes into play: "There they were" (to be reinforced by repetition at line 30) has the matter-of-fact ring of visual encounter, but they were "invisible" - and yet, recognizable enough to be known as "dignified", moving over the "dead leaves" (so prevalent in Kipling's story with its summer-into-autumn setting) without any physical pressure, and, we surmise, without exerting any other mode of pressure on the experiencing consciousness. The "autumn heat" and the "vibrant air" offer apt vehicles for what in more mundane circumstances would be a mirage or hallucinatory vision glimpsed through the shimmer. (And "vibrant" justifies its presence as it seldom does in contemporary speech, which has popularised it into a vague term of approval.) The deadness of the leaves emphasises by contrast the impression of intense life and purpose in the movement described - a deliberate, steady progress conveyed in the parallel phrasing: "*over* the dead leaves,/*In* the autumn heat, *through* the vibrant air".

The bird calls in response to "unheard music". The oxymoron emerges not from poetic mystification but from the quest for precision and clarity where the experience is all but ineffable. It is like the experience in *The Dry Salvages* of

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

The idea of unheard music is also probably indebted to Elizabeth Barrett Browning's line in "The Lost Bower", "Came a sound, a

sense of music which was rather felt than heard" (*CFQ* 40). Eliot, as Reibetanz (33) points out, used it again in *The Confidential Clerk*: Lucasta describes Colby's "secret garden", his private world, as

> Where you hear a music that no one else could hear,
> And the flowers have a scent that no one else could smell. (*Plays* 245)

It is clear by now that "they" in the passage are invisible presences, "accepted and accepting", presences indistinguishable syntactically from "echoes" which are also "memories". Those who are found in the garden are not strangers when they are found, nor are they objects of fear. All is filled with acceptance and recognition, the air is vibrant, the scene is bathed in light. The note of serene response is pervasive: the invisible is looked at, and looks unblinkingly back: "the unseen eyebeam crossed". Our response to beauty - notably human beauty - is often associated with unawareness of our gaze on the part of the admired object; but here it moves on another plane where the object is reciprocally conscious without any coyness or embarrassment: "the roses/Had the look of flowers that are looked at". (We cannot avoid - nor need we do so - a moment's awareness of the curiously conscious flowers at the climax of Tennyson's *Maud* (I.xxii), and the more whimsically conscious ones in Carroll's looking-glass burlesque of them: what is striking is how the poise of Eliot's lines allows us to assimilate the more haunting associations while firmly eliminating the element of whimsy.)

There they were as our guests, accepted and accepting. The encounter of consciousness with what lies outside time is

not a one-way affair. Since "they" inhabit the garden and "we" have strayed into it, "we" might expect to be *their* guests, yet the roles of host and guest are reversed and so in effect fused. The images of timeless encounter are significantly couched, not in the solitary terms of the mystical ascetic's experience, but in terms of *social* affirmation. And the images of plurality and of unanimous movement tremble on the brink of what we shall meet again and again in the Quartets, the notion of dance, with its implications of order within multiplicity and of timeless pattern within temporal movement.

> So we moved, and they, in a formal pattern,
> Along the empty alley, into the box circle,
> To look down into the drained pool.

The movement is towards the centre-point of the garden, to the feature that focusses its symmetry. The presences which have accepted and joined one another now become united as spectators of a climactic enactment of the timeless moment. The drained pool becomes for them (and therefore for us) the focus of attention as a lighted stage does for a theatre audience. Although we should be cautious about accepting the overwhelming number of puns detected in the text by, for instance, Harry Blamires, it is at least thinkable that at this moment the theatrical associations of the words "box" and "circle" are subliminally assimilated - in an imprecise atmospheric fashion - to the primary ones of formally shaped hedge. (Hugh Kenner, indeed, remarks that "there is no harm in allowing 'the box circle' to remind us of a theatre as well as a hedge" (252).)

The formal pattern sounds processional, and the "to" of "To

look down" implies purposive movement, as if the initial following of echoes has developed into a conscious tryst at a central point. Expectancy therefore rises as we approach the climax, and is further heightened by the matter-of-factly negative adjectives "empty", "drained" and "dry", which throw into strong relief the process that immediately follows.

> 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.

One simple way of accounting for "empty", "drained" and "dry" is, of course, to say that that is how Eliot and Emily Hale found the alley and pool when they visited the garden of Burnt Norton house. But, as always in his work, it is not the origin of the details that matters so much as their poetic destiny, so to speak. The literal dryness of the pool in the timebound world is incorporated into the description in such a way as to emphasise the vision of its filling in the timeless moment. The water created out of sunlight, glittering in the vibrant air from the concrete base, creates an impression of all four of the traditional elements (earth, water, air and fire) as momentarily at one - and this unity is further focussed in the mystical symbol of the lotos rising in the pool.

The lotos in the rose-garden hints at a universality of experience transcending the cultural differences of East and West - rather as the linked references to the Buddha and St Augustine do in Part III of *The Waste Land*. "Here Indic and Western points of reference meet without fuss, the 'lotos' of the Buddhist and Upanishadic scriptures, the garden of Eden,

and the 'emptiness' of *shunyata*", says Cleo Kearns, who continues:

> The vision in the rose garden is at once maya, or "illusion," and *at the same time* "brahman," or quite "real"....in the Buddhist term *shunyata*, "emptiness" or ignorance stands for and points to fullness of enlightenment. The final line of the passage, "Then a cloud passed and the pool was empty," may be read either way, as loss and deprivation or as a clearing of sight. (234)

Until the point of arrival at the pool, the syntax and word order of the poet have followed the norms of modern English. Then comes a slight shift into phrasing redolent of the biblical and archaic, signalling a quiet increase in intensity: not "The pool was dry" but "Dry the pool", followed by a cluster of "And" clauses, the loose co-ordination of which substitutes serial detail for causal connection, leaving us to make our own logical connections between the members of the series (a feature of biblical Hebrew): "And the pool was filled.../And the lotos rose.../.../And they were behind us". The verb "rose" emphasises serene depth, so that our senses of depth and of surface are brought together in the next line, especially with the unexpected "out of" connecting the surface to "heart of light".

The latter phrase has elicited a good deal of comment from writers on Eliot, not all of it helpful. Readers of *The Waste Land* are apt to think at once of the hyacinth-garden episode:

> -Yet when we came back, late, from the hyacinth garden,
> Your arms full, and your hair wet, I could not
> Speak, and my eyes failed, I was neither
> Living nor dead, and I knew nothing,
> Looking into the heart of light, the silence.

But the contrast seems to me more important than the similarity. The speaker in *The Waste Land* describes himself as looking *into*

the "heart of light"; nothing is mentioned as emerging *out of* it. The moment seems to be one of failure in love or desire, of an ecstasy more like death than life; and the Wagner quotation, "*Oed' und leer das Meer*", helps to underline this. On the other hand, *Burnt Norton*'s rose-garden experience, "out of heart of light", contains the momentary fulfilment of what might have been, but was *missed*, in the hyacinth-garden episode. Instead of an empty sea, we have "the pool was filled". The formulation "out of heart of light" - this time lacking any qualifying article *the* or *a* - is too peculiar to be accounted for by mere metrical preference; nor have we really explained anything when we remark that it seems to be the opposite of Conrad's "heart of darkness". *Burnt Norton*'s "heart of light", as source of spiritual illumination, seems to be unique, transcending all individual experience of it; one is tempted to repunctuate as if it were a proper name: "Heart-of-Light". For Eliot to do so would look distractingly quaint, but to respond to it in this way may be helpful.

At this climactic point, the unseen presences become briefly and indirectly visible: "And they were behind us, reflected in the pool". We have not been told who or what "they" are, and we are not told what they look like. Insofar as the poet's experience is here being recreated as the reader's - not merely described to the reader - it would surely not be appropriate to specify their nature any more distinctly, since that would incline us to feel we were hearing of an experience instead of undergoing one. (And the sound of children, which we are about

to encounter, is less sensuously immediate and limiting than the imaged sight of them would be.) We are also about to discover that we have had an encounter with "reality" in a form in which we do not normally meet it: even in this heightened state of awareness, this reality is available to us through reflection only, not direct visual perception. It is as if Eliot is here adapting and altering Plato's myth of the cave.

> Then a cloud passed, and the pool was empty.

With the passing of a cloud, like the disciples after the Transfiguration of Christ, we are brought back to the comparatively ordinary world: comparatively only, in the sense that we are still in the garden, but the pool within it is seen once more as empty. The central point of the experience has passed, but not the experience as a whole: we have still to be dismissed from that by further birdcall.

> Go, said the bird, for the leaves were full of
> children,
> Hidden excitedly, containing laughter.
> Go, go, go, said the bird: human kind
> Cannot bear very much reality.

In the Ariel poem *Marina*, the speaker's moment of ecstatic recognition (imaged in the figure of the daughter Marina) is conveyed in a further set of images that appear without any preliminary modulation:

> Whispers and small laughter between leaves and
> hurrying feet
> Under sleep, where all the waters meet.

Children are not mentioned explicitly, though "small" seems to imply them. And "Under sleep, where all the waters meet", though it defies paraphrase, clearly points to a state of psychic reconciliation, a "place" of meeting and unity. The

air of excitement is conveyed by the "Whispers" and "hurrying feet", and of hiddenness by "between leaves". Neither here nor in *Burnt Norton* are they referred to as leaves of an apple-tree, but in "New Hampshire" and *Little Gidding* this is made explicit. "New Hampshire", far from dealing with mystical experience, reads simply as a mood-piece, evocative images and lilting rhythms conveying innocent childlike happiness in an orchard, overlaid with an adult sense of passing time and the evanescence of life.

> Children's voices in the orchard
> Between the blossom- and the fruit-time:
> Golden head, crimson head,
> Between the green tip and the root.
> Black wing, brown wing, hover over;
> Twenty years and the spring is over;
> To-day grieves, to-morrow grieves,
> Cover me over, light-in-leaves;
> Golden head, black wing,
> Cling, swing,
> Spring, sing,
> Swing up into the apple-tree.

Here are children's voices among leaves in an apple-tree. The impression of joyous innocence is thrown into relief, not undermined, by the fleeting reminder of earthly transience: "Twenty years and the spring is over". And the apple-tree is identified as such when we return to the garden at the end of the Quartets:

> 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.

What is evoked is clearly a place or state which is a meeting-place of "beginning" and "end"; and the line that follows is a fleeting reminiscence of the summoning birdcall, this time not ushering us out, but resolving the oppositions of here and now, there and then, into "always": "Quick now, here, now, always". But that resolution, as at the end of *Burnt Norton* itself, is an anticipatory one. *Burnt Norton*'s momentary taste of timeless innocence cannot, in the nature of things, last: it is a hint of reality from which we must be recalled to the normal, though less "real", timebound existence to which we are committed. To dwell in this paradisal state would be the destruction of ourselves as we are at present constituted. As Part II says,

> the enchainment of past and future
> Woven in the weakness of the changing body,
> Protects mankind from heaven and damnation
> Which flesh cannot endure.

So the message of the monitory bird is a protection against, as well as a redefinition of, that "reality" which, like the face of God, cannot be dwelt upon by mortals. Our capacity for reality is limited.

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

Part I ends with a repetition of lines 9-10, preceded by the additional line "Time past and time future", which modifies our reading of "What might have been and what has been". Since "what has been" seems to be identical with "Time past", it looks as if these two lines are in chiastic apposition to each other, with "What might have been" assimilated to "time future": in other words, owing to the experience we have just undergone,

what-might-have-been is no longer divorced in our awareness from what-might-come-to-be. If this is so, the last two lines become far more affirmative in their implications than they were when they appeared as lines 9-10. Eliot has moved from images back into abstraction, and the repetition of the abstract statement creates the impression that we have come full circle to where we began; but its meaning has been modified by the experience in between, so that we have a muted anticipation of the thought expressed in *Little Gidding*, that

> the end of all our exploring
> Will be to arrive where we started
> And know the place for the first time.

Eliot can never be as affirmative as Dante, yet the sense that our losses, our might-have-beens, our unfulfilled longings, point towards an eternal "end" in which they are fulfilled, is at least faintly reminiscent of Dante's great affirmation in his account of the beatific vision at the end of the *Paradiso*:

> For everything the will has ever sought
> Is gathered there, and there is every quest
> Made perfect, which apart from it falls short.
> (XXXIII 103-105)

Or, as Grover Smith more prosaically puts it, "Through vision and poetry, 'What might have been' has become 'what has been'" (261). The moment of illumination has come and gone, but it affects subsequent speculation about the nature of time and how our existence in time may be made significant. This moment is in fact a point of intersection of the timeless with time, a point where time and eternity, limitation and infinitude, longing and fulfilment, are reconciled in a manner undreamt of in the opening lines, limited as they were by their abstraction.

Part II

Like Part II of each of the Quartets, *Burnt Norton* II consists of a formal lyric, which I shall call section A, followed by a more expansive meditation, section B. (Section B of *Little Gidding* II differs, though, from the corresponding sections by being prosodically more formal and having a narrative framework.)

The closing lines of Part I have, in one of their senses, brought us back from the moment of vision to the "present", as the last word suggests. And it is in the "present" of non-visionary experience that the poet tries to restate, in something like imagist lyric, the experience of timeless unity which is the subject of Part I. The shift is quasi-musical rather than logical or discursive. Part I was a meditation containing, ostensibly at least, a narrative. Part II alters the angle, approaching the same experience first by a lyric evocation of timelessness, unity and reconciliation in "pure" images, then by a more discursive series of phrases and statements about what the experience is and also what it is not (just as God himself is traditionally often described in terms of negatives).

There is little really useful commentary on section A. Much of what there is - Grover Smith's, for instance - ransacks allusive possibilities but offers negligible aid towards an imaginative reading of the whole. Comparatively helpful because more evocative are Helen Gardner and Raymond Preston, especially the former, although she remarks that the passage "is not susceptible of too close analysis" (*ATSE* 160). Her most suggestive

general comments are that in it "the unity of experience is conveyed by the juxtaposition of contraries" (160) and that "At once all is flux, yet all is pattern" (161). Preston says that "here more than anywhere else in the poem is a symbolist construction rather than a statement" (15). Certainly it is essential, as always, to respond imaginatively to the passage before thinking about it analytically; but that is no reason to waive further analysis as destructive or unhelpful.

In a general way, we have a sense of the "dance" of the entire cosmos, the experience of man the microcosm at one with the movements of the macrocosm:

> The dance along the artery
> The circulation of the lymph
> Are figured in the drift of stars

The conflicts of earthly existence are presented as part of a larger pattern in which all conflicts are resolved, where

> the boarhound and the boar
> Pursue their pattern as before
> But reconciled among the stars.

The meditation of Part I focussed on life in time and then on the transcendence of its limitations. The images of Part IIA focus on life in space and the transcendence of its limitations. Organic (and by implication geological and other physical) processes are brought together by the images and placed in cosmic perspective. But the individual images, and their relationships, are worth a closer look.

> Gárlic and sápphires ìn the múd
> Clót the bédded áxle-trèe.

In the above quotation I omit the caesura marks used in my discussion of Part 1. The caesura naturally varies a good deal

in strength, in Part I itself as elsewhere, although it is usually fairly prominent there. Here in Part IIA it maintains a ghostly presence, but is less significant owing to the continuous undulant yet onward movement of the verse, in which irregular yet emphatic rhyme plays an important unifying role. Moreover, the pace is comparatively swift, the four stresses often tending rather to be heard as only three primary ones and a secondary.

The opening lines have always been a puzzle. Gardner describes "Garlic and sapphires in the mud" as

> an image of the variety contained in a single sense impression: the soft and the hard, vegetable and mineral, the living and growing and the petrified and glittering, the common and the precious, the scented and the scentless. (*ATSE* 160-161)

This is helpful, but it does not illuminate the relation of the first line to the second, the relation set up by the unexpected verb "Clot" - as unexpected as the nouns themselves. The combination of sense impressions mentioned by her is no doubt present as we read, but some of them only fleetingly: garlic and sapphires are barely visualised before their combined impression is modified by "in the mud", and the main sense impression is not visual but kinaesthetic, an unusual mingling of textures and associated half-formed ideas; and the kinaesthetic effect is due partly to the movement and sound of the verse. The abrupt enjambement linking the stressed words "mud" and "Clot" with their short vowels, abrupt consonantal endings (like those of "bedded") - this combination of features contributes to the feeling of arrested movement in an environment compounded of

water and earth: an arrested movement that feels like death among mineral and organic elements of the earth. "Mud thou art, and unto mud shalt thou return", as we might say.

There are four passages of verse, very different ones, that may contribute something to our sense of what Eliot's lines are conveying at this point. The first, from Alonso's words in *The Tempest*, may have influenced the "clottedness" of sound by the abruptness of its past participles as well as by its elemental images:

> Therefor my son i' th' ooze is *bedded*; and
> I'll seek him deeper than e'er plummet sounded,
> And with him there lie *mudded*. (3.3.100-102)

The others are all from Eliot's own earlier work. The satire of "The Hippopotamus" takes its rise from the initial association of flesh and blood with mud:

> The broad-backed hippopotamus
> Rests on his belly in the mud;
> Although he seems so firm to us
> He is merely flesh and blood.

In "Whispers of Immortality" the lines on Webster, in the style of Jacobean macabre, dwell on the organic process underground by which root-bulbs replace decaying flesh:

> Webster was much possessed by death
> And saw the skull beneath the skin;
> And breastless creatures under ground
> Leaned backward with a lipless grin.
>
> Daffodil bulbs instead of balls
> Stared from the sockets of the eyes!
> He knew that thought clings round dead limbs
> Tightening its lusts and luxuries.

Finally, the opening lines of *The Waste Land* create the impression of death-in-life by images of organic breeding and tubers underground:

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.

All these passages in their contexts serve different purposes from "Garlic and sapphires in the mud", but cumulatively they support the notion that this opening of *Burnt Norton* II is evocative of the arrested movement of death in *contrast* to, yet introducing, the images of the dance of life that follow. As the lyric progresses, the clotted stillness of these first two lines is incorporated into the cosmic dance - death itself is part of that dance - but the force of that retrospective incorporation is lost if we do not at first see this stillness as resembling that of death.

Why is it an "axle-tree" that is "bedded" and brought to stillness? Here cross-references are often more distracting than illuminating, when they refer us to the chariot of Arjuna or to the "burning axletree" of Chapman which haunted Eliot's imagination: we try in vain to make bridges between such allusions and the force of the word in its present context - and this despite the evidence that Chapman's words, regardless perhaps of his thoughts, lay behind not only the axle-tree but also the "boar" and the "inveterate scars". (Shand, pointing this out, added in all fairness: "The fact...that the second line is derived from a line in one of Chapman's plays does not help interpretation, especially when one does not understand Chapman's line" (Grant 543).) Comparison with the Yggdrasil of Nordic myth (never "clotted") is only marginally more helpful.

Perhaps the axle-tree simply suggests the arrested principle of movement in the little world of man as external forces stop it spinning on its axis. But the image also prepares us for its more affirmative adaptation in section B where, from another perspective, what looks like the still point of death is itself part of the cosmic dance, "the still point of the turning world".

It is from this initial still point that the effortless movement of section A opens out. But before we trace it, it is necessary to comment on the nature of Eliot's debt to Mallarmé in these lines. Gardner writes:

> Mr Eliot seems to have had in mind two phrases of Mallarmé: "Tonnerre et rubis aux moyeux" from the poem "M'introduire dans ton histoire", and "bavant boue et rubis" from the sonnet "Le Tombeau de Charles Baudelaire". (*ATSE* 160)

There is certainly no doubt about the connection with the first of these, since one of the drafts for Eliot's poem "Lines for an Old Man" adheres more closely to Mallarmé, reading

> *Thunder* and sapphires in the mud
> Clot the bedded axle-tree

with Mallarmé's "Thunder" then deleted and "Garlic" substituted for it (*CFQ* 79). Eliot was clearly struck by the suggestiveness of the line; but what is equally clear is that he modified and adapted it to his own use and his own meaning. The other supposed debt (to "bavant boue et rubis") is less certain, though likely: yet here again the items (rubies changed to sapphires) are divorced from their context in Mallarmé, and there is nothing remotely "bavant" about the clottedness of Eliot's picture. Sometimes a "lifted" line in Eliot's poetry depends for its force on our awareness of its transplantation:

"Sweet Thames, run softly, till I end my song" is a case in point. At other times the recognition is only of marginal interest: so, Benson's life of Fitzgerald is the source of the opening lines of "Gerontion", yet adds nothing to our understanding of them, though it does point to the magpie quality of Eliot's poetic imagination and memory. It seems to me that the Mallarmé echo, like the Chapman one, is of this second kind.

The relationship between the first two lines and the rest of Eliot's lyric is at first sight adversative ([And yet] "The trilling wire in the blood/Sings"), but is also retrospectively cumulative ([And at the same time] "The trilling wire in the blood/ Sings"). And the word "Clot" rather curiously prepares by contrast for the images of blood and circulation.

> The trilling wire in the blood
> Sings below inveterate scars
> Appeasing long forgotten wars.

The parallel phrasing reinforcing the rhyme ("in the mud", "in the blood") emphasises the contrast, "Sings" in its position also balancing against "Clot". The individual pulse, delicately sensed as a continuous electrical impulse, is harmoniously linked by the rest of the sentence to the ancestral bloodstream of the race in a way that anticipates the river "within us" of *The Dry Salvages*. The poet seems to be momentarily achieving that impossible sensitivity referred to by George Eliot in her famous passage (in *Middlemarch*) about hearing the grass grow and the squirrel's heart beat, the roar that lies on the other side of silence. But he presents the individual human pulse and the submerged memory of "long forgotten wars", of the long-past

history of the race, in essential and effortless harmony with each other - a harmony experienced in the timeless moment of illumination in which all is "accepted and accepting". (The phrase "Appeasing long forgotten wars" is an improvement on the earlier "And reconciles forgotten wars" (*CFQ* 84): not only does its avoidance of repetition strengthen "reconciled" at the end of the lyric; "long" also extends the range of "forgotten" more firmly from the individual to the universal consciousness.)

The lines that follow continue, through their images, the impression of upward and outward movement from mud and blood-pulse, earth and what moves upon it, to what moves above it in analogous pattern, so that we feel ourselves as one continuous organism in common rhythm with the stars, rising easily with the sap of summer into and through trees and beyond them to the sky, from which the pattern of earthly conflicts ("the boar-hound and the boar") appears in a new perspective that reconciles them all.

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

The unpunctuated flow is clearly deliberate, to create a feeling of simultaneity and omnipresence rather than of contrasts and distinctions. But this lack of punctuation makes the line "Ascend to summer in the tree" syntactically ambiguous. The question is whether the ambiguity is deliberate or not. If we

place a stop *before* it, "Ascend" sounds like an invitation in the imperative. If we imagine a stop at the *end* of the line, "Ascend" is an indicative verb with "dance" and "circulation" as its subjects. Given the frequency of sparse punctuation and of ambiguity elsewhere in Eliot's work, it is reasonable to assume that the ambiguity here is deliberate. It is worth noticing that where Eliot *wants* to avoid ambiguity, he does introduce a stop: a comma after "Below" ensures that we attach it adverbially to "sodden floor" instead of reading it as a preposition with "the boarhound and the boar".

I read the lines, then, as follows (granted that the crudeness of paraphrase blunts their force): the rhythms of our biological processes are reproduced in, and at one with, the movements of the heavenly bodies, and are present also in the rising of sap in the trees of summer; and as we experience this rising, as of sap, we feel ourselves gliding uninterruptedly through, above and beyond the trees - which are also part of the unified cosmic movement - into the realm of light that shines upon their leafy patterns; and from this point we hear the rhythms of earthly conflict no longer as discordant but as harmonious; so in myths of metamorphosis, for instance, the hunter and the hunted become reconciled and part of the cosmic harmony when transformed into constellations.

"We", as well as the boarhound and the boar, undergo an apotheosis in the timeless moment of illumination, and this experience is conveyed in spatial images that evoke omnipresence as well as simultaneity. A reconciliation is effected, too, between the particularities of the singular nouns - really

generic singulars - and the plurality and multiplicity of the pattern in which they take their place.

The phrase "figured leaf", as well as the vision of totality in which it plays its part, is very likely indebted to section 43 of *In Memoriam*. Tennyson there suggests that the entire pattern of the world and all its history may be contained and preserved in the souls of those who, to earthly eyes, have died:

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

It is most unlikely that Tennyson's "still garden of the souls" (compare *Burnt Norton* Part I) and the "figured leaf" are simply coincidental. The word "figured" of course suggests pattern in the tracery of veins within the leaf as light falls upon it; the tracery of veins also "figures" the circulations of life-processes referred to a few lines earlier, and the repetition of "figured" from three lines earlier reinforces the connection.

Similarly the "sodden floor" glances back at the "mud" and retrospectively incorporates it into the pattern of reconciliation together with the contrasts or opposites implied in "Garlic and sapphires". It is not surprising, by the time we arrive at it, that the culminating verb-form in the lyric *is* the word "reconciled". Opposites such as ancient and modern, too, are resolved in the interplay between images redolent of antiquity (axle-tree, boarhound and boar) and those redolent of modernity (trilling wire and circulation).

Perhaps the most significant echo is simply the word "stars" at the end. No poet steeped in Dante as Eliot was could end

any passage on that word without full awareness that Dante purposely ends each of his three *cantiche* with it - and with its hints of reconciling transcendence. One's imagination is carried finally upward as each stage of the *Commedia* ends; and here the clearest progression of the images is a spatially ascending one. As Preston puts it:

> First the feeling is earth-bound, then as free as the leaves dancing in light; and we seem to see the purified essence of what we have known, with the accidents of our life removed and its conflicts resolved ....It is a vision of the ordered universe in which movement from one part of it to another seems so effortless that it is not movement at all, and it is the whole of earth of which we are conscious, not the part. (15)

Throughout this lyric section, the irregular yet persistent rhyming ("lymph" and "leaf" make a kind of half-rhyme) helps to reinforce the rhythmic beat of the line to carry the sensation of effortless omnipresence through *images* without the mediation of discursive comment. When we turn to section B, the picture is very different. Rhyme is dispensed with, the versification is more expansive and leisurely, and we return to a voice in meditation, using images yet constantly modifying, testing or re-exploring them in the effort to fix in words the nature of the experience which is the poet's subject.

He begins, as if to emphasise his tentativeness, with a phrase instead of a sentence: "At the still point of the turning world". Balance is inherent in the phrase, contrasting "still" with "turning" and "point" with "world". We have just had an impression of the turning world in the lyric section, but implicit in it has been the still point, the point at which movement *and* stillness are reconciled and held in harmonious

pattern with each other. Whatever may be said about the connection of this phrase with mystical experience, it is worth noting that the kind of paradox offered here is a simple mathematical one. Any spinning object - the terrestrial globe or a spinning top - presents the same situation: at the surface farthest from the axis, the speed is greatest; it becomes, by infinitesimal degrees, slower as we move inwards towards the axis; and at the central point - produced into the axial line in a sphere, but a "pure" point on a plane disc - there is no movement at all. Yet it is on the total stillness of this central point, relative to all the rest, that the movement of the rest depends. (Even if a revolving sphere wobbles as it turns, there remains a central stationary point halfway along its axis on which the rest of the movement depends for its pattern.) This still point is a little like Aristotle's God as Unmoved Mover; and the poet, although eschewing theological terms, implies that the variety on the surface of the "turning world" is held in a unified pattern by the still point at its centre. He implies, too - given the content of *Burnt Norton* thus far - that the visionary experience of the timeless moment is something like arrival at such a point, where time - conceivable only in terms of movement - and the timeless become one.

As if to underline this thought, the pattern of stress in the verse now undergoes a change and yet remains the same. Some readers would scan here with six stresses to the line, and this is possible; but (and here, as elsewhere, we need not take

Eliot's own recorded reading as definitive, nor would he expect us to) it is more interesting to hear the four-stress pattern again, slowing down the movement so extremely that distinguishing connectives acquire unusually strong emphasis, making each line one of "double" length accommodating *eight* stresses. I hear this pattern for the first eight lines of the passage:

> At the stíll póint of the túrning wórld. Néither
> flésh nór fléshless;
> Néither fróm nór towárds; át the stíll point, thére
> the dánce is,
> But néither arrést nór móvement. Ánd do nót cáll it
> fíxity,
> Where pást and fúture are gáthered. Néither móvement
> fróm nór towárds,
> Néither ascént nór decline. Excépt for the póint,
> the stíll póint,
> There wóuld bé nó dánce, and thére ís ónly the dánce.
> I can ónly sáy, *thére* we háve been: bút I cánnot sáy
> whére.
> And I cánnot sáy, hów lóng, for thát is to pláce it
> ín time.

Emphasis on the distinguishing negatives and other connectives (*Neither, nor, at, not, no, is, but, in*) conveys the tone and pace of the voice in exploratory meditation, attempting definition by means of discriminations designed to eliminate misunderstanding. The pondering tone of anxious precision, as we move among the abstractions clustered around the focussing figure of the dance, is enacted by the cautiously deliberate falling of the stresses; it is like watching a careful chameleon, after each footstep and before the next, swivelling an appraising eyeball backward, checking, foot poised, the placing of the next step.

The lines that follow, about the freedom and release experienced at the still point, enact that freedom and release by their more energetic motion and by their reversion to the

normal four-stress pattern, with an occasional extra (secondary) stress added, as we have seen in Part I.

> The ínner fréedom/from the práctical desíre,
> The relèase from áction and súffering,/reléase from the ínner
> And the oúter compúlsion,/yét surróunded
> By a gráce of sénse,/a whìte light stíll and móving,
> *Erhébung* without mótion,/cóncentrátion
> Withóut eliminátion,/bóth a néw world
> And the óld made explícit,/únderstóod
> Ìn the complétion/of its pártial écstasy,
> The résolútion/of its pártial hórror.

Doubtless there are individual lines in which other ears would prefer to hear as few as three or as many as six stresses; the norm is nevertheless four, and the insistent caesura again reinforces the impression of the poet's weighing and balancing thoughts and possibilities.

"At the still point of the turning world" appears first in Eliot's "Triumphal March" from the unfinished *Coriolan*. There it conveys metaphorically the centre of stillness (or desired stillness) in the key figure of the leader - who is himself the focus, the still point, at the centre of the turning world that observes him. As a double centre of two turning worlds it is somewhat ironic in its force: the Coriolan figure is a still point, a focus of the restless world of the triumphal procession; but inside him is also the longing for another, more intimate still point of which the naive spectators know nothing. The key line - which is also the still point at the centre of the poem - is ushered in by images of peace and seclusion in deliberate contrast to those of the public setting of military display and civic ceremonial. The irony is one of discrepant awareness - the awareness of Coriolan in contrast to that of

the spectators with their stools and sausages.

> There he is now, look:
> There is no interrogation in his eyes
> Or in the hands, quiet over the horse's neck,
> And the eyes watchful, waiting, perceiving,
> indifferent.
> O hidden under the dove's wing, hidden in the
> turtle's breast,
> Under the palmtree at noon, under the running water
> At the still point of the turning world. O hidden.

This passage does a little to prepare us for the recurrence of the phrase in *Burnt Norton*, but the differences are more important. Here in *Burnt Norton* there is no irony, no context of discrepant awareness; and the phrase is an attempt to focus the nature of an experience already undergone, not an evocation of a point either of public focus or of desired private retreat.

The definition, if we can call it that, of the dance at the still point proceeds largely by means of negatives: "Neither flesh nor fleshless", "Neither from nor towards", "neither arrest nor movement", "Neither ascent nor decline". It is easier to say what it is not than to say what it is - except for the insistent mention of it as a dance, yet again, a dance without movement or fixity. The paradoxical nature of a dance, like that of any temporal art-form, is that its essential identity inheres neither in the individual steps or movements that make it up, nor in the pattern that exists independently of their being performed. Without the pattern, the steps are not the dance. Without the performance of the steps, the pattern alone is not the dance either. The dance, therefore, paradoxically exists only in all of these things, and yet essentially in none of them. It is neither the physical

embodiment nor the pattern independently of it. It exists, in itself, only at the hypothetical "still point" where pattern and embodiment, flesh and fleshless, movement and stillness, are in some sense one, neither of these opposites being exclusively itself. Otherwise, there is no point at which the dance can, properly speaking, be said to exist: at the beginning it has not yet come into being; in the middle its pattern is not yet complete; at the end the pattern has been completed, but the dance is "over" and therefore no longer exists - if it ever did. The paradox can only be resolved by the concept to which Eliot gives the name of the still point: without it the dance exists in neither space nor time.

And yet the dance, the poetry tells us, does exist: it is implicit in the vision of Part I, and more explicit in the images of Part II, "The dance along the artery" and the cosmic dance of which that forms a part. Eliot has presented, in terms strange indeed yet accesssible to the modern reader, an experience of union between the individual and the universe which hints at both the cosmic dance of Sir John Davies's poetry and the hearing of the music of the spheres. And in section B's attempt to express this in comparatively abstract and discursive terms, the poetry itself enacts by its rhythms and pauses the combination of stillness and movement (which is yet neither of them) that he is discussing. I emphasise this, as I have emphasised the stress-pattern of the passage, because it is all too easy to make the assumption that the verse has here fallen apart into loose prosiness, and even that the loose prosiness may be deliberate. It is loose only in the sense of

being leisurely and expansive in contrast with the taut lyricism of section A, and in no other sense. The different form and rhythm serve as specific a purpose in enacting the theme - a new approach to the same experience - as they do anywhere else in the poem. In calling it leisurely and expansive I do not mean to imply that it is relaxed, any more than that the chameleon (in the analogy used above) is relaxed: it is tense and cautious, slow and deliberate, tentative and exploratory. When Eliot defines the relation of the still point to the dance, he is indirectly defining also the relation of the experience to the poetry that presents it:

> Except for the point, the still point,
> There would be no dance, and there is only the dance.

I have already suggested that after the first eight lines of this section the verse reverts to a more vigorous motion as it dwells on the freedom and release made possible by the timeless experience. It is from this point too that the language shifts noticeably from the abstractions of space and time into the register of psychological states and human emotions: "freedom", "release", "grace", "*Erhebung*". This shift in register - together with the return to the more usual stress-count - is in keeping with the fact that in the typed draft preserved by John Hayward a new verse-paragraph began here, with "The inner freedom from the practical desire" (*CFQ* 85). These lines offer the spiritual corollaries of the still-point experience, and relate them to the "practical" world of desire, action, suffering and compulsion. Eliot's mind was clearly moving along similar lines to those suggested in Thomas's first speech in *Murder in*

the Cathedral. Here he reproves the Second Priest for scolding the women of Canterbury whose fears, despite the limitations of their vision, express a real sense of the nexus between two worlds: the practical world of suffering and action and the eternal world in whose revolving pattern they are reconciled.

> Peace. And let them be, in their exaltation.
> [=*Erhebung*]
> They speak better than they know, and beyond your understanding.
> They know and do not know, what it is to act or suffer.
> They know and do not know, that action is suffering
> And suffering is action. Neither does the agent suffer
> Nor the patient act. But both are fixed
> In an eternal action, an eternal patience
> To which all must consent that it may be willed
> And which all must suffer that they may will it,
> That the pattern may subsist, for the pattern is the action
> And the suffering, that the wheel may turn and still
> Be forever still. (*Plays* 17)

Freedom, grace, release, *Erhebung* and concentration were implicit in the linked images of Part IIA; IIB now clarifies the experience in more discursive style. The "new world" of the experience allows us to see the "old" in a new light and is itself clarified by its relation with the old, where all things "Pursue their pattern as before" and yet, in the perspective of the new, are "reconciled among the stars". Both worlds are thus made "explicit", not only in the sense of being clarified but also in the original sense of "explicit", of being *unfolded* - implying that the *meaning* of the experience is not new but has been opened out for inspection, as it were. The old world maintains its mixed quality, but its ecstasy and its horror are together seen afresh as only partial: the reconciling experience

completes and resolves our formerly inadequate responses to each on its own.

But this experience is necessarily evanescent: man, normally timebound, cannot dwell in this other dimension more than momentarily, he "Cannot bear very much reality".

> Yet the enchainment of past and future
> Woven in the weakness of the changing body,
> Protects mankind from heaven and damnation
> Which flesh cannot endure.
> Time past and time future
> Allow but a little consciousness.

The state of timeless awareness is limited to glimpses; yet these lines show this limitation in a positive light rather than as a deprivation. In the world of physical and organic mutability, the sense of time is a necessary shield, like chainmail woven into our beings, against the annihilating force of a prolonged encounter with that ultimate reality - where heaven itself would become a hell for those not fully prepared to confront it. In the timebound world, only a little of such consciousness is possible. So the imagery here presents time as strong and the body as weak, limited in its capacity for full awareness - as the emphatic "Allow but" (meaning "only, merely") suggests. The contrast is pointed by the sound-echo between "en**chain**ment" and "**chan**ging". The thought here is continuous, despite the typographically broken line: the break highlights the reminder of an earlier motif ("Time past and time future" from the end of Part I), but does not constitute a new verse-paragraph, and the continuity of the meditation is unimpaired. In musical terms, the line-break resembles a rubato emphasis rather than the beginning of a new statement;

and the passage proceeds to emphasise the special meaning of "consciousness" and its relation to time. (Scansion here may clarify the thought.)

> To bé cónscious is nót to be in tíme
> But ónly ín time can the móment in the róse-garden,
> The móment in the árbour where the ráin béat,
> The móment in the dráughty chúrch at smókefall
> Be remémbered; invólved with pást and fúture.
> Ónly thróugh time time is cónquered.

Full awareness ("To be conscious") is possible only in the timeless moment of illumination ("is not to be in time"). And yet it is only within the time-continuum that we may ponder on such moments of release, meditate in memory upon their meaning and so, in some measure, come to terms with them. We have to live within the time-continuum, but given that fact, we can and must make use of memory - the gift of time - to integrate our timeless glimpses with our otherwise time-ridden lives.

Three such experiences of timeless awareness are briefly remembered as the value of memory is affirmed: the rose-garden moment; another in an arbour during rain, about which the Quartets tell us no more; and a moment in a church at dusk which, judging by the evocative "smoke-fall", with its reminders of the early poems, probably alludes to a London experience - not, at any rate, to the later one in the church at Little Gidding. But when and where precisely these moments occurred is not of importance: what matters is the evidence that the rose-garden of Burnt Norton is not their only setting; that they come sporadically and without warning (like Proust's moments of time-recapture); and that the memory of them may contribute towards a sense of being able to conquer time: "Only through time time

is conquered". By merely hinting here at specific personal experiences of his own, the poet seems to be inviting us to consider our own analogous experiences as well. Hence the tactful impersonality with which the idea is rendered.

Part V of *The Dry Salvages* says of the timeless moment that

> Here the impossible union
> Of spheres of existence is actual,
> Here the past and future
> Are conquered, and reconciled,

and identifies it as a type of Incarnation. Part II of *Burnt Norton*, in mentioning the conquest of time through timeless moments, does not yet make those larger claims, since Eliot here is not talking explicitly about the principle of Incarnation or about the one unique Incarnation of history; but the comparatively secular and philosophical thought of *Burnt Norton*, in this passage as in others, anticipates to some extent the later and more clearly Christian treatment of the timeless moment as we have it in the closing phases of the last two Quartets.

When the poet says that "only *in* time can [these moments]... Be *remembered*" and "Only *through* time time is *conquered*" (my scansion above reflects the need to emphasise the prepositions), he seems to be making almost parallel statements, suggesting the part played by *memory* in the *conquest* of time. This does not of course mean that we overcome our subjection to time by the mere remembering of such moments, but that *without* the remembering of them no conquest at all is possible. The whole of *Four Quartets* amounts to a meditation on such moments in relation to the variety of our other ways of experiencing time.

It is also a meditation on these moments in relation to our physical experience of the world - especially as embodied in specific places, and in the four traditional elements of the Empedoclean, medieval and Renaissance traditions. Although the fourfold cycle with its elemental symbolism was not planned when Eliot wrote *Burnt Norton*, it may nevertheless be more than mere coincidence that indirectly incorporates all four elements in the images of the three "moments" at the end of *Burnt Norton* Part II: the garden and the arbour, the rain, the draught, and the smoke.

Part III

Parts I and II have focussed on experience outside time: the moment of illumination in which what-might-have-been becomes actual (Part I); the sense of union and reconciliation with the cosmos that such a moment affords (Part IIA); and the nature and effects of the experience "At the still point of the turning world" (Part IIB). Part III is set in the timebound world, but with glances at that other world we have seen or sensed.

In Part IIB, of the still point, the poet says "*there* we have been". In contrast to the illumination of "*there*" stands, in Part IIIA, the inadequacy of "Here": "Here is a place of disaffection". It is worth noticing that the word "Here" functions simultaneously as a normal adverb modifying "is", and as a noun meaning "This place" or "This state", grammatical subject of the verb "is", and complemented by the phrase "a place of disaffection". We are back in something like the Limbo world of *The Waste Land* but, as there, with contrasting hints of beauty, repose, and significant form and identity.

> 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.

This passage is rich in semantic and syntactic ambiguities which have been less noticed than they deserve. I have already remarked on the ambiguity of "Here"; it may be helpful to explore the other ambiguities at some length. First, the words "place of" carry two potential meanings complementing each other.

The obvious one is "a place where disaffection prevails, a place filled with it". The other is more like "an opportunity for disaffection to assert itself", with a slightly biblical flavour - as in *Hebrews* 12:17 where we read that Esau, after selling his birthright, "found no place of [opportunity for] repentance, though he sought it carefully with tears". And the word "disaffection" itself is many-faceted: in modern parlance it connotes political or social dissatisfaction ("disaffected employees", for instance); yet its relation to what follows in the poem attaches to it further connotations of alienation, derangement, disorder and disease. Moody, who recognizes this rich multiplicity, rightly calls the word "uncompromisingly exact" (190). The "disaffection", then, can be taken here as compounding the ideas of both social *and* individual disorder or alienation.

The sparse punctuation of the passage also - by design, surely - lends itself to ambiguous yet mutually supportive readings. What relates the opening line to the next two: "Time before and time after/In a dim light"? At the end of the first line Eliot inserts no guiding comma or colon. The syntactic open-endedness allows for two kinds of relationship, each contributing to the total effect. "Time before and time after" implicitly answers two possible questions. To "When does this disaffection flourish?" the answer is "In the time before and after those timeless moments already discussed"; this makes the second line an adverbial phrase. To another question, "What kind of realm is meant by *Here*?" the answer is "A realm charac-

terised by *before* and *after*, in contrast to that other realm of liberating timelessness". This makes the second line a noun phrase in apposition to "place" and a second complement to the verb "is", so that we understand "This place is the realm of before-and-after, the world in its timebound state". The two meanings point in the same direction, but they emerge from different starting-points and with different emphases, together contributing to the initial idea a fulness that punctuation would have denied.

Again, "In a dim light" can be taken in two ways: as describing the environment of disaffection (as if the second line were parenthetic): "Here is a place of disaffection...In a dim light"; or as telling us more about the realm of before-and-after - that it is a dim one. Of course both meanings are present, each with its individual emphasis complementing the other. The ambiguities serve the purpose not of contrast but of fluidity of association: "Here", "place" and "light" are spatial in their connotations; "Time", "before" and "after" are temporal. The statement as a whole tends to fuse the notions of space and time, each conceived largely in terms of the other. And the substance of the poem up to this point ensures that "dim light" is taken at once in literal (spatial) and metaphorical (spiritual) senses. It is neither the "heart of light" of the timeless illumination, nor the "dark night of the soul" which we will soon encounter; its associations are negative rather than affirmative. (The "dark night" of asceticism, called the negative way in contrast to the visionary way of affirmation, is nevertheless affirmative in its spiritual

signification, and is in contrast to the "dim light" here.) The "place of disaffection", the "dim light" of our timebound experience, is neither daylight nor darkness: it lacks both the luminosity of the visionary moment and the paradoxical illumination of the ascetic's "dark night".

In the third line Eliot does insert punctuation: his colon ensures that we read the next six lines as a definition by contrast of what the dim light is, by grasping what it is not. It is neither the "daylight" (line 3) of illumination nor the "darkness" (line 7) of purification. Three lines (4-6) expand on the nature of this daylight, and another three (7-9) on the nature of the purifying darkness. This careful balance joins the two in opposition to the poverty of the dim light; and the balance is clinched by the syntactically detached summary, "Neither plenitude nor vacancy": neither the visionary's fulness of light, nor the self-emptied state of the ascetic's night.

These six lines before "Neither plenitude nor vacancy" are an unpunctuated flow, a slow, continuous arc of thought. And again syntactical connections (this time of participles to nouns) are remarkably fluid. This will emerge as we look more closely.

The image of daylight "Investing form with lucid stillness", and the lines that follow it, evoke the picture of a lovely art object slowly revolving in a beam of light - or else, with that light, creating the illusion of slowly turning: in either case, the gentle revolving motion reinforces the impression of stillness inherent in the object itself, while its own stillness in turn lends beauty to the rotation of light and shade. A similar

impression is created by the kind of cinema photography that uses speeded-up time-lapse shots to show, say, two hours of dawn coming up over a mountain, all within the space of ten seconds. The relationships of light and shade take on a "transient beauty" while their steady movement emphasises by contrast the "lucid stillness" of the mountain range itself, "suggesting permanence". The first of these examples, that of the art object, anticipates the lines in Part V, "as a Chinese jar still/Moves perpetually in its stillness". The simultaneous impressions of movement and of stillness invite an aesthetic response to a beauty compounded of both - and yet one which, in its timeless quality, is essentially neither. The movement draws attention to the stillness and vice versa, in a way that reminds us of Keats's Grecian urn. And this relationship is made possible, in Eliot's image, by the play of light and shade. The paradoxical fusion of motion and stasis causes the object itself to exist in an apparently timeless realm, "At the still point of the turning world".

At first sight the syntax appears to present "daylight" as the grammatical subject of all three participles, "Investing", "Turning" and "suggesting". But either "form" or "stillness" could also be the subject of "Turning"; and either of these, *or* "shadow" *or* "beauty" *or* "rotation" could be the subject of "suggesting". Moreover, "Turning" connotes both transforming and revolving/rotating; and finally, an imagined comma after either "form" or "rotation" would further multiply the already considerable number of syntactical possibilities. My point is that the unpunctuated arc of statement accumulates a variety of

possibilities as it proceeds, until at least half-a-dozen meanings are simultaneously present; and the result seems too richly complex to be simply fortuitous. Even stillness itself is a potential agent of a turning motion, and rotation is allowed to suggest permanence: motion and stasis become subtly interdependent. This should not surprise us after the "still point" paradox of Part II; what *is* surprising and highly impressive is the obvious ease and apparent inevitability with which these multiple relationships quietly unfold.

For the sake of clarity I tabulate below some of the possible meanings of these lines.

> 1. Daylight invests form with lucid stillness, and in doing so, it turns shadow into transient beauty by means of slow rotation, and so suggests permanence. (Here "daylight" is the subject of all three of the participles.)
>
> 2. Daylight invests form with lucid stillness; this lucid stillness turns shadow (transforms shadow) into transient beauty by means of slow rotation *within* the stillness; and this slow rotation suggests permanence. (Here we have three separate subject-participle links: daylight invests, stillness "turns", and rotation suggests.)
>
> 3. Daylight invests form with lucid stillness *by* turning shadow into transient beauty; and this beauty, with its slow rotation, suggests permanence. (Here "daylight" is the subject of the first two participles, but the second participial phrase is dependent on - not co-ordinate with - the first; and "beauty" is the subject of the third participle.)

Such analysis, it may be said, labours a simple point, while the general meaning of the passage is clear enough. Yet I believe it has the value of highlighting significant features not only of this passage but of Eliot's poetic method in general. Quite surprising relationships emerge between stillness on the

one hand and turning (revolving/transforming) on the other; and between transience on the one hand and permanence on the other - all expressed in a way ostensibly less deliberate and emphatic, yet no less complex, than in the passage about the dance in Part IIB. It reminds us that Eliot's syntax can be far more complex than it looks at first sight (his images have far too often been scrutinised with inadequate attention to their syntactical matrix). It reminds us too that his punctuation - or lack of it - is not always as loosely associative as it looks, and that ambiguity is more likely to be functional than the result of mere carelessness or imprecision.

A brief digression from our present text ought to reinforce this argument. In the opening lines of *The Waste Land* the punctuation is on the face of it more orthodox, yet there again the syntax, notably through the participles, allows a strong undercurrent of secondary meanings.

> 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.

The initial and most obvious assumption is that "April" is the subject of all the participles in the first sentence, "Winter" of all those in the second. But the enjambed suspension of the participles at the line-ends does more than create a rhythm of reluctant stirring: it quietly encourages a submerged set of secondary noun-participle links. The lilacs too may be mixing memory and desire; and memory and desire may themselves be stirring the dull roots with the coming of the spring rain

(since "with" can also be ambiguous, meaning not only "by means of" but also "to the accompaniment of"). Similarly, in the second sentence is it only winter that feeds the little life, or could it also be earth - or snow? (And does "with" simply mean that the little life is fed "by means of" dried tubers - or could it indicate that the little life is one "possessed of" dried tubers? Again "with" is itself ambiguous.) The lurking multiplicity of meanings is itself a fertile breeding-ground and stirs more than dull roots.

Returning to *Burnt Norton*, we have seen that three lines describe the daylight which the "dim light" is *not*. The next three lines describe the darkness which the "dim light" also is not. And they do so in a similarly unpunctuated way, equally rich in syntactic ambiguities. Even between the two three-line groups Eliot places no comma, allowing the sense to run on with no interruption, as if forcing us to hold the two sets of contrastive discriminations simultaneously in mind. The "neither" of the third line and the "Nor" of the seventh are immediately linked in their combined negation of what the dim light is like.

> Nor darkness to purify the soul
> Emptying the sensual with deprivation
> Cleansing affection from the temporal.

The ostensible subject of "purify", "Emptying" and "Cleansing" is "darkness". But we may also take the soul as the subject of the two participles, and the deprivation as doing the cleansing. There are therefore three possible readings.

> 1. The true darkness (which is not the dim light) is the darkness that purifies, empties and cleanses.
>
> 2. The darkness purifies the soul, which empties and

> so cleanses.
>
> 3. The darkness purifies the soul, the soul empties the sensual by means of deprivation, and this deprivation has the effect of cleansing affection from the temporal.

Notice that at the end of this passage we return to the word "affection": ridding the soul of worldly attachments is "Cleansing affection from the temporal", and yet making it *not* a "place of *dis*affection", but very much its opposite - since both disaffection *and* temporal affection are presented in negative terms. We have come through a process of clarification which defines more firmly, by negation, the nature both of the disaffection and of the dim light: the latter is neither true daylight nor true darkness, and disaffection is distinguished from the spiritual business of "Cleansing affection". The line of thought is precise; and meanwhile the ambiguities have linked - more firmly and economically than any series of discursive statements could do - the daylight, form, stillness, beauty, rotation and permanence on the one hand, and the darkness, soul, purification, emptying, deprivation and cleansing on the other. Patient analysis may convey these relationships to the intellect, but only the poetry as it stands can convey them to the imagination: which is why the poet's brief formulation is so much more memorable than my lengthy one. My concern has been less to explain what Eliot is saying - which is reasonably clear - than to show how and why it affects us as it does. And the last two lines are the more effective for the quiet assonantal emphasis linking six of their syllables into firm assertion:

Emptying the sensual with deprivation
Cleansing affection from the temporal.

The dim light which is neither daylight nor darkness offers "Neither plenitude nor vacancy"; and the place of disaffection itself is a place of "Neither plenitude nor vacancy": the phrase is set decisively between full stops that reinforce its doubly clinching function. The plenitude is that of the affirmative experience (of the rose-garden or the still point); the vacancy is that of the ascetic's self-emptying and detachment, the negative way which is also positive, leading to that illumination through darkness which occupies Part IIIB of both *Burnt Norton* and *East Coker*. (The same theme appeared in the second epigraph to *Sweeney Agonistes* in the words of St John of the Cross: "Hence the soul cannot be possessed of the divine union, until it has divested itself of the love of created beings" - in other words, cleansed affection from the temporal.) The word "vacancy" here is clearly positive in its connotations, in contrast with its cognate adjective at the opening of *East Coker* Part III ("the vacant into the vacant"). But the use of a word in different or even opposite senses is common in Eliot's poetry: deliberate plays on *turn*, *love*, *end*, *word* and *world* are all apparent in *Ash-Wednesday*, and here in *Burnt Norton* we are about to meet such lines as "Distracted from distraction by distraction" and "World not world, but that which is not world". Eliot's own comments on Lancelot Andrewes offer the most useful account of this word-play, and the most forceful defence of it against charges of mere verbal pedantry: it provides a means of sudden recognition as if it were a form of condensed metaphor.

> Reading Andrewes...is like listening to a great Hellenist expounding a text of the *Posterior Analytics*: altering the punctuation, inserting or removing a comma or a semicolon to make an obscure passage suddenly luminous, dwelling on a single word, comparing its use in its nearer and in its most remote contexts, purifying a disturbed or cryptic lecture-note into lucid profundity....Andrewes may seem pedantic and verbal. It is only when we have saturated ourselves in his prose, followed the movement of his thought, that we find his examination of words terminating in the ecstasy of assent. Andrewes takes a word and derives the world from it; squeezing and squeezing the word until it yields a full juice of meaning which we should never have supposed any word to possess. (*SE* 347-348)

The leisurely movement of Eliot's verse in the opening lines of *Burnt Norton* III seems to promise a point of repose, and this is what the firmly-stopped "Neither plenitude nor vacancy" initially offers. At first sight we are inclined to read it with stresses on both "Neither" and "nor", as well as on the two nouns "plenitude" and "vacancy", as if it were a normal full-length line of four stresses, ending in a point of rest. But by a species of metrical sleight-of-hand the poet forces us, with only a short pause, to read straight on into the restlessness introduced by "Only a flicker". This, with its commanding enjambement, plunges us without warning into the "place of disaffection" itself, and away from the contemplation of its opposites - the daylight and darkness with their hints of permanence and purification.

> Neither plénitude nor vácancy. Ónly a flícker
> Óver the stráined tíme-rìdden fáces
> Distrácted from distráction bý distráction
> Fílled with fáncies and émpty of méaning
> Túmid ápathy with nó concentrátion
> Mén and bìts of páper, whírled by the còld wínd
> That blóws befóre and áfter tíme,
> Wìnd ín and óut of ùnwhólesome lúngs
> Tíme befóre and tíme áfter.

If the ear retains - as I think it should - the expectation of a norm of four stresses to the line, the restless flicker of these lines is enacted not only by the insistent repetition of certain words and sounds but also by the scatter of secondary stresses ("ridden", "bits", "cold", "Wind", "un-").

Here images of light and of movement reinforce the contrast with the "true" daylight and darkness we have just pondered; and the positive plenitude and vacancy of the true forms are set against the negative connotations of "*Filled* with fancies and *empty* of meaning". The slow daylight and the purifying darkness are absent from the flicker of the dim light which is neither, and slow rotation is opposed to the whirling movement of the cold wind. These are obvious contrasts. Less immediately obvious is the degree, yet again, of enriching ambiguity. The faces are distracted; it may be the faces *or* the flicker *or* the distraction that is/are "Filled with fancies and empty of meaning" (it is potentially, of course, all of these, but more immediately the faces). Again, it is ostensibly the distraction that is appositionally described as "Tumid apathy with no concentration"; yet "Filled with" may be read as governing, by asyndeton, not only the "fancies" but also the "Tumid apathy" and the "Men and bits of paper" - all constituting what the flicker is filled with. The phrase "before and after time" is also ambiguous in its syntactic connections: on the one hand it suggests *when* the cold wind blows; but it is potentially, too, the object of the verb, hinting that *what* the wind blows is that before-and-after kind of time which differs so fundamentally from the timeless moment.

"Distracted from distraction by distraction" - perhaps an undeservedly notorious line - is paraphrasable as "saved from madness only by trivial preoccupations". But its force is due partly to the implication that it is *faces* rather than minds which are mentioned as distracted: the metonymy, or synecdoche, supports the theme as it does in many of Eliot's earlier poems. The words "distraction", "fancies" and "apathy" are all linked by assonance as well as by obvious meaning, but "Tumid apathy" is arresting in its apparently oxymoronic form. "Tumid" looks back to "Filled" and forward to the images of wind and inflation. It therefore anticipates the strange "Eructation" that follows, as if not only human beings were being belched into the air by the Tube-station exits, but also "unhealthy souls" suffering from a form of spiritual flatulence. By this set of relationships the unwholesomeness extends itself from the lungs to the rest of the human frame and to the implied scene as a whole.

The flickering, the whirling of the wind and the unwholesome air, all combine to anticipate the images suggestive of the London Underground; and in the ensuing lines we feel that we are back in the "Unreal City" of *The Waste Land*. It *is* the waste land, but seen now from a different perspective - one modified by the experience in the rose-garden.

> Eructation of unhealthy souls
> Into the faded air, the torpid
> Driven on the wind that sweeps the gloomy hills of
> London,
> Hampstead and Clerkenwell, Campden and Putney,
> Highgate, Primrose and Ludgate. Not here
> Not here the darkness, in this twittering world.

Passivity is the impression promptly created: the passivity of

the souls belched out into the evening dusk with its "faded air" - a phrase reminding us of the earlier poems such as "Prufrock" and "Preludes" with their evocations of urban day-night transitions. (It also provides an incidental contrast with the "vibrant air" of the rose-garden in Part I.) Eliot could more obviously have written "fading light"; but "faded air" creates a peculiarly synaesthetic effect, as if the air can be seen, felt and breathed simultaneously. Moreover, the eructation of the souls *into* the air makes the air both the medium into which they are conveyed *and* the element of which they become a part: they emerge into it *and* merge into it, becoming one with the wind that sweeps the gloomy hills. This metaphorical identification of the people with the air itself is confirmed by the nounless adjective "torpid": indirectly it personifies the air and collectively describes the people - they too are "Driven on the wind that sweeps the gloomy hills". The people and the air are left syntactically undistinguished from each other. Perhaps at the back of Eliot's mind lay Canto V of the *Inferno*, where Dante sees the shades of Paolo and Francesca in the circle of the Incontinent, caught in the gusts where they are "Driven on the blast" and "on the dark wind drifting go" (V.49, 75). From our experience of *The Waste Land* it would be natural enough that Dante's Hell and London's suburbia are thus linked.

The jerking rhythm of the otherwise primly formal "Eructation" - in its way just as onomatopoeic as "belch" - yields to the gliding enjambement into the long sweep of the assonantal line "Driven on the wind that sweeps the gloomy hills of London"

- then we are brought up short by the catalogue of suburban hills (seven, as of the hills of Rome). The images of wind and passivity invest the picture with a depressed pathos despite the detachment of the tone. This makes it more striking and moving than the flatly sermonising lines on suburban alienation and rootlessness in Chorus II of *The Rock*:

> And now you live dispersed on ribbon roads,
> And no man knows or cares who is his neighbour
> Unless his neighbour makes too much disturbance,
> But all dash to and fro in motor cars,
> Familiar with the roads and settled nowhere.
> Nor does the family even move about together,
> But every son would have his motor cycle,
> And daughters ride away on casual pillions.

This sounds like Eliot rubbing an itch of social and spiritual snobbery; the bland generalisations fall snugly and smugly into the end-stopped pentameters, and the tone is one of complacent superiority. The lines from *Burnt Norton*, on the other hand, are full of syntactic and metrical suggestiveness, and in their combination of sweep and pause, of generality and a kind of tender particularity (pausing on the place-names), are more visionary than derogatory: they convey something of the stern pity of Dante. (That Eliot still felt the temptations of snobbery is suggested by his originally writing after "torpid" the line "Fuddled with images of picture papers" (*CFQ* 87); that he resisted them is evident in his subsequent deletion - which saved the passage from ruin, maintained its tonal unity, and allowed "torpid" its useful ambiguity of reference.)

Here is the place of disaffection in its dim light. And *not* here is the illuminating darkness, not *here* in this world of twittering - a twittering so unlike the clear, sharp birdcall of

the rose-garden, but more like the chirping and squeaking of the shades in the classical underworld. The word "here" recalls the "Here" of the opening: unlike the lucid stillness of daylight and the silent purification of darkness, the place of disaffection is filled with visual flickering and its aural analogue, twittering. The final line of the section, with its mention of "darkness" and of "world" (a delayed punning echo of "whirled" nine lines earlier), eases the transition into section B, the rest of Part III. "Not here the darkness" raises the question "Where, then, the true darkness?" - and section B answers it.

Emerging from the Tube at dusk was of course a regular routine for Eliot, like the morning approach to work in the City. As in Part I of *The Waste Land*, so here, the poet has clearly been not only an observer but also a wry participant. He has experienced the atmosphere and felt himself a part of it, one of the "strained time-ridden faces" with the flicker of the underground lights playing over them. He regularly used the Gloucester Road station "whose two means of descent", says Helen Gardner, "by the stairs or by the lift, suggested to him the movement down and the 'abstention from movement', while being carried down, of the next paragraph" (*CFQ* 86). After the image of the sterile ascent, then, with the emergence into the faded air, we have now the contrasting descent into the purgative darkness of the mystical ascetic's "negative way".

> Descend lower, 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;
> This is the one way, and the other
> Is the same, not in movement
> But abstention from movement; while the world moves
> In appetency, on its metalled ways
> Of time past and time future.

The passage begins with unapologetic imperatives directed, presumably, not only to the poet himself but also to the reader who has accompanied him thus far on his meditative journey.

There is a specific reason for these imperatives. The rose-garden experience emerged out of abstract meditation, began in the present tense of immediate shared experience, then modulated into the past tense of narrating a remembered one, which occurred without longing and without expectation. By means of it we arrived at the apprehension of a still point, the centre of the turning world which was the moment of timeless illumination. Descent into the darkness of purgation through the "night of sense" is different: it must be actively sought and consciously made. So the imperatives (like the corresponding "You must"'s of *East Coker* IIIB) are appropriate to the different nature of the process and to the willing and conscious acceptance of what it entails. The way to *this* still point (which is after all the same one, approached from another direction) must be introduced not as invitation ("Shall we follow?") but as counsel.

The experience spoken of is not remembered or couched in terms of "we", but sought and envisaged in terms of solitude. It is described in terms not of light and fulfilment, but of darkness and deprivation. The solitude and deprivation are concomitants of the ascetic discipline. The earlier images of

the "affirmative" way have given place to those of the negative.

Eliot's main source of images for this negative way is the works of St John of the Cross, especially *The Ascent of Mount Carmel* and *The Dark Night of the Soul.* As such mystical writers often present spiritual insights through negation and paradox, so Eliot here plays on familiar terms - "World not world, but that which is not world" - implying a descent into a reality *other* than the "dim light" of mundane existence. It is as if the threefold iteration in the line just quoted offers the true spiritual paradoxes of which the earlier threefold "distraction" was a kind of serious parody.

The world of internal darkness and solitude is *not* "world": not the twittering one of time-ridden faces; instead, it is the world alluded to immediately before those images - the world of

> darkness to purify the soul
> Emptying the sensual with deprivation
> Cleansing affection from the temporal.

Verbal ambiguity appears again in "destitution of all property". The early meaning of "property", characteristic or individuality, applies here: the concern is not so much with the loss of worldly wealth - though we are fleetingly reminded of that - as with the loss of self-possession and self-sufficiency. The mystical ascetic empties himself even of these in the darkness in which he approaches the divine. The results of the descent are conveyed in negative terms: "Desiccation", "Evacuation", "Inoperancy". The account of the negative way employs abstractions rather than vividly sensory imagery; though it should be noticed that the abstractions themselves contain submerged

images of quasi-physical process: of becoming dry and becoming empty (desiccation, evacuation).

The vision to be achieved through this descent is, however, also the vision achieved through *abstention* from movement: Eloise Hay (153-156) draws attention to a possible distinction here between the "night of sense" and the "night of the soul" in the mystical thought of St John of the Cross, but Eliot's reason for introducing such a distinction at this point is not clear, and if it exists it appears to make no real difference to his general meaning. Reibetanz is, I believe, right in asserting that "Eliot chooses to abandon the distinction between active and passive purgation in *Four Quartets*" (21), subsuming both of St John's ways into one. The important distinctions remain those between the negative way as a whole and two other "ways": the affirmation of the fleeting beatitude experienced in the timeless moment represented by the rose-garden; and (more immediately in Part III) the way the temporal "world moves", in "appetency", disordered will and appetite, on its "metalled ways" of "time past and time future", since it is strained and time-ridden. The desire and yearning of "appetency" remain unfulfilled and unfulfillable because the "metalled ways" are restrictive. They are suggestive again of railways - and of tarred roads - and take us back for a moment to the imagery of travelling crowds in their helpless movement from nowhere to nowhere: a recurring motif in Part III of each of the first three Quartets. The implications here are of tracks that we cannot jump, of prepared and imprisoning ways that lead nowhere; and these make the negative way - whether of descent or of

abstention - seem free by contrast. The ways of descent and of abstention from movement are both, paradoxically, ways "upward" to illumination.

The "Men and bits of paper" passage of Part IIIA is, as Preston points out, "not merely a sordid London scene or even a sordid contemporary scene". More significantly, "it is what life in time is like compared with the fuller life the poet has felt" (19). The fuller life may be approached, too, through the negative way (Part IIIB), the image of descent implying, among other things, humility. Waiting in humility and true detachment at the "still point" becomes the subject of the remarkable lyric passage that follows in Part IV.

Part IV

After the descent just mentioned, in Part IV we share the experience of waiting at the "still point" in detachment, expectancy and also humility. It is like waiting in the grave itself after "dying to the world" to achieve a clear-eyed, sublime passivity. Here, speaking as if from under the soil, is a fulfilled corporate voice - in marked contrast to the one that spoke also from underground in the opening lines of *The Waste Land*. And the twilight here, which has been described as a twilight full of expectancy (*ATSE* 162), is totally different from the "dim light" of Part IIIA.

The patterning of stress and the lineation necessitate some alteration - though not a radical one - in our usual scansion.

> Tíme and the béll have búried the dáy,
> The bláck cloud cárries the sún awáy.
> Wíll the súnflower túrn to us, wíll the clématis
> Stráy dówn, bénd to us; téndril and spráy
> Clútch and clíng?
> Chíll
> Fíngers of yéw be cúrled
> Dówn on us? Áfter the kíngfisher's wíng
> Has ánswered líght to líght, and is sílent, the líght
> is stíll
> Át the stíll póint of the túrning wórld.

The opening couplet's rhythm, one of lightly poised yet quietly buoyant incantation, suggests a detached acceptance. It also establishes an undercurrent of serene dactylic movement throughout the lines that follow. (Reibetanz calls it choriambic (43) but the effect is really the same.) This *is* merely an undercurrent with other rhythms superimposed upon it; and yet, if only subconsciously, it affects our reading of the tone and mood of the lyric. Its presence can best be demonstrated by the artifice of redistributing the lines and scanning them as

if divided into the bars of a slow waltz, marking the "ghost"-syllables in the silences or pauses as if each were a musical rest or prolongation of the previous syllable. (Asterisks are used to mark these rests or lingerings, and virgules to mark the musical "bars".)

> Time and the / bell * have / buried the / day *, The
> black * cloud / carries the / sun * a- / -way * *.
> Will * the / sunflower / turn to us, / will * the
> clematis / Stray * * / down * *, / bend to us;
> tendril and / spray * * / Clutch * and / cling * *?
> Chill * * / Fingers of / yew * be / curled * *
> Down on us? / After the / kingfisher's / wing * Has
> an- * -swered / light * to / light, and is / silent, *
> * * the / light * is / still * * / At * the
> still * * / point of the / tur- * -ning / world * *.

This schematization is highly unorthodox as scansion; yet it may persuade the reader's ear to respond to the dactylic beat. It also draws attention to a number of strategic rhythmic pauses after rhetorically crucial words: *bell, day, black, sun, away, will, Stray, down, spray, Clutch, cling, Chill, yew, curled, wing, silent, still.* Almost all of these words are monosyllabic; and this, too, contributes largely to the overall impression of concentration in simplicity. For the feeling *is* one of simplicity and limpidness, though the artistry that goes to create it is astonishingly complex in its marshalling of sound-patterns and rhythms. The pauses or quasi-musical rests occur significantly at most of the punctuation-points and, in the original typography, line-endings. One exception, rightly, is the rhythmic continuation across the enjambement between "clematis" and "Stray": the pause here follows "Stray", the emphatic word into which the established rhyme has "strayed" down one syllable beyond its natural position *as* a rhyme - a

simple and effective aural enactment of the process.

The rhythm of this lyric, together with the opening rhyme and an image or two, apparently came to Eliot from the refrain of a pre-Elizabethan lyric:

> The bailey beareth the bell away:
> The lily, the rose, the rose I lay. (Reibetanz 211)

But a considerable number of other literary echoes suggest themselves. In the first place, "Time and the bell have buried the day" implies both a curfew and a knell. Perhaps the opening of Gray's "Elegy" was for a moment in Eliot's mind: "The curfew tolls the knell of parting day"; here too it is twilight, and the setting of a graveyard is hinted at. On the other hand, the central lines of the *Burnt Norton* lyric, formulated as eager yet unanxious questions, imply that the choric voice speaking them is not that of a meditative and generalising poet (as in Gray's case), but rather the voice of those who are buried themselves. Yet of course they are only metaphorically buried. They seem to represent those who have undergone the self-emptying advocated in Part IIIB, have "died" to the world, and now wait in patient expectancy and ineffable peace "At the still point of the turning world". And theirs is a plural voice, not that of an isolated individual. By the negative way, they have reached a point like that of Part IIA where we

> move above the moving tree
> In light upon the figured leaf
> And hear upon the sodden floor
> Below, the boarhound and the boar
> Pursue their pattern as before
> But reconciled among the stars.

But whereas that passage has an aerial quality, this one is quietly earthy. And just as IIA in its image of the "figured leaf" echoed Tennyson's *In Memoriam*, so too, in its different fashion, does this one. The images are reminiscent of those in the yew-tree sections (2 and 39) of Tennyson's poem, yet without the accompanying mood of grief.

> Old yew, which graspest at the stones
> That name the under-lying dead,
> Thy fibres net the dreamless head,
> Thy roots are wrapt about the bones....
>
> Dark yew, that graspest at the stones...
>
> And dippest towards the dreamless head,
> To thee too comes the golden hour
> When flower is feeling after flower....

The sunflower may remind us, though more distantly, of Blake's:

> Ah Sun-flower! weary of time,
> Who countest the steps of the Sun,
> Seeking after that sweet golden clime
> Where the traveller's journey is done....

In Eliot's lyric, it is as if the sunflower's aspiration might be more easily and sociably fulfilled in a turning downward towards the "dead" who speak, those whose traveller's journey - in a different sense from Blake's - is done, since they have completed the journey of self-emptying outlined in the previous section of *Burnt Norton*.

The "black cloud" has been seen as the "cloud of unknowing" of the mystics. This is, in a secondary sense, possible. But if the full impact of the passage is to be realised, it is helpful at the outset to think in comparatively literal terms of a quiet burial-place near twilight - a place not unlike Gray's churchyard at Stoke Poges. Peopled by the "buried" who speak, the churchyard is of course merely the vehicle of a

metaphor whose tenor is the state of waiting in detachment; but, as with all metaphors, we do not gain its full effect unless we first allow our imaginations to linger sufficiently on the vehicle, the details of which (including mood and atmosphere) all make their contributions in specific ways. The detachment following the descent into internal darkness is in some respects like death; yet in equally important ways it differs from it, issuing in a conscious state of ineffable peace.

Compare the analogous peace attained through the fleeting moment of illumination in the rose-garden. Here again we are, in imagination, in a garden, this time not a formal one enclosed by a box-hedge, but a churchyard dominated by yew-trees, creepers and sunflowers. Again we have the fleeting movement of a bird, but this time no air of urgency and no birdcall - simply the momentary flash of light reflected on the glossiness of a kingfisher's wing in its flight. The rest of the movement described or imagined is quiet, peaceful and slow. The only sound "heard" is the brief tolling of a bell, and even that is assimilated to the atmosphere of silence by the fact that it is already *past* when the passage begins: we sense it as a reminder of sound emphasising the silence, rather than as sound itself. Not only are the speakers metaphorically buried, but so too - in a metaphor within the larger metaphor - is the day ("Time and the bell have buried the day"); so this buried state is suggestive of harmony with the environment, not of removal from it. And we are unable fully to *visualise* the communal speakers

as buried, since they respond to the flash of light on the kingfisher's wing. They are on and of, yet not under, the earth.

A cloud has passed over the sun, and the sun itself is setting. In the rose-garden sequence of Part I, a cloud also passed over the sun: "Then a cloud passed, and the pool was empty". There, the moment of its passing was the moment at which the vision *ended* - a vision set in an atmosphere of "autumn heat" and "vibrant air". Here the atmosphere is cooler, less intense; and the passing of the cloud seems to signal not the end of the experience but its beginning. It continues as the kingfisher's wing flashes in the sunlight that yet remains, emphasising by contrast the steady stillness of the light here "At the still point of the turning world". The difference in detail and atmosphere quietly points up the difference between the unsolicited visionary moment (of the rose-garden) and the steady dwelling in the quietude arrived at by a willed descent into self-emptied passivity. We are allowed a sense of union with the whole of the turning world, a union made possible this time not by a sudden irruption of timeless vision but by a state resembling death. Brief comparison with Wordsworth's famous lines may help us further to clarify some distinctions.

> No motion has she now, no force;
> She neither hears nor sees;
> Rolled round in earth's diurnal course,
> With rocks, and stones, and trees.

Peace and union with the creation are implicit in both poems, and in each of them this is associated with a form of death. But in Eliot's poem the "buried", as we have seen, are not truly

dead and buried; they do not share Lucy's personal annihilation in order to become one with nature; and they speak with a communal voice conveying no sense at all of personal separation. Wordsworth's Lucy does not speak: the poet says how she seems to *him*. Lucy neither hears nor sees; Eliot's speakers, by implication, do both. Yet both are motionless and both, in their stillness, turn only with the movement of the turning world.

The suggestions of death and burial, black cloud and chill fingers, have caused some readers to react to this passage with something of the *frisson* we owe to the macabre. A certain atmospheric ambivalence is certainly present, and this is clearly by design; but the scales are not evenly weighed, and the passage as I hear it is characterised mainly by a mood of contained serenity like the one we feel - despite the images of dissolution - in "Death by Water", Part IV of *The Waste Land*. There the body of Phlebas, stripped of its flesh, enters into the whirlpool and so journeys to the "still point" at the centre. Harold Brooks speaks of the Quartets' fourth movements as "lyrics of communion between the divine and the temporal" (Martin 138): so here one enters into a feeling of the implied presence of the "Unmoved Mover". (More explicitly religious terms appear in the later Quartets, where the fourth movements deal in turn with the crucified Christ, the interceding Virgin, and the descending Spirit.)

As must be already apparent, I find it impossible to hear the questions of this lyric as either anxious or fearful in tone; they are characterised rather by what we may call passive

eagerness and serene energy. There is no hint of reluctance that the plants should turn towards and envelop the speaking "dead". On the contrary, such actions sound like the proper and inevitable things for them to do. The phrases "turn to us" and "bend to us" suggest courteous recognition, and "Stray down" is entirely unthreatening. It is perfectly true that "Clutch", "cling" and "Chill/Fingers" might in another context assume a Gothic flavour, but the already-established atmosphere counters such a response before we arrive at them. The clematis has (perhaps irrelevantly) been described as bearing the blue flower known as the Virgin's Bower; in any event, the phrase "tendril and spray" - partly perhaps by subconscious sound-association with "tender" - does convey gentleness and delicacy; their clutching and clinging feels no more sinister than the visually realised instance of such a process around the figure on the right-hand side of Botticelli's *Primavera*. A further impression of enveloping tenderness is created by the chiastic assonance of the fourth line, with what is virtually medial rhyme enclosed by initial- and end-rhyme:

"Str**ay** down, b**end** to us; t**end**ril and spr**ay**".

Throughout the lyric, in fact, a complex sound-pattern is built up through rhythmic variation combined with alliteration, assonance and internal rhyme. We have just glanced at the hypnotic patterning of the "-ray" and "-end" sounds. Contributing, too, to this hypnotic effect are: the alliteration and assonance of "**be**ll" and "**bu**ried" in line 1, enclosed by the conceptually paired "Time" and "day" at the extremes of the line; the conso-

nantal clustering of "**b**l**ack cloud c**arries" yielding to the fluidity of "the sun away" with its gliding, open ending; the quietly insistent repetition of "Will" modulating into "Chill"; the briefly lingering buoyancy of the phrases "turn to us", "bend to us", "Down on us"; the way in which the also lingering quality of "cling" and "Fing[ers]" yields to the comparative vigour of "king-" and "wing"; and the gradualness with which the assonantal dominance of **ĕ** and **ay** gives way to the more contrasting dominance of **ĭ**, **ī** and **ur**. The prevailing limpidness of the sound is helped, too, by the frequency of the fluid **l** and **n** consonants in contrast to the initial brief assertiveness of **b**, **c** and **d**. Nothing is overdone, every sound plays its part.

The lineation is similarly suggestive and effective. What I have called the gently buoyant movement is first established by the end-stopped lines of the opening couplet:

> Time and the bell have buried the day,
> The black cloud carries the sun away.

Then "Stray", which might have been the rhyme-word at the end of line 3, has "strayed down" in a delaying fashion to the next line, creating a slow curving movement-in-stillness, quietly throwing emphasis back on the word "will" (of "will the clematis") in the previous line:

> Will the sunflower turn to us, will the clematis
> Stray down, bend to us;

and the same effect is further aided by internal echoes or anticipations of the "-ill" and "-ing" rhymes, which increase the fluidity of the lineation: so the ear tends to linger where otherwise it would not ("Clutch and cling?/Chill/Fing...ers"),

and the mood is quietly intensified. The slow arc of movement created by the enjambement of "clematis/Stray down" and "tendril and spray/Clutch" comes to a brief pause at "cling"; then begins again at "Chill/Fingers of yew" and continues in the further enjambement, curving through "curled/Down on us" - "curled" sounding muted enough to avoid any impression of glibness when we arrive in the last line on the answering rhyme "world".

If we accept that the questions are serene and unanxious, it remains to ask, why the questioning at all? Why not simply statements that the sunflower, clematis and yew *will* do such-and-such, instead of apparent speculation on whether they will or not? One answer may be offered in terms of tone: the tentativeness is consonant with the notion of a detached expectancy, not of a preconceived "programme" of action on the part of the plants. Another answer is that the images of envelopment, though entertained, are not continued into fulfilment: instead of the answer "Yes, they will" appears the visionary glimpse of light on the kingfisher's wing - an intimation of light and life instead of the completion of the ostensible processes of death. Yet acceptance of those processes is itself part of the nature of waiting in detachment. As *East Coker* puts it:

> I said to my soul, be still, and wait without hope
> For hope would be hope for the wrong thing; wait
> without love
> For love would be love of the wrong thing; there is
> yet faith
> But the faith and the love and the hope are all in
> the waiting.

Into this unhurried questioning among the flowers and yew-tree, like an answer to the waiting, flashes the light on the

kingfisher's wing like another glimpse of timelessness - or timelessness in another form: but after this glimpse there is no return to *less* light, since "the light is still", quietly, there, "At the still point of the turning world" - a point of containment and resolution. The timelessness is like that of the rose-garden but arrived at, as we have seen, by another route. And since both moments are timeless, both point to the same thing. As the poet will say in *Little Gidding*, "The moment of the rose and the moment of the yew-tree/Are of equal duration": both the unsolicited moment of intensified life when what-might-have-been is realised, and the other moment vouch-safed to the state of death-like waiting in detachment.

As in the rose-garden episode, the moment is focussed in images of light, the wing here answering "light to light": we are briefly reminded, perhaps, of Hopkins's kingfishers which "catch fire" and in so doing "selve", unconsciously proclaim the meaning of their creation. Images connected with eye and ear fuse into inconspicuous synaesthesia: the kingfisher's wing becomes not "still" but "silent", as if the visible flash were an audible statement until the moment when it is over. In a natural process of association carried immediately into the next phrase, "the light is still" comes to connote silence as well as motionlessness. Sound and movement (or their absence) become hauntingly blended into one sensation. The lineation makes us pause a moment after "the light is still", and so we assimilate the two adjectival senses of "still"; yet at that very moment of being carried over into the last line, we realise also that "still" is an adverb - for the light remains where,

implicitly, it always was: "At the still point". This adverbial sense of "still" - continually/as before/always - blends in rich suggestiveness with its adjectival senses - motionless/silent - to anticipate the lines in Part V about the Chinese jar, the violin and the words: the Chinese jar "still/Moves perpetually in its stillness". Eliot has evoked the motionless, the silent and the eternal all together in a monosyllable. This is perhaps the most remarkable and fruitful, if in its way obvious, example in *Burnt Norton* of his sensitive use of ambiguity.

Part IV ends as Part IIB began: "At the still point of the turning world". We have come to the same "place", but by a different route. The idea is a thematic one in the Quartets, and here enacted by verbal iteration. The first movement towards the still point was couched in images of action, though without any initial awareness of where the action would lead:

> Shall we follow?
> Quick, said the bird, find them, find them,
> Round the corner.

In Part IV, on the other hand, the "us" (aptly there is no "we") do nothing: they are totally passive, merely waiting. The negative way of detachment is answered by light at the still point, just as the affirmative way of vision was. All the action, or imagined action, is attributed to time and the bell, the cloud, the flowers, the yew, and the kingfisher's wing; whereas in the rose-garden "*we* moved" together with the invisible presences.

We can, I think, usefully compare Part IV with another set of images associated with both a twilit landscape and the imagined

or anticipated "embrace" of plants. Towards the end of *Upon Appleton House*, Marvell as speaker presents himself rather whimsically seeking, yet failing to find, secure contemplative retirement in Appleton's woods from the restless mutability of the world and its claims. He does so in exaggerated images of passivity that suggest an act of imprisonment or even of crucifixion performed upon him by the forces of nature:

> Bind me ye Woodbines in your 'twines,
> Curle me about ye gadding Vines,
> And Oh so close your Circles lace,
> That I may never leave this Place:
> But, lest your Fetters prove too weak,
> Ere I your Silken Bondage break,
> Do you, O Brambles, chain me too,
> And courteous Briars nail me through.

There is clearly an element of hyperbolic self-mockery in this paradoxical plea for escape by imprisonment. The restless and exclamatory imperatives, of course, contrast strongly with the tranquil acceptance in Eliot's lyrical questions. No wishes are expressed in Part IV of *Burnt Norton*, and no fears.

A little later in Marvell's poem, the poet has left the seclusion of the woods for the banks of the river at sunset, where Mary Fairfax, his patron's daughter, comes to walk; and we are invited, in the appropriate tones of eulogy, to

> See how loose Nature, in respect
> To her, it self doth recollect.

She is compared to the kingfisher, the halcyon, which with the flutter - "horror" in its archaic Latinate sense - of its sunset flight reduces all of Nature to a quaintly hyperbolic stillness:

> The modest Halcyon comes in sight,
> Flying betwixt the Day and Night;
> And such an horror calm and dumb,
> Admiring Nature does benum.

> The viscous Air, wheres'ere She fly,
> Follows and sucks her Azure dy;
> The gellying Stream compacts below,
> If it might fix her shadow so;
> The stupid Fishes hang, as plain
> As Flies in Chrystal overta'ne...
>
> Maria such, and so doth hush
> The World...

Mary, like the halcyon in its flight, reduces the natural surroundings to a state not merely of stillness but of half-comical fixity: Marvell's hyperboles deliberately draw attention to themselves. In the lyric from *Burnt Norton* the tone, though serene, is far more solemn, and the images do not assert themselves as hyperbolic at all. The kingfisher's movement does not reduce nature to stillness but rather emphasises and focusses the stillness already there. The world continues to turn, but "the light is still".

Further comparison of these two poems is encouraged by the fact that just before the passage about the kingfisher, Marvell - in one of those playful conceits so characteristic of him - describes the setting sun as veiled in cloud:

> The Sun himself, of Her aware,
> Seems to descend with greater Care;
> And lest She see him go to Bed,
> In blushing Clouds conceales his Head.

In Eliot's lyric the sun is not personified, nor is it self-conscious - merely passive: "The black cloud carries the sun away". But the details - potentially clinging plants, the clouded sunset, the kingfisher, the stillness - are present in both poems: whether by coincidence, subconscious echo or deliberate design on Eliot's part, we cannot say. Of course they fulfil entirely different functions, as do the echoes or

reminders of Gray, Blake, Wordsworth and Tennyson mentioned earlier. In a mind as effortlessly stocked as Eliot's with the work of other poets, details and ideas are liable, consciously or otherwise, to be taken up, modified and combined into entirely new forms.

I suggested earlier that the setting of this lyric may be imagined as a country churchyard like that of Gray's Elegy. Readers may also be inclined to think of the churchyard at East Coker: but of course there is no reason to suppose that East Coker was in Eliot's mind when he wrote this, since he had not yet visited it. (Nor is he, in fact, buried in that churchyard; his ashes rest under a plaque in the wall of the church itself.) We are at liberty to imagine any burial-place, but remembering that the setting is after all a metaphor for a spiritual state.

It is interesting, though, to notice that a good deal of detail in *Burnt Norton* retrospectively gains from the other Quartets certain resonances that could not have existed when *Burnt Norton* itself was first published. The oft-mentioned elemental imagery, for instance (air, earth, water and fire respectively dominating each successive Quartet), could not have formed part of his original design, since the idea of the cycle began only with the writing of *East Coker* about five years later. Yet when we look back at *Burnt Norton* with this in mind, the part played by the element of air is after all evident to a surprising degree: from the "vibrant air" of the rose-garden to the movement "above the moving tree", the "draughty church", the "cold wind" and "faded air" of the Tube passage, the "black cloud" that carries the sun away, the

hallucinations of Part V and the dust moving in the shaft of sunlight at its end. Like the element of air in "What the Thunder Said" of *The Waste Land*, it seems to be an ambivalent vehicle for images: of disillusionment, or torpor, or deceptive hallucination, on the emotively negative side; of freshness and vibrancy, revelation and illumination on the more positive. But the lyric of Part IV is a fundamentally affirmative focal point: the things of earth and sky, light and shade, the animate and the inanimate, movement and stillness, time and the timeless, are here folded into inimitable harmony.

Part V

The last movement of each Quartet, as is generally agreed, involves a meditation on the arts in one form or another - a meditation in which the preceding ideas about time and the timeless are usually focussed and applied to the question of what makes, or fails to make, the fully realised work of art. Here in Part V of *Burnt Norton*, the implicit contrasts of silence with sound and stillness with movement, encountered earlier in the Quartet, lead naturally into the passage on the arts that exist in time - especially those composed of words - and those that exist in space. ("Word" or "Words" occurs five times in Part VA, as does "still" or "stillness"; and the cognates of "move" appear three times in VA and five in VB.)

The slow opening lines, with their remarkable enactment of tension-in-stillness, present the notion that aesthetic form is a product of the fusion of movement with stillness. It is, indeed, not an unusual idea, and is closely related to the notion that the temporal arts like music and poetry aspire to "shape" and "form", spatial terms more literally associated with the plastic arts; while the plastic arts in their stasis aspire to "rhythm" and "movement", temporal terms literally associated with the art forms that exist in time. The essential point is that a combination of "movement" and "form" is equally necessary to all the arts, both of the spatial and the temporal kind.

We have already been prepared for the idea by the passage about the dance in IIB, where "at the still point, there the dance is,/But neither arrest nor movement", and where the idea

of movement was paradoxically reconciled with that of stillness. "Except for the point, the still point,/There would be no dance, and there is only the dance". So here:

> Wórds móve,/músic móves
> Ónly in tíme;/but thát which is ònly líving
> Can ònly díe./Wórds, after spéech, réach
> Ìnto the sílence./Ónly by the fórm, the páttern,
> Can wórds/òr músic réach
> The stíllness,/às a Chínese jár stíll
> Móves perpétually/ín its stíllness.

If, as my scansion suggests, we adhere here to the usual four-stress pattern encouraged by the opening line, we sense in the lines that follow a rhythmic tension that reaches towards a fifth stress - which I mark as secondary - and also reaches towards the "stillness" of a caesura falling earlier in the line than the expected midpoint. In this way, together with the frequent enjambement, the lines tend to enact the blend of movement and stillness which is their subject. The movement suggested in the opening line, and in the repetition of the verb "reach", constantly arrives at points of rest in the words "die", "silence" and "stillness", with their related yet also contrastive connotations.

The first sentence dwells on the limitations of art forms as merely temporal occurrences: that which is exclusively temporal is by definition evanescent, whether it be words or music; and the word "only", used three times, emphasises this by the rich variety of its semantic possibilities. Words and music exist *exclusively* (only) in time; and since they are *merely* (only) "living", like mortal beings, they must - just as mortal beings do - *necessarily and inevitably* (only) die. This opening

sentence states by implication the problem with which the rest of the passage is concerned: if this is the fate of all words and music, wherein lies the supposed immortality which we would like to attribute to them?

The next sentence does two things simultaneously: it restates the problem - words "reach/Into the silence" which is potentially that of death; and it provides a bridge towards the positive *answer* to the problem: words "reach/Into the silence" which is the stillness of achieved, and therefore perpetually living, pattern. The third sentence makes the answer more explicit, throwing into relief the importance of form or pattern with yet another "Only" (signifying exclusively), and linking temporal art and spatial art by the introduction of the Chinese jar:

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

The semantic ambiguity of "reach" assists this development: "reach/Into" implies a quasi-spatial striving towards a condition of silence; the second "reach" ("reach/The stillness") is also quasi-spatial, yet implies not a striving towards but a successful *arrival* at the condition of stillness - a word more positive in its connotations than "silence", since it suggests not merely negation of sound, but a condition of rest including the motionless as well as the silent. The progression "die... silence...stillness" is therefore an affirmative one. And nothing except ("Only") form, pattern, makes this progression possible. Silence and stillness are at first registered as synonymous, yet it is soon apparent that stillness comprehends

more in its meaning than silence, especially when the analogy of the Chinese jar reminds us that to be still is not merely to be silent but also to be stationary. It is only when words or music arrive at the still point following cessation that we can be aware of their pattern, and therefore of what saves them from the death of mere evanescence. The adverbial form of "still" reminds us, too, of the meaning "continually/ever/ perpetually" superimposed upon the notions of the silent and the stationary - as we saw in "the light is still/At the still point" in Part IV. It is, of course, only metaphorically that the jar (like Keats's Grecian urn) "Moves...in its stillness"; properly speaking, it is the *pattern* that creates the illusion of movement, even while we are aware of the object itself as motionless. Yet just as the jar moves in its stillness, so the music sounds in its silence after the last note has been struck and has died away.

Both movement and form, then, are equally present in all the arts, whether temporal like music and poetry or spatial like sculpture and pottery. So it is no mere paradox-mongering to say that music and poetry aspire to a condition of stillness emerging out of their sound, just as a statue or a jar "Moves perpetually in its stillness". Like the dance of Part II, the music and poetry are merely in a state of becoming and dying as we listen to them: it is only in the silence framed and focussed by their *pattern* after they have ended, that they truly - in the timeless sense - exist. The stillness is created *by* the movement, but it is only *in* the stillness that the total pattern is apprehended. It is *still*: motionless, silent, constant. Yet

it is a product of movement, sound, and temporal mutability. Performance takes place in time; pattern exists in eternity.

Eliot's uses of repetition and sound-patterning help these seven lines to enact their subject. The iteration "Words... music...Words ...words...music" provides a kind of spinal column of subject-matter while "moves" (repeated in the first line) asks the implicit question answered in the sixth and seventh lines: "stillness...still...stillness". And these repetitions, poised on pauses or across enjambement, provide a musical answer to the assonantal iteration of the more plangent vowels in "time...die...silence" - as well as to the muted strenuousness in "speech, reach". "Words...reach/Into the silence" is answered by "words...reach/The stillness", with - as we have seen - positive connotations outweighing the negativity of "silence".

The next five lines elaborate on the nature of this stillness and its relation to form:

> Nòt the stíllness of the víolin,/while the nóte lásts,
> Nót that ónly,/but the có-exístence,
> Or sáy that the énd/precédes the begínning,
> And the énd and the begínning/were álways thére
> Befóre the begínning/and áfter the énd.

As the poet has now moved from focussing on the problem to focussing on the solution - the form achieved in stillness - it is noticeable that the caesuras fall more regularly between the pairs of main stresses than they did in the first seven lines. The establishment of the pattern is reflected in the movement as the sentence attempts to define its nature.

The stillness in which form asserts itself is not merely the

sensation of the dying-away last note or last word (and in any case the violin-string is *not* literally "still" while the note continues to sound): the real stillness is rather the timeless one in which, say, the sonata or the poem is apprehended as a *simultaneous* relationship, or "co-existence" (as Eliot says) of all its parts. In time, in performance, it exists as a series of dyings as one note or word succeeds another; but in the timeless sphere in which pattern exists, all the notes or words, from first to last, are simultaneously apprehensible as form; and this is what enables the temporal arts to transcend their temporality. The moment in which we recognise the form is, therefore, analogous to the timeless moment in the rose-garden, or to the condition of timelessness conveyed in the other garden of Part IV. Art, like life itself, has an eternal quality that can be at least fleetingly caught, although our time-ridden lack of perspective makes the apprehension of it a rare experience; normally we are on our "metalled ways/Of time past and time future".

In defining the timeless nature of aesthetic form, the poet is necessarily involved in paradox: the threefold iteration of "end" and "beginning" is therefore not merely evocative word-play but an attempt at precise formulation. If all the notes comprise a simultaneous pattern, the last one *is* implicit in the first, and vice versa; and insofar as the pattern is made by the notes and yet exists independently of their performance, the entire work, beginning, middle and end, has a formal and complete existence both before and after performance. The exploratory tone ("Not that...Or say that...") contributes to

the impression that the poet is hammering out his ideas as he goes, rather like Shakespeare's Richard II in his prison soliloquy. This is, of course, a tonal illusion of spontaneity which saves the passage from sounding like a prepared lecture in aesthetics. The effect is a little like that of the exploratory phrases in Part II: "And do not call it fixity", "I can only say", "And I cannot say". It reminds us that *Burnt Norton* is neither a report nor a reminiscence but an exploration and an experience. Yet it is *also* a complete and formal work of art, so that there is a certain irony in the air of tentativeness here: after all, the illusion of tentativeness is *itself* part of the total pattern, and in that sense was also "always there". The same is true of all those passages in the Quartets that give an impression of exploratory or prosaic spontaneity. When Eliot "drops" to the prosaic there is generally a formal reason, discernible on closer analysis, for the illusion of bathos.

When Eliot completed *Burnt Norton* he had not planned *East Coker*; yet when he came to write it he was clearly influenced by the formulation of his ideas in *Burnt Norton*. The recent strong emphasis on the separateness of *Burnt Norton* from the rest of the cycle (as in the works of Moody and Bush) seems to me unnecessary. We can no longer read the first Quartet as if the others were non-existent; and there is an enriching association between the iterations of "beginning" and "end" in these lines, applied to works of art, and in the opening and closing lines of *East Coker*, applied to the life of the poet-speaker. Taking our cue from Eliot we may claim that "the end and the

beginning [of *East Coker*, among other things] were always there/Before the beginning", and that the total pattern of *Four Quartets* was implicit, in embryo, in both the beginning and the end of *Burnt Norton* itself. This is not an entirely fanciful corollary of what Eliot says in these lines. The words of *Burnt Norton* "reach/Into the silence" in which their pattern may be apprehended; but that pattern, as we now know in retrospect, issued in the subsequent Quartets whose completed words in turn "reach/The stillness" in which the larger pattern is encountered. Each Quartet gives us a sense of its individual form; yet this is modified by our experience of each of the other Quartets - just as the initially separate parts of *The Hollow Men* and *Ash-Wednesday* must now be read, for their full effect, as essential constituents of the larger wholes into which the poet saw fit to arrange them. The process is analogous to the one taking place on a greater scale as described by Eliot in "Tradition and the Individual Talent":

> what happens when a new work of art is created is something that happens simultaneously to all the works of art which preceded it. The existing monuments form an ideal order among themselves, which is modified by the introduction of the new (the really new) work of art among them. The existing order is complete before the new work arrives; for order to persist after the supervention of novelty, the *whole* existing order must be, if ever so slightly, altered; and so the relations, proportions, values of each work of art toward the whole are readjusted.... (*SE* 15)

If we accept this notion, it applies as much to the relationship between parts of an individual work as to that between whole works themselves. It follows therefore that we can profitably read, say, *Burnt Norton* in the light of the later Quartets,

although the reverse would seem to be the more normal process. It also follows that whatever is said about a passage of one Quartet *in loco* is, in a sense, incomplete until the rest have been looked at - all the more so in view of the special relationship between them. As Harry Blamires remarks,

> The throwback of meaning and the forecasting of meaning are as consistently natural to the poetic practice of Eliot in *Four Quartets* as they are to that of Joyce in *Ulysses*....the commentator cannot have his say about any given passage and then mentally tick it off as he moves on to the next. (1)

This general observation can be taken as an apt comment on the specific lines with which we have been dealing here:

> Or say that the end precedes the beginning,
> And the end and the beginning were always there
> Before the beginning and after the end.

Eliot continues with what looks like a brief triumphant statement of the eternal quality conferred by pattern upon the work of art; but he immediately catches himself up in mid-line with a reminder of the struggle involved in enshrining such a pattern in words, recalcitrant material that they are.

> And all is always now. Words strain,
> Crack and sometimes break, under the burden,
> Under the tension, slip, slide, perish,
> Decay with imprecision, will not stay in place,
> Will not stay still. Shrieking voices
> Scolding, mocking, or merely chattering,
> Always assail them.

Like so many of Eliot's sentences, "And all is always now" is Janus-faced. Its initial implication is affirmative: in the formally realised work of art, the pattern is apprehended as timeless and therefore simultaneously existent in an eternal "now". But as the line immediately carries us on, the sentence assumes in retrospect a virtually opposite significance: where

the material of art is recalcitrant and unruly, the artist feels trapped in the present, unable to achieve the pattern that transcends the imprisoning "now". This secondary, or retrospective meaning, makes "all is always now" a pivotal statement in the passage. Without even the warning of an adversative conjunction such as "but" or "yet", we are carried on in the same line to "Words strain". Words have a life of their own, as the insistent personification suggests: they "Crack...break...slip, slide, perish,/Decay...will not stay in place,/Will not stay still"; and, like the poet himself or like the tempted soul, they are under constant attack. As in the corresponding passage in *East Coker*, the poet is involved in a perpetual battle "to get the better of words", again and again making

> a raid on the inarticulate
> With shabby equipment always deteriorating
> In the general mess of imprecision of feeling,
> Undisciplined squads of emotion.

Only when the timelessness of aesthetic form is achieved, can ends and beginnings become united in a transcendent and harmonious unity, as we see in Part V of *Little Gidding*, again with its richly suggestive personification:

> 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. And every phrase
> And sentence that is right (where every word is at
> home,
> Taking its place to support the others,
> The word neither diffident nor ostentatious,
> An easy commerce of the old and the new,
> The common word exact without vulgarity,
> The formal word precise but not pedantic,
> The complete consort dancing together)
> Every phrase and every sentence is an end and a
> beginning,
> Every poem an epitaph.

Meanwhile, in *Burnt Norton* V Eliot sets against the ideal,

timeless form of the work of art, the difficulties raised for the poet by the inchoate verbal mass which is his raw material.

The development of thought in Part V is carried largely by the series of key verbs attached to "Words" in their varying states and significations: "Words move", "Words...reach", "Words strain" etc., "The Word.../Is...attacked". Words, like humans, are presented as not merely wilful and restless, but also subject to clumsiness, temptation, discouragement and breakdown: they seem to possess an organic and nervous life of their own, one which is emphasised by the movement of the verse with its plethora of verbs from "strain" to "Decay" jolting from pause to pause like a spilt handful of marbles bouncing and slithering down a flight of steps. The sense of dislocation is heightened by the strange idea of words, the product of voices, as *themselves* being beleaguered by hostile voices "Shrieking... Scolding, mocking...chattering". The mental struggle of the poet to select and impose order is thus externalised into a miniature allegory in which words become a multiple Everyman assailed by both hostility from without and weakness from within. But the "Shrieking voices" also provide a transition into another small allegory of moral and spiritual temptation - one that links the quest for a transcendent order in art to the quest for a transcendent order in life. It is characteristic of Eliot to link the personal and aesthetic quest with the universal and religious one: and the nearest that we come to explicitly Christian language in the ostensibly secular *Burnt Norton* is in the sudden shift from words in general to "The Word in the

desert". The word as material and the Word as tempted soul unite the themes of aesthetic and of spiritual quest.

> The Word in the desert
> Is most attacked by voices of temptation,
> The crying shadow in the funeral dance,
> The loud lament of the disconsolate chimera.

Harry Blamires comments aptly here:

> Eliot's grappling with words...in the attempt to impose pattern and order, is in perfect correspondence with everyman's encounter with experience, and his desire to impose pattern and order upon it. The words are both too weak to bear the burden of meaning we would put upon them, and too slippery, shifting, and changing, to be organized into exactly articulated formulation. Like human creatures themselves, they are constantly under attack from the diabolical forces of disorder, indiscipline, evil passion, and triviality. Even so the true Word, Christ himself, was tempted in the desert. Here, if anywhere, is the climax of *Burnt Norton*. We have reached the point at which the Word is uttered. And its utterance has issued naturally out of the personal, yet universal, existential situation. (38)

What the poet has earlier said about spiritual experience has now been seen as true of art itself, which also strives to unite in significant form its timeless inspiration with its finite material, and so create a perfected pattern independent of time. The poet has faced the difficulty and rarity of this: the images of distraction and hallucination, channelling us back from aesthetic to spiritual experience, link the predicament of the writer to that of the tempted human soul. Redeeming the time and redeeming the word are analogous processes.

But there is, implicitly, some hope for these slippery and buffeted words, since Christ, the "Word in the desert", has faced and overcome the threat of chaos. This allusion to the biblical temptation story blends easily with our general awareness (if not specific memories) of other desert temptations

and hallucinations in religious and literary tradition, notably those of St Anthony as described by Flaubert and helpfully summarised by Milward:

> The "*crying shadow in the funeral dance*" refers to one of the phantasmal mourners of the dying god Atys, who (according to Flaubert) reminds Anthony of the lamentation of Mary at the crucifixion of her Son.... Another of his temptations was a hallucinatory vision of the two monsters of ancient mythology, the Chimera and the Sphinx, loudly "*disconsolate*" in mutual frustration - the one having only the head, the other only the body of a lion. The aim of such temptations, in so far as they have an aim, is not to induce the saint to do something wrong, but to distract his mind from the source of right. (62)

(It also blends, more negatively, with our memories of desert visions in Parts I and V of *The Waste Land.*) The images of our present passage are partly visual ("shadow", "chimera"), but mostly auditory, as if words - like "the Word" - become subject to aural hallucination created by the powers of chaos and evil: a mocking cacophony of sound, a monstrous moaning and jabbering, a distracting "distraction". Both shadow and chimera assault the consciousness with sound; and the fact that each revelation is characterised as subject to grief ("crying", "lament", "disconsolate") paradoxically reinforces the monstrous quality, as if the perceiving consciousness were in danger of absorption into deceptive and destructive emotion: emotive engulfment itself being an aspect of temptation.

Part V began as subdued meditation, then shifted into a restless surrealism with the images we have just been considering. Now, as we come to what I call section B of the movement, we return to a quiet poise in which the poet's voice impersonally offers a series of considered comments discriminating between

love and desire. We seem to be listening to a voice that has survived the onslaughts of linguistic instability, of shadow and chimera, and has brought out of that wilderness these measured insights. The temptations of St Anthony are, so to speak, being counterbalanced by the unruffled mysticism of St John of the Cross, to whose *Dark Night of the Soul* the opening lines refer. Reinforcing this tonal shift comes a rhythmic one into shorter lines of three stresses each, yet which retain the occasional ghost of a fourth (which I mark as secondary in the scansion that follows).

> The détail of the páttern is móvement,
> Às in the fígure of the tén stáirs.
> Desíre itsélf is móvement
> Nót in itsélf desírable;
> Lóve is itsélf ùnmóving,
> Ònly the cáuse and énd of móvement,
> Tímeless, and úndesíring
> Excépt in the áspect of tíme
> Cáught in the fórm of lìmitátion
> Betwèen ún-béing and béing.
> Súdden in a sháft of súnlight
> Éven while the dúst móves
> There ríses the hídden láughter
> Of chíldren ìn the fóliage
> Quíck now, hére, nòw, álways -
> Ridículous the wáste sàd tíme
> Strétching befóre and áfter.

From meditation on pattern in art, we have been returned - after a glimpse at the forces of chaos - to the subject of pattern in life, and more especially to *the* pattern by which chaos is defeated and time transcended: the pattern whose detail must be expressed in images of movement, although the pattern itself (like the other patterns we have considered) remains timeless. A stairway can be contemplated as an orderly pattern; but it can only be experienced through movement, as a

series of steps taken in succession in time. As Blamires (especially helpful on this passage) puts it,

> in St John of the Cross's study of the discipline of contemplation as the way to joy, the symbol of a ladder with ten steps is employed. The stillness of mystical contemplation is the end, but the saint has to use the image of movement up stairs in order to define the means. As in the dance, so even in the mystic's exercises, the detail is movement though the overall end is that which does not change - arrival at a pattern which eternalizes the whole. (40)

In the *Dark Night of the Soul* (Book II Chapters XVIII-XX) St John describes in detail the steps of the ladder of contemplation. He makes no claim to originality in using the image:

> For this ladder of contemplation, which, as we have said, comes down from God, is prefigured by that ladder which Jacob saw as he slept [*Genesis* 28:12], whereon angels were ascending and descending, from God to man, and from man to God, Who Himself was leaning upon the end of the ladder. All this, says Divine Scripture, took place by night, when Jacob slept, in order to express how secret is this road and ascent to God, and how different from that of man's knowledge. (Peers I 434)

The specific nature of each of St John's ten steps is not important to our understanding of Eliot's poem, but what is significant is that each of them is a "step of love" towards the source of all love. St John writes:

> The tenth and last step of this secret ladder of love causes the soul to become wholly assimilated to God, by reason of the clear and immediate vision of God which it then possesses; when, having ascended in this life to the ninth step, it goes forth from the flesh....by this mystical theology and secret love, the soul continues to rise above all things and above itself, and to mount upward to God. For love is like fire, which ever rises upward with the desire to be absorbed in the centre of its sphere. (Peers I 441)

Eliot's use of "the figure of the ten stairs" is, aptly, an introduction to his ensuing account of love, and of those qualities that distinguish it from desire.

Also relevant to our present study is a paragraph in which St John gives one of his reasons for calling this "secret wisdom" a ladder:

> We may also call it a ladder because, even as the ladder has those same steps in order that men may mount, it has them also that they may descend; even so is it likewise with this secret contemplation, for those same communications which it causes in the soul raise it up to God, yet humble it with respect to itself. For communications which are indeed of God have this property, that they humble the soul and at the same time exalt it. For, upon this road, to go down is to go up, and to go up, to go down, for he that humbles himself is exalted and he that exalts himself is humbled. (Peers I 433)

This passage gives an extra twist of meaning to the second of the fragments from Heraclitus which Eliot used as epigraphs: "The way upward and the way downward are one and the same". St John's remarks also give a new dimension of meaning to the lines from the end of *East Coker* Part II:

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

Humility is closely associated with transcendence of temporal limitations; in retrospect, we may also associate it with the poet's struggle to create timeless form out of the unruly material that words constitute.[4]

Despite the attention we have just given to them, it must be said that the ten stairs play a comparatively incidental part in the passage. Its main concern is rather with the contrast between movement and stillness, time and the timeless, in relation to the distinction between desire and love. As the living of a life and the performance of a work of art both exist in the spheres of time and movement, so too does desire.

But as glimpses of eternal life and of the pattern of a work of art exist in the spheres of timelessness and stillness, so too does love. The distinctions and correspondences are extremely deliberate. Two lines describe the nature of desire, and are followed by six lines describing the nature of love; the one is characterised by movement, the other by stillness.

> Desire itself is movement
> Not in itself desirable;

the poet is concerned with a quest for fulfilment *of* longing which must necessarily take the form of freedom *from* longing. Desire, therefore, is not desirable. The tone here is one of certainty, not of exploration; and the statements that immediately follow, on the nature of love, clarify the thought.

> Love is itself unmoving,
> Only the cause and end of movement,
> Timeless, and undesiring
> Except in the aspect of time
> Caught in the form of limitation
> Between un-being and being.

The function of "unmoving" is to offer a contrast with the assertion that desire, unlike love, is characterised by movement - by restlessness within the sphere of time. Love is not restless: it is poised in the stillness of eternity. Yet, like the God who is Aristotle's "Unmoved Mover", it is the source and origin of movement and indeed of desire itself. (Similar is the notion expressed in Dante's *Purgatorio* - Canto XVII especially - that all forms of desire and longing, including those which issue in sin, are products of that divine Love which draws us towards itself, although we often find inadequate substitutes and bypaths on the way to it.) These, then, are some of the implications of calling love the *cause* of movement - in

other words, that which accounts for its origin and impels its energies. But love is also the *end* of movement: both in the sense that, like a gravitational force, it is that to which all movement tends in the effort to find rest and so unmake itself in stillness; and also in the sense that it is the ultimate purpose for which all movement exists. It is, in fact, the origin, driving force, real purpose and target of all movement, including that form of movement which we know as desire.

A useful commentary on these lines is provided by the song of the bones in Part II of *Ash-Wednesday*, with its series of gnomic ambiguities playing upon the multiple meanings of *love* and *end*:

> The single Rose
> Is now the Garden
> Where all loves end
> Terminate torment
> Of love unsatisfied
> The greater torment
> Of love satisfied
> End of the endless
> Journey to no end
> Conclusion of all that
> Is inconclusible
> Speech without word and
> Word of no speech
> Grace to the Mother
> For the Garden
> Where all love ends.

The word "desire" does not appear here, but the idea of it is contained in the ambivalence of "love". Usually it means love in the lower sense of desire; but in the last line it lends itself to interpretation as either desire or love in the higher sense: "Where all love ends" can be read as "Where all desire ceases" or as "Where all true love finds its fulfilment", the point being precisely that the "Where" is the same in either case, fulfilment of the one involving cessation of the other.

To return to *Burnt Norton*: love, we are told, is timeless and free from desire ("undesiring"), whereas desire itself is not ultimately desirable. Love, by implication, *is* desirable, as well as being - in the broader sense, and whatever our response to it - unavoidable. But, having said that love in its absolute sense is undesiring, the poet introduces a qualification in the next three lines. Love is undesiring

> Except in the aspect of time
> [Under which all things are relative]
> Caught in the form of limitation
> Between un-being and being.

(Eliot deleted the bracketed line from the printer's copy (*CFQ* 89), and it seems quite likely that "Caught" really applied to "all things" and that with the deletion it lost its antecedent, since "aspect of time" relates somewhat awkwardly to "Caught".) This qualification, although it looks initially like a self-contradiction, is essential, since it reaffirms the possibility of a link between humanity in time and love in its timelessness. This does not oblige us to see the lines, as Milward (64) does, as a direct reference to the incarnation of Christ. The diction is, if anything, strenuously avoiding such neat identifications. Apart from its other desires, humanity is capable also of the one form of longing that connects it to the eternal stillness of love. Because we are in a state of limitation between fulness and nothingness of being ("this middle state", as Pope would have called it), our aspirations towards the higher love are not perfected; nevertheless they exist. The love that might have been is also a potential actuality, like the moment of fulfilment in the rose-garden. It is perhaps a pity that

Eliot, at this crucial moment of the poem, chose to express the idea using the words "aspect" and "limitation", which savour a little too much of the lecture-room, and slightly mar both the tone and the rhythm. Yet it seems appropriate that the formulation of his thought should be deliberately abstract here, since, like a miniature echo of the opening of *Burnt Norton*, it throws into relief the sudden surge of sensory imagery as we return to the sunlight, dust and hidden children of the garden.

The shift from abstract meditation to vivid experience, like the shift in Part I, creates an impression of the poem's having come full circle to the point from which it set out. What we end with is a restatement of themes from Part I, but themes that have been changed in key by what has intervened. As in the larger cycle of the Quartets, so here in this individual one, "the end of all our exploring" is

> to arrive where we started
> And know the place for the first time.

One thing that has made a considerable difference is the short meditation on love immediately before the concluding lines. Nowhere in *Burnt Norton*, until this second half of Part V, has love been explicitly mentioned. Now, in retrospect, we can see that the entire Quartet has been indirectly an exploration of the meaning of love, and not merely of time.

Like a musical coda briefly touching on motifs of the first movement, the last seven lines round off the exploration and the experience - but this time without any gradual transition between abstract meditation and timeless moment. We are, in an instant ("Sudden"), back in the world of the rose-garden:

> 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 -
> Ridiculous the waste sad time
> Stretching before and after.

The images constitute an objective correlative of the experience in the sense in which I understand Eliot's definition of that much-abused phrase in his 1919 *Hamlet* essay:

> a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events which shall be the formula of that *particular* emotion; such that when the external facts, which must terminate in sensory experience, are given, the emotion is immediately evoked. (*SE* 145)

They are also atmospheric metaphors: the shaft of sunlight strikes as suddenly into the poem as the timeless moment does into life, revealing the movement of dust-motes like the stirring of half-forgotten memories - as in Part I's phrase about the dust on a bowl of rose-leaves. Again we are aware of children's laughter among the leaves of a tree, suggesting a joyful innocence that is both fleeting and timeless. As so often in Eliot, the sparseness of punctuation allows for ambiguity: the children, the laughter and the foliage *are* all "Quick [living and rapidly moving] now, here, now, always"; yet the same line carries *primarily* the imperative force of directing us towards them, as in Part I's "Quick, said the bird, find them, find them" - as if they will be lost a moment later. They are both here and now, in the particular timeless moment of illumination, and "always" - because perpetually present in memory and in the potentiality of recurrence. The experience, as before, takes place in time yet also transcends it.

But the passing of the specific moment is inevitably attended by a sense of the desolation of all experience in comparison with it: as we return to the linear realm of time with its "before" and "after", it becomes an expanse of desert. Marvell wrote of "Deserts of vast eternity": they might in this context be renamed deserts of vast time - mere temporality without the dimension of the eternal. The end of the poem, like the end of the experience itself, suddenly drops us back into the mundane progression of time which is, on the face of it, pointless in comparison with the higher reality that we have experienced. Hence the abrupt change of key in the last two lines:

> Ridiculous the waste sad time
> Stretching before and after.

I have said "on the face of it, pointless", because it is not, of course, really regarded as pointless: much of the poem, as we have seen, militates against such a notion. The ending is not, however, presented as a logical conclusion to an argument. Far more appropriately - and like the endings of all the other Quartets - it is an emotive utterance. Some readers (I believe misguidedly) resent its alleged negativity instead of simply responding to its poignant note of human frailty. Kristian Smidt takes a more balanced view:

> Perhaps the poem would have been more encouraging if these last two lines had been left out. But on the other hand it is mainly they that cry out for a sequel. (39)

And several years after the completion of *Burnt Norton*, *East Coker* began to explore further answers to this cry - for it *is* a cry of the heart, a natural human response elicited by, *and* in spite of, the preceding affirmations.

EAST COKER

Part I

We have seen *Burnt Norton* Part V, on the subject of the timeless pattern in art, emphasising the strange relationships of beginnings and ends:

> Or say that the end precedes the beginning,
> And the end and the beginning were always there
> Before the beginning and after the end.

East Coker is framed by similar word-play, but with its own modification and expansion in the significance of the words themselves. As commentaries regularly point out, this Quartet opens with an inversion of the motto of the ill-fated Mary Queen of Scots, and ends with the same motto restored to its original form, "In my end is my beginning". What it means in the context of the poet's own meditation is our concern; but the full possibilities of its meaning will not be apparent until we arrive at the end and "know the place for the first time". Mary's motto, like the fragments of Heraclitus prefixed to the cycle, clearly appealed to Eliot by the suggestiveness of its paradoxical formulation; the poem that follows shows how richly he made the borrowing his own.

"In my beginning is my end". In a general sense, every beginning implies an end, in the cycle of personal life as much as anywhere else - and the cycle of personal life will be one of Eliot's major themes in this Quartet. But if we read the opening in the light of the title, as I think it helps to do, ambiguities promptly assert themselves. It is not simply that Eliot chose to be buried at his ancestral village of East Coker

in Somerset (a piece of hindsight that adds an extra flavour to our reading but is no essential part of it). More important, presumably, for the Eliot who wrote the poem in 1940, is the fact that his only visit to East Coker - in the summer of 1937 - must have been a journey of a kind that has since become far more fashionable among Americans returning to the Old World: a pilgrimage in search of roots. We may take the line as meaning, among other things, "In the exploration of my origins lies my purpose". The word "my" at once offers a more personal note than *Burnt Norton*'s occasional "we" or "I", which was usually generic.

Perhaps, too, the opening of *East Coker* states in a more personal way what was said in the first three lines of *Burnt Norton*. The implications are sombre: is life deterministic? Are our ends entirely implicit in, and therefore predetermined by, our beginnings? Although "end" here primarily means cessation, the secondary sense allows also for the reading suggested above: "My purpose in visiting East Coker is to make contact with the home-ground of my ancestry". And at the line-end, the phrase "In succession" hints at both serial and cyclic time, and at the idea of dynastic succession. Mary Queen of Scots produced the royal house of the Stuarts whose fortunes dominated England in the seventeenth century - the era in which Eliot's ancestor left this village for new "beginnings" across the Atlantic.

In the lines on transience that follow, it helps to bear in mind both the rise and fall of houses in the dynastic and familial senses and their literal rise and fall - especially

in 1940 when many foresaw the brick-and-mortar symbols of roots and continuity being wiped out in an England at war. As so often in the Quartets, as well as in the earlier poetry, two or more meanings run simultaneously, and to concentrate on one at the expense of another is to diminish the work.

> 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.

The word "time" has not yet been mentioned, but our familiar theme is immediately implicit in the terms "beginning", "end" and "succession"; and the view of time suggested here is mainly the cyclic one of rise and fall, generation and decay. In this respect it tends to contrast with the more linear view of time presented in *Burnt Norton*.

"Houses rise and fall", especially after "succession", sounds like a historian's or genealogist's remark, but through "crumble" (despite its initial metaphorical flavour) we move to a sense of real physical buildings. We are aware of a constant cycle of change, new layers being established, century by century, for the archaeologist eventually to penetrate. In fact the first four lines offer the imagination a kind of speeded-up cinematic survey of four centuries of English landscape, arriving quietly but firmly in the mid-twentieth century with the word "by-pass". At the same time, most of the diction allows for a sense of unspecified period. After all, it is only in a manner of speaking that the settings of *Four Quartets* are physical and geographical; they are more properly in the mind of the poet.

"Dust to dust, ashes to ashes", the lines seem to be saying (though asserting resurgence as well) as the rhythmic seesaw implies.

> Óld stòne to néw bùilding, óld tìmber to néw fìres,
> Óld fìres to áshes, and áshes to the éarth
> Which is alréady flésh, fúr and fáeces,
> Bòne of mán and béast, córnstalk and léaf.

The familiar liturgical language of dust and ashes is enriched by the particularity of the images with their insistence on the elemental, earthy process of generation and decay. The "flesh, fur and faeces" remind us fleetingly of Gerard Manley Hopkins's paean to the generative power of nature in his song to the Virgin Mother, "The May Magnificat":

> Flesh and fleece, fur and feather,
> Grass and greenworld all together....

Eliot's faint echo of this is nevertheless modified by the emphasis on building as well as on faeces, extending the spectrum of organic process towards the poles both of petrifaction and of putrefaction (as in "Dung and death" near the end of Part I). Humanity, as in Hopkins's poem, is incorporated into the organic process, here in a continuum in which he shares the disintegration and fragmentation of the animal and vegetable worlds: "Bone of man and beast, cornstalk and leaf". Lurking here are reminiscences of *Isaiah* 40 ("All flesh is grass"), and perhaps far more distantly, at this stage, of its balancing assertion that "the word of our God shall stand for ever". Yet Eliot's focus not merely on flesh but on *bone* adds an austere firmness to the proposition – without the sinister quality of the bones in *The Waste Land* and without the visionary or

allegorical quality of the scattered bones in *Ash-Wednesday*.

The meditation on transience in these opening lines has already prepared the reader for something like "Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth" (*Ecclesiastes* 12:1); and what follows does in fact echo the same biblical author, but in a slightly different vein:

> Houses live and die: there is a time for building
> And a time for living and for generation
> And a time for the wind to break the loosened pane
> And to shake the wainscot where the field-mouse trots
> And to shake the tattered arras woven with a silent
> motto.

In a series of fresh images, Eliot is rewriting the words of *Ecclesiastes* 3; and the whole of the biblical passage is worth quoting for its indirect bearing not only on these lines but on the whole of *East Coker*, with its weighings of beginnings and ends, the profit and loss of labour, the rhythms of war and peace, and the relationships of past and present - as well as on the rhythms of mourning and dancing, and of youth and age.

> To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven: a time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up that which is planted; a time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up; a time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance; a time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones together; a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing; a time to get, and a time to lose; a time to keep, and a time to cast away; a time to rend, and a time to sew; a time to keep silence, and a time to speak; a time to love, and a time to hate; a time of war, and a time of peace. What profit hath he that worketh in that wherein he laboureth? I have seen the travail, which God hath given to the sons of men to be exercised in it. He hath made every thing beautiful in his time: also he hath set the world in their heart, so that no man can find out the work that God maketh from the beginning to the end. I know that there is no good in them, but for a man to rejoice, and to do good in his life. And also that every man should eat and

> drink, and enjoy the good of all his labour, it is the gift of God. I know that, whatsoever God doeth, it shall be for ever: nothing can be put to it, nor any thing taken from it: and God doeth it, that men should fear before him. That which hath been is now; and that which is to be hath already been; and God requireth that which is past.

Eliot's lines emphasise the time for decay more than the time for generation; both are affirmed, but at this stage the images of disintegration strike us more forcibly than the balder statements about building, living and generation. Cumulatively these images of the window-pane, wainscot, field-mouse and arras are curiously timeless; yet in their particularity - ensured by the singular, if generic, nouns - lies much of their force. This particularity owes something, too, to one specific literary source of Eliot's inspiration here: the evocation of decay in Tennyson's "Mariana". Tennyson's is a poem which, in some respects like "Gerontion", presents "Thoughts of a dry brain in a dry season", and one in which the physical surroundings become analogues of the registering consciousness itself:

> All day within the dreamy house,
> The doors upon their hinges creak'd;
> The blue fly sung in the pane; the mouse
> Behind the mouldering wainscot shriek'd,
> Or from the crevice peer'd about.

We know from Eliot's essay on *In Memoriam* (*SE* 330) that he admired this passage. In his lines the blue fly is absent, but we have a mouldering or crumbling house, window-pane, wainscot and mouse in close association; despite the different context and the adaptation of the images, there are enough details to make the borrowing a significant one. (The "shrieking rush of the wainscot mouse" occurs again in the morbid musings of the

hero of *Maud* (I.260).) The images, in Eliot's adaptation of them, lose the sinister psychological desolation of their Tennysonian context, but in doing so acquire a fresh infusion of half-detached pathos; the *physical* desolation is more complete: the pane is loosened, and the mouse has become a trotting field-mouse among the remains of what is no longer really a house at all. (To John Hayward's objection to a field-mouse instead of a house-mouse Eliot replied, "the particular point here is that the house is supposed to have been long deserted or empty" (*CFQ* 97).) In the wind that shakes these remains flaps the "tattered arras", and the "silent motto" woven into it points us back to the Stuart one inverted in the opening line. The images of this section have already hinted at a cyclic process by encouraging the reader's imagination to travel through one.

From these statements we modulate, via repetition of the suggestive motto, into evocation of a rustic landscape. It is as if we have arrived, on a sultry summer afternoon, at the end of a field near the village of East Coker, and are gradually, in the torpid heat and expectant stillness, hypnotised into a state of readiness for a time-transcending vision of the long-dead ancestral peasants of the village.

> In my beginning is my end. Now the light falls
> Across the open field, leaving the deep lane
> Shuttered with branches, dark in the afternoon,
> Where you lean against a bank while a van passes,
> And the deep lane insists on the direction
> Into the village, in the electric heat
> Hypnotised.

Several details quietly establish an atmosphere compounded

of opposites: light and darkness, the open and the closed, stillness and movement, the timeless and the contemporary. The landscape with its twice-mentioned "deep lane" (as it still is, between high banks topped with hedgerows) remains fundamentally unaffected by the symbols of modern technology embodied in the van and in the word "electric" - here used to intensify our sense of nature's heat instead of suggesting man's harnessing of it. The observing consciousness, the "you" which identifies us imaginatively with the poet, is like a small half-hidden figure in the gleaming stillness of a Constable painting, but one placed in the twentieth century by the passing van. The phrase "Shuttered with branches" seems to work almost as a pun: from amidst the shade, the mind's eye captures momentarily an atmospheric snapshot of the scene, the observer leaning against the bank with no function but that of briefly registering the scene of which not he himself, but the timeless "deep lane", is the most insistent feature ("insisting", too, on the direction into the village). As so often happens in Eliot, syntactical indeterminacy contributes to the atmosphere: the "you", the lane and the village are all potentially the referents of "in the electric heat/Hypnotised".

The rhythmic focus preparing for the timeless vision is assisted by the progressive shortening of sentences and the end-stopping in the next lines, where the air becomes simultaneously - and strangely - more soporific *and* more expectant:

> In a warm haze the sultry light
> Is absorbed, not refracted, by grey stone.
> The dahlias sleep in the empty silence.
> Wait for the early owl.

As often happens in Tennyson - Eliot's master in this respect - external details both create and symbolise the receptive mood of the consciousness that assimilates them. Afternoon shades into evening with the mention of the "early owl", but while day closes in, the imagination remains as open as the field and the basking stone. Despite the solitude in this passage, its atmosphere invites comparison with that of the famous opening of *In Memoriam* 95:

> By night we linger'd on the lawn,
> For underfoot the herb was dry;
> And genial warmth; and o'er the sky
> The silvery haze of summer drawn;
>
> And calm that let the tapers burn
> Unwavering: not a cricket chirr'd;
> The brook alone far-off was heard,
> And on the board the fluttering urn.
>
> And bats went round in fragrant skies,
> And wheel'd or lit the filmy shapes
> That haunt the dusk, with ermine capes
> And woolly breasts and beaded eyes;
>
> While now we sang old songs that peal'd
> From knoll to knoll, where, couch'd at ease,
> The white kine glimmer'd, and the trees
> Laid their dark arms about the field.

From Eliot's deep lane the open field can be seen, and the deep lane leads to it. The phrase "open field" has been offered for general contemplation (line 4) and as middle-distance landscape (line 15). Now, in line 23, we are in it or on the edge of it, having arrived by way of the "deep lane", which has tended to become a symbol of both the individual pilgrimage and the historical process by which we arrive at the time-transcending midnight vision. The moment in Burnt Norton's rose-garden was a fleeting occurrence, an unexpected illumination. The vision in the open field seems different, in spite of the

corresponding eager presences which are both there and yet not there. We have a sense that our way to it has been carefully prepared, that it has been waiting for us, and that there are conditions attached to the experience - rather like the conditions surrounding the ancient rituals of prophetic ecstasy. The repeated "If you do not come too close" is, for instance, analogous to Horace's injunction to the *profanum vulgus* to keep their reverent distance and *favete linguis* (*Odes* III.1), rather by silence than by any speaking at all. If you do not make a noise and so shatter the spell, you can hear the music and see the dance of the life-cycle. It is a kind of midsummernight's dream in the style of Brueghel, but more tentative and less vivid: "the *weak* pipe and the *little* drum" help to keep us, imaginatively, at a tactful distance as we watch the peasant dance, the dance of order and concord, around the village bonfire. After its comparative fluidity since the opening of the poem, the four-beat rhythm now establishes itself firmly as the pulse of the peasant dance -- rather like the rhythm that Beethoven creates for the rustic dance motif in the third movement of the Pastoral Symphony.

> In that ópen fíeld
> If you dó not come too clóse, if you dó not come too clóse,
> On a súmmer mídnight, you can héar the músic
> Of the wéak pípe and the líttle drúm
> And sée them dáncing aróund the bónfire
> The assóciátion of mán and wóman
> In dáunsinge, sígnifying mátrimónie -
> A dígnifíed and commódious sácrament.
> Twó and twó, nécessarye coniúnction,
> Hólding eche óther by the hánd or the árm
> Whiche betókeneth cóncorde. Róund and round the fíre
> léaping through the flámes, or jóined in círcles,
> Rústically sólemn or in rústic láughter

> Lìfting héavy féet in clúmsy shóes,
> Eárth feet, lóam feet, lìfted in cóuntry mírth
> Mírth of thóse long sínce under éarth
> Nóurishing the córn. Kéeping tíme,
> Kéeping the rhýthm ín their dáncing
> Ás in their líving in the líving séasons
> The tíme of the séasons and the cónstellátions
> The tíme of mílking and the tíme of hárvest
> The tíme of the cóupling of mán and wóman
> And thát of béasts. Fèet rísing and fálling.
> Éating and drínking. Dúng and déath.

A summer midnight is, of course, an appropriate setting for the brief experience of another dimension of time. The dance is not merely what once was, but also what in some sense always is and will be, if we have eyes and ears to see and hear it. It is both the symbol and the celebration of the perpetual cycle of humanity's organic relationship with the earth. Some readers, including A.D. Moody (209-211), regard the vision as entirely negative in its implications. David Bernstein more persuasively remarks that the dancers "are vitally in touch with the rhythm of the seasons and of the constellations, of birth, death and rebirth" (249-250); and goes on to apply to this passage Eliot's approving remarks on Kipling who aims

> to give at once a sense of the antiquity of England, of the number of generations and peoples who have laboured the soil and in turn been buried beneath it, and of the contemporaneity of the past. (*OPP* 248)

The timeless nature of the vision readily accommodates quotation from another member of the ancestral family, Sir Thomas Elyot, whose *Boke Named The Governour* (1531) was a Renaissance statement of Christian humanist values. The quotation in the archaic spelling of the original struck Helen Gardner as "a little precious" (*ATSE* 165), but seems to me perfectly appropriate to the setting prepared for it - the

slight shock is in fact a part of the aptness, as we respond to the vision which is of another time, any time and all time. The dance - initially, at least - embodies a marriage of the primitive and the orderly, the simple and the sacramental. It is one of the many symbols suggesting a "reconciliation of opposites" in the Quartets. Its primitive quality is evoked by the modern Eliot, its sacramental one imported from the Tudor Elyot:

> It is diligently to be noted that the associatinge of man and woman in daunsinge, they both obseruinge one nombre and tyme in their meuynges, was not begonne without a speciall consideration, as well for the necessarye coniunction of those two persones, as for the intimation of sondry vertues, whiche be by them represented. And for as moche as by the association of a man and a woman in daunsinge may be signified matrimonie, I could in declarynge the dignitie and commoditie of that sacrament make intiere volumes.... In euery daunse, of a moste auncient custome, there daunseth to gether a man and a woman, holding eche other by the hande or the arme, whiche betokeneth concorde. (Elyot I.xxi, 233-234, 235-236)

The dance is the age-old symbol of sexual union and social harmony and so naturally of marriage; but, as in John Davies's *Orchestra* or Spenser's Mutability cantos, it goes beyond that to figure forth a human and a cosmic harmony: change and decay are harnessed to a larger reconciling pattern in which variety and sameness, the transient and the eternal, are resolved - in a tension that is at the same time a universal concord.

The passage offers a robust contrast to visions elsewhere in Eliot of the nightmarish or the futile: in place of "The crying shadow in the funeral dance" of *Burnt Norton* V, or the "crowds of people, walking round in a ring" of Madame Sosostris in *The Waste Land*, we have the peasants 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

- and the sparsely-punctuated lines, with their insistent repetitions and participles and the quietly stomping rhythm of "Earth feet, loam feet", move with beautiful aptness. Webster, said Eliot in an earlier poem, saw the skull beneath the skin; here Eliot, without discarding that insight, can also see the life beneath the loam - and not the individual life only, but the life of communities and generations. The corn continues to be nourished by those who are buried, even while we watch them dancing. Eliot seems to have crystallised a vision of natural fertility in direct contrast to the nightmarish fecundity of the Stetson episode in *The Waste Land*:

> That corpse you planted last year in your garden,
> Has it begun to sprout? Will it bloom this year?
> Or has the sudden frost disturbed its bed?

East Coker opened by emphasising the organic cycle of man's life at work in the fabric of his dwellings and his body; it has continued to a point at which the life-cycle of the human community is apparent: and in doing so, it affirms the accord of this process with the pulse of nature itself, reverting to the rhythms of *Ecclesiastes* 3 to express this:

> 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.

"Time" here means, above all else, "rhythm" - as in the phrases "Keeping time,/Keeping the rhythm". For the reader, time in

its more common sense is briefly and paradoxically transcended in the notion of its being "kept". Action - here the dance - attuned to the cyclic rhythms is action in harmony with the process of time itself, and for that reason a way of transcending time. Not only is the imagined observer granted an illuminating experience of the timeless: the objects of his vision are themselves unconsciously transcending time by keeping it. Their conformity to its process is also a conformity with the rhythms of nature, whether sidereal or seasonal or sexual. They can therefore be seen as simultaneously dancing life's round (in *contrast* to the late-medieval "dance of death" iconography) and as under the earth, "Nourishing the corn". The moment of illumination is now realised not as what-might-have-been but as what - though almost always invisibly - is.

Eliot thought he might have been influenced by a German story, Friedrich Gerstarker's *Germelshausen*, in which a whole parish, placed under a papal interdict, can neither live nor die. Once every hundred years, as H.S. Haussermann puts it, "it resumes for the space of one day its ghostly revelry, and then sinks again under earth" (*CFQ* 43). The observer in the story happens to visit the place on the day of the community's centennial re-emergence for its festivities. The similarity is clear, but the differences are far more important. The vision is available "On a summer midnight", not once in a century. And, as Helen Gardner points out,

> What seems to have remained in Eliot's mind is merely the idea of a man from another age encountering the revelry of the long dead. The implications of the story and the poem are entirely different. The

> village of East Coker lies under no curse; it is there in its late summer beauty, and the dance around the bonfire on a summer midnight is a vision, available to any who "do not come too close", of the old midsummer rites of the "coupling of man and woman". (*CFQ* 43)

Granted that the passage offers no hint of the Gothic or the sinister, can we be equally sure that it is not simply a piece of sentimentalised pastoral, of imaginative wish-fulfilment on the subject of "country mirth"? The answer to this must lie partly in our response to the verse itself as a convincing medium for the evocation of timeless order. I have offered some pointers to its quality, trying to indicate the coherence of rhythm and image in the creation of the general effect. But the passage engages us also by its brevity, and by the duality of the response it evokes as it moves to its close. The "time" being kept is not only that of human coupling but also

> that of beasts. Feet rising and falling.
> Eating and drinking. Dung and death.

The middle of the passage made the feet a part of the harmonious communal dance; this now gives way to a different use of synecdoche ("Feet rising and falling"), one that we tend to associate less with Eliot's later than with his earlier poetry, where we encounter the "muddy feet that press/To early coffee-stands", or the soul "trampled by insistent feet/At four and five and six o'clock" ("Preludes"). The dance is - but only here at the end - briefly transformed by a different mood into a fleeting image of futility, not unlike the "Birth, and copulation, and death" of *Sweeney Agonistes*: a perpetual wearisome cycle of generation and decay. As in *Burnt Norton*, we "Cannot bear very much reality" of the transcendental and timeless sort, and soon

revert to our gloomier perspective on the life-cycle; then we share something of Harry's experience (in *The Family Reunion*) after the fading of a timeless moment:

> I was only my own feet walking
> Away, down a concrete corridor
> In a dead air. (*Plays* 107)

The vision of the dance, then, can in retrospect be seen in two quite different ways, each with its own measure of imaginative truth - not in negative terms alone. The reconciliation of these opposed perspectives - like the reconciliation within the vision itself - is largely what the Quartets are about, and the variety and complexity of its forms ensures that it is never merely facile. Emergence from the illuminating vision is accompanied by either hints or more explicit expressions of desolation and futility: "Ridiculous the waste sad time/ Stretching before and after", as the end of *Burnt Norton* puts it; or, as Tennyson says immediately after recounting his timeless experience in section 95 of *In Memoriam*,

> At length my trance
> Was cancell'd, stricken thro' with doubt.

But his *doubt* is not the abiding experience, the *transcendence* is.

Part I ends with a brief evocation of a dawn which (as in French idiom) "points", like a demythologised and more matter-of-fact descendant of Homer's rosy-fingered dawn.

> Dawn points, and another day
> Prepares for heat and silence. Out at sea the dawn wind
> Wrinkles and slides. I am here
> Or there, or elsewhere. In my beginning.

The dawn ushers in "another day": this I take simply to refer

to yet another in a series of similar, sultry summer days - and not as signifying a different kind of era, as J.J. Sweeney in his valuable pioneering study (*Casebook* 42) implied. Part I ends, as it began, with the notion of repeated cycles in nature and in man's experience. The dawn follows the night which followed the hot afternoon - cyclic movements echo one another on various scales. It is a summer dawn bringing promise of heat, but with a light breeze on the sea which is imagined as near to East Coker village. (It is not really near it, but the image prepares for a later important modulation in imagery.)

At sea the dawn wind, reminding us of an image in Tennyson's "The Eagle", "Wrinkles and slides". This detail shifts and widens our imagined perspective to one of looking down from a great height, as if released from the immediate environment of the "open field" - as if, in fact, we have attained an aerial view including both the village and its surroundings, and the sea in the distance. The compression of the image leaves it to the reader to transpose the grammatical subject: it is, after all, the surface of the sea under the *influence* of the wind, and not the wind itself, that we imagine wrinkling and sliding. One of Eliot's earlier drafts did in fact read "And the dawn wind/Wrinkles the sea" (*CFQ* 98). The transitive verb has since become intransitive, and coupled with the verb "slides": we can picture vari-coloured planes of water gliding across one another at the surface. The dawn wind and wrinkles suggest that Eliot may here have been influenced by his own recently-completed translation of Perse's *Anabasis*, though there it is the earth

and not the sea that is wrinkled; in Perse, too, is a theme of migration or exile from ancestral places:

> Men, creatures of dust and folk of divers devices,
> people of business and of leisure, men from the
> marches and those from beyond, O men of little weight
> in the memory of these lands; people from the valleys
> and the uplands and the highest slopes of this world
> to the ultimate reach of our shores; Seers of signs
> and seeds, and confessors of the western winds,
> followers of trails and of seasons, breakers of camp
> in the little *dawn wind*, seekers of watercourses over
> the *wrinkled* rind of the world, O seekers, O finders
> of reasons to be up and be gone,
> you traffic not in a salt more strong than this,
> when at morning with omen of kingdoms and omen of
> dead waters swung high over the smokes of the world,
> the drums of exile waken on the marches
> Eternity yawning on the sands.
> (Perse 27-29, italics added)

The "I" of the poem is "here/Or there, or elsewhere. In my beginning". Eliot is "there" in his remote ancestral past, he is also "here" in East Coker village in 1937 when he visited it - or elsewhere. Where does he have his identity? He too is part of the time-cycle, and yet, through imaginative contemplation of his position in it, he is not limited to that particular position. The same is true of us all: "in our beginning" and unable to make sharp distinctions between our "beginnings" and our "ends". The question of where, in the most fundamental way, we have our existence, is not answered in simple literal terms of time and space. At the end of Part III, in a very different context, it is true, we shall be offered the paradoxical thought that "where you are is where you are not" (its implications will be considered when we arrive at that point); and in Part V, although the poet places himself more plainly in the cycle of his life ("in the middle way") and links beginnings and ends by means of ambiguity ("Home is where one starts from"),

he will go on to assert that literal time and place are not the essential pointers to what matters in our lives: "Love is most nearly itself/When here and now cease to matter".

Meanwhile, Part I completes a verbal cycle by returning us at its end to its opening: "In my beginning". The poet is, in his thoughts, variously "here" (at East Coker, or on the page as we read), or "there" (in the past, or at sea, or in the new home-continent that lies across it), or "elsewhere" (anywhere). His spatial position is, in the full sense of the colloquial phrase, "neither here nor there" as a determinant of who and what he is - an interesting paradoxical conclusion to the quest for geographical roots. Though his identity incorporates the details of time and place, it is not limited by them. Of the timeless experience that offers the sense of simultaneous dwelling anywhere and everywhere and yet nowhere, he might as well echo the words of *Burnt Norton* II: "I can only say, *there* we have been: but I cannot say where".

Part II

Part IIA of *Burnt Norton* presented, in an impersonal tone and in symbolist mode, a sense of the cosmic unity felt at the still point; Part IIA of *East Coker*, using similar poetic methods, presents a sense of the *dis*unity and dislocation felt in a state after, or removed from, the timeless experience. Opposites are once again brought into close association with each other, but now the relationship between them is one of conflict, not of harmony or reconciliation. Normal distinctions of time and space are collapsed into a warring simultaneity and ubiquity - there is no "Keeping the rhythm" of the seasons here. This is what the tensions of temporal experience are like in contrast with the ineffable harmony at the timeless point of intersection. *East Coker's* taut-rhythmed, irregularly rhymed lyric passage provides a kind of reverse-echo of the corresponding movement in *Burnt Norton*. Instead of movement and stillness reconciled, we have here an evocation of seasonal disorder and disturbance, an apparent disintegration of normal cycles and natural patterns, and strife even in the constellations. It is as if we share the strained consciousness of the poet who, in his apprehension of simultaneity, feels too much and yet not enough - lacking, now, the visionary perspective that resolves all these conflicts.

The passage begins on a bewildered, almost querulous note, the syntactical looseness of its elements straining against the leash of the ostensible rhetorical question. Indeed, until the question mark of the seventh line brings us up short, we tend to forget that grammatically, at least, this *is* a question.

> What is the late November doing
> With the disturbance of the spring
> And creatures of the summer heat,
> And snowdrops writhing under feet
> And hollyhocks that aim too high
> Red into grey and tumble down
> Late roses filled with early snow?

Here we seem to have an intensified and almost surrealistic fulfilment of the fear expressed by the Chorus in *Murder in the Cathedral*: "Now I fear disturbance of the quiet seasons" (*Plays* 12). The lines are full of untimely and unnatural phenomena, autumn, spring, summer and winter confusedly thrown together. As in *Burnt Norton* I flowers are personified, but this time in restless and uneasy activities: the hollyhocks aim too high at the wrong season, their glowing redness craning into the bleak grey of a November sky until they undermine their own strength; the snowdrops, which should belong to the early spring, are engaged in futile "writhing under feet" (notice how the sense of dislocation is reinforced by the suggestive plurality which replaces the normal idiom "underfoot"). We become aware of unnatural heavings just beneath the surface of the earth, where the rhythms of growth are in a state of confusion - and the process is all the more alarming for the silence in which we imagine it taking place. The impulses of spring are an aggressive disturbance in late autumn, and "creatures of the summer heat" have no place here.

It is surprising how often passages of later Eliot send us back to the opening of *The Waste Land* for comparison. Again we have the vegetable world uncomfortably personified (or the sentient world rendered bizarrely in vegetable terms); and vernal

energies again arouse resentment and disorientation. The "breeding", "mixing" and "stirring" are troubling and unwelcome.

The tone of the rhetorical question combines with the personification of the plants to encourage a translation of the passage into terms of human experience and human response. The poet's sense of dislocation seems to be associated with the unnerving effect of a springtime or summer of the spirit clumsily reasserting itself in the dour November of his life. In other words, we are being indirectly prepared for the sombre personal meditation on old age that will follow in Part IIB of the poem. That Eliot was not yet fifty-two is as irrelevant as debates over the intended age of Prufrock: if you are, as the saying goes, as old as you feel - and we fluctuate as rapidly in such feelings as in any others - the age does not matter. Eliot, Tennyson and Shakespeare, whatever their personal feelings on the subject, were all, at early stages of their own careers, masters in the *poetic* evocation of old age. And a passage on the collapse of normal time-distinctions is as good a context as any for a blurring of the actualities of biographical age, whether or not we choose to hear in such a passage the tones of personal confession.

Images of disturbed growth on earth - in an implied setting redolent of an English cottage garden - now give way to images of destruction in space. The perspective widens to a daunting scale, one that will carry us in a few lines from the precision of "late November" to fantastic thoughts of apocalyptic cataclysm and renewed ice ages. Seasonal dislocation goes along with dislocation among the traditional elements themselves:

earth's roses are filled with snow, comets "weep", and cosmic fire signals the return of enveloping ice. The transitions are more abrupt than those of the companion-piece in *Burnt Norton*: there, our imaginative passage from mud to stars was carefully graduated through the elements to create an impression of reconciling simultaneity; here in *East Coker* we leap in one line from snow to stars and in another from fire to ice, gaining a contrasting impression of jarring simultaneity. In the *Burnt Norton* lyric, most of the rhymes were comparatively close together, with spaced rhyming of "scars", "wars" and "stars" running through like a gathering thread. In the *East Coker* one, the "stars/cars/wars" rhymes occupy the exact centre of the piece, separating widely-spaced rhymes that seem to have minimal knitting effect. Again, in the *Burnt Norton* passage almost all the lines did rhyme; in the *East Coker* one, appropriately enough, nearly half do not.

> Thunder rolled by the rolling stars
> Simulates triumphal cars
> Deployed in constellated wars
> Scorpion fights against the Sun
> Until the Sun and Moon go down
> Comets weep and Leonids fly
> Hunt the heavens and the plains
> Whirled in a vortex that shall bring
> The world to that destructive fire
> Which burns before the ice-cap reigns.

The transition from images of earth to those of space is, as I say, abrupt, but the feeling conveyed is analogous. We have a growing sense of chaos pervading three spheres: the individual consciousness, earthly processes, and galactic phenomena. Human passions are implicit in the verbs "Simulates", "fights", "weep", "fly" (in the added sense of "flee"), "Hunt", and

"burns". The images indirectly interpret themselves as they arise: images of warfare, anguish and destruction. Impossible events are presented: the stars produce thunder resembling war-chariots; the sun is assaulted by the November constellation of Scorpio; comets imitate human responses to the prevalent distintegration; and the Leonids (a meteor cluster visible in the sign of Leo during rare Novembers) flash across the sky in headlong flight, or like celestial hunters. The culmination of these "events" is a vortex in which the earth spins to fiery destruction before a renewed ice-age asserts itself, suggesting both the end of the individual life and the end of humanity itself. Even during the "phony war" of early 1940, when anticipation of chaos ran deeper than experience of it, these images must have made a considerable impact on the imagination. Of this passage David Ward aptly remarks that

> the question whether the world will ever conquer its bloodlust, and the bitter recognition that passion mocks experience, merge with the violent distortion of the seasons and the constellations into a cosmic vortex (rather like the fracturing whirlwind which ends "Gerontion"). The end of the world felt near in November 1939; wisdom and dispassionate serenity very hard to gain...."If we fail", said Churchill, "then the whole world...will sink into the abyss of a new dark age." Eliot's even more sombre fear was that the dark age had already begun, and that the only possible defence against chaos was a lonely and continuous struggle for self-discipline and humility. (245)

Accordingly, Part IIB becomes a meditation on humility as the only true wisdom to be sought in old age.

Before we leave Part IIA, the nature of its debt to Mallarmé may be considered. We have already noted Helen Gardner's point that *Burnt Norton*'s "Garlic and sapphires in the mud/Clot the

bedded axle-tree" adapted phrases from two sonnets of Mallarmé, one being "Tonnerre et rubis aux moyeux" from "M'introduire dans ton histoire". The "Tonnerre" of this line, she suggests, found its way into "Thunder rolled by the rolling stars" here in *East Coker*; and Mallarmé's association of thunder with carriage- or chariot-axles is renewed in "Simulates triumphal cars", the "cars" echoing the last line of the same sonnet, "Du seul vespéral de mes chars". The link seems to be strengthened by the fact that Mallarmé's sonnet refers also to glaciers, victory, and "fire-pierced air" ("l'air que ce feu troue"). Nevertheless the images in Eliot's context have a far plainer purpose than in Mallarmé's very obscure poem. His sonnet is personal to the point of privacy, and the subject an acutely personal emotion; the tone of the Eliot is far more impersonal, and the subject-matter a universal cataclysm. As so often happens in Eliot's poetry, the transplanted image is totally changed by its new environment. The point may be clarified by parallel quotation of Mallarmé's poem and Roger Fry's translation of it, both quoted by Gardner (*CFQ* 80-81).

M'introduire dans ton histoire	To get myself into your story
C'est en héros effarouché	'Tis as a hero affrighted
S'il a du talon nu touché	Has his naked foot but touched
Quelque gazon de territoire	Some lawn of that territory
A des glaciers attentatoire	Violator of glaciers
Je ne sais le naïf péché	I know no sin so naive be it
Que tu n'aurais pas empêché	That you will not have prevented
De rire très haut sa victoire	From laughing's victory aloud
Dis si je ne suis pas joyeux	Say if I am not joyous
Tonnerre et rubis aux moyeux	Thunder and rubies at the axles
De voir en l'air que ce feu troue	To see in this fire-pierced air
Avec des royaumes épars	Amid scattered realms
Comme mourir pourpre la roue	As though dying purple the wheel
Du seul vespéral de mes chars.	Of my sole chariot of evening.

(I have corrected the Gardner misprint "sun" to "sin" in line 6 of the translation.) Paul Valéry, we are told,

> suggested that the speaker is making an evening promenade in a carriage with wheels either actually red or reddened by the reflection of the setting sun. The thunder suggests the noise of the chariot and the explosion of the speaker's joy at his triumph over his frigid mistress. (*CFQ* 80)

If this is an acceptable reading of these lines, we can say that there is no real connection between the two poems other than the resemblance between the image-clusters which, as we have seen, do nothing in the Eliot that they do in Mallarmé. The spirit of Laforgue found its way into some of Eliot's early poems, and the spirit of Baudelaire into *The Waste Land*; but it is questionable whether the "spirit of Mallarme" is detectable here, unless we stretch that phrase to include the symbolist method of image-association in unpunctuated lines of uncertain or ambiguous syntax. At any rate the method, after its brief exploitation, is ostensibly (not, I think, genuinely) rejected by Eliot in the lines that immediately follow.

> That was a way of putting it - not very satisfactory:
> A periphrastic study in a worn-out poetical fashion,
> Leaving one still with the intolerable wrestle
> With words and meanings. The poetry does not matter.

These lines, opening what I call Part IIB, constitute the most abrupt - indeed notorious - stylistic and tonal switch in the Quartets. The corresponding shift in Part II of *Burnt Norton* was, after all, very smooth. There the first half-line of IIB was almost readable as a continuation of IIA, as if it were part of the same sentence and we had moved through the Dantean crystalline sphere to the "unmoved Mover":

> Pursue their pattern as before
> But reconciled among the stars.
>
> At the still point of the turning world.

The transition was eased by the continued imagery of cosmic pattern and by the falling of the stresses. A slight element of surprise entered into the reading only when the last-quoted line *prolonged* itself into "Neither flesh nor fleshless"; the theme of timeless order made the smooth transition appropriate.

It can be argued - despite the many objections that have been raised - that the very abruptness of the switch in *East Coker* is equally appropriate to its quite different theme of dislocation and disorder. It is like an unmodulated change of musical key that shocks the ear yet in retrospect justifies itself in doing so.

Among the objectors is F.O. Matthiessen:

> The sharp drop from incantation is designed to have the virtue of surprise; but it would seem here to have gone much too far, and to have risked the temporary collapse of his form into the flatness of a too personal statement. (180)

Risked it, yes - but succeeded, I believe, in avoiding the danger. The statement is, after all, not "too personal", but rather a deft way of turning to the reader and including him in a process of thought from which the very intensity of the preceding lines had tended to place him at a spectator's distance. We might, with due allowance for the differences, compare the end of "The Burial of the Dead" in *The Waste Land*, where the bizarre Stetson episode suddenly gives way to the line from Baudelaire ("You! hypocrite lecteur! - mon semblable, - mon frère!") - which reminds the reader that he himself, together

with the speaker, is in some sense the subject of the poem. At this point in *East Coker*, far from falling flat on his face into a bog of prosiness, Eliot is pulling off the "meditative" equivalent of a *coup de theatre*. Again, we might compare the point in *Murder in the Cathedral* when the knights turn from the killing of Thomas to address us, the modern audience, in our own idiom (*Plays* 48-52), and by doing so promptly redefine our relationship to what we have just witnessed. The poet of *East Coker* is not *really* taking refuge in the defensive gesture of criticising his own recent performance. After all, to put it quite simply, if he had really thought the lyric unsatisfactory he would have altered it; and if he had sincerely thought the poetry did not matter he would have abandoned it. What he is doing, in the very moment of dropping the lyric tension, is arousing tension of a new kind in the reader: the tension of initial incredulity ("He can't really mean this!") jolting us into a fresh relationship with him. He now appears not merely as himself but as a generic figure of all poets and all ageing men, and by extension, of all of us in our struggle for clarity of vision. His self-conscious rejection of the symbolist mode is neither a critical stance nor a total rejection, but simply a rhetorical affirmation of the need for more modes than one in this context: "periphrastic" and "worn-out" are his purposely sardonic over-simplifications of the moment, dramatising his eagerness to communicate. He is, in a sense, echoing the claim of Sweeney ("I gotta use words when I talk to you"), but *un*like Sweeney, deliberately attaching more importance to the understanding of the words than to the heightened "poetry" itself -

as if warning us not to luxuriate in images from an uncommitted distance. He is both confessing himself more directly and addressing us more directly, going on to speak in the first person plural which includes us. When Gardner suggests that he is rejecting symbolism in favour of a poetry that "wrestles" with meanings (*CFQ* 101), this is only relatively true: he is rather saying "My attempt to convey this experience purely in images without discursive connection, isn't adequate to my present purpose: let me now wrestle with the problem of putting it in terms that we share. The poetry in fact matters very much, but not as an end in itself - the life and the spirit matter more. Given that they need a relatively prosaic style to do justice to them at this point, here it is."

The "intolerable wrestle/With words and meanings" will become the main focus of Part VA; meanwhile it is briefly anticipated, only to be replaced by the real immediate subject, which is a different kind of wrestling - the struggle of an honest ageing spirit, within the chaotic time-cycle, for the only true wisdom available to it. It is a quiet struggle conducted in the midst of overwhelming disillusionment, without the illumination of the timeless experience. The return to the longer four-beat line with its clear caesura emphasises the tension between judicious calm and exploratory anxiety.

> It was nót (to start agáin)/whát one had expécted.
> Whát was to be the válue/of the lóng looked fórward to,
> Long hóped for cálm,/the autúmnal serénity
> And the wísdom of áge?/Hád they decéived us,
> Or decéived themsélves,/the quíet-voiced élders,
> Bequéathing us mérely/a recéipt for decéit?
> The serénity ónly/a delíberate hébetude,
> The wísdom ònly/the knówledge of déad sécrets

Úseless in the dárkness/ínto which they péered
Or fróm which they tùrned their éyes./

(In the last two lines, as my scansion suggests, the contrasts of direction in the prepositions "into" and "from" seem to need more stress in reading than the simple connective "which".)

"It was not...what one had expected": the "It" refers not so much to the wrestling or the poetry, as to the general nature of cumulative experience: as we might say, "It - things, life, and more especially old age - did not turn out as we expected". The poet, who in Part I saw himself as a modern (and therefore by association young) descendant of the ghostly dancers, now sees himself - and indirectly invites us to see ourselves - as entering into an old age which is not merely personal but the old age of the race. (The whole of *East Coker* moves from origins through maturity to the anticipation of death.)

The impression of disillusionment and of frustrated hope is strengthened by the syntactically unusual, clumsy yet precise, form of the line "What *was to be* the value of the *long looked forward to*...": not "What is" or "What was" or even "What will have been", but "What was to be". The peculiarity of grammatical mood and tense, a kind of subjunctive perfect-future instead of indicative future-perfect, emphasises the difference between earlier misguided anticipation and present bleak reality; and the awkwardness of the compound adjective "long looked forward to" redoubles this effect. The hope did not merely turn out to be, but should at the same time have been recognised as, in the words of Part III, "hope for the wrong thing". We might have known that our expectations were misguided all along. They

were expectations of "autumnal serenity" and wisdom - terms whose force has been rhetorically undermined before the reader arrives at them. And the notion of autumnal serenity has been undermined not only by the lines preceding the phrase, but also by Part IIA's presentation of the chaotic "November" - the seasonal equivalent of the autumn of the life-cycle.

The next question is implicitly rather than explicitly rhetorical. The implied answer is both "No" and "Yes": the "quiet-voiced elders" had not deceived us, yet if they had deceived themselves, it was only in the sense in which it is our common lot to deceive ourselves about the fruits of our experience. The recipe ("receipt" in the common American, but no longer British, sense) - the recipe for self-deception is the natural heritage of fallen man. The "quiet-voiced elders" begin metaphorically with Adam, but the phrase silently expands to include all our individual, spiritual, social and aesthetic mentors and ancestors. The term "quiet-voiced" suggests the modesty and apparent serenity which *ought* to hold promise of wisdom, but also hints, I think, at the comparatively muted state of the dead in the classical underworld. Each of us may like to think of him- or herself as a kind of Aeneas enjoying the sage illumination of an Anchises in Elysium, but we flatter ourselves unwarrantably.

What I have been trying to indicate here is the remarkable range of association achieved by Eliot in these lines, and the economical precision of the language in which he does so. This is a far cry from the prosaic flatness commonly attributed to the passage. It is poetry of a high order, perhaps higher,

though less obvious in its workings, than that of the symbolist lyric preceding it. And the muted music, blending bald repetition with alliterative and assonantal insistence - moving from the fluidity of long **ē** vowels and voiced **v/d/th/l** consonants to shorter **ĕ** vowels and unvoiced **t** consonants - enacts the feeling of movement towards the disillusionment of a silent halt:

> Had **th**e**y** **deceived** us,
> Or **deceived** **th**e**m**s**elv**es, **th**e quiet-**v**oiced e**l**ders,
> Beque**ath**ing us merely a re**ceipt** for dece**it**?

The awkward abruptness of "receipt for deceit" is especially telling.

Instead of directly answering the rhetorical question (its last line really a statement), the poet turns it off by expanding on the two key terms of the previous question, "serenity" and "wisdom" - each now recognised as a misleadingly attractive term for something far less inspiring: dulness (hebetude) and mere useless knowledge. The first chorus from *The Rock* asks, more directly but less effectively, "Where is the wisdom we have lost in knowledge?", at least implying that real "wisdom" was once enjoyed. *East Coker* sombrely and with more complexity negates the term's aptness, seeing it as merely a euphemism for

> the knowledge of dead secrets
> Useless in the darkness into which they peered
> Or from which they turned their eyes.

Peering into darkness implies minimal vision, and turning away one's eyes from it implies (granted the logical impossibility of the distinction) even less.

It is worth noticing how, from "Had they deceived us", the poet speaks in the first person plural, incorporating us into

his bleak experience or - to reverse the emphasis - sinking his individuality in the general disenchantment of the race. Even when he continues into "it seems to us", the "us" is not quite the royal plural of modest evasion. What he asserts may not have seemed so to us - the readers - before we read, but the tentative authority of statement envelops us unprotestingly and carries us along with it. As we read, the "knowledge derived from experience" acquires for us less significance than the disillusioned wisdom gained from the reading itself - which, although logically a *part* of our experience, is rhetorically distinguished from it in the *process* of reading.

> There ís, it sèems to ús,
> At bést, ónly a límited válue
> In the knówledge dérived fròm expérience.
> The knówledge impóses a páttern, and fálsifies,
> For the páttern is néw in évery móment
> And évery móment is a néw and shócking
> Valuátion of àll we háve been. We are ónly ùndecéived
> Of thát which, decéiving, could nó lònger hárm.

Some further comments on the metre are called for here. I have already expressed my conviction that the metrical norm of *Four Quartets* is the four-beat line, with occasional variations in the direction of three (with the ghost of a fourth) or of five or six, but with the extra stresses best heard as secondary ones; and that this norm persists almost regardless of variations in pace and in line-length. What is of interest in this section of *East Coker*, with its fairly slow, meditative quality, is the frequent use of an additional (secondary) stress to ease transitions in the half-lines that straddle sentence-endings, as if to prevent us from hurrying across them, while the lineation preserves the sense of continuity. The secondary stresses

occur mostly in such lines: those with a period in the middle. Another feature of the passage is the variety of rhythms (combined with the variety of syntax, diction and tone) played upon the ground-bass of the four-beat line: at one moment comparatively close to prose rhythms ("That was a way of putting it - not very satisfactory"); at another, insistent with suppressed tension ("Bequeathing us merely a receipt for deceit"); now hesitant and exploratory in a slightly pedantic fashion ("There is, it seems to us,/At best, only a limited value/In the knowledge derived from experience"); suddenly subject to the "imposed pattern" of a quasi-dactylic metre ("The knowledge imposes a pattern and falsifies"); then abruptly breaking down again into irregularly spaced beats under the pressure of the "shocking newness" of every moment's revaluation ("For the pattern is new in every moment/And every moment is a new and shocking/Valuation of all we have been").

Meanwhile, the ostensibly sprawling continuity of utterance gathers tensile strength from unemphatic repetitions linking one part to another in a firm chain of association: instances are the repetitions of "value" and "Valuation", "serenity", "wisdom", "deceived" and its cognates, "knowledge", "pattern", "new" and "moment". The linkages are clearest (and have been marked) in these lines, where one unfolds into another through repetition in what Audrey Cahill, in a very different context, has called "a sort of rhyme of meanings" (158):

> There is, it seems to us,
> 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.

The individual life, then, does not form a redeeming pattern on its own, it cannot in its own strength transcend time or even catch up with it: "We are only undeceived/Of [i.e. with respect to] that which, [even if it were] deceiving, could no longer harm". What we learn, we learn only when it is no longer of any use. There are reminders here of Gerontion's whorish and perverse figure of history who

> gives when our attention is distracted
> And what she gives, gives with such supple confusions
> That the giving famishes the craving. Gives too late
> What's not believed in, or if still believed,
> In memory only, reconsidered passion. Gives too soon
> Into weak hands, what's thought can be dispensed with
> Till the refusal propagates a fear.

More important, perhaps, the individual's inability to "catch up" through experience will be echoed in *East Coker* V on the poet's problems. In order to emphasise the parallels, I quote from Part V, interlining from Part II in bracketed italics:

> and every attempt
> Is a wholly new start, and a different kind of failure
> [*For the pattern is new in every moment*]
> Because one has only learnt to get the better of words
> For the thing one no longer has to say, or the way in
> which
> One is no longer disposed to say it.
> [*The wisdom only the knowledge of dead secrets...*
> *.....We are only undeceived*
> *Of that which, deceiving, could no longer harm.*]
> And so each venture
> Is a new beginning, a raid on the inarticulate...
> [*For the pattern is new in every moment*
> *And every moment is a new and shocking*
> *Valuation of all we have been.*]
> There is only the fight to recover what has been lost
> And found and lost again and again....

So, in a tone of pained honesty, the poet goes on to reject the alleged wisdom of old men, preferring to confront their folly

and fear as ways to humility:

> In the middle, not only in the middle of the way
> But all the way, in a dark wood, in a bramble,
> On the edge of a grimpen, where is no secure foothold,
> And menaced by monsters, fancy lights,
> Risking enchantment. Do not let me hear
> Of the wisdom of old men, but rather of their folly,
> Their fear of fear and frenzy, their fear of possession.
> Of belonging to another, or to others, or to God.
> The only wisdom we can hope to acquire
> Is the wisdom of humility: humility is endless.

In the chaotic life of the individual, as Gardner says,

> we find no ordered sequence, pattern or development. The metaphor of autumnal serenity is false applied to man; experience does not bring wisdom, nor old age peace. The time when one knows never arrives, and the pattern is falsified by every new moment. We are always in the dark wood, in which Dante found himself in the middle of his life, the wood "where the straight way is lost". As we try to hold the past it slips from us, engulfed in the darkness of the present.... (*ATSE* 166)

The allusion to Dante's dark wood is, of course, to the opening of the *Inferno*, where midway through life - beginning the descent into old age - he finds himself lost, and can only truly find himself by way of the epic journey through the desolate regions and up the mount of purgation. The image serves archetypally to generalise the poet's experience and incorporate us into it. This "sentence" ("In the middle... enchantment") is not strictly speaking a sentence at all, but a series of phrases without a main verb: from the dark wood it ramifies into a variety of other images (bramble, grimpen, monsters) in such a way that the loss of grammatical direction enacts the loss of spiritual direction; and the universality of the predicament is hinted at by the total absence, at this point, of any pronouns at all ("menaced" and "Risking" have no

explicit referent). The rhythm becomes clotted with comma pauses, so that the ear gets snarled up in a thicket of short phrases, even while "no secure foothold" is offered to our syntactical expectations. The effect is the more vivid since this cluster of images follows so closely upon several lines of comparative abstraction. The landscape offered to our imagination, like something out of Bunyan or the Arthurian quest-cycles, is suggestive rather than precise, but none the less vivid for that. The word "grimpen", from the marsh in *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, justified itself for Eliot and Hayward (both Sherlock Holmes addicts), but its comparative privacy is perhaps a little too distracting for the general reader. What we feel in the two lines that follow is roughly analogous in effect to *Burnt Norton*'s "crying shadow in the funeral dance", though with more awareness of deceptive allure and less of desolation.

At this point ("Risking enchantment") we reach the climax of the deceptions on the pilgrim's journey into age; then the poet suddenly swings away from the thought of these distractions with a firmly expressed personal wish that silently invites our endorsement:

> Do not let me hear
> Of the wisdom of old men, but rather of their folly

and of the fears that go with it. These fears are of kinds by now familiar to the readers of Eliot's earlier poetry, where they were by no means exclusively the fears of old men: the fears of fear itself, of frenzy, and of possession. We have seen them all at work in *The Waste Land* especially, where the voices have recognized, but shied away from, the ecstasy of

commitment or "The awful daring of a moment's surrender/Which an age of prudence can never retract". The confrontation of these fears, with the admission of them as affecting ourselves, is now seen as preferable to entertaining conventional ideas of the wisdom of age: like the fear of the Lord (*Proverbs* 1:7), such fear honestly faced is the beginning of that knowledge which is the only true wisdom. So

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

The "wisdom of humility" is variously the wisdom that consists of, is seen in, is taught by, is born of, humility. (Eliot's prepositions often have a richly multiple function.) It is not defeatism, though it seems it cannot be learnt without the experience *of* defeat. Perhaps it is, in the end, the only valuable thing that we *can* learn from experience - experience which in other respects seems to be such a poor teacher. The word "endless" implies an infinity of value and of duration. But perhaps it is not too fanciful to catch also a hint here of a secondary meaning of "endless" as purposeless - that is, in this case, without any *ulterior* motive. Such an extra dimension of meaning would be characteristic of Eliot; and the lack of worldly or personal motive would be one of the distinguishing marks of true humility - like the true caring of *Ash-Wednesday* which includes the right kind of *not* caring ("Teach us to care and not to care/Teach us to sit still").

Part II ends with two lines set apart typographically as isolated, and therefore, highlighted, images. There is no obvious reason why these two lines should not have been joined

to each other, except perhaps Eliot's wish for each to be dwelt on slowly enough for its associations to ripple out as widely as possible in the mind. Yet in their immediate effect they are closely related and reinforce each other. They are like twin parallel reversions, for a moment, to the symbolist mode of the images of Part IIA: the solidity of human habitation sinks into the sea, the fluidity of human movement vanishes into the earth.

The hóuses are áll/gone únder the séa.
The dáncers are áll/gone únder the híll.

The switch from "humility is endless" is apparently abrupt, yet I suspect we should hear a note of detached acceptance (the poised resignation of humility) as the poet contemplates the evanescence of things, even of moments of timeless illumination.

Several echoes are aroused by these lines, perhaps the more strongly for their return to a more buoyant and haunting four-beat form - its buoyancy upheld by the triple rhythms hovering (in terms of traditional scansion) between anapaest, dactyl, choriamb and amphibrach. These echoes are worth listing by way of comment on their cumulative force.

The most obvious are the echoes of the imagery of Part I: the transience of houses among the shifting processes of the elements, and the brevity and evanescence of the villagers' dance glimpsed in a timeless moment. In *Germelshausen* the dancers, after their revelry, sink under the earth - so here the dancers go under the hill, while the houses (with a stronger effect of finality) go under the sea. This image may have blended in Eliot's mind with one or two others: the enchanted

cathedral of Ys, which rises briefly above the waves to the sound of bells and chanting, then sinks below them again, in the musical impressionism of Debussy's *La Cathédrale Engloutie*; and the legend of the sunken Lyonesse of Arthurian times, off the coast of Cornwall - a glimpse of lost splendour. A clearer echo, in rhythms and line-endings, is that of Robert Louis Stevenson's "Requiem" (which also lay behind a line or two of the typist-clerk episode in *The Waste Land*):

> Home is the sailor, home from sea,
> And the hunter home from the hill.

Considering the frequency of Tennysonian images and phrases in *East Coker*, there may be at least a tenuous link with "Break, break, break" which, amid its evocations of the sea, sets up a contrast between a "haven under the hill" and the havenless desolation of the speaker. And finally, the notion of dancers disappearing under a hill can hardly lack some reminiscence of the end of Browning's "Pied Piper", with its late-medieval setting for the legendary disappearance of the Hamelin children as they dance after the piper into the hillside - a faint analogue of the traditional dance of death, but with rumours of re-emergence elsewhere.

If all these echoes have (consciously or subconsciously) informed these lines, we can sense what a wealth of allusiveness helps to shape our complex response to them: the sombre, the lyrical, the desolate, and the semi-mythical. The picture is ostensibly of the transience of all things human, but seen from a standpoint of wise resignation attained by a mature humility. The dance of life in Part I has given way once more

to the dance of death, and this continues in the procession into the darkness of Part III.

Part III

Burnt Norton II focussed on the still point or the dance around it, on the reconciliation of time and the timeless. *East Coker* II, on the other hand, focussed more on the chaos and evanescence of life than on the reconciling pattern. Although neat thematic parallelism - or, for that matter, neat thematic contrast - cannot always be expected between corresponding movements of the Quartets, the third movements of *Burnt Norton* and *East Coker* do have a good deal in common.

East Coker III begins with an echo of Milton's blinded Samson, presenting the darkness into which all of timebound mortality must enter. As in *Burnt Norton* III, we hear first of the denizens of our "strained time-ridden" world, then of the darkness of the ascetic's self-emptying. So our minds move from the temporal world with its death-in-life or its approaches to death, to the dark night of the negative way with its route to the illuminating vision.

The movement opens with a somewhat ironic "dead march". The irony is due largely to the diction, of which more will be said shortly. The steady plod of a dead march is realized by a pattern of three beats followed by a comparatively light, lingering or "muffled" fourth beat: this is the rhythm we hear in the opening subject of the *Marche Funèbre* movement of Chopin's B flat minor sonata. It is recognizable in Eliot's lines if we scan them with *eight* "beats" to a line, reading very slowly, and allowing for the "muffled" beat implicit in the midline and end-of-line pauses:

> O dárk dárk dárk [páuse]. They áll go ínto the dárk [páuse],
> The vácant interstéllar spáces [páuse], the vácant ínto the vácant [páuse],
> The cáptains, mérchant bánkers [páuse], éminent mén of létters [páuse],
> The génerous pátrons of árt [páuse], the státesmen ánd the rúlers [páuse],
> Distínguished cívil sérvants [páuse], cháirmen of mány commíttees [páuse],
> Indústrial lórds and pétty contráctors, áll go ínto the dárk [páuse],
> And dárk the Sún and Móon [páuse], and the Álmanách de Gótha [páuse]
> And the Stóck Exchánge Gazétte [páuse], the Diréctory óf Diréctors... [páuse]

It is of course possible to scan the passage with a norm of six stresses to the line, but to do so, neglecting the pause-beats, is to miss the effect of the peculiarly apt rhythm with its multiples of four dominating the eight lines. Towards the end, particularly in the eighth line, the alternate stresses become lighter, preparing for a reversion to the norm of four primary stresses with interspersed secondary ones.

By far the best available analysis of the diction of this passage is that of Winifred Nowottny in *The Language Poets Use*. Discussing the power that unexpected words derive from their poetic contexts, she turns to this passage and remarks how,

> to convey the sterility of modern life, many locutions are taken from or closely modelled on the standardized and banal diction used on notable public occasions and in newspaper reports of them....Eliot makes his diction court comparison with the passionate, sensitive, religious diction of those lines in *Samson Agonistes* (80-105) to which it unmistakably alludes....And though Eliot's obituary language is set [by the Miltonic framing] in a context of impassioned thought and imagination, it is as much a part of the poem as the sensitive diction with which it is contrasted. (33-34: parenthesis added)

Yet this contrast alone does not fully explain the effect of the lines that follow. She continues:

> Eliot's description of the silent funeral of the eminent raises the acute problem of accounting for the fact that a diction which in normal use is stale and suspect of falsity is not stale or false in the poem....this diction does not oppress us with a demand for reverence or acclaim of the dead, for, whilst using obituary or *Who's Who* language, it subtly detaches itself from the social attitudes such language is normally associated with. (34)

Setting aside the initial (and gratuitously unpleasant) pointer "the vacant into the vacant", we can briefly list, adapting the Nowottny analysis of the diction, the ways in which Eliot uses one kind of eminence to nullify or diminish another. The word "captains" hovers between the traditionally heroic and the implied locution "captains of industry" (through its juxtaposition with "merchant bankers"), and so half satirises itself - indeed, the combination in one line of captains, bankers and *literati* makes them deflate one another. By the time we reach the patrons of art, their generosity has already acquired an air of formulaic speciousness, and does not impress. The words "statesmen" and "rulers" are made to suffer, as a pair, from a slight connotative jarring between the modern flavour of the first and the more archaic flavour of the second; and in the middle of such a list the civil servants lack any real distinction. The phrase "chairmen of many committees" deflates by its initial plural the obituary style which would apply to a single chairman at a time. In "lords" the older connotations chafe awkwardly against "Industrial", while its partner-phrase derives an extra measure of "pettiness" from the juxtaposition. The reference manuals which share their darkness with the sun and moon acquire a more profound darkness from the association;

and the "Directory of Directors" diminishes each individual director. In fact,

> as one form of illustriousness is succeeded by another and still another, each diminishes in importance....This is a manoeuvre to allude to contemporary forms of prestige whilst at the same time repudiating the attitudes usually adopted (or simulated) in connection with them....[There are] many telling deviations from the normal usage of writers of obituary columns and entries in books of reference....Eliot's diction here permits simultaneously a recall of contemporary ways of describing status and a criticism of the values associated with such ways of describing....he adheres sufficiently to contemporary usage to establish the reference and deviates enough from it to deflate the pomps to which he refers and to suggest older values of a higher order. Thus the diction, in which the element of reappraisal depends upon significant deviations from the contemporary language he has taken as his ostensible model, is a very delicately judged mixture of conformity to and deviation from the stereotypes of current usage. (34-36)

This is something more complex than satire, however: Eliot adapts the language of Milton's Samson to achieve a kind of metaphysical *frisson* as well. The substitution of "interstellar spaces" for Milton's "interlunar cave"

> brings the phrase up to date in its astronomy and at the same time adds to Milton's total darkness the horror Pascal expressed in the famous phrase "Le silence éternel de ces espaces infinis m'effraie"....[The] intricate dovetailing of meanings gives an ever-changing and ever-deepening value to the words "dark", "vacant", "cold", "lost", "silent", and infuses horror into the contrast between the inanity of the departing and these attributes of the void into which they depart. (37)

The lines that immediately follow the "obituary list", while retaining the four-beat rhythm, move very differently:

> And cóld the sénse and lóst the mòtive of áction.
> And we áll go wíth them, into the sílent fúneral,
> Nóbody's fúneral, for there is nó one to búry.

The steady plod of the dead march has given way to a more tense

and sombrely sardonic rhythm. The effect of "cold the sense and lost the motive of action" is of a death-in-life; and a certain severity of tone emerges in the formal departure from normal word-order (the inversion of adjective and noun in "cold the sense" and "lost the motive"). But any judgmental distancing of attitude is promptly eliminated by the quiet movement into the inclusive first-person pronoun: "And we all go with them". This haunting vision of life as a perpetual solemn procession in a funeral without a corpse, is not really relieved by what would otherwise be the grim humour of ambiguity ("No body's" - no corpse's - funeral", in fact, and "no one to bury" - no one to be buried, that is, and also perhaps no one to do the burying). The effect is macabre yet by no means tricksy. We have the impression of an endless line of shades flowing steadily into a metaphysical darkness - a far more disturbing image than the brief "Dung and death" near the end of Part I. If we momentarily make a mental distinction between ourselves and the rest of the throng, we are brought up short by the "we" at this point, and perhaps reminded - if it has not struck us earlier - of the poet's inclusion of himself (certainly, by 1940, one of the "eminent men of letters").

From one point of view the whole passage acts as a kind of mirror-image of the tube-station one in *Burnt Norton* III, where the (in both senses) undistinguished "Men and bits of paper" emerge from the London tube into the twilit greyness of the "faded air". Here, as if on the "down" escalator instead of the "up" one, the figures of supposed eminence are swallowed into the enveloping darkness of directionless death. At the

same time this is also, in quasi-spatial terms, the darkness of "interstellar spaces", yet lacking the orderly philosophical underpinning of, for instance, Milton's *Il Penseroso*, who

> may oft outwatch the Bear
> With thrice-great Hermes, or unsphere
> The spirit of Plato, to unfold
> What worlds or what vast regions hold
> The immortal mind that hath forsook
> Her mansion in this fleshly nook....

Eliot's speaker might be called a *Penseroso* of a new sort, communing with his soul in a state of passivity in a way that speaks potentially for all of us (as does Milton's), but in a set of markedly different, consciously modern and urban, images.

> I said to my soul, be still, and let the dark come upon you
> Which shall be the darkness of God. As, in a theatre,
> The lights are extinguished, for the scene to be changed
> With a hollow rumble of wings, with a movement of darkness on darkness,
> And we know that the hills and the trees, the distant panorama
> And the bold imposing facade are all being rolled away-
> Or as, when an underground train, in the tube, stops too long between stations
> And the conversation rises and slowly fades into silence
> And you see behind every face the mental emptiness deepen
> Leaving only the growing terror of nothing to think about;
> Or when, under ether, the mind is conscious but conscious of nothing -
> I said to my soul, be still, and wait without hope
> For hope would be hope for the wrong thing; wait without love
> For love would be love of the wrong thing; there is yet faith
> But the faith and the love and the hope are all in the waiting.

The rhythms of the dead march have faded, and the pace has become more varied; yet the frequency, once more, of the

secondary stresses maintains an undercurrent of oscillating meditative motion, as of a mental pendulum swinging quietly from thought to thought and image to image, while the tension of expectancy is upheld through the complicated syntactical relationships of a thirteen-line sentence.

The repeated injunction to the soul to "be still" will be expanded upon in a variety of paradoxical ways throughout the rest of *East Coker*: it must wait without false hope or misguided love; it must go by the unfamiliar ways of "active" passivity (of non-ecstasy, ignorance and dispossession); it must yield itself to the "wounded surgeon" and the "dying nurse"; it must fight without competing; it must be "still and still moving" to an end which constitutes its beginning.

The "darkness of God", already pointed to in Part IIIB of *Burnt Norton*, is in direct contrast to that metaphysical darkness into which "They all go" in the funeral procession -- is implicitly, in fact, the only alternative to it. But instead of discussing it in the traditional images of mystical writers, Eliot first presents analogies drawn from familiar sensory experience of the modern world of theatre machinery, underground trains and operating tables. Each evokes an expectant, or unnerving, suspension in time between a supposedly "normal" before and after; but the point of suspension itself is what we are invited to focus on, the point of potential elimination out of which illumination may emerge - as for the oriental meditator when the worlds of sense and thought have been temporarily annihilated by the rhythm of the mantra to the point where "the mind is conscious but conscious of nothing".

The keynote of this movement is the poet's *acceptance* of the abyss of darkness, whether we think of it as an old person's anticipation of death, or of anyone's sense of the mental abyss of emptiness that runs as an undercurrent in all of us: "I said to my soul, be still, and let the dark come upon you/Which shall be the darkness of God". Before repeating "I said to my soul", he offers three startling and suggestive similes that prepare for the "waiting". Each of these warrants some comment.

The simile of the scene-change darkness is more than one of simple expectancy. Our visual imagination is courted and teased. The "movement of darkness on darkness" implies differing degrees or layers of darkness, of the solidity of unseen objects superimposed upon the darkness of empty space. The evanescence of the visible world impinges upon us as, like the audience trapped in their seats, we wait helplessly for whatever comes next. Perhaps there is a faint (and ironic) echo of the once-popular song, "The Holy City": "Then once again the scene was changed,/New earth there seemed to be". Far more certain is the reminder of Prospero's sublime assertion - also in theatre images - of our transience:

> And, like the baseless fabric of this vision,
> The cloud-capp'd towers, the gorgeous palaces,
> The solemn temples, the great globe itself,
> Yea, all which it inherit, shall dissolve
> And, like this insubstantial pageant faded,
> Leave not a rack behind. (*The Tempest* 4.1.151-156)

Eliot's equivalents of the towers, palaces, temples, globe and rack are "the hills and trees, the distant panorama/And the bold imposing facade" which, instead of fading, are "rolled away" (and the "bold imposing facade" without substance is an

incidental reminder of the procession of the ostensibly eminent). We can imagine, and half hear them, being rolled away "With a hollow rumble of wings". Here is a submerged pun carrying considerable evocative power: the wings of the theatre are the source of the scene-change, but for an instant - if only half-consciously - there flits across our minds the titanic beating of angelic wings in an apocalyptic transition, a little like Dryden's images of the end of time "when the last and dreadful hour/This crumbling pageant shall devour" ("A Song for St Cecilia's Day"). As in Prospero's speech, a sense of the fragile evanescence of the visible scene becomes a sense of our own transience.

The effect of the second simile is less visionary, more reminiscent of the waste-land phase of Eliot's work and, in the pejorative sense of the term, more sermonic. The poet makes his point about incipient existential horror in a situation where the state of suspension undermines assurance (in E.M. Forster's recurring phrase from *Howards End*, "panic and emptiness"); but reader and poet are unfortunately distanced from the experience for a moment that encourages a patronising stance towards the spiritually "inferior", as if others don't also see the mental emptiness deepen behind "your" face. We sail dangerously close to the unintentional snobbery of the first chorus from *The Rock*:

> The desert is squeezed in the tube-train next to you,
> The desert is in the heart of your brother.

True enough, we may say: but the poetic impact is reduced if the imagery allows you even fleetingly to forget that it is

also squeezed into your own. What is impressive in the *East Coker* sequence, though, is the rhythmic enactment of the experience. If we temporarily ignore our distinction between main and secondary stresses, we find the anapaestic vigour of the train's movement jolting to a muffled halt with successive monosyllabic emphasis:

> Or ás, when an úndergrǒund tráin, in the túbe, stóps
> tóo lóng between státions

In the next line, unemphatic assonantal patterning suggests the rhythm of conversation welling up briefly and then dying away repetitively into the silence that precedes panic:

> And the conversation rises and slowly fades into
> silence....

Yet the simile as a whole is not among Eliot's really assured successes. It has been remarked, with some justice, that it is difficult to think of emptiness *deepening* (*CFQ* 105); one might expect it rather to grow or expand or spread; but then there would be (as there is to some extent even with "deepen") an element of metaphorical contradiction with the phrase "Leaving only", which presupposes a process of dwindling rather than intensification. It is odd to speak of a *growing* terror as the only thing *left*; and it seems to me that Eliot has failed to resolve the uneasy relationship between his verb and participle forms at this point.

The third simile is more successful, perhaps owing to its being more brief and bald than its predecessors: with all its syntactical control, the sentence could hardly have accommodated a third four-line extended simile. The comparison with

the mind under ether is apt: each simile has become rather more intimate and private than the one before it, and in the third of them, the theatre audience and tube-train passengers have disappeared: the mind is in a state of complete solitude and extreme passivity - the closest approach to the "darkness" in which the spiritual "waiting in suspension" is to take place.

It is a waiting without expectations or presuppositions, without even the traditional theological virtues of faith, hope and love, since its "faith" consists paradoxically in the wise passiveness that avoids focussing consciously on any *object* of faith. In Part III of *Burnt Norton*, the darkness in which illumination was to be found required a "putting off" of the attributes of sense, fancy and spirit; here, the waiting in darkness involves putting off the attributes of faith, hope and love. The mystical paradoxes are comparable, but now expressed in more intimate and also more theological terms. A few lines later in *East Coker*, the injunctions to "descend" and to "wait" become injunctions to "go", but they all mean fundamentally the same thing. One way of distinguishing between *Burnt Norton* and *East Coker* would be to say that *Burnt Norton* is dominated by the poet's meditation on his *experience* of the timeless, while *East Coker* is dominated by his meditation on his own *thought* about life *in* time. They approach the same topic from different angles and with different emphases. Given the degree of self-examination present in *East Coker*, it is perhaps appropriate that the urging of the soul to divest itself of faith, hope and love should be followed by a further urging to divest itself of thought: "wait without thought, for you are

not ready for thought". And, the next few lines suggest, it is in this state of spiritual nakedness that illumination will emerge out of the darkness which, as we read a little earlier, not "is" but "*shall be*" the darkness of God. The nature of the waiting is what makes the difference.

Not only does the darkness become light but, in images reminiscent of *Burnt Norton*, the stillness becomes the dance and the laughter in the garden is again heard. Several other images are added, apparently arbitrary ones, but they seem in Eliot's symbolic language to be objective correlatives of the experience of the timeless illumination.

> Wait without thought, for you are not ready for thought:
> So the darkness shall be the light, and the stillness the dancing.
> 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.

(In quoting I have corrected the misprint in most editions which places a full stop instead of a comma after "lightning" (*CFQ* 105).)

To the question "Why these particular images of streams, lightning, thyme and strawberry?" no specific answer can be given. We can only say that they are invested with a special significance for the poet, like "The moment in the arbour where the rain beat,/The moment in the draughty church at smokefall" of *Burnt Norton* II, and that they crystallise for him certain experiences which for the rest of us may be crystallised by a variety of other images in accordance with each one's own ana-

logous experiences. Their effect in their context is cumulative rather than individual (some of them recur near the end of *The Dry Salvages* in conjunction with a waterfall and the unheard music of *Burnt Norton* I); and they tend to have in common certain features: the pastoral, the glimpsed or unseen, the heard, half-heard or unheard, and the wild. The best way of commenting on them is to quote from a number of sources, including Eliot himself, on the subject of the "charged" private experience and the similarly charged private symbol.

Huizinga, in his classic study of medieval Europe, wrote:

> [The] idea of a deeper significance in ordinary things is familiar to us...independently of religious convictions: as an indefinite feeling which may be called up at any moment, by the sound of raindrops on the leaves or by the lamplight on a table. Such sensations may take the form of a morbid oppression, so that all things seem to be charged with a menace or a riddle which we must solve at any cost. Or they may be experienced as a source of tranquillity and assurance, by filling us with the sense that our own life, too, is involved in this hidden meaning of the world. The more this perception converges upon the absolute One, whence all things emanate, the sooner it will tend to pass from the insight of a lucid moment to a permanent and formulated conviction. (183)

Proust's recapture of time in *A la recherche du temps perdu* is built around such experiences, the memories of which have been transformed into symbols. The first such experience is Marcel's dipping of his *madeleine*, an action that recalls a similar one in the past, and in so doing unleashes his spirit from the constraints of the present and makes him a timeless inhabitant of his universe. Edmund Wilson, in *Axel's Castle*, vividly describes and interprets another such experience later in the work, when Marcel - Proust's projection of himself - is visited by the sensation that leads him to write his book. The

passage needs to be quoted at length:

> ...as he steps up on to the kerb, he is visited by a strange sensation - the moment of stepping up seems to be charged with some mysterious significance. He has known such puzzling moments before: in the early part of the story he has told us of the inexplicable impression made upon him by the combination of certain church steeples which he had seen on a drive in his childhood and again, at a later stage, by a clump of trees near Balbec. Why had these sights seemed to mean something special? Why had he derived from them a special satisfaction? To-day he resolves to get to the bottom of his feeling in connection with the kerb: he fixes his mind upon it and presently finds himself experiencing a whole series of similar sensations. In every case, he now comes to realize, some accident of the physical world - some odor, touch, taste or sound - has served to revive in his consciousness what he had felt at some moment of the past when a similar sense-impression had occurred - as the uneven steps of the kerb, by reminding his body of the water-steps of Venice, has brought back for an instant into his mind, divorced from the rest of Venice, the bright Venetian light and water. And these memories which move him so deeply, which spring back into his consciousness so promptly at the most irrelevant provocation, must possess some peculiar value. Are they not symbols for the fundamental truths of that internal world of our consciousness which is all we know of reality? Are they not alone among our experiences in having an existence outside Time? - in yielding us a kind of truth independent of Time's flux, independent of the incoherent and ever-changing succession of our other impressions? He must apply himself to deciphering their hieroglyphics....It is hopeless to seek happiness in others - in society or in love. One must turn in upon oneself - one finds the true reality only there: in those enduring extratemporal symbols - incidents and personalities as well as landscapes - which have been precipitated out by the interaction of one's continually changing consciousness with the continual change of the world. He will make of his life a book, and he will base it upon these symbols. So he may assert his will at last and retrieve his moral surrender - so he may turn at last to swim against the current of the undammed, unchannelled sensibility with which he has been drifting all his life - and at the same time master the world, rejoin the reality which has always seemed to elude him, and, opposing the flow of Time, establish something outside it: a work of art. (160-162)

Proust's concern with overcoming Time's flux - though pursued

in different and entirely secular ways - is in some respects remarkably similar to that of Eliot in the Quartets. And in both cases the process is connected, at least in part, with particular symbols drawn from private experience.

On a more explicitly religious level, the theologian Edwyn Bevan wrote in his Gifford lectures:

> Certain objects or experiences or actions have from the most primitive times aroused in man a sense of meaning *sui generis*, that which we describe as the divine or the religious or, in Otto's word, the numinous. (286)

He refers to Rudolf Otto's *The Idea of the Holy*; and these objects, experiences or actions he describes as "symbols without conceptual meaning".

William James, discussing moments of illumination in some respects similar to Eliot's, remarked that

> There are moments of sentimental and mystical experience...that carry an enormous sense of inner authority and illumination with them when they come. But they come seldom, and they do not come to every one [we might add, they do not come to everyone in the same form or with the same intensity]; and the rest of life makes either no connection with them, or tends to contradict them more than it confirms them. (16; parenthesis added)

The last observation certainly seems to fit *Burnt Norton*'s "Ridiculous...waste sad time/Stretching before and after"; the Quartets as a whole constitute an attempt to make a real connection between these moments and "the rest of life".

We cannot, of course, suppose Eliot to think that moments of timeless awareness occur only on such occasions as seeing winter lightning or hearing children's voices in an orchard or garden: but such images are the ones in which he crystallises

such moments in his own experience. He has, in *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism*, left a record of several especially significant images drawn from his own memories. In this passage he speaks of two kinds of imagery: the one drawn from other writers because of its "personal saturation value" for himself, and the other drawn directly from intensely charged experiences of his own. His example of "saturated" imagery is from Chapman's *Bussy D'Ambois*, in turn probably echoing Seneca:

> "Fly where the evening from the Iberian vales
> Takes on her swarthy shoulders Hecate
> Crowned with a grove of oaks: fly where men feel
> The burning axletree, and those that suffer
> Beneath the chariot of the snowy Bear..."
>
> There is first the probability [continues Eliot] that this imagery had some personal saturation value, so to speak, for Seneca; another for Chapman, and another for myself, who have borrowed it twice from Chapman. I suggest that what gives it such intensity as it has in each case is its saturation - I will not say with "associations"...but with feelings too obscure for the authors even to know quite what they were. And of course only a part of an author's imagery comes from his reading. It comes from the whole of his sensitive life since early childhood. Why, for all of us, out of all that we have heard, seen, felt, in a lifetime, do certain images recur, charged with emotion, rather than others? The song of one bird, the leap of one fish, at a particular place and time, the scent of one flower, an old woman on a German mountain path, six ruffians seen through an open window playing cards at night at a small French railway junction where there was a water-mill: such memories may have symbolic value, but of what we cannot tell, for they come to represent the depths of feeling into which we cannot peer. (*UPUC* 147-148)

Returning to Part III of *East Coker*, it is perhaps significant that the images of streams, lightning and so on follow one another without the syntactical formality of a finite sentence - as if simply listing them is more important to the poet than making any statement about them. Yet he ends with an indirect

statement hinting at their insistent nature, as if they constitute not merely a phenomenon of memory or sense-impressions, but a summons to some more fundamental and universal vision:

> echoed ecstasy
> Not lost, but requiring, pointing to the agony
> Of death and birth.

The "agony/Of death and birth" through submission to the darkness of God is central to his theme at this point, and he goes on to emphasise it in the rest of Part III, in lines adapted from St John of the Cross's *Ascent of Mount Carmel*. Two "ways" towards the divine have been linked in a beautiful modulation from waiting in darkness and utter passivity to experiencing illumination in ecstasy - an ecstasy which is not cheap, but makes its spiritual demands in turn, while it makes sense of the "agony" of death and birth. Now we modulate back into the most explicit account in the whole cycle of the way of negation.

St John's words in the *Ascent of Mount Carmel* (I.xiii.11) are:

> In order to arrive at having pleasure in everything,
> Desire to have pleasure in nothing.
> In order to arrive at possessing everything,
> Desire to possess nothing.
> In order to arrive at being everything,
> Desire to be nothing.
> In order to arrive at knowing everything,
> Desire to know nothing.
> In order to arrive at that wherein thou hast no pleasure,
> Thou must go by a way wherein thou hast no pleasure.
> In order to arrive at that which thou knowest not,
> Thou must go by a way that thou knowest not.
> In order to arrive at that which thou possessest not,
> Thou must go by a way that thou possessest not.
> In order to arrive at that which thou art not,
> Thou must go through that which thou art not.
>
> (Peers I 59)

The mystical paradoxes of course include the contradiction of

acting in order to fulfil certain desires by divesting oneself entirely *of* desire. Implicit in this ostensible contradiction is the distinction between true spiritual desire - which is love - and the lesser and more immediate desires of the worldly self. That distinction was spelt out in *Burnt Norton* V:

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

St John goes on to explicate his thought in lines that remind us of Eliot's injunction to the soul to "be still", and of his image of the mind "conscious but conscious of nothing":

> When thy mind dwells upon anything,
> Thou art ceasing to cast thyself upon the All.
> For, in order to pass from the all to the All,
> Thou hast to deny thyself wholly in all.
> And, when thou comest to possess it wholly,
> Thou must possess it without desiring anything.
> For, if thou will have anything in having all,
> Thou hast not thy treasure purely in God.
>
> In this detachment the spiritual soul finds its quiet and repose; for, since it covets nothing, nothing wearies it when it is lifted up, and nothing oppresses it when it is cast down, because it is in the centre of its humility; but, when it covets anything, at that very moment it becomes wearied. (Peers I 60)

(This counsel of detachment is of course by no means peculiarly Christian: it resembles Krishna's injunctions to Arjuna in the *Bhagavad-Gita*, as will be apparent when we meet Eliot's adaptation of them in *The Dry Salvages*.)

Eliot introduces his adaptation from St John with another drop from the heightened intensity of symbol to the prosaic tone of buttonholing the reader, in a manner a little like that

of the abrupt switch between sections A and B of Part II:

> You say I am repeating
> Something I have said before. I shall say it again.
> Shall I say it again?

No doubt the intention is once again to startle us into receptivity, but this time it does not really work. I agree with Helen Gardner that these lines are "regrettably defensive" (*CFQ* 107) and self-conscious; they cannot be justified as can "That was a way of putting it - not very satisfactory". The tone this time is not apologetic, but compounded of nudging archness and the intimate bravado of pedantic assertion. It would probably not occur to us to accuse the poet of repeating himself if he did not invite us to do so; and we cannot, after all, conclude that he really *is* repeating himself, in any case. The point of the assertion is presumably to make us see that the highly individual imagery and diction of Part IIIA constitute a statement which is now, in contrast, being presented in more traditional - indeed in deliberately second-hand - terms, as a way of further universalising it. This is fair enough. But to invite accusation by explicitly claiming to defy it, is to direct attention too abruptly away from the "message" and on to the "messenger", which is tactless and inappropriate at this point. If a prosaic bridge-passage were required, something as simple and direct as "To put it another way" might have sufficed, followed immediately by the adaptation from St John.

We turn now to the adaptation itself, briefly comparing it with the original. St John's paradoxes deal twice, in series, with four negations as ways to the true forms of what they seem

to negate: they are negations of pleasure, possession, "being" and knowledge (altering the order, in the second series, to pleasure, knowledge, possession and "being"). His formulas are deliberately repetitive: in the first series, a fourfold repetition of "In order to arrive...everything,/Desire...nothing"; and for the second series, "In order to arrive.../Thou must go". Eliot, presumably for the sake of greater variety and poetic tension, varies the "In order to arrive" formula with "In order to possess"; and his clipped three-line second series introduces the variation of omitting the "pleasure" clause, which indeed is only indirectly touched upon in his first series: "a way wherein there is no ecstasy" hints at the subject of pleasure only in "ecstasy", otherwise the emphasis is on the journey rather than on its object. His adaptation displays a degree of tension, tautness and ambiguity which St John apparently did not aim at.

> 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.

Eliot's first series of paradoxes (the first nine lines quoted above) is dominated by two of St John's repeated phrases, "In order to..." from his first series, and "You must go..." from his second series. In other words, Eliot is condensing the substance of both St John's series into one, omitting the reiteration of the intermediate terms, "Desire", "everything" and

"nothing". The result is a little less explicit yet a good deal more charged and suggestive than St John's formulation. For instance, instead of

> In order to arrive at possessing everything,
> Desire to possess nothing....
> In order to arrive at that which thou possessest not,
> Thou must go by a way that thou possessest not

Eliot says simply

> In order to possess what you do not possess
> You must go by the way of dispossession...

(followed a few lines later by the corollary "And what you own is what you do not own"). Moreover, instead of repeating the verbs as St John does, Eliot weights the ends of his alternate lines with abstract nouns ("no ecstasy", "ignorance", "dispossession"), making the movement less deliberate and the diction more modern.

Eliot's second series (the last three lines of Part III) dispenses entirely with St John's word-patterning and presents a new pattern of its own, dominated by "what" and, for variation in the last line, "where". Each of these three lines can be read in at least two different ways (even "own" can be read as "confess" or "admit" as well as "possess"); and this ambiguity, too, constitutes a departure from the plainness of St John's utterance, where the impact was achieved by repetitive patterning and paradox but not by any ambiguity.

At the risk of lapsing into the explicitness that Eliot's verse avoids, it is worth spelling out the nature of some of these ambiguities. If we read each line as applicable to man's state *before* the spiritual journey, the three lines mean roughly this:

> All you are aware of is your ignorance; all you possess is your sense of naked dispossession; and where you exist now, in a world ridden by time and self, is where your true spiritual identity - the real you - cannot flower in its fulness ("where you [now] are is where you [in fulness of being] are not").

On the other hand, if we read each line as applicable to man's state *after* the spiritual journey, the meanings are entirely different:

> The ultimate knowledge that you lacked now becomes the only knowledge you possess, and indeed all the knowledge that matters; in this state you enjoy the precious possession of what you have never had before; and where you attain to your true stature and find your real self ("where you [in the fullest sense of the word] are") is a state in which the restless and egotistical demands of self are done away with ("where you [as you have been with all your limitations] are not").

A full reading of the lines is of course one that entertains both sets of propositions simultaneously: they are complementary, not mutually contradictory. Eliot is not merely playing with paradoxes any more than the mystics do. He is offering a bristlingly condensed summation of the spiritual propositions that are his theme at this point. The indeterminacy of the present tense he uses makes both readings possible at the same time. And the last line is in effect a further summation and condensation of the rest, focussing not on knowledge or possession of any kind, positive or negative, but on the intimate essentials of identity itself. It may be scanned as

And whére you áre is where yóu are nót

- but the truth is that *any* of the eight monosyllables (excluding "And") could appropriately receive a stress, each form of scansion, if the ear can faintly entertain them all,

enriching the complexity of meaning and effect. The situation is a little like that which applies in modal music, where we can hear the harmonic relationships of two different keys at the same time. Here, without further interpretation, are some of the possible ways of scanning this line:

And whére you áre is whére you áre not.
And whére you are ís where yóu are nót.
And where yóu áre is where yóu are nót.
And where yóu áre is whére you áre not.
And whére yóu are ís where you áre not.
And where yóu are ís where yóu are nót.

The full significance of "you" and "are", and of the phrase "you are", differs in each case.

The similes of the theatre-, underground- and anaesthetic darknesses did not refer directly to the mystic's special kind of "vacancy" or "emptiness"; yet the latter does involve accepting, and recognizing for what they are, those other kinds of mental abyss. The images of Part IIIA have in fact funnelled the reader's imagination into the darkness of the "negative way", which Part IIIB has explored more fully without using the term "darkness" at all - although of course that darkness is implicit in terms like "ignorance" and "dispossession".

Eliot could have ended Part III by transferring or repeating the lines beginning "So the darkness shall be the light, and the stillness the dancing"; but having glanced at the "ecstasy of assent", he directs us instead, with the opening of Part IV, to the costliness of the illumination that is his theme.

Part IV

In Part IV, as in Part III, no mention is made of time. It was mentioned in every part of *Burnt Norton* as well as in *East Coker* I. In *East Coker* II, though the word did not appear, the idea was present throughout in the references to the seasons and to old age. It is not until *East Coker* III and IV that time temporarily disappears from the foreground, yielding to a focus on experiences of death and passive "waiting" where the nature of the experience itself is of more immediate significance than its relation to time. In *East Coker* V the subject of time will re-emerge strongly. Meanwhile, in Part IV - as also towards the end of Part III - the paradoxical "action" of waiting in passivity is the poet's main preoccupation.

Part IV is an elaborate religious lyric composed of metaphysical conceits that must remind many readers of Donne or Herbert - especially, in its meditative conceits upon disease, of Donne's "Hymne to God my God, in my Sicknesse" and his prose *Devotions upon Emergent Occasions*. Eliot, it is true, with the characteristic precision that often strikes one as a little perverse, claimed to be aiming at something closer to the more mannered ingenuity of the lesser "Metaphysicals" such as Benlowes and Cleveland. In March 1941 he wrote to Anne Ridler:

> I am glad...that you like part IV, which is in a way the heart of the matter. My intention was to avoid a pastiche of George Herbert or Crashaw...and to do something in the style of Cleveland or Benlowes, only better; and I liked the use of this so English XVII [*sic*] form with a content so very un-English - which George Every calls Jansenist. But the poem as a whole - this five part form - is an attempt to weave several quite unrelated strands together in an emotional whole, so that really there isn't any heart of the matter. (*CFQ* 109)

There is no doubt that he has avoided a mere pastiche of anyone. But it is not easy to know how much importance to attach to such remarks, with their unresolved contradiction between the claims that Part IV is "the heart of the matter" and that "really there isn't any heart of the matter". Perhaps we can say that, however varied the subject-matter may be, each individual Quartet finds a meditative point of rest or "still centre" in the Part IV lyric - before the loosely-associated themes re-emerge to assert themselves in Part V. As for George Every's description of the content as Jansenist, it does indeed slightly emphasise implicit notions of prevenient and irresistible grace; yet it seems to me that Eliot's explicit emphasis here is on the spiritual *experience* described, rather than on the formal theology surrounding or interpreting it. I have suggested that the lyric of *Burnt Norton* IV evoked the experience of waiting at the still point; *East Coker* IV in a sense follows on from Part III by evoking the experience of going "through the way in which you are not": the way of passive dispossession inherent in the image of the hospital patient.

Part IV has been widely praised and as widely condemned: "consummate art" (Preston 35); "on a rather frigid conceptual level without attaining to what would have been, in a 'metaphysical' writer, a true fusion of thought and feeling" (Traversi 144); "a piece of ingenuity, a synthetic poem, quite without feeling or life" (Stead 1964, 183).

Nothing is more difficult than to demonstrate conclusively a vitality of feeling where its presence is doubted or denied;

but a close examination may contribute towards at least a partial vindication of Eliot's art here. I should say at the outset that I believe the passage works powerfully in its context in *East Coker*, where the images of Part III have in some measure prepared us to be receptive to it; but that it may well strike the reader as excessively mannered, both sententious and pretentious, if taken in isolation - as I suspect it too often is, even by regular readers of the Quartets. I believe, too, that for its full flavour we should read it not merely as a sequel to Part III and as a Good Friday poem, but also as a war poem in which the general statements about personal purgation, couched almost entirely in the first person *plural*, reverberate also with implications for the Europe and the world of 1940. In this respect its utterance is both timeless and firmly rooted in time, despite the absence of time from its subject-matter.

The lyric is taut, regularly patterned and rhymed, in five stanzas of five lines each. (It would not be very surprising - though we have no evidence - if Eliot was here indulging in cryptic number symbolism based on the five wounds of Christ.) Each stanza rhymes *ababb*, the sudden appearance of rhyme contributing to the crisp firmness of movement; yet the paucity of rhyme-endings reinforces the impression of a doggedly persistent and sombre meditation. And the reiteration of the *b* rhyme in the hexameter ending of each stanza confirms this air of persistence in a manner reminiscent of the long-line endings favoured by Donne in several of his *Songs and Sonets*.

If we apply traditional accentual-syllabic scansion to the lines, we find that each stanza forms a pattern of three iambic

tetrameters followed by a pentameter and a hexameter, the metric expansion more or less corresponding in each case with an expansion of the images from particularity to generality. If, on the other hand, we scan in terms of natural modern speech-rhythms, allowing for secondary stresses here and there, we find that the pattern still accommodates itself quite closely to the norm of four stresses throughout, regardless of syllable-count in the longer lines. I think Eliot sought to achieve - and succeeded in maintaining - a simultaneous tension and close relationship between the rhythms of Renaissance and modern poetry: as if to say "This lyric is recognizably seventeenth-century in form and inspiration, yet it is equally of the twentieth century; not only do the images proclaim this, the rhythms do so too". In scanning the stanzas I shall mark four stresses (some of them secondary) for each of the first three lines of each stanza; five stresses for the fourth line, but one of them always secondary (hinting at the continuing norm of four in modern speech-rhythms); and six stresses for the last line, but two of them always secondary (again hinting at the same norm of four). This should help to illustrate the observations made above.

The wóunded súrgeon plíes the stéel
That quéstions thè distémpered párt;
Benéath the bléeding hánds we féel
The shárp compássion òf the héaler's árt
Resólving thè enígma òf the féver chárt.

Our ónly héalth ìs the diséase
Íf we obéy the dýing núrse
Whose cónstant cáre is nót to pléase
Bùt to remínd of óur, and Ádam's cúrse,
And thàt, to bé restóred, our sickness mùst grow wórse.

The whóle eárth is our hóspitàl
Endówed by the rúined míllionáire,
Wherein, íf we do wéll, we shàll
Díe of the ábsolùte patérnal cáre
That wíll not léave us, bùt prevénts us éverywhère.

The chíll ascénds from féet to knées,
The féver síngs in méntal wíres.
Íf to be wármed, thén I must fréeze
And quáke in frígid pùrgatórial fíres
Of whìch the fláme is róses, àǹd the smóke is bríars.

The drípping blóod our ónly drínk,
The blóody flésh our ónly fóod:
In spíte of whích we líke to thínk
That wè are sóund, substántial flésh and blóod -
Agàin, in spíte of thàt, we cáll this Fríday góod.

In each stanza, the comparatively steady pacing of the first three lines arrives at a slight quiver of the unexpected as the fourth and fifth lines stretch out with the variously-placed secondary stresses added. Quite apart from the effect of the startling images, the element of *rhythmic* surprise, though muted by the basic regularity, is never far off.

The metaphors of the passage as a whole, in their insistent focus on the body, its sensations and organic processes, are in keeping with the dominant elemental imagery of *East Coker*, which focusses on the earth and its organisms with their cycles of life and death. The images of Part III, derived mainly from the modern world - and including briefly the analogy of the mind under ether - have to some extent attuned our imaginations to the kind of thing we are to find here, but not to such an extent as to deprive Part IV of its essential element of surprise. And many of its surprises arise from ambiguity: either semantic ambiguity, or the ambiguity inherent in simultaneous reference to physical and spiritual processes (as in "distempered"). The metaphors encourage us sometimes to

translate them semi-allegorically (the "wounded surgeon" as Christ), and sometimes to let them ripple out widely in our minds: "questions", for instance, may imply examines, probes, interrogates, challenges, casts doubt on, finds unsatisfactory - it is, finally, a rich amalgam of all of these in varying degrees.

This ambiguity is by no means as characteristic of most of the metaphysical poets (with the notable exception, I think, of Marvell) as are the initial conceits themselves: Donne's language points at specific ideas, and seldom exploits wide-ranging ambiguities of impression. Eliot, on the other hand, takes ambiguity, punning and paradox to a sustained pitch not often found in either seventeenth- or twentieth-century literature - another exception being the compulsive punning of the later James Joyce, so different in mechanism and effect.

We begin with a wounded surgeon performing a surgical examination. Since the collocation is virtually oxymoronic - we do not normally expect a surgeon to work under such conditions - our minds are immediately prepared to spiritualise the surgeon-figure, and encouraged to do so more specifically by the religious flavour of "compassion" and "healer" later in the same stanza, together with the combined implications a stanza later of "obey", "Adam's curse", and "to be restored". (At the risk of stating the obvious, I shall spell out some of the mental processes involved in the reader's response, since this is seldom done in existing analyses. The present commentary is, or aims to be, an account of the unfolding reading process as

well as of the retrospectively-considered meaning of the work.)

There is, of course, one circumstance in which we *can* imagine a wounded surgeon "operating" (in both senses of the word): namely, at a point of crisis in a time of war, when he himself is at the battlefront. This is a relevant consideration here: although the tendency to identify the surgeon with Christ does make us think of a spiritual war more than of a literal one, a war-situation is nevertheless hinted at; and the use of "wounded" rather than "injured" helps to point our developing response in this direction (even when we later proceed to images of fever and an endowed hospital). This is not, of course, to claim that the single word "wounded" turns Part IV into a war poem; but if, as we read on, we keep the date and therefore the first readers of *East Coker* in mind, the images of communal frailty and paradoxical paths to restoration acquire topical as well as eternal implications. Meanwhile we can take the point that in the spiritual warfare of mankind, Christ the healer is himself vulnerably "at the front". To state this so baldly is to risk making the passage sound indeed sententious and pretentious. It is therefore important to note that such associations are normally likely to be felt subconsciously; yet this does not negate the nuances they offer.

"The wounded surgeon plies the steel/That questions the distempered part": "plies the steel" is assured and uncompromising and, within the vehicle of the metaphor, a surprising locution for the activity of a surgeon; "plies" suggests "wields vigorously and without hesitation", and the choice of the material "steel" instead of a specific instrument adds to the impression

of cold incisiveness - an impression only partially softened by the delicacy of "questions" (the range of meanings of which we have already noted). The wounded surgeon is imagined as *inflicting* wounds with his "sharp compassion". Notice that the steel is *personified* as questioning while the compassion is *reified* into metallic sharpness: a striking reversal of couplings which both serves the oxymoronic force of "sharp compassion" and also knits more firmly the metaphorical relationship of the physical/sensory on the one hand and the mental/emotional/spiritual on the other.

Meanwhile, once we have identified the wounded surgeon with Christ, it is natural to think of his dead body on the Cross being probed by the soldier's lance. In going through the way of dispossession we, says the poet without having to spell it out, undergo similar probing while still alive. We think of his adaptation of *Luke* (2:35) in "A Song for Simeon": "And a sword shall pierce thy heart,/Thine also" - words which in their new context may be heard as if addressed to the infant Christ, or the Virgin Mother, or the reader in general. Here in *East Coker* the first person plural unites the personal experience of this pain with the general condition of "diseased" humanity: insofar as we *do* feel the pain, we are alive to both the sharpness and the compassion. The poetry makes it plain that the one cannot be known without the other. And in the phrase "we feel", the physical and emotional poles of the metaphor are blended: a case of simple and effective ambiguity.

These lines are built upon an eloquent patterning of related

and opposed units of meaning, in an approximation to what Cahill (158) has, as we have seen, called the rhyming of sense: so we have the wounded surgeon (line 1) recalled and made more startlingly vivid in the bleeding hands (line 3); his plying the steel (line 1) causes us to feel (line 3); the blend of delicacy and firmness in the questioning (line 2) is reinforced in the sharp compassion (line 4); and the distempered part (line 2) is specifically the focus of the healer's art (line 4). The opening phrase of each line is echoed by the opening phrase two lines later; the rhyming phrase of each line is closely related in sharp *opposition* to the rhyming phrase two lines later. This is most easily demonstrated thus:

a *b*
The wounded surgeon plies the steel

c *d*
That questions the distempered part;

a *b*
Beneath the bleeding hands we feel

c *d*
The sharp compassion of the healer's art

The pairing of these phrases in turn suggests further comment. The hands are bleeding because they are wounded (with the nails of the Crucifixion). But since they are also, in terms of the surgical metaphor, covered with *our* blood, the bloods of surgeon and patient are mingled in a tellingly intimate fashion. Beneath the bleeding hands we feel the pain of the surgery; but *because* they are bleeding we feel also the *com*passion, the suffering *with* us, of the healer, whose suffering it is that *makes* him the healer. (He could not, after all, heal us if his

own hands were not bleeding.) The steel inflicts the agony, yet it is in doing so that it enables us to feel the compassion.

The traditional paradoxes of Christianity are here restated in astonishing terms; allowing for the difference in period, they would do justice to a Donne or a Hopkins - and I cannot see that they are restated frigidly. Any non-literary quarrel with the doctrine that yields the paradoxes need not blind us to the force with which they are here presented.

The probing or questioning that enacts the sharp compassion is itself both compassionate and sharp, like the questioning of a more literal sort that George Herbert often puts into the mouth of his God. And the distempered part is, as we have seen, the focus of the healer's art: the word "distempered" suggests not only diseased but deranged, disorientated, ill-disposed - and according to the Oxford Dictionary it was also once used of political disorders. The distemper of the part affects the whole - although it is worth observing that the use specifically of "part" avoids any Calvinistic implications of total depravity. What *is* total is the healer's art. A healer is, etymologically, one who makes "whole" - a further balance and contrast to the phrase "distempered part". Eliot's mind regularly took into account root-relationships of this kind, and here it is as well to remember his remarks on the meaning of "auditory imagination":

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

> obliterated and the trite, the current, and the new and surprising, the most ancient and the most civilized mentality. (*UPUC* 118-119)

Up to now we have looked at this stanza without reference to its last line. What is interesting is the syntactical illusion created by the arrangement of the first four lines: an illusion that allows us initially to respond as if the sentence and the stanza were completed at the phrase "healer's art". The first two lines are devoted to what the surgeon does, the next two to what we feel; and the main verb "feel" has a quietly expanding range of implied or stated objects. Our first impression is that we feel the pain of the probing steel; then we feel the compassion of the healer. Finally, and more unexpectedly, we feel not only his sharp compassion, but feel also how it is "Resolving the enigma of the fever chart". The impression is further unified by the fact that syntactically either compassion *or* art can be taken as the subject of "Resolving" - a detail that confirms the intimate identification of the compassion with the art, healing disease and solving mysteries simultaneously. The "enigma of the fever chart" is now recognizable, by an easy transference, as the mystery of man's evil predicament; but the passivity implied in the vehicle of this metaphor is such that the emphasis falls upon Christ's compassion rather than upon humanity's sinfulness.

The wounded surgeon and his sharp compassion initiate a series of oxymorons and paradoxes that dominate the thought of the stanzas that follow: the disease which is the only way to health, the nurse who is dying, the doing well as a way to dying, the warming by freezing in frigid fires, and finally the

Friday which, in view of all these things, is good. As we follow them we undergo a progression from the intimacy of the surgeon-patient relationship to the more explicitly spiritual generalities of the human condition. The singular "I" appears only as an instance of a general truth in stanza 4: it is the generic "we/us/our" that pervades the statements of the lyric.

Stanza 2 affirms that the disease (including presumably our consciousness of it, and incorporating also the secondary sense of dis-ease) is our only way to health - but the affirmation is conditional: "If we obey the dying nurse". Now to most readers - rightly, I think - the dying nurse must signify the Church, whose care of "patients" is partially delegated to her by the surgeon; yet it must be admitted that "dying" jars as a distracting redundancy. There is no reason why the Church - which Eliot knew was traditionally the Church Triumphant as well as the Church Militant - should be described as dying; and if his purpose was to introduce incidental sociological comment on the Church Militant of 1940, he was misguided. In this context it strikes one as merely tricksy and irrelevant, and as belonging more appropriately to the pulpit tones of *The Rock*. Be that as it may, the essential point about this "nurse" is that her duty, like that of any literal nurse, is to offer "constant care", and not of a kind that will necessarily please the patient. When, however, we are told that this care consists in reminding us of "our, and Adam's curse", the metaphor momentarily fails again. It is not that a reminder of original sin is in itself out of place, or that the Church should not remind us of it;

but the transition from medical to religious terms does sudden violence to the vehicle of the metaphor, the nurse herself. We cannot conceive of a nurse whose main function is to preach. The figure of the wounded surgeon fits its matrix of meaning far more successfully. As a comment on the human condition - and more especially perhaps for readers of 1940 - the notion that our sickness must grow worse before it can be cured is unexceptionable. But here again there seems to me a flaw in Eliot's expression of this idea: perhaps in order to preserve the spiritual overtones, he chooses to use the word "restored" instead of "cured", and this makes for a rather awkward syntactical leap. The thought is that for *us* to be restored, our sickness must grow worse; omission of "for us" (which would of course be rhythmically redundant) occasions an unacceptably colloquial wrenching of the syntax, which strictly speaking - and therefore inaccurately - refers to a restoration of the sickness itself and not of the patients.

The allegorical nature of the imagery becomes more explicit in stanza 3: "The whole earth is our hospital". This is very seventeenth-century in flavour. John Hayward, in fact, in his notes to *Quatre Quatuors*, the French edition of the Quartets, suggested an echo from Browne's *Religio Medici* (II.11): "for the world, I count it not an Inne, but an Hospitall, and a place, not to live, but to die in". Helen Gardner surmised that the echo was unconscious (which is quite likely, in view of Eliot's independent sustained metaphor) and incidentally drew attention to the surprising fact that Eliot had little liking for Browne's prose:

> Eliot may have been as unconscious of this as of his echo of Browne in *Little Gidding*, and, if Hayward had pointed out this echo to him, might well have replied as he did later: "Damn Sir T. Browne, a writer I never got much kick from: I suppose it *is* a reminiscence...." (*CFQ* 108)

Less explicit than the earth as hospital is the identity of the ruined millionaire. Gardner felt strongly on this:

> In his book *Four Quartets Rehearsed* (1946), Mr. Raymond Preston provided an allegorical interpretation of the lyric, identifying the "wounded surgeon" with Christ, the "dying nurse" with the Church Militant, and the "ruined millionaire" with Adam; and in a footnote reported that he had originally thought "that the ruined millionaire was the Fallen Angel" and that he was "indebted to Mr. Eliot for the correction". In *The Art of T.S. Eliot* (1949) I contested this interpretation, in spite of Mr. Preston giving the author as his authority, on the grounds that to endow a hospital is an act of charity hardly to be compared with endowing the world with Original Sin. I took all three figures, surgeon, nurse, millionaire as types of Christ, who "emptied himself" that he might suffer for man's sake and with man. (*CFQ* 43-44)

Her suggestion appears to have the virtue of simplicity, yet it creates more problems than it resolves. There is, of course, no dispute on the identification of the wounded surgeon with Christ. But to see Christ as the nurse immediately after seeing him as the surgeon is to tax the reader's imagination more than one would expect even Eliot to do - and even the imagination of a reader unusually receptive to allegorical images. It would make the "reminding" function of the nurse trivial and anticlimactic after we have contemplated the same person as the wounded surgeon - the nurse's function, though important, being clearly of so much less significance than the surgeon's; and to most readers of 1940 the mention of a nurse would inevitably conjure up a female figure rather than a male

one - another jarring circumstance if we are to attempt an identification with Christ, whereas it is natural and traditional enough to personify the Church as female. Although I have found fault with the metaphorical working of the nurse image, I would be very surprised at Eliot's risking such discrepancies as the Gardner interpretation entails.

As for the ruined millionaire of the third stanza, it is surely sensible to accept Preston's interpretation as a true reflection of Eliot's conscious intention, whether or not we think he realized it successfully. Eliot's vagueness and evasiveness in answering questions about his poetry is well known, and his volunteering a correction on a specific point like this is so unusual that we must accord it serious consideration (he would not, of course, claim absolute authority, even on a detail of this sort). Gardner's preference may fit the internal details of the stanza, but again it feels uneasy when combined with Christ as the wounded surgeon; the millionaire makes better sense as Adam. Her objection that "to endow a hospital is an act of charity" (*CFQ* 44) is not a cogent one; after all, we have had no serious objection to the image of a doctor performing surgery while his hands are bleeding; and "Endowed" in this context has a suitably ironic force applied to Adam, to whom were entrusted, according to tradition, all the riches of the earth. The fact that Eliot in his notes for the poem originally wrote "bankrupt banker" (*CFQ* 109) is, for all the oddity of the phrase, more appropriate to Adam in his fall than to Christ's voluntary act of self-emptying. To

support her identification of the figure with Christ, Gardner suggested that "ruined" "allows us to regard the millionaire as suffering from a Timon-like generosity" (*CFQ* 109); but against this we may suggest that it is more natural to think of a millionaire's ruin as the result of overreaching himself, as Adam did; and that "ruined", if we think of its roots and of characteristic seventeenth-century word-play on it, carries strong hints of the meaning "fallen". What the lines most *plainly* seem to be saying, then, is that the whole earth is our heritage from fallen Adam. [5]

Ambiguities of idiom appear again in the rest of this stanza, both in the phrase "do well" and in the word "prevents". To do well is of course to live rightly, but is also to make a satisfactory recovery from illness, as in "The patient is doing well". The oddity, even the submerged humour, of the phrase is not foreign to Eliot. The gist of the paradox, in any case, lies in the thought that right behaviour or right recovery is fulfilled only in death and not, as we might expect, in continued living. We then die "of" the care that surrounds us, death being the ultimate cure. The mention of *paternal* care introduces a new note of intimacy into the imagined setting of an endowed hospital. To revert to the millionaire controversy: it is on account of Adam's fall that the earth *is* a hospital (in *that* sense it was certainly endowed by him), and he is suitably distanced from us in time by the implications of "Endowed" and "ruined"; on the other hand, the paternal care is ever-present, and the paternal presence can assuredly have nothing to do with the figure of the millionaire two lines

earlier, as it would be obliged to do if Gardner's reading were valid. The paternal care (this time not specified as a hospital personage within the larger metaphor) "will not leave us, but prevents us everywhere". The word "prevents", with its modern connotations of hindering, reinforces the pervasive paradox dominating the passage since "sharp compassion": we are reminded of Thompson's "The Hound of Heaven" or of Herbert's "The Collar". But "prevents", as is often pointed out, also bears its root meaning (now archaic except in liturgical language) of "goes before" or anticipates in action. Originally Eliot had written "That will not let us be, but must torment us everywhere" (*CFQ* 108). This adequately conveyed the notion of divinely-inflicted pain, but was far less rich in implications than the final version: "That will not *leave* us" can be simultaneously positive and negative, and "prevents" suggests *both* the pain of having our impulses divinely thwarted *and* the God whose grace is prevenient (from the same root as "prevents"), whose care anticipates our circumstances, acting as both divine path-finder and divine hindrance. The positive face of the word is most aptly seen in the fourth of the six collects at the end of the Communion liturgy in the 1662 Book of Common Prayer: "Prevent [go before] us, O Lord, in all our doings with thy most gracious favour, and further us with thy continual help...."

In stanza 4 we move away from the series of semi-allegorical persons (surgeon, nurse, millionaire). Reference to "the absolute paternal care" seems to act as a means of transition to a

further emphasis on the "patient's" feelings, which we have not encountered since stanza 1. There we felt the "sharp compassion of the healer's art" while the patient underwent surgery - but the presence of a fever was also mentioned. Now we revert more specifically to the fevered state, the heat and cold of which are exploited figuratively to serve the spiritual paradoxes of the theme. Donne exploits his fever to the same general purpose in his "Hymne to God my God, in my Sicknesse". Because

> this is my South-west discoverie
> *Per fretum febris*, by these streights to die,
>
> I joy, that in these straits, I see my West;

and his appeal is:

> As the first *Adams* sweat surrounds my face,
> May the last *Adams* blood my soule embrace.

This is not to suggest that Donne is a specific source here: the images develop in different directions, and the impressions of physical *sensation* are vivid in Eliot's lines while virtually absent from Donne's; yet we may surmise that the idea of a general connection between fever and spiritual preparation was indirectly indebted to Donne.

The "chill" can be understood simultaneously in a variety of ways besides its literal connection with the fluctuations of fever: as suggestive of old age, of the approaching chill of death, and of creeping spiritual anguish. There is a curious air of detachment from the body in the remark, without possessive pronouns, that the chill "ascends from feet to knees". Meanwhile the fever, in a striking evocation of the near-delirium of high temperatures, "sings in mental wires"; and this evokes a sensation virtually opposite to that aroused by

the healthy "trilling wire in the blood" of *Burnt Norton* IIA. The chill seems about to separate soul and body, while the fever makes each acutely conscious of the other. Again without claiming a source-relationship, we may compare these extracts from Marvell's "A Dialogue between the Soul and Body". The soul complains that it is

> Here blinded with an Eye; and there
> Deaf with the drumming of an Ear.
> A soul hung up, as 'twere, in Chains
> Of Nerves, and Arteries, and Veins.
> Tortur'd, besides each other part,
> In a vain Head, and double Heart

while the body complains

> But Physick yet could never reach
> The Maladies Thou me dost teach;
> Whom first the Cramp of Hope does Tear:
> And then the Palsy Shakes of Fear.
> The Pestilence of Love does heat:
> Or Hatred's hidden Ulcer eat.

The frame, here and in Eliot, is subject to contradictory sensations and extremes. And the totality of the affliction is deftly conveyed by the rapid imaginative ascent from feet to brain in Eliot's two lines. The combination of chill and fever-heat, the poem suggests, can only be spiritually prescribed for by another combination of the two:

> If to be warmed, then I must freeze
> And quake in frigid purgatorial fires

which remind us, as so often in Eliot, of the purging fires in which Dante's Arnaut Daniel (*Purg.* XXVI) prepares for the heavenly ascent. (We shall find them again in Part IV of *Little Gidding*.) But the extra paradox injected here by Eliot is that the fires to warm us against the chill of spiritual death are themselves cold ones. The word "purgatorial" initiates a new

degree of explicitness about the religious theme here, which will be pursued in the eucharistic imagery of stanza 5. (It is noteworthy that although this lyric *is* clearly religious, the only baldly biblical or ecclesiastical terms are the name Adam, the word "purgatorial" and the last words inverting the phrase "Good Friday".)

Besides the spiritual application of these lines, there may be an indirect hint of the war situation; a thought encouraged mainly, it is true, by a retrospective linking of the fires of *Little Gidding* with the ones here. If the link is legitimate, we may imagine the chill and the fever of wartime being purged only by the purgatorial fires of war itself.

The purgatorial fires are further described: their flame is roses, their smoke is briars. This figure-within-a-figure defies neal translation into literal terms, yet invites interpretation of some sort. We need momentarily to step outside the immediate context of the stanza and consider the likely significance of these symbols for Eliot in terms of his usage elsewhere and of their most probable traditional connotations. Clearly we have two metaphorical pairings: a positive one, the flame which is roses, and a negative one, the smoke which is briars. The essential point seems to be that the purgatorial fires - and thus the experiences they represent - have inseparable qualities that are illuminating and beautiful on the one hand, ugly and painful on the other. This duality corresponds to the duality of the glorious agonies in Dante's Purgatory: agonies because they represent and arise from the

sins being purged, and glorious because they *do* purge, and constitute the way to Paradise. The union of the two poles has already been anticipated in the simultaneous warmth and coldness of Eliot's fires. The roses seem to stand, in Eliot as in Dante, as symbols of eternal life - as at the end of *Little Gidding*, and as anticipated at the opening of *Burnt Norton*; the briars represent the thorns inseparable, in earthly experience, from the roses, and therefore that suffering without which the eternal life is unattainable. By this stage the reminders of Christ's passion are strong enough, too, for the briars to put us in mind of the crown of thorns.

It might be argued that the last line is an unnecessary expansion on the rest of the stanza, which could have ended quite adequately with its fourth line. But this, interestingly enough, is true of all the stanzas of Part IV. They share the surprising syntactic peculiarity that each stanza could have ended with its fourth line and would still have constituted a complete utterance. To place a full stop after each fourth line, ignoring the fifth, is to see this immediately. Yet each fifth line, though ostensibly an unnecessary addition, provides a rhythmic expansiveness that modifies the tautness of the other four, consolidates the ideas of the stanza as a whole, and makes for a retrospective widening of the perspectives it has opened up. We have seen evidence of this in stanza 1 (p.198 above).

In stanza 5 the hospital and medical images have disappeared - unless we choose to think in terms of a transition from the medical treatment of the "patients" to the nourishment offered them. The fact that the first two lines have no main verb

supports this feeling: they read like a syntactic addendum to the last line of stanza 4, as if that line had initiated a continuing series (the flame is roses, the smoke is briars, the drink is blood, the food is flesh). The paradoxical relationship between suffering and salvation (or "cure") is pursued with the deliberate grotesquerie of the eucharistic images:

> The dripping blood our only drink,
> The bloody flesh our only food....

The concentration on the bodily and organic is here carried to its climactic point; then follows the solemnly sardonic comment on our persistent illusions of adequacy in spite of our earthly frailty. The redeeming flesh and blood are our only true sustenance, yet we persist in flattering ourselves that our *own* flesh and blood are "substantial". This word, I suspect, helps to intensify the irony of our illusion by hinting at the language of eucharistic theology in which Christ's true body and blood are present in "substance" in the consecrated elements.

It is a further and no doubt unintentional irony that the phrase "flesh and blood" is reminiscent of "The Hippopotamus", a generation earlier in Eliot's career:

> The broad-backed hippopotamus
> Rest on his belly in the mud;
> Although he seem so firm to us
> He is merely flesh and blood.
>
> Flesh and blood is weak and frail,
> Susceptible to nervous shock;
> While the True Church can never fail
> For it is based upon a rock.

Discounting its satirical tone and rhythm, that second stanza would in essentials have been accepted quite *without* irony by the author of *East Coker*.

The final twist in this passage of many twists comes with the thought that after all, in spite of our many illusions of earthly substantiality, we continue to call Good Friday by its accepted name: a nominal courtesy in both senses of the word "nominal", yet resonant with deeper implications, if we consider and accept what the wounded surgeon and his flesh and blood stand for. And our sense of the irony would not be complete without our reminding ourselves of the date of publication, and that this Friday called "good" was the first Good Friday of the second World War - and therefore, whether good or bad in common parlance, an appropriate time for meditation on man's illusions of earthly adequacy, and for realizing that "to be restored, our sickness must grow worse".

The emphasis in Part IV on the organic leads one to feel that here we have a modernised strain not only of the metaphysical lyric but also of that related impulse in seventeenth-century art, the baroque: especially the element of it that focussed on flaming swords, sacred bleeding hearts, ecstatic lepers and the roasting flesh of martyrs - the sensuously vivid devotional art that we find, say, in Bernini's statue of St Teresa being pierced by the angel's lance, or in Crashaw's hymn to her; a counter-reformation baroque with which most non-Catholics nowadays feel comparatively little affinity. Hence, perhaps, some of the hostility with which this part of the Quartet has been received. The paradoxes themselves are somewhat baroque in the flamboyance of their execution.

Despite Eliot's remark (quoted on p.188 above) about alleged

"unrelated strands", the whole of *East Coker* IV may be seen as a kind of conclusion arrived at in the "darkness" of Part III, or as a statement of the paradoxes which make sense *of* that darkness. The earlier crowds of *East Coker* have disappeared, and the rest of this Quartet concentrates on the individual consciousness, despite the frequency of the rhetorical "we".

The real theme of Part IV is the pain of healing; and it is perhaps natural that in handling such a paradoxical theme Eliot should exploit the ambiguities of so many words and phrases, so that some temperaments respond to it as a cluster of sterile ingenuities while others accept it as a *tour de force*. The "cure" is a purgatorial one, and here, as indeed in Part IV of each Quartet, the emphasis is on man in a state of passivity - waiting, being acted upon, interceded for, and so on. The active initiative, at least momentarily, passes in each case to the sphere of the divine.

Part V

Like *East Coker* IIB, Part V opens on a prosaic note, as if commenting on the self-conscious poetic effort immediately preceding it - again perhaps hinting that it was not an unqualified success. Here we have again the difficulties of the poet in handling the "Undisciplined squads" of words and emotions. We are reminded of *Burnt Norton* VA, which was largely on the timelessness of the completed work of art, but also partly on the poet's struggle to control and marshal recalcitrant words:

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

Yet Part VA of *East Coker* is more emphatically on the problems of the creative process and its relation to the moral life and the poet's self-assessment: the poet, his attitude to himself and to his predecessors, dominates the foreground more than the work of art itself does; and this is in keeping with the comparatively personal note of *East Coker* as a whole.

The ends of the first two lines pause in meditative and reminiscent fashion; then the verse proceeds restlessly, in very simple language, through seven enjambed lines, as if enacting the effort described: the effort to use words to catch up on one's own thought which meanwhile keeps outstripping them. The lines maintain the usual pattern of four stresses, but with plenty of secondary ones imparting to them the rather undulant motion of a mind in restless communion with itself. The meditation has the quality of privacy: we feel we are overhearing, not being consciously addressed.

So hére I àm, in the míddle wày, hàving had twénty
yéars -
Twénty years làrgely wásted, the yéars of *l'èntre*
deux guérres -
Trýing to lèarn to úse words, and évery attémpt
Is a whólly nèw stárt, and a dífferent kìnd of
fáilure
Becáuse one has ònly léarnt to gèt the bétter of
wórds
For the thíng one nò lónger has to sáy, or the wáy in
which
One is nó lònger dispòsed to sáy it. And só each
vénture
Is a néw begínning, a ráid on the ìnartículate
With shábby equípment álways detérioràting
In the géneral méss of ìmprecísion of féeling,
Ùndísciplined squàds of emótion.

The opening word "So" introduces what is really a new topic, but perhaps with a glance back at our illusions of substantiality at the end of Part IV. Its effect is not so much one of logical continuation as of introducing a marked tonal difference from the taut stanzas of Part IV. The comparative intimacy, with its hint of a sigh of weariness, is furthered by the word-order of "here I am", in contrast to the potentially more declarative "I am here". The poet pauses to review his career in a tone quite different from that of, say, *Paris Review* interviews, meanwhile making his comments - as I hope the following pages will demonstrate - an integral part of the present poem. His reference to "the middle way" (echoing "the middle of the way" in IIB) suggests middle age with its prospect of decline to follow, as well as perhaps mediocrity; and the echo again of Dante's famous opening prepares us for the meditation on the poet's assessment of himself in relation to his great predecessors.

The threefold iteration of "years" emphasises the feeling of

weariness, and by the phrase "the years of *l'entre deux guerres*" he sets his efforts in a context of warfare: the literal meaning would have been the same, yet our responses would have been quite different, if he had said "the twenty years of peace". A great deal of *East Coker* emphasises the strenuousness of the personal life, and the mention of wars prepares us to respond to the military imagery that soon follows: that is, when he discusses his perpetual struggle with words and feelings, and the business of relating each to the other.

If we ask whether "Twenty years largely wasted" is false modesty, it is fair to answer "No", since the poet is speaking from his own intimate awareness of his personal struggle with the process of composition, not focussing on finished products; at the same time, as the pronoun "one" implies, he is beginning to speak in the generic voice of poets who know that they cannot measure up to the great masters. Moreover, "wasted" is not in itself a confession of poor poetry, but rather a pointer to the frustration entailed in his failure to keep pace verbally with his own intentions:

> one has only learnt to get the better of words
> For the thing one no longer has to say, or the way in which
> One is no longer disposed to say it.

This it is that makes every attempt "a wholly new start, and a different kind of failure"; or, to rephrase the thought in the now familiar terms of Part I, his repeated "beginnings" do not match his "ends", his purposes. Of course there is, as in George Herbert's poems about the inadequacy of his verse, an

inherent paradox in treating such themes *in* verse: the subject is a common enough one, and constitutes virtually a poetic genre in itself. What is unusual here is the apparently prosaic baldness of the expression, in language such as "Trying to learn to use words", "a different kind", "to get the better of", "no longer disposed to say it", "And so", "shabby equipment", "the general mess". Poetic tension is nevertheless maintained by the rhythmic undercurrent already noted, as well as by the introduction in the second sentence of the cluster of military metaphors: "raid", "equipment", "Undisciplined squads", followed more distantly by "conquer", "strength and submission", "fight". The attempt to write a poem becomes a "venture", a campaign, a quasi-military effort. Apart from the topical force of such imagery in 1940 - which may indeed have alienated some readers' imaginations while stimulating others' - the image of poets or words as soldiers makes concrete the otherwise comparatively abstract expression of a peculiarly private predicament. (The phrase "a raid on the inarticulate" best exemplifies this marriage of concrete and abstract.) The verse accordingly becomes less prosaic than in the opening lines, and acquires more rhythmic tautness and pace by reducing the frequency of the secondary stresses noticed in them. Some of this tautness is audible in the strategically placed enjambement of "And so each venture/Is a new beginning" where, too, the re-appearance of the now-familiar *word* "beginning" reinforces our impression of its being precisely that: it is like having a musical phrase from the first movement of a symphony quietly re-introduced in the last one, somewhat in the manner of Brahms, as a preparation

for the finale proper - a deft way of re-alerting the listener to an incipient resolution of themes and knitting-up of the entire structure. (This device is of course far more obvious in the cluster of images recurring in Part VB of *Little Gidding*.) It is ironic that the mention of a new beginning should strike us as an indirect preparation for a concluding resolution, yet it is not surprising, given Eliot's deliberate play on beginnings and ends.

The lines that follow modulate from military metaphors into those of loss and recovery and of gain and loss, arriving at an indirect yet forceful statement about the *moral* relationship of the poet to his efforts and his self-assessment. What we are witnessing, in fact, is an adaptation to this new context of the culminating insight of Part II, about the wisdom and also the endlessness of humility.

> 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.

Although the poet has been lamenting his inability to do verbal justice to "the general mess of imprecision of feeling", his experience of *this* particular feeling is made more precise by the images in which he couches it. Then, as if reacting against the incipient dangers of morbid self-regard, his mind

moves outwards to the few who have, in their poetical careers, succeeded in doing justice to what they had to say. The attempt at conquest - by a mixture of the strength to marshal words with the necessary degree of submission to them - comes to be seen in terms of discovery: the poetic process of relating words and feelings is, at its best, one of exploration in uncharted waters. When, a little later, the poet's voice is heard to remark that "Old men ought to be explorers", our response has been partially prepared, our imaginations attuned, by this passage.

The fulness of discovery is reserved for very few, and is achieved "Once or twice, or several times, by men whom one cannot hope/To emulate". (Those in Eliot's mind no doubt included Dante and quite possibly Yeats, whom Eliot had at last grown to admire as his 1940 lecture shows, and who is certainly one of the constituents of the "familiar compound ghost" of *Little Gidding* Part II). If one cannot emulate them, that is neither here nor there, since "there is no competition" but only the continuing obligation to carry on the struggle with what equipment one has, shabby or otherwise. The tone of Part V, starting with weary resignation, grows steadily more positive as the passage unfolds. It is the nearest equivalent in Eliot to Milton's sonnet "When I consider how my light is spent", in which the sense of personal limitations is transcended in the course of meditation upon them. The resolutions are naturally different in form, and Eliot does not have to regard himself as one of those who "only stand and wait"; nor is his meditation presented in overtly religious terms. Yet the Milton of the

sonnet would surely have endorsed the statement that "For us, there is only the trying. The rest is not our business".

In talking of the perpetual fight to recover what is repeatedly lost, Eliot once again aligns his account of the poet's vocation with the world of military endeavour - but also, significantly, with what may be said in general about the nature of the individual moral life: that there is no question of resting on laurels, either one's own or those of other men. And the war, as well as the poet's advancing age, comes back to mind when we read the apparent afterthought, "and now, under conditions/That seem unpropitious". The adjective unfortunately has a slightly prissy ring to it. The abrupt switch to the syntactic fragment "But perhaps neither gain nor loss" may well be a half-conscious reaction *to* the tone of "unpropitious": it drops us back for a moment into the prosaic with its pairing that suggests - and thereby rejects - the kind of motivation associated with commercial enterprise and all other worldly considerations. It is interesting, by the way, to notice how Eliot periodically reverts to the idea of profit and loss to suggest the kinds of activity and motivation with which his values do *not* ultimately concern themselves: Phlebas the Phoenician "Forgot the cry of gulls, and the deep sea swell/And the profit and loss"; and the speaker near the end of *Ash-Wednesday* finds himself still "Wavering between the profit and the loss".

Although this passage is not obtrusively figurative, the quiet shifts among the language of warfare, of exploration, of

contest, of losing and finding, and of calculating profits and losses, lend it an unemphatic resonance and a breadth of implied reference that contribute considerably to its effect. The transitions are smoothly managed, and reinforced by backward glances from one set of terms to another. What there is to *conquer* has already been *discovered*; the discoverers are those we cannot hope to *emulate*; but instead of *competition* there is only the *fight* to recover what has often been *found and lost*; yet the awareness of this involves consideration of neither *gain nor loss*; and finally, with the force of a muted climax, comes a reminder that what matters, and what all these endeavours have in common, is the *trying*; the rest (in what approaches the status of a serious pun after "neither gain nor loss") is not our *business*. So we have moved, from an unlikely set of metaphoric approaches, to the main idea that unites the efforts of poetry and those of the moral life. The simple "For us, there is only the trying. The rest is not our business" now applies clearly to mankind and not only to poets - poetry and life being so intimately linked by the language that leads up to it. The thought is similar, but the tone and expression superior, to that of the lines spoken by The Rock in the first of Eliot's choruses from the work of that name:

> All men are ready to invest their money
> But most expect dividends.
> I say to you: *Make perfect your will.*
> I say: take no thought of the harvest,
> But only of proper sowing.

It also anticipates Krishna's advice to Arjuna, retailed in Part III of *The Dry Salvages*, on the nexus between purity of motive and commitment to action:

> And do not think of the fruit of action.
> Fare forward.

Part VA began with the poet speaking ostensibly of himself alone ("I"); it progressed through his speaking of himself in a more representative capacity ("one"): and it ends with him including himself among "us". The first person plural - despite the initial generality of "Home is where one starts from" - asserts itself firmly though sparsely in Part VB: "As we grow older" and "We must be still and still moving". Here the poet seems to speak as a member of the human family, and words and phrases like "Home", "we grow older", "a lifetime", "the evening under lamplight", "the photograph album", together introduce a mellower tone than any we have heard since the vision of the peasant dance in Part I. And the word "Love" is re-introduced. It is seldom used in the Quartets, and its impact is considerable when it does appear. Up to now we have met it only in *Burnt Norton* V and *East Coker* III. We shall meet it once in *The Dry Salvages* (V), and then several times in *Little Gidding* as the whole cycle gathers towards its conclusion.

As their typographical appearance suggests, the lines of Part VB begin in the comparatively expansive and prosaic rhythms of VA, soon become a good deal tauter and shorter in their syllable-count, and then, without any sacrifice of this new poetic tension, broaden out at the end in keeping with the sense that they create of an imagined movement outwards over the vastness of the ocean. In the scansion that follows I adhere to the usual pattern of four main stresses to the line (now without any secondary ones added), with the exception that

some of the shorter lines - as at the end of *Burnt Norton* - really have only three main stresses while a fourth is marked (because heard) as secondary.

> Hóme is where one stárts from. Ás we grow ólder
> The wórld becomes stránger, the páttern more
> cómplicated
> Of déad and líving. Nót the inténse moment
> Ísolated, with nó befóre and áfter,
> But a lífetime búrning in évery móment
> And nót the lífetime of óne man ónly
> But of óld stónes that cánnot be decíphered.
> There is a tíme for the évening únder stárlight,
> A tíme for the évening únder lámplight
> (The évening wìth the phótograph álbum).
> Lóve is mòst néarly itsélf
> When hére and nów céase to mátter.
> Óld mén óught to be explórers
> Hére or thére dòes not mátter
> Wè must be stíll and stíll móving
> Ínto anóther inténsity
> For a fúrther únion, a déeper commúnion
> Through the dárk cóld and the émpty desolátion,
> The wáve cry, the wínd cry, the vást wáters
> Of the pétrel and the pórpoise. In my énd is my
> begínning.

This passage begins by recapitulating the main themes: every moment is a new moment, every end is a new beginning -- and this time the generalizations are clearly universal, making no mention of poets in particular. As usually happens in Part V of a Quartet, the A section's meditations on art, poetry or the poet initiate and modulate into the B section's meditations on time, life and love. And, as Helen Gardner points out, "as the rhythm alters the mood alters; effort becomes something nearer to adventure" (*ATSE* 169).

"Home is where one starts from" glances back at East Coker village, the ancestral home with which the poem began. But the noun obviously incorporates other meanings as well: home is not only where you come *from*, it is also (in common metaphor, from

racing for instance) where you aim *for*. The point of departure of *Burnt Norton*, and therefore of the whole cycle, was the ineffable experience of arrival in the rose-garden of primal innocence, the "home" from which we started out and to which, consciously or unconsciously, we long to return. The final movement of *East Coker* is in effect an anticipation of the last movement of *Little Gidding*, where

> 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;

so "Home is where one starts from". In visiting his ancestral home and building his meditation upon that visit, Eliot has arrived at a more personal and more "human" response to the relations between the timebound individual and the timeless world of which he is a part - more so, that is, than he did in *Burnt Norton*. He has looked at himself - and therefore by implication at all of us - as a part of a cyclic pattern that unites us with our predecessors and with posterity. No longer does significance lie *only* in the experience of the intense moment (with a "waste sad time" stretching on either side of it); it lies also in the sense of being a part of a struggle and a process which began long before us as individuals and will continue long after us. We are part of something much larger than our own experience - the fellowship of the now living, the long dead and the yet unborn. It is not surprising that

> As we grow older
> The world becomes stranger, the pattern more complicated
> Of dead and living.

(When Henry Reed echoed this in his "Chard Whitlow" parody - "As we grow older, we do not grow any younger" - he was, like many good parodists, paying an indirect compliment to one of the poet's most characteristic tones.) "Not the intense moment/ Isolated", implying "The pattern involves more than that", is a strong advance on affirming the intense moment exclusively; in response to the perpetual cycles of generation and decay, ancestors and descendants, predecessors and successors, masters and disciples, he can see the redeeming and timeless pattern in

> a lifetime burning in every moment
> And not the lifetime of one man only
> But of old stones that cannot be deciphered.

The past and future have taken on a new value for him, including the past represented by the now indecipherable gravestones of East Coker's village churchyard, as John Hayward pointed out. Helen Gardner remarks on the fact that Hayward "made no comment in criticism of this passage which he singled out for special praise", and adds that "The whole passage plainly came effortlessly" (*CFQ* 111).

Further echoes of *Ecclesiastes* 3 take us back to the communal simplicities of the mundane life glimpsed in the peasant dance of Part I, and shed upon them a warm splendour in which we too are included. There is an air of humane (rather than mundane) acceptance in the phrases introduced by "a time for" as they remind us of the beginning of the poem and of the distance we have travelled since then.

> There is a time for the evening under starlight,
> A time for the evening under lamplight
> (The evening with the photograph album).

What is perhaps not immediately apparent here, yet certainly contributes to our imaginative response, is the progressively universalising set of chronological gradations: from hints of the primitive past in starlight, through those of the less distant past in lamplight, to the evocation of a twentieth-century domestic scene in the peace of poring over a photograph album and making the more recent past present to us once again. But the photograph album becomes, too, something like an emblem of humanity's sense of its own past, and of an acceptance of it without either morbid rejection or morbid attachment. The past, like the future, can be valued without mattering too much: and what is true of past and future is similarly true of the present.

In such a condition of balanced acceptance we can accept, too, the quietly climactic assertion that "Love is most nearly itself/When here and now cease to matter". Time and place are transcended in awareness of a love which is timeless, whether we think of it in contrast to the limitations of Donne's dull sublunary lovers or in terms of its religious implications. Perfecting of love is the perfecting of a spiritual independence of time and place; and the closing images of the poem are a moving and inspiring affirmation of this independence. Setting aside his earlier laments on old age that have so strongly characterized this Quartet, the poet can now assert, with an audible lifting of the spirit, that old men (like any others) ought to be explorers. Even here the ghosts of Eliot's poetic

predecessors rise reassuringly from the shades, as if in timeless endorsement of what he affirms. We think of Tennyson's Ulysses:

> Yet all experience is an arch wherethrough
> Gleams that untravelled world, whose margin fades
> For ever and for ever when I move....
>
> ...my purpose holds
> To sail beyond the sunset, and the baths
> Of all the western stars, until I die....
>
> Though much is taken, much abides; and though
> We are not now that strength which in old days
> Moved earth and heaven; that which we are, we are;

(and then, certainly more assertively than in Eliot's vein)

> One equal temper of heroic hearts,
> Made weak by time and fate, but strong in will
> To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield.

We think also of the Yeatsian old man (in "Sailing to Byzantium") whose soul must

> clap its hands and sing, and louder sing
> For every tatter in its mortal dress....

So, for Eliot,

> Old men ought to be explorers
> Here or there does not matter
> We must be still and still moving
> Into another intensity
> For a further union, a deeper communion

- the lines drive forward with an eagerness that defies normal punctuation. "Here or there" matters no more than "here and now"; and one of the striking things about these lines is that the air of consolation ("cease to matter", "does not matter") does nothing to undermine the feeling of epic vitality that they communicate.

For the sake of completeness, a long-standing textual error should be noticed here. It is most simply dealt with by direct

quotation from Gardner, whose quotation in turn from Eliot himself helps to clarify the syntax:

> The reading "Here and there does not matter" appears first in *Four Quartets* [not in the separate *East Coker*] and is an error overlooked in the correction of the proofs. Mr. Hermann Peschmann called Eliot's attention to the false concord and kindly sent me a copy of Eliot's reply: "How very odd. Thanks for calling my attention to it. What I prefer is *Here or there does not matter* (Here-or-there = i.e. an abbreviation of whether here or there' is the subject of the singular *does*)." The error remained in *Collected Poems 1909-1962* (1963), but was corrected in the edition of 1974. (*CFQ* 113; square brackets added.)

Also of interest is the first typed draft of the conclusion, which helps us to appreciate the value of Eliot's alterations:

> Here or there does not matter. We must be still
> And be still moving. The mind must venture
> Where it has not been, be separated
> For a further union, a deeper communion,
> Aranyaka, the forest or the sea
> The empty cold with the desolation
> The wave cry, the wind cry
> With the [knowledge *deleted*] understanding and the consolation
> Of the petrel and the porpoise. In my end is my beginning. (*CFQ* 112)

Besides the distracting allusion to oriental forest hermits in "Aranyaka" there are several other weaknesses here, perhaps the most obvious being the comparative lack of onward movement in the lines, together with the relatively sermonic tone. "We must be still/And be still moving", followed by a full stop, fails to move with the impetuous ardour of its eventual single lineation and enjambement; and the repetition of "be" makes it circle back too explanatorily and prescriptively - too self-consciously, in fact - upon itself. The impersonality and abstraction of "The mind must venture/Where it has not been, be

separated", though more explicitly aligned to the "negative way" of St John of the Cross, is unnecessarily direct and flat in comparison with the final version, which loses nothing by its omission. As the poem now stands, "We" move - not "The mind" - towards that further union, and the improvement is immense. And the line "Into another intensity" introduces a more stirring and positive note than the idea of separation, since at this stage of the poem the *destination* of the spirit, not what it has left behind, is our main focus. (Reibetanz 96) rightly points to the "progressive intensification" of "another", "a further", and "a deeper".) On the word "Aranyaka" Gardner's comment is surely conclusive: it

> would have required a gloss to make it intelligible; and the "forest or the sea" are not imaginatively equal alternatives in this context. The forest is to eastern asceticism what the desert is to western; but Eliot's sea-image is personal, with no historic or cultural associations. It speaks directly to the imagination of the journey of the alone to the alone, whether undertaken in the forest or the desert. (*CFQ* 113)

In the final version the word "sea" does not appear, and its impact as an image is thereby strengthened; "vast waters" says much more. "The empty cold with the desolation" lacks the sensuous vividness and onward movement of "*Through* the *dark* cold *and* the empty desolation". And, finally, we can be grateful that the evocative petrel and porpoise have been relieved of the heavy and embarrassing abstractions of understanding and consolation.

Granted that it is easy to have the wisdom of hindsight, it can be safely said that every alteration here is a considerable improvement. And it is illuminating, if only for a few lines,

to watch Eliot shaping, refining and enlivening his raw matter.

"We must be still and still moving" may remind us briefly of the Chinese jar of *Burnt Norton* V, and employs a similar play on the ambiguity of "still". But the new context makes its associations more vivid and human, and the rhythm discourages us from pausing consciously to ponder over the play on words. More important is the intensity, the communion, into which we are imaginatively moving. The lines gather in excitement as our spiritual exploration is imaged in the movement out over the bleak yet exhilarating desolation of the sea, evoked in finely alliterative and assonantal music in which the dark and the desolation, the wave, wind and waters, the petrel and the porpoise all reinforce the emotive and evocative power of one another. Although the desolation is "empty", our initial impression of blankness is modified and half humanised by the cries, chill yet inviting, of personified wave and wind, and by the hint that these "vast waters" are themselves a home "Of" (a significantly possessive "Of") the petrel and the porpoise. The collocation of the two creatures is surprisingly devoid of grotesquerie or oddity, which says much for the power of the lines that lead up to them. The petrel, presumably the stormy petrel of the north Atlantic, lives far from land, and is aptly chosen as a symbol of ostensible weakness, yet real power, winging its way over an infinite waste; and the porpoise (a little like the dolphin-like delights of Shakespeare's Antony (*Antony and Cleopatra* 5.2.88-90)) embodies the notion of attunement to the apparently homeless element it lives in. The

rhythmic beat, in its undulant energy, encourages us to hear an assonantal half-rhyme, and in doing so subtly reinforces this impression:

> The wave cry, the wind cry, the vast ***waters***
> Of the petrel and the ***porpoise***.

Despite the primary impression of movement into a great unknown, the poem ends by creating at the same time a complex impression of having in some sense arrived "home". Following the phrase beginning "Through the dark cold", we have in fact experienced an aural (by analogy with optical) illusion of having heard the absent preposition "to" before we arrive at "the vast waters/Of the petrel and the porpoise". The sense of journeying and the sense of arrival *coexist* without emotional contradiction in our imaginations. We can only speculate about whether this effect was part of the poet's intention; but it is likely that most readers arrive at the last line of the poem with at least a dim impression of having shared in "a further union, a deeper communion", regardless of the terms in which they would choose to describe it. An explanation is no doubt implicit in the emotive effects of the sea, a symbol, after all, both personal and universal. To turn yet again to Helen Gardner, who more than most Eliot critics unites the qualities of plain description and sensitive evocation:

> The poem ends with the injunction to be "still and still moving"; that we may pass "through the dark cold and the empty desolation" to [again the preposition is worth noticing] the open waters of the sea, which men have always regarded as a symbol of eternity. The close is typical of the whole poem, at once terrifying and exalting; it bids us "launch out into the deep". (*ATSE* 169; parenthesis added)

And she goes on, persuasively, to suggest that in the moral

sense the subject of *East Coker* is faith.

The last half-line, following immediately upon the images of the sea like a natural corollary of them, reinforces our sense of having actually arrived at an end and so at a new beginning. It presents the opening motto of *East Coker* in its original form; "end" now gathers up many meanings, influenced of course by the meditations on old age and on death, but implying at the same time a purpose, a goal, and therefore also a resolution of the subjects pondered in this Quartet. We cannot tell whether Eliot intended the end of this poem to anticipate as aptly as it does the imagery of his next Quartet - although Matthiessen understandably describes it as "the most thrilling transition of the whole series" (186); yet we can claim that, whether or not we read the last sentence in an overtly religious light, it certainly leaves us with a sense of fresh beginnings, of perpetual possibilities - and not only in a world of speculation.

THE DRY SALVAGES

Part I

More than *Burnt Norton* or *East Coker*, *The Dry Salvages* takes our minds both west and east. Country garden and village field give place to oceanic horizons. We are now concerned less with the experience of the individual or of generations than with that of humanity throughout its history. Time seems less a continuum or a series of cycles than an amorphous flux on a scale beyond the human.

The third Quartet was written very quickly in the winter of 1940-41, and published in February 1941. The name of a group of rocks off the Massachusetts coast, familiar to Eliot in his boyhood, links the poem to the personal background of the poet, yet the details are not as personal as those of *East Coker*: "with the change of setting from the village to the sea there is a shift of mental perspective from the person and the family - personal experience and inheritance - to the race" (Preston 38). The title differs from all the others in being an American place-name, not an English one. But the progression implicit in *East Coker*, *The Dry Salvages* and *Little Gidding* (ancestral village, American childhood, English naturalisation and Anglican conversion) is like a brief synopsis of the Eliot story.

Besides the Dry Salvages of Massachusetts summer holidays, we have also the image of the river based on the Mississippi at St Louis. Eliot once said "You will notice...that this poem begins where I began, with the Mississippi; and that it ends [with the image of mortal remains as "significant soil" near a

yew-tree] where I and my wife expect to end, at the parish church of a tiny village in Somerset" (*CFQ* 47) - a reference to his wish to be buried at East Coker. Elsewhere, of the two landscapes of river and seashore, he said: "In New England I missed the long dark river, the ailanthus trees, the flaming cardinal birds, the high limestone bluffs where we searched for fossil shell-fish; in Missouri I missed the fir trees, the bay and goldenrod, the song-sparrows, the red granite and the blue sea of Massachusetts" (*CFQ* 48).

Two large metaphors, like first and second subjects in sonata form, dominate the opening movement. Both river and sea are strongly evoked in literal terms, and this lends the more power to their operation as symbols in the rest of the poem. (I call them either metaphors or symbols, since although each vehicle points toward a specific tenor, it points also into somewhat indeterminate regions beyond it.) Both river and sea suggest life or time, but in different senses, as we shall see.

The Dry Salvages seems to be the least admired of the Quartets. Hugh Kenner has damned it with faint praise, finding "nothing in the last three-quarters of *The Dry Salvages*...that is beyond the scope of a sensitive prose essayist" (269); Donald Davie, in a well-known but ill-judged essay (*Casebook* 152-167) has claimed that its poetry is deliberately bad, and that this Quartet as a whole constitutes a parody, or false resolution, of themes initiated in *Burnt Norton* and *East Coker*, while *Little Gidding* offers a true resolution of them. It is not the aim of this study to answer his strange argument point by point; but it will, I hope, suggest that a less tortuous approach to

the poem offers both simpler and richer rewards.

What, Davie asks,

> is the tone in which we could hear without embarrassment the first line spoken? "I do not know much about gods" -- who could conceivably start a conversation like that without condemning himself from the start as an uncomfortable poseur? Is it not rather like
>
> Poems are made by fools like me
> But only God can make a tree?
>
> What is it but a gaucherie? And yet there *is* a tone in which we have been addressed, which hovers here in the offing, a tone familiar enough but still far from acceptable, a tone which has indeed become a byword as a type of strident uncertainty in the speaker and of correspondingly acute embarrassment in the hearer - it is the tone of Whitman. (*Casebook* 154)

Quite apart from being an astonishing generalization on the tone of Whitman, this is a remarkable amount to detect in the tone of less than a line of Eliot - especially in view of Davie's earlier suggestion that "the first line has not sufficiently defined the tone (a single line hardly could)" (*Casebook* 154). Moreover, there is no evidence that "we have been addressed" or that this is the start of a "conversation". The poet's opening disclaimer needs to be held in suspension in our minds while he continues into the main body of his sentence, setting up a metaphorical relationship between the river and the primitive forces that are implied in the uncapitalized "god".

Meanwhile we are free to hear this opening statement in a variety of ways, depending on where we place the metrical stresses. We can stress any, though not all, of the words "do not know much", the second syllable of "about", the word "gods". The first word, "I", remains unaccented, whatever pattern we choose to hear. The emphasis is upon the ignorance and not upon the speaker, whose "I" is there to introduce the

tentative note and the unusual metaphor describing the river, but otherwise blends into the impersonality of an implied "we" or the generic "one". There is therefore no hint of "fools like me", since there is no concentration on the speaker at all. An "I" as unassertive and greyed-out as this is hardly reminiscent of Whitman. It is closer to the quite unemphatic "I" of the Omar Khayyam of Fitzgerald:

> I sometimes think that never blows so red
> The Rose as where some buried Caesar bled;

Fitzgerald's reader is not arrested by "I sometimes think", but merely drawn in by it to focus on the rose - as Eliot's reader is drawn in to focus on the river.

One way of scanning the opening line on first reading might be in lilting anapaests:

> I dó not know múch about góds; but I thínk that the
> ríver

But on closer acquaintance a more meditative rhythm suggests itself:

> I do not knów much abóut gods;/but I thínk that the
> ríver
> Is a stróng brówn gòd -/súllen, untàmed and intrác-
> table,
> Pátient to sòme degrée,/at fìrst récognised as a
> frontier;

(or perhaps, with the more American intonation, "frontíer")

> Úseful, untrústworthy,/as a convéyor of cómmerce;
> Then ónly a próblem/confrònting the búilder of brídges.
> The próblem once sólved,/the bròwn gód is àlmost for-
> gótten
> By the dwéllers in cities -/éver, however, implácable,
> Kéeping his sèasons and ráges,/destróyer, remínder
> Of whát men chòose to forgét./Unhónoured, unpropítiated
> By wórshippers of the máchine,/but wáiting, wàtching
> and wáiting.

Here, as in the openings of the other Quartets, the lines can

be heard as fluctuating between four, five and six stresses, but with two primary ones on either side of the caesura. The meditative expansiveness is, as usual, held in check by the rhythmically regular undercurrent.

The initial profession of ignorance about gods is rhetorically functional, not to focus our attention upon the speaker, but to invite us to consider the implications of regarding a great river in such a way. The essence of man's relation to the river is that he too doesn't know much about gods or, for that matter, about rivers. We are at first somewhat awed by them, but as our utilitarian impulses assert themselves, we begin to take them (gods or rivers) for granted. The stages of the long process from pioneering to settlement - in the Old World just as in the New - are deftly telescoped in the ordering of the key nouns "frontier", "commerce", "bridges" and "cities"; but the historical process of the "opening up of the Midwest" becomes at the same time a process of the human spirit in its relation to the initially unknown. It is perhaps no accident that the epithets attached to the river would be easily transferable to American Indians as seen from the facile viewpoint of popular "white" history: "sullen, untamed and intractable"; "Patient to some degree"; "Useful, untrustworthy"; "a problem"; "almost forgotten".

Here, as in the opening of *East Coker* III, Eliot mingles a variety of language registers to achieve an air of timelessness and pervasive irony: words suggestive of the western pioneering myth such as "untamed" and "frontier" in close proximity; the

cautious qualification of the pedant in "to some degree"; the phraseology of vigorous pragmatism in "conveyor of commerce" and "a problem confronting the builder of bridges"; and an epical Old Testament flavour in "the dwellers in cities". It is within this mixed matrix that the sermonic flavour of "what men choose to forget" takes - and earns - its place. Similarly, "worshippers of the machine", which Davie plucks out of context to identify it as journalistic cliché (*Casebook* 154), acquires freshness from the very context in which it appears: the river has, through the elaboration of the metaphor, been established as worthier of worship and propitiation than the vulnerable objects of man's mechanization.

The personification of the river as a pervasive presence accorded less than its due of imaginative response, might well encourage comparison with *Ol' Man River*. But this is in turn to accord the lines less than their due of imaginative response. *This* Mississippi, unlike that of *Ol' Man River*, specifically does *not* "jus' keep rollin' along": its variety of mood is too sinister and powerful for that. And it will come to be seen as a symbol of one way of apprehending the passage of time: "The river is within us". Like the life-rhythms of the human pulse, it flows for the most part evenly and predictably, but under that rhythm lurks the perpetual possibility of destructive outbursts when, swollen with turbid rage, it overflows its normal bounds (as in warfare) and becomes the "destroyer, reminder/Of what men choose to forget" - namely, the primitive force, both within and without us, that remains after all "untamed".

This connection, between the flow of the river and the flow

of life as we perceive it in time, is reinforced by the images and the metre of the lines that follow:

> His rhýthm was présent/in the núrsery bédroom,
> In the ránk ailánthus/of the Ápril dóoryard,
> In the sméll of grápes/on the áutumn táble,
> And the évening círcle/in the wínter gáslight.

The context established for these lines seems to me to make nonsense of Davie's initial charge against them:

> "His rhythm was present in the nursery bedroom" - could anything be more vague and woolly? After this statement has been issued, we know not a tittle more about the relation between river and bedroom than we did before. (*Casebook* 155)

We do, in fact, know something about the relation between the river and the poet remembering his childhood (the bedroom as such is not in question); and that "something" is the sense of the perpetual flow of the Mississippi as the child lay in bed at night in St Louis. It is in moments of quietness that a constant feature of our surroundings impinges upon our senses; and all four "moments" in these four lines are implicitly ones of quietness, of receptivity to what we might call the Wordsworthian constants of nature as personal presences. The sense of regularity - we are focussing now on the river's normal movement, not its sporadic outbreaks - is reinforced rhythmically in the patterning of these lines, each memory-snapshot labelled by a parallel phrase in the second half-line, placing it within the cycle of the seasons or of the growing life ("nursery", "April", "autumn", "winter"), telescoping briefly the memories of indoors and out, of the growth of natural objects and the security of the family circle. The intimacy of these sensuously varied images offers a contrast with the

broader view of the river in the preceding lines, and a yet greater contrast with the expansive evocation of the sea and the land's edge in the lines that follow. The rhythms of the child's life are linked to those of the river by the senses of sight, hearing and smell, and are briefly touched in in the allusions to the bedroom, enclosed garden (the American "door-yard"), dining-table and living-room: we share briefly his sensation of the pervasive presence of the river, like the persistence of a pulse, throughout the days and nights, the seasons and activities, of his early life. The comparison with Wordsworth is, I believe, relevant although not precise in its application. The Mississippi here is, for instance, not the object of explicitly personal invocation as is the Derwent in Book I of *The Prelude* - although that too, for Wordsworth, "sent a voice/That flowed along my dreams" (*The Prelude* I.273-274), like the rhythm that was present in the nursery bedroom.

There are, then, two significant things about the river.

First, it is primitive and powerful. It is like the primordial pulse, the atavistic impulse in the bloodstream of man, which every now and then bursts its "banks" and floods our familiar lives with disaster - and yet something whose power we usually forget, or choose to forget. In a world in which "worshippers of the machine" have forgotten that "There is a time" for everything - have, as it were, forgotten to take notice of the need for myths and gods - this river waits with only temporarily curbed ferocity. The literal Mississippi, with its notorious floodings, serves this metaphorical purpose

exceptionally well.

Secondly, the river represents, by its association with our bloodstream ("The river is within us"), our earliest and simplest conception of time, as we feel it on our pulses. This is implicit in the river's presence in the childhood memories. The child's sense of time and its passing is registered on his own pulse and develops through memories of specific places, times of day and night, phases of the seasons, together with the sense-impressions they evoke.

So the river comes to suggest two things: the individual's time-scale in contrast to the chaotic mass of external experience, the sea of life around him; and the primitive pulse of mankind in contrast to the forces of nature that work impersonally around, and indifferently to, the human race. These contrasts are emphasised by the juxtaposition of river and sea.

The opening lines of the poem convey an impression of generality rather than intimacy of experience. Then, in the firmly rhythmic last four lines of the river section, we move towards more intimate apprehensions of the world of nature impinging upon us. They convey, in condensed form, the child's awareness of the "other", of the non-human world that lies outside us, yet is part of the rhythm of our own lives. We are ourselves intimately connected to that world: "His rhythm was present".

The phrase "The river is within us" confirms the river's metaphorical function as we begin the next section. It suggests a part of ourselves (even though the river may be godlike), whereas the sea, encroaching on all sides, is alien to us. Yet, although it is customary to say that Part I is dominated

by these twin symbols, it is important to notice the central, transitional passage of the movement focussing, before we move to the sea itself, on "the land's edge" - that boundary where land and sea, the familiar and the alien, interpenetrate each other. The images - flotsam and jetsam thrown up on the beaches and objects found in rock pools - cumulatively convey a strong impression of both the familiar and the alien, the products of man and the products of a nature that dwarfs us in our timebound existence.

> The river is within us, the sea is all about us;
> The sea is the land's edge also, the granite
> Into which it reaches, the beaches where it tosses
> Its hints of earlier and other creation:
> The starfish, the horseshoe crab, the whale's backbone;
> The pools where it offers to our curiosity
> The more delicate algae and the sea anemone.
> It tosses up our losses, the torn seine,
> The shattered lobsterpot, the broken oar
> And the gear of foreign dead men. The sea has many voices,
> Many gods and many voices.
> The salt is on the briar rose,
> The fog is in the fir trees.

Our sense of the flow of time, conceived as a river, implies direction and limitation, in spite of the godlike power hinted at in the opening lines. The image of the sea, on the other hand, implies another view of time altogether, as boundless and without direction. The boundary of sea and land becomes the meeting-point between the known and the unknown, between the relatively controllable certainties of our life and the timeless dimension that transcends them. The rhythm, restless and unpredictable, underlines this sense of the "other" with its enjambements, shifting caesuras and abrupt variations in pace. The variety of the sea's moods and offerings, as experienced

from the shore, is caught with a particularity reminiscent of Keats's sonnet "On the Sea":

> It keeps eternal whisperings around
> Desolate shores, and with its mighty swell
> Gluts twice ten thousand Caverns, till the spell
> Of Hecate leaves them their old shadowy sound.
> Often 'tis in such gentle temper found,
> That scarcely will the very smallest shell
> Be moved for days from where it sometime fell,
> When last the winds of Heaven were unbound.

And as in Keats, the effect is achieved largely by unobtrusive personifying of the sea as a quasi-human force, yet distanced from humanity by the careless power of its action, reaching here, tossing up this, offering that. We are made aware of it as the source of life, yet also indifferent to life; the "hints of earlier and other creation" confirm the vastness of the time-scale on which it works, and our apparent irrelevance within it; we too, or remains of us, may one day be contemplated as "hints of earlier and other creation". Yet the poet who remembered exploring the Massachusetts coast does not allow thematic generality to absorb loving particularity: the items tossed up by the waves are offered to our curiosity for their own sakes as well as for the variety of mood and impression they arouse - the primitive and the powerful, the delicate and the poignant. Helen Gardner points out how much of the meaning is carried in the verbs "reaches", "tosses" and "offers" (*ATSE* 12). The little catalogue of objects includes a telescoping of evolutionary stages ("The starfish, the horseshoe crab, the whale's backbone") and a glance back at primitive life forms ("The more delicate algae and the sea anemone"), and ends, significantly, with the images of manmade objects destroyed. The sea's care-

less power involves both a delicacy of creation and a bland and blind process of destruction, reminding us, as Elizabeth Drew remarked in her commentary, that "human nature is only a part of the whole life-surge" (215). Precisely: "The sea has many voices,/Many gods and many voices". If the single river, that "strong brown god", is untamable and a potential destroyer, how much more the "many gods" of the sea.

This passage contains a syntactic peculiarity worth puzzling over: "The sea *is* the land's edge...the granite...the beaches... The pools..." (italics added). Did Eliot intend the rather odd identification of the sea with granite, beaches and pools? It seems as if he must have done so, but with "the land's edge" as a kind of middle term to ease the mental transition: we can conceive of the sea as the land's edge, and we can conceive the land's edge as including the granite, beaches and pools. Yet the syntax, strictly read, implies that the granite itself is an aspect of the sea and, moreover, a part of itself into which it reaches. The impinging of sea upon land is conveyed in terms so intimate as to imply that the one is indeed in some sense an aspect of the other. To translate our metaphor at the risk of being crudely explicit, the implication seems to be that the familiar realm of man's experience does, after all, offer dimly perceived perspectives on the realm of immensity transcending it. If this is so, it certainly corresponds with some of the ideas about life in time expressed elsewhere in the Quartets.

There is a considerable feeling of insistence about the

sea's activity as presented here. This is due partly to the enjambement and partly to the onomatopoeic force of consonantal clusters that wash and thrust through the lines in a welter of **sh**, **ch** and **j** sounds, beginning in "edge" and continuing after the comparative hardness of "granite" into the internal rhymes "reaches" and "beaches" and the muted sibilance of "creation" and "starfish". (And "creation" is, incidentally, an improvement on the awkward alliteration of "existence", its predecessor in draft (*CPQ* 124).) A more static liquidity briefly asserts itself in the **l** and **n** consonants of the "delicate algae and the sea anemone" in the pools: then the sibilance returns with the more vigorous action (again with internal rhyme) of "It tosses up our losses, the torn seine,/The Shattered lobsterpot". The "broken oar" carries our imagination closer to human agents, and leads on naturally to the rhythmically poignant awkwardness of "the gear of foreign dead men". Our ears have already been prepared for the notion that "The sea has many voices". The river has impinged upon us as a rhythm, whereas the sea is a concatenation of voices without any recognizable or familiar rhythm at all. It is hauntingly personified, yet distanced from us by its quality of alien multiplicity. We are told not that it *is* a god or gods, but - more strangely - that it *has* "Many gods and many voices", as if it were a being that transcended and yet included gods and whatever they stand for. The losses it tosses up are "ours", those of humankind, but the force that tosses them up is something quite other.

The references to "the broken oar" and "the gear of foreign dead men" tend to transport our imaginations from the world of

fishermen to that of war (hinted at in "gear"), and of war in any or all periods of history. Perhaps "Many gods" eases the transition, so that we mentally accommodate the ancient world of Homeric heroes in the same phrase that might remind us of naval conflict in the early days of World War II. And, as Blamires has pointed out (85), the phrase "many voices" echoes Tennyson's "Ulysses" (already hinted at in *East Coker* whose "Old men ought to be explorers"), where "the deep/Moans round with many voices". In this way the details of the language bring together the ancient and the modern sailor in a timeless blend of associations.

At this transitional point the metre too works transitionally. The ear attuned to a norm of four beats per line hears a slow elegiac movement in "And the géar of fóreign déad mén". But the line continues, and retrospectively we adapt its stresses to include the addition: "And the géar of fòreign déad men. The séa has màny vóices". The same applies to the typographically split line that follows: the initial weight of

Mány góds and mány vóices.
The sált is ón the bríar róse

becomes lightened and quickened to

Màny góds and màny vóices.
The sált is òn the bríar ròse

so that the next half-line, identical in syntactic pattern, echoes this unobtrusive quickening ("The fóg is ìn the fír trèes"), and allows for two more full stresses in the abrupt opening of the final typographical section: "The séa hówl". A new vigour has now emerged out of the transitional lines, and

is pursued through one long sweeping sentence down to the end of Part I - a passage in which Eliot's lineation and punctuation strike me as even more deliberate and precise than usual.

The two separated half-lines have been described as "two images of smell or taste, immediate and pervasive, haunting and formless, images which suggest the eerie menace of the sea felt inland" (*ATSE* 13) - only a little way inland, it is true. The visual images of the previous lines have modulated mainly into those of sound but also, briefly, of a less specific sense-impression compounded of salt and fog, that permeates the air around objects more landlocked in their associations. If we are reminded of the garden of *Burnt Norton* I or the purgatorial fires of *East Coker* IV, we tend to feel that the briar rose smacks here of unrealised symbolism: a distraction precisely because it remains unrealised. But if we respond more simply to the immediate sense-impression of familiarly sweet or fresh scents assailed by a disturbingly alien tang, the images do their work adequately: we are being made to feel the unnerving quality, in this environment, of what Arnold's great metaphor called "The unplumbed, salt, estranging sea". And now, without further preparation, we are launched upon that sea in a welter of sound.

> The sea howl
> And the sea yelp, are different voices
> Often together heard: the whine in the rigging,
> The menace and caress of wave that breaks on water,
> The distant rote in the granite teeth,
> And the wailing warning from the approaching headland
> Are all sea voices, and the heaving groaner
> Rounded homewards, and the seagull....

Our first impression is less of temporal or spatial rela-

tionships than simply of sound: "sea" is used as an adjective common to "howl" and "yelp", so that the impact of the sounds is emphasised while their source is generalised; and the use of "sea" as an adjective while "howl" and "yelp", primarily verbs, become nouns, is obviously a way of reinforcing this effect. Most of the words conveying sound appear syntactically as nouns while retaining a good deal of their force as verbs: and the *extent* to which they convey sound varies in such a way as to reinforce the pervasive impression of personified power: we register mainly sound (as of animals) in "howl", "yelp" and "whine", then respond to "menace" and "caress" as implying sound while not explicitly denoting it: "rote" takes on its nautical sense of a specific sound made by water, "warning" is qualified for the ear by its alliterative association with "wailing"; and a more complex cluster of sense-impressions is aroused by "the heaving groaner" (glossed by Eliot in his headnote). Finally, and far more simply, comes the familiar impression of sound conveyed in the bare word "seagull". We are directed to the "differentness" of these "voices" and at the same time reminded that they are all "sea voices": so that within a few lines the sea becomes both a richly personified force and a densely populated expanse - producing the sounds and at the same time containing them. It is as if we are sailing a little way from shore, aware of the "whine in the rigging" overhead and of that onomatopoeic "menace and caress of wave that breaks on water" along the sides of the vessel, aware too of tidal noise in the middle distance, and of the shore not far off. The variety of aural perspectives afforded

by these details and by the placing of the words "distant", "approaching" and "homewards", and the sense of a world of living forces, are all vividly achieved within eight lines.

The variety of sea voices is accompanied by a feeling of their ambivalence, sometimes animal-like, sometimes quasi-human, at one moment threatening and at another not quite reassuring - most obviously in the coupling of "menace and caress", an apter linking of sound and sense than Eliot's earlier, more oxymoronic attempt, "soothing menace" (*CFQ* 126). But the nearness of the shore implied by "granite teeth", "approaching headland" and "homewards" does nothing to dispel the general quality of alienness; and the slightly archaic flavour of the inverted word-order in "Often together heard" reinforces this. (Eliot rightly kept it although it was queried in draft by both John Hayward and Geoffrey Faber (*CFQ* 127).) The sounds, whether produced by nature or by man's artefacts, are distinguished from those of the land proper, and emphasise the mystery of the ocean in preparation for the climactic entry into the poem of the tolling bell rung by the ground swell, a rhythm of nature as far as possible removed from those of land-locked life.

The phrase "under the oppression of the silent fog" - arrived at comparatively late in the drafting of the poem (*CFQ* 126) - now plays a crucial part in this transition. It throws into further relief the various sounds before it and the single sound after it. By a kind of synaesthesia, "silent fog" in this context reminds us of the heightened significance of sounds heard

through a blanket of fog, while "oppression" conveys the eerie feeling of a palpable weight upon the atmosphere.

> And under the oppression of the silent fog
> The tolling bell
> Measures time not our time, rung by the unhurried
> Ground swell, a time
> Older than the time of chronometers, older
> Than time counted by anxious worried women
> Lying awake, calculating the future,
> Trying to unweave, unwind, unravel
> And piece together the past and the future,
> Between midnight and dawn, when the past is all deception,
> The future futureless, before the morning watch
> When time stops and time is never ending;
> And the ground swell, that is and was from the beginning,
> Clangs
> The bell.

If the sea feels like a living being, it is nevertheless totally unpredictable; and it is from the mention of the bell (presumably on a bell-buoy) that the fuller significance of the sea as time-symbol emerges. From here to the end of Part I occurs a dense clustering of words associated with time. The difference from our human time-scale is made explicit:

> The majestic conception of the time that is not our time, given grandeur and significance by the liturgical phrase "that is and was from the beginning", and expressing itself in the final reverberating word "clangs", contrasts with the time of our daily experience, the time we try to measure exactly by our instruments, the time we try to make sense of in our minds. (*ATSE* 14)

And the undulating, continuous movement, aided by variations in line-length, and intermediate pauses in what is actually a 23-line sentence, helps to suggest the "otherness" of this rhythm.

Like so much in Eliot that echoes familiar texts only to emphasise the difference, the tolling bell here calls to mind, fleetingly, that other tolling bell of John Donne's *Devotions*

(XVII); but whereas we are there reminded that no man is an island but everyone a piece of the continent, here the emphasis is on man's *alienation*, both individually and racially, from what this bell represents. We are not clods being washed away from the continent by death, but timebound creatures in life, to whom the rhythms of the ocean of time are unfathomably foreign.

Within this apparently chaotic flux exists, it seems, one hint of pattern - yet a pattern vaster than all we normally recognize by the name. The "ground swell" is godlike in age and power and, like God, "is and was from the beginning". This symbolic connection, the eternal rhythms of the universe making themselves strangely felt in the world of man, will later be expanded so that the clanging of the bell becomes a kind of angelus marking moments of annunciation, of the intersection - for good or evil - of the timeless with what we call time. Between the two mentions of the ground swell, and throwing them into strong relief, come the restless worried rhythms, insistently and weakly repetitive, in which we hear of

> time counted by anxious worried women
> Lying awake, calculating the future,
> Trying to unweave, unwind, unravel
> And piece together the past and the future,

the wives and mothers of the sea-going men we shall meet in Parts II and IV, women engaged in their hopeless mental battle with the "time" of the sea and the "sea" of time.

Yet they too, before we leave them, briefly acquire the dignity of biblical figures as the solemnity of the Psalmist's words envelops them: "My soul fleeth unto the Lord: before the morning watch, I say, before the morning watch". Eliot's

allusiveness sometimes has a richly multiple effect: the text concerned, Psalm 130, is often used as a funeral psalm, and both its Prayer-Book title and its opening verse are peculiarly apt: the title, *De Profundis*: the verse, "Out of the deep have I called unto thee, O Lord: Lord, hear my voice". After the echo of the Psalmist, it is not surprising that the unnerving paradox "time stops and time is never ending" should be promptly followed by an answering phrase from the doxology. The state of mind of "anxious worried women" fearing the loss of their men at sea is well captured in the simultaneous stoppage and endlessness of time as they know it; and the phrase also points us to a dimension of time beyond our own. For the ground swell, as for God in traditional conceptions of him, "time stops and time is never ending", because each "is and was from the beginning" - the metaphorical resonance of the ground swell is thus firmly established. Even though this "beginning" is in one sense prehistoric and prehuman, referring to the rhythm of the ground swell, the fragment of the doxology contributes to the climax a quality not necessarily hopeful, yet strangely exhilarating.

This ambivalence is, after all, only to be expected, since throughout the passage Eliot presents the sea as implicitly both lovely and terrifying. The sense of an alien life or alien rhythm going on in the sea, of a "time not our time", makes us realise what strangers we are in the physical universe, in the scale of a geological or astronomical time entirely different from our own pulse-bound sense of what time *is*. And yet the ground swell, for all its alien quality, does hint at

pattern; it too, in its unlikely way, is a part of the cosmic dance: and although its ringing of the bell is not yet envisaged as an annunciation, such a notion is (to use an apt metaphor) present as an undercurrent by the time we end Part I. The word "beginning" placed here at the end seems like a faint echo of its occurrences in *East Coker*; but whereas the emphasis there was on the ostensibly personal "*my* beginning", here it is far more impersonal and universal in its resonance. For *The Dry Salvages* creates and traverses a wider landscape - or perhaps one should say seascape - of the mind.

Part II

The Dry Salvages is exceptional among the Quartets in the expansiveness of its lyric section forming Part IIA. The images of this modified sestina are far less "packed" and more easily assimilable than those of the corresponding lyric sections in the other Quartets. In its rhythm and pace, and in the regular falling of its feminine endings, it expresses a combination of aching monotony and futility which the reader nevertheless finds strangely stirring.

After the variety of "sea voices" encountered in Part I, we begin with a rhetorical question emphasising silence rather than sound. The "howl" and "yelp", "whine" and "wailing warning" of Part I give way to the soundless cries of humanity, faced with the flux of a "time not our time" represented by the sea. The "soundless wailing" is the unheard voice of mankind as part of the "drifting wreckage" on time's flood. No longer do we make a distinction between the "anxious worried women" and the men at sea whom they worry about: the sestina speaks for all, including the poet and by implication the reader.

> Whére is there an énd of it, the sóundless wáiling,
> The sílent wíthering of áutumn flówers
> Drópping their pétals and remáining mótionless;
> Whére is there an énd to the drífting wréckage,
> The práyer of the bóne on the béach, the ùnpráyable
> Práyer at the calámitous annùnciátion?

The standard pattern of four main stresses per line asserts itself with considerable regularity throughout the sestina, which meanwhile achieves its "dying fall" by means of the consistently feminine line-endings. It is not a sestina in the standard or traditional sense, differing from that norm in a

number of ways. One is that, instead of using the same six end-words throughout each stanza, Eliot, in his subsequent stanzas, uses *different* end-words *rhyming* with those of stanza 1, until he reaches the sixth and final stanza, where he returns to the end-words of the first - except for replacing "unprayable" with "prayable" (which throws it into strong relief), and altering "annunciation" by beginning it with a capital letter. Nor does he end his sestina with a three-line *envoi*: the six stanzas are complete in themselves. Finally, he does not, as the stanzas progress, alter the ordering of the end words in the "plaited" pattern of the standard sestina (F, A, E, B, D, C in relation to the previous stanza), but maintains the same pattern of line-endings throughout.

The deliberate use of the sestina pattern, yet at the same time the deliberate modification of it, warrants comment. Presumably Eliot wished, as in Part IIA of every other Quartet, to create a tautly-patterned lyric embodying a universal experience: of timeless order among the elements in *Burnt Norton*; of a corresponding disorder in *East Coker*; here in *The Dry Salvages* of a helpless drifting on the chaotic flux of a sea of time "not our time", because vaster than our normal time-scales can accommodate; and in *Little Gidding* of a series of "deaths" suffered by, and inflicted by, the elements. There is no definite answer to the question "Why a sestina rather than anything else?" But we may surmise that Eliot wanted a lyric form that would overlay its own sense of order with one of repetitiveness and even monotony. The firmness is achieved by modifying the sestina to accommodate rhyme; the repetitive-

ness and monotony are achieved by avoiding the traditional variation in the ordering of the corresponding line-endings. The pattern gives the impression of being forever the same (yet not with the excessive sameness that identical end-words would provide); the variety of end-words, on the other hand, is counteracted by maintaining the same relative order for their rhymes. And in the final stanza, a peculiar effect is achieved: the original end-words return, taking us back to the beginning, yet their force has been subtly qualified by what appears between the first and sixth stanzas. And no compressed tercet is added to knit up the sestina into finality: relatively complete in itself, it is at the same time left open for the continuation offered in what I call section B of Part II.

The overall effect is that of a wave-like motion combining predictability with a modicum of variation; and the theme is reinforced partly by syntax: the relative absence of active verbs in decisive forms - the verbs are largely participial and adjectival - implies continuity without progression. Geoffrey Faber commented approvingly that "the run of participles seems right here" (*CFQ* 131).

As a kind of thematic refrain throughout the passage runs the idea of endlessness, in the double sense of an absence of termination and an absence of purpose (as we have seen, a very common form of word-play in Eliot). The first line of each stanza illustrates this: "Where is there an end of it..."; "There is no end, but addition..."; "There is [paradoxically, no end and yet] the final addition..."; "Where is the end of

them..."; "We have to think of them as [having no end but] forever bailing..."; "There is no end of it...".

The sestina pattern, as modified here, has a curious effect: it seems to answer Eliot's apparent needs by lending to the poetry an underlying hint of order and direction even while it reinforces the contemplation of disorder, shapelessness and "endlessness" in a chaotic flux. The slow pace and smooth movement of the verse also contribute to this: Reibetanz points out how, in the opening lines, the languid rhythms are achieved

> partly because unstressed syllables are liberally interspersed between major stresses, and also because smooth consonants like "w", "n", "m", "l", "r", and "s" prevail. The effect of the four-stress line here is totally unlike that of the original "Time present and time past," with its more percussive beat. (111)

Moreover, the feminine rhymes appearing often in quite long words help to retard the pace:

> by punctuating his lines with polysyllabic words (conspicuous too in their suffixal endings), Eliot has given special weight to the end of each line. The result is to underscore the effect of "repetition without progression, a wave-like rise and fall". (112, quoting at the end from *ATSE* 38)

The initial rhetorical question implies, of course, the answer given in the next stanza: "There is no end" (or so it seems at present), no end to the cycle of "soundless wailing" in the human spirit, to the withering of flowers that symbolise lives, to the drifting wreckage of humanity and its hopes. The opening stanza creates an odd, slightly surrealistic coupling of images so that for a moment the "soundless wailing" seems to *be* that of the autumn flowers as they wither, their only motion that of dropping their petals. The words "soundless", "silent" and "motionless" do not cancel out the implications of wailing,

withering and dropping. The use of oxymoron as in "soundless wailing" intensifies the impression of hidden anguish - hidden yet revealed here. Images suggesting the land and individual identities (flowers and petals) yield easily to the dominant imagery of the sea with its anonymous wreckage on the surface, representing the helpless remnants of lives and of history reduced to an indeterminate mass. Yet there is a further shift in mental and syntactical perspective as the lyric voice asks where there is an end to the "prayer of the bone on the beach", allowing us to see this "prayer" - or the bone that makes it - as a *part* of the wreckage just mentioned, though no longer drifting, but beached. It is, too, a peculiar combination of ideas that makes the prayer implicitly without end yet also "unprayable" and therefore without beginning. The apparent contradiction, as elsewhere in Eliot, creates an impression of insistence in spite of incapacity, as of the "children at the gate" in *Ash-Wednesday* who "will not go away and cannot pray", or of the voice among the bones (in the same poem) that wishes to be forgotten and to forget even while it is "devoted, concentrated in purpose".

"The prayer of the bone on the beach" returns us from the drifting mass to a single personified object; throughout the passage we are encouraged to see ourselves as part of the whole generalised drift of life, yet without losing the sense of individual identity. Here we contemplate, briefly, the single bone, as it were one of the bones of Ezekiel's vision (*Ezekiel* 37) or one of the "heap of broken images" of *The Waste Land*, or

the prophet Jonah crying to the Lord from the belly of the fish. The image, though fleeting, has the same poignant air of appeal as the fragment of the *De Profundis* noted towards the end of Part I. The prayer, or the attempt to make it, is "at the calamitous annunciation" - every such annunciation being a moment of death or disaster, an instant when the claims of the timeless impinge upon mankind trapped in time.

Normally we see no end - in either sense of the word - to this picture of ourselves, and of history, as the helpless flotsam and jetsam on the ocean of life. Instead of it, there is merely more of the same:

> There is no end, but addition: the trailing
> Consequence of further days and hours,
> While emotion takes to itself the emotionless
> Years of living among the breakage
> Of what was believed in as the most reliable -
> And therefore the fittest for renunciation.
>
> There is the final addition, the failing
> Pride or resentment at failing powers,
> The unattached devotion which might pass for
> devotionless,
> In a drifting boat with a slow leakage,
> The silent listening to the undeniable
> Clamour of the bell of the last 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.

These central stanzas of the sestina gather into themselves much of the thought of *East Coker* about the apparent futility

of effort and the inescapable approach of old age and death, but they universalise it within the context of the prevailing imagery of the sea; we are also reminded, in the image of the boat "with a slow leakage", of the passage in *Marina* about the body as a boat in a state of ill repair:

> Bowsprit cracked with ice and paint cracked with heat.
> I made this, I have forgotten
> And remember.
> The rigging weak and the canvas rotten
> Between one June and another September.
> Made this unknowing, half conscious, unknown, my own.
> The garboard strake leaks, the seams need caulking.

The traditional image of life as a voyage, whether we think of Tennyson's "Ulysses" or *Moby Dick* or Hopkins's "Wreck of the Deutschland", gains freshness from the particularity with which it is presented in these stanzas of *The Dry Salvages*.

We are aware of time as like the shapeless surface of the ocean, with no clear destination in sight and nothing but the addition of more of the same, "the trailing/Consequence of further days and hours" (enjambement effectively emphasising the point); and the first two line-ends of stanzas 2 and 3 form small thematic units in themselves, linking the ideas of "trailing...hours" and "failing...powers". Human emotion is personified as absorbing into itself the consequence of years of living, not so much without emotion ("emotionless") as with stifled, stunted emotions, among broken faith and hope and love: "the breakage/Of what was believed in as the most reliable". It is a sombre picture of the average life. And yet, remarks the poet's voice parenthetically, these things in which we have put our misplaced trust are, for that very reason, "the fittest for renunciation". We seem to be hearing echoes, in this gene-

ralizing context, of that far more private voice which opened the meditations of *Ash-Wednesday* on a note of renunciation:

> 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 to strive towards such things

Although there is "no end", there is yet the addition only of what we may look forward to at the end of life's voyage: "the failing/Pride or resentment at failing powers". There is also an addition which is less clear in its significance: "The unattached devotion which might pass for devotionless". The question is whether this "devotion" is to be seen in a positive or a negative light. Anticipating the meaning of "detachment" as we find it in Part III of *Little Gidding*, it is likely that the "unattached devotion" so quietly mentioned here, and which looks so little like devotion at all, should nevertheless be understood as the one positive response to be made by the spirit in the ageing body, the "drifting boat with a slow leakage"; yet it must be admitted that the line, if this is its meaning, seems more like a gratuitous intrusion than a natural expansion of the thought in this context - rather as if "devotionless" offered itself as a natural rhyme-word here, and imported a line of irrelevantly anticipatory thought along with it. The main idea of the stanza is, after all, the grimly helpless approach to death, couched in the established metaphor of the voyager who has nothing left except "The silent listening to the undeniable/Clamour of the bell of the last annunciation" - death itself. To introduce detached devotion here seems rather

foreign to the main concern of the lyric at this point.

In the third stanza "undeniable" is ambiguous: the clamour of the bell is an inescapable fact, and it represents a summons that must be answered. The clanging of the bell by the ground swell, introduced in Part I, is meanwhile undergoing a series of metaphorical role-shifts, becoming in turn a signal of danger or disaster, a death-knell, and finally (at the end of the sestina) an angelus.

Stanza 4 shows humanity as the fishermen forever "sailing/ Into the wind's tail, where the fog cowers". These fishermen, of course, may have been inspired by the literal fisherfolk of Gloucester, Massachusetts, with whom Eliot was familiar; but here they immediately represent the human race, as the rest of the stanza suggests: "We cannot think of a time that is oceanless/Or of an ocean not littered with wastage". And just as the ocean cannot be thought of as without wrecks, so the future cannot be thought of as neatly packaged with accomplished purposes: it is liable, like the past, "to have no destination" - unless an "annunciation" of disaster or some claim of the timeless imposes upon it (as in "The Wreck of the Deutschland") a pattern transcending its apparent sterility. But this is to anticipate: Eliot does not bring us to that kind of epiphany until the end of the sestina.

Meanwhile, we are limited to a vision of the fishermen as endlessly engaged, under a hostile wind, in their drudgery at sea, varied only by its land rhythms of payment and preparation for fresh voyages. The word "erosionless", however, strikes me as another instance of the exigencies of rhyme importing a

redundancy into the passage: there is no reason why the banks should be seen as erosionless except to suggest (which "unchanging" already, and less confusingly, does) that the land, like the life-rhythms of the fishermen, must be always the same.

The last two lines of stanza five suggest not merely that we are literally unable, but that we *cannot afford* (because the thought would be too daunting) to think of the fishermen as "making a trip that will be unpayable/For a haul that will not bear examination": in other words, that effort without reward is too painful and discouraging to contemplate, and yet just what we need to learn to contemplate. The unusual word "unpayable" seems to mean "unprofitable": "unpaying" would be the more normal usage, but "unpayable" adds the implication that the *source* of the payment, or non-payment, lies elsewhere. In his comments Geoffrey Faber queried the word "bear":

> Do you mean this in the usual sense of not repaying examⁿ? or do you mean "that never will undergo examⁿ"? The latter sense seems to be suggested – if so is "bear" the right word? (*CFQ* 131)

The "usual sense" makes better sense: that the cargo is too poor to warrant examination, or if examined, would be rejected as worthless. We can, then, read the thought of these lines more or less like this: "We find ourselves obliged to think of their sturdily regular rhythms of work rather than of its purposes, if only because emotionally we cannot afford to see it as unprofitable and pointless" – with the silent corollary that this, too, is how we are obliged to see our own life-rhythms, otherwise we would give way to despair. The sestina, if this is correct, has not yet arrived at the affirmation

offered in Part V of *East Coker*:

> perhaps neither gain nor loss.
> For us, there is only the trying. The rest is not
> our business.

The last stanza of the sestina returns us to the images and end-words of the first. Four-and-a-half lines of it constitute an apparent confirmation of what the initial rhetorical questions implied; but the climactic line-and-a-half at the end introduces a new dimension. Out of the silence, chaos and pointlessness emerges, as it were, a whisper of affirmation.

> There ís no énd of it, the vóiceless wáiling,
> No énd to the wíthering of wíthered flówers,
> To the móvement of páin that is páinless and
> mótionless,
> To the dríft of the séa and the drífting wréckage,
> The bóne's práyer to Déath its Gód. Ónly the hárdly,
> bárely práyable
> Práyer of the óne Annùnciátion.

In the penultimate line the normal four-stress rhythm has, to my ear, been slowed down and doubled to emphasise this significant shift in perspective. Though ostensibly a sudden switch, it has been prepared for by the repeated occurrence of "annunciation" in negative senses over which hung, inevitably, the hint of its more traditional and positive connotations. The various forms of anguish alluded to in the previous stanzas have also been gathered up in the heavily paradoxical line about "the movement of pain that is painless and motionless" - a process not really without pain or motion, but so muted and stifled as to seem so, and therefore the more acutely present to our consciousness.

This time the prayer of the bone - of the individual thrown up by the surging mass of "time not our time" - is no longer

undirected: it is "to Death its God". What on the face of it might look like peculiar theology is really a summation of our awareness, growing throughout the sestina, that every "annunciation" is a summons from a dimension beyond time as we know it, whether we call that dimension Death or God. And in response to such a summons lies the *only* end to the wailing, the withering, the pain and the drifting: namely, the prayer that can scarcely be breathed, the prayer made in response to the one Annunciation known by a capital A: "Be it unto me according to thy word" (*Luke* 1:38). In this acceptance of the summons from the timeless lies "the end", the only escape from, and the only purpose in, our subjection to the "destructive element". The adverbial insistence is justified by its deliberate word-play: the prayer is "hardly, barely prayable" - not only is it scarcely capable of being uttered, it is necessarily uttered with extreme difficulty ("hardly") and in a state of total nakedness ("barely") to the power that elicits it.

As the Quartets follow one another, religious affirmation appears in progressively earlier positions: in *Burnt Norton* not until Part V, with "The Word in the desert"; in *East Coker* not until Parts III and IV. Here in *The Dry Salvages* we have it halfway through Part II; and in *Little Gidding* it is already established in the images of pentecostal fire, pilgrimage and prayer before the end of Part I. Whatever the controversy surrounding the nature of their Christianity and the consequent limitation or universality of their appeal, it seems pointless to deny the progressive emphasis, as the cycle of Quartets con-

tinues, on the religious interpretation of the experience that provides their nucleus. At the risk of over-simplification we can say that *Burnt Norton*'s main focus is on the experience of timelessness itself; *East Coker*'s on the processes of suffering, disillusion and dispossession that lead to its rediscovery; that of *The Dry Salvages* on the prayerful acceptance and detached action that this process entails; and *Little Gidding*'s on the pentecostal illumination that confirms and makes sense of the process in relation to the rest of our experience. Perhaps this is clearest if we consider Part IV of each Quartet, and see each of those lyrics, in retrospect, as focussing in turn on God the Father (the "unmoved Mover"), on the redemptive suffering of Christ, on the self-yielding of the Virgin, and on the purging and illuminating power of the Holy Spirit.

As in *East Coker* II, section A here gives way to section B not with a smooth transition but with a very abrupt drop in emotional register and an equally abrupt switch in style and rhythm. The voice we hear is meditative, explanatory and slightly sermonic. Yet it is not simple enough to be summed up by any one of these epithets: there is a slightly more personal note, yet the air of self-confession and exploration is modified by the generality (shifting between "one", "I" and "we") and by a growing tone of assurance belying the initial tentativeness of "It seems". This is a voice speaking both to and for us; it is the voice of the poet aware of himself ("I have said before") and at the same time a representative voice. It offers firm considered statement in abstract language, mingled with exploratory stops, starts and self-interruptions as illustrative images

are - sometimes uneasily - tried out and qualified.

Although the opening of *East Coker* IIB, glancing back at the lyric of IIA ("That was a way of putting it - not very satisfactory"), exposed itself to charges of bathetic prosiness, Part IIB of *The Dry Salvages* is in fact, in its opening lines, the less successful of the two. Here the poet is *not* glancing back at section A but saying, in effect, "This is the way I'm now *going* to try and put it". The mixture of tones involved is difficult to justify. We get an impression of the variety of modes (in the first eight lines, especially) as a rough equivalent of saturation bombing in the hope of making the required impact one way or another. It is not vindicated either by the elusiveness of the idea or by the deliberate assumption of self-consciousness. Nevertheless, the meaning warrants teasing out.

> It seems, as one becomes older,
> That the past has another pattern, and ceases to be a
> mere sequence -
> Or even development: the latter a partial fallacy
> Encouraged by superficial notions of evolution,
> Which becomes, in the popular mind, a means of
> disowning the past.
> The moments of happiness - not the sense of well-
> being,
> Fruition, fulfilment, security or affection,
> Or even a very good dinner, but the sudden
> illumination -
> We had the experience but missed the meaning,
> And approach to the meaning restores the experience
> In a different form, beyond any meaning
> We can assign to happiness.

The drifting sestina rhythms have now ceased, and the voice we hear is no longer directly expressing the human predicament but standing back from it in a tone of assessment. In this respect the passage resembles the corresponding sections of *Burnt Norton* and *East Coker*. Normally Part IIB begins in a

comparatively low-keyed tone after the intensity of the Part IIA lyric, then gradually works up to a new pitch of intensity of its own before it ends. With the exception of *Burnt Norton* IIB, each of them focusses to some extent on old age or on a vision or assessment of life from the perspective of old age, meditating on the meaning of the past. So here:

> It seems, as one becomes older,
> That the past has another pattern...

The sestina has looked at the experience of life from the perspective of immediate involvement in it, adrift upon the ocean of time; now we look back on it from another temporal angle, with the tentative assertion that a pattern is discernible - not a mere pattern of addition or of items in a sequence, but something else. The nature of this pattern is partly obscured (I think designedly, lest it sound glib) by the parenthetic expansions and self-interruptions of the speaking voice. At first we are clearer about what it is *not* than about what it is. We are denied the reassurance of an ascending pattern of progress. After all, our atavistic streak - hinted at in the account of the river - remains; we cannot disown it. Eliot is of course not rejecting evolutionary theory, but rejecting its false comforts of the kind that facilely confirm the notion of upward progress; and his attitude is hardly surprising in the midst of a war waged between some of the most "advanced" nations in history. But while we can accept the *idea*, the diction has the unfortunate flavour of the pedant - even perhaps of the intellectual snob. We tend for a moment to hear a lecture-room voice dismissing

a partial fallacy
Encouraged by superficial notions of evolution,
Which becomes, in the popular mind, a means of
disowning the past.

The problem here is that the generic "one" which opens the passage, the representative voice of ripe experience, finds itself in conflict with the voice that primly dismisses "the popular mind", and therefore becomes less representative after all. This seldom happens in the Quartets, and it makes for a strong contrast with the corresponding section of *East Coker*, where the poet has not suffered this confusion of voice-roles.

We cannot disown the past (just as Part V of this Quartet, dismissing fortune-tellers and the like, will assert that we cannot disown the future either). What the poet has called annunciations, whether moments of ecstatic illumination or of agony, are a permanent part of our experience. The "trilling wire in the blood", to use the imagery of *Burnt Norton* II, may sing, but it does so under "inveterate scars".

The rest of this section attempts to redefine the "pattern" of the past by pondering both kinds of "annunciation", the "moments of happiness" and, fourteen lines later, the "moments of agony". And it insists throughout that our personal past includes the past of others and of all humanity. Moreover, our past experience is constantly modified as we re-approach its meaning. The landscape of experience alters as we shift our position in it; the present, or the new experience, is constantly changing the past. The notion of Heraclitean flux, a strong undercurrent in the Quartets, reasserts itself: as we have read in *East Coker* II,

> the pattern is new in every moment
> And every moment is a new and shocking
> Valuation of all we have been.

From "The moments of happiness" to "many generations", the repetitive playing on the words "happiness", "experience" and "meaning" helps to enact the sensation of constantly changing relationships among counters of thought that are ostensibly the same. The effect is of a steady unravelling of a difficult line of thought, with the speaker clinging to the security of a few familiar terms as he pursues his exploratory statement.

> The moments of happiness - not the sense of well-
> being,
> Fruition, fulfilment, security or affection,
> Or even a very good dinner, but the sudden
> illumination -
> We had the experience but missed the meaning,
> And approach to the meaning restores the experience
> In a different form, beyond any meaning
> We can assign to happiness. I have said before
> That the past experience revived in the meaning
> Is not the experience of one life only
> But of many generations...

This idea - of the modification of the pattern as we approach the meaning - is enacted syntactically by the odd nature of the sentence, which begins with one grammatical subject ("moments of happiness"), clarifies it for two-and-a-half lines, pauses, then begins afresh with "We" as its new subject: "We had the experience but missed the meaning".

The middle lines of the passage just quoted describe what the poet and the reader have been doing ever since the initial "moment of happiness" in the rose-garden of *Burnt Norton*: re-approaching, through meditation on its meaning, the ineffable experience of the timeless, and undergoing it in different forms that transcend mere "happiness" in its limited senses of

well-being, "Fruition, fulfilment, security or affection,/Or even a very good dinner". The last phrase is clearly a deliberate, though perhaps misguided, piece of bathos intended to emphasise the difference between this mundane satisfaction and the really profound experience of timeless illumination.

The initial suggestion that "the past has another pattern" itself needs qualification in the light of what follows: it has not one but many patterns. What they have in common is that they are not describable in temporal terms alone, being dependent on the recognition of the extra-temporal dimension which is, after all, the source and origin of all "annunciations", whether ecstatic or painful.

The slightly pedantic note of "I have said before" is more justifiable than the one a few lines earlier: it is brief and undismissive, its diction is simple, and it reminds us that just as the pattern, or recognition of it, changes, so too do successive formulations of it. What Eliot is doing, more explicitly than usual, is making a cross-reference within the Quartets themselves, reminding his reader of an earlier statement of a similar idea in Part V of *East Coker*:

> As we grow older
> The world becomes stranger, the pattern more complicated
> Of dead and living. Not the intense moment
> Isolated, with no before and after,
> But a lifetime burning in every moment
> And not the lifetime of one man only
> But of old stones that cannot be deciphered.

The pattern is not limited to the experience of the individual life. So the point is now repeated, but the addition (from "not forgetting" onwards) takes a different form appropriate to the

preoccupations of this particular Quartet:

> the past experience revived in the meaning
> Is not the experience of one life only
> But of many generations - not forgetting
> Something that is probably quite ineffable:
> The backward look behind the assurance
> Of recorded history, the backward half-look
> Over the shoulder, towards the primitive terror.

The first three lines of this sound like an echo from Eliot's much earlier discussion of "the mind of Europe" in "Tradition and the Individual Talent". We are part of a communal mind: our experience contributes to its experience, and vice versa, in such a way that the pattern of experience (and therefore, in the essay, of literary monuments) is forever changing. What is added here is that we share not only in the creative experience of this communal mind, but also in its primitive impulses, its terrors and agonies, and cannot argue them away.

Strictly speaking, "the past experience revived in the meaning" actually signifies the past experience revived in the *process of re-approaching* the meaning - and it is this process of re-approach to the meaning of an initial experience that constitutes the unifying theme of *Four Quartets* - as the end of *Little Gidding* will make clear. There is a sense in which, like most great poetry, the Quartets teach us how to read them: and here, more explicitly than usual, we are reminded that the experience with which we are concerned is "not the experience of one life only" - T.S. Eliot's - "But of many generations". The cycle makes its own claim to that universality without which it would be merely confessional and far less interesting.

Without accepting the notion that *The Dry Salvages* is

deliberately bad poetry, we may grant that several passages in it are marred by uncertainty or misjudgment of tone, vocabulary or rhythm. And one of them is the line "Something that is probably quite ineffable". "Something that is" has an air of clumsiness about it, the tone is damaged by the rather trite sound-echo between "-ably" and "-able", and the juxtaposition of the tentative "probably" with the intensive "quite" jars us, giving the impression that the poet was trying to make a virtue of not being able to make up his mind. In any case, the clear articulateness of the lines that follow - about "The backward look" - is enough to persuade us that the subject was perfectly "effable" to Eliot. The passage might have been improved by the simple deletion of the questionable line. His point would remain the same: that the pattern of our experience of timeless moments includes our experience - usually only half-conscious - of primitive terror, of the primordial awe in the face of the numinous. This idea, of course, takes us back momentarily to the presentation in Part I of the river as a numinous presence whose awesome nature is usually forgotten but from time to time reasserts itself, as does the atavistic streak in the human psyche. It is also a reminder that in man's experience of the extratemporal, ecstasy and dread are closely linked, and linked in a manner defying the superficial reassurances of "recorded history" that we can know, master and improve ourselves and the world in which we live.

The sense of having at one's back a profound source of terror against which one's developed rationality offers no defence, is reminiscent of the Ancient Mariner's simile in Coleridge's poem

when he describes himself as

> Like one, that on a lonesome road
> Doth walk in fear and dread,
> And having once turned round walks on,
> And turns no more his head;
> Because he knows, a frightful fiend
> Doth close behind him tread.

We do not wish to look, but whether we look or not, we are aware, with an appalled fascination, of what lies behind us - "behind" spatially or temporally. The assurances of recorded history tend to encourage unfounded optimism about our evolutionary development, but in all generations the "backward look" intermittently counteracts this.

This emphasis on the backward glimpse towards the primitive terror provides a means of transition from discussing "moments of happiness" to discussing "moments of agony" which are, in their own way, equally enduring in the general pattern of our experience - or, to put it in temporal terms, "likewise permanent /With such permanence as time has". Such moments of agony, if we consider the earlier images of this Quartet, would include those "annunciations" of death, disaster and loss affecting sailors, fishermen, "anxious worried women" - all of whom have become symbols of humanity as a whole, their experiences of disaster the experiences of shipwreck in all our lives.

The passage that follows makes a sombre addition to our understanding of the "restored" experience: personal moments of anguish, like personal moments of illumination, acquire a kind of permanence by continuing to exert their influence on our timebound lives - and this is especially true of the sufferings of those close to us, which we can contemplate and assess more

clearly than our own.

> Now, we come to discover that the moments of agony
> (Whether, or not, due to misunderstanding,
> Having hoped for the wrong things or dreaded the
> wrong things,
> Is not in question) 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.

That this is a new thought in the Quartets is emphasised by the distinction between "I have said before..." and "Now, we come to discover...". Although the earlier Quartets do make generic statements, *The Dry Salvages* takes more notice not only of the common experience of humanity, but of the experience of other people as individuals. Whatever the specific causes of pain may be ("Having hoped for the wrong things or dreaded the wrong things,/Is not in question"), the real pain is as permanent as the real ecstasy. Its intensity may be fleeting (as in "moments") yet its significance is lasting. Again it is likely that Eliot's imagination was being stirred simultaneously by his own troubles and by the many individual disasters constituting, but not absorbed or reduced by, the communal sufferings of the war. The one sadly positive thing to be said about the suffering of others is that we can contemplate it more steadily and therefore understand ("appreciate") its permanent significance more clearly than that of our own suffering. In the phrase "the agony of others, nearly experienced" the ambiguity of "nearly" is a fruitful one: we *almost* ("nearly") experience directly, because we do experience *intimately* ("nearly"), the agony of others "Involving ourselves". The core of the pain is

not our own, yet we are deeply enough implicated in it to become aware of its continuity.

Here again we find a repetitive playing on words: "agony", "permanent" and "permanence", "of others", "our own". It gives the impression of a patient unravelling of the newly-discovered thought, and as we respond to this commitment *to* the thought, the poetry works well because - paradoxically - in the more superficial sense "The poetry does not matter". There is a tone of growing intensity from this point to the end of Part II. Contributing to it, after the heavy caesura at "time has", is the almost impatient continuation across the enjambement as the next phase of thought begins:

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

In the next sentence, "our own past" refers, of course, to the "own past" of each of us individually. Our own activities, with the focus they entail, modify our sense of the past pain we ourselves have suffered, whereas the suffering of those close to us remains - for us - unmodified by that focus.

> For our own past is covered by the currents of action,
> But the torment of others remains an experience
> Unqualified, unworn by subsequent attrition.

Eliot seems to be saying that in one sense it is easier to cope with our own pain than with the pain of those we love, since theirs is not as muted by our own continuing activity as ours is. We cannot transfer the anodyne of our own action to them. He is clearly presenting this not as a grumble against life, but simply as a poised statement of its ways of working.

The tide ("currents") of my action washes over the rock of my personal grief, offering relief by submerging it from time to time and gradually eroding it; but the grief of those whom I love remains uneroded by my action, precisely because it is my action and not theirs.

It is worth noticing how the image of tidal currents, and the implied image of a rock near water-level, prepare to bring us back from the comparative abstraction of the previous twenty five lines to the characteristic imagery of this Quartet. We have here an anticipation of the image in which Part II culminates: a rock in the sea, sometimes obscured yet permanently present.

The transition to this culminating image is now (though in an earlier draft (*CFQ* 135) it was not) afforded by a simple and profoundly moving single-line sentence, summing up what has just been said about the permanence of anguish in a mutable world: "People change, and smile: but the agony abides". It exerts a poignant epigrammatic force defying the cheap consolations of common speech, as will the remark in Part III that "time is no healer: the patient is no longer here". In the realm of time, change does not do away with the problem of pain any more than it negates the ecstasy of illumination.

Having arrived at this point, it seems natural - given the final text - that Eliot should continue "Time the destroyer is time the preserver" (although the naturalness of reintroducing the river at this point is less immediately apparent). The simple platitudes that time changes all, or destroys all, or heals all, are rejected in favour of a more complex statement.

> Time the destroyer is time the preserver,
> Like the river with its cargo of dead negroes, cows
> and chicken coops,
> The bitter apple and the bite in the apple.
> 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.

In these closing lines of Part II the rhythms become tauter, and the return from abstraction to imagery goes along with a quickening of pace towards the climactic statement of the last line. In each of the first three Quartets Part II, approaching its end, briefly recalls the imagery of Part I, alluding in *Burnt Norton* to the moment in the rose-garden, in *East Coker* to the houses and the dancers, and in *The Dry Salvages* to the river and the sea. In each case the reminiscent chord strikes us with a freshness derived from its new context: we approach the familiar image from a different angle. The river's sporadic rages and the sea's destructiveness have been linked to the rhythms of time-processes, and now they reappear with a force - though a confusing one, as we shall see - intensified by the meditations on the moments of happiness and of agony in human experience.

Time, like the Mississippi, is a destroyer yet also - with a certain grim irony - a preserver. What it preserves is images of destruction and loss, notably the primordial loss of mankind symbolized by the bitter apple (perhaps a self-conscious image, but an important one for the poet's purpose). In a kind of sardonic reversal of Isaac Watts's hymn, "Time like an ever-rolling stream" does *not* bear all its sons away, but washes

them down to us to flood our consciousness with its indifference to life and effort; they do not "fly forgotten as a dream": the agony abides.

Eliot's allusion to the apple of Eden reminds us, of course, that in his poem the concern is not primarily with space and nature but with time and human history. But as we move suddenly from the river of Huckleberry Finn to the colder seascape of the Dry Salvages, a new image breaks upon us: "the ragged rock in the restless waters". Unlike the generalised rocky shores of *Marina*, and unlike the Dry Salvages themselves, it is a single rock. Ragged but monumental, it may act as a navigational guide in calm weather. But "in the sombre season/Or the sudden fury" - in the tempests of man's experience - it is recognizable as unchanging. And here we have a problem in interpretation.

That there is a problem is obvious from the bewildering variety of ways in which this rock has been glossed: as the Church (Blamires 101), as "perfected meaning" (Smith 280), as the love of God, Being as distinct from Becoming, the Fall represented by the "moments of agony" a few lines earlier, a terrifying "permanent purpose and reality", an anguished awareness of the weakness of the human condition (respectively Jones, Wheelwright, Drew, Preston, Cahill; listed in Cahill 178-179).

The confusion was probably unwittingly created by Eliot himself when he *inserted* into an earlier draft the four lines from "People change" to "bite in the apple". The introduction of the two lines about the river, between "currents of action" and the "ragged rock", caused an abrupt switch from sea imagery

("currents") to river and, even more abruptly, back to sea. Previously the draft had read

> But the torment of others is an experience
> Unqualified, unworn by subsequent attrition;
> And the ragged rock in the moving waters... (*CFQ* 135)

Here the rock is fairly clearly a metaphor for *the experience of torment* which remains "unworn". But, as the last five lines of Part II suggest, the rock, though remaining ever the same, appears to us in different ways at different times: sometimes obscured, sometimes almost disregarded, sometimes a kind of navigational marker: only in adverse and violent conditions do we recognize its essential permanence, and then (though the final phrase does not spell this out) it is seen afresh as an object of terror, renewing our recognition of the abiding problem of suffering and evil.

The reading offered here is supported by the echo in "what it always was" of "permanent/With such permanence as time has", applying to the "moments of agony" - especially our experience of the agony of others. But Eliot, coming back to this passage in the course of composition, obviously felt a compulsion to re-introduce the river-motif from his first movement into the close of his second movement. This, evocative though it is, has combined with the potential ambivalence of the last half-line ("is what it always was") to confuse the issue. The final phrase lends itself to being heard as a very *different* sort of echo suggesting the doxology, the permanence of God and the stability of the Church (long associated with the Rock through biblical metaphor) - hence the "positive" but surely misguided readings of it among those listed above. It is easy to expect

assertions of permanence to be reassuringly positive in their implications. Yet in *The Dry Salvages* much that is stressed as ancient and lasting is presented as terrifying and challenging rather than reassuring, like the ground swell of Part I (also described in terms of the doxology) with its anticipatory hints of calamitous annunciation. Peter Milward's is one of the clearer explications of this image, and corresponds with what we can deduce, from the drafts, of the poet's intentions:

> The rock symbolizes the permanence of the agony beneath the fluctuations of earthly life and the abiding nature of original sin in fallen man. (150)

This - barring the explicit emphasis on original sin - is also consistent with the interpretations of Cahill (mentioned above) and of Reibetanz, who sees it as representing the memory of past agony that abides:

> when the seas are calm, we may choose to ignore the rock and think of it only as a memorial to pain we have come through and gone beyond....at times, we use the rock to find our bearings, and in remembering past pain,we can steer a meaningful course in the present. But "in the sombre season/Or the sudden fury, [the rock] is what it always was," a still agonizing part of the currents of life, a reality we cannot escape and are driven against by the "restless waters" of time. (119-120)

In draft, Eliot ended Part II with the added phrase "Now about the future" (*CFQ* 134). Later he rightly deleted it as damaging to the poetic force of his ending; nevertheless, the fact that he considered it offers us a useful pointer to the emphasis of Part III, as well as retrospective confirmation that IIB has been essentially a meditation on the meaning of the past.

Part III

Part III opens on a slow, pondering note about the relation of past and future, a subject that pervades the rest of it.

> I sómetimes wónder if thàt is what Krí́shna méant -
> Among óther things - or óne way of pútting the sáme thing:
> That the fúture is a fàded sóng, a Ròyal Róse or a làvender spráy
> Of wístful régret for thòse who are nót yet hére to regrèt,
> Préssed between yèllow léaves of a bóok that has nèver been ópened.
> And the wày úp is the wày dówn, the wày fórward is the wày báck.
> You cánnot face it stéadily, but thís thing is súre,
> That tíme is nò héaler: the pátient is no lònger hére.

The first two lines are apparently quite as prosaic in tone as the opening of *East Coker* IIB: here their function seems to be to throw into relief the sudden surprising allusion to Krishna, and then to ease the link between that and the equally surprising images that immediately follow as descriptions of the future. The peculiarly leisurely pace is ensured by the pauses and by the presence, within a few lines, of several secondary stresses among the usual four main ones, extending the line to as many as eight in all. After the accumulated intensity at the end of Part II, we feel we are again listening to the poet in (at first) an unbuttoned mood as he speculates with a sober relish on the paradoxical nature of the future as a focus for nostalgia, using the time-honoured images associated with nostalgia for the past.

The first obvious question to ask is what is meant by "that" in "that is what Krishna meant". The colon at the end of the second line indicates that it points forward to what is about to be said. Does it also refer to something just said in Part II? (If so, it is at first difficult to determine what.) Or

does "that" really mean "this", pointing not retrospectively to Part II but only anticipatively to the next few lines? If the latter, it would perhaps be fair to accuse Eliot of using "that" where he ought to have used "this", and of importing unnecessary ambiguity into an already elusive context. Looking at the lines that follow, we might also be inclined to defy him to tell us where Krishna ever said anything quite as apparently whimsical. But it is worth reserving judgment and waiting for the ideas to clarify themselves as the passage continues.

The poet claims to "wonder" if what he is saying, or is about to say, restates part of Krishna's message to Arjuna in the *Bhagavad-Gita* - implying, of course, that it does. Why, then, the tentative note of speculation? This is explicable in what might be called strategic terms. Despite his air of self-communing, he is here concerned to woo his readers into entertaining a connection of ideas that must - and certainly do - at first sight look distinctly odd, indeed bewildering. Tonal tact makes speculation preferable to immediate strong assertion if this "joint" is to be lubricated. As in his later plays Eliot presented Christian ideas indirectly in secular language or by adapting the myths of ancient Greek drama, so here he seems to be following a similar method of indirection: western images of romantic nostalgia are tentatively aligned to the Hindu ideas attributed to Krishna, and these in turn - towards the end of Part III - become the means of expressing views that Eliot sees as both western and eastern, indeed both Christian and universal, but that need unusual formulation to make them

explicit and at the same time forcefully fresh.

In Part IIB he had remarked that "Time the destroyer is time the preserver", and meditated on the meaning of past experiences of happiness and the permanence of past experiences of pain. Time, we may say, is a destroyer, yet it preserves the effects of "annunciations" of both kinds - of illumination and anguish. Part III alters the focus, but the subject is not fundamentally different.

The difference in focus between Parts IIB and III can be summed up in four ways:

> 1. The one looked at the preservation and meaning of the past in the present, whereas the other emphasises the illusory distinction between past and future, at the same time - paradoxically enough - stressing the notion of perpetual change.
>
> 2. The characteristic pronouns of IIB were "we" and "our" used generically of the human race, while the dominant generic pronoun of III is "you".
>
> 3. In keeping with this, in most of IIB the tone was one of exploring feelings, while in III - after the tentative opening - we have a tone of exhortation, instruction and advice.
>
> 4. IIB was couched largely in abstract language, building up to vivid imagery just before its end; III, on the other hand, proceeds mainly by means of extended images of travelling, out of which more abstract generalities about time, identity, motive and action are allowed to emerge.

I have said that the focus alters yet the subject is fundamentally the same. This subject is the nature of experience in time, and the illusion that past, present and future are quite distinct. In a sense they are; yet the burden of both sections is that, properly understood, they are not as distinct as they look. Past experience, however modified in form, is ever with us in the present (IIB); and the future is not something into

which we escape from the past, since it is already in some sense with us - indeed, "the time of death is every moment", and our actions and motives ought to be geared to that fact (III). Only so, in the proper state of detachment from the limitations of the immediate, can we really live fully in the present, instead of being constantly strung between past and future. And perhaps *that* (taken as a whole) is "what Krishna meant": that time, and our life in it, can be fully grasped only from a perspective outside time, in which destruction and preservation, past and future, motive and action are no longer in conflict, where they can be reconciled in simultaneity - even while we continue to live as children of time - since we are also children of eternity.

To return to the opening of Part III: the initial account of Krishna's meaning takes the paradoxical form of describing the future as if it were the past, of asserting

> That the future is a faded song, a Royal Rose or 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.

To see the future in this light is to be independent of both past and future and to look at it from an eternal present. Eliot seems to have deliberately chosen cliché images of western romantic nostalgia, precisely because, despite the oddity of the context in which they find themselves, they communicate *as* images so readily to the ordinary reader.[6] Into their "definition" of the future they carry all the emotive associations of longing for, or preservation of, the past. The future,

like the past, may be permanent, merely waiting for the moving "now" to reach it (though this no longer raises the problems of freewill implied at the opening of *Burnt Norton*). We can even think in terms of regret, and the symbols of regret, for "those who are not yet here to regret": the last two words, suitably ambiguous, signifying either "for us to have regrets about them" or "for them to feel regrets themselves". (And the objects of their regret may even, as they one day look back, include us.) As Grover Smith puts it,

> If all time is simultaneous, the future is like the past in being real but inaccessible through time; in such terms "the way forward" resembles "the way back". (281)

And, correspondingly, "the way up" (if we think of time in quasi-spatial terms) "is the way down". So the Heraclitean paradox first introduced as the second epigraph to *Burnt Norton* finds its place in this context, and through it the images attain a metaphysical status that makes them more than merely the whimsy of wistfulness that they at first appear.

If from one point of view all time is simultaneous, it must follow logically that time changes nothing and so can heal nothing: "time is no healer". Just as "human kind/Cannot bear very much reality" (*Burnt Norton* I), so human kind must find it difficult to accept this truth: "You cannot face it steadily".

But what looks like a neat logical conclusion is at this point complicated by a *different* reason for the assertion that time cannot heal: there is no patient to heal, "the patient is no longer here". (This reminds us fleetingly of the "funeral" of *East Coker* III at which "there is no one to bury".) It

appears, then, that time *can* after all change something by removing the sufferer out of the range of time's own capacity to heal, which remains therefore in a perpetual state of unfulfilled potential. The "you" who might have been healed is constantly changing in the course of the journey through time, so the concept of the "patient" lacks the stasis of identity by which healing needs to be measured. We have then, in sharp juxtaposition, two totally opposed views of time and change: that nothing ever changes, and that everything constantly does.

It is arguable that Eliot is here being far too clever for his own good, that he is manufacturing cheap truisms into equally cheap paradoxes. But the images that follow help to vindicate the thought by the emotive responses they elicit; and he is, after all, indirectly asserting that, in the fullest sense of the word, "healing" of timebound humanity comes not from within time itself, but only from another dimension, from outside time altogether. In any case, we may add as a corollary, the logical contradictions of opposing views of time cannot be reconciled except from the viewpoint of eternity.

By this stage the tentative pondering quality of the opening lines has quietly disappeared, and the rest of Part III unfolds in a tone of firm assertion, indeed of instruction. Its images correspond to those of *Burnt Norton* III and *East Coker* III by focussing on travel and, through it, leading up to a presentation of the "negative way". *Burnt Norton* III contrasted the dwelling at the "still point" with the emergence of time-ridden humanity from the London Tube, and ended with the invitation to

descend into the illuminating darkness of the soul. *East Coker* III contrasted the vision of universal mortality descending into the realm of death (as if into the Tube) with the stillness of the soul in the "darkness of God", and ended with the invitation to "go by the way of dispossession". Now *The Dry Salvages* III contemplates humanity travelling through time with an illusion of progress, and ends by asserting that the only true progress comes from action undertaken in a state of proper detachment.

The rest of Part III falls naturally into three divisions: the image of the train journey, the image of the sea voyage and, emerging out of it, the exhortation to "fare forward" in a state of detachment from calculating motive. We shall look at each of these in turn.

> When the train starts, and the passengers are settled
> To fruit, periodicals and business letters
> (And those who saw them off have left the platform)
> Their faces relax from grief into relief,
> To the sleepy rhythm of a hundred hours.
> 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...

The journey through life is presented in the extended metaphor of a journey by train, this time not confined to the Tube but evoking the wider horizons that characterise the imagery of *The Dry Salvages*. The fruit, periodicals and business letters at first suggest a range no more extensive than a middle-class foray into the Home Counties; but almost imperceptibly the journey assumes larger proportions through the platform farewells attended by modest grief, and by "the sleepy rhythm of a hundred hours" - enough, if we are momentarily literal-minded,

for a trans-European express.

At the risk of gratuitous allegorizing: those who have launched the passengers on their way, "who saw them off [and] have left the platform", sound a little like the parents who set us on the rails and then disappear from sight as other preoccupations claim us. The passengers' faces soon take on the expression of putting the past behind them and adapting themselves to the rhythms - largely passive - of the journey. But then we switch from third person to second person, as the passengers are suddenly accosted by the poet's voice reminding them that their journey is, in temporal terms, an illusory one: they are not really putting the past behind them, nor are they entering into a different future - since past and future, as suggested earlier, can be thought of in virtually interchangeable terms.

The injunction to "Fare forward" amounts to an exhortation to live in the present, which means being neither dismissive of the past nor over-eager for the future. Not to live thus in the present is tantamount to not being ourselves, since our present selves, not our future ones, are, in the realm of time, the only ones we have. This, incidentally, prepares us for the claim twenty lines later that "the time of death" - and, for that matter, the time of life - is every moment. It also endorses the earlier denial that time is a healer, since the self to be healed no longer exists and has been replaced by an everchanging series of new selves. We are reminded of the remarks of Heraclitus that all things are in flux, and that you cannot put your foot into the same stream twice (Fragments 12 &

49a, Freeman 25 & 28).

On the journey, then, the point of departure and the destination are equally irrelevant to the business of journeying itself; the stasis implied by the bland word "station" and the flavour of purpose contained in "terminus" both play their part in the gently ironic effect. The "now" consists only of every moment "While the narrowing rails slide together behind you": an infinite series (as Zeno's mathematics would claim) of apparently identical instants implicit in the visual impression of each rail-width of our present view converging into the perspective-point of the past. The rapid forward motion is suggested by the anapaestic beat of the stresses in this line, just as the sideways swaying of nodding passengers keeps time "To the sleepy rhythm of a hundred hours". While the train journey is no more than metaphorical, Eliot's eye and ear for detail ensure that it is vividly realised.

The same applies to the sea voyage. The different, more vibrating rhythm of the liner is immediately conveyed in "drumming"; and the image this time of the widening wake, in direct contrast to the narrowing rails, serves an added purpose. Two lines apart we have the phrases "slide together behind you" and "widens behind you"; and Eliot, by exploiting the semantic versatility - both temporal and spatial - of "behind", makes us see the similarity of past and future from the perspective of the present. On the train we are at the base of a triangle from which we look back to the apex of the past; on the ship we are at the apex itself, and the triangle widens behind us. The

visual images themselves, by *both* presenting what is spatially "past" in opposite forms derived from visual actuality, prepare us to do what the "descanting" voice will urge upon us: to "consider the future/And the past with an equal mind".

> And on the deck of the drumming liner
> Watching the furrow that widens behind you,
> You shall not think 'the past is finished'
> Or 'the future is before us'.
> At nightfall, in the rigging and the aerial,
> Is a voice descanting (though not to the ear,
> The murmuring shell of time, and not in any language)
> 'Fare forward, you who think that you are voyaging;
> You are not those who saw the harbour
> Receding, or those who will disembark.
> Here between the hither and the farther shore
> While time is withdrawn, consider the future
> And the past with an equal mind...'

I have briefly drawn attention to the exploitation of the simultaneously temporal and spatial referents of the word "behind" as it appears in this passage. Obviously this is one example among many. Prepositions and adverbs primarily of space-relationships often also function metaphorically with reference to time, and vice versa; and some are so commonly associated with both that it is hard to say which is primary. The number of such words in this passage is considerable, including "forward", "back", "before", "behind", "between"; and even the word "past", usable as noun, adjective, preposition or adverb, has this chameleon quality, which influences us subconsciously even while it is normally used as a noun only. The cumulative effect of such words, in conjunction with the images of travel, is to encourage our minds to shift easily between thinking in terms of space and thinking in terms of time. The process is natural enough, since we cannot really conceive of the one except in terms of the other; but the deftness with

which Eliot exploits this for his purpose is worth noticing.

In the course of Part III the images have themselves undergone a shift affecting our imaginative response. From the comparatively close and intimate perspective of the spray pressed between the leaves of a book, we have been taken to the wider one of the train journey, and then to the wider one still of the ocean voyage with the breezy poop-deck and the ethereal voice "in the rigging and the aerial". The sense of release into wider spaces encourages us to respond readily to the injunction to "Fare forward" in the spiritual sense, since the one kind of movement becomes an implicit analogue of the other, even while the poet's more explicit purpose is to *distinguish* between true spiritual voyaging and "illusory" spatial or temporal travel. The progression of the images has itself persuaded you, the reader, to become one of those "who think that you are voyaging". A kind of hypnotic effect operates.

Similarly, as already noted, the pronouns have undergone a quiet modification: the image of the train journey began by referring to the passengers in the third person, but at "Fare forward, travellers!" moved into the second person, which from that point on dominates the rest of Part III, allowing for the intensification of tone in the wishes and injunctions directly addressed to us. Meanwhile, the poet's voice yields to the impersonal "voice descanting" over the ship, which in turn yields (by quoting it) to the voice of Krishna himself: this steadily increases the authority of the utterance while guarding the reader from feeling personally badgered by the

poet. All these transitions work together to woo our acquiescence; nor does awareness of the method immunise us from the effect. We can even accept without protest the biblical flavour of "You shall not", since the sensory images of the ship's rhythm and movement carry us along in a state of passivity like that of the passengers themselves.

Repetition and patterning of thought also reinforce what I have called the hypnotic effect. A kind of chiastic symmetry links the train and ship phases: in the case of the train, we move from departure to mid-journey; then we move to the ship in mid-voyage before harking back to the memory of "the harbour/ Receding". And elements of the one phase are adapted, reiterated and confirmed in the other, as appears in the parallelism of

> While the narrowing rails slide together behind you

with

> Watching the furrow that widens behind you,

of

> not escaping from the past
> Into different lives, or into any future

with

> You shall not think 'the past is finished'
> Or 'the future is before us'.

Similar parallelism links

> You are not the same people who left that station
> Or who will arrive at any terminus

with

> You are not those who saw the harbour
> Receding, or those who will disembark.

Added to these is of course the repetition of what becomes a refrain-like phrase, "Fare forward". The contexts of its

repetition cause "forward" gradually to shed its temporal and spatial connotations and to assume qualitative spiritual ones, so crystallising the main theme of Part III: the journey into consciousness. Apparent progress in space and time becomes an ironic contrast to true progress in relation to the spaceless and timeless. We are reminded of Plato's distinction between the worlds of imperfect shadows and of ideal forms.

This is why the ethereal voice speaks without language and not to the ear. Language and "ear" are attributes of the timebound world, which is less real than the other: hence the reference to the ear as the "murmuring shell of time", offering a conch-like illusion of new sound. Much of the peculiarity of *Four Quartets* arises from its attempts to pierce beyond these limitations to that *inner* ear attuned to the timeless; familiar language and images strain beyond themselves to become "a voice descanting" in another mode altogether, like that attributed to "the communication/Of the dead" in *Little Gidding* - to become "tongued with fire beyond the language of the living", while ordinary time as we know it is "withdrawn".

I have mentioned how the perspectives widen from the pressed spray to the train and then the ocean. This development encourages subconscious expectation of a further widening again into a realm beyond space and time, and this is what we find even as, paradoxically, we focus on to a single moment.

"Here between the hither and the farther shore" is in one sense where we are on life's journey, and therefore our only reality in time; yet it also reminds us of that state of

suspension-in-time felt by ocean-liner passengers; yet again, this crossing of life's ocean is, in the scale of eternity, no more than the crossing on Charon's ferry, a moment where past and future are brought together as we approach the "farther shore". (Archaic use of "hither" and "farther" as adjectives qualifying "shore" creates a hint of what we may call the mythological undercurrent.) The state of journeying *through* time has thus been quietly but remarkably refocussed into a moment, a point at which time is withdrawn, where the poised, "equal" mind, shedding the illusion of progress, can become sufficiently detached from temporal action and inaction to entertain past and future together in the all-encompassing present. In this state it can respond at last to Krishna's timeless message as presented by the "descanting" voice (which continues to speak until four lines from the end).

> '...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.
> O voyagers, O seamen,
> You who come to port, and you whose bodies
> Will suffer the 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.

Like, but less obviously than, the third parts of *Burnt Norton* and *East Coker*, this one gathers itself into slightly tauter rhythms as it approaches its end: the lines are by and large swifter and more broken, punctuated by apostrophe, and

not always prolonged to the usual extent of four full stresses. Again like the third parts of the previous Quartets, it leaves behind the images of physical travel to focus, with growing intensity, upon the consciousness divested of worldly attachments and motives: that is, upon the "negative way".

Only in such a state of detachment, it seems, can humanity receive the fulness of insight to enable it to go ahead and act rightly - which is to act without ulterior motive, without thought for result or reward. In *Murder in the Cathedral*, Thomas's encounter with the Fourth Tempter showed him this: that to do even "the right deed for the wrong reason" (*Plays* 30) is to make it the wrong deed. In *The Dry Salvages* Part III, the formulation of the thought is indebted neither to the tradition of Becket's martyrdom nor, as in *East Coker* III, to the Christian spirituality of St John of the Cross, but - in a new departure adumbrated in the opening line - to the teaching of the *Bhagavad-Gita*. Once again the comparative universality of reference in this third Quartet is supported by the choice of image and allusion.

The entire framework of the *Gita* is determined by questions of action or inaction. Arjuna, bound by his earthly duty to make war on his kinsmen in the opposing army, hesitates to do so and presents his dilemma to the incarnate god Krishna, who is disguised as his charioteer. At this moment "which is not of action or inaction" Krishna offers his answers which constitute the revelation enshrined in the *Gita* as a whole. He urges Arjuna to engage in the fight, distinguishing between right action (pursued in a state of detachment) and wrong action

(undertaken with impure regard to results). Although freedom from action is the ultimate good, the way to it is not through shirking of action: action in this world is necessary, and the state of mind in which it is undertaken is what purifies it.

> Not by refraining from action does man attain freedom from action. Not by mere renunciation does he attain supreme perfection. For not even for a moment can a man be without action. Helplessly all are driven to action by the forces born of Nature. He who withdraws himself from actions, but ponders on their pleasures in his heart, he is under a delusion and is a false follower of the Path. But great is the man who, free from attachments, and with a mind ruling its powers in harmony, works on the path of Karma Yoga, the path of consecrated action. Action is greater than inaction: perform therefore thy task in life. Even the life of the body could not be if there were no action. The world is in the bonds of action, unless the action is consecration. Let thy actions then be pure, free from the bonds of desire. (3:4-9)

And a little earlier Krishna has said:

> Set thy heart upon thy work, but never on the reward thereof. Work not for a reward; but never cease to do thy work. Do thy work in the peace of Yoga and, free from selfish desires, be not moved in success or failure. (2:47-48)

Eliot condenses and adapts this into the simple and telling

> And do not think of the fruit of action.
> Fare forward.

Elsewhere, Krishna talks about the state of one's mind at the point of death.

> And he who at the end of his time leaves his body thinking of me, he in truth comes to my being: he in truth comes unto me. For on whomsoever one thinks at the last moment of life, unto him in truth he goes, through sympathy with his nature. Think of me therefore at all times; remember thou me and fight. (8:5-7)

Raymond Preston presents the same passage in slighty abridged form, and with a clearer bearing upon the corresponding lines in Eliot's poem, as follows:

> On whatever sphere of being the mind of man may be intent at the time of death, to that he goes...having been used to ponder on it. Therefore at all times remember me; and engage in battle. (44)

Eliot's lines clearly indebted to this passage are:

> "on whatever sphere of being
> The mind of a man may be intent
> At the time of death" –

then he breaks off the quotation and the descanting voice continues with an adaptation of the thought that follows:

> that is the one action
> (And the time of death is every moment)
> Which shall fructify in the lives of others:

not an exact reflection of Krishna's message, which emphasises the possibility of union with him after death, breaking the cycle of otherwise compelled incarnations. (This, of course, is foreign to Eliot's metaphysical scheme, and he deliberately alters it to emphasise instead the thought that the moment of death is potentially every moment.) Our thoughts need to be focussed on purity of detached action while we undertake action in time – otherwise we cannot "Fare forward" in consciousness, but only in the parody of it which is travel in time and space. And to say that the time of death is *every* moment is in effect to say that every moment is, properly understood, eternal: every moment may be an annunciation, and to see it as such is the only way to live in the realm of time, because it is also living, in another sense, outside the realm of time. Faring forward in this way constitutes the only real journey into consciousness.

The thoughts offered here are prefaced by

> At the moment which is not of action or inaction
> You can receive this:

this contrasts with the earlier assertion about time's being no healer, that "You cannot face it steadily"; this time "You *can* receive this". The lines between these remarks have helped to put us into a frame of mind to receive the later proposition without protest. We have gradually become conscious of the distinction between journeying through time and space on the one hand, and journeying into another kind of awareness on the other. The images of travel, and the comments attached to them, have made this possible.

Clearly the closing passage of Part III is the equivalent of the "descent-into-the-dark" passages of *Burnt Norton* and *East Coker*, the equivalent of the negative way. Preston makes this clear by his paraphrase of Krishna's message:

> The way of salvation...lies in action...performed in such complete freedom from personal desires or interests that it is equivalent to the abstention from action of the contemplative life. (44)

Some verbal and syntactic peculiarities in the lines just looked at warrant further comment. One is that Eliot's interruption of Krishna's words makes for an apparent *non sequitur*: "on whatever sphere of *being*/...that is the one *action*" (italics added). A thought-connection has been left unstated, otherwise we should be at a loss as to what constitutes action at all in this context. The implication, of course, is that the very intentness of the mind upon a sphere of being - in this case, upon action performed in detachment - is *itself* a form of action, whatever other, more physical, actions we are simultaneously involved in. And as Cleo Kearns (248) points out, the word "intent" captures the senses of both *purpose* and

concentration involved in this detachment.

Another detail inviting comment is the word-play urging the hearers not to think of the *fruit* of action, while they have just been told what kind of action will *fructify* in the lives of others. This deliberately emphasises the paradox that right action will bear the right fruit provided one does not think wrongly in *terms* of the fruit. But Eliot also alters Krishna's point by inserting the phrase "in the lives of others", and this reduces the sharpness of the paradox. We are not to think of the fruit of our action in our own lives; then it will bear fruit in the lives of others. Krishna's corresponding words to Arjuna about the state of the mind at the point of death had nothing at all to do with its fruits in the lives of others. Eliot's alteration tends to Christianise the Hindu thought of the original by directing attention away from the destination of the individual soul and focussing it, albeit indirectly, upon the "communion of saints".

He then turns to apostrophise all voyagers and seamen (and by implication ourselves, adrift on the sea of time) as

> You who come to port, and you whose bodies
> Will suffer the trial and judgement of the sea,

two clauses that resonate with eschatological suggestiveness. On the literal level their meaning is clear enough; on the metaphorical - to which we have long been attuned - they hint at death (Spenser's "port") as well as at the dangers and hardships of living and dying, undergoing testing and judgment. Then he adds, as if to be even more comprehensive, "Or whatever event" - "event" here clearly exploiting its common and its Latinate

meanings, "incident, accident" and "outcome, issue, result". Whatever the event, "this is your real destination".

One might excusably ask what is the precise antecedent of "this". The implication seems to be that our real destination, the goal of life's journey, is not to think in terms of any destination in time, but to act in detachment in every moment in such a way that our action will bear fruit in the lives of others. The moral point is made rather indirectly, and here again we have evidence of a habit that offends many of Eliot's readers, since they feel that he has furtive designs upon their consciences. It is true enough that we have been hearing a sermon of sorts; but now the voice that we hear addresses us as if we were not a congregation being exhorted but a band of Odyssean mariners. Certainly the dominant images of *The Dry Salvages* align it more easily with the epic world than do those of the other Quartets. At the same time, there is a poignancy in the mode of address to the voyagers and seamen, implying a physical passivity that in itself would convey a pessimistic view of life, if it were not for the counterbalancing force of spiritual action.

Some of those who dislike the implied world-view of the Quartets protest at their alleged pessimism (or, as Leavis repeatedly called it, desperation). This surely reflects a failure to read them with sufficient attention to their full import. Any ostensible pessimism about life in time is more than answered by the claims for its value and significance in relation to the timeless. One can understand opposition to the world-view itself; but one might expect objections to be raised

against an excess of *optimism* rather than the reverse, since the affirmations of redeeming transcendence are so strong.

The statements made about the fruits of detached action take us back to a final reminder of Krishna's admonition to Arjuna on the field of battle - an incidental reminder, too, that the field of human action, whether seen as a sea-voyage or a land-battle, is subject to the same eternal laws. And the final salutation to the voyagers (or, for that matter, warriors) telescopes into itself the essence of what Part III has been about: the wish that others should "fare well" implies a certain *passivity* on their part in relation to their destiny, not unlike "good luck", and is accordingly rejected in favour of the more genuine imperative to "fare forward" - one which, as we have seen, has gradually shed its spatial and temporal connotations and assumed instead those of a journey into spiritual awareness of the eternal quality of every moment. There is therefore a considerable richness of meaning condensed into the apparently simple closing lines:

Not fare well,
But fare forward, voyagers.

Part IV

Part IV is, as always in the Quartets, a lyric – but this time not so much a meditation as an invocation. For the first and indeed the only time in the cycle, the lines take the form of prayer or, more accurately, of an invocation appealing for the Virgin's prayers. She is asked to intercede for all whose lives have to do with the sea. One of her many titles is Maris Stella, star of the sea, and the invocation is therefore apt in traditional terms.

Referring to her shrine on a promontory, Eliot seems to have had in mind a specific statue of her watching protectively over ships and sailors. This had long reminded me of the statue overlooking Marseilles harbour (from the church of Notre Dame de la Gard), despite its lack of Massachusetts connections. So I was pleased to discover that Eliot, in an exchange with the Rev. William T. Levy, had identified this as the "shrine" he had in mind. Yet it is clearly the universality of the plea, not the precise locality of the shrine, that matters. When Levy expressed his surprise at his failure to identify the church and statue alluded to, Eliot significantly replied:

> You accepted it as a class of churches, and were not thinking of a particular church. And that is the right way to think of it. It is fortuitous in our case that I as writer and you as reader of these lines happened to know and react identically to the same place – and then we had to know each other for me to affirm it. (*CFQ* 141)

Notre Dame de la Gard can be accepted, then, as a detail of incidental interest, though not of critical importance.[7]

After the multiplicity of earlier images of voyaging and the hazards of the sea, this invocation acquires a poignant serenity

despite the fact that those dangers, far from being forgotten, are here as vividly present as before. The lyric represents the achieved - not passive - resignation to the timeless that characterised also the fourth parts of *Burnt Norton* and *East Coker*. In them the experiences of the "still point" and of redemptive suffering were focussed through the pronouns "we" and "us", generic yet limited, pointing to those with explicit awareness of such experiences. Here in *The Dry Salvages*, in keeping with its more universal scope, the dominant pronouns are "those" and "them": the lyric is an act of intercession for the many, regardless of how they interpret their own experience. It is implicitly for all mankind on the sea of time, as well as more explicitly for fishermen and merchant sailors and, we can safely add, for wartime navies.

Each stanza is governed by a pleading imperative which, by its repetition, fulfils a unifying function analogous to that of rhyme: "Pray for", "Repeat a prayer also on behalf of", "Also pray for". Intercession is asked first for those in action of any kind on ships ("For those in peril on the sea" - it would be surprising if Eliot did not have the familiar hymn in mind); then for the bereaved womenfolk of those lost at sea (who take our minds back to the "anxious worried women" of Part I); and finally for the dead themselves - those who have died at sea or directly as its victims.

The date of the poem makes it more than likely that the last two stanzas refer, among others, to the members of the navy lost in action, and to their families. This lends it a certain

quality of epitaph as well as of intercession. The last three Quartets were all written during the war, and the images reflect Eliot's mind running in turn on the army (in *East Coker* V), on the navy (in *The Dry Salvages* IV), and on the air force (in *Little Gidding* II and IV) - in accordance with the elemental symbolism appropriate to each. For readers of 1941 it would certainly not have been coincidence that Krishna's advice to Arjuna was offered just before battle; and the voyagers and seamen to whom it is passed on in Part III of *The Dry Salvages* include those "who come to port, and you whose bodies/Will suffer the trial and judgement of the sea". We are of course quite free to continue thinking of civilian fishermen off the Massachusetts coast near the rocks called the Dry Salvages, but the image of the sea has by this time expanded to include far more than them alone.

Eliot begins directly with "Lady", an apostrophe slightly startling in its blandness - a blandness a little like that of the otherwise far more startling opening to *Ash-Wednesday* II. The tone seems to be one of familiar reverence that quietly puts aside the intensity of the recent address to the voyagers and looks at them instead from a fresh perspective, contemplating their dangers with realism but also with the serenity of faith. The entire address to the Virgin is tenderly austere in manner.

The point from which intercession is offered is, by implication, the shore. Our imaginations have returned from the liner in mid-ocean to where we can, like the Virgin's statue, look out from a promontory in an attitude of protective but unworried

concern.

> Lády, whose shríne stánds on the prómontory,
> Práy for áll thóse who are in shíps, those
> Whose búsiness hás to dó with físh, and
> Thóse concérned with every láwful tráffic
> And thóse who condúct them.

This stanza, like each of the others, maintains for four lines the norm of the four-stress pattern, ending with a line of only two stresses which gives it an apt quality of restraint and slight formality. The lines generally end on unstressed syllables or secondary stresses, and the tendency to feminine endings affects the tone: it is grave, even a little melancholy, but uninsistent. There is an air of resignation to higher powers, a sober calmness that suits the mode of address.

The first line contains, in common with the formal structure of many prayers and collects, an adjectival clause mentioning those attributes of the power being addressed that are appropriate to the petition offered: "whose shrine stands on the promontory". It is in her specific capacity as sea-watcher and protector of sailors that the Virgin is being invoked. This attribution is followed, in traditional fashion, by the petition itself: "Pray for...". Throughout most of the Quartets we are accustomed to hearing the poet speaking either to himself or, directly or by implication, to us. Here he is speaking *for* us (however indirectly) to a being never addressed in any other part of the cycle; and none of it is ever addressed specifically to God. The form of the invocation needs to be both formal and simple enough for us to include ourselves imaginatively in it; and the blend of formality and simplicity is one of the triumphs

of the lyric voice at this point.

"Pray for all those who are in ships": the phrasing is at once decorous and slightly naive. The same is true of "those/ Whose business has to do with fish". It is the language not of common or of sophisticated speech, but rather of the simple, slightly angular man being consciously reverential. A distant echo of biblical phrasing ("They that go down to the sea in ships" (*Psalms* 107:23)) mingles with the tender banality of "Whose business has to do with fish" – the kind of mingling that sometimes takes place in extempore prayer where traditional formulas and mundane locutions coexist. Another register enters with "Those concerned with every lawful traffic", but the blend is again discernible: quasi-legal or quasi-commercial language is crossed with the rhythms of the Book of Common Prayer. (And "traffic" in the old sense suggests trade and merchandise, but also does duty for any kind of business or activity, allowing for an overall effect of timelessness.) Meanwhile the subtle compound is governed by the formal syntactic structure that shapes it: "all those who...those/Whose...Those concerned with ...And those who...". Sober decorum therefore contains and controls the utterance as a whole.

The stanzas that follow depend less for their effect on this blend of reverential decorum and mildly angular simplicity. The lyric becomes more deliberately traditional in language, more allusive, and finally richer in sensory images. By these means it builds up steadily to a climax of muted intensity in the last stanza. The middle one contributes unemphatically towards this development.

> Repeat a prayer also on behalf of
> Women who have seen their sons or husbands
> Setting forth, and not returning:
> Figlia del tuo figlio,
> Queen of Heaven.

Between the intercessions for those alive at sea (stanza 1) and those lost at sea (stanza 3) the lyric voice returns to the land and the bereaved. One might at first suppose that this stanza would appear more aptly *after* the deaths mentioned in stanza 3. But the climax is to focus not on bereavement but on the "annunciations" themselves of which we first became aware in Part IIA, and which were associated retrospectively with the bell clanged by the ground swell at the end of Part I.

Stanzas 1 and 3 focus on men in action, danger or death, stanza 2 on women in bereavement and then on the archetypal woman who has "foresuffered all", but who enters still as intercessor and mother into the sufferings of others. It is the quiet core of the lyric, which arrives at its own "still point" in the luminous calm of "Figlia del tuo figlio,/Queen of Heaven". This is the simplest of the three stanzas, with neither the subtle mix of tones we heard in the first, nor the complexity of image- and sound-patterns we shall find in the third.

"Repeat a prayer" has a certain archaic flavour that maintains the air of formality, but it is unemphatic because we are carried on across the enjambement to focus on those for whom the prayer is asked, the women in their loss. "Setting forth", again very mildly archaic, contributes to the feeling of agelessness that pervades the invocation. The simple word

"seen" is allowed an enriching duality of reference: the women have literally seen their menfolk setting forth, but the word-order confers on "seen" a metaphorical status, since it is only thus that they can be said to have *seen* them "*not* returning" - felt, experienced, the loss of them - otherwise we should have required something awkward like "not seen them returning".

The phrase from St Bernard's prayer in Dante's *Paradiso*, "Daughter of thy son" (XXXIII.1), is, like Dante's own use of it, no mere paradox-mongering, but a highly condensed way of redoubling for us the intimacy of relationship between intercessor and redeemer, as well as reminding us of its timeless nature going beyond her maternity in time. The son suffers to redeem, and the mother-daughter (in Catholic salvation theology) by her attendant grief has a share in that redemptive suffering. She is the archetypal victim of loss, both *mater dolorosa* and *filia dolorosa*, and therefore the supreme intercessor for all who suffer such loss. The notion that each is child as well as parent of the other indirectly affirms not only the humility but also the protectiveness of both mother-daughter and father-son. At the same time, she is "Queen of Heaven", which further helps to put the suffering of the bereaved in a wider perspective.

These lines prepare us for the affirmation of the mysteries of incarnation that will follow in Part V. It can be said that the whole of *The Dry Salvages* moves from the "annunciations" (for good or evil) of Parts I and II to the principle of incarnation (eternity present potentially in every moment of time); and the one unique Incarnation is here quietly affirmed.

Burnt Norton IV was about the state of illumination and

expectancy at the "still point" which is a fleeting taste of redemption, *East Coker* IV about the redemptive suffering of both redeemer and redeemed. *The Dry Salvages* IV is about human loss and "annunciations" of danger and death, but also, less directly, about the one redeeming Annunciation in the light of which all losses and lesser annunciations must be seen; and *Little Gidding* IV is about the agony of purgation by redeeming love. Each of these lyrics focusses on a kind of, or aspect of, redemption - from subjection to time, or to the disease of fallen nature, or to the dangers of the world, or to disordered desire. Each is in that sense a variation on the same theme. But the presiding agent or medium of redemptive power is, as we have already seen, different in each case: in *Burnt Norton* the dimly-felt "unmoved Mover" at the still point, in *East Coker* the wounded Christ, in *The Dry Salvages* the interceding Virgin, and in *Little Gidding* the burning Spirit.

The last stanza of the lyric is the most complex of the three in its imagery and in the word-music accompanying it. It begins by returning us from the comparative quietude of stanza 2 to the world of earthly action, danger and death, its first line, "Also pray for those who *were* in ships", offering an echo and modification of the second line of stanza 1, "Pray for all those who *are* in ships" (italics added). And it presents in its glimpses of disaster a timeless vision of the sea's hostility to man.

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

After the images that seem to warrant the accompaniment of a death-knell, Eliot by a remarkable imaginative twist introduces instead the idea of the angelus, reminder of the new birth promised at the supreme Annunciation. That the lost cannot be reached by its sound is less significant than the reminder to us that the angelus still rings out. By a trick of word-order the stanza is made to end on an upbeat: normal locution would demand something like "wherever the sound of the sea bell's perpetual angelus cannot reach them"; but the rearrangement avoids the finality of the negative phrase, and the slight archaism of the modified order reinforces the universality of the utterance.

The images strongly personify the ocean: some end their voyage on the shore which is "the sea's lips", others descend irretrievably into its maw. The lips, the "dark throat" and its refusal to "reject" them - to belch them up again like Jonah's fish or like the leopards of *Ash-Wednesday* Part II - turn the hostile flood into the dimly familiar figure of the archetypal cosmic sea-monster, Leviathan of the Old Testament or, more aptly still, the Tiamat of the Babylonian creation myth. This in turn has, in iconographic tradition, long been associated with the mouth of Hell, for instance in many Byzantine frescoes. For much of this Quartet we have contemplated the sea as an image of the flux of time on which we are adrift, and have responded to the intimations of its hostility. But this imaging of it as mythic monster lends an extraordinary reverberation to the lines, and carries us to a further pitch

where it becomes the personification of destruction itself. Nevertheless the prefixed plea for intercession remains, an assurance that though the victims cannot hear the angelus, the Virgin herself can hear and respond to the plea on their behalf. The angelus is perpetual, the monstrous powers of annihilation are not.

Something should briefly be said about the music of this stanza. It makes itself felt in a wash of sound amid a tidal sway of complex rhythms, arriving at last at a point of stillness in the clarity of the sea bell's perpetual angelus - no longer (like the clanging bell of Part I) an unnerving reminder of alienness and death, but pealing the promise of a redemption that transcends the oblivion of those who cannot hear it.

We can go a little way towards analysing this music by simply marking the more prominent phonetic echoes.

> Also pray for those who were in **ships, and**
> **End**ed their voyage on the **sand**, in the sea's **lips**
> Or in the dark throat **which** will not re**j**ect them
> Or wh**erever** cannot **reach** **them** the **sound** of the **sea**
> **bell**'s
> Perp**etual** **angel**us.

Pervasive is the variety of muted sibilants inadequately represented by **sh**, **tsh**, **zh** and **dzh**, which I have suggested create a wash of sound throughout, occurring (in normal spelling) on the letters **sh**, soft **g**, **ch**, **j**, even the **tu** consonant in "Perpetual". Combining with these are the consonant cluster **nd** (especially in the echoes of "ships, and", "sand" and "sound"); non-terminal rhyming of "ships" with "lips"; accumulation towards the end of the swaying "liquid pealing" through the "**bell**'s/Perpetual **angelus**"; and the frequency of three vowels, the short **ĕ** and **ă**

and the long **ea**. It is impossible to demonstrate decisively the specific function and effect of each of these on the ear, let alone their cumulative working; but to draw attention to them is at least to alert the ear more fully to the rich and subtle weave of sound that runs through the stanza, partly onomatopoeic but often less straightforward than that, compelling assent with its insistent vowel-iterations and consonantal textures.

To pursue all the possible literary antecedents of a passage like this is more than can fairly be attempted here. They would range from Homer and Virgil through *Pericles* and *The Tempest*, *Lycidas*, *Adonais* and *In Memoriam* to *The Wreck of the Deutschland*. It is not a question of specifically verbal echoes but of half-submerged memories and associations that for many readers exert their own pressure upon our response to these lines, reinforcing their capacity to stir us. This last stanza represents the culmination of the sea imagery in *The Dry Salvages*, and also its conclusion. Apart from one incidental mention of the "sea monster", Part V will ignore the sea entirely, taking up the notions of past and future, of annunciation and incarnation, of human terror and right action, and developing them to their climax by other means.

Part V

It is often noted that the last movement of each Quartet opens with a meditation on the nature of art or the problems of the artist, but that *The Dry Salvages* V differs from the others, dealing not with the arts in the usual sense but with the false arts by which mankind (including "anxious worried women") tries to overcome the terrors and bewilderments of living in time. And these "arts" are dismissed as "Pastimes and drugs", forms of escapism that ignore the real issues of our timebound state.

> To communicate with Mars, converse with spirits,
> To report the behaviour of the sea monster,
> Describe the horoscope, haruspicate or scry,
> Observe disease in signatures, evoke
> Biography from the wrinkles of the palm
> And tragedy from fingers; release omens
> By sortilege, or tea leaves, riddle the inevitable
> With playing cards, fiddle with pentagrams
> Or barbituric acids, or dissect
> The recurrent image into pre-conscious terrors -
> To explore the womb, or tomb, or dreams; all these
> are usual
> Pastimes and drugs, and features of the press:
> And always will be, some of them especially
> When there is distress of nations and perplexity
> Whether on the shores of Asia, or in the Edgware Road.

Eliot takes eleven lines to arrive at his main clause: what precedes it is a catalogue of the various mechanisms of escape. These are: archaic religion (or perhaps claims of extraterrestrial contact); spiritualism; speculation about strange monsters; astrology; augury by reading entrails; crystal-gazing; archaic herbal prescription by means of distinctive markings known as "signatures"; palmistry; divination by lots; fortune-telling by reading cups or cards, the use of mystic symbols or drugs; psychoanalysis by the study of symbolism; the investigation of prenatal or of postmortal consciousness; and the study of dreams

for the purposes of psychoanalysis or tortune-telling.

The meaning of one or two of these phrases is a matter of doubt: for instance, "To communicate with Mars" may seem to point to astrology, but the latter is clearly indicated two lines later in "Describe the horoscope". Communication with Mars alludes more probably to experiments with ancient religion - unless Eliot had "extraterrestrial contact" in mind. There is, at any rate, no evidence elsewhere in the passage of repeated allusion to the same specific activity; Eliot in fact deleted "crystal gazing" after he had chosen to include "scry" (*CFQ* 142), which shows he was concerned to avoid repetition.

Readers may well feel that the tone of these dismissals is repulsively acidulous and the range excessive (especially where psychoanalysis is concerned). Still, whether or not we regard any of them as acceptable occupations, Eliot's real point is that however fascinating in themselves, they do nothing at all substantial to release us from the sense of imprisonment in time: the true ways of liberation are, as he sees them, totally different.

I have mentioned my uncertainty about the intended meaning of "To communicate with Mars". The other phrases in the list are less problematic but warrant brief attention. To "converse with spirits" is to participate in spiritualist seances of the kind alluded to in Gerontion's reference to Madame de Tornquist shifting candles in a dark room. That passage of "Gerontion", indeed, feels like a precursor of this one in its focus upon a variety of implied substitutes for religious commitment and exploration, and on the diminution and debasement of spiritual

values into sterile occultism or sterile aestheticism: "Christ the tiger" comes

> To be eaten, to be divided, to be drunk
> Among whispers; by Mr. Silvero
> With caressing hands, at Limoges
> Who walked all night in the next room;
> By Hakagawa, bowing among the Titians;
> By Madame de Tornquist, in the dark room
> Shifting the candles; Fraulein von Kulp
> Who turned in the hall, one hand on the door.

"To report the behaviour of the sea monster" is somewhat peculiar, since it does not obviously fit into a list of common superstitions. But it hints at the tendency to assume that if we can solve the mysteries of alleged monsters - such as the Yeti and the Loch Ness monster as well as supposed denizens of the ocean - it would help us to feel more reconciled to the temporal world we inhabit. (Hayward, in commenting on it (*CPQ* 143), mentioned the Loch Ness monster apparently without finding it inappropriate to the phrase "sea monster". Indeed the word "sea" seems both unnecessary and incongruous, especially so soon after the powerful evocation, in a totally different tone and context, of the sea as a dark-throated primal monster itself.)

The observing of disease in signatures looks at first sight like a reference to graphology, although the latter deals with handwriting other than signatures, and claims to read character from it, not merely to recognize or treat disease. However, the term "signatures" once denoted distinctive marks on plants used as herbal remedies, sometimes for human organs supposedly resembling or corresponding to them (Eliot's explanation to Bodelsen for a later edition of his book, quoted by Reibetanz

(224)).

"Describe the horoscope" is plain enough to need no comment, as are the allusions to palmistry, divination by lots, and fortune-telling from cups and cards. "Scry" is an unusual term for crystal-gazing, which fits the emphasis at this point on ways of looking into the future: they form a cluster running all the way from the horoscope to the playing cards. More unusual is the term "haruspicate". The haruspex was the priestly functionary of ancient times who read omens in the entrails of sacrificial victims and so foretold the future or fixed auspicious or inauspicious days. But "haruspicate" is already rare enough as an adjective, and Eliot here chooses to use it more unusually still, as a verb, going on to pair it with "scry": gazing at entrails and gazing at crystal balls are thus linked in their alleged futility. "Scry" has also the obsolete meaning of divining by sifting sand in a sieve - which Eliot, until corrected, had taken as the meaning of "haruspicate" (*CPO* 143). What probably attracted Eliot to this verb-form was its slightly absurd jingle of sound next to "horoscope", which provides an auditory link to reinforce the rather contemptuous tone: "horoscope, haruspicate".

The movement of the verse in these lines is repetitive and restless, obviously suiting Eliot's purpose, which is not outright satire yet does entail a certain sardonic dismissiveness. (The wrinkles of the palmist's client suggest not only palm-lines but also, with fleeting poignancy, the illusory nature of efforts to defy the physical ravages of time.) Some specific

word-couplings, like the jingle on "horoscope, haruspicate", tend to support, by sound or association, this ironic intent: "riddle" and "fiddle" in successive lines, "womb, or tomb" in the same one, and the incongruously literary terms "Biography" and "tragedy" attached to the dubious arts of palmistry.

The catalogue of infinitive verbs, too, is worth noticing, as a suggestive mixture of the *ostensibly* respectable and responsible, the exotic and the recondite, the futile and the foolish: "communicate", "converse", "report", "Describe", "haruspicate", "scry", "Observe", "evoke", "release", "riddle", "fiddle", "dissect" and "explore". Within a few lines all are subsumed into the oddly touching combination of "searches" and "clings", placing them in another perspective. In the order in which they appear in the list, they group themselves (excluding "Observe") into pairs in which some of them acquire a further ironic authority, others less authority than they would exert singly - as "fiddle", for instance, undermines the potential force of "riddle". And the injection of the noun phrase "the inevitable" in "riddle the inevitable" economically makes the ironic point that if (as fortune-telling implies) the future *is* inevitable, then the sense of control over it by detecting it in advance is illusory and illogical.

Pentagrams and barbituric acids are rather oddly coupled, and the nature of the "fiddling" unspecified. Their placing here is puzzling, though presumably the barbiturates represent what, a generation later, came to be widely known as the use of drugs to explore "alternative states of consciousness".

The remaining items of the list are the various forms of

investigation connected mainly with depth psychology or psychoanalysis, which Faber called "a very *new* addition" (*CFQ* 143). They comprise the study of recurrent images or symbols in the psyche, of prenatal experience and of dreams - the one exception being the exploration of the "tomb", if by it we understand attempts to examine evidence of consciousness after death (as a parallel to evidence of consciousness before birth) - something not quite identical with spiritualism, which assumes rather than examines postmortal consciousness. The implied dismissal of Freud and Jung may appear rather gratuitous; but Eliot's reactions to the comparatively new science of psychology were always ambivalent, and here its incapacity to "conquer" time aligns it with the traditional forms of superstition. As Preston remarks of the long opening sentence, "To make way for divinity, divination is first rejected" (47), along with whatever savours of divination or shares its limitations in the poet's eyes. And as the catalogue ends and makes way for the main clause at last, the rhythms slow down and the stress-count nearly doubles itself for one line as if to mark the transition: "To explóre the wómb, or tómb, or dréams; áll thése are úsual".

Usual indeed, we may agree, as far as only some of them are concerned - but our momentarily hesitant assent is complicated by the run-on line that suddenly brands them as not merely usual but also "Pastimes and drugs, and features of the press". In the words of Part IIB, they are "in the popular mind...means of disowning the past" as well as the future. The combination of wit and authority with which Eliot makes the point is un-

fortunately undermined by the addition of "and features of the press"; it sounds like an irrelevant sideswipe at journalism, momentarily distracting us from the stated convictions and arousing a suspicion of snobbery instead - like the allusion to the "popular mind" just quoted from IIB.

In one form or another these brands of escapism are always with us, since they are not merely products of curiosity but the escape-mechanisms of frightened and insecure human nature, particularly in times of communal crisis. So, what they are they always will be

> When there is distress of nations and perplexity
> Whether on the shores of Asia, or in the Edgware Road.

The slightly sermonic tone is made more acceptable by the sardonic one introducing it, and the phrase "the shores of Asia" is not entirely arbitrary, since it operates as a fleeting reminder that the breeding-place of Krishna's wisdom is no less prone to superstition than any other part of the world. Meanwhile the naming of the Edgware Road returns us for a moment to the waste-land world glimpsed in the "Hampstead and Clerkenwell, Campden and Putney" of *Burnt Norton*; and as in *The Waste Land* itself, the realms of East and West, ancient and modern, are telescoped together to universalise the spiritual thirst and misguided solutions of humankind. The point is marred by the intrusion of the clumsy phrase "some of them especially": "some of them" has a pedantic ring, and interferes with the clarity of the syntax by attracting towards it the adverb "especially", which properly belongs with the next line - a rare instance in Eliot of ambiguity that serves no purpose but to distract.

Despite the flaws, much of the passage moves with assurance and conveys its ideas with clarity. Certainly the reader coming to it for the first time may be inclined to wonder what its purpose is in relation to the rest of the poem, especially since it marks such a sudden departure from the familiar images of the sea and of travelling. But he or she is immediately answered in the lines that follow: we are still concerned, as before, with humanity's attitudes to past and future in relation to the present.

> Men's curiosity searches past and future
> And clings to that dimension. But 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.
> For most of us, there is only the unattended
> Moment, the moment in and out of time,
> The distraction fit, lost in a shaft of sunlight,
> The wild thyme unseen, or the winter lightning
> Or the waterfall, or music heard so deeply
> That it is not heard at all, but you are the music
> While the music lasts. These are only hints and
> guesses,
> Hints followed by guesses; and the rest
> Is prayer, observance, discipline, thought and action.
> The hint half guessed, the gift half understood, is
> Incarnation.

The lines beginning the passage just quoted are really the pivot on which Part V turns. They point back to the false solutions (searching past and future and clinging to that dimension) and then, with only a "But" for a hinge, swing round to identify the true and ideal solution: apprehending the point of intersection of the timeless with time. For about ten lines the argument proceeds in abstractions - in contrast with the variety of images thrown up by the list of superstitious paths - and then we are suddenly faced with four lines of intensely

concentrated images, correlatives of the experience of the timeless moment: the shaft of sunlight, the wild thyme, winter lightning, waterfall and music.

These lines offer a more explicit account than anything we have yet met in the Quartets of what essentially they are about and where they are leading. They focus the theme of Part V and of *The Dry Salvages* as a whole: the dabblers in the occult, in the manner of Dusty, Doris and Madame Sosostris, have been trying to "piece together the past and the future" like the more sympathetically treated "anxious worried women" of Part I, but unaware that the only way to do this is *not* to cling to past and future. It is to apprehend and, as far as possible, dwell spiritually in the timeless moment of intersection where - as we shall soon be told - "the past and future/Are conquered, and reconciled".

The lines also focus the theme of the entire cycle, which is concerned with our consciousness of time, and of ourselves in time yet not "at home" in time. We are temporal creatures, yet with an inescapable sense of really belonging outside time altogether. (In more traditional terms, we are conscious of ourselves as mortal bodies, but also as eternal spirits.) The intuitive awareness of our freedom, properly speaking, from time is generally only a fleeting one that comes to us in fugitive moments like the one in the rose-garden. They are experiences of heightened awareness in which we are more fully alive than usual. And in comparison with them - until we have explored them and sought to recover them by means of spiritual

discipline - our normal state is one of grey imprisonment in time and space. In the course of the Quartets we learn that these moments are experiences not simply of joy or pain but, properly understood, experiences of love, of spiritual significance and therefore ultimately of God, drawing us into a higher and fuller union with the creation than we can otherwise enjoy. The fullest consciousness of this state is rare and is that of the saint; but approximations to it are available to the rest of us through the disciplined commitment of the spirit.

When the poet says that "Men's curiosity searches past and future", the last phrase should immediately take us back not only to the lines just before it, but also to Part III where the travellers - who mistakenly think they are escaping from the past into the future - are being urged to do something quite different: to "consider the future/And the past with an equal mind". Part III, with its harping on the travellers' illusions about the relation of past and future, and with its correction of these illusions, prepares us for, and is completed by, Part V. The implication is that the wrong attitude to the *present* (seldom mentioned but always lurking in the interstices of the thought) is to regard it as the bridge between past and future, which is really a way of denying it any regard at all. The "point of intersection of the timeless/With time" is, on the other hand, a point at which the present moment is also apprehended as an aspect of the eternal: and this - not escape from the past or into the future - is the only key to release us from the prison of temporality. To be able to see all moments in this way is to see, as *East Coker* puts it,

a lifetime burning in every moment
And not the lifetime of one man only
But of old stones that cannot be deciphered.

The adherents of the occult, the fortune-tellers and their like, have in effect been *trying* to see "a lifetime burning in every moment", but have been going about it in the wrong way, piecing together the past and future instead of apprehending the nexus between time and eternity.

The versification of Part V illustrates a rhythmic truism that nevertheless warrants explicit mention. In both the blocks of verse quoted up to now (the long sentence about the occult pseudo-solutions and the subsequent passage about the point of intersection), the norm of four main stresses per line has by and large been maintained, both passages using frequent medial pauses and a good deal of enjambement, keeping up a fairly rapid pace from line to line. In other words, there is little to distinguish them in versification. Yet the movement of each *feels* quite different, because (and this is the truism) the subject-matter inevitably affects our way of responding to it: the first passage gives an impression of cluttered restlessness, whereas the second displays swift energy speaking more of ardent intensity than of restlessness. Only at the end of the second, leading into the climax, is there a *rallentando* created by repetition, more frequent and deliberate pauses, and finally one of those rare lines in which the stress-count of four is doubled, signalling this time the moment of arrival at an unusually definitive statement. So the key line about Incarnation has eight stresses:

> These are ònly hínts and guésses,
> Hínts fóllowed by guésses; and the rést
> Is práyer, obsérvance, díscipline, thòught and áction.
> The hínt hálf guéssed, the gíft half únderstóod, is
> Incarnátion.

It is the climax of Part V, of *The Dry Salvages* and, arguably, one of the major climaxes of the Quartets as a whole.

The word "apprehend" (in "But to apprehend...") is worth noticing. In drafting the passage Eliot had first put "attend to", changed it to "be aware of", and then - in response to Faber's valid objection to too many "ofs" - changed it again to "apprehend" (*CFQ* 144). His thought-process is helpfully revealed in these alterations. The occupation of the saint is to be sensitively alert to the "point of intersection" (as the initial "attend" suggested); but it is also to be in a state of constant attunement and readiness for its occurrence, and to be able to recognize ("be aware of") it when it does occur; finally - and a great improvement quite apart from eliminating the unwanted "of" - "apprehend" implies the sensitivity and alertness, the attunement and the awareness, but implies something else as well: an *active* response to the moment, since the word imports connotations not only of understanding and grasping, but also of seizing and arresting, of "catching hold of" the moment when it comes, not simply responding passively to it. The term becomes a submerged metaphor enriching a statement otherwise couched largely in abstractions, and so intensifying it.

Of course "intersection" is also a submerged metaphor, and this too plays its part. Normally we think of the word in the context either of geometrical figures or of road maps, and these connotations are not irrelevant here. Into the "line" of

time - conceived once again in linear terms and not as shapeless flux - cuts the eternal, the timeless; and the point in time at which it does so is the point of intersection. Since it is a point on time's axis it is a moment in time; but since it is a point on the "axis of eternity" it is also a moment outside time. From our point of view it is thus a moment *in* time at which we are aware of contact with what lies *outside* time's realm entirely. Nor is it too fanciful to visualise this intersection by imagining a horizontal line, the progression of time, being perpendicularly cut by a vertical line, descending from the realm of the timeless, in such a way as to form a cross-shaped intersection - a symbol appropriate enough to the increasingly explicit Christian formulation of Eliot's ideas on the relation of the two realms or states. In *Burnt Norton* we focussed for a while on the visual symbol of the circle with the still point at its centre, and on the timeless moment as an arrival at that still point where movement and stillness are reconciled. Now in *The Dry Salvages* we may think in terms of another visual symbol, the crossing of two lines marking the same still point - this time not as a point at the centre of a circle, but as a point defining the co-ordinates where time and eternity both exist, yet which we may with excusable looseness condense into the oxymoronic phrase "a timeless moment".

That Eliot is not simply playing with mathematical paradox hardly needs stating. And the lines that immediately follow emphasise the explicitly religious bearing of his thought here. The apprehension of this point, not merely intellectually but

experientially and actively, is "an occupation for the saint" who is thus distinguished from the practitioners of the occult sciences. They try to recognize or create bridges between past and future; the saint seizes upon and grasps in his spirit *not* a bridge between one thing and another - let alone between past and future - but the eternal as it manifests itself in the mystically charged moment of the present.

Calling this an occupation might initially suggest that it is no more than a pastime, or at best analogous to the job of work that occupies most of us in our waking hours. But "occupation" is repeated and rhetorically negated in order to be more exactly redefined as a vocation, a commitment, and beyond that, a relationship pervading the whole of the saint's personal life:

> No occupation either, but something given
> And taken, in a lifetime's death in love,
> Ardour and selflessness and self-surrender.

Two of Eliot's commonest stylistic habits are here evident: repetition of the same word almost immediately ("occupation"), and the juxtaposition of antonyms ("given", "taken", "lifetime", "death"). These can easily become mannerisms, and when Eliot is not at his best they are. But here they fulfil their proper function of adding force and clarity to ideas which, we gradually realise, may be made clear in another way or forceful in yet another, but - without these devices - not both at once.

Although they look like wordiness, they often provide the most economical way of expressing what the poet has to say. Thus, repeating "occupation" emphasises that he is describing more than an occupation in the mundane sense. "Something given and taken" suggests a task imposed *on* and at the same time

gladly accepted *by* the saint, and a gift (the "moment" itself) freely offered by the eternal and at the same time demanding a due response - a balance characterized by the "give and take" of decent personal relationships (for this *is* a personal relationship with the God who remains unnamed here). And "a lifetime's death in love" condenses in a powerful phrase the idea of a saint's devoting a whole life to a constant "dying daily" to self, not out of perverse asceticism but out of the love, "Ardour and selflessness and self-surrender" motivating, and demanded of, him or her.

These phrases carry the apprehension of the timeless moment beyond the sphere of fugitive mystical experience into something more lasting and constant, more personal and moral, in its implications. The contrasts between "point" and "lifetime", between "occupation" and "love", emphasise this. Truly to apprehend the "point" is not merely to respond rightly at a given moment, but to respond in a way made possible only by a lifetime of discipline and by the surrender of self that love enjoins. The "moment of illumination", as we called it when looking at *Burnt Norton*, is now seen as clearly a religious experience, or at least as one that only makes sense in a specifically religious context. And so the word "saint" has been very deliberately chosen.

So too has the word "love". We have already noticed how seldom it is used in the Quartets, as if to throw into relief each of its rare occurrences. Apart from the passage in *East Coker* III about waiting without love (where it is not separately

focussed on but mentioned along with faith and hope), it has occurred only twice before, each time in the fifth movement of a Quartet. In *Burnt Norton* V we have read that

> Love is itself unmoving,
> Only the cause and end of movement,

where love sounded like the God of the philosophers, the unmoved Mover of Aristotle. Then in *East Coker* V we were told of love in a different way:

> Love is most nearly itself
> When here and now cease to matter

– that is, when mundane considerations of space and time are no longer of primary concern to us, since love in its fullest sense partakes of eternity. Now we read of the saint's love of God in the context of a life ostensibly timebound but, even in that state, *free* of time in the apprehension of the timeless moment. Through these three occurrences the word has moved progressively closer to what we commonly understand by the term; it has become a little more humanised and personal. And in *Little Gidding* we shall at last read about love that expands "beyond desire" without ceasing to be love, and about love of a country and of faces and places, a love not negated but transfigured by the divine love that torments in order to purify and draw us to itself.

As we have seen, Part V of each Quartet opens with a meditation on the nature of art in relation to time, and the success or failure of the artist in marshalling his material, except that in *The Dry Salvages* this topic is replaced by the "false arts" of divination and the like. And when we come to the right way of dealing with our timebound state, the passage presents us not with the successful artist but with the saint

on the one hand and the common man ("most of us") on the other. In Part V of *Little Gidding* we shall revert to the topic of art for the last time, contemplating the fully achieved work of verbal art – but by then the common ground between average individual, saint and artist will have been clarified by the poetry that lies between (the end of *The Dry Salvages* and most of *Little Gidding* itself). All three – ordinary individual, saint and artist – need to overcome the limitations that time imposes on them; and while the solutions differ in some ways, their basis is fundamentally the same.

Whereas the saint's "occupation" is an abiding apprehension of the nexus of time and eternity, the ordinary person's contact with it is fleeting and occasional:

> For most of us, there is only the unattended
> Moment, the moment in and out of time,

in which we have our glimpses of the rose-garden experience or what it represents, but which leaves us with "the waste sad time/Stretching before and after". To call it an "unattended" moment is appropriate: it is unattended in the sense of not being waited for or expected, and also in the sense that we, unlike the saint, are unversed in the kind of attention to pay to it, and therefore relatively incapable of uniting it fruitfully with the rest of our experience. (The versification at this point also helps, by the enjambement at "unattended/Moment", to throw into relief the suddenness and unexpectedness of the moment itself.)

To suggest the nature of that moment, Eliot now injects into the passage another set of those haunting correlatives of the

timeless experience which we have remarked on in looking at *East Coker* III. Although their private nature as Eliot's personal symbols makes them hardly susceptible to discursive analysis, it is worth examining some clusters in which they occur in different Quartets. They are not all equally rich or varied, but they have several interesting features in common. Here are four such clusters.

> Sudden in a shaft of sunlight
> Even while the dust moves
> There rises the hidden laughter
> Of children in the foliage
>
> (*Burnt Norton* V)

> Whisper of running streams, and winter lightning,
> The wild thyme unseen and the wild strawberry,
> The laughter in the garden, echoed ecstasy
>
> (*East Coker* III)

> The distraction fit, lost in a shaft of sunlight,
> The wild thyme unseen, or the winter lightning
> Or the waterfall, or music heard so deeply
> That it is not heard at all, but you are the music
> While the music lasts.
>
> (*The Dry Salvages* V)

> 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.
>
> (*Little Gidding* V)

Each of these clusters includes the word "hidden" or the word "unseen", and in each occurs the idea of something - music or voices - heard or half-heard as if at a distance, as laughter or whispering or murmurs internalised in the hearer. Images of sensory experience are being offered as approximations to a more internal and ineffable kind of experience on the part of the poet; and these are the mechanisms that, in a way very difficult

to define, trigger off memories of similar experiences on the part of the reader. It may appear rather odd to invoke the name of Milton in discussing imagery of this sort: nevertheless these passages, working in a totally different manner from the verse of Milton, appeal to our imaginations with strange evocations of music, of light (either a shaft of sunlight or a fleeting flash of lightning in winter) and of primal innocence, entities that in more traditional forms pervade so much of Milton's poetry when he is concerned with the nexus of time and eternity.

The combination of light, music, and voices from an unseen source is not new in Eliot's work either. In *The Hollow Men* the speaking voice alludes to eyes in another kingdom which are

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

This suggests a visionary experience that the Hollow Men can fully imagine but which is wholly denied to them in their present state. In the rose-garden sequence of *Burnt Norton* we read of the "unheard music" and the "unseen eyebeam", and are persuaded by a kind of emotional logic that we are both hearing and not hearing the music, both seeing and not seeing that which is seeing us. It is as if a sensory experience is taking place on a wave-length so different from mundane experience that it is really more of an extrasensory one, yet communicable only in terms of a sensory one. And this is, of course, the experience of the "timeless moment", the "moment in and out of time", the "point of intersection of the timeless/With time".

Three of the four excerpts quoted contain components of one of Eliot's best-known images in the Quartets: the sound of the laughter of children hidden in an apple-tree in a garden, happy and excited laughter, but sensed only at a distance. We have already seen how this image occurs in Part I of *Burnt Norton*, and something rather like it in *Marina* and in "New Hampshire". It seems to represent a recognition of primal innocence, and is the clearest of Eliot's images of this kind. Associated with it, but far more "private" in their connotations, are the other images of growing things either seen or sensed (perhaps smelt) while unseen: wild thyme and wild strawberry. Whether they are autobiographical or literary in origin we cannot say; we can only surmise, for instance, that Eliot's imagination responded strongly to the evocativeness of Oberon's "bank whereon the wild thyme blows" in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (2.1.249).

Again in three of the four excerpts occur images associated with the flowing, movement or sound of water: "Whisper of running streams", "the waterfall" (or, more fully, "The voice of the hidden waterfall"), and - in *Little Gidding* only, as it takes up some of the leading images of *The Dry Salvages* - the "longest river" and its source, and the fleeting moment of equilibrium "Between two waves of the sea". The last two are not strictly speaking correlatives of the timeless experience so much as metaphorical settings for it. The other two are evocations not of visual experience but of water unseen yet heard: the voice, or whisper, of the flowing water, like the other voices, is what impinges upon our imaginations with the force of something distant yet recognizable, known from afar in

a "fit" of distraction or - in the psychological rather than linguistic sense of the term - abstraction.

Perhaps the most evocative of all these images in the cluster from *The Dry Salvages* is that of the music

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

It suggests that in the fleeting moment of timelessness we are not merely aware of *having* an experience, but also of being ourselves a *part of* that experience in a consciousness other than our own: we too, like the flowers of *Burnt Norton*, have "the look of flowers that are looked at" or - to translate it into auditory terms, have "the sound of music that is being heard". It also suggests that we are so rapt into the moment that the usual distinction between the experiencing self and the object of experience ceases, for that instant, to exist.

But all our experiences of the timeless moment, evoked in these images, are only dim intimations of eternity, "only hints and guesses,/Hints followed by guesses". For them to become anything more to us requires at least a distant approach to the discipline of the saint's occupation: "prayer, observance, discipline, thought and action" - in other words, commitment. (An illustration of such commitment, which is not the saint's, is the poet's own attempt to explore the implications of such moments in the poetry he is writing.) In Hopkins's "Spring and Fall", the theme is the young child's intimations of mortality; it is "What heart heard of, ghost guessed". In a line of similar word-music, but one thrown into relief by the doubling of

the stress-count, Eliot at last approaches a more explicit definition of what these moments signify. Not only are they intimations of *im*mortality, they are glimpses of that divine principle embodied in the unique event of Christian revelation: "The hint half guessed, the gift half understood, is Incarnation". All the "annunciations" encountered earlier are now retrospectively redefined in terms of the one Annunciation, the archetypal "point of intersection" between the worlds of time and eternity.

This degree of explicitness is very unusual, and marks the climax of the Quartet. As if to confirm this, although no typographical break occurs, the rhythm of the verse immediately changes, and the concluding lines of the poem (Part VB) are written in a pattern mostly of three instead of the usual four stresses to the line. It is noticeably like that of *Burnt Norton* VB, except that there the slow deliberateness of pace tended to make the full stresses vary between three and four, whereas here the vigour and swiftness demand three as a norm.

> Hére the impóssible únion
> Of sphéres of exístence is áctual,
> Hére the pást and fúture
> Are cónquered, and réconcíled,
> Where áction were ótherwise móvement
> Of thát which is ónly móved
> And has ín it nò sóurce of móvement -
> Dríven by daemónic, chthónic
> Pówers. And ríght àction is fréedom
> From pást and fúture álso.
> For móst of us, thís is the áim
> Néver hére to be réalised;
> Who are ónly úndefèated
> Becáuse we have góne on tríying;
> Wé, contént at the lást
> If our témporal revérsion nóurish
> (Nót too fár from the yéw-tree)
> The lífe of significant sóil.

For most of this passage it is possible to imagine each pair of lines run together into one line of six stresses, thus:

> Here the impossible union of spheres of existence is actual,
> Here the past and future are conquered, and reconciled,

and so on; but the arrangement into shorter lines maintains the vigour and intensity without which this conclusion would be rather anticlimactic, a mere exegetical expansion after the peak attained in the line about Incarnation. As short lines, they move with an unusual mixture of rapidity and deliberation.

"Here", at the point of incarnation implied in every timeless moment and focussed above all in the unique Incarnation of Christian tradition, what seemed impossible becomes possible: two apparently opposed spheres of existence, the temporal and the eternal, become united. (It is surely no accident that Eliot chose the careful phrase "is Incarnation", and neither "*an* incarnation" nor "*the* Incarnation", so allowing the term to signify either simultaneously.) Having put the thought one way in the first two lines, he characteristically rephrases it in the next two, this time taking us back to the recurrent concern with the terms "past and future" which played such a large role in Part III: here, they "Are conquered, and reconciled"; neither simply conquered like enemies (as they might be in the spiritual experience of an oriental mystic achieving Nirvana), nor simply reconciled with each other (as they might be in the psyche of an individual after successful psychotherapy), but both at once, conquered in the moment in which the present and the eternal meet, and in that same moment reconciled with each other not only in the individual life but in human history.

As if in answer to the question "What is the sphere in which they are conquered and reconciled?" comes the answer "In the sphere of action", not of abstention from action: we think again of Krishna's enjoining upon Arjuna the necessity of action. But without this principle of incarnation, action on its own would be futile. It would be, or would have been ("were" is subjunctive), mere passive movement otherwise, not truly action at all, since we should have been impelled to an appearance of action by forces beyond our own powers. So, in these highly compressed lines, there emerges the paradoxical notion that not only does incarnation reconcile past and future in the sphere of action, but incarnation is what *makes* action truly itself in the first place. Without it, human action would be on the level of animal action, the product not of choice but of instinctual drives. If this were all that action amounted to, it would be the diametrical opposite of that "unmoved Mover" which is the divine: it would only be moved because driven, having in itself no source of movement. This is what I understand as Eliot's meaning in the lines

> Where action were otherwise movement
> Of that which is only moved
> And has in it no source of movement -
> Driven by daemonic, chthonic
> Powers.

Without the link between time and eternity, action would have no inherent or cumulative significance, and humanity would be entirely at the mercy of primitive forces, those atavistic impulses which, as we have seen repeatedly in *The Dry Salvages*, are still one element in his psyche, and which the more deter-

minist or behaviourist schools of psychology might maintain are still its *only* motivating forces. These Eliot sums up briefly in the deliberately dismissive chiming, negative in tone, of "daemonic, chthonic/Powers".

A further corollary of what has just been affirmed is that this freedom from past and future makes possible not only real action but right action: incarnation has not only metaphysical but moral significance. The phrase "right action" reminds us of the dilemma of Arjuna and the answer of Krishna, adapted by Eliot, as to what makes action right and fruitful.

For those of us who are not saints, the ideal of right and fruitful action will never be entirely realised within the temporal realm; but we have been given good reason to go on aiming at it, and only in our constant "trying" lies the guarantee that we will not be defeated. The repetition, just before the end, of "For most of us" from twenty lines earlier, confirms the connection between our fleeting experience of the "unattended/Moment" and our abiding assurance that our aim, though not perfectible in this life, is nevertheless a valid one.

These lines are written with a moving simplicity of a peculiar sort - not the facile simplicity of trite moralising, but the hard-earned simplicity of felt experience which has behind it the pressure of the whole poem with all its complex explorations:

> For most of us, this is the aim
> Never here to be realised;
> Who are only undefeated
> Because we have gone on trying;

and in the year 1941 these words, with their universality of import, must also have struck their first English readers with a profound topical relevance that we can now only dimly surmise. Throughout *The Dry Salvages*, from the initial reminders of the uncontrollable rage of the river, through the images of wreckage adrift on the flux of time, the agony of others, the sudden fury, and the trial and judgment of the sea, to the more recent images of conquest and undefeatedness in the realm of the spirit, hints of war have never been far off; and they too play their part in the reader's complex emotional response to the poem as a whole.

Having brought us to this point of recognition and acceptance, there is only one more affirmation left for the poet to make before the end. This is the affirmation that - in the light of what we have seen - we can accept personal death without repining, since we know that although as denizens of time we must revert to dust, our dust will be "significant" with the meaning given to it by eternity in incarnation as well as by our "trying" (as in *East Coker* V), and will therefore be *not* simply dust but (with all the rich connotations of continuing fertility attached to the word) "soil". A similarly affirmative note is sounded in the last verb of the poem: our reversion to what the temporal realm holds in store for us will "*nourish*" life even where death is contained. In Eliot's poetry the yew-tree has appeared from time to time as a symbol of either death or immortality; here, appropriately, it points simultaneously to both, and we can therefore, at the last, be "content" with whatever contains our mortal remains:

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

Commentators on *The Dry Salvages* sometimes refer to Eliot's wish to be buried at East Coker, seeing in the closing lines an anticipation of this event. Here they are obviously following his own hint. Introducing a reading of this Quartet, he told his audience:

> You will notice...that this poem begins where I began, with the Mississippi; and that it ends, where I and my wife expect to end, at the parish church of a tiny village in Somerset. ("The Influence of Landscape upon the Poet" 422)

This certainly confers on the poem a satisfyingly cyclic shape in terms of the poet's personal life; but nothing in the text itself invites us to think of East Coker at this point. Indeed, the image of "significant soil" near the yew-tree is slightly at odds with our knowledge that Eliot's ashes now rest in the wall of the church itself. It is quite likely that Eliot, in these remarks made long after he wrote the poem, was reading back into its ending a more personal meaning than it really warranted.

The general allusion to mortal remains was the essential point; but too specific an emphasis on East Coker would tend to distract the reader from the full range of the statement, in which the plural pronouns "we" and "our" (referring to "most of us") need to be given their full weight. Without this, the closing phrase, "The life of significant soil", would be in danger of soundly merely like a pious personal hope appended to the poem instead of the movingly (and logically) generalising conclusion that it is.

LITTLE GIDDING

Part I

After all its emphasis on river and sea, *The Dry Salvages* returns at the end to "significant soil", made significant by what it contains. Places do **matter**, in fact, because of what people have done or been in them - and this is clear as we turn to *Little Gidding*.

A place-name like the other three titles, it is the site, in Huntingdonshire, of an Anglican religious community founded in the seventeenth century by Nicholas Ferrar, otherwise best known as the friend who arranged for the publication of George Herbert's poems. A family community and not a monastic one, and unique in its day, its house and chapel became a place of retreat and of pilgrimage for devout adherents of the Laudian Anglican church, and Charles I was said to have visited it three times before the community was forcibly disbanded in 1647 by the Parliamentarians. Interest in the site revived following the Oxford Movement, and especially after the publication in the 1880's of J.H. Shorthouse's historical romance *John Inglesant*, with its vivid description of the community there. For Eliot, a modern high Anglican, the place also acquired significance as a place of prayer and pilgrimage, although he apparently visited it only once; and the publication of this Quartet has, of course, increased its fame in the latter half of our own century. Within the last generation, in fact, a new religious community has been founded there.

East Coker and the Dry Salvages are place-names linked with

Eliot's ancestors and his youthful memories; Burnt Norton and Little Gidding, lacking such associations, are nevertheless connected with specific "moments of illumination" in his life. But whereas the rose-garden experience of *Burnt Norton* is presented in purely secular terms, the "pentecostal" experience of *Little Gidding* is clearly religious, bound up with the poet's faith and his awareness of the history of the place. As the poem opens, we may imagine him - though the note is not a personal one - arriving at the place on a brilliantly sunlit midwinter afternoon. (The seasonal setting is imaginatively realised: his actual visit took place in the spring, in May 1936).

Each of the first three Quartets began on a note of exploratory meditation or generalization:

> Time present and time past
> Are both perhaps present in time future...
>
> In my beginning is my end. In succession
> Houses rise and fall...
>
> I do not know much about gods; but I think that the river
> Is a strong brown god...

Little Gidding begins quite differently. A voice of immense assurance plunges us straight into a blaze of vivid imagery, sharing with us an experience unqualified at the outset by any generality or abstraction, or by any note of personal confession, ignorance or uncertainty. Instead of these, we find an intense correlation between what Hardy might have called outer and inner weather. It is a windless, sunlit early afternoon in midwinter, ice and snow bathed in the blinding brilliance and clarity of the scene. This taste of the purity and freshness of spring in

"the dark time of the year" is reproduced in the spirit as the "soul's sap quivers", stirred by the pentecostal fire associated with spring, the season of Pentecost. The surrounding coldness emphasises by contrast the blaze and glow of warmth at its core. We are aware of a controlled ecstasy of spirit.

> Mídwinter spríng/is its ówn séason
> Sémpitérnal/though sódden towards súndown,
> Suspénded in tíme,/between póle and trópic.
> When the shórt dày is bríghtest,/with fróst and fíre,
> The bríef sùn flámes the íce,/on pónd and dítches,
> In wíndless cóld/that is the héart's héat,
> Reflécting/in a wátery mírror
> A gláre that is blíndness/in the éarly afternóon.
> And glów mòre inténse/than bláze of bránch, or
> brázier,
> Stírs the dúmb spírit:/nò wínd, but pentecóstal fíre
> In the dárk tìme of the yéar./Betwèen mélting and
> fréezing
> The sóul's sáp quívers./There is nò eárth sméll
> Or sméll of líving thìng./Thís is the spríng time
> But nót in tìme's cóvenant./Nów the hédgerow
> Is blánched for an hóur/with tránsitory blóssom
> Of snów,/a blóom mòre súdden
> Than thát of súmmer,/nèither búdding nor fáding,
> Nót in the schéme/of gènerátion.
> Whére is the súmmer,/the únimáginable
> Zéro súmmer?

The spirit is stirred, the soul is quivering, and in this apparent conflation of seasons appears none of the confusion, chaos or dislocation that we felt at the opening of *East Coker* Part II, when we read:

> What is the late November doing
> With the disturbance of the spring
> And creatures of the summer heat,
> And snowdrops writhing under feet
> And hollyhocks that aim too high
> Red into grey and tumble down
> Late roses filled with early snow?

There, the sense of disturbance dominated, and was reinforced by the bewildered insistence of the rhetorical questions. Here, the one rhetorical question (at the end of the passage) is of a

different kind, being in effect an *a fortiori* exclamation of wonder: if this is what "Midwinter spring" is like, how much more astonishing must be that state to which it seems an invitation and a foretaste, that "Zero summer" of spiritual illumination?

The verse medium here conforms at first to the usual pattern of four stresses to the line, two on either side of a medial caesura. But then it breaks into variations, as if the pressure of the experience defies containment within the set pattern. (And as we shall see, much of *Little Gidding* departs from the metrical norms that operate in the other three Quartets.) Some lines, especially in the intense middle of the passage, acquire extra secondary or even primary stresses; others ("Reflecting in a watery mirror" and "Of snow, a bloom more sudden") reduce the primary stresses to three; and the final half-line, broken off typographically from its continuation, arrives at a climactic halt on two. The middle lines of the passage, which spell out the correlation between the landscape and the spirit, achieve their intensity partly by the combination of enjambement with strong caesuras: six consecutive lines run on, and four of them in succession do so from medial full stops.

Both image and sound contribute, of course, to this intensity. Roughly following the linguists' method of analysis in terms of "lexical sets", we can easily notice that the whole is a complex patterning of words and ideas associated with three kinds of sensation or experience: of light or heat, of cold, and of time. To separate them for a moment, we have these groups:

> tropic, brightest, fire, sun, flames, heat, glare, glow, blaze, brazier, fire, melting;
>
> pole, frost, ice, cold, freezing, snow, zero;
>
> midwinter, spring, season, sempiternal, time, sundown, day, afternoon, year, transitory, summer.

The combination of the groups contributes to another sensation in turn, that of a fleetingly caught moment of timelessness which is neither midwinter nor spring, though it contains clear elements of both. As in the rose-garden of *Burnt Norton* - less hauntingly but more strongly - time is transcended.

The opening statement, "Midwinter spring is its own season", immediately makes the point that this is a moment outside the ordinary cycle of the seasons. Being "Sempiternal" it transcends all bonds of time even while it is "Suspended in time", between the extremes of heat and cold implied by "pole" and "tropic". (The phrase *in questa primavera sempiterna*, "in this eternal spring", occurs in *Paradiso* XXVIII at the point where Dante gazes into the dazzlingly brilliant light of God surrounded by the nine radiant rings of the angelic orders.) Literal weather and spiritual experience are connected throughout by the imagery, so that our response to the elevation of the spirit is anchored to sensory detail. The sempiternal quality of the moment is not negated by the knowledge that the scene becomes "sodden towards sundown", and the reverse also applies. Ostensibly opposed details are united into one impression by imagery and sound, as in "frost and fire". Not only is the brilliance of the landscape reflected invisibly in the spirit; it is itself composed of visible reflections that unite opposed elements, such as fire and water, into one process: "The brief sun flames

the ice". (The unusual use of "flames" as a transitive verb, focussing the metaphor into a single word, intensifies the sensation.) The ice is on the surface of "pond and ditches".

Apart from the title, there is nothing yet to locate this moment as occurring at Little Gidding, but the sketch-map of the place in Maycock's biography of Nicholas Ferrar (127) specifically marks two ponds and two ditches, one pond a few yards from the west door of the church, and ditches bordering the churchyard on the north-east and south-east. The topographical detail may derive partly from Eliot's visit to Gidding in May 1936, but the winter landscape is clearly independent of that, and it is more than likely that Maycock's sketch recalled the pond and ditches to his notice. (Bernard Blackstone reviewed Maycock's book in the October 1938 number of the *Criterion*, which Eliot was of course editing at the time.) We know of no winter visit by Eliot to Gidding, but the realisation of the scene clearly blends memory and imagination: the white blossom of the hedgerows seen in Maytime is here transformed into "blossom/Of snow"; midwinter and spring reflect each other and are united in the imaginative and spiritual perception of the visitor.

Nowhere does the poet explicitly identify himself as the visitor who experiences these things. As Reibetanz points out (141-2), the entire passage is impersonal: "heart", "spirit" and "soul" are qualified simply by "the"; and the dominant pronoun in the rest of Part I is the generic "you" of the reader sharing responses to which the poet himself makes no personal claim, yet which are nonetheless clearly his.

The glittering midwinter day is calm, the cold "windless". Not only is the heart warmed to a glow amid the icy landscape; no external wind is necessary to stir it. The power of the Holy Spirit - the source of this timeless moment - is imaged by one of his traditional attributes, pentecostal fire, but not by another: there is "no wind". (The third traditional attribute of the Spirit, the dove, will be alluded to negatively in Part IIB and positively in Part IV.)

The sun, reflected in the ice, makes "A glare that is blindness in the early afternoon". Time - in the baldly specific "early afternoon" - and the timeless are again blended. The brilliance that is at once blinding and revelatory, inducing both ecstasy and awe, is of course a standard feature of theophanies both in the Bible (as in the Transfiguration story) and elsewhere; and we think of Milton's "Dark with excessive bright thy skirts appear" (*Paradise Lost* III.380). Eliot is not presenting a theophany as such, yet the sensory images, together with the phrase "pentecostal fire", constitute something very like one. The strength of light ("glare") is alliteratively and emotively matched by a strength of heat in that "glow" which, "more intense than blaze of branch, or brazier,/Stirs the dumb spirit". The plosives and sibilants of "blaze", "branch" and "brazier" combine to reinforce the effect, while the vehicles of comparison - "branch" fleetingly suggesting a Yule-log and "brazier" a simple open-air fire - contribute to our sense of the experience as not simply modern but ageless. The adjective "dumb" is so placed that its effect is strangely both retrospective and proleptic: "Stirs the spirit which until now has

been dormant", and "Stirs the spirit into a state of awed stillness". Eliot took some time to arrive at "dumb": its predecessors in draft were "animated" and "awakened" - looking ahead to the result - and "numbed" - looking back to the previous state (*CFQ* 158). The economical combination of "Stirs" and "dumb" achieves the double effect.

If this is so, and the spirit moves from one kind of "dumbness" into another, this highly-charged movement-in-stillness is well caught in the phrase "The soul's sap quivers". This is not, as in *The Waste Land*, a reluctant stirring of dull roots, yet the sense of new life is not without tension: it occurs "Between melting and freezing", at a still point which is also a turning point. As Cahill puts it, "something of the pain of the awakening of *The Waste Land*, though none of its reluctance, is communicated" (190). The very "hiddenness" of the process, as of sap rising in bark, imbues it with a remarkable intensity. Seldom in his exploration of spiritual experience does Eliot use sensory contrasts to greater effect than he does here.

The scents of spring are absent although the other sensory reminders of it (the sun's brightness and the snow-blossom) are present. All the more reason, then, for feeling that this is a moment both in and out of time. The juxtaposition of the next two sentences is therefore not arbitrary:

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

And the second of these sentences in turn leads naturally on to the one that follows it:

> 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.

The successive sentence-endings, "not in time's covenant" and "Not in the scheme of generation", emphasise the connection of thought and at the same time remind us that this was the thought on which the passage opened: "its own season". But several details combine to insist that this "season" of timelessness is short-lived: while it lasts it is sempiternal in quality, but it is "sodden towards sundown" and the midwinter afternoon is short; the sun is "brief", the hedgerow blanched "for an hour" and the snow-blossom "transitory", its bloom "sudden" without the gradual processes of budding and fading. The eternal quality of the experience is subject to, yet not negated by, the temporality of its context.

In strong contrast with this insistence is the rhetorical cry of longing for the fulness of that eternity only glimpsed here, for that "unimaginable/Zero summer" in which the paradoxes of "Midwinter spring" are intensified and fully resolved in the never-fading summer at absolute zero. The first published text, in the *New English Weekly* of 15 October 1942, included a line that spells out the metaphorical nature of this "summer", the last three lines reading:

> Where is the summer, the unimaginable
> Summer beyond sense, the inapprehensible
> Zero summer? (*CFQ* 160)

Since the "extra" line was never deleted in later proofs, Helen Gardner surmised that its subsequent omission was accidental, adding that "Any future editor would have to consider seriously

whether it should be restored. Without it the paragraph ends rather abruptly" (*CFQ* 161). Yet it seems to me that the abruptness is an essential part of the effect, and that the extra line explicates the metaphor unnecessarily; moreover, the awkwardness of "inapprehensible" as a line-ending after the previous one, "unimaginable", makes the slight addition of meaning hardly worthwhile. The omission, whether deliberate or accidental, strikes the reader who is not obliged to edit the text as, on the whole, a good thing.

In comparison with the intensity of this passage, *Burnt Norton*'s evocation of the timeless moment of illumination was tentative, although profoundly suggestive and moving. Much of the difference is due to the sensory extremes set up by the imagery of *Little Gidding* – also to the explicitness with which the pentecostal experience is presented. The "experiencing voice" of *Burnt Norton* I was exploratory and even a little bewildered; that of *Little Gidding* is fully aware of what is happening. Another difference is made by the functioning of the elemental imagery: fire (as it does throughout *Little Gidding*) plays a major part in the effect; and we are more aware than usual of all the traditional elements, fire, air, water and earth, playing their parts, as if recapitulating and modifying the elemental motifs of the other three Quartets – as they will do again in the lyric of *Little Gidding* Part II. Fire is light reflected on the surface of ice which both is and is not water; melting ice mixes with earth to become sodden; the products of earth are consumed by fire blazing into air

which is without wind and without smell, yet contains hints of both in the heat that "stirs" and the snow that is in "bloom". A strong sense not only of elemental presence but of elemental *process* emerges from the imagery. The timeless moment has again arrived unsought, but is now better understood.

The next typographical section moves from the experience itself to a series of firm statements about the relation between experience and purpose. Ostensibly addressing the hypothetical visitor to Little Gidding, whether pilgrim or tripper, the poet's voice insists that the realised experience of the place alters whatever initial purpose - or lack of it - the visitor may have entertained before the journey:

> If you came this way,
> Taking the route you would be likely to take
> From the place you would be likely to come from,
> If you came this way in may time, you would find the hedges
> White again, in May, with voluptuary sweetness.
> It would be the same at the end of the journey,
> If you came at night like a broken king,
> If you came by day not knowing what you came for,
> It would be the same, when you leave the rough road
> And turn behind the pig-sty to the dull facade
> And the tombstone. And what you thought you came for
> Is only a shell, a husk of meaning
> From which the purpose breaks only when it is fulfilled
> If at all. Either you had no purpose
> Or the purpose is beyond the end you figured
> And is altered in fulfilment. There are other places
> Which also are the world's end, some at the sea jaws,
> Or over a dark lake, in a desert or a city -
> But this is the nearest, in place and time,
> Now and in England.

The change in tone and imagery is striking. We are now more directly addressed - though the generic "you" includes a hint of self-communing - and the emphasis is on assessment rather than description of experience. The insistent tone is, of course, largely due to the combination of "you" with a kind of

austerely dogged reiteration of certain words and phrases: "If", "If you came this way" and "If you came", "you would be likely", "It would be the same", "purpose". (The phrase "you came" occurs six times.) Scattered internal rhyming on "you came" and "the same" further contributes to the insistence, as does the assonantal harping on sameness in key words: "came", "way", "Taking", "take", "place", "may", "May", "same", "day". We feel rather as if a crucial lesson were being drummed into us, yet the variety of detail and fluidity of the verse (with its frequent enjambement) help us to listen without impatience. The norm of four stresses to the line is largely maintained, but the nature of the tension aroused is very different from that of the opening passage, since we are inclined to read more quickly without savouring individual images, and because no sentence-end except the first coincides with a line-end.

The opening sentence indulges in a conscious excess of meditative deliberation, the exploratory repetitions clustering so thickly that virtually every thought or phrase is paralleled except for the prediction that "you would find the hedges/White again...with voluptuary sweetness"; and even that notion, as "again" reminds us, modifies the image of the snow-blossom from the previous passage while transferring the blossom proper to the appropriate season. Strictly speaking, "in May" is not a repetition of "in may time", since the one refers to the month itself and the other to the season when the plant is in flower - but the homonyms do contribute to the effect of the poet's voice "back-stitching" to reinforce each idea, bringing us

firmly along whatever route we come from. The impression created here and in the lines that follow is that certain inescapable consequences must attend a journey to this place: we seem to be hearing both a promise and a warning. Removed from their context, the lines

> Taking the route you would be likely to take
> From the place you would be likely to come from

could sound ploddingly awkward, yet in context they command our attention more fully than a simple alternative such as "Wherever you came from". The repetition builds up suitable expectancy.

Reading "It would be the same at the end of the journey", we do not yet know quite what this sameness consists in: we are delayed by a pair of "If you came" clauses, another assertion that "It would be the same", and a clause beginning "when you", carrying us to the end of the sentence with a strong *sense* of the "sameness" but no further clarity about its nature. (We have to wait another couple of sentences for that.) Meanwhile our imagined visit has been aligned with other kinds of visit, ranging from the nocturnal flight of the defeated Charles I to the casual arrival of the sightseer with no real purpose at all; and before the sameness is made clear to us, we are compelled to respond to the homely features of the landscape itself as seen by any visitor regardless of his motives: the rough road, the pig-sty, the dull facade and the tombstone (Ferrar's own, a few yards from the rather undistinguished west front of the restored church). What is interesting about this delay is that before it is satisfied, we are imaginatively drawn into the journey and arrival, and made to feel it is more than simply an

individual excursion: it is, rather, a participation in a communal experience that transcends time and personal need or taste. The emphasis on the individual taken up into the communal is stronger in *Little Gidding* than elsewhere in the cycle; it is almost entirely absent from *Burnt Norton*.

If we have entertained any illusion about *our* purpose in coming, this, we now learn, is a mere shell out of which the true purpose may emerge like a bud bursting its confines (an unusual metaphor for which the earlier images of blossom have helped to prepare us). The ultimate purpose (implicitly God's) lies beyond our conscious intentions, and its existence is affirmed whether or not we are ever vouchsafed full awareness of its nature: it breaks out "only when it is fulfilled/If [it breaks out] at all". The single purpose of one visitor is taken up into, and transformed by, the divine purpose. Whether our routes and motives are particular or indeterminate, this place of pilgrimage imposes its own pattern upon the comer: and the purpose of the journey emerges like a germinating seed. This is why "It would be the same" for all comers.

Although it is impossible to say whether Eliot consciously intended it, some of the imagery here rouses distant echoes that seem to play their part in the general effect: the proximity of "pig-sty" and "husk" (though the former is literal, the latter metaphorical) encourages a fleeting thought of the prodigal son (*Luke* 15:16), whose journey in retrospect acquired a different purpose from the one with which he began it.

> Either you had no purpose
> Or the purpose is beyond the end you figured
> And is altered in fulfilment.

As so often in Eliot's verse, the term "end" takes on connotations of aim and purpose as well as of cessation or completion. Our acts have greater significance than we initially assign to them, because "purpose" does not begin and end with ourselves.

Yet this general idea is presented as having a special relevance to Gidding: it is a peculiar (though not unique) turning-point standing for the less visible turning-points in our lives - it is "the world's end", as are other places of pilgrimage:

> There are other places
> Which also are the world's end, some at the sea jaws,
> Or over a dark lake, in a desert or a city -

places where personal motives are, more clearly than usual, subsumed into higher and more mysterious ones. Following Eliot's hints, commentators have listed some of the places he apparently had in mind, such as Iona, Lindisfarne, Glendalough, the desert of St Anthony's hermitage and the Padua of another St Anthony. Such details are of interest, but the suggestiveness of the lines as they stand in the text carries its own authority, allowing us to hear echoes of other Quartets (the "sea jaws" of *The Dry Salvages* Part IV and the desert of *Burnt Norton* Part V, for instance), besides hints of *The Waste Land* and *Ash-Wednesday*. The "world's end" is really any place of transcendent encounter (including encounter with death - and we think again of the war), though here it signifies especially those places where such encounters are hallowed by those who have gone before. A passage from the last chorus of *Murder in the Cathedral* clarifies the point as well as echoing some of the imagery:

> For wherever a saint has dwelt, wherever a martyr has
> given his blood for the blood of Christ,
> There is holy ground, and the sanctity shall not
> depart from it
> Though armies trample over it, though sightseers come
> with guide-books looking over it;
> From where the western seas gnaw at the coast of Iona,
> To the death in the desert, the prayer in forgotten
> places by the broken imperial column,
> From such ground springs that which forever renews the
> earth
> Though it is forever denied. (*Plays* 53-54)

The poet now makes his special claim for Little Gidding:

> But this is the nearest, in place and time,
> Now and in England.

The phrasing reminds us that although the poet's themes may take us beyond space and time, we are creatures of both, and both matter; indeed they are made to matter more explicitly in *Little Gidding* than in the other Quartets. The emphasis on England at the ends of three verse-paragraphs (two in Part I and one in Part V) has nothing to do with narrow patriotism but everything to do with the insight that in all our explorations of the world or the spirit, "Home is where one starts from" (*East Coker* V), regardless of where home is.

After another line-break, Part I continues with what looks at first like mere reiteration of the point already so firmly made: "It would always be the same"; but we soon find that the emphasis on *purpose* in the middle paragraph is now giving way to an emphasis on *prayer* - the purpose that subsumes all other purposes now acquires a sharper focus. The multiplicity of motives and intentions is resolved into a unity of submission to the validity of prayer and contemplation, which join us to the communion of those long dead, so that their words speak to us with redoubled power.

> If you came this way,
> Taking any route, starting from anywhere,
> At any time or at any season,
> It would always be the same: you would have to put off
> Sense and notion. 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.

The first few lines reiterate the conditional formulations that we saw at the opening of the previous paragraph (the first half-lines of each are identical), and the "sameness" is again asserted as we have seen. But now the focus is not on sameness of ultimate purpose but on sameness of necessary action and response, on what "you would have" to do. It is unnecessary to object that many modern visitors to Gidding do *not* pray or that many in fact *do* merely "inform curiosity" and "carry report". The "rather censorious warnings to antiquarians and tourists" (*CFQ* 165) have their point: by a natural use of poetic licence Eliot presents the advisable as the inevitable, an oblique way of affirming that even if we ignore the *numen* of the sacred place, it does not ignore us. The putting off of "Sense and notion" implies a stripping of temporal considerations in the face of the eternal values enshrined here: and if the visitor to Gidding does not do this, at least we may remind ourselves that that other "visitor", the reader of the poem itself, is compelled to do so in order really to read it at all. (Since readers of the poem far outnumber visitors to the place itself,

this transference of application is not without a certain odd validity. It is like an indirect but salutary reminder that the poetry exists for purposes other than acquiring a cultural patina, passing an examination or writing a thesis.) Here the emphasis is on divesting ourselves of the urge to control and master, and on acquiring - in the much-invoked and ever-useful phrase of Keats - the "wise passiveness" which Eliot associates here with prayer in its fullest sense:

> 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.

The fact that "prayer has been valid" at Little Gidding does not of course invalidate other prayer, but does affirm the hallowing force of the particular place and its history, together with the essential communality and efficacy of prayer: Eliot's faith is certainly that the prayers of others in a certain place make a difference to those prayers subsequently offered in it.

Prayer, we read, is more than formula, and more than individual action: "the conscious occupation/Of the praying mind", though an aspect of prayer, is after all only that of one mind, and "the sound of the voice praying" that of one voice. Prayer in its fulness is the continuous act of the communion of saints, of the church triumphant as well as militant, in which we, as we pray individually, are participants; it is not simply something we do, but something we enter into. It is a process of hearing and receiving, not only of speaking and offering - which is why, in prayer at Gidding, the visitor may hold communion with the dead in terms which they themselves could not have conceived:

> 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.

As the phrase "tongued with fire" suggests, the pentecostal moment in the sunny winter landscape now returns as, by implication, a pentecostal awareness attendant on prayer.[8] Several clear differences between the two are worth noticing. The first was intensely realised through sensory imagery, and seemed to be an unbidden experience of the individual spirit reflected in the natural world around it, an "illumination" like that of the rose-garden, though more fully grasped. The second emerges out of an attitude of prayer, and the emphasis this time is not on the individual experience so much as on communication that outsoars temporal limits. This pentecostal visitation is not mirrored in a landscape of silent objects, but expressed in a community of ever-living voices. At this point in the poem they seem most likely to be the voices of the Ferrar community at Gidding; but as the Quartet unfolds, they include the voices of dead poets, of all involved in the conflicts of seventeenth-century England, of the fourteenth-century mystics, and indeed of all and any of the dead in communion with whom we are lifted from time into eternity.

The meditation on prayer reaches its climax in the pentecostal image, the line itself standing out from its context by virtue of its six stresses in contrast to the usual four: the communication

> Of the déad is tóngued with fíre beyónd the lánguage
> of the líving.

Up to now we have concentrated on how the words of the dead, "tongued with fire", exert a pentecostal influence upon the individual who is praying. But the line seems to have another meaning too: the words of the dead are tongued with the fire of the Holy Spirit to raise our prayers and meditations, along with theirs, into the sphere where they pierce the divine ear. In other words, "the living" do not pray alone, and alone their prayers are inadequate: it is as part of a *community* of praying souls linked by the Paraclete that they pray at all, whether they know it or not. Clearly Eliot does not mean, in this line, to suggest that the living are inherently inferior to the dead, but rather that all real prayer (and indeed all real communication) defies the limits of the temporal. As we read in Part V:

> We are born with the dead:
> See, they return, and bring us with them.

The pentecostal experience at prayer is therefore also an "intersection of the timeless moment", or what *The Dry Salvages* calls "The point of intersection of the timeless/With time". But now, even for those without the saint's high vocation, this is not an "unattended/Moment", but a moment girt about with clouds of witness. *Little Gidding* I has moved from describing the stirring of the individual spirit to affirming the timeless communion of spirits, and although from the individual's point of view this is necessarily associated with a specific place and time, from the eternal point of view it transcends both:

> Here, the intersection of the timeless moment
> Is England and nowhere. Never and always.

The poles of the paradox are emphasised by the return, in the last two lines, to the norm of four stresses, the movement -

especially in the last line - seesawing appropriately between the opposed key terms. These poles are defined, too, as much by the opposition of "Here" and "nowhere" as by "Never and always" (which also includes the unstated "now"). And although for the visitor to Little Gidding church the immediate focus of the experience may be "England", its significance expands to accommodate the unstated addition "everywhere". There are, then, really three temporal terms and three corresponding spatial ones defining the range of this intersection: it is *never*, *now* and *always*; and it is *nowhere*, *here* and *everywhere*. Since it occurs in time and space, it is both now and here ("On a winter's afternoon, in a secluded chapel" as Part V puts it); since it is not definable in terms of time or space it is both never and nowhere; and since it incorporates the rest of time and space it is both always and everywhere. And finally, since it is the pattern of such timeless moments that gives meaning to history (as Part V will also affirm),

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

Eliot's known visit to Little Gidding took place, as we have seen, in May 1936. But if we wish to read this Quartet "dramatically", aligning the supposed visit with the other images redolent of wartime England, we are perhaps justified in placing Part I on a midwinter afternoon in wartime - which is how its initial readers would have imagined it. If we can take it in this manner, Julia Reibetanz's remarks sum up aptly the point of both the references to England in Part I:

> The poet's visit to Little Gidding at this dark time in England's history comes to symbolize his sense of history as continuity and his faith that wisdom and strength may be gained in the present from the wisdom and strength of the past. (147)

And this strength and wisdom are gained from the "communication/ Of the dead" received, as if "tongued with fire", in an attitude of prayer.

In the course of Part 1 we can easily trace a development in focus and in imagery which links the first image of pentecostal fire to the second, and which presents in small compass the range of matter treated in the Quartets. Taking the three paragraphs in order, we are invited to focus first of all upon the phenomena of the natural world, then upon the creations and purposes of man in time and space, and finally upon the spiritual communion of mankind one with another and with the divine, a communion transcending the bounds of time and space. From the "intersection of the timeless moment" mirrored in the pentecostal midwinter spring at Little Gidding, we have moved to that same intersection point conceived as communication uniting the dead and the living, the human and the divine, the nation and the race.

Part II

The lyric of *Little Gidding* II, like that of *East Coker* II, has received surprisingly little attention. Critics and commentators generally accord it brief notice before concentrating on the real "meat" of Part II, the Dantesque encounter. The implication seems to be that the lyric is comparatively unimportant and straightforward. It seems to me to be neither, though I suspect that its structural importance in the cycle is rather obscured by a falling off in quality. It moves with assurance, but lacks clarity and precision, which seem to have been sacrificed for the sake of that assured movement.

On a rapid reading our immediate impressions are that its imagery brings together, more obviously than anything else in the cycle, the traditional quaternion of the elements, and that through them it offers a vision of universal destruction. But a number of its individual lines and images are highly problematic, as is the final line of each stanza: we are never quite sure what, in this context, "death" means, and even less sure about "of". We shall return to this question a little later.

Coming from the climactic affirmations of the first movement, we find no immmediate connection as the second begins. This in itself is no fault, any more than it would be in a literal string quartet: we are accustomed to suspending our judgment while we await further development. Our initial response, then, is to the contrast between the expansive meditation of Part I and the taut, even curt, weave of rhyme and image constituting the lyric. Except for the generic "we" twice in the third stanza, it is an impersonal construct with

no direct expression of emotion, although the images seem designed to elicit an emotive response.

Each eight-line stanza rhymes in couplets, and every couplet is end-stopped, encouraging a strong individual focus on the images it encloses. Not a single sentence is linked to its predecessor by any conjunction, nor does Eliot dispense with traditional punctuation to allow the fluidity we felt in the corresponding lyrics of *Burnt Norton* and *East Coker*. The effect is percussive, as of a series of drum-taps.

> Ásh on an óld man's sléeve
> Is áll the ásh the bùrnt róses léave.
> Dúst in the áir suspénded
> Márks the pláce where a stóry énded.
> Dúst inbréathed was a hóuse –
> The wáll, the wáinscot and the móuse.
> The déath of hópe and despáir,
> Thís is the déath of áir.
>
> There are flóod and dróuth
> Óver the éyes and ín the móuth,
> Dèad wáter and déad sánd
> Conténding for the úpper hánd.
> The párched evíscerate sóil
> Gápes at the vánity of tóil,
> Láughs withóut mírth.
> Thís is the déath of éarth.
>
> Wáter and fíre succéed
> The tówn, the pásture and the wéed.
> Watér and fíre derídc
> The sácrifice that wé denied.
> Wáter and fíre shall rót
> The márred foundátions wé forgót,
> Of sánctuary and chóir.
> Thís is the déath of wáter and fíre.

The lines vary between four and nine syllables, most of them six, seven or eight. The stress-pattern, however, is more regular. The ghost of accentual-syllabic metre overlays the looser pattern of spoken stresses to give us, in each couplet, a fairly regular alternation of three and four primary stresses

to the line. (What I call "ghost stresses" are bracketed in the scansion above.) There are two exceptions: the last lines of stanzas 1 and 2, which pull us up shortly on an abrupt third stress. Preston speaks aptly of "the dead shudder as each stanza halts at the elemental death" (54). The last line of stanza 3, on the other hand, runs to the fourth stress which in terms of the stanza pattern we expect, yet which - owing to the short rein on the other two last lines - strikes the ear with a certain mild surprise. In other words, "This is the death of air" and "This is the death of earth" defy the expectation of a fourth stress set up by the stanza pattern; yet having done so, together they set up a *new* expectation which is in turn defied by the longer "This is the death of water and fire", providing the climax.

This metrical effect of slight abruptness and surprise is paralleled by the disposition of the imagery. After the two stanzas devoted to the "death of" two of the elements, we are led to anticipate two more stanzas corresponding to the other two, to complete the four. But the last two are dealt with together in the third stanza, so that the lyric comes to a sudden stop before we might expect it to. These devices, setting up expectations and then defeating them, create a general feeling of curtailment, in keeping with the theme of the destructive forces of nature at work upon man and his creations.

The elemental imagery of this passage, together with its refrain-like end-lines, has attracted commentary directing us

to Heraclitus's Fragment 76, about the life-through-mutual-destruction (or mutual-exclusion) of the elements:

> Fire lives [in] the death of earth, and air lives [in] the death of fire; water lives [in] the death of air, earth [in] that of water. (Freeman 30, with each bracketed *[in]* added to show how most translators understand the connection between the nouns.)

If we substitute "absence" for "death", the meaning becomes a little clearer. In the perpetual flux of the elements, each depends for its survival on the absence of one of the others: each suffers "death" to allow another to exist. The list of relationships follows the traditional order of the elements from highest to lowest, fire being the "highest" or "lightest" of the elements and dominating the Heraclitean cycle.

Now it is impossible to understand Eliot's lyric, if we look at it closely, in terms of this formulation. At most we can say that the Heraclitean fragment, like others, attracted him by its suggestiveness - if he had it in mind at all. The repeated phrase "death of" in the poem simply will not accommodate itself consistently to the apparent meaning of "death of" in Heraclitus, as I will demonstrate.

But before pursuing the larger question of what precisely the end-lines *are* saying, let us look at some of the details one by one and see to what extent they communicate successfully.

The first has long been the most puzzling of all: "Ash on an old man's sleeve/Is all the ash the burnt roses leave". Northrop Frye suggested that it referred to an old experiment in which, when a flower was burnt to ashes, its "ghost" could be seen hovering over them, offering a symbol of immortality (88). And allusion has sometimes been made to Sir Thomas

Browne's mention, at the end of *The Garden of Cyrus*, of raising up "the ghost of a rose" (174). But this tells us nothing about "Ash on an *old man's sleeve*". Blamires (134) suggested that we should imagine an old man poking his garden bonfire and getting the ash on his sleeves; this is surely asking too much of the imagination. Levy and Scherle tell us that Eliot attributed the image to the results of fire-watching during the war:

> During the Blitz [he said] the accumulated debris was suspended in the London air for hours after a bombing. Then it would slowly descend and cover one's sleeves and coat with a fine white ash. I often experienced this effect during long night hours on the roof. (*CFQ* 166)

Even this does nothing to explain the mention of roses, so that we might excusably wonder whether Eliot's Blitz experience has not become overlaid and obscured by an attempt, in the collocation of "burnt" and "roses", to put us in mind of *Burnt Norton*. His reference to the Blitz certainly helps to confirm readings of later images in the lyric, but leaves our grasp of this one incomplete. What are the roses that are burnt? (Are they literal roses in Bloomsbury or Kensington? - too much, surely, for us to assume.) And why an *old* man's sleeve? Eliot was only in his early fifties in the Blitz, and many younger fire-watchers unfit for active service must have had the same experience.

At the risk of presumption in the face of Eliot's reported words, I find it helpful to visualise the lines in another way - also, and this time more persuasively, hinted at by Blamires (134): an old man, his passions (symbolised by the roses) now

burnt out, declining into the slovenliness of senility, his clothes covered in tobacco ash as he approaches his own descent into dust and ashes. (We might compare "The burnt-out ends of smoky days" of "Preludes", reapplying it to an individual life and perhaps, by metaphorical extension, to a civilization.) The roses, age-old symbol of human love and desire, emphasise the contrast between vital ardour and dusty decay. This, the lines seem to imply, is what our earthly passions come to, "Ash on an old man's sleeve" - a less attractive image than *Burnt Norton*'s tender symbol of memory, "dust on a bowl of rose-leaves".

This makes some sort of sense of the lines - since we have to read them as poetic statement and not merely autobiographical reminiscence - but if it does, the mental shifts required are hardly justified within such a short space. The slight poignancy within the firmness of statement, if we can capture it readily enough to respond, is perhaps reinforced by the alliterative insistence of the glottal-stop vowels on "Ash", "old", "all" and "ash" again. But the fleeting image seems, whichever way we look at it, too uncharacteristically intimate to blend successfully into context with the rest of the lyric. Perhaps the point was to hint, by contrast with the preceding images of pentecostal fire, at another firing of the spirit that might have *felt* pentecostal but wasn't; the old man's "soul's sap" no longer "quivers" (if it ever did), and is now nothing but dust and ashes.

The connotations of the last phrase are, of course, not accidental. Each of the first three couplets begins with

either "Dust" or "Ash", and one thing that soon emerges with clarity is that the lyric meditates on the evanescence of merely human passion and effort - again, perhaps by contrast with the timeless efficacy of prayer affirmed in Part 1. Ash and dust, not only liturgically, are aspects of the same thing: the reduction in air to an amorphous state (whether through fire or other agencies) of forms produced by the elemental earth. It begins to look as if "the death of air" means not "the death suffered *by* air" but "the death suffered *in* air or through the medium *of* air". The next image tends to confirm this.

"Dust in the air suspended/Marks the place where a story ended": the ending of a story implies the ending of a life. Eliot at one stage wrote "a history" and then reverted to "a story" (*CFQ* 166), but if we entertain a mental picture and not merely an abstract idea, we are likely to think of the dust hovering over a recently demolished or damaged building. There is no reason why we should be reluctant to find a pun here on "story" and "storey", even if we take it to have been an afterthought on the poet's part. Eliot was not averse to the "serious pun" as an economical device, and the notion of a newly-bombed building both fits in with Eliot's account (convincing or not) of the previous couplet and offers an anticipatory link to the air-raid setting of Part IIB. If we accept such a reading, the dust comes to symbolise, once more, not the death suffered *by* air but the death that arrives *through* the air. We shall have to revise our notion of that strangely ambiguous word "of" when we arrive at the end of the stanza.

The third couplet begins with "Dust" again, and the mention of a house tends to support the above reading of the previous couplet: where a house, or part of it, has ended, dust hangs in the air, but where a house exists, dust has been given form and, metaphorically, life - it has been "inbreathed". The word faintly recalls Milton's line in "At a Solemn Musick" about the power of voice and verse, like that of the Creator, to pierce "Dead things with inbreathed sense". The echo, at any rate, of the Genesis account of man's creation will hardly be lost. But man's effort as creator of houses (literal or dynastic) is rhetorically undercut by the reminder that they are ultimately dust and revert to ruin, "The wall, the wainscot and the mouse" that we recognize from *East Coker*. In *East Coker* this destruction or decay was part of a cycle that included re-creation; but there is no context of re-creation here.

The association of dust and ash with air, and the hint of air as a medium of annihilation, give a certain force to the last line of the stanza without our invoking the enigmatic formulation of Heraclitus. The "death of air" - and here we have the peculiar ambiguity of "*of*" - must signify the death that comes through the air or the signs of death seen in the air; it certainly has nothing to do with the notion of the element itself as dying.

The air as destroyer of man's structures is also presented, it seems, as destroyer of hope and despair. We can understand how it destroys hope, but not how it destroys despair - unless this means simply that "in the face of endless change, both

hope and despair are beside the point" (Reibetanz 152). In any event, the couplet lacks the context-generated precision of the lines from *Ash-Wednesday* III, "The deceitful face of hope and of despair" and "strength beyond hope and despair". Eliot often uses opposed abstractions to good effect, but this coupling in the *Little Gidding* lyric seems little more than a vague emotive gesture. The tone of grim assurance, aided by gnomic rhythm and structure, is here perhaps offering a rhetorical substitute for precise intelligibility.

Unlike stanza 1 where the four sentences rigidly fit the couplets, stanza 2 is a little more fluid in structure, with units composed of four lines, three lines and then one. The abruptness of the rhythms makes the variation appropriate and necessary. We are faced now with different modes of destruction, but with images linked by their reminders of the human body and its organs.

The "flood and drouth" also perhaps reflect the sensations of a fire-watcher in the Blitz contemplating, indeed being physically affected by, the aftermath of the bombings and of the efforts to put out the fires - parched amid the sheets of water from the fire-engines while the dust continues to rise. Yet here again alternative possibilities offer themselves. The opening lines, in a vein of daunting impersonality ("the eyes", "the mouth"), tend to evoke the image of a dead and dying body on the seashore, at the point where land and sea meet. (This reminder of *The Dry Salvages*, like those of *Burnt Norton* and *East Coker* in stanza 1, is doubtless deliberate on Eliot's part, though the echoes all feel a little contrived, unlike

those at the end of *Little Gidding*.) The combination of "flood and drouth" - the latter word more common in Eliot's native United States than in England - suggests a waterlogged body unable to receive sustenance from that water; we may think of a body washed up by the salt sea, and again are justified in hearing hints of the war and its consequences, if only as symbols of a more universal state of affairs. The flood is then over the eyes, the "drouth" - and perhaps sand - in the mouth; the former cannot see, the latter cannot drink. Like a carcase quarrelled over by hyenas and vultures, the body has its possession contested by water and sand, but - rather strikingly - these scavengers are themselves "dead", receiving no life from what they prey upon.

As an image of elemental forces acting in hostility to man, this is strong; but the expression of it is flawed. The opening "There are" strikes one as weak and inconsequential, the word "There" acquiring metrical stress only by a kind of deference to the prevailing pattern; and "for the upper hand" is somewhat gratuitous after "Contending": it looks like a line-filler to rhyme with "sand".

The next sentence, half-linked to the eyes and mouth by the metaphors "Gapes" and "Laughs", sets up a different picture, if we continue to ignore the alternative reading that places the entire lyric in the context of an air-raid. Drought-stricken soil, itself personified as tortured, in turn mocks man's efforts while it frustrates them. It too has "drouth... in the mouth", and is "eviscerate" - gutted or disembowelled

of its goodness. (The adjectival use is a curious one, since "eviscerate" normally occurs as a verb only; and the force it exerts here hardly compensates for its self-consciousness.) The impression is of an earth spitefully triumphant amid its own disaster.

But the alternative and perhaps more acceptable reading of these lines would be to place them again in the wartime context of an air-raid and take the gaping of the earth to signify not drought fissures but bomb craters. (Earlier drafts tried out "scorched [*or* annealed] and unemployable" where we now have "parched eviscerate" (*CFQ* 167), and this supports the latter reading.) In either case, the image is one of a waste land that mocks its inhabitants as if with a life of its own at the very point when it has no such life.

If we read this stanza as suggested above, its last line functions somewhat differently from that of stanza 1. The "death of earth" does, it is true, suggest death caused by, or through the medium of, earth, and to that extent parallels the "death of air"; but since the earth itself is gutted, and contends with water but receives no life from it, the phrase also signifies a death suffered *by* earth. The identical pattern of the refrain-lines obscures this semantic variation in the preposition.

The last stanza is the least problematic and most successful of the three. The elemental destroyers, water again and fire, are placed by the first couplet as together the last in a descending chain of items: in their catastrophic progress they overwhelm and replace the town (man's artefact and the symbol

of his civility), the pasture (man's partial ordering of nature) and the weed (nature left to itself, but still with a principle of life in it). Water and fire are elemental barbarians which, like the parched soil of stanza 2, mock human loss. But *un*like that parched soil, they themselves are not destroyed: they are triumphant vandals feeding upon the remnants of civilization. It will be seen that the roles played by the elements in each stanza are differentiated by the metaphors in which they are couched, and that the refrain-lines therefore impose a slightly spurious uniformity upon the lyric. In stanza 1 air is really neither victorious nor defeated, but simply a medium of destruction. In stanza 2 earth and water at first contend with each other, then earth alone becomes both victim and agent (as well as medium) of destruction, offering grisly mockery of man even in its death-throes. In stanza 3 water and fire are unambiguously victorious, are the scourges of man's world and suffer no death in themselves: the "death of water and fire" is the death inflicted *by* water and fire, not undergone by them. Their victory is underscored by their united appearance, coupled to an active verb ("succeed", "deride", "shall rot"), in each of the first three couplets.

Although humanity as victim has been implicitly present all through the lyric, it is only halfway through the last stanza that the generic "we" appears, and both its occurrences, "we denied" and "we forgot", are in a context of self-reproach. Only here does man appear as more than victim - as, indeed, a contributor to his own plight. The implication is that his

denial and negligence have made possible the victory of water and fire, here more clearly than ever the result of bombings and of the quenching of their results. Man's failure to attend to his spiritual vocation, ideally a higher activity than that implied in "town" (let alone "pasture" or "weed") has brought this disaster upon him. "The marred foundations we forgot,/Of sanctuary and choir" might briefly remind us of Little Gidding and the values it enshrines, but more immediately they put us in mind of Coventry Cathedral or of the London churches destroyed in the Blitz. Over these, the elemental scourges assert their ruinous ascendancy: the words "shall rot" (with the forcefully prophetic "shall" instead of "will") are especially strong in their context, driving home the idea not only of sudden calamity but also of steady decay following it. With a highly-charged ambiguity characteristic of him, Eliot accords to "marred foundations" a Janus-like function: the foundations, the physical fabric or the spiritual commitment which has raised them, are "marred" by the destruction visited upon them, but have also been "marred" by the negligence of spirit that encouraged the destruction in the first place. The enemies presented in the lyric are the elements themselves, but there is also a fifth element or quintessence of destructive power, subtler than all the rest, which is humanity's failure to honour its spiritual vocation. No political enemy is even hinted at.

That these preoccupations were of long standing with Eliot is apparent as soon as we turn to *The Rock*, written nearly ten years earlier. There, but with less artistry than here, he had

inveighed against neglect of the Church and the churches, and had given prophetic lines to two successive choric voices:

> There shall be left the broken chimney,
> The peeled hull, a pile of rusty iron,
> In a street of scattered brick where the goat climbs,
> Where My Word is unspoken

and

> Where My Word is unspoken,
> In the land of lobelias and tennis flannels
> The rabbit shall burrow and the thorn revisit,
> The nettle shall flourish on the gravel court,
> And the wind shall say: 'Here were decent godless
> people:
> Their only monument the asphalt road
> And a thousand lost golf balls'.

In analysing the *Little Gidding* lyric it may seem strange to make higher claims for the more explicitly sermonic stanza (the third) than for the other two; but the third can be seen in retrospect as the real destination of the piece and the point at which its thought and expression are both most explicit and most precise. The other two stanzas are not without power, but are inadequately unified, inconsistent in their handling of the elemental imagery, and occasionally obscure or rather awkwardly expressed. They leave an impression of being too deliberately designed to gather up echoes from the other Quartets and to introduce stanza 3: they do not fully "pay their way".

Nevertheless this lyric, in its grim contrast to the pentecostal illumination of Part I, is of crucial importance in preparing us for the rest of Part II - all the more so if we can see an air-raid as the unifying image throughout the three stanzas. It directs us towards the modified Inferno in which the Dantesque encounter is to unfold: an encounter ending in

the summons to purgatorial restoration before we rise with the poet, at the close of the cycle, to the nearest he can bring us to the paradisal beatitude of his greatest poetic master.

The Dante imitation (Part IIB) has been so widely discussed and so universally praised that of all sections of the cycle it seems to warrant least in the way of fresh commentary. Yet a sequential analysis of it may help to answer some questions and to raise others not usually asked.

In his 1961 lecture "To Criticize the Critic" Eliot spoke of "Jules Laforgue, to whom I owe more than to any one poet in any language" (*TCC* 22). Yet in an earlier talk, "What Dante Means to Me" (1950), he had said of Dante that "I still, after forty years, regard his poetry as the most persistent and deepest influence upon my own verse" (*TCC* 125). This is not the flat contradiction it looks like - though in 1961 he did rather inconsistently deny that the greatest poets such as Shakespeare and Dante can "influence" (*TCC* 188). In the 1950 talk he went on to say of Laforgue that "he was the first to teach me how to speak, to teach me the poetic possibilities of my own idiom of speech", adding that "the smaller poet, who has directed one's first steps, is more like an admired elder brother", whereas the great masters are like deified ancestors (*TCC* 126).

The distinction is clear: Laforgue enabled him to start writing poetry with an authentic voice, and his was therefore the uniquely valuable initial influence. But Dante remained the most pervasive influence for the rest of his career - from his youth, when "Dante's astonishing economy and directness of language...provided for me a wholesome corrective to the extra-

vagances of the Elizabethan, Jacobean and Caroline authors in whom I also delighted" (*TCC* 23), to *Little Gidding* Part II, where he consciously imitated him.

In distinguishing between imitation and influence, Eliot introduced a significant exception in the case of Dante:

> the difference between influence and imitation is that influence can fecundate, whereas imitation - especially unconscious imitation - can only sterilize. (But when I came to attempt one brief imitation of Dante I was fifty-five years old and knew exactly what I was doing.) (*TCC* 18)

The implication is that Dante lent himself on that occasion to imitation without the concomitant sterility - although, as Eliot added with a typical blend of whimsy and seriousness, "imitation of a writer in a foreign language can often be profitable - because we cannot succeed" (*TCC* 18-19). Total success *qua* imitation need not be assessed here; but the imitation, such as it is, is generally regarded as highly successful in fulfilling its function in the Quartet itself.

After referring (in the earlier of these two essays) to his borrowings and adaptations from Dante in *The Waste Land*, Eliot went on to say:

> Twenty years after writing *The Waste Land*, I wrote, in *Little Gidding*, a passage which is intended to be the nearest equivalent to a canto of the Inferno or the Purgatorio, in style as well as content, that I could achieve. The intention, of course, was the same as with my allusions to Dante in *The Waste Land*: to present to the mind of the reader a parallel, by means of contrast, between the Inferno and the Purgatorio, which Dante visited and a hallucinated scene after an air-raid. But the method is different: here I was debarred from quoting or adapting at length - I borrowed and adapted freely only a few phrases - because I was *imitating*. (*TCC* 128)

Here, perhaps more than anywhere else in his poetry, Eliot

wanted the reader to recognize the parallel with Dante and to allow it to guide his response. The setting is *Inferno*-like, and the ghost's message at the end directs us, together with the poet-narrator, to an acceptance of "that refining fire", the agent of purgatorial restoration.

Several Dantesque features soon make themselves apparent: the quasi-infernal setting, with visually and auditorily precise images setting the atmosphere before the meeting takes place; the element of uncertainty or surprise in the meeting itself; the initial questions before the spirit satisfies the poet in a speech of some length; and the approximation to terza rima in which the whole episode is recounted. Perhaps only in Shelley's *The Triumph of Life* (which Eliot greatly admired) and in Owen's "Strange Meeting" (though it lacks the terza rima) do we find comparably Dantesque passages in English that are at the same time original poems in their own right. But we may add that the sometimes elaborate language and mystifying paradox in Eliot's passage is rather different from Dante's notable plainness of diction. The extent to which this serves its own purpose in Eliot's poem will emerge in the course of analysis.

It is necessary to give some attention to Eliot's imitation of, or rather substitute for, terza rima. He was perfectly explicit about his feelings on the subject:

> I think that rhymed *terza rima* is probably less unsatisfactory for translation of the Divine Comedy than is blank verse....Dante *thought* in *terza rima*, and a poem should be translated as nearly as possible in the same thought-form as the original. (*TCC* 128-129)

But he goes on to say (soon after the Dorothy Sayers *Inferno* appeared, and perhaps with her version or Binyon's in mind) that

> when I read a *terza rima* translation of the Divine Comedy and come to some passage of which I remember the original pretty closely, I am always worried in anticipation, by the inevitable shifts and twists which I know the translator will be obliged to make, in order to fit Dante's words into English rhyme. And no verse seems to demand greater literalness in translation than Dante's, because no poet convinces one more completely that the word he has used is the word he wanted, and that no other will do. (*TCC* 129)

This goes some way to explain his strategy in *Little Gidding*, where he was *not* obliged to translate, yet wanted to achieve a close approximation to terza rima movement without the problem of obtrusive rhyming. Again he explains his thinking fully:

> English is less copiously provided with rhyming words than Italian; and those rhymes we have are in a way more emphatic. The rhyming words call too much attention to themselves: Italian is the one language known to me in which exact rhyme can always achieve its effect - and what the effect of rhyme is, is for the neurologist rather than the poet to investigate - without the risk of obtruding itself. I therefore adopted, for my purpose, a simple alternation of unrhymed masculine and feminine terminations, as the nearest way of giving the light effect of the rhyme in Italian. (*TCC* 128)

(It is, by the way, worth noticing how when he uses rhyme in the Quartets - Part IIA and Part IV of each Quartet, except for *The Dry Salvages* Part IV - he deliberately exploits the "emphatic" nature of English rhyme.)

This, then, is the rationale of his choice of verse-medium in *Little Gidding* Part IIB. But he says nothing about the length of line chosen. Dante's feminine-ending line with its eleven syllables has usually been rendered in English verse-translation (whether terza rima or blank verse) by iambic

pentameter, as the most natural approximation. What Eliot does here is both similar and different. His lines throughout the passage are of ten or eleven syllables, occasionally twelve. They are long enough to accommodate, if we wish to hear them so, a slightly wrenched, but recognizable, accentual-syllabic pattern of five stresses; yet as we hear them in modern speech-rhythms, they normally have four primary ones. (Peter Dale, noting the same rhythmic duality in this passage, remarks that "Eliot may have intended the uncertain hour and the vacillation of the rhythm to complement each other" (90), and he too demonstrates - slightly differently - both methods of scansion.)

Ín the uncértain hóur befóre the mórning
  Néar the énding óf intérminable níght
  Át the recúrrent énd óf the unénding
Áfter the dárk dóve with the flíckering tóngue
  Had pássed belów the horízon óf his hóming
  While the déad léaves still ráttled ón like tín
Óver the ásphalt whére no óther sóund was
  Betwéen three dístricts whénce the smóke aróse
  I mét one wálking, lóiterîng and húrried
As if blówn towárds me líke the métal léaves
  Befóre the úrban dáwn wind únresísting.

There we have the pattern of five stresses to the line. And now follows the same passage with the pattern of four, which in most lines entails not stressing one of the connectives (usually a conjunction or one of the insistent prepositions).

In the úncértain hóur before the mórning
  Néar the énding of intérminable níght
  At the recúrrent énd of the únénding
After the dárk dóve with the flíckering tóngue
  Had pássed belów the horízon of his hóming
  While the déad léaves still ráttled on like tín
Óver the ásphalt where nó other sóund was
  Between thrée dístricts whence the smóke aróse
  I mét one wálking, lóitering and húrried
As if blówn towárds me like the métal léaves
  Before the úrban dáwn wind únresísting.

I have scanned this extract in both ways to suggest first the fairly deliberate pace of the traditional blank-verse rhythm, then the slightly faster, more fluid movement of the four stresses as likely to be heard by the modern reader. What I want to suggest is that, in the ear accustomed to English blank verse, the one pattern quietly overlays the other to produce, if only half-consciously, a peculiar blend of the old and the new - just as Eliot is here attempting something both traditional and yet original in his adaptation of Dante's own measure. The pattern of four, with occasional exceptions, is the one most of us are likely to prefer; but the unusually regular number of syllables per line persuades me that Eliot would have wanted the reader, ideally, to feel the slight tension between the two patterns and, in some sense, to respond to both simultaneously. The movement of the verse, if we try to describe it impressionistically, is curiously like the movement of the ghost as described in the poem itself: both "loitering and hurried", an odd mixture of leisurely unfolding and rapid development. The latter is encouraged by the considerable use of enjambement, especially in the earlier part of the passage; and many lines that would normally take an end-stop are denied it (most of the lines scanned above are cases in point).

As we have seen, most if not all of the lyric (Part IIA) can be read as meditation arising out of the aftermath of an air-raid. Now we have an episode, couched in the narrative past tense so unusual in the Quartets, describing a further specific incident following an air-raid, and focussing on a

personal encounter in which the poet-speaker is narrator and responding consciousness - like Dante; and, like Dante again, the poet is the addressee of a speech addressed to him from beyond the grave.

Nothing in Eliot's preparatory notes for Part II indicated an intention to deal with wartime air-raids, and apart from the bare word "Inferno", nothing in them would prepare a reader for a conscious imitation of Dante. They simply read: "Lyric. air earth water & & [sic] daemonic fire. The Inferno." As Helen Gardner remarks:

> There is nothing in the original notes to suggest that Eliot's experiences in the air raids were to play a part in his poem; they thrust themselves in as he wrote. Anyone who lived through the London raids must link water and fire as equally destructive, remembering the charred and sodden ruins and their smell the morning after as the great hoses played on the flaming and smoking ruins. (*CFQ* 169)

This makes the end of the lyric clearer than ever; but perhaps the most original and striking imaginative leaps in the entire Quartet were to set a Dantesque meeting between the living and the dead at a point between a raid itself and sounding of the all-clear, and to develop the dominant thematic image of fire - in the multiple mode of Dante - by adding contemporary bombings and even the bomber itself (as a grim parody of the Holy Ghost) to play their parts before the episode ends. And it ends with the mention of "that refining fire" from *Purgatorio* XXVI, clearly a major landmark in Eliot's imaginative experience throughout his career.

The opening tercet, with repetitive circling fluidity, sets the scene in time which is somehow also timeless. The literal

time is "the uncertain hour" near dawn, near the end of a night that has *felt* "interminable", at the end of one in a recurring series of raids that seemed, while in progress, to be "unending". Literal and emotive time are blended here, by means of synonym-play, to offer a setting at once temporal, personal and (potentially) universal, since "interminable night" with its polysyllabic deliberation hints that earthly experience is analogous to Hell itself, the only interminable night in the fullest sense of the phrase. "*In* the uncertain hour" itself adds an element of the mysterious; Eliot had earlier written "At" (*CFQ* 172), which is more prosaic.

The second tercet expands on this temporal setting: it is after the departure of the bomber which has descended like an infernal parody of the Holy Ghost, discharged its tongues of fire, and then descended again below the horizon. Two traditional attributes of the Spirit are here combined, the dove and the fire; and added to them is the hint that this dove ("dark" unlike the Spirit) is of the homing variety, with a daunting sureness of direction. Moreover, it has what no literal dove ever had, a "flickering tongue" - clearly more reminiscent of the serpent than of the dove. And it leaves in its wake a sound of "dead leaves" rattling like tin. Eliot may here have been thinking of fragments of shrapnel on the asphalt surfaces of the streets, the "metal leaves" mentioned a few lines later that are blown about in the dawn wind - a slightly surrealistic detail. We are free to imagine a great silence punctuated and emphasised by the rattling, and no

doubt metallic chinking and scraping, of these fragments.

We are now passing from the temporal setting to the spatial one implied in "asphalt". But just as the temporal setting included what we may call an emotive dimension of quasi-time, so does the spatial one include a corresponding dimension. The event to be described takes place "Between three districts whence the smoke arose". Before arriving at "districts" Eliot had tried "angles" and "corners" (*CFQ* 172, 173), each of them apparently an attempt to suggest a specific place without locating it geographically. The districts may, of course, imply simply a focal point of three areas of London such as Brompton, Kensington and Chelsea; but the lack of further detail, the archaic flavour of "whence the smoke arose", and the strong sense of a realm both worldly and otherworldly, together invite a more metaphorical reading - so that we can perhaps fairly see these "districts" as connoting Earth, Hell and Purgatory - especially in view of what follows. The setting has prepared us, at any rate, for an event located initially yet not exclusively in mundane time and space.

Only after these eight lines of scene-setting, with their insistent prepositions and periodic build-up of expectation, comes the main clause, "I met one walking". The simple baldness of it carries the kind of authority we associate with Dante. Yet here again paradoxical complications immediately assert themselves: the stranger's movement is both "loitering and hurried", which creates a flavour of furtiveness; and although he is walking, he also seems to be gliding or floating "As if blown towards me". Already it is clear that he is not

a denizen of the familiar world. He resembles the "metal leaves" in his movement and it is an easy step to assume that, like them, he is not a natural inhabitant of the place. The word "unresisting" is positioned strangely enough to make us wonder for a moment what it qualifies: the wind itself, the leaves, or the stranger? Perhaps all three: neither stranger nor leaves offer any resistance (as a solid human body would) to the breeze in which they move; and if the dawn wind too is "unresisting", that implies a gentle wafting in contrast to a strong wind. It is tempting to find an echo of *Inferno* Canto V, but the wind on which the shades of Paolo and Francesca are borne is tempestuous. In any case, the next few lines, though less explicitly than in manuscript draft, direct us to another of Dante's encounters later in the *Inferno*.

> And as I fixed upon the down-turned face
> That pointed scrutiny with which we challenge
> The first-met stranger in the waning dusk
> I caught the sudden look of some dead master
> Whom I had known, forgotten, half recalled
> Both one and many; in the brown baked features
> The eyes of a familiar compound ghost
> Both intimate and unidentifiable.

The second and third lines of this excerpt constitute a muted and miniature epic simile which in its simplicity and vividness strongly resembles some of Dante's epic similes drawn from everyday experience. In the "waning dusk"[9] just before dawn, we regard the first stranger stirring abroad with a particular curiosity, especially if, with down-turned face, he does not regard us in the same way. Of course the lines have a certain literalness about them as well as presenting a simile: this *is* the first-met stranger just before dawn.

A number of other interesting details invite comment. In an earlier draft "That pointed scrutiny" was "that pointed narrowness of observation" (*CFQ* 174); and Gardner not surprisingly regards the latter as an "oddly stilted rendering" of Dante's description, just before the meeting with his master Brunetto Latini (*Inferno* XV.18–21), of how the spirits under the rain of fire looked at him and Virgil, his guide:

> As in the evening men are wont to look at one another under a new moon; and towards us they sharpened their brows, as an aged tailor does at the eye of a needle. (*CFQ* 175: the version given here makes the point with more verbal precision than does Sayers's "squinnied".)

A difference here is that in Eliot's passage the scrutiny is exercised *not* by the spirit but by the poet himself. There is a brief reversal of the Dantean roles, placing the *narrator himself* in a position analogous to that of the condemned. This does not last, and the ordinary reader is unlikely to notice it; yet it does perhaps tell us something significant about the working of Eliot's mind when he wrote the passage.

Peering at the stranger, "I caught the sudden look of some dead master". Catching the look implies recognizing either the resemblance or the expression; but since "look" is ambiguous, we infer also that the stranger has suddenly looked at *him* (and "caught", like the earlier "drew" in draft, suggests "a kind of complicity between the poet and the stranger" (*CFQ* 174)). In the canto to which Eliot is chiefly alluding, Dante does of course meet a "dead master" in the person of Brunetto Latini; but the chief dead master throughout the *Inferno* and *Purgatorio* is the guide himself, Virgil – the first of all the spirits he

meets with in the underworld, and the one likely to spring first to the minds of many readers. The momentary ambiguity prepares us to meet not simply one of the condemned but one who will offer special spiritual guidance: not merely one who was a master and is dead, but one who is dead and will be a master.

The recognition is both poignant and unnerving, because it corresponds so closely to many mundane recognitions: "known, forgotten, half recalled". There is nothing complicated about the combination of these three terms - we all know the experience. Even in the next line, "Both one and many" reminds us of the simultaneously single and multiple identity familiar to us from dreams. Fleeting details of odd yet comparatively familiar experiences funnel us into a state of responsive readiness, and it is not until the more specific detail of "brown baked features" and the very strange phrase "familiar compound ghost" that we are compelled to accept the uniqueness of the figure. Helen Gardner notes how various changes in the early stages of drafting made the encounter more mysterious than it had initially been (*CFQ* 174); yet the final version still carries us with great tact from the more to the less familiar while sacrificing nothing of that element of mystery.

The "brown baked features" derive from Dante's description of Brunetto Latini in *Inferno* XV. Dante's Brunetto, under the rain of fire - an appropriate parallel to the recent bombing in Eliot's poem - has a "scorched face", *viso abbruciato*; Eliot's phrase began in manuscript draft as "scorched brown", was later changed to "brown scarred" and finally, and more strikingly, to "brown baked" (*CFQ* 174). In a draft, too, the initial greeting

was not "What! are *you* here?" but "Are you here, Ser Brunetto?" (*CFQ* 174) - a quotation from Dante and an explicit pointer to the parallel. Eliot subsequently decided that this was too specific to serve the purpose of "a familiar compound ghost", and he was surely right. The figure who at first resembles Brunetto grows in authority as his strange multiplicity is increased. The effect needed here is quite different from that of the Dantesque meeting in *The Waste Land*, where the figure is promptly recognized, accosted, named and finally taunted:

> There I saw one I knew, and stopped him, crying:
> "Stetson!
> "You who were with me in the ships at Mylae!
> "That corpse you planted last year in your garden,
> "Has it begun to sprout? Will it bloom this year?..."

I have mentioned that for a brief moment there has been a reversal of the Dantean roles, placing the narrator himself in a position analogous to that of the condemned. This is more apparent at

> So I assumed a double part, and cried
> And heard another's voice cry: "What! are *you* here?"

The compound identity of the ghost impels the poet to adopt or assume a multiple identity himself. The cry of incredulous recognition seems to emanate either from both figures or from more than one element in the poet himself. For a moment he seems to be addressing, and hearing, a *doppelganger*. The ghost, then, embodies not only a dead master but an aspect of himself, and more aspects of himself are brought to the surface by the encounter.

Explaining to Hayward why it was necessary to delete the explicit mention of Ser Brunetto, Eliot gave two reasons, both

related to the ghost's speech which was to follow:

> The first is that the visionary figure has now become somewhat more definite and will no doubt be identified by some readers [owing presumably to his recent death] with Yeats though I do not mean anything so precise as that. However, I do not wish to take the responsibility of putting Yeats or anybody else into Hell and I do not want to impute to him the particular vice [sodomy] which took Brunetto there. Secondly, although the reference to that Canto is intended to be explicit, I wished the effect of the whole to be Purgatorial which is much more appropriate. (*CFQ* 176: parentheses added)

What Eliot wanted, then, was a recognizably Dantesque meeting with a "dead master": a master who should nevertheless remain an unidentifiable compound of figures, and a meeting which should be fluid enough to turn without awkwardness from an infernal into a purgatorial one.

The possible ingredients of this compound ghost include Dante himself, by virtue of the style in which the episode is couched; Dante's guide, Virgil, his dead master Brunetto Latini, and the various fellow-poets he meets with in the course of his pilgrimage - including Arnaut Daniel who at the end of *Purgatorio* XXVI reminds the poet, as this ghost does, of the "refining fire" in which one must be purged; Yeats, who had died as recently as 1939, and whom Eliot (and his draft notes) tended to identify with the ghost more strongly than any other poet; Swift, whose ghost plays a part in Yeats's play *The Words upon the Windowpane*, and who is verbally echoed in the ghost's phrase "laceration/Of laughter"; Mallarmé, whose line "Donner un sens plus pur aux mots de la tribu" is adapted in the line "To purify the dialect of the tribe"; and Poe, since Mallarmé's line appeared in his poem "Le Tombeau

d'Edgar Poe". To list these names is not to say that Eliot necessarily had all of them, or indeed only them, in mind; it is to illustrate the ripplingly allusive effect that he seems to have been striving after here. The assertion in the poem that the ghost was "Both intimate and unidentifiable" must be taken seriously. What we can with safety assume is that the ghost is above all a compound of *poets*, and that not the least of his ingredients is an aspect of Eliot himself, since he appears as among other things a *doppelganger* figure.

One other suggestion is worth adding. Eliot was a keen reader of Dickens, whose story "The Haunted Man" (one of the *Christmas Books*) comes to mind here. In that story the hero, Redlaw, is haunted by a ghost identical with himself, who teaches him a bitter wisdom by offering him an appalling gift of forgetfulness. What he is enabled to forget is well phrased in one of Eliot's lines: "the awareness/Of things ill done and done to others' harm". But in accepting this gift, Redlaw learns that such forgetfulness, being contagious, does even more harm to others, and so becomes a curse until the others are mercifully delivered from it at his request. The moral of the tale is clearly that it is necessary to remember the evil we have done, since the remembrance is essential to whatever remaining good we can do. So the ironic lesson of the ghost in Dickens is that *awareness* of our past evils, intentional or otherwise, is essential; and this painful knowledge is (with some adaptation) an important part of what Eliot's ghost lists as "the gifts reserved for age". Like the sins and errors

recalled by Dante's souls in Purgatory, ours must be remembered if we are to find purgation from them.

Finally, one other ghost hinted at in the presentation of this one - a "poetic" ghost though not a poet - is the spirit of Hamlet's father: he too returns from the beyond to lay a painful burden upon his hearer; after which he "faded on the crowing of the cock" as Eliot's ghost "faded on the blowing of the horn".

The ghost is, then, a projection of the poet's own self-communing - an aspect of which is, inevitably, his communing with the words and works of other poets before him. To try to identify the ghost more precisely than this would be misguided.

> So I assumed a double part, and cried
> And heard another's voice cry: 'What! are *you* here?'
> Although we were not. I was still the same,
> Knowing myself yet being someone other -
> And he a face still forming; yet the words sufficed
> To compel the recognition they preceded.
> And so, compliant to the common wind,
> Too strange to each other for misunderstanding,
> In concord at this intersection time
> Of meeting nowhere, no before and after,
> We trod the pavement in a dead patrol.

My comments up to this point should serve to clarify - as far as they admit of clarification - most of the details in the lines just quoted. Poet and ghost have met both in and out of time and space, "at this intersection time" where even their identities are amorphous and interchangeable. The phrase "assumed a double part" seems to mean "adopted a dual role", speaking both for himself and for the initially hesitant ghost. His exclamatory greeting does duty for both of them - "What! are *you* here?" - although they are not, since their encounter occurs in a realm of "nowhere, no before and after", and for a moment it is a moot point which is living and which dead, which

on earth and which in Hell or Purgatory. In the phrase "heard another's voice cry" we can imagine the poet hearing the ghost's voice as an echo of his own, but *also* hearing his own voice as if with the ears of the ghost - so intimate is the bond already existing between them. Although the dawn street is the setting for their meeting, the meeting itself transcends time and place: "we" as individuals were not there, because "I" was more than "I" and he was more than one. This is more than a chance encounter of acquaintances, and the message that follows will show that it is really an encounter with self. (We do not need Jungian archetypes such as the Shadow to make the experience explicable.)

"I was still the same,/Knowing myself yet being someone other" appeared in draft versions as "I was always [*or* often] dead,/Always [*or* Often] revived, and always something other" (*CFQ* 179). The implication of these versions is that the poet felt himself to be both dead and alive - or resurrected - as well as in a state which was neither of these but "something other". The final version alters the emphasis from his successive or simultaneous *states* to the nature of his *consciousness*, which makes the experience less bewildering, though no less mysterious, and gives it more dramatic force. The change from "something" to "someone" plays a part in this, just as the preceding phrase "Although we were not" is more personal in emphasis than the earlier "Although it was not" (*CFQ* 179) - "it" referring impersonally to the ghost. The general tendency of Eliot's revisions was to make the encounter more dramatic and immediate, more intimate and personal. As in

a dream I can know myself yet also be someone else, so here; and the person I meet in a dream can still be assuming a full identity ("a face still forming") after I have greeted him with a cry of recognition: so here, the words of greeting themselves "sufficed/To compel the recognition they preceded".

Brief notice should be taken of what we may call the fluctuations of atmospheric rhythm and pace in Part IIB up to this point. Expectancy is aroused with the hesitant, even slightly furtive appearance of the dawn stranger; a kind of recognition follows, and the verse acquires a new vigour with the exclamatory greeting; this promptly gives way to the poet's attempted analysis of his own consciousness at this point, a dreamlike awareness of being both himself and someone else; then the verse settles into a kind of steady rhythm of acceptance as, "compliant to the common wind,...We trod the pavement in a dead patrol". After the initial climax there is a descent into the almost matter-of-fact, as the air-raid warden and the ghost move along side by side like two nightwatchmen. This relaxing of tension allows for a new and more gradual accumulation of it as the ghost's speech proceeds, building to a fresh climax in the grim picture of "the gifts reserved for age" and the need for acceptance of the "refining fire". Variations in intensity in the final version are carefully graded and, indeed, very much like those of Dante's own narratives in the *Commedia* of otherworldly encounters.

> I said: 'The wonder that I feel is easy,
> Yet ease is cause of wonder. Therefore speak:
> I may not comprehend, may not remember.'

Again we have the easy wonder of a dream, yet also a marvel-

ling at the fact that it *is* so easy. There is a tone of unquestioning acceptance, a submissive readiness to listen without any eager guarantees of understanding or retention. What the poet says is an illustration not of jadedness but of a modest, if rather weary, humility: "I may not comprehend, may not remember". This openness of response, too, is rather like Dante's in many of his encounter episodes.

A recurrent concern with the poet's own vocation is, as we have seen, a strong and often moving sub-theme throughout the Quartets. Here, as in *East Coker* IIB and V, it is closely linked with the theme of old age and spiritual self-recognition, but the practical struggle with recalcitrant words is no longer a leading concern. In place of it is the practical struggle with a recalcitrant *self*, and the need for total submission of the self to the fires of purgation. The ghost's message would be a bitterly despairing one if it were not for the offered opportunity, at the very end of his speech, of submission to this refining fire.

He (the ghost) begins his reply with an account of what he will *not* discuss. He is not concerned with the poetic work or theory of himself or his companion, but with the poet's soul and self-awareness, especially in old age: a focus which incidentally puts us in mind of the later Yeats, one of the poet-ingredients of this compound figure. Yeats's handling of the theme in his poetry is of course very different from the ghost's here, but we have seen that the identification is only partial, and can in any case expect the ghost's post-

mortal insights to differ from those of his temporal life.

> And he: "I am not eager to rehearse
> My thoughts and theory which you have forgotten.
> These things have served their purpose: let them be.
> So with your own, and pray they be forgiven
> By others, as I pray you to forgive
> Both bad and good. Last season's fruit is eaten
> And the fullfed beast shall kick the empty pail.
> For last year's words belong to last year's language
> And next year's words await another voice...."[10]

"My thoughts and theory" and "your own" are not in question, they "have served their purpose" and can be laid aside with whatever they contain of bad and good. The good they have achieved is not negated, but in spiritual terms it is futile to look back and tot it up as a kind of credit balance; the temporal world goes on, and the poet has no business to expect the milk of gratitude or fulfilment to flow from his past: "Last season's fruit is eaten/And the fullfed beast shall kick the empty pail" (a quaint but telling pastoral metaphor injected into this dialogue from the underworld). The present moment is all that he has,

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

Or, as *East Coker* IIB puts it,

> 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.

Similarly, *East Coker* V asserts that "each venture/Is a new beginning". The poet's present struggle is now seen more clearly than ever as primarily a spiritual one, not simply a problem of creative artistry.

Instead, then, of discussing poetic thought and theory, the ghost seizes the opportunity afforded him by his easy passage

"Between two worlds" to communicate a more urgent and - even to himself - more unexpected message.

> But, as the passage now presents no hindrance
> To the spirit unappeased and peregrine
> Between two worlds become much like each other,
> So I find words I never thought to speak
> In streets I never thought I should revisit
> When I left my body on a distant shore.

The "two worlds become much like each other" are the temporal world of suffering in war and the spiritual world of suffering beyond death: earth has become like Hell or Purgatory. This, it is ironically suggested, has facilitated movement between these worlds for "the spirit unappeased and peregrine", who therefore has the opportunity to "find words I never thought to speak" to the world of living men. The "distant shore" on which he has left his body has occasioned a good deal of speculation, but we need not take it in literal terms: to the dead who address Odysseus or Aeneas or Dante in the world of the shades, their place of death is always a distant shore, the distance being a spiritual and not a geographical one; the ghost is not speaking of the distance from Bloomsbury or the Cromwell Road or wherever the encounter is taking place. (One of Eliot's remarks to Hayward suggests that it was in fact in the Cromwell Road that he placed the meeting (*CFQ* 181).) I have mentioned the dead addressing Odysseus or Aeneas or Dante; quite apart from Dante's obvious debt to the ancients, it is fairly appropriate for us to see this encounter as Homeric or Virgilian as well as Dantesque - the soul speaking from beyond the grave is often prophetic and admonitory in all three.

When the ghost says

> So I find words I never thought to speak
> In streets I never thought I should revisit
> When I left my body on a distant shore

he is strangely echoing the words of *Little Gidding* Part I:

> 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.

It is not *only* from the communion of the saints, and not *only* in words of reassurance, that "the communication/Of the dead is tongued with fire". Such pentecostal gifts may be painful as well as ecstatic, challenging as well as reassuring, and delivered through spirits of another and an unexpected kind.

The ghost, invoking his status of poet as his qualification for doing so, now offers the main body of his message: an account of "the gifts reserved for age" and of how to overcome, through the anguish of the purgatorial process, the torment that they bring with them. This is the most painful part of *Little Gidding*, if not of all the Quartets.

> Since our concern was speech, and speech impelled us
> To purify the dialect of the tribe
> And urge the mind to aftersight and foresight,
> Let me disclose the gifts reserved for age
> To set a crown upon your lifetime's effort.
> First, the cold friction of expiring sense
> Without enchantment, offering no promise
> But bitter tastelessness of shadow fruit
> As body and soul begin to fall asunder.
> Second, the conscious impotence of rage
> At human folly, and the laceration
> Of laughter at what ceases to amuse.
> And last, the rending pain of re-enactment
> Of all that you have done, and been; the shame
> Of motives late revealed, and the awareness
> Of things ill done and done to others' harm
> Which once you took for exercise of virtue.
> Then fools' approval stings, and honour stains.
> From wrong to wrong the exasperated spirit
> Proceeds, unless restored by that refining fire
> Where you must move in measure, like a dancer.

Audrey Cahill's comment is a helpful point of departure for further discussion of this passage:

> The "aftersight and foresight" to which it is the poet's task to urge his readers are surely the recognition of significant pattern in what is past and what lies ahead. This technique of interpretation is now applied to the poet's own life and work in an attempt to assess their meaning and purpose, and to discover how the past can be redeemed from frustration and failure. For this is the impression which his self-examination gives: even "exercise of virtue" turns out upon closer scrutiny to have been "done to others' harm", and greater self-knowledge leads only to further depths of shame, painfully intensified by the world's approval and honour. (196)

The ghost's qualifications for his utterance are two. He and all the poets he represents (not only Mallarmé or Yeats or Eliot himself) have in common a concern with speech which has impelled them to do two things: to purify and enrich a constantly deteriorating language as all good poets must do; and to "urge the mind to aftersight and foresight", using that broader perspective which poets often possess more comprehensively than the rest of us. The ghost also, we may assume, is endowed from beyond the grave with a further perspective transcending even the mortal insights of other poets. He is therefore peculiarly fitted to disclose with eloquence "the gifts reserved for age" which, with a terrible irony, he describes as setting "a crown upon your lifetime's effort" - since the "gifts" themselves seem in the first instance to reduce all that effort, as it bears upon the poet's personal life, to dust and ashes. Like "the dialect of the tribe", he too needs to be purified.

The gifts are three: impotent physical longings in a frail

body, impotent frustration at human folly, and the agony of full self-recognition which leaves no room for reassuring self-approval. The body will be dulled but the mind alert - yet in all its alertness unable to put right either the evil around it or the evil in itself. Eliot's prose draft of this part of the speech is instructive and clear: there is little or no ambiguity in the ghost's revelation at this point.

> Consider what are the gifts of age - the cold craving when the sense is gone which kept *the soul and* body together; the angry impatience with human folly & turpitude & pusillanimity with the knowledge of the futility of protest; the doubt of self which springs from retrospection of past motives, the awareness of the fact that one was moved while believing oneself to be the mover
>
> For all these ills that the enraged spirit strives to overcome by progressing into new and greater sin - there is only the one remedy, pain for pain, in that purgative fire which you must will, wherein you must learn to swim and better nature. (*CFQ* 189, the italics marking a minor correction of the Gardner transcript)

The lines about these "gifts" warrant a closer look. Each is really, in terms of worldly gifts, a deprivation: loss of sensory pleasure, loss of power to change things, and loss of self-esteem. The first, with its oxymoronic "cold friction", points to the survival of the sensual impulse without any potency for joyous fulfilment - one of Yeats's themes in his poetry of old age. (And the "bitter tastelessness of shadow fruit" may remind us fleetingly of the deceptive fruit which, in *Paradise Lost* Book X, turns to dust and ashes in the mouths of Satan and his fallen host.) Whatever pleasurable impulse survives in the body brings frustration to the soul "As body and soul begin to fall asunder".

The second of these dubious gifts is another kind of frustration, practical powerlessness maddeningly aware of itself in the face of mankind's absurdity. We are reminded of the "parched eviscerate soil" of Part IIA that "Gapes at the vanity of toil,/Laughs without mirth"; here we have, metaphorically, the parched and eviscerate old man whose mirthless laughter acquires, in its "laceration" - Hayward's inspired suggestion (*CFQ* 193) - an added Swiftian intensity.

Worst of all is the last gift, "the rending pain of re-enactment": the torment of self-recognition that makes a hell on earth. It endows one with unwonted clarity about motives and results, including those of even the best-intentioned actions "Which once you took for exercise of virtue". The pain of hearing this is increased by our knowledge that the poet (as T.S. Eliot) is fully aware of himself as successful in his vocation, admired and revered by thousands of readers, and (in Yeats's words) a "smiling public man". It is the last twist of the knife for him to realise how his aching private self-recognition will contrast with the public approval and honour accorded to him. Yet the wretchedness of this recognition is guarded from self-pity or self-consciousness by the dramatic matrix in which it appears: the ghost speaks with uncompromising firmness and the poet who hears him makes no reply at all.

Without any obvious alteration in the verse-medium, Eliot injects remarkable force into these lines by a modification of syntax and diction, and by alliterative and assonantal insistence. The three "sentences" beginning "First", "Second" and

"And last" derive not only a curt authority from their lack of main clauses, but also a desolate eloquence from the mingling of abstractions with the vivid language of physical stress: "cold friction", "Without enchantment", "no promise", "fall asunder", "impotence", "folly", "laceration", "rending pain", "re-enactment", "shame", "stings". Moreover, the prevalent assonance on the long **ay** diphthong, together with the pervasive alliteration - especially of fiercely hissing sibilants - binds the utterance into an astonishing blend of poignancy, pain, and abrasive severity.

> **First**, the cold **friction** of **expiring sense**
> Without en**chant**ment, offering no promi**se**
> But bitter **tastelessness** of **sh**adow **fruit**
> As body and **s**oul begin to **f**all a**s**under.
> **S**econd, the con**sc**ious impote**nce** of ra**ge**
> At human **f**olly, and the **laceration**
> Of laughter at what **ceases** to a**mus**e.
> And la**st**, the **r**ending **pain** of **re**-enactment
> Of all that you have done, and been; the **sha**me
> Of motive**s** la**te** **r**evealed, and the awarene**ss**
> Of thing**s** ill done and done to other**s'** harm
> Which on**ce** you **took** for **exercise** of virtue.
> Then fool**s'** approval **stings**, and ho**n**our **stains**.

By the end of this ostensibly narrative episode, the poet's own position is comparable to Harry's in *The Family Reunion*. Harry too encounters presences from another world which reflect his own deepseated dissatisfaction with his life in this one. They make his life appear finished and a failure until - like Orestes in the Aeschylean drama - he learns to see the Furies as Kindly Ones, the Eumenides who point him to the true way of salvation from his private agony of self-recognition. The compound ghost here also points the way - the paradoxical one of exit from torment by willing entry into torment:

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

The preceding lines have accumulated an intensity that pours itself into the striking word "exasperated" - doing more justice to the thought than would the more obvious "desperate" or "despairing". The "exasperated spirit" in question is of course primarily that of the poet being addressed; but there is a secondary sense in which it applies also to the ghost himself who has come like Hamlet's father, "unappeased and peregrine", from a realm of pain. The lines move again with alliterative abrasiveness ("**exasperated spirit/Proceeds**") that gives way only in the last of them to the aptly smooth orderliness of submission ("Where **you** **m**ust **m**ove in **m**easure, like a dancer").

This is, of course, "that refining fire" in which another poet, Arnaut Daniel (*Purgatorio* XXVI), hastily re-envelops himself after a short colloquy with Dante. It had possessed Eliot's imagination since as far back as *The Waste Land* with its reminder of how Arnaut "dived back into that fire which refines them" - *Poi s'ascose nel foco che gli affina*. As Dante makes clear, it is not merely that this fire represents the painfully cleansing love of God for the souls on the cornice of earthly lusts, but that the torment of it is gladly undergone in preference to all other torments, since it is the answer to them: hence Arnaut's haste to be re-embraced by it. In the submission and acceptance required lies the answer to exasperation of spirit which would otherwise be the exclusive and appalling result of the ghost's revelation. And that submission and acceptance in turn reflect attunement to divine

order: "must move in measure, like a dancer".

To move in measure is to move proportionately, in time and in tune with the higher will; several times in the Quartets the image of the dance has appeared as a symbol of the order recognized at the point of intersection between time and eternity; here, after what would otherwise have been the nadir of despair, this principle of eternal order is once again affirmed, and with the same symbol. The fire of suffering is thus transformed from the apparently infernal into the purgatorial; and with a complexity worthy of Dante's own treatment of his images, it can also be seen in retrospect as the fire of the Holy Spirit, the fire of the divine love, the fire that - in its negative or positive aspects - dominates the imagery of this last Quartet. This entire movement, in its fusion of many persons into one, and its fusion of places and circumstances (modern London in wartime, the poet's awareness of approaching age and of the insight of his dead predecessors, the Dantesque inferno and purgatorio), can be read as a final treatment of themes that have preoccupied Eliot since *The Waste Land* and earlier. A form of lyric epilogue to it appears in *Little Gidding* Part IV:

> We only live, only suspire
> Consumed by either fire or fire.

The episode ends, as it must, on a muted note, but also reminding us of the most famous of all ghosts in literature as he returns to Purgatory. The significant difference is that *this* ghost has, as it were, invited his companion into Purgatory in turn.

> The day was breaking. In the disfigured street
> He left me, with a kind of valediction,
> And faded on the blowing of the horn.

The departure is abrupt as, traditionally, it must be with the coming of day. But we are directed again, before the episode is quite ended, to the setting - "the disfigured street" after the air-raid; and the "blowing of the horn", the sounding of the all-clear, replaces the familiar crowing of the cock from *Hamlet*. At this point the idea of the "all-clear", with all its possible implications, expands in our minds beyond the literal setting, thanks to the final affirmation that the ghost's message contains.

Part III

It is often remarked that in its meditations on time and eternity Part III of each Quartet - with the exception of *Little Gidding* - makes use of the symbol of travelling: the images of the London underground in *Burnt Norton* and *East Coker*, and those of the train journey and the ocean voyage in *The Dry Salvages*. In *Little Gidding* the usual pattern is altered.

The previous movement, Part IIB, alludes strongly to Dante and his is certainly a symbolic journey; yet the episode of the walk through the bombed streets strikes us not as a journey but as a prophetic revelation. There is no need to find a regular journey-motif in every Quartet, at least not in specific images of travel. It would be more to the point to say that the whole of *Little Gidding*, like each of the other Quartets, simply unfolds from the idea of a visit to, or a memory of, a specific place. And this Quartet plays on the contrast between the meaning of such a visit on the one hand, and the state of the soul in wartime London, in age and in disillusionment, on the other.

Part IIB of *Little Gidding*, the Dante imitation, is indeed related thematically to earlier Quartets. What it shares with the corresponding movements of *East Coker* and *The Dry Salvages* is its emphasis on the anguish and disillusionment that afflict the memory, especially in old age. (Part IIB of *Burnt Norton* differs in this respect, focussing exclusively on the affirmative description of the reconciling "still point".)

Now, in Part III of *Little Gidding*, the poet deals *not* with

the anguish and disillusionment that afflict the memory, but rather with the positive, *liberating* function of memory. And like Part III of each Quartet it includes a statement on the nature of or need for *detachment*. The third movements of both *Burnt Norton* and *East Coker* modulate from evocation of a waste-land existence into the imperatives of the "negative way" of detachment: "Descend lower", "I said to my soul, be still, and wait without hope", "You must go by the way of dispossession". And Part III of *The Dry Salvages* addresses the imagined travellers with the advice to "Fare forward" in the state of detachment advocated by Krishna in the *Bhagavad-Gita*. *Little Gidding* III, though indirectly didactic, presents *no* explicit advice or imperatives, but does revert to the subject of detachment as distinct from mere indifference, presenting true detachment as a larger and longer perspective emerging out of our inevitable *at*tachment to persons and causes.

As we leave the "familiar compound ghost" and embark on Part III, we leave the personal (as well as representative) anguish of the poet, and revert to a generality of utterance about the generality of mankind. After the strong climax of the ghost's message, there is a drop in tension and intensity, and the verse moves at first with a fairly prosaic deliberateness. At one point in the drafting process John Hayward voiced his doubts about the pace of this long-lined section:

> The first fifteen lines of Part III - the didactic passage - strike me as being imperfectly resolved into poetry, in fact rather laboured and prosy. I think I appreciate the difficulty of this kind of expository writing. It may be that it is too easy to cast such philosophic and ethical statements into

> the kind of long, fluid lines you use so ingeniously. But this particular passage does seem to me to drag; to need fusing: possibly to be presented to the reader in a less didactic and uncompromising form. (*CFQ* 199)

Eliot agreed at the time that it needed "thorough re-writing", but made none. Hayward's statement now seems rather sweeping, but there are details in the lines to which his objections may strike us as valid.

> There are thrée condítions which óften look alíke
> Yet díffer complétely, flóurish in the sáme hédgerow:
> Attáchment to sélf and to thíngs and to pérsons,
> detáchment
> Frŏm self and frŏm things and frŏm persons; and,
> grŏwing betwéen them, indífference
> Which resémbles the óthers as déath resémbles lífe,
> Being betwéen twó líves - únflówering, betwéen
> The líve and the déad néttle.

The long verse-line varies easily with four, five or six stresses; no obvious pattern is imposed until, a little later, the lines contract into a regular beat of three. The reversion to the prosaic is underlined by the metrical irregularity of virtual free verse, by the unhurried deliberation of tone, the repetitions, the prolongation of lines into and ideas across enjambement, and the slight informality of syntax.

> There are three conditions which often look alike
> Yet differ completely, flourish in the same
> hedgerow:

this could have begun "Three conditions look alike", but the addition of "There are...which often..." relaxes the reader into a less questioning readiness of assent even before the three conditions have been named. Again, formal syntax would require a conjunctive "and" or "but" before "flourish in the same hedgerow", yet the juncture is left to hang loosely on a comma. (A similar syntactic informality, dispensing with a

relative pronoun, appeared in the first draft of the first line: "There are three conditions look very much alike" (*CFQ* 199).) Eliot creates the impression of thoughts undergoing an approximate conversational ordering from line to line.

The three conditions are then named in leisurely fashion: "Attachment to self and to things and to persons, detachment" (a momentary end-of-line pause here, throwing the word into relief, then a lapse into the same formula in parallelism) "From self and from things and from persons; and," (now prolonging the line exceptionally in apparent disregard for pattern as the third condition asserts itself) "growing between them, indifference/Which resembles the others as death resembles life".

The point can be made negatively: an ostensible concern for neatness of linear, metrical and syntactic patterning might have produced this:

> 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.

This, though the words are the same, would have been somewhat glib in effect and would have lacked the meditative simplicity yet sinuousness that Eliot's arrangement gives it. The *idea* cannot be regarded as spontaneous, yet the apparently - only apparently - unstudied arrangement of it makes it fresh and persuasive. A tendency to formulaic pronouncement is reduced, even at the cost of slight awkwardness (as in the opening "There are" and the missing conjunction in the second line).

These three "conditions" are made more vivid, if momentarily more puzzling, by the metaphor that compares them to plants or blossoms in a hedgerow - and suddenly we realise that our imaginations have been transported back from the streets of wartime London to the countryside of Little Gidding where "the hedgerow/Is blanched for an hour with transitory blossom" or "you would find the hedges/White again, in May, with voluptuary sweetness". The shift has been managed simply by the one word "hedgerow". It is as if bombed London is the setting of the poet's temporal anguish in the present, but Little Gidding is the setting of his timeless mystical insights, clothing even the expression of them with its incidental images to make the distinction between true and false spiritual "blooms".

What are these three conditions? Attachment and detachment correspond roughly to the traditional ways of affirmation and of negation, potential routes to spiritual growth and to the experience of the eternal in time. Indifference, "growing" close to them and therefore easily confused with detachment, is like the tares among the wheat in the parable: it is really as different from them as death is from life - it *is* death, in fact, and breaks out into no spiritual flowering since it is "the sterile apparent freedom from desire of those who have never felt love" (*ATSE* 181). This thought prepares us for its corollary when we glance, later in this movement, at the conflicts of past history: we do not need retrospectively to take sides in those conflicts, but that does not mean we should be indifferent to them, otherwise we should have nothing to

inherit from them and history would become meaningless and sterile. The distinction between detachment and indifference is, then, a crucial one. To adapt the words of Krishna in Part III of *The Dry Salvages*, if the mind of a man is not intent on *any* sphere of being, *nothing* in his life can fructify in the lives of others or in his own. True detachment, on the other hand, is fruitful.

The hedgerow as metaphor, useful up to this point, now leads Eliot into a sub-metaphor which does him a disservice. He refers to indifference, between the "two lives" of attachment and detachment, as "unflowering", which is well enough; but then adds "between/The live and the dead nettle". This obscures his point. Is the phrase merely an impressionistic illustration of how indifference fails to bring forth flowering (in which case its application is vague), or are the two *betweens* strictly paralleled - in other words, do "The live and the dead nettle" represent attachment and detachment respectively? The answer seems to involve such specialised knowledge of nettles that even the reasonably well-informed reader can hardly be expected to profit by it. Hayward had suggested inverting the phrase to "the live nettle and the dead" (*CFQ* 200), but Eliot replied:

> I am sorry that I cannot fall in with your suggestion of an inversion of "dead nettle". You know as well as I do that the dead nettle is the family of flowering plant[s] of which the White Archangel is one of the commonest and closely resembles the stinging nettle and is found in its company. If I wrote "the live nettle and the dead" it would tend to suggest a dead stinging nettle instead of a quite different plant, so I don't see that anything can be done about that. (*CFQ* 200)

This botanical pedantry is a little comical. Most of us do not "know as well as" Eliot does about the dead nettle, and with or without the inversion the automatic tendency would be to understand a reference to a dead stinging nettle. Helen Gardner, after quoting Eliot's response, comments:

> I suspect that Hayward, along with many readers of the poem was ignorant of "the White Archangel" and had taken it that the "unflowering" plant of "indifference" grew between a live and a dead specimen of the same plant. (*CFQ* 200)

This is surely the natural assumption to make. But she adds:

> The image is very apt, when explained: indifference, that neither stings nor bears a flower, being between selfish love that stings and unselfish that bears a white flower. Eliot did do something about it, by inserting "the" before "dead nettle", although I doubt if this protected readers from misapprehension. (*CFQ* 200)

I share her doubt, but not her conviction that the image is apt when explained; moreover, attachment, for all its limitations, is not in this passage emphasised as a "selfish love", but simply as the limited love out of which the higher love born of detachment may emerge. And when she goes on to mention in a footnote that Anne Ridler saw Eliot as actually confusing two different plants of the nettle family, we are even less likely to respond with much conviction to the image. The phrase "dead nettle" in any case sounds too negative as an image of detachment, and implicitly contradicts the high claims made for it both in this passage and elsewhere. The metaphor, fleeting though it is, is confusing and unhelpful.

The ideas presented in these opening lines are now developed into an argument about memory as a liberating force. It is noteworthy that, as in Part I, the continuity of thought is

reinforced by frequent enjambement while most of the sentence-endings occur in mid-line.

> 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. Thus, love of a country
> Begins as attachment to our own field of action
> And comes to find that action of little importance
> Though never indifferent. History may be servitude,
> History may be freedom. See, now they vanish,
> The faces and places, with the self which, as it could, loved them,
> To become renewed, transfigured, in another pattern.

The first problem here is the meaning of "This" in "This is the use of memory". Does it merely point us forward to "liberation" (what memory is useful for is liberation), or does it also have an antecedent in the previous lines? No clear antecedent is discernible, but if we try to cement the joins in an otherwise loose train of association, we may assume that attachment and detachment between them (and not indifference) are what determine the nature of our memories and so endow them with their valuable function. I offer this as a tentative reading, but some such connection needs to be made to give the ideas coherence and continuity. Eliot has placed us in the invidious position that he deprecated in his early essay "The Function of Criticism" when he remarked that "Comparison and analysis need only the cadavers on the table; but interpretation is always producing parts of the body from its pockets, and fixing them in place" (*SE* 33).

What the sentence in question seems to be saying is that memory can help to free our otherwise timebound spirits from the tyranny of both the past and the future; that the freedom

it offers does not mean a diminution of love for what is past or of concern for what is to come, but an increase of detachment to the point where *love* continues but the itch, regret and anxiety of *desire* are stilled. A comparable distinction between true love and mere desire appeared near the end of *Burnt Norton*:

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

And an illustration of "not less of love but expanding/Of love beyond desire" may be found in a poem that Eliot greatly admired, Tennyson's *In Memoriam*. Attachment to the dead Hallam plunges the poet into the depths of grief, but he gradually learns to detach himself from the limited desire of earthly communion until his love, in no way diminished, is liberated into a higher love in which his spirit finds freedom: "My love involves the love before;/My love is vaster passion now" (Section 130) and "Regret is dead, but love is more" (Epilogue). *Without* the initially limited love here called "attachment", there is no path to the higher love made possible by "detachment", and so to the liberation of soul that memory, filled with love, brings about.

To sum up the thought to this point: In our relation to ourselves and the world around us, unconcern is a form of death. Stoic indifference is sterile and hopeless. What *is* needed is true detachment - not loveless, but an expansion of love to a

point where we are liberated from personal desire, and can see our experience from a new perspective, recognizing a larger pattern in which apparent conflicts are reconciled.

What is true of love for persons also applies to love of other kinds, for a country or for causes. And this is the next step in Eliot's argument:

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

What a proper use of memory does for our personal loves is what a proper attitude to history may do for our wider loyalties. Love inevitably "Begins as attachment" to what commands our affections in the limits of time and space (such as attachment to England in the Second World War); but the higher perspective of detachment, without reducing that love, "comes to find that action of little importance/Though never indifferent". This liberates us into the kind of detached action advocated by Krishna when he urged Arjuna to set aside his anxieties and fight without hatred or a narrow concern for results but simply with purity of motive. Depending on which attitude we adopt, "History may be servitude,/History may be freedom".

The thought of the war is never far from the surface of the verse at this point, as the ambiguous phrase "field of action" shows. And a few lines later Eliot will widen his perspective to accommodate the conflicts of the seventeenth century, the last in which warfare, for a variety of motives and causes, had been conducted on English soil - including the conflict

that put an end to Little Gidding as an earthly community yet helped to ensure its survival as a symbol "perfected in death".

We have already seen that the word "love" occurs very rarely in the *Four Quartets*, and usually only towards the end of each. *Burnt Norton* V distinguished between love and desire, as did *East Coker* V when it asserted that "Love is most nearly itself/When here and now cease to matter"; and *The Dry Salvages* V referred to the saint's occupation as involving "a lifetime's death in love". Each of these occurrences, including *East Coker* III's injunction to the soul to "wait without love" (without the limitations of desire), contributed to a recurrent emphasis on true love as partaking of that detachment which expands it "beyond desire" - the thought that we encounter at this point in *Little Gidding*, whether in relation to things or to persons or to countries. And now, after this preparation, the meditation of Part III reaches its initial climax in a movingly matter-of-fact statement of loss and renewal, which applies not only to the circumstances of war but also to the whole of life's experience:

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

Like an answer to Yeats's "Man is in love, and loves what vanishes,/What more is there to say?", Eliot's fundamentally religious affirmation adds "what more" there is to say. Indirectly it affirms faith in the Resurrection, but this is not all. The lines exert their special force partly because this is the one and only moment in all the Quartets when "love" is

used as a *verb* ("the self which, as it could, loved them"); and partly because the modest claim ("as it could") recognizes without any cynicism the limited capacity for love in all of us. As the loved faces and places disappear in the course of war's destruction or "the changes and chances of our fleeting life", the higher love born of detachment renews and transfigures them in memory so that their loss is not total: they take upon them "another pattern" in which they can be more fully loved without grasping attachment. And as they undergo this change, so too does the self that loved them "as it could", in order to love them *sub specie aeternitatis* as it could not do before. The passage feels a little like a distant echo, though certainly less triumphant, of St Paul's words about the resurrection of the dead:

> It is sown in corruption, it is raised in incorruption: it is sown in dishonour, it is raised in glory: it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power: it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body.... (*I Corinthians* 15:42-44)

It is also reminiscent of, though again far less final than, Dante's account of his beatific vision in which all earthly losses and fragments are gathered into the divine pattern in such a way that no loss need be seen as lasting forever:

> In that abyss I saw how love held bound
> Into one volume all the leaves whose flight
> Is scattered through the universe around....
> (*Para.* XXXIII.85-87)

Shortly after the passage just quoted from St Paul, he continues:

> The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. (*I Corinthians* 15:56-57)

As if with this in mind, Eliot begins the next section by recognizing, in the words of the fourteenth-century mystical writer Julian of Norwich, the inevitability and, in the logic of salvation, the necessity of sin:

> Sin is Behovely, but
> All shall be well, and
> All manner of thing shall be well.

Seen from the longer perspective, sin is "Behovely" as part of the pattern determined by the divine love. Dame Julian's comment on the mystical revelation received in those words was:

> In this naked word *sin*, Our Lord brought to my mind, generally, *all that is not good*, and the shameful despite and utter noughting that He bare for us in this life, and His dying; and all the pains and passions of all His creatures, ghostly and bodily; (for we be all partly noughted, and we shall be noughted following our Master, Jesus, till we be full purged, that is to say, till we be fully noughted of our deadly flesh and of all our inward affections which are not very good.)

Audrey Cahill, after quoting this, appropriately adds:

> This "noughting" is the process of being made aware of our own insignificance: it is the process of learning detachment; it is the purgation in "the refining fire". In this process all experience can be used, even that which at the time seems, and indeed is, evil or sinful; for in this process the paradox of the wounded surgeon comes to life. (199)

From this revelation the third movement, without losing its meditative quality, undergoes a lightening of its rhythm into a pattern of three stresses, and takes us back more explicitly to Little Gidding ("this place") and the history surrounding it. The theme is our memories of the dead as well as the uses of memory.

> If I thínk, agáin, of thìs pláce,
> And of péople, nòt whólly commẽndable,
> Of nó immèdiate kín or kíndness,

> But sóme of pecúliar génius,
> Àll tóuched by a cómmon génius,
> Unîted in the strîfe which divîded them;
> If I thînk of a kîng at nîghtfall,
> Of thrée men, and móre, on the scáffold
> And a féw who dîed forgótten
> In óther plàces, hére and abróad,
> And of óne who dìed blînd and quîet,
> Whý shóuld we célebrate
> These déad men móre than the dýing?
> It is nót to rîng the bèll bàckward
> Nor îs it an încantátion
> To súmmon the spéctre of a Róse.

In the degree to which the poet thinks not merely of a place but of its *history*, and of people connected with its history and other history, *Little Gidding* goes further than the other Quartets. It is more peopled with specific figures than the other three. By its standards *Burnt Norton* is impersonal, *East Coker* and *The Dry Salvages* anonymous. M.C. Bradbrook notes this development in these poems of "inner experience":

> The house of Burnt Norton is empty and deserted, and only the vision of children seen [more correctly, the sound of children heard] in the garden suggests the possible existence of other human forms. In *East Coker* the ghosts of the village merrymakers are seen dancing in a field at midnight: and in *The Dry Salvages*, the fishermen setting and hauling, the travellers and the women...are more substantial.... *Little Gidding* is filled with a sense of historic characters - Milton, Charles I, the Ferrars, Julian of Norwich.... (34: parenthesis added)

The principle of Incarnation, enunciated at the end of *The Dry Salvages*, carries with it the corollary that the individual person, place or event remains of infinite significance, not dwarfed by time. So in *Little Gidding* history makes sense: it is not a series of merely arbitrary events. In the light of the belief in Incarnation, it is seen as a pattern of timeless moments, and in the recognition of this pattern all conflicts and enmities, parties and factions, are in the larger scheme

of things reconciled. In the words of *Burnt Norton* II - which now apply to more than the personal moment of illumination - we

> hear upon the sodden floor
> Below, the boarhound and the boar
> Pursue their pattern as before
> But reconciled among the stars.

The fact that the actors of past history "Accept the constitution of silence/And are folded in a single party" does not negate the reality and importance of their differences at the time of conflict. The bearing of these thoughts, not only on the seventeenth-century Civil War but also on the twentieth-century World War, is obvious. Accordingly, as I have already suggested, Eliot can in *Little Gidding* write *inter alia* a war poem in which the comment "History is now and England" is, if properly understood, neither insular nor jingoistic.

The syntax in the middle of Part III is rather strange. One thirteen-line sentence consists of eleven lines of conditional clauses governed by "If I think of...", apparently anticipating a resolving statement. But the main clause of two lines which resolves them offers, instead of straight statement, a quite unexpected question, "Why should we celebrate/These dead men more than the dying?" - in other words, why focus on the past conflicts more than on the present one? The number of lines given to figures of the past, especially those connected with Little Gidding and the Civil War of the seventeenth century, reinforces the impression that the poet *is* focussing on the dead (who are now living, "renewed, transfigured, in another pattern") more than on the living (who are now dying).

These dead men were

> people, not wholly commendable,
> Of no immediate kin or kindness,
> But some of peculiar genius,
> All touched by a common genius,
> United in the strife which divided them; [11]

that is, they were fallible mortals, though in some cases possessed of genius, ranged on either side in a major conflict but now, in the paradoxical perspective of history, united. (The alliteration of "**c**ommendable", "**k**in", "**k**indness", "**c**ommon", and the assonance of "Un**i**ted in the str**i**fe which div**i**ded them", help to reinforce our sense of this unity.) The word "genius" acquires through repetition a flavour of ambiguity: *some* were of *peculiar* genius but *all* were touched by a *common* genius. We think first of extraordinary personal ability in the modern sense, and then perhaps - in the older sense - of a tutelary or presiding spirit of a person or place or age: in this case one common to them all, even to those opposed to what the place, Little Gidding itself, stood for.

The tutelary, presiding "genius" of this Quartet as a whole is the Holy Spirit, and it might be objected that Eliot is claiming God's support for both sides in the Civil War. But is this as strange as it looks? The point is surely that God works in individuals who have different lights and loyalties, and is ultimately on all sides because really he is on none, transcending them all in ways that we - with our limited vision in the present - cannot recognise at the moment of conflict:

> before God no side is wholly right or wholly wrong. The lives and deaths of many individuals contribute to the significant pattern of history, not because they were on the winning side or even on the "right side", but because of the dedication of their action. (Cahill 199)

"All manner of thing shall be well", but this does not divest us, and never has divested us, of the responsibility to fight like Arjuna, keeping our motives pure. We too will eventually be united in the strife that now divides us (or then, during World War II, did).

The individual figures Eliot has in mind have often been named. The "king at nightfall" is Charles I, who one night in May 1646 sought shelter at Gidding during his flight from the Parliamentarians. The "three men...on the scaffold" - though there were "more" - are commonly identified as Archbishop Laud, Thomas Strafford Earl of Wentworth, and King Charles himself. Those who "died forgotten/In other places, here and abroad" would include Richard Crashaw the poet, and the "one who died blind and quiet" is presumably their enemy, John Milton. Many other figures - especially on the Parliamentarian side - might fill out the list, but this handful of more obvious identities is all that is needed to give the lines their impact by reminding us that Eliot is thinking of specific people.

The question remains: if the poet thinks of these men, "Why should we celebrate/These dead men more than the dying?" The shift from "I" to "we" and the word "celebrate" are not accidental: the draft version, "Why should a man lament" (*CFQ* 202), was deliberately altered to "Why should we celebrate", emphasising communal commemoration of those who have become transfigured "in another pattern". What it says, in effect, is "Why [you may ask, *or* I ask myself] should we celebrate/ These dead men more than the dying?" - since from a temporal

viewpoint, especially in wartime, this is strange behaviour. The poet goes on to give an answer which is already implicit in what we have seen above. To celebrate the long dead in other causes, we learn, does not after all constitute romantic escapism, contempt for the present, or elevation of the past at its expense. It is to look at both present and past in proper relation to each other in the pattern which is history, seen from the transcendent viewpoint of the detachment we have been reading about. This is what makes history "freedom" and not "servitude".

This is the general tenour of the lines that follow; but rather puzzling among them is the choice of images in the assertion that to celebrate the dead

> is not to ring the bell backward
> Nor is it an incantation
> To summon the spectre of a Rose.

More than pardonable is the suspicion that Eliot is here indulging in either very private or somewhat confused symbolism. According to Helen Gardner, to ring a peal of bells in reverse ("backward", starting with the bass and not the treble) means to send out a signal of distress or alarm (*CFQ* 205); and she refers to Sir Walter Scott's song (in *The Doom of Devorgoil*, II. ii) in which "The bells are rung backward, the drums they are beat" (and a few lines later in *Little Gidding* occurs the line "Or follow an antique drum") (*CFQ* 204). Yet Eliot changed "bells" in draft to the singular "bell", and a single bell, of course, cannot be rung backward. Eliot, therefore, - so her argument goes - misunderstood the meaning of Scott's phrase and adapted it to an independent metaphorical meaning such as

"reverse the course of history" or "turn the clock back"; which is what, in effect, Dundee in Scott's poem was attempting when he aimed to undo the "Glorious Revolution" of 1688 by setting up the standard the next year for James II, another ousted Stuart monarch (*CFQ* 205). Her theory, if cumbersome to explain, is convincing as an account of how the image entered the poem; more simply we can suggest that in the final version the poet is disclaiming any attempt to "bring back the dead" by somehow reversing their death-knell. This fits the alteration to the singular, but the Gardner theory accounts for the plural in the earlier version.

In the next two lines Eliot seems to be saying more or less the same thing in different words. His mention of the dead - metaphorically musical or verbal, a bell or an incantation - is not designed to restore them to our consciousness as they were when alive. The idea of summoning a spectre by incantation recalls the occult arts dismissed in *The Dry Salvages* V; and the poet appears to claim that he is certainly not indulging (like those who attend seances) in the sentimentality of such misguided attachment: *de*tachment is, after all, the higher mode of love and of memory.

But why "To summon the spectre [he originally wrote "ghost" (*CFQ* 202)] of a *Rose*"? Hayward, assuming that the line consciously echoed Sir Thomas Browne's *The Garden of Cyrus* (see above, p.365), suggested "raise up" instead of "summon" as a closer and more evocative echo. Eliot's response shows that his conscious thought, at least, was not of Browne but of

the ballet *Le Spectre de la Rose*, in which Nijinsky had distinguished himself a generation earlier, and in which the spirit of the rose she has worn represents a young girl's dream-memory of the ball from which she has just returned. Eliot remarked that "perhaps it would be better to go all out for the quotation" from Browne (*CFQ* 202), but apparently changed his mind, since his final version rejects Hayward's suggestion and reads "To summon the *spectre of a Rose*" (virtually the ballet's title) rather than "To *raise up the ghost of a Rose*", which would have followed Browne closely. In any event, neither Browne nor the ballet really clarifies the choice of image.

A further step in the course of revision offers little help: the use of a capital letter for "Rose". Eliot wanted a reference, he said, back to the "Royal Rose". This appears early in Part III of *The Dry Salvages*, and in that context, as I have said, seems to me a symbol of romantic nostalgia (as is the spectre in the ballet). But Eliot's own comments, in response to a question from Bonamy Dobrée about the significance of the rose in the Quartets, introduce further confusion:

> There are really three roses in the set of poems; the sensuous rose, the socio-political Rose (always appearing with a capital letter) and the spiritual rose: and the three have got to be in some way identified as one. (Tate 89)

Recounting this, Dobrée added "I must confess that I was not much illuminated", and I share his feeling. If the "Rose" here is socio-political - whatever that may mean, but presumably referring to the past glory of England through its heraldic flower - one would expect "*the* Rose" (as one would, too, in a

strict quotation of the ballet title); and I can see no socio-political meaning in the "Royal Rose" of *The Dry Salvages*. This image of summoning the spectre of a "Rose" remains a puzzling one, perhaps all the more so because we have so much recorded comment on it. Sometimes the only way for a commentator to account for an image is, regrettably, to ignore the poet's account of his conscious intentions, and this I suspect is a case in point. The general impression we receive from the lines is that the poet's references to the men three centuries dead are not attempts to revive old conflicts, recall ghosts or indulge in romantic nostalgia, but aim to present the old faces and places as "renewed, transfigured, in another pattern". This reading is, at any rate, supported by the rest of Part III.

> We cannot revive old factions
> We cannot restore old policies
> Or follow an antique drum.
> These men, and those who opposed them
> And those whom they opposed
> Accept the constitution of silence
> And are folded in a single party.
> Whatever we inherit from the fortunate
> We have taken from the defeated
> What they had to leave us - a symbol:
> A symbol perfected in death.
> 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.

One of the remarkable things to be noted about the three-stress line Eliot uses here is the way in which he adapts it, without any effect of unnatural wrenching, to the various purposes of cataloguing individuals, questioning and defending his motives, pursuing and resolving his argument, drawing a corollary from it, and finally rising again to the coda of

mystical incantation on which the section began.

Having said, in rather obscure metaphors, that his purpose is not to do certain things, he goes on in clearly literal terms to say that these things cannot in fact *be* done: the history of the past cannot be re-enacted and its causes cannot be re-espoused; the perspective from which we ought to, and do, see them is now quite different. So we read, not "I will not revive old factions..." but "We cannot revive old factions...".

The threefold patterning of statements at this point is noteworthy: we cannot (a) revive, (b) restore, (c) follow; we cannot do these things to (a) old factions, (b) old policies, (c) an antique drum; the men in question are (a) "These men", (b) "those who opposed them, (c) "those whom they opposed". These triads help to prepare us for a renewal of incantation as we approach the end of Part III, and the terms associated with political contentions ("factions", "policies", "opposed", "constitution", "party") give way to the paradoxical triumph of defeat and the repeated affirmations of the mystic. This process is quietly helped, too, by the tendency of the last political terms, "constitution" and "party", to shimmer with metaphorical ambiguity. To accept the constitution of silence is to accept the figurative form of political order imposed by the decrees of silence (in other words, death), and to accept the peace and stability which that silence of death affords. The word "Accept" does duty for both a necessary submission and a willing and even grateful welcoming of what is offered. To be "folded in a single party" endorses and expands on the idea expressed in "United in the strife which divided them", and

becomes an image of peace; "folded" helps the effect by its connotation of being enveloped in one protective fold, like sheep settled for the night.

Having "folded" these men away with that air of gentle and respectful finality, the passage goes on to discuss what we have inherited from them. Our debt to the men of the past is not only to their successes but also to their defeats, because - from the longer perspective of a detached view of history - the meanings of success and defeat go beyond what they looked like at the time of earthly conflict. In a period of strife, the poet assures his readers that in the long term, what we call defeat has its own value as well as what we call success. Little Gidding's community, not least through its "defeat" at its disbandment, became a "symbol perfected in death". Julia Reibetanz expresses the idea admirably:

> Little Gidding can teach the lesson of detachment by being itself a symbol - a symbol of the partisan actions of the Civil War no longer divided in the pursuit of temporal goals, but united in the service of history's timeless end. What we ultimately inherit from the adversaries of the Civil War is what they symbolize so united in death, victors and vanquished alike....whatever factions we may support and to whatever purpose, our strife must necessarily serve an end beyond the end we may have figured.... It is only the dead who can speak to us so well of a way of acting that sees beyond immediate ends and is conscious always of the larger pattern within which all actions must take their place. (172-173)

In the phrase "A symbol perfected in death", "perfected" carries its connotations of finished, completed, accomplished - like the traditional *consummatum est* from the Cross, the archetype, we may call it, of symbols perfected in death, of apparent defeat being made to serve purposes beyond the ones

immediately visible to eyes blinded by temporality.

Eliot can therefore revert with confidence to the words of Julian of Norwich, "And all shall be well and/All manner of thing shall be well", this time adding a more explicit indication of *how* they shall be made well: it is "the purification of the motive" that empowers defeat to take upon itself the face of triumph and so, at last, become that perfected symbol. So Eliot closes his movement with a further echo from Dame Julian, who received one of her revelations in the words "I am the Ground of thy beseeching": God is the source as well as the recipient of her petitions. Eliot adapts this phrase ("In the ground of our beseeching") not merely as a periphrasis for the divine name, but in order to complete the assertion that behind the history which "may be freedom", behind the detachment that sees it as such, and behind the purity of motive that perfects its pattern, lies the same transcendent power. Like several of the words in this movement, "ground" is slightly ambiguous. It means the basis or foundation of all we wish and ask for, but it also indirectly reminds us that the poet's meditation has sprung from (is "grounded in") a specific *place*, Little Gidding, where "prayer has been valid" in a special way.

Some of Eliot's draft versions ended with neither the repeated nor the new echo of Dame Julian, but with an adaptation of the traditional *Anima Christi* prayer (*CFQ* 208). This was remodelled to accommodate the symbolism of the four Heraclitean elements, with "Soul" representing air and "Body" representing earth:

> Soul of Christ, sanctify them,
> Body of Christ, let their bodies be good earth,
> Water from the side of Christ, wash them,
> Fire from the heart of Christ, incinerate them.

At one stage he also added several lines referring to other "defeats" of figures in English history such as Richard III and the Duke of Wellington (*CFQ* 209-210). It is of course easy to be wise after the event, but clearly it is fortunate that he deleted these and reverted to Julian instead. The adaptation of the *Anima Christi* was clearly intended to take up the four elements from Part IIA and, more important, to anticipate the "incinerating" fire of Part IV; but in this context it would have felt more than a little contrived. Moreover, its petitions for "them" would have turned our attention *back* to the figures of history instead of *forward* to the universal assurances he has derived from meditation on them. Once the point has been made about the "symbol perfected in death", mention of further individual figures from history would be redundant and distracting. In the final version, on the other hand, the significant word which (departing from Julian's text) most aptly reminds the reader of the poet's main concern, is the generic pronoun "our": the God who makes sense of history is, after all, the "ground of *our* beseeching".

Part IV

In its treatment of detachment Part III pursued the theme of the liberation afforded by memory and history, and resolved that theme in its closing assurances that "All shall be well". It ended on a note anticipating ultimate peace.

The lyric of Part IV, in total contrast, breaks upon us with challenging intensity, its images taking our minds back to "the dark dove with the flickering tongue" of the air-raid in IIB, and to the "refining fire" at the end of that section. Here, however, we are confronted not with a bomber in a literal attack but with the fire of the Holy Spirit descending in a spiritual "air-raid". The poet challenges the reassuring idea of this divine power as *merely* the Paraclete, the Comforter, by presenting the pentecostal gift as the agonising fire of purgation by the love of God - the only path to that peace which "the Spirit of truth" (*John* 14:17) is promised to bring:

> But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you. Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you (*John* 14:26-27):

but the next words are, significantly, "not as the world giveth, give I unto you". The torment accompanying the descent of the Spirit is certainly not what the world calls peace or comfort, although it is the only way to them. Part I's account of the pentecostal illumination freely given is clearly only a part of the full picture, a fleeting foretaste but not a complete realisation of what the Spirit's action entails.

In the manner of Dante, Eliot here brings together several traditional connotations of the fire-symbol in Christian

iconography, and intensifies them by conflation: fire as the visible manifestation of the Holy Spirit; fire as the refining agent of purgatorial suffering; and fire as both the power and the love of God. Their combined force is augmented by the opposition between them on the one hand and, on the other, the symbol of fire as the destructive force of unappeasable earthly desire. And the lyric presents an inescapable choice between the two kinds of fire, destructive and redemptive. Each one promises anguish, but the one pain leads to salvation while the other leads to nothing but more pain. And we must be either consumed in sterile perpetuity or consumed in order to be fully purified.

> The dóve descénding bréaks the áir
> With fláme of íncandéscent térror
> Of whích the tóngues declâre
> The óne dischárge from sín and érror.
> The ónly hópe, or élse despáir
> Líes in the chóice of pýre or pýre -
> To bé redéemed from fíre by fíre.
>
> Whó then devísed the tórment? Lóve.
> Lóve is the únfamíliar Náme
> Behínd the hánds that wóve
> The íntólerable shírt of fláme
> Which húman pówer cannót remóve.
> We ónly líve, ónly suspíre
> Consúmed by éither fíre or fíre.

This is the most tightly constructed of the Part IV lyrics. *Burnt Norton* IV communicated a haunting blend of peace and expectancy at the "still point", and *The Dry Salvages* IV was an act of intercession to the Virgin. These movements in *East Coker* and *Little Gidding* are clearly aligned with each other, both in theme and in their strictness of stanzaic pattern and rhyme scheme. The former dealt with the agony of redemption

from "disease" by "disease" (taking the word in its widest metaphorical senses): the wounded surgeon hurts in order to heal. The latter deals with the agony of redemption from "fire" by "fire" (again taking the word in its widest - and most multiple - metaphorical senses): the fiery dove burns in order to purify.

The stanzas are built on the iambic tetrameter line, except that the third line of each contracts into a trimeter, giving us momentary pause by its brevity and so avoiding glibness of movement. In rhyme scheme they resemble the Chaucerian stanza or rime royal, again with one exception: the fifth line rhymes on *a* instead of *b*. This denies the ear the anticipatory resolution of a couplet in lines 4-5, keeping the cadences open until lines 6-7 (indented as a couplet and rhymed identically in both stanzas) close them. This throws into stronger relief the reiterated statement of the final couplets. Another detail that prevents lines 4 and 5 from tending towards premature resolution is the sentence patterning which places a full stop after line 4 in stanza 1 and only after line 5 in stanza 2.

A complex pattern is also set up by allowing lines in the second stanza to offer verbal, semantic or contrastive echoes to lines in the first: "Of which the *tongues* declare" and "Behind the *hands* that wove"; "With *flame* of incandescent terror" and "The intolerable shirt of *flame*"; "The one *discharge* from sin and error" and "Which human power cannot *remove*"; "The *only* hope, or else despair" and "We *only* live, only suspire"; and, of course, "To be *redeemed* from *fire by fire*" and "*Consumed* by either *fire or fire*".

In Biblical tradition the Holy Ghost descends in one of three

forms: dove, tongues of fire, wind. The dove manifestation is not normally combined with either of the other two, but here and in Part II Eliot deliberately conflates dove and fire to intensify the effect. Iconography makes the dove also a symbol of peace, which allows the poet in this instance to play on the paradox that spiritual peace is intimately related to that spiritual anguish embodied in the symbol of fire.

In 1939 Charles Williams, Eliot's chief mentor in his Dante studies, had published his book on the Holy Spirit in the history of the Church under the title *The Descent of the Dove*. Although the phrase "The dove descending" can easily be derived from the gospel accounts of Christ's baptism, it is very likely that Williams's title influenced it. His book also contains discussions not only of Dante but, more briefly, of Julian of Norwich and of the anonymous author quoted in the middle of *Little Gidding* Part V: the writer of the mystical work *The Cloud of Unknowing*.

More baroque than biblical or medieval is the image in which the descending dove "breaks the air/With flame". It reminds us a little of how, in seicento painting, celestial figures are often seen either parting, or half enveloped in, clouds as they ascend or descend. (A good literary example of this kind of image is Milton's account in his Nativity hymn of the figure of Peace descending to earth.) What is arresting in Eliot's case is the substitution of "air" for "cloud" or "clouds", which is less immediately visual yet makes the verb "breaks" more striking. Although air is not normally thought of as broken or

breakable, the image reinforces the impression of a swift and streamlined passage, yet one that creates turbulence around it: the Spirit "bombs" the consciousness, and of course the earlier description of the bomber has helped to prepare for this.

As well as being a dove it brings, or is, flame "of incandescent terror". The adjective-noun relationship is a very interesting one, because the former seems to have a double function. The Spirit *as* flame is incandescent, but its effect on the human heart is to set that on fire too: the fire of terror which may, with a proper response, become the fire of love. The Spirit and the human heart, the love and the terror, the cause and the effect, are closely connected by the syntactic compression of the phrase. And the placing here of a feminine rhyme ("terror" and "error" form the only feminine endings in the lyric) contributes an emotive quivering effect to the rhythm - a more complex because emotively a more ambivalent one than in the first movement where "The soul's sap quivers".

Familiar from the book of *Acts* are the accounts of the Spirit's descent in tongues of fire (indicating physical shape) and the resulting "gift of tongues" by which the apostles were enabled to preach the gospel at Pentecost. These two meanings of "tongues" are really quite different - elongated divisions on the one hand and a variety of languages on the other - but the word common to both creates a profound connection between them. The physical separation of the one theophany into individual tongue-*shapes* leads to the spiritual unification of many men formerly separated by a variety of tongue-*sounds*. Eliot exploits the double meaning of "tongues" while omitting

reference to the mediation of apostle or preacher, so making the experience in both senses of the word more *im*mediate. We are not worried by the potentially grotesque detail of a dove with many tongues, because our minds have been attuned to prompt adaptation of physical detail into metaphor, partly by the ambiguity of "tongues" itself. And these are tongues that not merely descend but also "declare". The firm alliterative links help to bind the thought together: the dove descending can declare the discharge; and the nature as well as the effect of the descent is emphasised in the sound-pattern linking "descending" with "incandescent".

What the tongues declare is "The one discharge from sin and error", the only way of release from them. But "discharge" is one of those words which, without any obtrusive punning, takes on subtly new shades like taffeta as it turns in the mind. One connotation is to unload, to relieve of a burden - another way of setting free, in addition to that of dismissing a conscript or manumitting a slave. Finally, after the description of the dove's descent like a bolt of lightning it is easy, if only subconsciously, to sense in "discharge" some of the connotations of an electrical impulse. The flames not only declare the one way of release, they are also felt, rather like a cauterising agent, to offer and perform it.

"The *one* discharge" is promptly echoed in "The *only* hope" of the next line. (It is well worth noticing how often in this lyric the simple definite article appears where we might expect a personal pronoun such as "our" or "his", so lending an added

austerity to the utterance; and only in the climactic final couplet does the generic "We" appear.) The stanza ends in a careful set of antithetical balances between words of opposite meaning or the same words with diametrically opposed reference:

> The only *hope*, or else *despair*
> Lies in the choice of *pyre* or *pyre* -
> To be redeemed from *fire* by *fire*.

This balancing points up the element of choice in the theme, and is reinforced again by the music of linked sounds ("despair" and "pyre", "To be redeemed"). And in the next stanza, with its allusion to the death - or rather apotheosis - of Heracles, the word "pyre" is allowed to develop in significance.

The nature of the choice is well expressed by Helen Gardner:

> The fires which have flamed and glowed throughout the poem here break out and declare their nature. Man cannot help loving; his choice is between the fire of self-love and the fire of the love of God. (*ATSE* 182)

"Man cannot help loving": indeed, love is the source of all that is in him both of good and of evil. Eliot was naturally familiar with the form Dante gave to this idea in the *Purgatorio*. As the travellers reach the fourth cornice and pause for the night, Virgil instructs Dante on love as the source of both good and evil, going on to explain how all the sins purged on the Mount have their origins in love.

> So he began: "Never, my son, was yet
> Creator, no, nor creature, without love
> Natural or rational - and thou knowest it.
>
> The natural cannot make an erring move;
> The other may, either by faulty aim
> Or else by too much zeal, or lack thereof.
>
> When to the great prime goods it makes full claim,
> Or to the lesser goods in measure due,
> No sin can come of its delight in them;

> But if it swerve to evil, or pursue
> Good ends too hot of foot or slack of speed,
> Then would the Workman's work His work undo.
>
> Bethink thee then how love must be the seed
> In you, not only of each virtuous action,
> But also of each punishable deed." (*Purg.* XVII.91-105)

Our "love gone wrong" has produced the torment from which we can find release only through that other torment devised by the divine Love and symbolised by the refining fire of Purgatory.

To the age-old question of how a God of love can permit or inflict suffering, Eliot does not address himself directly; the poem attempts none of the patient argument of classical apologetics. But it does, like the writings of the mystics, confront this question through images that affirm the mysterious paradoxes of the orthodox answer. Julian of Norwich records one of her revelations offering, in response to the riddle of evil, the one answer that faith can and must accept:

> Wouldst thou learn thy Lord's meaning in this thing? Learn it well: Love was His meaning. Who shewed it thee? Love. What shewed He thee? Love. Wherefore shewed it He? For Love. Hold thee therein and thou shalt learn and know more in the same. (Cahill 201-202)

The reader's response to such a line as "Who then devised the torment? Love" inevitably depends to some extent on individual temperament and religious conviction. But we have been prepared for it by the affirmations, in Part III, about the nature of history and the longer perspective of detachment that makes sense, in retrospect, of its many conflicts. It can in fact be claimed that what we have in Parts IIB, III and IV is, successively, a *series* of "longer perspectives", focussing in turn on the ageing poet's consciousness of himself, on the

reader's (and poet's) consciousness of past history, and now on the universal human consciousness of the eternal opposition of good and evil and of the choice between them.

As man's love gone wrong, yet love nevertheless, is the origin of sin, so God's love tormenting, yet love nevertheless, is the source of release from it: "Love is the unfamiliar Name" that answers the ultimate question - and the impact would be reduced if the more familiar name of God were introduced here, even though the meaning is clear enough. The connotations of "Love" are more universally affirmative than those of "God"; yet the poet is not concerned to soft-pedal the devastating paradoxes he offers, since he immediately goes on to make "Love" responsible for "The intolerable shirt of flame" that afflicts mankind. It is the very name "Behind the hands that wove" this shirt; and if the transition from "Name" to "hands", and the preposition "Behind", seem to make the connection less painfully immediate, we are nevertheless forced to respond to the deliberateness implicit in "wove". The hands that wove are the hands that created us, and the shirt of flame - of our anguished earthly longings - is so much a part of us that it must continue to burn us until it in turn is burnt away.

The allusion here to the Nessus shirt of Heracles is wonderfully apt. Steeped in the blood of the centaur Nessus, it was presented to Heracles by his wife Deianeira as a charm to ensure his continued love for her when it was threatened by his infatuation with the captive Iole. But its poison caused it to grow fast to his skin and to inflame his body with agony. The

only way for him to remove it was to light a funeral pyre for himself and throw himself into it - whereupon in earthly terms he died, but in celestial ones underwent an apotheosis, ascending to Olympus with the baser elements burnt away, to become an immortal among the gods (Graves II.201-203). The origin of the torment lay in "love gone wrong", and that evil is embodied in the shirt of Nessus; but the very answer to that agony was the further agony of the pyre by which Heracles was purified and made fit for immortality. The striking correspondence to the theme of Eliot's lyric extends even to the crucial detail that "human power cannot remove" the shirt of Nessus which causes such pain. And the ghost's words at the end of Part IIB,

> From wrong to wrong the exasperated spirit
> Proceeds, unless restored by that refining fire

return to us with renewed force.

Having made his point so firmly and finally, the poet has little left to do except reiterate the alternatives mentioned in the previous stanza. Yet the end of the lyric is not an anticlimax: in stanza 1, the choice between the fires represented "The only hope, or else despair"; in stanza 2, the line that echoes this drives the point home by introducing the hitherto tactfully avoided word "We", and alters the emphasis from choice to the grim inevitability of fire, one way or the other, as a condition of life itself:

> We only live, only suspire
> Consumed by either fire or fire.

This is not to negate the necessity of choice, but to insist on the inescapable context in which it must be made.

Some further comments on rhythm and sound are appropriate

at this point. In the first stanza the iambics move with total regularity except for a minor (and perfectly normal) inversion of the accentual-syllabic stress-pattern at the opening of the sixth line: "Líes in the chóice". This helps to signal the approaching climactic statement of the stanza, and the stress on "Lies" binds it assonantally with "pyre" and "fire". In the second stanza, initial inversions in the first two lines ("Whó then" and "Lóve is"), and the single word falling abruptly at the end of the first, highlight question and answer as we confront the dominant concern of the lyric. Two lines later occurs the only major wrenching of standard iambic rhythm: "The íntólerable shírt of fláme" rather than, in clumsy deference to iambics, "Th'intóleráble shírt of fláme". This wrenching, with the harsh glottal break between "The" and "in-" and the consequent pause between "in-" and "-tol-", places a climactic emphasis on the image of the shirt that binds the stanza together and links love and fire. It stands out all the more forcefully by contrast with the austere matter-of-factness and smooth regularity of the neighbouring lines. Finally, in the penultimate line of the lyric occurs an ordinary medial inversion after the pause, so that the second "only" gains the reinforcement of a slight rhythmic quiver: "ónly suspíre". The general point to be made is that the passage depends for its rhythmic force primarily on the rigid regularity of its metre, yet is elastic enough to accommodate the few irregularities for special effect.

One other point about sound warrants mention here. The

passage is fairly tightly bound by alliteration, stanza 1 dominated by **d** and **t** sounds with their plosive force, while stanza 2, echoing them occasionally ("devised the torment", "intolerable shirt"), is less intense, playing more frequently around the continuous consonants **l**, **m**, **n** and **v**. Yet each stanza approaches its end with a unifying emphasis on **p** and **f**, the latter prepared for in each case by "flame" or "unfamiliar". Eliot's fine ear for word-music deserves fuller attention than space allows here; not much work seems to have been done on it.

By the time we arrive at the end of the lyric, we are at least dimly aware that more than two kinds of fire are in question. If we think of them in terms of Dante's world (often a helpful thing to do), we realise that the fire of human love, the "shirt of flame", is quasi-infernal like the "Burning burning burning burning" of *The Waste Land*; the refining fire descending with the dove is not only pentecostal but also purgatorial; yet when we choose the latter and see it in true perspective, the purgatorial fire is, as always in Dante, really the paradisal fire of the divine Love preparing the soul for itself.

Just as paradoxical as the nature of fire is the nature of love, which the fire symbolises: the love that destroys is set against the love that heals by tormenting. And this is, after all, the central *theme* of the passage, whereas fire, though of great significance, is merely the central *symbol*. The middle of this lyric is only the sixth place in the cycle where the word "love" is mentioned. *Little Gidding* is unique among the Quartets in mentioning love in the middle of each of its last

three movements, and the effect is of a growing accumulation of thematic weight. We begin to suspect that ever since the opening of *Burnt Norton* the Quartets have been, in however indirect a fashion, a meditation not only on the relationship between time and eternity but also on the relationship between the love that is human and the love that is divine. To adapt the opening words of *Little Gidding* V, we realise that as we approach the end, we are ready to make a new beginning, since the end is the point where what was implicit *from* the beginning is only now starting to become explicit. So the end is in this sense "where we start from", and the experience of the Quartets becomes the experience of a cycle in more than one sense of the word.[12]

Part V

The final movement of *Little Gidding* and of *Four Quartets* follows a pattern by now familiar from the other three. It has two sections: the first a meditation on aspects of art or the artist's endeavour, beginning in comparatively relaxed and prosaic rhythms but tautening as it proceeds; the second a more lyrical resolution conveyed by image-clusters in short verse-lines of three (or sometimes four) stresses each.

The first rough draft of Part V makes more explicit some of the ideas contained in the final version. "What we think a beginning is often an end", it starts, and goes on a couple of lines later to assert that "every moment" is "both beginning and end" (*CFQ* 219). This reiteration takes us back to the play on these words in *East Coker*, but with the personal pronoun "my" now omitted, so that the statements acquire a more immediate generality of application. In the experience or life of an individual, as well as in our retrospective experience of history, every beginning implies a new end and every end belies the appearance of finality by marking a new beginning. "The end is where we start from" echoes *East Coker*'s "Home is where one starts from", where "home" could refer to a place of origin *or* to a destination or target, as in getting "home" in a race; "home" therefore signifies either the beginning or the end of a process, which in either case means a new start to a further process - and this idea of an "end" as a new start (implicit in *East Coker*'s "Old men ought to be explorers") is made more explicit here in *Little Gidding*.

As we approach the end of the poem and the cycle we can also

apply this to our experience of the poet's work itself: arrival at the end prepares us for a new start in grasping the meaning of the work, and the conclusions or purposes that seemed to be implicit when we began it have been modified by the intervening experience, have "become renewed, transfigured, in another pattern". Yet this in turn is only the starting-point for a fresh understanding: the cycle, at its end, affirms its own cyclic nature. Transition from life to poetry seems to take place without any wrenching of subject-matter.

> What we cáll the begínning is óften the énd
> And to máke an énd is to máke a begínning.
> The énd is where we stárt from. And évery phráse
> And séntence that is ríght (where every wórd is at hóme,
> Táking its pláce to suppórt the óthers,
> The wórd neither díffident nór ostentátious,
> An éasy cómmerce of the óld and the néw,
> The cómmon word exáct withóut vulgárity,
> The fórmal word precíse but nót pedántic,
> The compléte cónsort dáncing togéther)
> Every phráse and every séntence is an énd and a begínning,
> Every póem an épitaph.

Two things are striking about the long parenthesis: one is that words are described as if they were people, the piece of writing as a human community; the other is that the claims are made more especially for writing characterized by a fine balance between extremes and by a union of opposed qualities. End and beginning may be seen most clearly in the light of each other where this kind of balance is achieved: "every phrase/And sentence that is *right*". (Yet after the parenthesis we read "Every phrase and every sentence is an end and a beginning": only when they are "right"? often? always? The poet is less specific now, preparing for the parallel with "any action".)

The parenthesis between these iterations seems to constitute an indirect statement of the poet's stylistic ideals in the work we are reading. But what he says is also an affirmation of a more general ideal about the nature of a work of art, as we saw it expressed in Part V of *Burnt Norton* when he pondered on the relation between movement and stillness in such works:

> 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.

The end and the beginning exist in the mind and response of the hearer or spectator - as well as of the creator - and the literal beginning or end of a work of art is therefore never absolute. The parenthetic account of the fully-realised work of art - which the poet does not claim to have achieved but which he holds as an ideal - stands in direct contrast to *Burnt Norton*'s account of the constant struggle to marshal the right words into proper order while they strain,

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

The opposed passage in *Little Gidding* suggests that even "The complete consort dancing together" remains a beginning as well as an end.

> We are not to take these lines to mean that the poet's struggles have suddenly vanished and that he can now achieve effortlessly what was so difficult before. Nor do these lines mean that the poet has ceased to fail....Though struggle and failure have not vanished, the poet has risen above them. In detachment from his own field of action, he is able to see and accept his inevitable defeat as part of a larger pattern: (Reibetanz 177-178)

the pattern in which any action is "a step to the block".

Eliot has taken the two key words "beginning" and "end" and elevated them to the level of metaphor until the metaphor itself virtually becomes the reality and the literal meanings occupy the status merely of approximate appearances, when looked at from the longer perspective that the poem offers. New views of the relation between end and beginning are offered not only by the rightly-balanced utterance as a whole, but also by every passing phase of it: every phrase and every sentence. The poem - although it is part of a constant process - becomes not simply a statement *about* the eternal "dance" at the still point, it it also in some measure a part of that eternal dance itself. Available to us here and now, the work of art is also, to use Yeats's words, gathered into "the artifice of eternity".

If, as the first draft (*CFQ* 219) puts it,"Every poem is its own epitaph", so too, by implication, is every life and every action. A frequent problem in responding to statements of this kind arises from our habit of thinking about time and experience sequentially, whereas Eliot, with his theme of transcending time, is inviting us to respond in an unwonted way and to look at things *sub specie aeternitatis*. A rough analogy would be the position of an astronaut in outer space trying, without reference to his space-ship, to make distinctions between "up" and "down" or between the four points of the compass. He would realise that such distinctions apply in the limited sphere of terrestrial bodies and their fields of gravity, but that otherwise - in most of the space that constitutes the universe -

they are metaphors only. To aim at the stars is to accept the relativity of terrestrial bearings, yet to accept also the need to carry those bearings with us in newly-adapted forms.

In the parenthesis, as I have said, words are described as if they were people and the piece of writing as if it were a human community. This running metaphor is far more than incidental. It binds firmly together two areas of concern: human experience (the relation of the individual to the community as well as to his own sense of time and the timeless), and the work of art and the artist's aims in creating it. The fully-realised work of art is therefore described in terms of the fully-integrated, harmonious human community where everyone is at home, each supports and is supported by the others, the extremes of diffidence and ostentation are avoided, and a fine balance is achieved between old and new, the formal and the common, the precise and the simple.

This harmonious community is finally described in one of Eliot's key metaphors which we have already seen at work amid the abstractions of *Burnt Norton* and the midnight vision of *East Coker*, that of the dance: "The complete consort dancing together". It "betokeneth concorde" not only maritally and socially, but also a concord between the physical and the abstract, the time in which it is danced and the timeless pattern that the dance makes.

The rhythms of this passage reinforce the theme by themselves taking on a dance-like motion. The neatly end-stopped lines marked by the predictable four-beat rhythm remind us - but in a context of greater abstraction and greater verbal

sophistication – of the peasant dancers of *East Coker*,

> Keeping the rhythm in their dancing
> As in their living in the living seasons.

The impression of orderly movement and balance is strengthened, too, by the unobtrusively functional word-music. Alliteration and assonance bind the lines into an harmonious whole where individual sounds support one another:

> Taking its **pl**ace to su**pp**ort the others,
> The word neither **d**iffi**d**ent nor os**tent**atious,
> An easy **com**merce of the old and the new,
> The **com**mon word ex**a**ct without vul**g**arity,
> The formal word **p**recise but not **p**ed**a**ntic,
> The **com**plete **con**sort dancing together...

Syntactically, too, the pattern is underpinned by the balancing of individual phrases and lines in roughly this manner: "taking its A to B, the word neither A nor B, an easy commerce of A and B, the common word A without B, the formal word A but not B". The whole is of course further unified by the word that dominates it, "word" itself. But in the final line we read "The complete consort", not "The complete consort of words", because the words, each with its individual character, have done their work in such a way as to *efface* their individuality in the larger unit of the dancing "consort". The latter is an apt word here with its slightly archaic connotations of an ensemble of performers (as in a "consort of viols") as well as its hint of mutual help and partnership: in the words of *East Coker* with their own archaism, it points to a "necessarye coniunction" which "betokeneth concorde". The language of these lines of *Little Gidding* does, in fact, exemplify "An easy commerce of the old and the new" in which archaic meanings add their own

fragrance without overpowering their partners. The archaic sense of "commerce" here is itself a case in point. Even the word "complete" has a flavour of the richer seventeenth-century connotations of "compleat": not merely mathematically complete, but mature in skill and practice.

This account of "rightness" in individual words and in the whole poem becomes a symbol of "rightness" in individual lives and in the whole community. Utterance and action, poetry and life, are made one. No longer does the "timeless moment", as in *Burnt Norton*, seem unrelated to the rest of life around us; nor is the "dancer" in the "refining fire" condemned to dance alone. The way of dispossession and the occupation of the saint, lonely though they are, can be seen within the larger context of the human community. History is a pattern of timeless moments, society is a consort of lives rooted in eternity, and poetry - though in a limited sense it "does not matter" - is in the larger sense an embodiment of these recognitions. Moreover, every moment of action is a moment of annunciation, not necessarily the "calamitous annunciation" heard by the bone on the beach, but the Annunciation affirming the principle of Incarnation, the nexus of time and eternity, in every instant of living or of dying. The recognition of this enables us to see the relationship between living and dead in a new light.

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

Like phrases in a musical last-movement reprise, the images in the opening lines of this passage echo details we have met at earlier points of our journey through the Quartets: the block and the fire, the sea's throat and the illegible stone, glance back to those who have suffered death on the scaffold (*Little Gidding* III) or by fire (*Little Gidding* II), those who encountered death at sea (*The Dry Salvages*) and those buried in country churchyards (*East Coker*) - or, if we press the elemental symbolism of the cycle, deaths associated in turn with air, fire, water and earth. The poet is starting, and will continue in Part VB, to gather up ideas and images scattered throughout the cycle, to draw them into a firm unity at the end.

All these apparent endings of lives are abruptly reaffirmed as beginnings: "and that is where we start". Just as ends and beginnings inhere in each other, so death and birth, commonly seen as opposites, are now presented as coexistent and interdependent. The lines in which this assertion is made would have had for wartime readers a strongly topical significance and served to some extent as a *consolatio*. When those we love die, part of us dies with them, and in any case, as we saw in *The Dry Salvages*, "the time of death is every moment". But so too is the time of birth, and as the dead become "renewed, transfigured, in another pattern", so may we share with them in that rebirth:

> 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.

The two shorter lines here stand out from their context in

their brevity and the abruptness of their end-stopping, while the gently imperative button-holing of the reader immediately after each ("See") throws them into further relief by enacting the immediacy of direct vision. The first two lines do not present a really new thought: in *East Coker* III's vision of the eminent going into the dark, "we all go with them". But the next two lines gather up and affirm in a startlingly new way the "discoveries" made in *Little Gidding* III about the reconciliation and transfiguration of the dead, and the inheritance from them of a new perspective that in turn transfigures us until "All shall be well". Paradoxical formulations like those in the first two lines of *Little Gidding* V have now given way to the more direct kind of affirmation that we find in the mystics, "a daring and tenuous poetic realization of paradox" (Reibetanz 179).

Quite as daring and tenuous is the next assertion, that

> The moment of the rose and the moment of the yew-tree
> Are of equal duration.

Preston's reading of it is clear and simple, and based on the contrast in life-span between the two:

> As the thousand years of the yew-tree are equivalent in value to the hour of the rose's perfection, so it is not duration that matters: it is that quality and intensity of life which, if it exists in a moment, exists in every moment. (62)

This is true enough, but it is not all. The rose - traditionally a symbol of earthly life, love and beauty as well as of their transience and the nostalgia it arouses - has acquired further symbolic resonances from the rose-garden passage in *Burnt Norton*. These are associated with the fleeting and

ecstatic "moment of illumination" in which the timeless is directly apprehended, like a very small foretaste of Dante's final beatific vision amid the celestial Rose at the end of the *Paradiso.* In contrast to it is the yew-tree of the graveyard, traditional symbol of death with its chill fingers (*Burnt Norton* IV), but also of that immortality in which the "life of significant soil" is nourished (*The Dry Salvages* V). Both of these contexts have associated it in turn with acceptance of the "negative way" of deprivation described in the third movements of *Burnt Norton* and *East Coker* - that acceptance which leads through darkness back to the light, through the apparent "death" of the spirit to its renewal.

From these details it is evident that both the rose and the yew-tree are already double-edged symbols; and their conjunction in this line amounts to a climactic assertion that life and death, the temporal and the eternal, and the ways of affirmation and of negation, are ultimately one. All these things have in one way or another been said before; but now they are said in a more compact and symbolically charged manner than ever. The moment of the rose was brief and yet timeless; the "moment" of the yew-tree was, from an earthly point of view, a long and arduous process *towards* liberation from time, though in the perspective of eternity it is also only a moment; but the two have led to the same point and the same understanding. (The first draft (*CFQ* 219) claimed that both are "equally moments" and so "must vanish" to become eternal.)

When, in *Sweeney Agonistes,* Sweeney remarks that "Death is life and life is death", his paradox voices a horror of life

from which the inadequate escape is a form of death-in-life. Now, nearly twenty years later, Eliot rewrites the paradox to voice a totally different idea: from the timeless perspective that makes sense of history, death is constantly renewing and rewriting life, and we may be liberated from the rigid distinction between the two that otherwise afflicts us.

This liberation is a redemption from time, and without the perspective that makes it possible, we remain unredeemed.

> A people without history
> Is not redeemed from time, for history is a pattern
> Of timeless moments. So, while the light fails
> On a winter's afternoon, in a secluded chapel
> History is now and England.

When the poet asserts that "A people without history/Is not redeemed from time", I think we must take his statement as rhetorical rather than exclusive. It would be crass to suppose that he is pausing here to play the invidious game of separating the sheep from the goats, the saved from the unsaved - especially on the level of national identities. The negation is rather a way of reinforcing the claim that "history is a pattern of timeless moments", that only in the vision that relates human history to the eternal can we recognize the larger pattern in which, ultimately, "All shall be well". And those who "make history" by acting in detachment free from temporal motives - such as those we glanced at in Part III - make it easier to see the process of history in the light of the eternal pattern.

These thoughts, not surprisingly, bring us back to the point from which the poet's meditation has unfolded: the chapel at Little Gidding where the purpose of his visit has broken from

its initial "husk of meaning" and become "altered in fulfilment", where "the communication/Of the dead" has been "tongued with fire beyond the language of the living". It is a particularly moving moment when the poem, after ranging through time and space, through the anguish of the ageing individual and the pain of ancient conflicts as well as the present one, returns to its point of departure with the wealth of understanding accumulated in its circlings. For the moment, Gidding itself becomes a focal point in the process and acceptance of all that "history" has come to mean; the small chapel containing the lone poet (we inevitably imagine him alone) is now a vantage-point - like Keats's "peak in Darien" - from which a new immensity of experience can be grasped and marvelled at.

The smallness and seclusion of the place play their part in emphasising the paradoxical breadth of the vision (even the adjective in the title place-name has its function here). So too do the specific reminders of the particular season and time of day. The Quartet began with a brilliantly sunlit winter's afternoon in the fields near Gidding, and now (with a wealth of implied meaning in that simple connective "So") brings us back to its chapel later the same afternoon as "the light fails" over that landscape while a light beyond time fills the poet's mind: the light of eternity uniting temporal process (history) and national consciousness (England) in the transcendent vision of the present moment (now). Obscurity and seclusion are no bars to this awareness of time - and place - redeemed.

We have come a long way from the initial doubts and problems voiced at the opening of the cycle:

> The familiar words in the phrase "redeemed from time" recall the opening speculations of *Burnt Norton* and the supposition that "All time is unredeemable"; but the intervening exploration has led us to the experience of a perspective beyond time and to the knowledge that any moment in time may break out of the chain of time past and time future into the pattern of timeless moments beyond time. Indeed, for a few men, every moment is such a dying out of time to be born transfigured into the pattern of timeless reality beyond. But then, we are not all saints; for us there is only the trying. Our history is redeemed, however, because for some men who *were* saints and for one man in particular who was God, every moment of life was such a dying, "a lifetime's death in love"....The opening speculations of the poem have been answered: time is not unredeemable. Christ has redeemed time by His Incarnation. (Reibetanz 181-182)

And in doing so he has called us to enter into and continue that process of redemption.

These considerations make the injection of the next line appropriate and emotively logical. Taken from the fourteenth-century mystical work *The Cloud of Unknowing*, it forms the equivalent of a musical bridge-passage ushering in a coda that briefly recapitulates and resolves the themes enunciated elsewhere in the work. Audrey Cahill, quoting its original context,

> What weary wretched heart and sleeping in sloth is that, the which is not wakened with the drawing of this love and the voice of this calling?

remarks that the line

> communicates something of the sensation of reconciled freedom and compulsion which those who are called of God seem to feel. (205)

The word "Love", now capitalized together with "Calling", has gradually accumulated significance in the course of its rare and scattered occurrences throughout the cycle, and is now identified not only with the power that redeems from time, but

also with the person who constantly summons mankind to *continue* that process of redemption through spiritual exploration and the detached action born of love in its fullest sense.

> With the dráwing of this Lóve and the vóice of this
> Cálling
>
> We shálł not céase from èxplorátion
> And the énd of ál our explóring
> Will bé to arríve where we stárted
> And knów the plàce for the fírst tíme.
> Thróugh the únknown, remémbered gáte
> When the lást of èarth léft to discóver
> Is thát which wás the begínning;
> At the sóurce of the lóngest ríver
> The vóice of the hídden wáterfàll
> And the chíldren ìn the ápple-trée
> Nót knówn, because nót lóoked for
> But héard, hàlf-héard, in the stíllness
> Betwéen twò wáves of the séa.
> Quíck now, hére, nòw, álways -
> A condítion of compléte simplícity
> (Cósting nòt léss than éverything)
> And ál shál be wéll and
> Ál mánner of thíng shall be wéll
> When the tóngues of fláme are ìn-fólded
> Ìnto the crówned knót of fíre
> And the fíre and the róse are óne.

After the long bridge-line, the tautening of rhythm in Part VB arises from its usual source at this stage of a Quartet: a shorter line of either three or four main stresses or, where the ear prefers the distinction, three main ones with a secondary fourth. Meanwhile, the images recapitulated in these lines are drawn from a variety of contexts earlier in the cycle, including a variety of metrical settings in which they first appeared. The effect is of a swift yet unhurried finale in which various correlatives of the "timeless moment" are gathered into a majestic coda, the images quickening our pulse with no further argument, but with a concentrated impact far greater, now, than was achieved in their initial separate

occurrences.

The typographical isolation of the line from *The Cloud of Unknowing* marks it out as a point of modulation into the final harmonies of the poem; but syntactically it is not isolated, since what follows represents a direct response to it: it is *with* (owing to, and in recognition of) this love and this calling that "We shall not cease from exploration". The cycle began with a summons (not then recognized as proceeding from love), when the birdcall beckoned our footsteps into the garden of illumination. It ends with another summons, emanating from the same ultimate source, but imaged - and recognized - in other terms. And this summons leads not simply to a renewal of that experience but to a realization of the effort and cost it will entail and the revelation it will afford.

One of the draft versions read "We must not cease from exploration" (*CFQ* 222); but Eliot - presumably realising that by this stage the tone of triumphant prediction and promise warranted precedence over the hortatory - altered the "must" to "shall". Perhaps the intermediate emphasis of "will" (marking determination as well as prediction) would have been slightly better; but the element of resolving as well as anticipating is clear enough from the context, especially in the parenthetic line that spells out the cost. It is, I think, not accidental (especially after "History is now and England") that "We shall not cease from exploration" recalls Blake's famous stanza from *Milton*, emotively charged in turn by Parry's rousing musical setting of it as *Jerusalem* ("And did those feet in ancient time"):

> I will not cease from Mental Fight,
> Nor shall my Sword sleep in my hand,
> Till we have built Jerusalem
> In England's green & pleasant Land.

Even if only subconsciously, the expansive harmonies of Blake and Parry in combination - their fervour arising from and yet transcending national feeling - help Eliot's lines to affect the reader profoundly (all the more so, perhaps, in a time of war). Here is a positive answer to the grim vision in which

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

Destruction, waste and disillusion may after all be followed by rebuilding, both physical and spiritual, and by the exploration that leads us back to our primal innocence. *East Coker* ended with the conviction that "Old men ought to be explorers"; now *Little Gidding* takes up a similar idea but directs it into a wider field of reference.

The end (both goal and conclusion) of all our exploring

> Will be to arrive where we started
> And know the place for the first time.

What is true of the poet's spiritual odyssey (which the pronoun "we" makes more than an individual one) is true also of our own odyssey, as readers, through the Quartets. When we arrive at the end of *Little Gidding* we have gained a fresh understanding of what *Burnt Norton* and the subsequent Quartets have been about - "been about" in several senses of the phrase, their subject matter and their intended goals and ways of achieving them.

This retrospective recognition has to a large extent been shared by the poet with the reader, since *Four Quartets* has been for Eliot a continuous exploration not only of his themes but also of his poetic resources for handling them. His poetic concerns and methods, and the conclusions to which they have been leading, have been redefining themselves all along. In the words of *East Coker*, "It was not (to start again) what one had expected", since every attempt was a wholly new start and each venture a new beginning. One obvious way in which this is true is in the fact that *Burnt Norton* did not anticipate a cycle, let alone a cycle impregnated with the responses aroused by the circumstances of war. Yet the last three Quartets, to an extent undreamed of when he wrote the first, can be read with profit (though not of course definitively) as poetry of acutely personal reminiscence and confession, as poetry of place, and also, in part, as poetry of war. What we have seen in them has been, as in Wordsworth's subtitle to *The Prelude*, the growth of a poet's mind, moving from private experience of timeless joy to a deeper grasp of the significance of that experience and the context in which it has its meaning.

The mention of Wordsworth offers an appropriate moment to expand on a remark made earlier in this study: in their combination of formal structure and varied shifts in subject, mood and style, the Quartets are rather more like odes than like any other traditional poetic genre; and their subject, starting from the poet's own intimations of immortality - or eternity - and expanding into the world around him to grasp his experience from a more universal perspective, puts us in mind of that very

different poem known as Wordsworth's Immortality Ode. To make this comparison is not to claim any direct debt, and of course Eliot's temperament and presuppositions differ markedly from Wordsworth's; but it could be an interesting and rewarding subject for some other writer to pursue.

To arrive where we started and to know the place for the first time is clearly to grasp how beginnings are often ends and vice versa, and how the end may be "where we start from". The imagery with which the poet's explorations began is therefore aptly re-evoked here, with all its accumulated ambiguity and paradox, as the unknown *yet also remembered* gate into the rose-garden, the gate through which, as "What might have been" momentarily became reality, we entered "Into our first world" peopled with the sound of children's laughter among leaves. At the end of all our exploring, this might-have-been will become what is: the primal state to which our fugitive moments of vision have always pointed, and which, the poet suggests, has always been waiting for us. This, "which was the beginning", is for us in our timebound lives "the last of earth left to discover"; it is the restored Eden which is also the place of the beatific vision. But the nature of the diction used in the cycle would probably have made the words "Eden" or "Heaven" fall too heavily and self-consciously on our ears, regardless of the extent to which we share Eliot's religious convictions; and he was clearly right to avoid them.

These lines have a syntactic peculiarity worth noticing: nine lines between full stops ("Through the unknown..." to

"...waves of the sea") have no main clause to make them into a formal sentence. What they describe in this elliptical way, through image rather than complete statement, is the end of the journey to "where we started" and the arrival at the place which we shall then know "for the first time". My additions below, though technically necessary for completeness of syntax, are obviously unnecessary for completeness of understanding, and indeed detract from the immediacy of the experience as the poet wishes to convey it.

> [We shall pass]
> Through the unknown, remembered gate
> When the last of earth left to discover
> Is that which was the beginning;
> [There,]
> At the source of the longest river
> [We shall hear]
> The voice of the hidden waterfall
> And the children in the apple-tree
> [And these things will till then have been]
> Not known, because not looked for
> But heard, half-heard, in the stillness
> Between two waves of the sea.

If "the longest river" is the Mississippi-Missouri which we recall from *The Dry Salvages* - the "strong brown god" that symbolized our primal life-pulse with its simple awareness of the time-process - then "the source of the longest river" represents the origin of that pulse and indeed of that time-process itself. No such logical deduction is needed, however, for the image to exert its effect: we have by now become fully attuned to the way in which such symbols work, and they are registered immediately in the emotions without any need for the conscious mind to work them out.

What we know, almost intuitively - and indeed almost tautologically - is that to arrive at our point of origin is to

regain the fountainhead of all our experience. There it is that we shall hear two of the sounds that have come to signify our sense of the timeless illumination: the waterfall (deriving its meaning from its context in *The Dry Salvages* and anticipated in *East Coker*'s "Whisper of running streams") and the voices of children among the leaves of the apple-tree (strongly recalled from *Burnt Norton*).

In the first Quartet we read of the laughter of the children among leaves, and the apple-tree was not named as such (though the memory of the minor poem "New Hampshire" encouraged the identification). Now, at the end of *Little Gidding*, as if in tacit recognition of the regained Eden in which the sin of Adam is undone, the apple-tree is explicitly mentioned and occasions no surprise - as if we had never expected it to be any other kind of tree. Meanwhile the laughter that featured in *Burnt Norton* is *omitted* here, together with the excitement and the hiddenness. Perhaps this is not accidental: in the fulness of ultimate revelation, where at long last we "know the place for the first time", joy is not negated, but tension is; there is nothing teasing or elusive, nothing left to hide, nothing on earth "left to discover". In the Kipling story "They" which influenced Eliot in *Burnt Norton* I, the elusive children around the country house were the ghosts of other people's children, those whom the blind woman might have had yet did not. But in the arrival at our primal source and origin there are no "might haves": all is clear, unambiguous and fulfilled.

Until then the children and what they represent will not have been known "because not looked for". This phrase is a little ambiguous. We may read it to mean that our preoccupation with other quests has distracted us from this one. But more likely is the meaning that the children, encountered as voices in fleeting moments of visionary intensity, have never truly been known before the final encounter, because their voices have come unbidden ("not looked for") and have departed as swiftly as they came, remaining elusive like half-recalled dream-images. When they are met in the full and final discovery they will therefore be, like the gate, unknown and yet remembered. And when in the fulfilled moment of that encounter they *are* known, there will be no *need* to look for them: for discovery will cancel all quests, whether pursued or evaded. St Paul's image, of seeing through a glass darkly and then face to face, comes to mind (*I Corinthians* 13:12).

Until then, the voices of the waterfall and the children, though not "known", are sometimes briefly "heard, half-heard", in those timeless moments that have recurred throughout the Quartets as intimations of eternity and have provided the entire cycle with its point of departure. Those moments are now described, in a glance back to the imagery of *The Dry Salvages*, as occurring in the minimal stillness "Between two waves of the sea" - the sea felt in that Quartet as the chaotic flux of a "time not our time", defying all measurements by which we try to make sense of our place in the temporal world. The moments of vision have given us intimations that it *does* make sense; but to capture and fully grasp those intimations

would be like trying to halt the sea's movement in order to study the stillness between two successive waves. Only in another dimension altogether - the dimension towards which the Quartets point - will we acquire that fulness of comprehension in a simultaneous fulness of love.

Heralding the initial vision of *Burnt Norton* was the call of the bird, "Quick, said the bird, find them, find them"; and our dismissal from it was again expressed in the image of birdcall:

> Go, go, go, said the bird: human kind
> Cannot bear very much reality.

Near the end of *Little Gidding* the summons is repeated in slightly different terms (this time from the end of *Burnt Norton*), but now there is no dismissal. The tone of urgency is there again in the words "Quick now", urging us into the exploration from which we "shall not cease", and exhorting us to unfailing responsiveness to the intimations of eternity when they come. The words "here, now, always" now describe not only where and when we should be alert and sensitive to them, but also where and when they are available to us: wherever we are, in the very moment of the present and at all moments, if we have the eyes and ears to apprehend them. To live in perpetual awareness of them is what *The Dry Salvages* called "an occupation for the saint", but the end of *Little Gidding* makes no concession to a double standard distinguishing between the saint and "most of us"; it is concerned with the ideal. There is yet another way of reading this strange line (like Lear's fivefold "Never", so trite out of context and so haunting in it): we may take it not only as describing the readiness to

apprehend the eternal, but also as describing the eternal *itself* which, properly understood, is more than something to which we look ahead, since it is alive and at work ("Quick") now, here and always about us.

To be constantly aware of and responsive to it in the world of time entails, as we have already seen in *The Dry Salvages*,

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

And to dwell in its fulness in the world beyond time entails becoming renewed and transfigured beyond all familiar patterns of our earthly experience. In either case this will mean

> A condition of complete simplicity
> (Costing not less than everything)

– the word "condition" meaning primarily a state of being, but acquiring also the secondary connotation of a prerequisite to be met before the state in question can be achieved. Simplicity is what will characterise us, but is also what will be demanded of us, as the parenthetic line insists. ("Costing not less than everything" can be read as qualifying either "condition" or "simplicity" or both, and this syntactic ambiguity is richly opportune.) The cost is total, and that totality is emphasised by the phrase "not less": not merely will it cost everything, but everything will be the *minimal* cost in that sphere which defies temporal arithmetic. It is, to take up a submerged pun from the opening of the cycle, "Only in a world of speculation" that we fail to see "everything" as a minimal price; the world we have now begun dimly to grasp operates according to different laws of spiritual economics.

The lines of this coda-finale move with an extraordinary combination of qualities: they are serene yet not calm, excited yet not tense, swift yet not hurried, firm and assured yet not deliberate or self-conscious. An air of discovery already made *and* discovery yet anticipated permeates them: we feel that we are simultaneously reviewing landmarks already passed, undergoing a present journey, and arriving at a destination. The poetry itself creates the illusion of that timelessness which is its subject.

On a mechanical level we can partly account for this by the variety of tenses used or implied (*shall not, will be, started, remembered, is, was, known, heard, now, always, costing, shall be, are*); by the often implicit presence of that complex tense, the future perfect ("are in-folded" meaning "will have been in-folded" or "will have been recognized as in-folded"); and by the ambiguity of tense in a phrase like "because not looked for", which may mean any or all of "because they have not been looked for", "because they are not looked for", "because they will not have been looked for". We can also partly account for the blend of tones and qualities by pointing to the sparseness of punctuation which prevents us from lingering on any of the familiar phrases and images flickering past us, yet allows them to form a variety of possible syntactic relationships only half-registered in the course of our reading.

Yet when we have pointed to all of these features, we have gone only a little way towards explaining the overall effect, since it is inseparable from the pressure of the entire cycle of poems impinging upon its last moments. If an exaggeration,

it would nevertheless be an excusable one to compare the task of analysing the closing lines of the *Paradiso* without reference to all that has led up to them through the other ninety-nine cantos.

The sparse punctuation just mentioned concedes parentheses to the significant glance at the cost, but does not allow us to dwell on it, for without further punctuation we move right on into the repeated affirmations of Julian of Norwich, already familiar from Part III. It is worth noting, too, that these affirmations are not introduced by any adversative conjunction such as "but" or "yet", merely by the eloquently simple "And", which ensures their status as pure affirmation without the weakness of *apologia* or consolation. When they appeared at the end of Part III, we learnt that all shall be (made) well

> By the purification of the motive
> In the ground of our beseeching.

Now the recurrence of Dame Julian's words has no concern with purification or beseeching, but only with the consummation beyond time in which beseeching is no longer necessary and purification is complete. The "hints and guesses", the partial and fleeting visions of eternity, will have passed away to be replaced by the thing itself in its fulness.

Although Eliot does not attempt a description of the beatific vision (and would probably have marred the poem had he done so), the last three lines point towards that vision in images of a more indirect nature than Dante's.

The "in-folding" of the tongues of flame (half enacted by the sound pattern in "**flame**" and "**in-fold**ed") suggests a

gathering into firm and final unity of what we have formerly known as multiple and separate. A crowned knot "is used to tie three strands of rope in such a way as to turn all the ends inward to prevent them from fraying" (Heibetanz 186). Here it becomes an emblem of oneness securing, yet not eliminating, elements of diversity. The last three lines not only mention the "crowned knot" in which this process is completed; they themselves *are* the "crowned knot" binding into finality the symbols of *Little Gidding* and of *Four Quartets* as a whole.

The "tongues of flame" have by now come to be associated not only with the manifestation of the Holy Spirit in the traditional sense, but also with the painful fires of purgation, the destructive fires of earthbound desire, and the conflicts it generates. These are all "in-folded" into one another in the mystic knot that fulfils the desire in cancelling the conflict, and fulfils the purgation in cancelling the pain. And yet the symbol offers more than this. In the chapel of Little Gidding the poet had been aware that "the communication/Of the dead is tongued with fire beyond the language of the living"; when "the tongues of flame are in-folded/Into the crowned knot of fire", our temporal distinction between the dead and the living will be abolished and all communication gathered into the crowned knot. This is what the tongues of pentecostal flame have always pointed towards: not only the undoing of the curse of Babel, but the undoing of everything that makes man (including the poet himself) less than fully articulate. Finally, the crowned knot which is both one and three hints at the Triune

fulness of the Godhead. After the Son's work of redemption and the Spirit's work of purgation and sanctification are complete, the three Persons will at last be known in that eternal and mysterious union which absorbs and reconciles all contradictions and multiplicities in the universal One. In the final canto of the *Paradiso* (XXXIII.91) Dante refers to the universal form of this knot (*nodo*), by which, says Singleton, is meant "the absolute principle of the union, this 'conflation' or fusion of all things temporal and eternal in the Creator" (*Paradiso* Commentary 579, ad loc.).

The *crowned* knot in effect suggests the crown of our experience, the crowning of our longings in fulfilment, and the crown of the divine kingship which fulfils them. The image of infolding implies that no "ends" (in whatever sense of the word) will be left loose: ends and beginnings come together as one in the eternal nexus which is the knot itself. And the term "infolded" is well chosen, since as well as "plaited" or "bent back into a focal point", it also accommodates secondary connotations such as being embraced, enveloped, brought into a fold. The lines do not explicitly say that *we* will be protectively in- or en-folded, but the word gives off the scent of such an idea and is emotively appropriate at this point.

After knitting this rich variety of connotations into the "crowned knot of fire", the poet makes his final affirmation by uniting that fire with "the rose". On the simple visual level this makes a strong appeal, since the three images (all of them also in Dante's last canto) are linked by their shape: the flames of the fire, the petals of the rose, and the strands of

the knot, all simultaneously focussed upon and radiating out from the nodal point. But the fusion points to more than this.

Like the fire, the rose has become charged with a wealth of symbolic resonance, partly traditional and partly from Eliot's own use of it. That the fire of the divine love is one with the celestial rose of the redeemed (Dante's multifoliate rose of the *Paradiso*) is only a little of what is implicit here. It is also true to say that the rose of our earthly loves is seen afresh (as in Dante) as having been an emanation of the fire of divine love - and the rose signifying *Burnt Norton*'s timeless glimpse of illumination is now seen as an aspect of that celestial fire from which the illumination sparks and streams. Moreover, as we have seen, the fire of the divine love appears in one of its manifestations as the tormenting, purging and refining fire of which we read in *Little Gidding* IV. When all the impurities of human love have been burnt away, that very *human* love (imaged in the rose) will be recognized as one with the fire of the divine, as an aspect of the eternal. (And we have already been told in *East Coker* IV that the flame of the purgatorial fires "is roses".) When this purging is complete, and the fire and the rose are truly seen as one, the fire no longer torments, since Purgatory has become Paradise, burning with the pure light which is also love.

Syntactically the last line allows more than one reading, since its tense is ambiguous. On the one hand we hear this: all shall be well when the tongues of flame have been in-folded into the crowned knot of fire, and when the fire and the rose

have become one. On the other hand, we may hear this: all shall be well when the tongues of flame have been infolded into the crowned knot of fire - and then comes the added thought that the fire referred to *is* in fact one with the rose, and always has been: "one" not merely in the sense of together or united, but in the sense that they are one and the same.

Eliot originally wrote "are the same", Hayward proposed altering to "are as one", and Eliot finally wrote "are one", ignoring (perhaps significantly) Hayward's "as" (*CFQ* 224). Had Eliot retained his original phrasing, "And the fire and the rose are the same", the ostensible meaning would have been no different, yet the pallid phrase "the same" would have weakened the emotive effect considerably. It would also have weakened the rhythmic effect, creating a rather glibly moving line of three anapaests. The final one would have tripped a little too easily to its destination, missing the sudden stab of intensity which impales us upon "one".

In any event, we may read the last line as not simply in the implied future but in the continuous present, signifying an eternal and perpetual identity, not merely one anticipated. That we will not fully *grasp* the identification of fire and rose *until* that consummation of in-folding, does not negate the intimation that fire and rose always are and always have been essentially one. If this is so, the consummation will enable us to recognize not a new state of affairs but one which "was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be, world without end". It is *we* who shall have been changed, not the fire of the divine love. Both readings (in both tenses) are appropriate,

since from the perspective of humanity in time the fire and rose will "become", or at least be *seen* to be, one; whereas from the perspective of eternity - without past and future - they simply *are* one and have never been otherwise. Whether or not Eliot was conscious of this double tense in the last line, it is the culminating verbal enactment of that redemption of time which has been his theme.

The end of the cycle, then, is a perception both of what will be and of what is. As we have seen, the recognition of history as a pattern of timeless moments marks the distance we have travelled since the end of *Burnt Norton* lamented the "waste sad time" before and after them. Nancy Gish has aptly observed that *Little Gidding* "returns to the timeless moment understood in a new way, not an eternal present but eternity within the present" (96); and that the Quartets "end not on a reiteration but on a new level of apprehension, the timeless moment understood in relation to all of life" (118). Pondering on the fire and the rose that will be yet always have been one, we now understand in a new way how

> Time present and time past
> Are both perhaps present in time future,
> And time future contained in time past.

We know now that time *is* redeemable, yet also - in a different sense from that in which we first read the lines - that

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

And that "end" is eternity.

NOTES

Note 1: page 6

Ms Reibetanz's is the most detailed and sustained commentary on the poetry of the Quartets that I have seen. It gives closer attention to metrics than most of the others, and while the present study differs in some respects on the subject (particularly in its concern with secondary stresses and more frequent hearing of the four-stress "base"), her account of Eliot's metres is very persuasive. I am indebted to her study at several points, above all in the section on *Little Gidding*. There are also - as is inevitable in a commentary of this kind - some places where I find I have independently made remarks which I later discovered to be almost identical with hers. On p.354 above, for instance, I quote a passage from *Murder in the Cathedral* which naturally suggested itself in connection with certain lines from *Little Gidding* I. After quoting these lines I found that Ms Reibetanz had made the same connection and offered the same quotation. Wherever I am conscious of a direct debt, however, I have acknowledged it.

Note 2: page 13

In his study *Eliot's Four Quartets: Poetry as Chamber Music*, Keith Alldritt has attempted an analogy between the four instruments of a string quartet and the alleged four "verbal roles" in the Quartets of "the lecturer, the prophet, the conversationalist and the conjuror", and goes on to say:

> The rapid and complex interaction of these four voices and the unmistakeable inference that there is a distinction to be made between the poet and his four verbal instruments account for that unremitting intricacy of tone which constitutes much of the meaning and achievement of the poem. (39)

If one seeks to identify specific "voices" in this way, there seems no reason to stop at four, other than the determination to make them correspond to the instruments of a string quartet; nor are other potential "voices" adequately accounted for by the suggestion that they represent quasi-instrumental blends of two or more of those already mentioned. The suggestion is an interesting one, and usefully draws attention to shifts in tone and intensity; but the analogy is surely too "mechanical" to be consistently sustained. In any case, Eliot's remarks quoted on p.14 above (considering but rejecting the alternative title "sonata"), suggest that such a scheme is really unnecessary and could, if rigidly applied, be misleading.

Note 3: page 16

These allusions to the irregular Pindaric ode and to Wordsworth are offered as suggestions but not developed in the sequential commentary that follows. They would no doubt be interesting lines of study for further students to explore.

Related to them is the attractive emphasis placed by Julia Reibetanz in the last chapter of her book on the connection between Eliot's Quartets and the poetry of place, and more especially of landscape in what M.H. Abrams called the greater Romantic lyric:

> The greater Romantic lyric displays a structure of situation, tone, and thought that might be described in general terms as follows. The poem is usually spoken by an identifiable speaker, who engages in a meditation of some length inspired by an actual landscape. The landscape is particularized - present as a kind of catalyst to the poet's thoughts; often it is described at some length in the opening paragraph of the poem. The ensuing meditation is framed in conversational tones, though it rises easily to a more formal and patterned speech. The substance of the poem as a whole is determined by the poet's original experience of the landscape....This interweaving of place and meditation, of external and internal landscapes, is the crucial factor for the shape of the poem; the process of introspection, feeling, and observation leads the speaker finally to new insight, a resolution of some personal dilemma or of some more universal problem. The poem ends by returning to the outer scene; but though the external landscape may be unchanged, the internal landscape has been modified, as a result of the process of their interaction. The speaker's mood has altered as his understanding has deepened, and he looks on the landscape before him with an enlarged vision of its meaning. (Reibetanz 194-5)

The resemblance of these features to what we see in the *Four Quartets* is very striking, and invites detailed comparison.

Though without the specific emphasis on the Romantic lyric, Helen Gardner, too, in "The Landscapes of Eliot's Poetry", refers to Eliot's "mastery of the distinctively English poetry of mood and feeling expressed through images of place" (313). She remarks that "if the sense of time is the soul of Eliot's later poetry the sense of place is its body" (320), and of the Quartets in particular that "the sense of place is fundamental to these poems, as fundamental as the sense of time" (329). No extended work that I know of has yet been done on "place" in his work to match the admirable contribution made by Nancy Gish's *Time in the Poetry of T.S. Eliot*.

Note 4: page 117

In commenting on this passage and its debt to St John of the Cross, Helen Gardner detected - I believe unnecessarily - a confusion in the poet's mind:

> The word "figure" suggests Eliot has confused in memory the description of the "ladder of love" with the famous drawing prefixed to *The Ascent of Mount Carmel*, which also shows ascent and descent but does not have ten steps or stairs. *The Ascent of Mount Carmel* treats of the "active purgation" of the senses and spirit. Its teaching is briefly summarized in lines 114-121 of *Burnt Norton* ["Descend lower...the world of spirit"]. *The Dark Night of the Soul* treats of "passive purgation" in which God works upon the soul. (*CFQ* 89)

There is in fact no confusion here between the *Ascent* and the *Dark Night* if we accept that the word "figure", in "the figure of the ten stairs", means simply *metaphor*, referring to the metaphor of the ladder. There is no reason to suppose that it must allude to St John's "figure" (his visual illustration or "map") of the Mount of Perfection, which he placed as frontispiece to the *Ascent*. Each of the two mystical works has its metaphor: the mountain in the *Ascent*, and the ladder in the *Dark Night*.

On the matter of "active" and "passive" purgation something more should be added. Eloise Knapp Hay (see p.84 above) has emphasised the distinction between the two different aspects of St John's *via negativa*, while discussions of Eliot have generally treated the two as one.

Granted that the distinction was important for St John, I am not convinced that it was important for Eliot: the only passage in the Quartets that seems to recognize something like it is Part IIIB of *Burnt Norton*, in the distinction between the way of descent ("Descend lower...world of spirit") and the way of abstention from movement ("This is the one way ...abstention from movement"); and here we are told that the "other", the second of these, "Is the same".

The fact that in different parts of the Quartets Eliot refers to St John's *Ascent* or to his *Dark Night* does not oblige us to assume that he is on each occasion accepting and reproducing St John's distinction between the two aspects of the negative way. As is so often the case when he uses other men's words or images, Eliot is attracted by the suggestiveness rather than by the overall scheme or theme of the original: what matters is less what the original has argued than the use to which Eliot puts it by adapting it to a new context in his own work.

Note 5: page 203

Notice should be taken of a puzzling aspect of Helen Gardner's discussion of this stanza. She found in Gide's *Le Prométhée mal enchaîné* a source for the image of the ruined millionaire (*CFQ* 43-46): one which she felt supported her identification of him with Christ.

Her case is based more on Eliot's notes for the stanza - containing the phrase "bankrupt banker" with "banker" deleted and "millionaire" substituted for it (*CFQ* 109) - than on the finished stanza itself. She is also influenced by the reading "torments", for which "prevents" was substituted at the last moment (*CFQ* 108). The collocation of the words "banker" and "millionaire" puts her in mind of Gide's Zeus who, pursuing a programme of gratuitous action, inflicts pain on some men and gives large sums of money to others, causing apparently arbitrary torment.

In the same work Prometheus, whose eagle feeds on his liver, becomes thin enough for it to carry him out of prison, and he delivers an oration to the effect that one ought to have an eagle ("Il faut avoir un aigle") - the eagle clearly a symbol of liberating torment (*CFQ* 45). (Eliot had in fact quoted this remark in *The Use of Poetry* when discussing the anguish that contributed to Coleridge's creative inspiration (*UPUC* 69).) Later in Gide's work Prometheus, in an interview with the millionaire Zeus, asks to see Zeus' eagle, and is astonished - since he has come to regard an eagle as a necessity - to find that Zeus doesn't have one. Zeus, amused, says that it is he himself who gives eagles to men; whereupon Prometheus' companion calls him the good God, and Zeus modestly replies "I could call myself that". Gardner continues:

> I find it difficult not to think that the icy Zeus of Gide, who plays with men for his amusement, giving them the eagles that torment them but having no eagle himself, and who yet, in spite of this is called by men "*le bon Dieu*", was in Eliot's mind when he crossed out "Singing is silence", as the theme of his third stanza and, reverting to his hospital metaphor, wrote "banker" and then cancelled that for "millionaire". By adding the adjective "bankrupt" (later altered to "ruined") he transformed Gide's cynically selfish Zeus into a banker or millionaire who gives away his infinite wealth to endow the hospital in which a wounded surgeon and a dying nurse minister to men. And, similarly, the "punch-line" with which Gide ends the interview would seem to have suggested to Eliot his final line: "Again, in spite of that, we call this Friday good", in which Gideian irony is transformed into Christian paradox. (*CFQ* 46)

The argument is interesting but unconvincing; it constitutes no case for rejecting the reading of the millionaire as Adam.

Firstly, the collocation of "banker" and "millionaire" is not uncommon, nor is the collocation of "ruined" or "bankrupt" with either of them. A connection would be more likely if *Eliot* had mentioned an eagle or *Gide* mentioned a hospital, but neither of these is the case. The idea of liberating torment is common to both, but in totally different contexts, and it is not such an unusual idea as to constitute a source-connection between them.

The tormenting eagle and the cynical Zeus have no shades at all of Eliot's "absolute paternal care", and it is no confirmation of the alleged link to draw attention to the remarkable *difference* between them; nor is there any suggestion of "une action gratuite" (*CFQ* 44) in Eliot's stanza. As we have seen, "ruined" has no specific connotations of self-sacrificing generosity, and offers neither contrast nor similarity to Gide's Zeus. The only echo lies in the collocation of "banker" and "millionaire", but literature is full of such figures.

As for the supposed connection between Gide's punch-line and Eliot's concluding one, there is no similarity except in the common irony of calling something or someone good in spite of surface appearances. Calling "this Friday good" is a natural conclusion to a series of paradoxes on the subject of Christ's passion and Christian suffering; and the image of the ruined millionaire is more likely to derive indirectly from the eminent worldly figures at the opening of *East Coker* Part III than from Gide's Zeus.

Finally, in Eliot's poem our dying of the paternal care is a fulfilment of doing "well", and there is nothing of this sort in Gide's *Prométhée*. Moreover, Gide's Zeus has no eagle, which means he suffers *no* torment; whereas the whole of Eliot's lyric is *built* upon the idea that Christ, the wounded surgeon with the bleeding hands, indeed suffers torment, without which our own torment would be meaningless. The one is such a far cry from the other that claims of significant similarity and of significant contrast are equally unilluminating. The alleged Gide connection is best dismissed.

Note 6: page 283

On the vexed question of the "Royal Rose", see pp.422-4 above. Eliot's identification of it to Bonamy Dobrée as the "socio-political Rose (always appearing with a capital letter)" has bedevilled commentary on the "Rose" in both *The Dry Salvages* III and *Little Gidding* III. In the latter case it may, in a rather distant fashion, be taken to allude to the heraldic rose of England in connection with the wars of the seventeenth century, looking back in turn to the earlier Wars of the Roses. But this is not much help, and no help at all in the context of *The Dry Salvages* III. It would be incautious to charge Eliot with mischievous obfuscation in his answer to Dobrée; but one can only add that alternatives are not apparent.

Note 7: page 301

In *The Composition of Four Quartets* Helen Gardner mentions a mistaken, but understandable, identification of the statue.

> In the Eliot-Hayward Correspondence there is a postcard of a crudely coloured representation of the statue of *Notre Dame de Bon Secours*, with a sailing-boat in place of the infant Saviour carried on her left arm, from Gloucester, Massachusetts. The card is addressed to Ezra Pound in St Elizabeth Hospital, and is postmarked 14 June 1947. It reads: "E.P. et famille: Here is my Lady that Possum stole. Best dead Madonna this side Atlantic....Yrs. Olson."

She goes on to quote Eliot's typewritten note attached to the card, which had clearly been passed on to him by Pound:

> Mr Olson or Olsen is in error. I have never returned to Cape Ann or to Gloucester Mass. since 1915. Presumably this statue tops the facade of the R.C. Church in Gloucester. I do not think it was there in my time: anyway I had no knowledge of its existence when I wrote "The Dry Salvages". (*CFQ* 34)

A church in Gloucester would certainly seem to be a more likely original than one in Marseilles, and Olson's assumption was natural enough; but presumably we have to take "Possum"'s word. Gardner herself made two curious errors in this case: the post-card is in black and white, not "crudely coloured"; and what Olson wrote was "Best dmd [i.e. damned] Madonna", not "dead".

Note 8: page 357

In the poem as we now have it, the line about the communication of the dead as "tongued with fire" has a feeling of inspired inevitability about it, taking up the pentecostal motif initiated earlier in Part I. Yet this was not originally the case. As is clear from Helen Gardner's study of the drafts, much of *Little Gidding* in particular was worked and re worked before arriving at its present text. From the manuscripts M1 and M2 at Magdalene College, Cambridge, she shows the following stages in the drafting of the phrase between "the communication/Of the dead" and "the language of the living":

> "...exceeds..." (M1)
> "...does not speak in..." (M1)
> "...is touched with fire beyond..." (M2)
> "...is tinged with fire beyond..." (M2)

and finally "...is tongued with fire beyond..." (M2). From the initial general idea that the one kind of communication

possesses a greater *intensity* than the other, Eliot worked towards the notion that it differs in *kind* from the other, then to its association with *fire* (the dominant elemental symbol of this Quartet), and finally to its being empowered with *pentecostal* fire. One can see the successive stages in his feeling his way towards precision.

Examining the manuscripts, however, I found that Gardner had misread the penultimate stage as "tinged", which had already struck me as surprisingly vague, weaker than its predecessor "touched", and the only apparent exception to the progressive improvement of the passage. What Eliot actually tried out at this stage was the far more interesting "*fringed* with fire" - an echo (conscious or otherwise, we cannot say) of Tennyson's magnificent last line of *In Memoriam* 15: "A looming bastion fringed with fire". Tennyson's line describes a sunset cloud on a blustery day; the context of the phrase in his poem has nothing in common with Eliot's context - as is so often the case with his verbal echoes.

The progression from "touched" to "fringed" to "tongued" is itself of interest. The first suggests a passive and tenuous link between the communication of the dead and the fire; the second connotes less passivity and considerably increases the fiery presence; and the last, grammatically still a passive participle, is passive in no other way: it reinforces the sense of communication by means of a vivid and unusual verb, "tongued"; confers on the fire a far more active role; and finally, of course, identifies it with the pentecostal fire appearing in other forms both earlier and later in the poem.

Note 9: page 384

Eliot himself in his essay "Scylla and Charybdis" has described in some detail the problems of choice that faced him before arriving at the phrase "waning dusk". (That this was an address delivered originally in French to a French audience accounts for his emphasis on English usage and expectations.)

> I found myself in great difficulties for a word to express *twilight before dawn*, as distinct and different from *twilight before night*. The word *dusk*, in English, means either: but its immediate denotation, to every English speaking person, is the evening. (7)

During the search he had also explained his problem to John Hayward:

> It is surprisingly difficult to find words for the shades before morning; we seem to be richer in words

> and phrases for the end of day. And I don't want a phrase which might mean *either*. (*CFQ* 177)

In "Scylla and Charybdis" he goes on to tell how he could surely have found a country dialect word that would have been exact, but rejected this because his scene was set in a London street and the speaker would not have used dialect. He would therefore have to use the ambiguous "dusk" and prefix a clarifying adjective to make it clear that it was growing lighter. The adjective "antelucan" was attractive both for its precision and its sound, but was too rare and ornate for his deliberately plain style. He therefore regretfully abandoned it for its incongruity, choosing "waning" in the sense of "decreasing".

> So I had in the end to put "waning dusk". It was not what I wanted: but it was, I believe, the best that the English language could do for me. (8)

This is of interest not only for its evidence of conscious care - and frustration - about factual precision and specific kinds of diction, but also for the responses of Christopher Ricks to it in "A Note on 'Little Gidding'". He accepts that "antelucan" in the mouth of the poet would have been wrong, whereas the also rare "peregrine" is acceptable in the mouth of the dead master. What Ricks with engagingly humorous exactness questions is Eliot's *grounds* for choosing "waning", since despite its primary meaning of "decreasing", its generally accepted connotations in connection with light

> are necessarily so powerful, so natural and ubiquitous, as to make "waning" convey a sense of less light, not more, which then makes the dusk seem to be darkening. So that the adjective which Eliot chose in order to clarify the matter has the paradoxical effect of perpetuating the uncertainty, though in a much more richly allusive manner. (152)

Ricks's suggestion is that - given the ghostly atmosphere pervading this passage - Eliot chose the right phrase for the wrong reason, doing better than his careful thought-process recognized, as often happens in the process of composition.

> Eliot's imagination defied his conscious wishes, and the phrase - in its evocation of eerie process and in its uncoercive aptness to the haunting equivocation of the whole scene (the vision by night is an illumination, and daybreak is likely to bring disfigured obfuscation) - is a glory of the poem. (152)

Note 10: page 394

Following "another voice", the last thirty lines of Part II as we have them did not appear in the earlier drafts; in their place were twenty-four lines quoted by Helen Gardner (*CFQ* 183-

4), twenty-one of them - up to the end of the ghost's speech - also quoted by A.D. Moody (335) with minor differences in punctuation. Instead of being about the "gifts reserved for age" and the need of the purgatorial fire, they are about the memories that unite the future and the past. What they have in common with the final version is that in them the ghost urges the poet to remember other things than poetry. Although they are available in Gardner and Moody, I quote them here for convenience before briefly discussing them.

> Remember rather the essential moments
> That were the times of birth and death and change
> The agony and the solitary vigil.
> Remember also fear, loathing and hate,
> The wild strawberries eaten in the garden,
> The walls of Poitiers, and the Anjou wine,
> The fresh new season's rope, the smell of varnish
> On the clean oar, the drying of the sails,
> Such things as seem of least and most importance.
> So, as you circumscribe this dreary round,
> Shall your life pass from you, with all you hated
> And all you loved, the future and the past.
> United to another past, another future,
> (After many seas and after many lands)
> The dead and the unborn, who shall be nearer
> Than the voices and the faces that were most near.
> This is the final gift of earth accorded -
> One soil, one past, one future, in one place.
> Nor shall the eternal thereby be remoter
> But nearer: seek or seek not, it is here.
> Now, the last love on earth. The rest is grace."
> He turned away, and in the autumn weather
> I heard a distant dull deferred report
> At which I started: and the sun had risen.

(The Gardner printing reproduces Eliot's failure to indent the ninth line in typescript D1; this is unnecessary, since Eliot himself corrected it by pencilling an "indent" mark around the first word. I have therefore corrected its alignment here.)

Helen Gardner remarks that Eliot's dissatisfaction with the passage was justified.

> It is slackly written and the "essential moments" lose their individual poignancy and are trivialized by being set in a catalogue. The "strange meeting" deserved a better revelation at its climax than this. (*CFQ* 185)

I agree that the meeting deserved a better revelation. I am less sure that the passage as a whole is slackly written, though it does somewhat resemble a pastiche of earlier Eliot rather than a development of the poet writing *Little Gidding*. What is striking is the Tennysonian flavour of a good deal of

it, combined with details that remind us of *Murder in the Cathedral*, *Marina*, *The Dry Salvages* and "La Figlia che Piange", as well as of *Hamlet*. In any event, it appeals to individual memories in too ostensibly specific a way to chime in with the poet's own compound identity in communion with the ghost. The romantic memories listed feel a little arbitrary, and the general impression is not of a challenge from beyond death so much as of a modernized farewell to a kind of Bedivere from an Arthur before the barge moves away.

On the revised ending as we now have it, Helen Gardner agrees in a footnote with A. Charity's opinion that

> the tension and ferocity of the second version, one of the most powerful and painful passages in Eliot's poetry,...fits rather oddly on to the leisurely movement of the first part of the passage with its "easy" wonder and exchange of forgiveness for things "forgotten". (*CFQ* 185)

I cannot agree with this. The alleged "leisurely" movement is tense and expectant, certainly not relaxed as "leisurely" seems to suggest here. And as we read the finished passage now, the "easy" wonder and the exchange of forgiveness with the ghost afford a necessary brief lowering of tension, yet also a setting aside of minor issues, precisely in preparation for a renewed heightening of tension to the painful climax. The poet and the ghost may reach a peculiar mutual understanding, but the gist of the ghost's message as we now have it concerns *not* the relationship between them, but the poet's (and also by implication the responsive reader's) own anguished route to understanding and forgiveness of himself - a route to be taken through the disillusionment of hindsight and the acceptance of purgation.

Note 11: page 419

The line "United in the strife which divided them" ought, I believe, to read "United in the strife that divided them". Helen Gardner writes:

> On D5 [the fifth working draft of the poem sent to him] Hayward, a stickler for "correct English", queried "which" following the definite article.... Eliot wrote on 10 October "I have definitely accepted your THAT...." He corrected "which" to "that" on the NEW [*New English Weekly*] proof and the text in NEW reads "that". But his conversion to "correct English" did not last. He made no correction of the text of D5 for the printing of LG and *Four Quartets*, which both have the idiomatic "which". [LG signifies the printing of *Little Gidding* alone in pamphlet form.] (*CFQ* 205; all parentheses added)

It is by no means certain that Eliot's "conversion" did not

last. Setting aside the question of correctness or otherwise, the fact remains that he expressed his strong approval of the change, and deliberately made it for the first publication of the poem. All the evidence of the remaining material, in draft or in proof form, points to his preparing the poems meticulously for their first publication. Before subsequent republications of the same poems there were occasional precise and specific alterations, but not the same degree of careful proof-reading, even when the less-than-ideal copy-text was used by the printers. Gardner herself reveals this in her last sentence quoted above: "He made no correction of the text of D5 for the printing of LG and *Four Quartets*", when one might have expected him to regard *not* D5 but *NEW* as the perfected copy-text.

The reversion to "which", then, does not mean that Eliot changed his mind about the suggestion he had so "definitely" adopted from Hayward. It was an oversight of a perfectly understandable kind, all the more so since what was involved was no substantial change in meaning. A parallel instance in the text of *East Coker* will further illustrate the point.

Throughout the drafts, the *New English Weekly* and pamphlet publications of *East Coker*, the seventh line from the end consistently carried the correct reading "Here or there does not matter". It was only in the first edition of *Four Quartets* that the minor error "Here and there" crept in, and this reading remained through various reprints of *Four Quartets* and the *Collected Poems*. It was not corrected in the *Collected Poems* until 1974, nearly ten years after Eliot's death, although his attention had been drawn to it and he had agreed that the text was faulty (see above, pp.225-6).

This is a comparable case of a grammatical nicety not affecting the clearly understood meaning. Yet when he was alerted to it, Eliot gladly accepted the correction as in accord with his intentions. Had he been reminded of the *which/that* discrepancy, his reaction would surely have been the same.

The fact that even the most meticulous of poets could for a long period overlook an error of more substantial detail is well illustrated in his own reminiscence about the *hermit/horseshoe crab* reading in *The Dry Salvages* ("Scylla and Charybdis" 7). And Gardner suggests (*CFQ* 161) that after initial publication he may have consistently failed to notice the omission of an entire line from subsequent texts of *Little Gidding* Part I (see pp.347-8 above). If the notion of such substantial oversights can be entertained, it is far easier to entertain it in the case of "which" and "that".

Unfortunately, what Eliot's poems have never received is a proper scholarly edition of the text. The need for this is not, I think, exceeded even by the very real need for a full collection and publication of his uncollected and unpublished prose.

Note 12: page 441

The drafting of Part IV cannot be discussed at length here, but the Gardner source-study offers a great deal of detail for consideration. Briefly, what is clear from the material in manuscript and typescript, and from the correspondence with Hayward, is that Eliot's original drafts were extremely different from what we see in the final version. Like the "metaphysical" lyric of *East Coker* IV it was dominated by conceits, based this time not on the motif of a hospital but on the world of finance and commerce. Out of two stanzas full of such images emerged a third - the original of our first stanza - in a quite different mode, but perhaps linked to the others by one of the many connotations of "discharge", in the sense of cancelling a debt. Eliot may subsequently have thought that the emphasis on sin and redemption in terms of accounts, debts and deficits was too self-conscious and inappropriate. Most readers would doubtless agree with him. In any event, Hayward declared himself baffled by the early drafts, and Eliot shows himself sorting out his priorities when he writes:

> It may be that the attempt to give a XVII century flavour is a mistake (having previously done it successfully) but I feel that some explicit attack on the Descent of the Holy Ghost (which is an undertone throughout) is necessary at this point. (*CFQ* 216)

So he returned to the "attack", took the "dove descending" stanza as his first (discarding the others), and set himself to write a companion stanza to it. Before he arrived at the final second stanza, he experimented with one of far less intensity and austerity. It lacks the "shirt of flame" image, yet it does expand on the love paradox with great lyric beauty:

> Who heaped the brittle roseleaves? Love.
> Love put the match; and blew the coals.
> Who fed the fire? Love,
> To torture and to temper souls
> In that consumption from above
> Where all delights & torments cease
> The will is purified to peace.
> (*CFQ* 216, correcting the Gardner transcription with a comma instead of a full stop at the end of line 3.)

This still has a certain seventeenth-century flavour, and would have been admirable in another context. But in its given one it lacked the uncompromising power of the final stanza 2, by allowing the intensity of the first stanza to dissipate into prettiness and peace instead of maintaining and intensifying the grim challenge of the given choice.

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