

PREFACE

NATURE IMAGERY AS A SOURCE OF OBJECTIVE CORRELATIVE IN THE POETRY OF T. S. ELIOT

A THESIS

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PREFACE

Both as a poet and a critic, Thomas Stearns Eliot has profoundly influenced post-World War I literature. Not only has he conveyed his view of the human condition poetically, but he has articulated the philosophy which shaped his artistic intention and described the poetic method used to express it. The purpose of this study is to examine how these three aspects of his art are synthesized.

The writer contends that T. S. Eliot's artistic intention was to determine and then to convey through poetry what, if anything, constituted order in the universe. In expressing this theme (which dominates all his major poems), he developed the poetic method described in his criticism--notably the concepts of the "historical sense" and the "objective correlative." Examination of all the major poetry reveals that in nature imagery and the mythology surrounding it, he found symbols for the presence or absence of order in the universe which were at once rooted in tradition and suited to his delineation of contemporary society. Consequently, this study

will trace the development of nature imagery as a source of objective correlative throughout the major poems in order to reveal how Eliot transmuted his personal philosophy into poetry, which he described as "something rich and strange, something universal and impersonal."

The limitations of this study are threefold. It was necessary to examine Eliot's personal view of life in order to substantiate the position that his major theme evolved from a search for order in the universe which ultimately led him to seek commitment to a divine ordering principle. This examination necessarily had psychological and philosophical overtones, but it is significant in this context only as a means of better understanding how Eliot, the poet, utilized the experiences of Eliot, the man, in achieving his artistic intention.

Secondly, by focusing this study on one source of imagery and two aspects of the artist's poetic method, the writer ran the risk of oversimplification. Other aspects of Eliot's poetic method, notably his use of form, are necessary to a total understanding and appreciation of his

art. This study, then, provides only one approach to a rich and complex body of poetry.

Finally, the writer made no attempt at critical evaluation. Rather, the purpose of the thesis is to explicate the major poems in order to illustrate, through an analysis of imagery, how T. S. Eliot synthesized his personal ideas, his artistic philosophy and his poetic method in order to create poetry.

In conclusion, the writer gratefully acknowledges the assistance and encouragement of Dr. Peter Stanlis of the English Department, under whose direction this thesis was undertaken.

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CHAPTER I

ELIOT'S ARTISTIC INTENTION: HIS QUEST FOR ORDER IN THE UNIVERSE

When Thomas Stearns Eliot published the essay, "Tradition and the Individual Talent," in 1919, he stood at a turning point in his artistic development. His formal education had been completed, the groundwork for his philosophical principles had been laid, and he had met several of the men who were to strongly influence him--notably, Irving Babbitt, George Santayana, Ezra Pound and Arthur Symons. Moreover, he had already produced several significant short poems, including "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock." But he was yet to publish "The Waste Land"--a work establishing him among his peers as the voice of modern poetry; he was yet to embrace Anglo-Catholicism or to become an English subject. And he had just begun the struggle to express the "dark night of the soul" that is born in the negation of "The Waste Land," endured in "The Hollow Men" and "Ash Wednesday," and surmounted ultimately in "Four Quartets."

¹ Thomas Stearns Eliot, "Tradition and the Individual Talent," *Selected Essays* (new ed.; New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1950), p. 7.

² Kristian Smith, *Poetry and Belief in the Works of T.S. Eliot* (Oslo: Kari Jacobs Dybbild, 1949), p. 148.

Despite Eliot's contention that "the progress of an artist is a continual self-sacrifice, a continual extinction of personality,"¹ the experience of his youth and young manhood had contributed significantly to his desire to discover and then to express poetically what constitutes order in the universe. This artistic and philosophical enquiry is central to his thesis in "Tradition and the Individual Talent."

Born on September 26, 1888, Eliot spent his early years in New England and in St. Louis.² The latter locale bred in him a fascination for the Mississippi River which was part of an instinctive sensitivity to nature. As a mature poet, he stated the significance of his attachment as a powerful if almost subconscious influence upon his imagery:

Of course, only a part of an author's imagery comes from his reading. It comes from the whole of his sensitive life from

Eliot, The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism (New York, 1933), p. 148.

1 Thomas Stearns Eliot, "Tradition and the Individual Talent," Selected Essays (new ed.; New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1950), p. 7. xix.

2 Kristian Smidt, Poetry and Belief in the Works of T.S. Eliot (Oslo: Komisjan Hosjacob Dybivad, 1949), p. 148.

early childhood. Why for all of us out of what 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 time and place, the scent of one flower. . . . Such memories have a symbolic value, but of what we cannot tell for they come to represent the depths of feeling into which we cannot peer.³

But it was his New England rather than his Midwestern background that shaped his intellectual nature. Eliot was descended from a Devonshire family that had emigrated from East Coker in 1670.⁴ Their leader was Andrew Eliot, a Puritan juror in the Salem Witch Trials who later recanted. Eliot's parents possessed superior intellects and strongly defined ethical and philosophical viewpoints. While replacing Calvinistic theology with Unitarianism, they adhered to Puritanical morality and an absorption in problems related to belief and the existence of evil. The result was a religious environment enforcing a clearly defined personal

³ Eliot, "Book Review," *CRI* (July, 1931), quoted by Snidtt.
³ Eliot, The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism (New York, 1933), p. 148.

⁴ F. O. Matthieson and C. L. Barber, The Achievement of T. S. Eliot (3rd ed.; New York and London: Oxford University Press, 1958), p. xix.

ethic which included respect for the dignity of any man's convictions regarding the supernatural order:

I was brought up outside the Christian Fold in Unitarianism. And in the form of Unitarianism in which I was instructed, things were either black or white. The Son and the Holy Ghost were not believed in certainly, but they were entitled to respect as entities in which many other people believed.⁵

The secular aspects of the senior Eliots' convictions found expression in the philosophies of Emerson, Channing and Herbert Spencer.⁶ The result, according to Eliot, was to provide him with "the best of Unitarianism, a kind of emotional reserve and intellectual integrity," while at the same time inculcating what he terms "the Boston doubt. This skepticism is not . . . destructive but it is dissolvent and philosophy."⁷ These attitudes, along with a dry, New England wit, were his childhood legacies.

5 Eliot, "Book Review," CRI (July, 1931), quoted by Smidt, op. cit., p. 3.

6 Smidt, op. cit., p. 2.

7 Eliot, "A Skeptical Patrician," Atheneum, (May 23, 1919), quoted by Smidt, op. cit., p. 2.

Eliot's early intellectual achievement was competent but undistinguished. Up to the age of sixteen, his literary and philosophical readings were sporadic and relatively unimportant, with the exception of his introduction to the classical poets of Greece and Rome. At sixteen, not too surprisingly, he became interested in the Romantics and the Aesthetes, notably Byron, Shelley, Rossetti and Swinburne. He recalls being moved to imitation primarily by their "feeling" and the results were "Don Juanlike verses tinged with the disillusion and cynicism only possible at sixteen."⁸

In 1907 he entered Harvard. There, while reading Donne and the other metaphysical poets, he discovered how thought and feeling could be combined to produce an expression of passion and philosophy.⁹ He also read Dante, but not with the awareness or enthusiasm that he would later gain from Ezra Pound. In 1908 he was introduced to the Symbolists through Arthur Symons' book, The Symbolist Movement in

⁸ Eliot, "Byron," From Anne to Victoria, ed. B. Dobree (1937), p. 602, quoted by Smidt, op. cit., p. 7.

⁹ Smidt, op. cit., p. 9.

¹² Eliot, "Baudelaire," Selected Essays, op. cit., p. 390.

Literature.¹⁰ From his reading of the Symbolists, particularly Laforgue, Eliot found expression for his own developing view of a disjointed world to be viewed with pessimism and sometimes despair. Critics have attributed this turn of temperament to various causes, notably an intense, almost despairing awareness of sin, resulting from his Puritan background.¹¹ Eliot himself gives a significant indication of

its source when he evaluates Baudelaire at a later date:

It is true to say that the glory of man is his capacity for salvation; it is also true to say that his glory is his capacity for damnation. The worst that can be said of most of our malefactors from statesmen to thieves is that they are not men enough to be damned. . . . Such suffering as Baudelaire's implies the possibility of a positive state of beatitude.¹²

By a sort of negative reasoning, Eliot's early vision of a sordid, chaotic society may be construed as the first indication of a desire to seek an ordered universe. His disillusioned pessimism is a rebellion against acceptance of the

¹⁰ Arthur Symons, The Symbolist Movement in Literature (rev. ed., New York, 1919).

¹¹ A representative exploration of this position is contained in Edmund Wilson, Axel's Castle (London, 1935).

¹² Eliot, "Baudelaire," Selected Essays, op. cit., p. 380.

disorder he saw about him. He already realized the necessity to sharpen his perceptions beyond surface realities if his rebellion were to have any positive value: both a student

and a teacher of Virgil, Lucretius and Dante.

The essential advantage of the poet is not to have a beautiful world with which to deal. It is to be able to see beneath both beauty and ugliness; to see the boredom and the horror and the glory.¹³

Irving Babbitt, a classicist in his belief in the subordination of sentiment to normative reason. He had discovered (possibly with youthful excessiveness) the and in the control of nature's emotion. But he was primarily boredom and the horror. Ultimately, his preoccupation with the apostle of humanism. Babbitt conceived of the humanist them would lead him in his maturity to see the glory. as a man who sought to perfect his individual personality by

seek. But Eliot's primary concern as an undergraduate was philosophy, and at Harvard his chief mentors were George Santayana and Irving Babbitt. Santayana's philosophy of for the elevation of mankind as a whole; and naturalism and disillusion complemented Eliot's own position at that time, but his most lasting influence upon Eliot was made by a strong, articulate position on classicism. Santayana taught that "imitation is a fundamental principle in art, and specific values of art are technical values."¹⁴

¹³ Eliot, The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism, op. cit., p. 98.

¹⁶ Irving Babbitt, Literature and the American College (Los
¹⁴ George Santayana, quoted by Smidt, op. cit., p. 31.

To Santayana, "art must be incorporated in the life of reason and recognized for what it is: a servant with a useful function in our lives."¹⁵ Eliot found in Santayana both a student and a teacher of Virgil, Lucretius and Dante.

The other major influence on his undergraduate days was Irving Babbitt. Babbitt, too, was a classicist in his belief in the subordination of sentiment to normative reason and in the control of mature emotion. But he was primarily the apostle of humanism. Babbitt conceived of the humanist as a man who sought to perfect his individual personality by seeking to balance all aspects of his nature:

[The humanist] is interested in the perfecting of the individual rather than in schemes for the elevation of mankind as a whole; and although he allows largely for sympathy, he insists that it be disciplined and tempered by judgment The true humanist maintains a just balance between sympathy and selection.¹⁶

"Selection" is based upon a man's desire to overcome "one-sidedness," the inevitable emphasis of certain personal

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

¹⁶ Irving Babbitt, Literature and the American College (Los Angeles: Gateway Editions, Inc., 1956), pp. 5-6.

characteristics above others:

Man is a creature foredoomed to one-sidedness, yet who becomes humane only in proportion as he triumphs over the fatality of his nature, only as he arrives at that measure that comes from tempering his virtues, each by its opposite. . . . For most practical purposes, the law of measure is the supreme law of life.¹⁷

One pitfall of one-sidedness is to fail to achieve a balance between the supernatural and the natural elements in one's personality:

If man's nobility lies in his kinship to the One, he is at the same time a phenomenon among other phenomenon and only at his risk and peril neglects his phenomenal self. The humane pose of his faculties suffers equally from an excess of naturalism and an excess of supernaturalism.¹⁸

For Babbitt, the achievement of harmony among all aspects of his nature was the ultimate goal of man:

The true mark of excellence in a man, as Pascal puts it, is his power to harmonize in himself opposite virtues and to occupy all the space between them. By his ability thus to

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

unite in himself opposite qualities, man shows his humanity, his superiority of essence over other animals.¹⁹

Although Eliot accepted Babbitt's humanism during these early years, his mature conviction that the supernatural life of man is the principle element in his nature ultimately led him to repudiate Babbitt's position. In fact, he came to believe that Babbitt's rejection of supernatural religion placed him close to the very naturalism he attacked:

Man is man because he can recognize supernatural realities, not because he can invent them. Either everything in man can be traced as a development from below or something must come from above. There is no avoiding that dilemma; you must be either a naturalist or a supernaturalist. If you remove from the word 'human' all that the belief in the supernatural has given to man, you can view him finally as no more than an extremely clever, adaptable and mischievous little animal.²⁰

But at this time Babbitt's belief that a balance of faculties by normative reason was essential in ordering one's personal

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 15.

²⁰ Eliot, "Second Thoughts on Humanism," Selected Essays, op. cit., p. 433.

²¹ Babbitt, op. cit., p. 14.

existence offered a first step toward formulating a concept of order in the universe. Moreover, Eliot's own temperament would be in harmony with the virtue Babbitt found in the "avoidance of everything that is excessive and over-emphatic. . . . (The humanist) cultivates detachment and freedom from affectation and wonders at nothing."²¹

In 1911, after a year of study at the Sorbonne, Eliot returned to Harvard to study logic, metaphysics, psychology, Indic philology and Sanskrit. He has ruefully admitted that his philosophical growth in Eastern studies was meager. But his new awareness of Indian thought and sensibility, coupled with the interest in Buddhism that Babbitt had given him, figured significantly in his later poetry. Other subsidiary interests that shaped his imagery were anthropology and psychology. Doctoral studies at Oxford followed a short stay in Germany in 1914. His studies at Oxford centered in the idealism of F. H. Bradley and in Aristotle.

The year 1915 stands out in Eliot's life. He went to England to live permanently; he published "The Love Song of

²¹ Babbitt, op. cit., p. 14.

J. Alfred Prufrock"; most significantly, he met Ezra Pound who became his stern taskmaster and devoted mentor. Eliot felt Pound's influence in every phase of his artistic life. His credo that a poet must write with the literature of all of Europe in his bones echoes Pound's dictum that "a poet who knows only the poetry of his own language is as poorly equipped as the painter or musician who knows only the painting or music of his own country."²² Pound introduced him to the poetry of Yeats and developed his admiration for Dante. Yeats used mythology to provide images that depicted modern themes; Dante created an integral relationship of the past to the present. Eliot would incorporate both techniques into his poetic method.

Having provided his student with a new depth of artistic appreciation, Pound worked to influence his style. Eliot had already adopted the French Symbolists' use of rhythms to emotionally suggest meanings. From Pound he gained a feeling for contemporary subjects, imagery

²² Eliot, "On a Recent Piece of Criticism," Purpose (April-June, 1938), quoted by Smidt, op. cit., p. 22. quoted by Smidt, op. cit., p. 21.

and idiom, and discarded the final vestiges of Romanticism in favor of unsentimental, precise, sometimes enigmatic expressions. In dealing with his prize pupil, Pound was a stern taskmaster whose criticism broadened Eliot's awareness of the potentialities of both poetry and literary criticism as a means of self-expression:

My indebtedness to Pound is of two kinds: first in my literary criticism; and second in his criticism of my poetry in our talk, and in his indications of desirable territories to explore. . . . He was so passionately concerned about the works of art which he expected his protégés to produce that he sometimes tended to regard the latter almost impersonally as art or literature machines to be carefully tended and oiled for the sake of their potential output.²³

As a mature poet, Eliot realized that the regimen Pound had enforced had provided his pupils with the disciplines that are so essential to the productivity of any writer:

I think that Pound was original in insisting that poetry was an art, an art which demands the most arduous application and study; and in seeing that in our time it had to be a highly

²³ Eliot, "Ezra Pound I," NEW, (October, 1946), quoted by Smidt, op. cit., p. 21.

conscious art Pound's greatest contribution to the work of other poets is his insistence upon the immensity of the amount of conscious labor to be performed by the poet.²⁴

Eliot's contacts with Pound extended from 1915 through 1922, when Pound left England. His associates during those years were seeking, like himself, to establish personal and artistic philosophies. The modification of his position on humanism was influenced by his association with T. E. Hulme, who was like Irving Babbitt in many respects, but who possessed a religious devotion characterized by strong belief in Original Sin.²⁵ With another associate, Middleton Murray, Eliot shared a common desire to reconcile philosophy and faith. The French critic, Remy de Gourmont, shared Eliot's belief in the need for a "cultural tradition in Europe transcending the boundaries of the nations."²⁶ "Tradition and the Individual Talent," published in 1919, reflects

²⁴ Eliot, "On a Recent Piece of Criticism," quoted by Smidt, op. cit., p. 22.

²⁵ Smidt, op. cit., p. 23.

²⁷ Eliot, "Tradition and the Individual Talent,"

²⁶ Ibid., p. 25. cit., p. 4.

both the influences of this particular period and Eliot's total personal and artistic development to this point. It is his first articulate statement of the artistic problem which gradually emerges from his search for a personal philosophy.

The thesis of this essay is the necessity for an artist to possess and to utilize a "historical sense." A "historical sense" enables him to perceive events as occurring within a context of time that is simultaneous rather than simply sequential:

The historical sense involves a perception, not only of the pastness of the past but of its presence; the historical sense compels a man to write not merely with his generation in his bones, but with a feeling that the whole of literature of Europe from Homer and within it the whole of the literature of his own country has a simultaneous existence and composes a simultaneous order. This historical sense, which is a sense of the timeless and of the temporal together, is what makes a writer traditional. And it is at the same time what makes a writer most acutely conscious of his place in time, of his own contemporaneity.²⁷

27 Eliot, "Tradition and the Individual Talent," Selected Essays, op. cit., p. 4.

For Eliot, the principle value of the "historical sense" lies in the premise that it "compels a man to write . . . with a feeling that the whole of literature . . . has a simultaneous existence and composes a simultaneous order." The "historical sense" is an instrument to help Eliot to resolve his chief personal dilemma: what, if anything, constitutes order in the universe and how can the poet express this quest for order in an artistic form?

"The Waste Land" marked the end of Eliot's young manhood. Five years later he became a British subject and embraced the All great art is in a sense a document of its time, but great art is never merely a document for mere documentation is not art. All great art has something permanent and universal about it, and reflects the permanent as well as the changing. . . .²⁸

The effort to clarify and then to convey his conception of an ordered universe, containing both "the permanent and the changing," forms the conscious basis of Eliot's art from this time on. Already he had begun to evolve a framework of images that are repeated in a variety of contexts throughout his poetry to show the deepest relationships between all put of the previous seven years had been rather generations. With the publication of "The Waste Land" four

²⁸ Smidt, *op. cit.*, p. 40.

²⁸ Eliot, *CRI* (October, 1932), quoted by Smidt, *op. cit.*, p. 52.

years later, Eliot made his first significant--if negative--statement of his preoccupation with the question of order in the universe. Eliot dedicated the poem to its editor, "Ezra Pound, the better poet." But it was Eliot himself who, among a storm of praise and controversy that has never wholly diminished, was hailed as "The Poet of the New Age."²⁹

"The Waste Land" marked the end of Eliot's young manhood. Five years later he became a British subject and embraced the Anglican communion. Both actions indicated the passing of an era in his own life and in society. He had moved beyond a preoccupation with the deterioration of the social order which had dominated intellectual thought after World War I to a more penetrating analysis of the causes of this deterioration in the realm of spiritual values:

Only from the year 1926 did the features of the post-war world begin clearly to emerge. From about that date, one began slowly to realize that the intellectual and artistic output of the previous seven years had been rather

31 Eliot, *The Listener*, (January, 1947), quoted by Smidt, *op. cit.*, p. 30.

²⁹ Smidt, *op. cit.*, p. 40.

Selected Essays, *op. cit.*, p. 117.

the last efforts of the old world than the first struggles of a new.³⁰

Just as the publication of "Tradition and the Individual Talent" was not the pinnacle but merely a stepping stone in Eliot's search for an artistic creed, so "The Waste Land" was his first major attempt to realize what he terms "the highest stage civilized man can attain--to unite the profoundest skepticism with the deepest faith."³¹ Eliot had ordered his own universe. Now he was dedicated to the artist's task:

The struggle which alone constitutes life for a poet--to transmute his personal and private agonies into something rich and strange, something universal and impersonal.³²

Essential to his theory of poetic creativity was the "historical sense" he had defined four years previously in 1919. Eliot, it can be recalled, termed it "nearly indispensable" because it compels a man to write with a feeling

that the whole of the literature of Europe from Homer . . .
 30 Eliot, "Last Words," CRI (January, 1939), p. 211, quoted by Smidt, op. cit., p. 27.

31 Eliot, The Listener, (January, 1947), quoted by Smidt, op. cit., p. 30.

32 Eliot, "Shakespeare and the Stoicism of Seneca," Selected Essays, op. cit., p. 117.

CHAPTER II

ELIOT'S ARTISTIC METHOD: THE HISTORICAL SENSE AND THE OBJECTIVE CORRELATIVE

T. S. Eliot was still deeply involved in his "personal and private agonies" when he published "The Waste Land." But that struggle had already yielded a significant by-product. Through his attempt to express his dilemma, Eliot had evolved a theory regarding the methods a poet should employ in realizing his artistic intention. Characteristically, it combined a lofty conception of the poet's role as a universal voice, with a practical awareness of the artistic problems of his own era.

Essential to his theory of poetic creativity was the "historical sense" he had defined four years previously in 1919. Eliot, it can be recalled, termed it "nearly indispensable" because it compels a man to write with a feeling that the whole of the literature of Europe from Homer . . . has a simultaneous existence and a simultaneous order. According to Eliot, the historical sense gives the artist an awareness of the "timeless and the temporal together."

He lives not simply for the moment; nor does he escape into the past. Time for him is not sequential; it simultaneously comprehends great variety and complexity and thus encompasses, past, present and ultimately future in "the present moment of the past."¹

The broader, more objective perception that results from such an overview of history renders the artist more keenly aware of the problems of his own age. Eliot was well aware of the complexities of his era. Western civilization had emerged from World War I with its traditional political and economic structure destroyed. Of deeper significance to the artist was the deterioration of ethical and spiritual values which inevitably follows in the wake of the destruction of an entire social order. Eliot felt that this dilemma challenged the artist to utilize past experience to force an awareness of the gravity of the present condition. But the materials of the past should be conveyed in a manner that complemented the highly complex, sophisticated spirit of present-day culture:

¹ Eliot, "Tradition and the Individual Talent," Selected Essays, op. cit., p. 4.

We can only say that it appears likely that the poets in our civilization, as it exists at present, must be difficult. Our civilization comprehends great variety and complexity and this variety and complexity, playing upon a refined sensibility, must produce various and complex results. The poet must become more and more comprehensive, more allusive, more indirect, in order to force, to dislocate if necessary, language into his meaning.²

This recognition of the need for complexity is more misunderstood than any other aspect of Eliot's poetic method. For while poetry that transmutes a man's deepest struggles into "something rich and strange, something universal and impersonal" would necessarily be complex, it need not be obscure.

Eliot's poetry is directed primarily to the intellect. Like his mentors, the metaphysicals, he sought to express "passion and philosophy." To make his expression truly objective (for that is the end of impersonality) and truly universal, he knew that he must be clearly comprehensible to the enlightened intellect. Foggy intellection clothed in pretentious obscurities had no place in Eliot's poetry. Neither did a mode of expression that went no further than scholarly

² Eliot, "The Metaphysical Poets," Selected Essays, op. cit., p. 248.

exposition. As a poet, Eliot knew that universality did not lie in an appeal to the intellect alone, but in an appeal to mind, emotions and spirit combined. Such an appeal required the "rich," "strange" vision that a poet brings to the human condition. Now Eliot's poetic theory had provided the artist with an objective: To render universal the poet's "personal and private agonies" (in his case, the struggle to find order in the universe) by finding a mode of expression that united objectivity, complexity, clarity, richness and strangeness. A major technique in realizing his goal was the objective correlative.

In 1919, the same year in which "Tradition and the Individual Talent" had been published, Eliot defined the principle of the objective correlative. He held that in order to express an emotional response artistically, the poet should seek to create symbols from tangible objects and specific experiences that would engender the same emotion in all his readers:

The only way of expressing emotion in the form of art is by finding an "objective correlative" in other words, a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events which should be the

formula for that particular emotion: such that when the external facts which must terminate in sensory experiences are given, the emotion is immediately invoked.³

Even before "The Waste Land," Eliot's historical sense had directed him to two sources of objective correlatives in "the timeless and the temporal": nature images and the myths that surrounded them. In delineating contemporary society, Eliot used nature images of aridity, sterility and corruption. The blind futility of modern action was mirrored in the blind functions of lower natural processes, particularly life beneath the sea; its dinginess and obscurities in the dying hours of twilight and pre-dawn. Just as corruption was the only vital process in nature that Eliot depicted, so the only human energy was found in the animality of Sweeney or the satyrlike quality of Mr. Apollinax.

The choice of nature imagery as an objective correlative was the artistic outgrowth of both Eliot's intellectual and psychological development to this point. Two major poetic influence of his young manhood had been the Romantic

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ Eliot, "Hamlet and His Problems," Selected Essays, op. cit., pp. 124-125.

and Symbolist movements. Both schools emphasized the evocative power of nature imagery. Moreover, at this time he was deeply interested in the philosophy of Francis Herbert Bradley, on whom he had written his doctoral dissertation. Bradley conceived of both time and objects existing in time as comprising a "simultaneous existence":

At any time, all that we suffer, do and are forms one psychical entity. It is experienced all together as a coexisting mass, not perceived as part and joined even by relations and co-existence. It contains all relations and distinctions and every ideal object that at that moment exists in the soul.⁴

In his 1916 doctoral thesis, Eliot paraphrased Bradley's position with characteristic succinctness: "In feeling, the subject and the object are one."⁵ To convey this concept in poetic terms, Eliot had to conceive of nature imagery more deeply than as a mirror of the human condition. He must view the individual--his emotional, spiritual and psychical

⁴ Francis Herbert Bradley, quoted by Hugh Kenner, The Invisible Poet: T. S. Eliot (New York: McDowell, Oblensky, 1959), p. 49.

⁵ Ibid., The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism, p. 148.

faculties of perception--and the objects of his perceptions as an entity. At this time, Eliot envisioned the universe as disjointed and fragmentary. Yet even then he sympathized

with a philosophical position that imposed order upon the

A second source of objective correlatives--actually a universe through the contention that man's faculties of perception and the natural objects of that perception form an entity. development of the first--was mythology. Prior to "The Waste Land," mythology had figured significantly in Eliot's entity.

The relationship between his poetry and his intellectual training up to this point is subject to objective analysis. A less tangible but no less vital influence was his psychological response to nature: of imagery--a calling upon

the past to provide a poignant contrast to the present. But

Of course, only a part of an author's imagery comes from his reading. It comes from the whole of his sensitive life from early childhood. Why for all of us, out of what 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. . . . Such memories have a symbolic value, but of what we cannot tell for they come to represent the depths of feeling into which we cannot peer.⁶

Since, for Eliot, the myth pattern has invariably merged with

religious practice. As a culture grows more complex, the

6 Eliot, The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism, op. cit., p. 148. The influence of myths alter, but their influence is never totally obscured.

From personal experience Eliot realized the psychological effectiveness of nature imagery to engender the utmost "depths of feeling" he sought to universalize in his poetry.

A second source of objective correlatives--actually a development of the first--was mythology. Prior to "The Waste Land," mythology had figured significantly in Eliot's intellectual background. He had studied the Greek and Roman classics intensively, and his consideration of Buddhism and Indic philosophy had introduced him to Eastern myths. In his earliest poetry, the myth was utilized primarily as one of Eliot's "traditional" sources of imagery--a calling upon the past to provide a poignant contrast to the present. But as his subsidiary interest in anthropology and psychology developed, his respect grew for the myth as a symbol of man's spiritual striving. Even in the most primitive cultures, man has sought to explain and order his world through devising myths. Since divining his spiritual relationship to the universe and its Creator presents the greatest challenge to man, the myth pattern has invariably merged with religious practice. As a culture grows more complex, the literal significance of myths alter, but their influence is never totally obscured.

Eliot further discovered that men were united not only in their need to evolve a myth pattern, but in the striking similarity among myth patterns of cultures spanning all ages. He was particularly indebted in this investigation to Sir James Frazer's study of comparative mythology, The Golden Bough.⁷ Eliot was not alone in his enthusiasm for the work. Frazer's elucidation of the evolution of vegetation mythology was essential to another study, From Ritual to Romance by Jessie Weston.⁸ Miss Weston's focus of interest was the search for the Holy Grail. She theorized that Grail legendry was not simply a romantic outgrowth of the Christian tradition, but another step in the evolution of vegetation rites. Frazer's study had traced the whole development of vegetation mythology from earliest recorded beginnings in Aryan cultures through the Egyptian and Greek myths which he had found reflected in later Western and Oriental folklore and

7 Sir James Frazer, The Golden Bough (Imperial ed.; New York: The Macmillan Co., 1958).

8 Jessie Weston, From Ritual to Romance (Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Co., 1920).

religious practice. Jessie Weston had found a definite relationship between the symbols of the Grail legend and the mythology surrounding the process of regeneration in nature that Frazer had traced. Moreover, both Frazer and Weston claimed a significant relationship between these pre-Christian, mytho-religious symbols and the symbolism surrounding the Reincarnation and Resurrection of Jesus Christ. Both theorized that this was not coincidental, but an intentional development of symbols that were rendered acceptable to early Christians because of their similarity to earlier pagan practices:

When we reflect how often the Church has skillfully contrived to plant the seeds of the new faith on the old stock of paganism, we may surmise that the Easter celebration of the dead and risen Christ was grafted upon a similar celebration of the dead and risen Adonis. . . . The type created by Greek artists of the sorrowful goddess with her dying lover in her arms resembles and may have been the model of the Pieta of Christian art. . . .⁹

Weston went one step further in her belief that not merely their function and importance in the realm of values, but also basic belief in the early

⁹ Frazer, op. cit., p. 401.

¹⁰ Weston, op. cit., p. 147.

Church, evolved partly from pagan "mysteries":

acknowledged in the notes to "The Waste Land":

That Christianity might have borrowed from previously existing cults certain outward signs and symbols may be, perforce, has to be, more or less grudgingly admitted, that such rapprochement should have gone further, that it should even have been inherent in the very nature of the Faith, that to some of the deepest thinkers of old, Christianity should have held no new thing but a fulfillment of the promise enshrined in the Mysteries from the beginning of the world will to many be a strange and startling thought. Yet so it was, and I firmly believe that it is only in the recognition of this one-time essential kinship between Christianity and the Pagan Mysteries that we shall find the key to the mystery of the Grail.¹⁰

It is essential to note that at the time Eliot first used Frazer and Weston's findings, he was not primarily interested in the theological validity of their attempts to relate Christianity and paganism. As an anthropologist, Frazer certainly did not believe that religion was the soundest basis for civilization; his interest in myths was purely scientific. Eliot, on the other hand, already recognized their function and importance in the realm of values. But the direct influence of Frazer and Weston's studies rests

11 Eliot, Notes on "The Waste Land." The Complete Poems and Plays (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1955) p. 50

10 Weston, op. cit., p. 147.

in their providing a rich source of imagery which Eliot

acknowledged in the notes to "The Waste Land":

... Instead of
method. It is, I seriously believe, a step
toward making the modern world possible for
art. Not only the title, but the plan and a
good deal of the incidental symbolism of the
poem were suggested by Jessie L. Weston's book
on the Grail legend: From Ritual to Romance.
... Indeed, so deeply am I indebted, Miss
Weston's book will elucidate the difficulties
of the poem much better than my notes can do.
... To another work of anthropology I am
indebted in general, one which has influenced
our generation profoundly; I mean The Golden
Bough. I have used especially the two volumes
Adonis, Attis, Osiris. Anyone who is acquainted
with these two works will immediately recognize
in the poem certain references to vegetation
ceremonies.¹¹

A less direct but much deeper significance is attached to
the importance of myth a year later when Eliot reviewed
James Joyce's novel, Ulysses:

In using the myth, in manipulating con-
tinuous parallels between contemporaneity and
antiquity, Mr. Joyce is pursuing a method which
others must pursue after him . . . it is simply
a way of controlling, of ordering, of giving a
shape and a significance to the immense panorama
of futility and anarchy which is contemporary

¹¹ Eliot, Notes on "The Waste Land," The Complete Poems
and Plays (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1950), p. 50.
(New York: Charles Scribner and Sons, 1949), p. 1.

history. But it is an event for which the horoscope is auspicious. . . . Instead of narrative method, we may now use the mythical method. It is, I seriously believe, a step toward making the modern world possible for art.¹²

Eliot had found in mythology--specifically mythology related to regeneration in nature--a source of imagery that fulfilled his requirements for an objective correlative for the presence or absence of spiritual vitality. Its universality clearly illustrated Eliot's belief that the artist must view human action as taking place in "the present moment of the past." It was truly "rich and strange." Most important, his entire career would bear out his contention that in using the "mythical method," the artist would take a step toward "controlling and ordering," toward "giving a shape and a significance . . . to contemporary history."

In his early writings, when Eliot envisioned the modern world as fragmentary and disordered, nature imagery and myth provided both a mirror and a point of contrast to the

¹² Eliot, The Dial, (November, 1923), quoted by Elizabeth Drew, T. S. Eliot: The Design of His Poetry (New York: Charles Scribner and Sons, 1949), p. 1.

present human condition. Later, when he sought to articulate the individual's spiritual struggles to find order in the universe, both instinct and a cultivated "traditional sense" led him to realize the poetic power and vitality of nature imagery and myth. Ultimately the same pattern of imagery assisted him in expressing in vivid, tangible symbols the depths of his abstract, highly complex vision of a universe ordered by the Hand of the Triune God.

Thus, as early as 1923, Eliot had defined the basic characteristics of his theory of poetic creativity. In practice, other sources of the objective correlative, as well as his mastery of form, would become essential elements of his creative technique. However, it is the intention of this paper to illustrate through a selective study of these two sources of objective correlatives how theories formulated in young manhood possessed the depth and flexibility necessary to express the ultimate development of his intellect and his art.

CHAPTER III

THE POET'S "PERSONAL AND PRIVATE AGONY"

"The Waste Land"

While T. S. Eliot had hailed James Joyce as the formulator of the "new, universally significant mythical method," his own poem, "The Waste Land," reveals an equally significant "manipulation of the continuous parallel between contemporaneity and antiquity" through the use of myth. In utilizing the combined symbolism of ancient vegetation rites and medieval Grail legendry, Eliot had given cohesive form to the various nature images which had appeared repeatedly in his earlier poems. In barest outline, the major nature imagery is built around: time (with particular emphasis on dawn, noon and twilight); water and fire, aridity and infertility and their opposites, verdance and fertility. When Eliot considers man as a phenomenon of the natural world, he is concerned primarily with fertility and sterility as symbols of spiritual as well as physical inadequacy. Thus, the early Eliot creates male figures who are either impotent or past their prime, as are Gerontion and Prufrock, or vital

in the satyric sense of Mr. Appolinax and Sweeney.²⁰ Eliot's women are consciously distorted personifications of some type of sexual incapacity. They may manifest the neuter emptiness of the sterile society woman in "A Game of Chess," the grotesque romanticism of the aged "Portrait of a Lady," the shallow beauty of the object of Prufrock's frustrated desire, or the coarse, brutal sexuality of Sweeney's women.

It is in "The Waste Land," that these isolated nature images and their human personifications are fused under the water, which was so essential to irrigation, became integral guise of myth into a major objective correlative for the futility and seeming disorder that Eliot found in contemporary society. Viewed in the light of his later poetry, the human fertility, the god's injury became sexual, and the poem is not simply a negation of the world, but the genesis of the quest for order that would be realized in an awareness of the life of the spirit expressed in "Four Quartets." In order to analyze Eliot's use of these myths as vehicles for illuminating his themes, their basic structure must be examined.

The fertility and vegetation rites described in The Golden Bough have their known beginnings in Aryan culture

and appear repeatedly throughout Babylonian, Egyptian, Persian and Greek religious practices. The mythology surrounds the birth, death and resurrection of a young and handsome god who personifies the corresponding death and renewal of both crops and animal life that are so essential to agriculturally oriented societies.¹ Within these cultures, an elaborate ritual involving prayer and pageantry first mourned the death of the god and the subsequent blight on the land, and then rejoiced in his return to earth. Characteristic symbols of fertility, particularly water, which was so essential to irrigation, became integral parts of the religious observance. Eventually, as the people identified the life force in nature more closely with human fertility, the god's injury became sexual, and he was mourned by a beautiful and powerful goddess who had taken him as her lover. Hence, women became increasingly important in the observance of the feast, even to the extent of offering their virginity as a sacrifice. After using Frazer's enquiry as the foundation for her own search for the sources of the Grail legend, Jesse Weston summarized

² Weston, *op. cit.*, p. 41.

¹ Frazer, *op. cit.*, pp. 376-380.

his findings in the first chapter of From Ritual to

Romance: Chapel Perilous." The most obvious parallel

between these legends and the early vegetation myths is that

By 3000 B.C., the idea of a Being upon whose life and reproductive activities the very existence of nature and its corresponding energies was held to depend, yet who was himself subject to the vicissitudes of declining powers and death, like any ordinary mortal, had already assumed a fixed and practically final form, further that this form was finally crystallized into ritualistic observances.²

times to symbolize the life force. Other symbolism sur-

round According to Miss Weston, these findings set her "on

the road to the Grail Castle,"³ where she found striking

parallels between the early vegetation myths and the Grail

legendry. With certain variations, these legends contain

four similarities: the purpose of the Grail Quest is to

restore the health and vigor of the king, known as the

"Fisher King." The king's infirmity reacts destructively

on his land, sometimes through prolonged drought and human

sterility. The king may be restored to health by a youth

of beauty and vigor who must first question the cause of

his illness. The opportunity often presents itself after

affirms that there was no clearly defined connection between

the two ² Weston, op. cit., p. 41. ³ Ibid., p. viii.

striking ³ Ibid., p. viii.

the seeker has endured strange and terrible tests in a haunted "Chapel Perilous." The most obvious parallel between these legends and the early vegetation myths is that the illness of both the Fisher King and the young god affects the fertility of the land. Moreover, the fish in the king's name recalls not only the use of the fish as a symbol for Christ, but also its use in ancient times to symbolize the life force. Other symbolism surrounding both the Grail Quest and the ancient quest for the source of fertility is also similar. The medieval symbols of the Grail Quest were the cup and the lance-- often associated with Christ's passion. But as Weston points out, a significant aspect of the fertility rituals in China and Egypt centered in the use of the Tarot Pack-- a pack of cards containing four suits: cup, lance, sword and stone, all of which were phallic symbols. Still used by gypsies in their divination acts, the Tarot Pack was originally used to predict the rise and fall of the waters essential to irrigation. While Miss Weston cautiously affirms that there was no clearly defined connection between the two, she, nonetheless, attaches significance to the striking similarities.

Finally, after a detailed study of what she terms the "exoteric" elements of the ritual, Miss Weston posits that pagans sought spiritual as well as physical vitality through their vegetation rites: . . . But he obviously saw how the

myths she examined contained nature symbols he had already
Mystery Ritual comprised a double initia-
foundation, the Lower into the mysteries of generation,
i.e., of physical life; the Higher into the Spirit-
tual Divine Life where man is made one with God.⁴

Further, she turns to the Maassene Document to demonstrate that a link did exist through the early heresies between these rituals celebrating the life, death and resurrection of the pagan god and similar events in the life of Jesus Christ: "the present moment of the past." Just as Miss

Weston's use of Fraser's findings led her on the "road to the Grail" The Vegetation deities, Adonis, Attis and more especially the Phrygian god, were the chosen guides to the knowledge and union with the Supreme Spiritual Source of Life, of which they were the communicating medium. Although this is a document of a Gnostic sect, the essential groundwork upon which it is elaborated belongs to a period anterior to Christianity.⁵

⁴ Ibid., p. 182.

⁵ Ibid., pp. 158-159.

This was the elaborate pattern of symbolism that Eliot turned to in "The Waste Land." As stated earlier, Eliot was not passing judgment on the theological validity of Miss Weston's hypothesis. But he obviously saw how the myths she examined contained nature symbols he had already found useful in expressing the themes in his earlier poems. Organized into a myth pattern, these symbols became a vivid metaphor for the spiritual sterility he sought to reveal in modern society. Moreover, Miss Weston's effort was an attempt to unify human thought and action throughout history, which truly illustrated his conviction that one must create in "the present moment of the past." Just as Miss Weston's use of Frazer's findings led her on the "road to the Grail Castle," so Eliot's use of her material provided a metaphoric structure for the poem which is his first major effort toward realizing the nature of order in the universe.

given. Instead, the prophetic voice, reminiscent of Ezekiel,⁶ explicitly states the theme of the poem: is introduced through a contradiction of traditional Romantic nature imagery in the first line of the poem: "April is the cruellest month." Spring, a time of year romantically associated with rebirth and revitalization, is cruel to the

inhabitants of the Waste Land because it stirs the
 You cannot say, or guess, for you know only
 winter-deadened "dull roots with spring rain." The poet
 And the dead tree gives no shelter, the
 experiences a poignant mixing of "memory and desire." He
 And the dry stone no sound of water.
 envisions two interludes: first, a moment of unexpected
 communication between two youthful travelers, then a
 child's moment of freedom on an Austrian mountain slope,
 as it is recalled by a weary woman seeking artificial
 vitality by going south in the winter. These isolated,
 pathetic recollections of youthful vitality are over-
 shadowed by an almost prophetic voice describing the total
 aridity in "The Waste Land." Here one finds the first
 link to Grail legendry, for the question, "What are the
 the impact of his picture of spiritual and emotional aridity
 roots that chill, what branches grow/ Out of this stony
 by creating two contrasts. The sailor's carefree song as
 rubbish," recalls the need for the Grail seeker to enquire
 he brings Isolda to find romance with Tristan, and a moment
 the reason for the destruction of the Waste Land, before
 of idyllic love between the protagonist and the hyacinth
 it could be restored. But the restorative reply is not
 girl, are preludes to painful, meaningless separations.
 given. Instead, the prophetic voice, reminiscent of
 The protagonist recalls:
 Ezekial,⁶ explicitly states the theme of the poem:

..... 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.

6 Ezekial 11.

In the Son of man, possible spiritual rebirth through love,
 You cannot say, or guess, for you know only
 his A heap of broken images, where the sun beats
 And the dead tree gives no shelter, the
 cricket no relief
 And the dry stone no sound of water.

In these lines, Eliot quickly establishes water and
 And in short, I was afraid.
 aridity as the contrasting components of his objective cor-
 relative for the absence of spiritual life in the modern
 world. The only surcease is to "hide under the shadow of
 this red rock," and even there, one does not find cooling
 release, only "fear in a handful of dust."

Again, as throughout the entire poem, Eliot heightens
 the impact of his picture of spiritual and emotional aridity
 by creating two contrasts. The sailor's carefree song as
 he brings Isolde to find romance with Tristan, and a moment
 of idyllic love between the protagonist and the hyacinth
 girl, are preludes to painful, meaningless separations.

The protagonist recalls: Ironically, she is still "the

wisest woman in Europe. . . . She introduces the prin-

. I could not
 ciple Speak, and my eyes failed. I was neither characters

Living nor dead, and I knew nothing.
 who Looking into the heart of light, the silence. person-

ality that eventually merge into one another. Each char-

acter is delineated by one of the cards in the protagonist's

In the face of possible spiritual rebirth through love, his reaction echoes that of Prufrock:

I have seen the moment of my greatness flicker . . .

And in short, I was afraid.

Tristan was not afraid, but when he lies dying as a result of his tragic, illicit passion, he looks seaward for a sight of Isolde, only to find that "Desolate and empty is the sea."

Having brilliantly established the mood and the theme of the poem in the first forty lines, Eliot introduces the symbolism that unifies "The Waste Land." It is the Tarot Pack, once cherished by the Egyptian seers as a means of divining the tides, now in the hands of Madame Sosostris, a shady, modern fortune teller whose performance is poor because of a bad cold. Ironically, she is still "the wisest woman in Europe. . . ." She introduces the principle inhabitants of the Waste Land, including characters who represent various aspects of the protagonist's personality that eventually merge into one another. Each character is delineated by one of the cards in the protagonist's

fortune. First is the drowned Phoenician sailor, a symbol of the early practice of drowning an effigy of the vegetation god at Alexandria. When it was washed up by the tides at Byblus, it was received with rejoicing as a symbol of rebirth.⁷ The protagonist associates the sailor with Prince Ferdinand of Naples in The Tempest. Ariel's song describing the supposed drowning of his father led Ferdinand on another quest; it resulted in his love affair with Miranda and freedom for the inhabitants of the enchanted island.

The second card represents all the women in the poem, "Belladonna, the lady of the Rocks, the lady of situations." She is clearly a figure of destruction, who drugs rather than vitalizes the senses. Next there is the man with three staves. Eliot explains in a note: "I associate him quite arbitrarily with the Fisher King himself."⁸ The wheel in the fourth card is the ancient symbol for the cycle of life and death. Finally, there is the one-eyed merchant, significant in his similarity to the merchants

⁷ Frazer, op. cit., p. 390.

⁸ Eliot, Notes on "The Waste Land," The Complete Poems and Plays, op. cit., p. 52.

of ancient times, who Jessie Weston tells us, spread the doctrines of their faith during their journeys. What Madame Sosostris is "forbidden to see" (as are all the inhabitants of the Waste Land) are the keys to the inner mysteries of spiritual life contained in his pack; what she does see is that he is "one-eyed." It is significant that Madame Sosostris cannot find the Hanged Man, an authentic symbol in the Tarot Pack. Eliot says he associates him with the hanged god--another variation on the figure personifying death and rebirth within the nature cycle. Madame Sosostris' warning to "Fear death by water" is expanded throughout the entire poem, for water is an ambiguous symbol in "The Waste Land." It is at once the symbol of life and rebirth, as in baptism, and a source of oblivion for those who are spiritually dead. Again, one recalls Prufrock:

We have lingered in the chambers of the sea . . .
Till human voices wake us and we drown.

In the concluding lines of Part I, Eliot locates the poem in London, the "Unreal city/ Under the brown fog of a winter dawn." The description of the people in a deathlike

trance, who cannot hear "the dead sound on the final stroke of nine" (the hour when Christ died in reparation for the sins of man), harkens back to the aimless vision of "crowds of people walking round in a ring" that Madame Sosostriis sees. (It is also allied to Dante's description of the inhabitants of the Inferno.)⁹

The voice of the protagonist abruptly intrudes upon the scene calling out to one who fought with him in the commercial wars of Mylae:

That corpse you planted last year in your garden
Has it begun to sprout?
man, my brother!

His question refers to another vegetation ritual. The effigy of the dead god was planted with seeds of corn and placed in the ground. When the effigy was dug up, the corn would have sprouts. This was construed as a sign that the god had given his life to bring about the rebirth of the land.¹⁰ The protagonist wonders if it has bloomed or

⁹ Inferno, III, 49-54. They are full of a rich,

¹⁰ Frazer, op. cit., p. 437.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 395.

"if the sudden frost has disturbed its bed?" Just as he was terrified at the moment with the girl with the hyacinths (flowers used in early fertility rituals),¹¹ now he warns "Oh keep the dog far hence that's friend to man, or with his claws he will dig it up again." He is terrified at the possibilities of rebirth.

Finally, all mankind from the earliest pagans through this point, the poet interjects a bitter comment upon how those who heard the voice of Ezekial exhort against "the inhabitants of the waste land choose to view this day of evil" and those who were present at the stroke of "present moment of the past" are united in the "present moment of the past," as the poet cries out to "you, hypocritical reader, my fellow man, my brother!"

It is impossible in a short space to fully examine the rich intricacies of imagery Eliot employs throughout "The Waste Land" in building his major objective correlative, but nowhere is his technique more artful than in the opening passage of Part II, "A Game of Chess." The lines are an obvious play upon the Shakespearean description of Cleopatra's barge. They are full of a rich,

¹¹ Ibid., p. 395.

exquisite sensuality. Yet one finds dark touches. The lady's perfumes "lurk . . . troubled and confused." They, too, drown one, but this time the drowning by a "synthetic" agent does not cause new vitality, only a dulling of the senses. Among the elaborate bric-a-brac is a carving depicting the change of Philomel into a nightingale in order to protect her purity from the lust of King Tereus. At this point, the poet interjects a bitter comment upon how the inhabitants of the Waste Land choose to view this "present moment of the past":

And still she cried and still the world pursues,
'Jug, Jug' to dirty ears.
A barbarous modern society replaces the barbarous ancient voice of Ariel to Miranda. But then, that is nothing but king in the act of defilement.

Other delineations of myths are only depicted as "withered stumps of time" in this room where physical beauty provides a suffocating setting for the modern goddess of love, the petulant lady of situations. The protagonist's replies to her nagging questions are a study in contrast. Each shallow enquiry is answered by

a profoundly ironic reference to earlier ideas. Her demand that he "think" engenders a harrowing vision of the Waste Land as seen in Part I:

I think that we are in rats' alley
Where the dead men lose their bones

The world in which she moves is devoid of any significance: who, in the face of the insupportable march of time and the

"Do
you know nothing? Do you see nothing? Do you
remember
Nothing?"

This is the world in which the protagonist was blindly induced in Part II is central to Part III, "The Fire Sermon." ineffectual in his response to the hyacinth girl, unlike Ferdinand, who in another form of "blindness" followed the voice of Ariel to Miranda. But then, that is nothing but "Shakespearean Rag." In such a world there is nothing--nothing to see, nothing to do, nothing worth being. And so, revitalizing waters of spiritual rebirth are replaced with other "synthetics"--"the hot water bottle at ten."

Rain, a natural agent of regeneration, is shut out by "the closed car at four," and one's life is lived amid restrictions as rigid and artificial as the rules in a game of chess. of bones" and envisions a rat, "dragging its slimy

There need be no transition to the pub scene, for the lady of situations is still present in another form.

Despite the artificial restrictions of class, she is one with Lil, a woman trapped by her way of life into loveless, weary sex, whose fruition she deliberately and clumsily aborts. Both women are united with the irrational Ophelia, who, in the face of the inexorable march of time and the denial of genuine love, bade good night to all "sweet ladies" and drowned herself.

The theme of meaningless, fruitless sexuality introduced in Part II is central to Part III, "The Fire Sermon."

Water in the form of three rivers, the Thames, the Rhine and, briefly, Zion, is a counter-image to water as a traditional symbol of female fecundity; and all references harken back to the protagonist's fortune, "Fear death by water." Once again, Eliot resorts to contrasts.

The protagonist, like the Fisher King, sits beside water. It is dirty and windswept during winter, the dead season. Nearby is the Chapel Perilous of Grail legendry-- now a gas house. As in "A Game of Chess," he hears the "rattle of bones" and envisions a rat, "dragging its slimy

belly on the bank." There is water here, to be sure, but it is fetid, producing rotten vegetation. Like Ferdinand, the protagonist muses on the death of his own source of life, his father. But he does not hear the magic voice of Ariel. Rather, his thoughts are interrupted by the sounds of the city, personified in Sweeney and Mrs. Porter, who are hurrying toward one another to consummate a lust as old and violent as that of Actaeon for Diana and Tereus for Philomel. Ironically, Mrs. Porter washes her feet in soda water, in a vulgar parody of the purification rites which were part of the Grail Quester's initiation.

At this point, the one-eyed merchant seen by Madame Sosostriis appears. Unlike his devout predecessors, who brought knowledge of religious mysteries from country to country, he is dirty and debauched and carries a handful of currants, dried remnants of fruits used in orgiastic Bacchic rites.¹² He offers the protagonist another opportunity for barren lust, a homosexual liaison. Just as the

¹² Eliot, Notes on "The Waste Land," *The Complete Poems* 12. *Ibid.*, p. 448.

protagonist was blindly ineffectual during his encounter with the hyacinth girl, the merchant's vision is crippled and incomplete. . . . snatched on the same divan or bed."

Both figures merge into Teresias, the ancient seer.

His role is defined by Eliot in the notes to the poem: a

warm and vital background to the "clatter and chatter" of

Teresias, although a mere spectator and not indeed a "character," is yet the most important personage in the poem, uniting all the rest. Just as the one-eyed merchant, seller of currants, melts into the Phoenician Sailor and the latter is not wholly distinct from Ferdinand Prince of Naples, so all the women are one woman, and the two sexes meet in Teresias. What Teresias sees, in fact, is the substance of the poem.¹³

front, the song of the Thames daughters. Their shabby, In this significant role, Teresias is the ultimate example pathetically passive seductions are contrasted to the of Eliot's use of seeming contradiction to create a unify-fate of the Rhine daughters who were also violated and ing image. Teresias, "old man with wrinkled female breasts" mourned the subsequent loss of beauty on the Rhine.¹⁴ is at once man and woman rendered impotent. While blind in The intrusion of Elizabeth and Leicester's dalliance along a physical sense, he is a prophet who can see the "present the river merely serves to describe in another age, under moment of the past" and foresee the future. What he sees a glossy veneer, a similarly arid relationship. Finally, is the human "engine" of the typist and her lover enduring the water carries the protagonist, now the Phoenician

¹³ Eliot, Notes on "The Waste Land," The Complete Poems and Plays, op. cit., p. 52.

automatic, meaningless lust. And having since ancient times "walked among the lowest of the dead" he has "fore-suffered all . . . enacted on the same divan or bed."

The next voice is that of Ferdinand, and the "music that crept by me upon the waters" is the Thames music, a warm and vital background to the "clatter and chatter" of fishermen at home in the shadows of a great church. But if one were to assume that surcease from the sufferings in the Waste Land can be achieved by a romantic return to simplicity, the thought is ironically dispelled by another picture of life among the simple residents of the waterfront, the song of the Thames daughters. Their shabby, pathetically passive seductions are contrasted to the fate of the Rhine daughters who were also violated and mourned the subsequent loss of beauty on the Rhine.¹⁴ The intrusion of Elizabeth and Leicester's dalliance along the river merely serves to describe in another age, under a glossy veneer, a similarly arid relationship. Finally, the water carries the protagonist, now the Phoenician

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 53.

sailor, to Carthage. The following lines are based, so Eliot notes, on the Augustinian Confessions:

To Carthage then I came, where a cauldron of
unholy loves sang all about my ears.

The song of the Thames is mingled with the unholy song
(merged with the merchant) is drowned. His lust is not
Augustine hears, a song of lust as destructive as fire.
The concluding lines . . .

Burning burning burning
O Lord Thou pluckest me out
O Lord Thou pluckest
burning

link Augustine to Buddha, who in his "Fire Sermon"

exhorts one to "conceive an aversion"¹⁵ for the lusts
of the flesh. Like Eliot's use of water, the fire
image is deliberately ambiguous. The burning may be
construed as the destructive force of lust or as the
means of destroying the lust itself. However one con-
strues it is not so important as is Eliot's concluding
note to the section:

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

Christ's The collocation of these two representatives of eastern and western asceticism, as the culmination of this part of the poem, is not an accident.¹⁶

living is now dead." In his absence, spiritual death
 In Part IV, "Death by Water," the fate foretold by

Madame Sosostriis is realized. The Phoenician Sailor (merged with the merchant) is drowned. His lust is not assuaged or cauterized but quenched in the oblivion of death by water. With this negative realization of his destiny, Eliot once more exhorts all his readers, all those who "turn the wheel" of destiny, to consider the fate of the sailor.

Part V, however, seeks an alternative fate to the one predicted by Madame Sosostriis. The protagonist, hanged god and the resurrected Christ at Samos; but this like the Grail Quester, now seeks "the waters of salvation." But the images evoked are again negative--fire, Waste Land, the protagonist encounters horrors comparable to the supernatural tests imposed on the Grail Quester during the journey to the Chapel Perilous. However, when he reaches the chapel, he finds that it is empty, "only the spit." The section begins at the fire-lit scene of

initiation into the Sacred Mysteries of the Grail.

16 Ibid.

Christ's betrayal in the garden. Like all the vegetation gods whose mythology preceded his coming, "He who was living is now dead." In his absence, spiritual death descends upon the land, just as aridity cursed the lands of the Fisher King:

If there were water we should stop and drink
Amongst the rock, one cannot stop or think.

But in the midst of this desolation appears a veiled, ambiguous figure.

There is always one walking beside you
Gliding wrapt in a brown mantle, hooded

The figure is at once reminiscent of the resurrected hanged god and the resurrected Christ at Emmaus; but this vision is obscured by others. In his journey through the Waste Land, the protagonist encounters horrors comparable to the supernatural tests imposed on the Grail Quester during the journey to the Chapel Perilous. However, when he reaches the chapel, he finds that it is empty, "only the wind's home." Hence, the protagonist cannot undergo his initiation into the Sacred Mysteries of the Grail.

Abruptly a cock's crow creates a transition from the scene of the Grail Quest to the Ganges River, scene of the earliest enquiries into the mysteries of regeneration. It is sunken and waiting for rain. The poet introduces into this context a legend defining the meaning of the sound of thunder. The first crash symbolizes the word "datta," an exhortation to give. The protagonist answers that all that the inhabitants of the Waste Land have given of themselves is a surrender to meaningless lust. The second directive "dayadhvam" means "sympathize," and once again the protagonist points out the unwillingness, possibly inability, of modern man to "turn the key in the lock" and share the quest for spiritual identity, instead of being imprisoned by pride. Finally, the thunder warns "daymata," control. Returning to the imagery of the sea, the protagonist is exhorted to be obedient to disciplines, just as the boat must obey the command of the hand "expert with sail and oar."

In the concluding passages, the protagonist, as Fisher King, still lingers upon the shore of a barren land. But he is changed. While his condition seems

hopeless, he has gained knowledge. Like the man with three staves in his fortune, the three directives are the key to his regeneration. But he and his fellow inhabitants of the Waste Land do not have the will to apply them. Therefore, he contemplates his inevitable death and plans to put his house in order by collecting the broken fragments of self-knowledge he has "shored against (his) ruin." The quotations that follow point out the inevitable destruction of the city, allude to the need for voluntary purification and the desire for regeneration in the face of defilement and finally recall the predicament of the protagonist standing before the "ruined tower" of the Chapel Perilous, the source of his initiation into the mysteries of spiritual life. Knowing that, like Hieronymo, his words will convey seeming madness to the inhabitants of the Waste Land, he still repeats them: "Give, Sympathize, Control." Returning to ancient writings for the final time, the poet finds an ironic comment on the ideal human condition that "The Hollow Men" which seems to be even more pessimistic obedience to these directives could create: "Shantih Shantih Shantih." To the inhabitants of the modern Waste Land this would be "the peace that passeth all understanding."

"The Waste Land" is not an obscure poem; rather it is a highly complex and artful weaving of a series of quite simple nature images and the myths surrounding them. The result is a unified artistic statement of Eliot's view of the "immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporaneity." Any careful reading of the poem yields two significant indications of how his ultimate philosophy will evolve from this position. First, he is fascinated by the continuity that exists in human attempts to grasp spiritual truths, particularly the concept of rebirth after death. Secondly, his concern for the present human condition clearly indicates his belief that men are blind, not that they exist in a spiritual void in which there is nothing to be seen. Hence, "The Waste Land" is not a hopeless poem, but it is rather a negative judgment of human action.

It is necessary to bear this in mind when reading "The Hollow Men" which seems to be even more pessimistic than "The Waste Land." That it is actually a step forward in Eliot's attempt to express his search for spiritual commitment is manifested once again in his use of established

nature imagery, with a significant addition: the positive symbolism contained in the star and the "multifoliate rose."

is a quotation from the novel Heart of Darkness which
"The Hollow Men"

announces the death of Joseph Kurtz, a European in the African ivory district who had set himself up as a primitive deity. The second epigraph is the salutation of

child Who are those hooded hordes swarming, of Guy Fawkes,
 Over endless plains, stumbling in cracked
 a religious earth
 Ringed by the flat horizon only

Parliament.

His question is answered in Eliot's sequel to "The Waste Land"--"The Hollow Men":

despite the enormity of their wrongdoing, neither Kurtz

nor We are the hollow men. Both had been intensely
 We are the stuffed men
 Leaning together and had been able to engender that
 Headpieces filled with straw. Alas!
 same intensity in other men. The words with which Kurtz

For "The Hollow Men" in mood and imagery reaffirms Eliot's conviction that modern man is living in a spiritual void which has rendered him incapable of meaningful thought or action. The poem examines one facet of this spiritual paralysis: the inability of modern man to relate "sympathetically" first to his fellow men and then to God. motivated Guy Fawkes are the bonfires and pranks of children.

Two epigraphs begin "The Hollow Men": "Mistah Kurtz--he dead" and "A penny for the old Guy." The first is a quotation from the novel Heart of Darkness which announces the death of Joseph Kurtz, a European in the African ivory district who had set himself up as a primitive deity. The second epigraph is the salutation of children as they solicit pennies in memory of Guy Fawkes, a religious zealot who attempted to blow up the Houses of Parliament.

The epigraphs set a tone of bitter irony, for despite the enormity of their wrongdoing, neither Kurtz nor Guy Fawkes were "hollow men." Both had been intensely committed to an ideal and had been able to engender that same intensity in other men. The words with which Kurtz ended his life, "the horror, the horror," indicated that, like Lucifer, the fallen angel, he was able to perceive the depth of his degradation more truly than either his followers or those "pilgrims" who condemned his actions. Yet Kurtz's epitaph is tonelessly delivered by an ignorant native, and all that remains of the burning zeal that motivated Guy Fawkes are the bonfires and pranks of children.

Implicit in the epigraphs is the attitude expressed in Eliot's essay on Baudelaire:

It is true to say that the glory of man is his capacity for salvation; it is also true to say that his glory is his capacity for damnation. The worst that can be said of most of our male-factors from statesmen to thieves is that they are not men enough to be damned. . . . Such suffering as Baudelaire's implies the possibility of a positive state of beatitude.¹⁷

In "The Hollow Men," Eliot goes further in his denunciation of modern man's ineffectuality. It is not enough to say that he is "not man enough to be damned." He is not a man at all, but an effigy, like those burned on Guy Fawkes Day:

We are the stuffed men
Leaning together
Headpieces filled with straw. Alas!

It is this inability to envision a commitment greater than their own self-preservation that casts the "Shadow" which obscures every potentially vital activity of the hollow

men: "dead voices" of the hollow men are "quiet and meaningless, as wind in dry grass." They recall the wind in "The

¹⁷ Eliot, "Baudelaire," The Selected Essays, op. cit., p. 380.

straw" is iron
 And the creation
 fertility gods
 Between the emotion source of physical and
 And the response
 spiritual rego: Falls the Shadow religious observers.

In "The Hollow Men," as in "The Waste Land," aridity
 in nature is the objective correlative for this human in-
 capacity. The spokesman for the hollow men describes the
 land:

This is the dead land
 This is the cactus land
 Here the stone images
 Are raised . . . of spiritual regeneration,

or deliberately rejects it. In his encounter with the hya-
 And one remembers the prophetic voice in "The Burial of
 cinth girl, he is on the brink of discovery but falters:
 the Dead":

. . . my eyes failed, I was neither
 Living nor Son of man know nothing,
 you know only light, the silence
 A heap of broken images, where the sun beats
 And the dead tree gives no shelter, the circket
 The he no relief, re equally terrified at the prospect of
 And the dry stone no sound of water
 achieving a genuine insight into the life of the spirit.

The "dead voices" of the hollow men are "quiet and meaning-
 less, as wind in dry grass." They recall the wind in "The
 Waste Land" that "crosses the brown land, unheard." Even
 the description of the "stuffed men headpiece filled with

straw" is ironically similar to the effigies of the first fertility gods that symbolized the source of physical and spiritual regeneration in early religious observance.

Once he has created a strikingly similar mood to that of "The Waste Land," Eliot uses another pattern of imagery from the earlier poem--images related to vision--to build an objective correlative for man's dim awareness of the life of the spirit as the ordering principle of human existence. In "The Waste Land," the protagonist is either incapable of "seeing" the source of spiritual regeneration, or deliberately rejects it. In his encounter with the hyacinth girl, he is on the brink of discovery but falters:

. . . my eyes failed, I was neither
Living nor dead, and I knew nothing,
Looking into the heart of light, the silence

The hollow men are equally terrified at the prospect of achieving a genuine insight into the life of the spirit. Like the inhabitants of the Waste Land ("I had not thought death had undone so many"), their existence is a living death in "death's dream kingdom." Yet they do perceive the existence of "death's other Kingdom," a state to

which some men have crossed with "direct eyes." The first three sections of the poem are devoted to attempts by the hollow men to avoid direct contact with that other Kingdom and its inhabitants. Their fears are pathetically reminiscent of the sense of isolation and rejection evoked by the Thames daughters in "The Fire Sermon":

The post leaves them on the brink of perceiving what--if
It is like this
In death's other kingdom
Waking alone
At the hours when we are
Trembling with tenderness
Lips that would kiss
Form prayers to broken stone.

Yet even in their fear of death, they reject the isolation and emptiness of life:

There are no eyes here
In this valley of dying stars
In this hollow valley
This broken jaw of our last kingdoms.
In the wind's singing
More distant and more solemn

In their final frightened acceptance of the inevitability of the journey to death's other Kingdom, they huddle together for the first time in some semblance of mutual sympathy: Their own world is initially described as a "twilight kingdom"--devoid at once of sunlight and starlight. They admit that they have lost contact with spiritual reality

in their sterile religious practices. Theirs is "The

In this last of meeting places
 We grope together
 And avoid speech
 Gathered on the beach of this tumid river
 life in death's twilight kingdom is totally devoid of any

As in the conclusion to "The Waste Land," there is no assurance that this act of mutual sympathy will help them to achieve spiritual rebirth in death's other Kingdom.

The poet leaves them on the brink of perceiving what--if anything--constitutes spiritual reality. Once again he resorts to nature imagery to provide an objective correlative for their emotion. The ideal of a spiritual world is symbolized by a star. Early in the poem, the hollow men

dimly envision life in death's other Kingdom. Their conception is full of mystery, awe and gentle beauty:

There, the eyes 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

Their own world is initially described as a "twilight pathetic--"hope only of empty men." They pass into death's kingdom--devoid at once of sunlight and starlight. They admit that they have lost contact with spiritual reality in their sterile religious practices. Theirs is "The radiance of the "perpetual star."

supposition of a dead man's hand/ Under the twinkle of a fading star." Ultimately, they are forced to admit that life in death's twilight kingdom is totally devoid of any insight into the life of the spirit: "There are no eyes here/ In this valley of dying stars." Another nature image reminiscent of "The Waste Land" provides a final poignant symbol of the endless circle of meaningless activity that constitutes their lives: "Four Quartets."

In both "The Waste Land" and "The Hollow Men," Eliot places Here we go round the prickly pear
Prickly pear prickly pear
Here we go round the prickly pear
At five o'clock in the morning.

Torn between their fear of what waits in death's other Kingdom and their rejection of life in death's dream world, and his imagery, with its strong dependence on mythology, is devoted to "making the modern world possible for art." Even so, "The Hollow Men" should be considered as kingdom, they, like the Fisher King who shored "these fragments against my ruin," recall imperfectly and incompletely the words of prayer given to man by the Redeemer: "For Thine is" It is in these half-forgotten fragments of divine revelation that the hollow men place their moment of the past." In his attempt to articulate his pathetic "hope only of empty men." They pass into death's search for a spiritual reality, he draws on such traditional-ly Christian symbolism as the star and the rose, in order to create new objective correlatives for the deep emotion this radiance of the "perpetual star."

"The Hollow Men" was written in 1925, two years prior to Eliot's formal conversion to Anglo-Catholicism. One can speculate that as a man, he, too, was trembling "between the idea and the reality." While the poem contains the first indication of the significance Eliot would ultimately attach to the life of the spirit as the ordering principle in human existence, it is more closely allied to "The Waste Land" than to "Ash Wednesday" and "Four Quartets." In both "The Waste Land" and "The Hollow Men," Eliot places primary emphasis on the secular aspects of life. The disillusionment which dominates both poems is centered in the world, and his imagery, with its strong dependence on mythology, is devoted to "making the modern world possible for art." Even so, "The Hollow Men" should be considered as the poem that links Eliot's preoccupation with the negative aspects of human existence to the introduction of positive Christian themes. In making this transition, he again fulfills his dictum that a poet must live in "the present moment of the past." In his attempt to articulate his search for a spiritual reality, he draws on such traditionally Christian symbolism as the star and the rose, in order to create new objective correlatives for the deep emotion this

spiritual involvement engenders.

In "Ash Wednesday," having personally committed himself to the life of the spirit, he must first reconcile his religious belief and his prior disillusionment with the world, and then universalize his experience into "something rich and strange, something universal and impersonal."

influenced his artistic achievement by reading two of his essays, "The Pensées of Pascal" and "Dante." In "Pascal," he explains why he feels that Christianity can be the solution to a man's personal quest for order in human existence. In "Dante," he indicates how such belief can be useful to the artist.

Eliot obviously represents the "Christian thinker" who arrives at religious belief through the process of elimination he describes in "Pascal":

The Christian thinker--and I mean the man who is trying consciously and conscientiously to explain to himself the sequence which culminates in faith . . . proceeds by rejection and elimination. He finds the

CHAPTER IV

THE POET'S QUEST FOR SPIRITUAL COMMITMENT

Reflections on Pascal and the Ariel Poems

With customary reticence, T. S. Eliot has had little to say concerning his conversion to Christianity. However, one can gain some insight into how it came about and how it influenced his artistic achievement by reading two of his essays, "The Pensees of Pascal" and "Dante." In "Pascal," he explains why he feels that Christianity can be the solution to a man's personal quest for order in human existence. In "Dante," he indicates how such belief can be useful to the artist.

Eliot obviously represents the "Christian thinker" who arrives at religious belief through the process of elimination he describes in "Pascal":

The Christian thinker--and I mean the man who is trying consciously and conscientiously to explain to himself the sequence which culminates in faith . . . proceeds by rejection and elimination. He finds the

world to be so and so; he finds its character inexplicable by any non-religious theory: among religions he finds Christianity, and Catholic Christianity, to account most satisfactorily for the world and especially the moral world within; and thus, by what Newman calls "powerful and concurrent" reasons, he finds himself inexorably committed to the dogma of the Incarnation.¹

Eliot readily admits that a skeptical temperament leading to an analytical approach to life is required to undertake such an enquiry in the first place:

To the unbeliever this method seems disingenuous and perverse: for the unbeliever is, as a rule, not so greatly troubled to explain the world to himself, nor so greatly distressed by its disorder.²

By projecting into Pascal his own desire to "explain the world to himself" and to deal with his "distress [at its] disorder," he indicates indirectly how the passive despair of "The Waste Land" and "The Hollow Men" could evolve into the active attempt to dispel despair in "Ash Wednesday."

¹ Eliot, "The Pensees of Pascal," The Selected Essays, op. cit., p. 360.

² Ibid., p. 363.

The idea that despair can remain after conversion is essential to an understanding of "Ash Wednesday." Eliot does not see Christianity as a panacea for the world's ills to be purchased like one of Madame Sosostri's fortunes; nor is it an escape mechanism to avoid a human condition that remains arid and sterile. The effort to commit oneself actively to the life of the spirit awakens all the faculties of a man's nature, including his skepticism:

For every man who thinks and lives by thought must have his own skepticism, that which stops at the question that which ends in denial or that leads to faith and which is somehow integrated into the faith which transcends it. And Pascal, as the type of one kind of religious believer, which is highly passionate and ardent, but passionate only through a powerful and regulated intellect . . . is facing unflinchingly the demon of doubt which is inseparable from the spirit of belief.³

Eliot believes that this state of doubt and the despair it can engender are essential steps in achieving total commitment to the life of the spirit:

³ "Ash Wednesday" was published in 1930. Part II, titled "Salutation," had appeared in 1927, Part I, "Perchance to lose," had appeared in 1928, and Part III, "At the end of the world," in 1929.

³ Ibid., p. 363.

His [Pascal's] despair, his disillusion are no illustration of personal weakness; they are perfectly objective, because they are essential moments in the progress of the intellectual soul; and for the type of Pascal they are the analogue of the drought, the dark night of the soul which is an essential stage in the progress of the Christian mystic. . . . It was a despair which was a necessary prelude to, and element in, the joy of faith.⁴

The man who arrives at belief, but stops short at this active if painful step toward total spiritual commitment, is depicted in two of Eliot's poems written at the same time as "Ash Wednesday": "The Journey of the Magi" (1927) and "A Song for Simeon" (1928).⁵ Both poems deal with men who find themselves "inexorably committed to the dogma of the Incarnation." Both the Magus and Simeon had the "vision of the perpetual star" before the birth of the Child and both have acknowledged Him. They realize that His birth, an event in time, is the prelude to the redemption of mankind for all eternity. Yet they are old men who find themselves unable

4 Ibid., p. 364.

5 "Ash Wednesday" was published in 1930. Part II, titled "Salutation," had appeared in 1927, Part I, "Perch io non spero," had appeared in 1928, and Part III, "Al som de l'escalina," in 1929.

to move beyond the past, even though they are exiled from it by their belief.

In both poems, Eliot once again creates objective correlatives from nature imagery. In "The Journey of the Magi," the precise physical detail (echoing Lancelot Andrewes' sermons)⁶ conveys the Magus' absolute conviction that what he saw was not a mystical vision, but a physical reality, revealed in a way that the world could not deny. His irritable recounting of the cold and darkness in this "dead season," contrasted to the sensual pleasures left behind ("the summer palaces, the slopes, the terraces and the silken girls bringing the sherbet"), is reminiscent of the Waste Land where one "goes south in the winter." As he travels, he and his companions are subjected to discomfort, neglect and exploitation. In the end, they prefer to travel all night, guided, according to tradition, by a star.

In contrast to this drearily familiar picture is the description of the Birthplace. It is humble, inhabited by

⁶ Lancelot Andrewes, Seventeen Sermons on the Nativity (New ed.; London: Griffith, Tarron, Okedon and Welsh, n.d.).

people whose unawareness of the miracle yields "no information." Yet here, as in all of Eliot's poems, the scene of spiritual rebirth is a temperate place, moist and verdant. Of the encounter with the Child, the Magus says simply "it was (you may say) satisfactory," and that he arrived "not a moment too soon" before the Child is forced into exile. Although this happened long ago, the Magus recalls the moment vividly and he affirms that he would "do it again." Nonetheless, he suffers the "hard and bitter agony" of watching the death of the way of life to which he had been born and had devoted his own life. While he is spiritually exiled from his people, "alien people clutching their gods," he is unable to actively embrace the unspoken Word: Unless a man be born again of water and the Holy Spirit, he shall not see God." Rather, like the Fisher King who had knowledge but could not use it, he concludes: "I should be glad of another death."

In "A Song for Simeon," the prophet who recognized the Infant brought to the Temple as the Messiah invokes God to free him from the bitter knowledge that man will reject his Redeemer. It is late winter and the Roman hyacinths,

reminiscent of pagan regeneration ritual, are being artificially cultivated. Yet winter, "the stubborn season," persists. Like Teresias, Simeon is an old man "waiting for the wind that chills the dead land." Humbly, he recounts his devotion to the Law that God had laid down before the coming of "The Infant, the still unspeaking and unspoken Word." And, like Teresias who has "foresuffered all," he can envision "the time of cords and scourges and lamentation" that Christ and his followers must endure, as well as the ultimate self-destruction of God's chosen people.

But apart from the temporal sufferings destined for those who follow and those who reject Christ, he is aware of the painful journey "to the ultimate vision" that Christ's act of redemption will make possible. And he does not have the vitality to undertake it:

Not for me the martyrdom, the ecstasy of
 thought and prayer,
 Not for me the ultimate vision
 Grant me thy peace

I am tired with my own life and the lives of
 those after me.

I am dying in my own death and the deaths of
 those after me.

Let thy servant depart,
Having seen thy salvation.

In both of these poems, Eliot portrays man with dignity and sympathy. But one senses his need to go beyond such men to depict those who actively seek total commitment to God:

. . . Those who doubt, but who have the mind to conceive and the sensibility to feel, the disorder, the futility, and the meaninglessness of the mystery of life and suffering, and who can only find peace through a satisfaction of the whole being.⁷

This satisfaction can only be achieved through purgation, the theme of "Ash Wednesday."

The Influence of Dante and "Ash Wednesday"

Just as Eliot had recognized the validity of the "mythical method" in his attempt to "give significance to the immense panorama of futility . . . which is contemporary history," so he found in the allegorical method of Dante a means to assist him in expressing the ascent from this seeming futility to an awareness of the life of the spirit in

⁷ Eliot, "The Pensees of Pascal," The Selected Essays, op. cit., p. 368.

"Ash Wednesday." that his problem was not unique to his

era. While Dante had had the advantage of writing in an

Eliot's references to Dante did not begin with this
age of faith. In fact, he had been forced to deal with dif-
ficulties inherent in his subject matter
poem. The epigraph to "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock,"
which supplies the motif for the poem is taken from the

Inferno, Canto XXVII. Moreover, imagery describing both
states of damnation and beatitude can be traced to The
Divine Comedy in "The Waste Land" and "The Hollow Men."

But it was when he wrote his own account of the struggle
to achieve total spiritual commitment that Dante's handling
of a similar theme achieved particular significance as a
frame of reference.

To Eliot, a significant factor in Dante's ability to control

and Eliot, who still experienced the disillusionment with
contemporary society reflected in "The Waste Land," foresaw
difficulties in expressing the theme of purgation to his con-
temporaries:

Dante's is a visual imagination. It is
visual in the sense that he lived in an age
in which it is apparently easier to accept damna-
tion as poetic material than purgation or beati-
tude; less is involved that is strange to the
modern mind.⁸

⁸ Eliot, "Dante," The Selected Essays, op. cit.,
p. 214.

⁹ Ibid.

But he recognized that his problem was not unique to his era. While Dante had had the advantage of writing in an age of faith, he, too, had been forced to deal with difficulties inherent in his subject matter:

Indeed, the Purgatorio is . . . the most difficult of the three parts. It cannot be enjoyed by itself like the Inferno, nor can it be enjoyed merely as a sequel to the Inferno; it requires appreciation of the Paradiso as well; which means that its first reading is arduous and apparently unremunerative. Only when we have read straight through to the end of the Paradiso and re-read the Inferno, does the Purgatorio begin to yield its beauty. Damnation and even blessedness are more exciting than purgation.⁹

To Eliot, a significant factor in Dante's ability to control and illuminate these difficulties was his use of allegory. He saw Dante as a visionary who found in allegory a means of bringing "the vision back to earth":

Dante's is a visual imagination. It is visual in the sense that he lived in an age in which men still saw visions. It was a psychological habit, the trick of which we have forgotten. . . . We have nothing but dreams, and we have forgotten that seeing visions--a practice now relegated to the aberrant and uneducated--was once a more significant, interesting and disciplined kind of dreaming.

Essays, 22, cit., p. 248.

⁹ Ibid.

... meaning of the images, but the reverse process. [Allegory] was not a device to enable the uninspired to write verses, but really a mental habit, which when raised to the point of genius can make a great poet as well as a great mystic or saint. And it is the allegory which makes it possible for the reader who is not even a good Italian scholar to enjoy Dante. Speech varies, but our eyes are all the same.¹⁰

The same viewpoint holds true in undertaking an explication. Eliot made no claim to being a visionary, but his historical sense must have shown him how Dante's use of allegory "with particular effect toward lucidity of style"¹¹ resembled the two errors: either the reader will accuse the poet of deliberate complexity that he considered are essential technique of the modern poet:

The poet must become more and more comprehensive, more allusive, more indirect, in order to force, to dislocate if necessary, his meaning.¹²

An examination of the structure of the entire poem shows that it contains two interrelated themes. It depicts meaning," Eliot warns the reader against demanding too explicit an interpretation of each allegorical device:

¹¹ Eliot, "Dante," *The Selected Essays*, op. cit., p. 204.

¹² For a significant example of the latter error, compare ¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 204. the poem by three competent critics, George Williamson, F. Grover Smith and Helen Gardner, particularly ¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 201. ent interpretations they attach to Part IV, l. 21: "While jewelled unicorns draw by the gilded hearse" ¹² Eliot, "The Metaphysical Poets," *The Selected Essays*, op. cit., p. 248.

What we should consider is not so much the meaning of the images, but the reverse process, that which led a man having an idea to express it in images. . . . For to a competent poet, allegory means clear visual images. And clear visual images are given more intensity by having a meaning--we do not need to know what the meaning is, but in our awareness of the image, we must be aware that the meaning is there, too.¹³

The same viewpoint holds true in undertaking an explication of "Ash Wednesday." To insist that each allegorical image have a clearly discernable meaning will result in one of two errors: either the reader will accuse the poet of obscurity when Eliot is actually practicing deliberate ambiguity, or he will deny the existence of this ambiguity by insisting on imposing his own erroneous "clarification" on the imagery.¹⁴

An examination of the structure of the entire poem shows that it contains two interrelated themes. It depicts

13 Eliot, "Dante," The Selected Essays, op. cit., p. 204.

14 For a significant example of the latter error, compare the explications of the poem by three competent critics, George Williamson, F. Grover Smith and Helen Gardner, particularly the totally different interpretations they attach to Part IV, l. 21: "While jewelled unicorns draw by the gilded hearse."

the experience of a "powerful and regulated intellect facing . . . the demon of doubt which is inseparable from the spirit of belief." This aspect of purgation involves the intellect primarily, and the poet expresses it through explicit statement and metaphor. The second theme centers in the poet's "more significant, interesting and disciplined kind of dreaming," as he attempts to make the transition from "the modern world [which] seems capable only of the low dream"¹⁵ to the world of the "high dream"¹⁶ where spiritual commitment transcends even the most superior intellect. Here the poet uses allegory. Parts I and III deal with the first theme; Parts II and IV with the second. In Parts V and VI, the two are united as the poet recognizes that "peace through a satisfaction of the whole being" is realized in dedication to the Divine Will. But that peace is not an anaesthetic. The poet emerges from his experience deeply responsive to the beauties and temptations of the material world. His reaction is similar to that of Dante to

¹⁵ Eliot, "Dante," The Selected Essays, op. cit., p. 223.

¹⁶ Ibid.

Beatrice as described by Eliot in his commentary on the final cantos of the Purgatorio:

hopes to gratify worldly ambitions or sensual desires. More

We see the passionate conflict of the old feelings with the new; the effort and triumph of a new renunciation, greater than the renunciation at the grave because a renunciation of feelings that persist beyond the grave.¹⁷

The air which is now thoroughly small and dry. A more detailed examination of "Ash Wednesday" will show

the significance of nature imagery in unifying the two themes and expressing the poet's final "triumph of a new renunciation."

The title itself provides a significant image in "Ash

Wednesday." Within the Christian tradition, Lent is the penitential season when the Faithful "turn" from the world

in order to "return" to God. The ashes placed on their

foreheads on Ash Wednesday symbolize, first, the mortality

of the flesh and all human gratification, and, secondly,

the need for humility in seeking the salvation of one's

immortal soul. Intellectually, he finds himself tortuously

probing into the nature of spiritual fulfillment.

In Part I of "Ash Wednesday," the penitent has already

These matters that with myself I too such

discuss

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 224.

turned from the world. Aware of the inevitable effects of the passage of time on human capability, he no longer hopes to gratify worldly ambitions or sensual desire. More important, he realizes that the greatest limitation on human action lies in the very nature of life:

The air which is now thoroughly small and dry
Smaller and dryer than the will.

But even as he admits the inevitability of his turning from the world, he cannot find peace of mind. Like the Magus, he finds that this experience, though an awakening to truth, is deeply disturbing:

Hard and bitter agony for us, like Death,
our death

Yet when we came back, late, from the Hyacinth

Garden

Your arms full and your hair wet, I could not

We returned to our places, these Kingdoms

But no longer at ease here. . . .

Emotionally, he feels exiled from the sources of human gratification. Intellectually, he finds himself tortuously probing into the nature of spiritual fulfillment:

The air which is now thoroughly small and dry," an atmosphere reminiscent of the
These matters that with myself I too much
of the discuss

Too much explain.

Therefore, he renounces "the blessed face"--the poem's first ambiguous image which can represent with equal

validity either human or divine love--and the "voice" of reason which has governed his beliefs until now. Eliot clearly draws a distinction between the

At this point, it is interesting to make a comparison to the mood and imagery of the early poetry, particularly "The Waste Land." At the beginning of both poems, the speakers recall moments of idyllic human experience. Their memories are overshadowed by their present despair. The penitent's knowledge that "I cannot drink/ There where trees flower and springs flow" recalls the moment in the hyacinth garden:

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 . . .

The beauty of these isolated memories is rendered more poignant because both speakers know that emotional aridity dominates their lives. The penitent speaks of "air which is now thoroughly small and dry," an atmosphere reminiscent of the Waste Land:

his fate, the penitent turns to God. In his determination

to "The dead tree gives no shelter, the cricket
no relief,
And the dry stone no sound of water

Eliot points out that they voluntarily endured their suffer-
But at this point, still employing seemingly similar nature
imagery, Eliot clearly draws a distinction between the

theme of "The Waste Land" and that of "Ash Wednesday."

Both speakers are marked by dust, but the protagonist in
because they wish to suffer for purification.

"The Waste Land" receives the exhortation: "I will show
and keenly, being souls prepared for blessed-
you fear in a handful of dust," while the penitent is
In their suffering is hope, in the anasthesis
marked with Lenten ashes symbolizing the implicit assurance:

"I will show you hope in a handful of dust." If man can
The same parallel can be drawn between the protagonist in
accept the fact that "Dust thou art and unto dust thou shalt
"The Waste Land" and the penitent in "Ash Wednesday." The
return," he is free to deny the cravings of his mortality
fate of the protagonist is that of the Phoenician sailor in
and humble himself before the Author of his immortality.

"Death by water":

Because this humility is a voluntary act of a will that
finds the world "thoroughly small and dry," it denotes
Forgot the cry of yells, and the deep sea swell
strength, not weakness. The penitent is like the eagle
whose inherent power, though diminished by age, makes him
yearn for flight.

As he rose and fell
He passed the stages of his age and youth
Entering the whirlpool

Where the protagonist in "The Waste Land" turns to
the disreputable clairvoyante, Madame Sosostris, to know
18 Ibid., p. 217.
his fate, the penitent turns to God. In his determination

to "rejoice, having to construct something/ Upon which to rejoice," he resembles the souls Dante visited in Purgatory. Eliot points out that they voluntarily endured their sufferings in order to achieve beatitude:

In Purgatory the torment of flames is deliberately and consciously accepted by the penitent. . . . The souls in Purgatory suffer because they wish to suffer for purgation. And observe that they suffer more actively and keenly, being souls prepared for blessedness, than Virgil suffers in eternal limbo. In their suffering is hope, in the anaesthesia of Virgil is hopelessness.¹⁸

The same parallel can be drawn between the protagonist in "The Waste Land" and the penitent in "Ash Wednesday." The fate of the protagonist is that of the Phoenician sailor in "Death by Water":

Phlebas the Phoenician, a fortnight dead,
Forgot the cry of gulls, and the deep sea swell
And the profit and the loss.

.....

In Part II of "Ash Wednesday" As he rose and fell
He passed the stages of his age and youth
Entering the whirlpool.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 217.

In this context, the "turning" image suggest the drowning of human despair in oblivion. But in "Ash Wednesday," the penitent wills himself to deny his human craving to "turn" once again to a world that recognizes the demands of the flesh and the limited competence of the intellect as the highest achievement of man:

Because I do not hope to turn again
 Let these words answer
 For what is done, not to be done again
 May the judgment not be too heavy upon us

Teach us to care and not to care
 Teach us to sit still

The section ends with an invocation of the Virgin Mary, "Pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death." Thus, the penitent also addresses himself to a deity. The veneration of the Virgin as intercessor becomes implicit in the penitent's meditation and provides the transition to Part II.

In Part II of "Ash Wednesday," the penitent, having willed himself to "sit still," achieves the self-abnegation he has sought. Eliot depicts the experience through allegory closely related to Dante's vision of the Earthly Paradise

at the conclusion of the Purgatorio. At this point in his journey, Dante leaves Virgil, the voice of Reason, who has reached the limits of human apprehension of the Divine Will. Here, too, the poem reaches its emotional climax when Dante is reunited with Beatrice, the "blessed face" of idealized human love. But Beatrice quickly rebukes him for his joy. She points out that complete devotion to human love, no matter how beautiful, is unworthy in the presence of Divine Love. Dante's tears of repentance signify the "triumph of a new renunciation." His purgation complete, he may now revere Beatrice as Divine Love Incarnate and follow her to Paradise.¹⁹

At the beginning of Part II of "Ash Wednesday," the penitent also addresses himself to a Lady. Like the souls in the Purgatorio, he has been purged of his vices. Three white leopards, destructive agents of purification, have devoured his legs (human vitality), heart (human emotion), liver (human lusts) and brain (human intellect). All that remain are the dry, bleached bones under the juniper tree.

²⁰ Kings 19:4.

²¹ Genesis 3:9.

²² Ezekiel 37:1 (Authorized King James Version).

¹⁹ Purgatorio, XXXI.

The vision stands by itself as an image of the enforced "turning" from human gratification in Part I, but it is enriched by its relationship to Biblical narrative. The tree recalls two moments when human despair was the prelude to a manifestation of Divine Will. The most direct reference is to Elijah who, having been threatened by Jezebel, went into the desert where he sat under a juniper tree and prayed for death.²⁰ It is also associated with the despair of Adam and Eve as they waited "in the cool of the day"²¹ for God's judgment after eating from the Tree of Knowledge.

The bones themselves recall the vision of Ezekiel in the desert:

The hand of the Lord was upon me, and carried me out in the spirit of the Lord, and set me down in the midst of the valley which was full of bones.²²

²⁰ Kings 19:4.

²¹ Genesis 3:8.

²² Ezekiel 37:1 (Authorized King James Version).

God tells Ezekiel that these bones "are the whole House of Israel. Behold, they say, our bones are dried and our hope is lost, we are cut off from our parts." Then God instructs Ezekiel to "prophesy to the wind" that the bones shall rise up and that Israel shall be restored.

Like Ezekiel, the penitent tells how "God said/ Shall these bones live." But in this instance, the bones reply that it is because of the goodness and devotion of the Lady that they "shine with brightness" and that what remains of the penitent after the destruction of his human desire will be "recovered." As in ancient tradition, the penitent makes an offering in thanksgiving. But his earlier disillusionment with the human condition intrudes into the beauty of the allegory. All that he can offer is what he has known in life as lived in the Waste Land:

The single Bone I who am here
dissembled Is now the Garden
Proffer my deeds to oblivion, and my love
To the posterity of the desert and the fruit
of the gourd.

Moreover, he realizes that unlike the word of Ezekiel, the prophesy he reveals will go unheard in the world, "Prophesy

to the wind, to the wind only for only the wind will listen." Knowing this, he prays once again to forget all that has comprised his human nature before the bones were purified, and his prayer associates their purity with that of the Lady, the passive instrument of that purification:

The Lady is withdrawn

In a white gown to contemplation, in a white gown
Let the whiteness of bones atone to forgetfulness
There is no life in them. As I am forgotten and
would be forgotten, so I would forget
Thus devoted, concentrated in purpose.

The litany with which he invokes the Lady embraces the paradox of her nature that is at once limited by her humanity and rendered sublime by her spirituality. It also evokes the image of Mary, who not only as the Immaculate Conception but as a simple maiden, shared in the Mystery of the Incarnation:

The single Rose
Is now the Garden
Where all loves end.

Speech without word and
Word of no speech
Grace to the Mother
For the Garden
Where all love ends.

The exquisite symbolism of the litany rests largely on nature imagery that has become a traditional part of Christian veneration of the Virgin. In this context, however, familiar images are deliberately ambiguous in order to emphasize the paradox of human nature which possesses both the limitations of mortality and the potentialities of immortality. This paradox creates a transition to Part III which returns to an intellectual consideration of purgation. As the bones complete their litany to the Lady, they recall that their heritage is not the Promised Land of Israel but the Waste Land--where "neither division nor unity matters" and one finds peace in oblivion:

We are glad to be scattered. We did little
good to each other,
Under a tree in the cool of the day, with
the blessing of sand
Forgetting themselves and each other, united
In the quiet of the desert.

Unlike Dante, the penitent cannot purge himself of all memory of human sin in the waters of Lethe. Nonetheless, as the metaphor of the stairs in Part III suggests, his act of self-abnegation has brought him to the "first turning of

the second stair." For the time being, he is able to put aside "these matters that with myself I too much discuss/ Too much explain." But in temporarily divesting himself of his skepticism regarding immortality, he is left with a terrible awareness of mortality.

In cruelly beautiful contrast to the images of physical deterioration on "the second turning of the second stair" is the trial of sensuality that he must endure on the third stair. His vision of the delights of the senses is distorted by the "slotted window bellied like the fig's fruit" through which he receives a series of exquisite, isolated sense impressions. Pan, the "figure with the flute," personifies this romanticized distortion. His back is turned so that the penitent perceives only his vitality, not his satyric aspects. Nonetheless, the penitent finds strength "beyond hope and despair" to cast off this temptation. He recognizes that this strength lies not within himself but within God:

Lord, I am not worthy

but speak the word only.

23 *Purgatorio*, XXVI, 147.

It is this underlying knowledge that unifies the entire poem, constantly reminding the reader that purgation is the voluntarily sought objective of the penitent. Implicit in this awareness is the fact that ultimately he will surmount his despair and, like the souls in the Purgatorio, achieve beatitude.

The ambiguity which characterizes Part IV of "Ash Wednesday" first appears in the construction of the opening sentence. The first word "who" leads the reader to expect a question--an enquiry into the identity of the person who is "going in white and blue, in Mary's colour." Actually it introduces a series of elaborate relative clauses modifying the subject of the brief main clause, "Sovegna vos,"²³ remember us. The identity of the person the penitent invokes is never explicitly stated. But the words of invocation recall the litany in Part I. She is the lady of paradoxes who, as she walks "talking of trivial things" in the simple innocence of a maiden, bears the burden of the knowledge of "eternal dolour."

the lady is never explicitly named. Instead, the penitent's

²³ Purgatorio, XXVI, 147.

²⁴ Paradiso, III, 86.

Eliot further associates her with the Virgin by placing her in a garden and using familiar nature imagery to symbolize her power. The blue and white of her garments mingling with "the various ranks of varied green" recalls the earlier description of Pan, "the broadbacked figured dressed in blue and green," who, according to pagan tradition, has the power to "enchant the Maytime with an antique flute." But she, not Pan, restores fertility to the land:ge. They must

"redeem the time" devoted to limited human emotion by

Who then made strong the fountains and made
their fresh the springs that emotion absorbed in Divine
Made cool thy dry rock and made firm the sand.

The first association of water with the Lady's powers of

intercession is a prelude to a more direct reference in

Part VI. In both instances, the imagery recalls not only Mary-like figure, "the silent sister veiled in white and blue," in the conclusion of the section. While ambiguous, generation, but the allegory of the Paradiso, in which the Divine Will is characterized as "the sea to which all figures in the poem. The penitent, like Dante, finds his moves."²⁴

way to God through an intercessor. Within Christian tradition, But as clearly as the imagery relates to the Virgin, the lady is never explicitly named. Instead, the penitent's

²⁴ Paradiso, III, 86.

revery carries him back in time beyond the recollection of sensual pleasures ("bearing away the fiddles and the flutes") to the remembrance of ideal human love. He sees again the Lady in Part I, "wearing/ White light folded, sheathed about her, folded." Again, the imagery recalls Dante's experiences in the Purgatorio. Both the penitent and Dante are reunited with the objects of their human love, only to discover that that love must undergo a change. They must "redeem the time" devoted to limited human emotion by their willingness to see that emotion absorbed in Divine love. They must "Redeem/ The unread vision in the higher dream."

Just as in Part I, the Lady in white merges with the Mary-like figure, "the silent sister veiled in white and blue," in the conclusion of the section. While ambiguous, this merger actually clarifies the function of the female figure in the poem. The penitent, like Dante, finds his way to God through an intercessor. Within Christian tradition, the Virgin is the strongest intercessor between man and Christ. In the Purgatorio, Beatrice is that intercessor. She stands veiled behind the griffon (the symbol of Christ).

When she removes her veil, Dante perceives through her eyes the two-fold nature of Christ:

Like sunlight in the glass the twofold creature
Shone from the deep reflection of her eyes,
Now in the one, now in the other nature.²⁵

In her smile is the splendor of Divine love, "O splendor of the eternal living light."²⁶

"In "Ash Wednesday," the penitent, whose reverie takes place within the world, is not granted so sublime a vision. His contact with his Lady is limited by mortality and earthly sorrow, symbolized by the yews. He sees her standing not behind Christ, but behind the "garden god" of human sensuality, whom he now realizes is powerless. She is still veiled and speechless, but she does tender him a sign, and this gesture of sympathy is enough to revitalize his spirit. He sees in it a "token" of the "word, still unheard, unspoken" that Christ will give to man. Even though he knows that man has rejected the word (Prophecy to the wind, to the wind

²⁵ Purgatorio, XXXI, 120-23.

²⁶ Ibid., p. 139.

only for only/ The wind will listen"), he longs for the time when "the wind will shake a thousand whispers from the yew." Until then, the penitent must endure his exile, leaving unspoken, too, his plea to his intercessor: "Show us the fruit of thy womb, Jesus." who avoid the face
 The right time, the right place are not here
 No time to rejoice for those who walk among the
 noise and deny the voice.

In Part V, the penitent is once again beset with despair, as he views the world into which the Word has come. Again, the "turning" image conveys the chaos of the Waste Land:

Against the Word, the unstilled world still
 whirled There are those who make worldly ambition
 About the center of the silent Word.
 their god, those too ignorant or too fearful to pray, those

"Unstilled" has a double connotation: it depicts the endless, pointless "turning" of humanity ("I see crowds of the people walking round in a ring") and the inability of man to "sit still" and listen to the Word: is parallel response

in P There is not enough silence as the modern sinner to
 Not on the sea or on the islands, not
 his On the mainland, in the desert or the rain land. made

a spiritual "desert in the garden" by his sin. But like
 As in "The Journey of the Magi," the explicit nature imagery then also, he can rediscover "the garden in the desert of reaffirms the fact that the Mystery of the Incarnation manifested itself as a physical reality that man could not deny.

Nonetheless, "the light shone in darkness and the darkness knew it not." Nor, says the penitent, does man acknowledge it today:

The right time, the right place are not here
 No place of grace for those who avoid the face
 No time to rejoice for those who walk among the
 noise and deny the voice.

The penitent, who has sought the intercession of the Lady since the beginning of his purgation, now questions whether she will extend her mercy to those who deny Christ in various ways: "Who walk in darkness, who chose thee and oppose thee" There are those who make worldly ambition their god, those too ignorant or too fearful to pray, those who have sinned and who pay lip service to God, while denying him in their hearts. In Part II, Eliot contrasted the garden as a symbol of spiritual regeneration to the Garden of Eden where Adam and Eve sinned. This parallel reappears in Part V as the penitent compares the modern sinner to his first parents. Like Adam and Eve, modern man has made a spiritual "desert in the garden" by his sin. But like them also, he can rediscover "the garden in the desert of Divine Will. But the long and painful journey to that drought" by "spitting from the mouth the withered apple "ultimate vision" has yielded an unforeseen by-product.

seed" of the knowledge of evil. He cannot accomplish this alone, however. Only the sufferings of Christ, "the Word within the world and for the world," can redeem him. And the voice of the Redeemer, now devoid of the reproach heard earlier in the section, affirms the penitent's faith as He acknowledges: "Oh my people."

The fact that the penitent's act of purgation has brought him full-circle in his attempt to turn from the world in order to turn to God is signified by the difference in the opening lines of Part I and Part VI. In Part I, the penitent says: "Because I do not hope to turn again. . . ." His painful admission that his turning from the world is not simply a voluntary denial but a necessity caused by the incapacity of age leads him to modify the statement further:

Because I cannot hope to turn again

Consequently I rejoice, having to construct something

Upon which to rejoice

What he constructs, of course, is total commitment to himself to deny the world. The prayer, "Teach us to care Divine Will. But the long and painful journey to that and not to care," achieves full significance within the "ultimate vision" has yielded an unforeseen by-product.

In Part I, the penitent could turn neither to God nor to the world. Now, by finding God, he has also found the world. He no longer views the delights of the senses with the romanticized distortion of Part III; his perception is sharp and intense. Through a series of vivid nature images, Eliot portrays all the longing of a heart newly awakened to the beauties of life:

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

He no longer passively endures life as "the dream-crossed twilight between birth and death." Now life endows him with vitality. It is the time of tension "between dying [to the cravings of mortality] and birth" [the enjoyment of immortality]. Fully aware of both the life of the flesh and the life of the spirit, he does not turn to God because he cannot hope to turn again to the world. Rather, although he chooses to turn to God, he still needs strength beyond himself to deny the world. The prayer, "Teach us to care and not to care," achieves full significance within the

context of his new awareness. Once again he invokes his intercessor, the Lady who encompasses human and Divine love, to teach him how to accept "Our Peace in His Will," even while he remains exiled "among these rocks." How far she has led him toward the perception of that Will becomes evident, because for the first time he has the courage and the faith to offer his prayer directly to the Source of spiritual regeneration, whose act of Redemption makes the purgation of "Ash Wednesday" the prelude to beatitude:

Spirit of the river, spirit of the sea
Suffer me not to be separated.

And let my cry come unto Thee.

While it is not the purpose of this study to evaluate Eliot's poems, an explication of "Ash Wednesday" would not be complete without pointing out its difficulties. To justify its ambiguities completely by attributing them to his use of allegory is as mistaken as to demand a precise interpretation of that allegory. Once again, his remarks on Dante illuminate his own poem. As noted before, Eliot repeatedly comments on the difficulties of the Purgatorio and attributes them largely to the fact that it is the transitional canto:

The Purgatorio is the most difficult because it is the transitional canto; the Inferno is one thing, comparatively easy; the Paradiso is another thing, more difficult as a whole than the Purgatorio, because more of a whole.²⁷

A broad and admittedly simplified parallel can be drawn between Dante's use of the soul's journey to God as a theme and Eliot's similar intention. If "The Waste Land" is comparable to the Inferno, and "Four Quartets" in its complex cohesiveness resembles the Paradiso, then "Ash Wednesday," like the Purgatorio, is transitional poetry, with one significant difference. While Eliot calls upon much of the imagery of the cantos describing the Earthly Paradise, he does not carry his penitent as far toward perception of Divine Will as does Dante. One recalls that Dante actually perceives the twofold nature of Christ, as well as the nature of Divine love, through the eyes and smile of Beatrice, whereas the penitent's intercessor remains veiled. More important, Dante bathes in the waters of Lethe and Eunoe. The one cleanses him of all memory of sin and error. The other strengthens his virtues:

²⁷ Eliot, "Dante," The Selected Essays, op. cit., p. 214.

I came back from these holiest waters new,
 remade,
 reborn, like a sun-wakened tree
 that spreads new foliage to the Spring dew
 in sweetest
 freshness, healed of Winter's scars
 perfect, pure, and ready for the Stars.²⁸

In "Ash Wednesday," however, the penitent remains "among
 these rocks," and one recalls his experience on the stairs
 in Part III:

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

At the second turning of the second stair
 I left them twisting, turning below;

The penitent forces himself to move beyond the struggle
 between hope and despair, but he has not overcome it, and
 this ambivalence accounts for much ambiguity in the poem.

As noted earlier, "Ash Wednesday" was not written as a
 whole. While it is unified by imagery and a deliberate

edition; New York: E. P. Dutton and Company, 1959),
 p. 11. ²⁸ Purgatorio, XXXIII, 142-46.

repetition of language in Parts I and VI, it lacks the sense of progression found in "The Waste Land." Rather, as Helen Gardner has pointed out, it seems to be a series of meditations on the same spiritual dilemma:

There is less a progress of thought than a circling round, and the centre around which this meditative poetry revolves is not an idea or an experience so much as a state of mind which is aspired to. The absence of clear structure is the formal equivalent of this peculiarity in the central subject.²⁹

The "state of mind aspired to" is the awareness of "Our Peace in his Will," but the penitent is never able to rise completely above his human limitations, both sensual and intellectual, to achieve this peace. Nonetheless, the poem ends with his awareness that such complete spiritual commitment can be achieved and that ultimately he may attain it. In theological terms, one might say that he is completely aware of the implications of the Incarnation but has not experienced the joy of the Redemption.

²⁹ Helen Gardner, The Art of T. S. Eliot (Everyman edition; New York: E. P. Dutton and Company, 1959), p. 114.

These ambivalent attitudes regarding hope and despair, sensuality and spirituality are particularly revealed in the delineation of the Lady. Clearly, the penitent feels the need of an intercessor between himself and Divine Will, but the identity of that intercessor is never clear.³⁰ Does she personify Divine Love Incarnate or ideal human love? Is she the penitent's "sister"--another child of Eve, or "mother"--the Immaculate Conception? If she does represent, at least in part, ideal human love, does Eliot reject the position of St. John of the Cross that the soul must cast off all earthly attachments before being united with God, or does he see in her the personification of the dictum to "sympathize" in "What the Thunder Said"?

Because none of these ambiguities are completely

resolved, "Ash Wednesday" is Eliot's most obscure poem.

Nonetheless, while it was stated earlier that the use of

it to "the world of the high dream." Particularly important

30 It is interesting to note the influence of Eliot's conversion here. Prior to this poem, Eliot's female characters were either empty or destructive. Henceforth, however, he embodies the virtues of the Virgin in his women--even in seemingly "non-Christian poems" like "Marina." Only in the plays do female characters manifest negative qualities; but that is another genre.

First, he describes her as ideal human love in terms

allegory cannot totally justify the ambiguities, it does illuminate them. Eliot refers to vision as "a more significant, interesting and disciplined kind of dreaming," and that is how "Ash Wednesday" affects the reader. As in a dream, the reader, like the penitent, is a spectator to whom every phase of the vision is clear, inevitable and true. Its meaning is felt rather than deduced.

Nature imagery plays an important part in achieving this effect. In the first place, Eliot's success in depicting man's sensual yearnings lies in the exquisite clarity of his nature imagery:

Who then made strong the fountains and made
And the lost heart stiffens and rejoices
In the lost lilac and the lost sea voices
And the weak spirit quickens to rebel
For the bent golden-rod and the lost sea smell

Having delineated the beauties of the natural world so clearly, he takes essentially the same imagery and transfers it to "the world of the high dream." Particularly important is the imagery surrounding the Lady. In the litany, she is addressed as the rose, a traditional symbol for the Virgin.

But this, too, reflects the ambivalence of the penitent.

31 *Paradiso*, XXIII, 73-74.

First, he describes her as ideal human love in terms

reminiscent of medieval tales of courtly love:

intercession. Eliot links the symbolism of spiritual

sterility in the The symbolism surround-
 ing spiritual fulfillment in "Four Quartets." However, in

The single Rose
 Is now the Garden
 Where all loves end

Then he directly attributes to her the role of the Virgin³¹
 in the Incarnation. His invocation, "Grace to the Mother/
 For the Garden Where all Love Ends," recalls Dante's de-
 scription of the Virgin in the Paradiso: "Here is the Rose
 in which the Word Divine/ Became Incarnate."³¹ It is in
 this role that she possesses the power to control the flow
 of water and dispel aridity:

Who then made strong the fountains and made
 fresh the spring
 Who made cool the dry rock and made firm the
 sand

The Lady controls the springs and fountains because of her
 unique relationship to "the spirit of the river, spirit of
 the sea." Her role in the Mystery of the Incarnation was
 essential to the realization of the Redemption. As such,
 she is truly a link between the penitent and God.

31 Paradiso, XXIII, 73-74.

By utilizing nature imagery to describe her powers of intercession, Eliot links the symbolism of spiritual sterility in the earlier poems to the symbolism surrounding spiritual fulfillment in "Four Quartets." However, in "Four Quartets," Eliot's technique differs from the earlier poetry by removing the images from the pattern of myth and allegory in which they had been couched. This utilization of simple, direct, nature imagery reflects the direct relationship between man and his Redeemer which Eliot describes briefly in the conclusion to "Ash Wednesday" and explores fully in "Four Quartets."

such, it moves beyond the level of spiritual insight expressed in the earlier poetry and incorporates all elements of the poet's painful struggle to achieve that insight.

Prior to "Four Quartets," Eliot, like the penitent in "Ash Wednesday," had sought a positive commitment to the life of the spirit through a negation of human life. "The Waste Land" is predominantly a condemnation of modern society, even though it concludes with the positive directives: "Give, Sympathize, Control." "The Hollow Men" is an extension of that condemnation, for while it moves toward a more positive

CHAPTER V

ELIOT'S REALIZATION OF HIS ARTISTIC INTENTION: "FOUR QUARTETS"

The Theme and Symbolism of "Four Quartets"

The recurrence of nature imagery as an objective correlative for the presence or absence of spiritual vitality in the poetry prior to "Four Quartets" reflects the progression of T. S. Eliot's attempt to "transmute his personal and private agony into something . . . universal" "Four Quartets" is the culmination of this effort. As such, it moves beyond the level of spiritual insight expressed in the earlier poetry and incorporates all elements of the poet's painful struggle to achieve that insight.

Prior to "Four Quartets," Eliot, like the penitent in "Ash Wednesday," had sought a positive commitment to the life of the spirit through a negation of human life. "The Waste Land" is predominantly a condemnation of modern society, even though it concludes with the positive directives: "Give, Sympathize, Control." "The Hollow Men" is an extension of that condemnation, for while it moves toward a more positive

view of life by portraying the hollow men huddling together in a pathetic act of "sympathy," Eliot manifests no sympathy for their frailty. The Ariel poems further reflect this lack of sympathy in the delineation of the Magus and Simeon, whose reaction to the knowledge of the Incarnation is to seek death as a release from a world that does not perceive its significance. Finally, the penitent in "Ash Wednesday" feels compelled not only to turn from the ugliness of human existence but from its beauty as well, even though heightened response to that beauty is a by-product of his spiritual awakening.

Each of these poems indicates a growing insight into the nature of the life of the spirit and a deeper commitment to it, but it is only in "Four Quartets" that the poet reconciles humanity and spirituality through a full awareness of the significance of the Incarnation:

Love is the unfamiliar Name
 Behind the hands that wove
 The intolerable shirt of flame
 Which human power cannot remove

Eliot now perceives that the Incarnation is a divine act of love in which God assumed the nature of man for a two-

fold purpose: to redeem him in a manner that fully
 acknowledged the potentiality for evil inherent in human
 nature, and at the same time to provide him with a sublime
 Model of human goodness in the God-man Jesus Christ.
 Because Eliot has achieved this insight into the nature of
 God's relationship to man, he views human experience from a
 different perspective:

It seems as one becomes older
 That the past has another pattern
 And ceases to be a mere sequence--or even
 development

We had the experience, but missed the
 meaning
 And approach to the meaning restores the
 experience
 In a different form . . .

Eliot realizes that he "missed the meaning" in the earlier
 poetry by attempting to deny the world. In "Four Quartets,"
 he acknowledges the limitations of human existence which
 create fear and disorder in the universe because he is
 aware that a supreme ordering principle exists in the Mind
 of God.

Eliot sees time as the chief symbol of this relation-
 ship between man and his Redeemer. God exists out of time;

The theme, then, of "Four Quartets" is the poet's reconciliation to the limitations of human nature because he is spiritually as well as intellectually committed to the belief that man and his universe are the product and the object of Divine Wisdom and Love. Two quotations paraphrased from Heraclitus at the beginning of the poem explicitly state the implications of this philosophy. If the nature of man is a product of Divine Love, free will is a major manifestation of that love. Eliot believes that disorder in the universe results when man exercises his will to reject the Will of God. In the words of Heraclitus, "Although the Word is common to all, most men live as if they each had a private wisdom of his own." This viewpoint is essentially the same as that which dominates the earlier poetry. But Eliot moves beyond this negative appraisal of human action when he quotes Heraclitus further: "The way up and the way down are the same." Eliot places this statement within the context of his own philosophy to posit that, despite its frailty, the natural inclination of human will is to aspire to union with God.

Eliot sees time as the chief symbol of this relationship between man and his Redeemer. God exists out of time;

man is imprisoned in it. But in choosing to redeem the world by an event "in time," God has provided a "point of intersection of the timeless and time." God has submitted His eternal Nature to the sufferings and limitations of mortality in order that man's mortality may be a prelude to eternity. To apprehend the significance of this eternal Mystery while living in the world is, for Eliot, the ultimate act of faith:

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. . . .

There 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

Since Eliot has chosen time as the major symbol of God's relationship to human existence, each section of "Four Quartets" focuses on a different conception of time:

time perceived in memory, time as cycle, time as flux and time as a key to the meaning of history. Underlying these concepts of time which are the product of human intelligence is the concept of eternity or timelessness which exists in the Mind of God. Through nature imagery related to setting, Eliot conveys the interrelationship between the limited view of time which is man's and the comprehensive vision of eternity which is God's.

In each section of the poem, Eliot visits a specific geographic location--a "point in time." In "Burnt Norton," he stands in the deserted formal garden of an eighteenth-century English country house. In "East Coker," he visits the ruined estate of Thomas Elyot, his Renaissance ancestor. In "Little Gidding," the poet takes fire as his central image and, as in "The Waste Land," uses it to symbolize both spiritual destruction and purification. The poet's title from the rocky peninsula near Eliot's boyhood home in Massachusetts, not far from where Andrew Elyot settled in the seventeenth century. In "Little Gidding," the poet returns to England on a pilgrimage to the ruins of a community of seventeenth-century contemplatives. The poet's reflections upon his earlier experiences in these "points in time" result from his present state of mind which

encompasses all previous experience:

Time present and time past
Are both perhaps present in time future
And time future contained in time past

Each poem within the poem sequence is a reflection on an essential characteristics of human nature. It is symbolized by one of the four elements which comprise the universe, according to the philosopher, Empedocles. "Burnt Norton" is a poem about air, the symbol of the faculty of abstraction. "East Coker" is about earth, the symbol of human mortality. "The Dry Salvages" concerns water, as always for Eliot a symbol of both regeneration and oblivion. In "Little Gidding," the poet takes fire as his central image and, as in "The Waste Land," uses it to symbolize both spiritual destruction and purification. The poet amplifies his delineation of human nature by juxtaposing acts of the will which are directed toward union with God and those which reveal ignorance or rejection of Divine Will. The disorder engendered by such rejection is symbolized by unnatural phenomena within the orderly course of the four seasons. A consideration of each poem will indicate precisely how Eliot conveys this relationship of

man to his natural environment and both to God.

"Burnt Norton"

Part of the simplicity of structure which distinguishes "Four Quartets" from the earlier poems is Eliot's forthright use of explicit philosophical statement within the context of poetic form. "Burnt Norton," the first poem in the sequence, begins with such a statement dealing with the nature of time. The poet discards the concept of time as sequence to state his conviction that time past and time future are contained in the only reality--time present. Hence, there is no point in reflecting on what might have been:

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

Nonetheless, the poet indulges himself by returning to that moment in time when man's free will made the choice between innocence and sinful knowledge, as he travels:

He stays Down the passage which we did not take
Toward the door we never opened
Into the rose-garden.

There he moves "into our first world"--the world of natural innocence. Yet he remains a part of the real world, the deserted autumn garden of Burnt Norton estate. The garden is uninhabited except by the ghosts of what might have been, yet the existence of their potentiality, "an abstraction remaining a perpetual possibility," creates tension in the air, reflected in the forces of nature:

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

The poet views these ghosts with a double vision. He sees them in the context of their own world of "what might have been" and in the real world of the deserted garden with its artificial pattern of order:

And so we moved and they, in a formal pattern,
Along the empty alley, into the box circle,
To look down into the drained pool
Dry the pool, dry concrete, brown edged.

He stands with them before the reality of the drained pool,
 a familiar symbol for the spiritual aridity of modern society,
 but the contemplation of their innocence engenders his first
 perception of the human potentiality for spiritual fulfill-
 ment:

And the pool was filled with water
 Out of sunlight
 And the lotus rose, quietly, quietly
 The surface glittered out of the heart of light
 But "then a cloud passed," (reminiscent of the Shadow which
 falls between the idea and the reality in "The Hollow Men")
 and the pool was empty. The poet is bidden to leave by the
 bird that first led him to the garden, for human nature is
 limited in its capacity to perceive truth:

Go, go, go, said the bird; human kind
 Cannot bear very much reality.
 Nonetheless, the moment has existed, and it reaffirms the
 poet's conviction that "what might have been and what has
 been point to one end, which is always present."
 The vision of the rose garden immediately calls to
 mind the Garden of Eden where human nature existed in

natural innocence for the first and only time. But the presence of the children suggests that Eliot is not only describing the particular "moment in time" when man first disordered his world, but the moment when each individual discards the innocence of childhood. The insight he has gained in the garden is that "what might have been" (the existence of natural goodness) and "what has been" (the existence of sin) "point to one end, which is always present"--the only moment in which all men can move toward "the heart of light," an awareness of God.

The theme of reconciliation of opposing forces by Divine Will is extended to include the entire natural universe in the second movement of the poem. In the brief, tightly compressed opening lyric, the common vegetable and the precious mineral, the vitality of the blood and the morbidity of scar tissue, the complex structure of the solar system and of one leaf are all part of a pattern which is "reconciled among the stars." When Eliot returns to explicit statement to define this process, he finds that he can do so only in terms of paradox. In a "turning world," Divine Will is the "still point." It is the source

of movement, yet It is unmoving. If man perceives It at all, he does so during a brief moment in time, yet It exists out of time. For the first time, Eliot gives name to the means by which human intellect reconciles these seeming contradictions: it is grace which allows man to perceive his existence as, "both a new world and the old made explicit, understood. . . ." Yet, once again, as in the garden in Part I, he moves away from the perception of Divine Will. This, too, is part of the paradox: the limitations of human nature render the experience too intense to be sustained:

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.

Here is a place of disaffection
Time before and time after

Yet it is only by virtue of one's humanity that the perception of God is rendered at all possible.

Investing form with lucid stillness
With slow rotation suggesting permanence
Nor darkness to purify the soul

Time past and time future

Allow but a little consciousness

To be conscious is not to be in time

If grace inevitably directs man toward "the still point of

the turning world," the absence of grace renders man and

his environment "pointless," aimlessly buffeted by "the

In the first two movements of "Burnt Norton," Eliot acknowledges that man is limited in his capacity to perceive the Will of God, yet is given the grace to achieve partial awareness of it. In contrast, the third movement begins with a delineation of the spirit devoid of grace. In place of images suggesting the order in nature, Eliot describes the city in twilight in language reminiscent of "The Waste Land" and the "Preludes." In this half light, the human spirit is neither illuminated by the intuitive perception of natural innocence described in the first movement, nor divested of all impurities by journeying through the "dark night of the soul," as the penitent sought to do in "Ash Wednesday":

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 translucent beauty
 With slow rotation suggesting permanence
 Nor darkness to purify the soul
 Emptying the sensual with deprivation
 Cleansing affection from the temporal

If grace inevitably directs man toward "the still point of the turning world," the absence of grace renders man and his environment "pointless," aimlessly buffeted by "the

cold wind that blows before and after time." Yet even this state of mind offers a path to grace if it is the prelude to pursuit of "the way down" described in the epigraph:

Descend lower, descend only
Into the world of perpetual solitude.

.....

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

The tone of Part III of "Burnt Norton" is strongly reminiscent of both "The Waste Land" and "Ash Wednesday."

In Part IV, Eliot comes to terms with an aspect of human existence with which he struggled in both earlier poems: the possibility that human mortality is not a prelude to immortality. In "The Waste Land," the protagonist as Phoenician Sailor must accept the possibility that his ultimate fate is oblivion through drowning; in "Ash Wednesday," the penitent attempts to leave "the demon who wears the deceitful face of hope and of despair twisting and turning below" only to come face to face with the horror of human decay;

There were no more faces and the stair was dark,
 Damp, jagged like an old man's mouth, drivelling,
 beyond repair.

In Part IV of "Burnt Norton," the poet's reflections on a
 voluntary rejection of human existence in order to unite
 with God lead him once more to the fearful possibility that
 such rejection leads to oblivion. Is the completion of
 human life the beginning of an eternity with God or is it
 merely a means to renew vegetable life?

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?

Having used traditional nature imagery symbolizing death
 to convey this basic human fear, Eliot uses another nature
 image to dispel it: the light of grace is the evidence of
 the eternal link between the spirit of man and his Creator:

After the Kingfisher's wing
 Has turned light to light, and is silent, the
 light is still
 At the still point of the turning world.

Repeatedly throughout "Burnt Norton," Eliot uses the
 word "still" to convey the nature of Divine Will. He gives

it a double connotation. It is "still," unmoving, unchanged, constant; It still is--It is eternal. While human nature is forever subject to change, Divine Will is constant; this is the nature of the relationship of the moving to the Unmoved, the pattern by which Divine Will governs human destiny.

In Part V, Eliot uses the relationship of the artist to the work of art to symbolize the nature of this spiritual relationship. By themselves, words have no meaning, and, therefore, no lasting value; nor is it an easy task to order them into a coherent statement. Only when they submit to the pattern imposed by the artist do they achieve the unique immortality that characterizes a work of art. So, too, human will in defiance of Divine Will lacks direction; it no longer has a valid existence. It is:

The crying shadow in the funeral dance
The loud lament of the disconsolate chimera

Eliot concludes "Burnt Norton" by restating the seeming paradox of man's relationship to his Creator. Man is perpetually "moving," subject to change which he perceives in terms of the passage of time. God is "unmoving," existing out of time. Divine Will ordains that only through

"moving" toward God can man be united with Him:

material possessions and social institutions are subject

Love is in itself unmoving
to decay. Only the cause and end of movement.

as the ruins of the estate, are proof that:

This is the ordering principle of the universe, glimpsed
briefly, "sudden in a shaft of sunlight" in the course of
human life which Eliot still views as "the waste sad time
before and after."

Ultimately, both man's body and the material fruits of his

"East Coker" to the earth which is already "flesh, fur and

In "Burnt Norton," Eliot uses air as the objective
correlative for time as an intellectual abstraction en-
compassing what is, what has been and what might have been.

Just as in "Burnt Norton," the poet reflects on the
In "East Coker," the poet is concerned with earth--the
past from the vantage point of the present. But that double
temporal cycle of birth, maturity, death and decay which
vision is not illuminated by intuitive natural innocence as
characterizes both human life and institutions. The poem
it was in the rose garden. At East Coker, there is no
is located in the environs of East Coker, the estate of
"vibrant air," no "sudden shaft of sunlight." The host is
Thomas Elyot, the poet's sixteenth-century ancestor who
"electric," the light "sultry," the silence "empty," as
wrote a humanistic treatise on ethics and literature
both the man and his physical surroundings wait in the "dark
entitled "The Gouvernor." "East Coker" begins with the
in the afternoon" for night to fall. The bird which symbo-
ironic inversion of the motto on Mary Stuart's chair of
lizes this reflection on the inevitability of death is
state to read "In my beginning is my end." Implicit in
neither the bright garden bird nor the kingfisher, but the
owl.

this statement is the idea that not only man but his material possessions and social institutions are subject to decay. The history of the unfortunate Stuarts, as well as the ruins of the estate, are proof that:

In succession

Houses rise and fall, crumble, are extended
Are removed, destroyed

Ultimately, both man's body and the material fruits of his

life return to the earth which is already "flesh, fur and

faeces," where they become part of the regenerative process

on a vegetative level.

Just as in "Burnt Norton," the poet reflects on the

past from the vantage point of the present. But that double

vision is not illuminated by intuitive natural innocence as

it was in the rose garden. At East Coker, there is no

"vibrant air," no "sudden shaft of sunlight." The heat is

"electric," the light "sultry," the silence "empty," as

both the man and his physical surroundings wait in the "dark

in the afternoon" for night to fall. The bird which symbo-

lizes this reflection on the inevitability of death is

neither the bright garden bird nor the kingfisher, but the

owl. Remember Phlebas who was once like you

The remainder of "East Coker" develops from this reflection on mortality. The renewal of the life cycle through "matrimonie . . . a dignifying and commodious sacrament which betokeneth concorde," is extended to include the regenerative cycle in nature:

Keeping the rhythm in their dancing
 As in their living in the living seasons
 The time of the seasons and the constellations
 The time of milking and the time of harvest
 The time of the coupling of man and woman
 And that of beasts.

But the marriage dance which symbolizes this cycle is inexorably linked to the dance of death:

Feet rising and falling
 Eating and drinking. Dung and death.

The poet's thoughts return to the present, to another day of "heat and silence." The dawn wind comes from the sea, now a symbol of oblivion rather than regeneration. It recalls the fate of the Phoenician Sailor who is also a part of the cycle that ultimately leads to death:

As he rose and fell
 He passed the stages of his age and youth
 Entering the whirlpool
 O you who turn the wheel and look to windward
 Remember Phlebas who was once like you

Both "Burnt Norton" and "East Coker" begin with reminiscence, but while the reflections in "Burnt Norton" lead to the poet's first perception of the eternal pattern, those in "East Coker" point only to the pattern of mortality. In both poems, the perception of a pattern on a human level is extended to encompass the entire universe, but the reconciliation of universal systems present in "Burnt Norton" is replaced by chaos in "East Coker." Unnatural phenomena appear on earth and extend into the heavens. Both signify the destruction of the universe and its inhabitants. Man does not move toward the Unmoving. He is:

Whirled in a vortex that shall bring
The world to that destructive fire
Which burns before the ice cap reigns.

Abruptly, the poet returns to the examination of his personal attempt to create a pattern, the struggle with words first described in "Burnt Norton." He finds that his poetry, with its neo-classical restrictions, is unsatisfactory: "A periphrastic study in a worn-out poetical fashion." But this dissatisfaction in itself is not important: "The poetry does not matter." Its significance rests in that his failure belies the wisdom which man claims as a by-product of the

human cycle of existence: the two lines separated from each

other and from the remainder of the section. They restore

What was to be the value of the long looked
 forward to,
 Long hoped for calm, the autumnal serenity
 And the wisdom of age. Had they deceived us
 Or deceived themselves, the quiet-voiced elders,
 Bequeathing us merely a receipt for deceit.

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

The dancers are all gone under the hill.

In this section of "East Coker," the poet's view of
 modern society is no less negative than in the earliest
 poetry. We find ourselves, he states:

In a dark wood, in a bramble
 On the edge of a grimpen, where is no secure
 foothold, described the working man: "Man and his
 And menaced by monsters, fancy lights,
 Risking enchantment."

the privileged classes:

His denunciation of the so-called wisdom of age echoes the

incapacities of Prufrock, Gerontion, the Hollow Men, and
 of letters,

the Fisher King: a patrons of art, the statesmen
 and the rulers,

Distinguished civil servants, chairmen of many
 committees. Do not let me hear
 Of the wisdom of old men, but rather of their
 folly the dark.

Their fear of fear and frenzy, their fear of
 possession
 Of belonging to another, or to others, or to God.

positive presence of grace. Its opposite, darkness, has a

The movement concludes with two lines separated from each other and from the remainder of the section. They restore some of the detachment felt by the poet at the beginning of his meditation, while reiterating his awareness that human life and achievement are ephemeral:

The houses are all gone under the sea.

The dancers are all gone under the hill.

The parallels in structure and imagery between "Burnt Norton" and "East Coker" continue into the third movement. Both begin with a delineation of the total absence of grace which characterized the inhabitants of The Waste Land. "Burnt Norton" described the working man: "Men and bits of paper, whirled in the cold wind." "East Coker" describes the privileged classes:

The captains, merchant bankers, eminent men
of letters,

The generous patrons of art, the statesmen
and the rulers,

Distinguished civil servants, chairmen of many
committees.

Industrial lords and petty contractors, all go
into the dark.

In both poems, light is the objective correlative for the positive presence of grace. Its opposite, darkness, has a

dual symbolism. First it stands for the absence of grace: "O dark, dark, dark. They all go into the dark." Then it is linked to the deliberate negation of the mode of existence which rejects grace, the journey into the Dark Night of the Soul of the contemplative. Such negation required a denial of the beauty as well as the ugliness of human existence. Just as in "Ash Wednesday," exquisite, isolated nature imagery reflects how difficult such self-denial can be. Yet it is one way in which the life cycle becomes not only a journey in time from birth to death, but a prelude to spiritual rebirth:

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 required, pointing to the agony
 Of death and birth.

In concluding the third movement of "East Coker," Eliot returns to explicit statement. His language, while simple and personal, conveys the highly complex philosophy of St. John of the Cross which is the basis of his belief that negation of the world, "the way down," is a way to reach God:

In order to arrive there,
 To arrive where you are, to get from where you
 are not,
 You must go by a way in which there is no ecstasy.

The essence of that philosophy is contained in the concluding line of the movement: "And where you are is where you are not." The true state of being of the soul, "where you are," is in union with God; this union is only achieved when the ego is denied: "where you are not."

Contrasted to the direct simplicity of statement in the third movement is the fourth movement, in which the same idea is lyrically recapitulated in imagery reminiscent of the metaphysical poets. Eliot links the imagery describing Adam to that of the "captains, merchant bankers." He is the "ruined millionaire," whose supreme act of ego gratification has not only robbed his descendants of their heritage of natural happiness but infected them with a fatal, congenital disease, Original Sin. Hence, "the whole world is a hospital." The patients are attended by the "dying nurse," the Church, a human and, therefore, infected institution:

Our only health is the disease
 If we obey the dying nurse
 Whose constant care is not to please
 But to remind of our, and Adam's curse,
 And that, to be restored, our sickness must
 grow worse.

The only cure is removal of the "distempered part,"
 and the surgeon is Christ. His wounds, His bleeding
 hands signify that He, too, suffers the "mortal illness"
 that is human nature. The supreme act of self-sacrifice
 in which He offers "this dripping blood, this bloody flesh"
 both to the Father, "that will not leave us, but prevents
 us everywhere," and to man himself causes man to "call this
 Friday good." But Christ's Passion is not enough to insure
 redemption. Man wills his own redemption by remembering
 that physical birth is a prelude to death and that mortality
 is the prelude to immortality. The time between is a period
 of purgation in which Christ's suffering is united to that
 of man:

The chill ascends from feet to knees,
 The fever sings in mental wires
 If to be warmed, then I must freeze
 And quake in frigid, purgatorial fires
 Of which the flame is roses and the smoke is
 briars.

"East Coker" ends by relating the difficulties of the poet in giving shape and significance to his ideas through control of language to the difficulties every man must face when he attempts to order his own life and to perceive its significance in relation to all human destiny. Both efforts are discouraging for "every attempt is a wholly new start and a different kind of failure," particularly in modern society, "under conditions that seem unpropitious." Yet for the artist, as for every man, "there is only the trying."

"East Coker" begins and ends with references to the poet's age. He is in the "middle way," and he realizes that the brief, exquisite moments of spiritual illumination that spring from natural innocence must be replaced by a constant effort to probe beneath the surface pattern of human existence to find the ordering principle that exists in man's relationship to God:

We must be still and still moving
 Into another intensity
 For a further union, a deeper communion

Nature imagery, reminiscent of The Divine Comedy, symbolizes this effort. Both Dante and Eliot begin their journey

toward union with God in a "dark wood." Both end with a vision of God symbolized by the sea. To Dante, who ends his journey in Paradise, Divine Will is "the sea to which all loves move." To Eliot, who remains in the world, Divine Will can only be perceived in isolated glimpses, just as the immensity of the sea can only be sensed in the isolated beauty of its components:

linked to the dance of death.

The wave cry, the wood cry, the vast waters
Of the petrel and the porpoise

Feet rising and falling

Eating and drinking. Dying and death.

"East Coker" restates the seeming paradox of man's relationship to God which provides the main theme of "Four Quartets."

It begins with a comment on the inevitable mutability of human life and achievement: "In my beginning is my end."

It concludes with an affirmation that, through dying to the world both in a physical and a spiritual sense, man can achieve eternal life: "In my end is my beginning."

My objection is that the humanist believes in

of that 'supernatural' which he denies. For I am

the smiling of man and nature collapses at once.

If you remove from the word 'human' all that the

Taken out of the context of the entire poem sequence, "East Coker" is significant as a recapitulation of Eliot's views of modern society. A preoccupation with the limita-

tions of human nature--the greatest of which is mortality--

op. cit., p. 431.

dominates the mood of the poem. Eliot's delineation of

these limitations centers on modern thought and action. He begins with a description of the human regenerative cycle quoted directly from Thomas Elyot's treatise, "The Gouvernor." But the humanistic conception of a harmonious pattern of existence which can be realized on a human level, "The association of man and woman . . . which betokeneth concorde, keeping the rhythm in their dancing as in their living," is grimly linked to the dance of death.

Feet rising and falling
Eating and drinking. Dung and death.

This return to the philosophy of his ancestor, only to reject it, parallels his rejection in maturity of the humanism of his teacher, Irving Babbitt.

My objection is that the humanist makes use, in his separation of the 'human' from the 'natural,' of that 'supernatural' which he denies. For I am convinced that if this 'supernatural' is suppressed, the dualism of man and nature collapses at once. . . . If you remove from the word 'human' all that the belief in the supernatural has given to man, you can view him finally as no more than an extremely clever, adaptable and mischievous little animal.¹

¹ Eliot, "Second Thoughts on Humanism," Selected Essays, op. cit., p. 433.

Forster, American Criticism, p. 244, quoted by Eliot, "Second Thoughts on Humanism," Selected Essays, op. cit., p. 430.

By linking "the time of coupling of man and woman" to "that of beasts," Eliot has reduced the pattern in human existence envisioned by Thomas Elyot to that of "an extremely clever, adaptable and mischievous little animal."

Eliot's rejection of the so-called wisdom of age is another manifestation of his repudiation of humanism. In the essay, "Second Thoughts on Humanism," Eliot quotes a representative modern humanist, Norman Foerster:

This center to which humanism refers everything, this centripetal energy which counteracts the multifarious centrifugal impulses, this magnetic will which draws the flux of our sensations toward it while remaining at rest, is the reality which gives rise to religion. Pure humanism is content to describe it thus in physical terms as an observed fact of experience; it hesitates to pass beyond its experimental knowledge to the dogmatic affirmations of any of the great religions. It cannot bring itself to accept a formal theology . . . that has been set up in defiance of reason, for it holds that the value of supernatural intuition must be tested by the intellect.²

Eliot finds Mr. Foerster's description of a "nameless centre to which humanism refers everything" both bad philosophy

² Norman Foerster, American Criticism, p. 244, quoted by Eliot, "Second Thoughts on Humanism," Selected Essays, op. cit., p. 430.

and bad writing:

The passage I just quoted seems to me a composition of ignorance, prejudice, confused thinking and bad writing. His first sentence, for the meaning of which I am at a loss, is a cloudy pseudo-scientific metaphor; and his remark that 'pure humanism is content to describe it thus in physical terms' seems to give his hand away completely to what he calls 'naturism.' Either - his first sentence is, as I think, merely a metaphor drawn from nineteenth-century physics . . . or else the author is surrendering to the mechanistic ethics based upon old-fashioned physics. Mr. Foerster's 'hesitates' and 'cannot bring itself' conceal dogmatism behind apparent prudence. . . . If an individual humanist hesitates and cannot bring himself, that is a perfectly natural human attitude, with which one has sympathy; but if the humanist affirms that Humanism hesitates and cannot bring itself, then he is making the hesitation and the inability to bring itself, into a dogma: the humanistic Credo is then a Dubito.³

"East Coker" echoes this denunciation of the humanist's hesitance to pass beyond his experimental knowledge, his belief that religion negates the possibility of using the intellect to determine the value of supernatural intuition:

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.

³ Ibid., p. 431.

If Eliot's rejection of humanism is implicit in "East Coker," his rejection of the standards of modern society are explicit. In the notes to "The Waste Land," he directly related the nightmare vision in "What the Thunder Said" to "the present decay of Eastern Europe." In "Four Quartets," he describes the journey into darkness of the "industrial lords and petty contractors" in language almost identical to that with which he stated his reaction to the outbreak of World War II in "The Idea of a Christian Society":

I believe that there must be many people who, like myself, were deeply shaken by the events of September 1938; persons to whom that month brought a profounder realization of a general plight . . . a feeling of contrition, of humility, repentance and amendment; a doubt of the validity of a civilization. . . . Was our society which had always been so assured of its superiority and rectitude, so confident of its unexamined premises, assembled around anything more permanent than a congeries of banks, insurance companies and industries, and had it any beliefs more essential than a belief in compound interest and the maintenance of dividends?⁴

At the conclusion of the poem, he abandons the impersonality of imagery completely:

Love is most nearly itself

⁴ Eliot, The Idea of a Christian Society and Notes toward the Definition of Culture (New York: Harcourt Brace and Co., 1949).

So here I am, in the middle way, having had
twenty years--

Twenty years largely wasted, the years of distinction
L'entre deux guerres--

But at this point he rejects the totally negative reaction
which had characterized his view of modern life in the
earlier poetry. He does not believe that the years were
wasted:

But perhaps neither gain nor loss.

For us, there is only the trying. The rest
is not our business.

The "business" of life is the continual effort to perceive

Divine Will:
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.

In this effort, which recognizes that mortality is a neces-
sary step toward immortality, is the beginning of union with
God:

Love is most nearly itself

When here and now cease to matter.

In my end is my beginning.

"The Dry Salvages"

Each of the "Four Quartets" has a twofold distinction: the manner in which it relates to the poem sequence as a whole and the way in which it conveys a particular idea. "Burnt Norton" establishes the main themes, the basic imagery and the over-all structure of the Quartets while focusing on the concept of time as an intellectual abstraction which includes what might have been. "East Coker" relates the concept of time as sequence introduced in "Burnt Norton" to Eliot's philosophy regarding evolution in human history. "The Dry Salvages," like the two earlier poems, negates the concept of time as sequence and at the same time comes to terms with the ambivalence the poet has always felt in reconciling his involvement with the world and his commitment to the life of the spirit. As in the past, water is the objective correlative for this ambivalence, symbolizing the human potentiality for spiritual regeneration or oblivion.

The poem opens with an image of the river as a "strong, brown god," linking the poet's deeply personal childhood response to the Mississippi River to the

supernatural significance attached to water in the earliest mythology:

The brown god is almost forgotten
By the dwellers in the cities--ever, however,
implacable,
Keeping his seasons and rages, destroyer, reminder
of what men choose to forget. Unhonored, unpro-
pitiated
By worshippers of the machine, but waiting, watch-
ing and waiting.

"What men choose to forget" is that "the river is within us, the Sea is all about us." The river symbolizes the individual's awareness of the life force that flows from birth through maturity to death in all natural phenomena, including man. Encompassing this pattern of development that links "the worshippers of the machine" to "earlier and other creation" is the vast sea of time--a state of perpetual flux to which each human being is inexorably drawn by "sea voices offering both menace and caress." Yet the poet believes that another power, transcending the limitations of both time as sequence and time as flux, is an integral part of human existence:

And the ground swell, that is and was from the
beginning
Clangs
The bell.

The bell signifies an annunciation, and the various annunciations to which each man must reply within his lifetime are the subject of "The Dry Salvages."

During the first movement, the bell tolls, announcing the death that dries up the river of life and ends the individual's puny struggles on the seas of time. But this annunciation foreshadows one of deeper significance. It can be heard "under the oppression of the silent fog" as a warning and a guide through the dangers at sea. Moreover, though it tolls, it does not indicate finite time only, but "Time not our time . . . a time older than the time of chronometers."

The second movement focuses on the bewilderment and despair of the individual to whom the tolling bell announces only death:

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

To such a man, time as sequence offers only the gradual deterioration of the body and the spirit:

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 at the last annunciation.

His failure to perceive his capacity to give significance to
 his "moment in time" distorts his vision of all human experi-
 ence:

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.

The body of the second movement vividly portrays this
 aimless journey toward death, but it began by questioning
 the necessity for such waste: "Where is there an end to the
 drifting wreckage?" The answer comes at the moment of deep-
 est despair:

There is no end to it, the voiceless wailing,
 No end to the withering of withered flowers,
 To the moment of pain that is painless and
 motionless,
 To the drift of the sea in the drifting
 wreckage,
 The bone's prayer to Death its God. Only the
 hardly, barely prayable
 Prayer of the one Annunciation.

The "barely prayable prayer" is that of the Virgin Mary who consented to be the instrument of the Incarnation: "Let it be unto me according to thy Word." It was echoed by Christ in Gethesemane: "Not my will but Thine be done." Both prayers were necessary preludes to the act of Redemption, and each man must offer them again in his own lifetime. As stated in "East Coker," only in this active commitment to Divine Will comes the power to control one's spiritual destiny:

We must be still and still moving
 Into another intensity
 For a further union, a deeper communion
 Through the dark cold and the empty desolation,
 The wave cry, the wind cry, the waters vast
 Of the petrel and the porpoise.

Having committed one's self to Divine Will, one's view of the human condition gains new dimension. Not only the concept of time as flux, but that of time as sequence and development is discarded. The only permanence in purely human experience lies in the fact that it has been and will continue to be shared by all men:

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 past experience revived in the meaning
 Is not the experience of one life only
 But of many generations

The third movement of "The Dry Salvages" is a reverie relating the negation of the concept of time as sequence which concluded the second movement to a similar idea expressed in the Bhagavad Gita. In Part II, Eliot discounted the theory that time as sequence resulted in human progress:

It seems as one becomes older
 That the past has another pattern and ceases
 to be a mere sequence--
 Or even development and the latter a partial
 fallacy
 Encouraged by superficial notions of evolution

At the beginning of Part III, the poet speculates on whether this view parallels that of the Hindu philosophers:

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

That the future is a faded song, a Royal Rose or a
 lavender spray

Of wishful regret for those who are not yet
 here to regret,
 Pressed between yellow leaves of a book that
 has never been opened.

Both ideas are then linked metaphorically to each other and to the first two Quartets by imagery related to city life. The voyage on the seas of time now takes place on a modern ocean liner reached by a boat train. But the traveller, whether he is an Englishman in the twentieth century or a Hindu philosopher, must perceive the same truth: he is not moving beyond the past into the future; as always, he is living in the present. Touched by a new experience, he becomes a different person:

Fare foreward, travellers! not escaping from
 the past
 Into different lives, or into any future;
 You are not the same person who left that station
 Or who will arrive at any terminus

The fourth movement turns from Hindu philosophy to a conventional invocation of the Blessed Mother. Underlying the traditional language of the simple prayer is the entire complex symbolism Eliot had attached to water in all his poetry. As in "Ash Wednesday," Mary is venerated as one who can protect and control the waters. Her intercession

is sought for those, like the simple fishermen in "The Fire Sermon," "whose business is concerned with fish, and those concerned with every lawful traffic." Then she is invoked by "women who have seen their sons and husbands setting forth and not returning." Like Mary, they have been instruments of regeneration. They also share with her the "knowledge of eternal dolour"; while the river of life has flowed through their wombs, that life has been destroyed on the seas of time. Finally, she is asked to intercede for those "who were in ships and ended their voyages on the sand." As in "The Waste Land," the waters of spiritual regeneration have dried up for them. Thus, the Mother of God is asked to protect those men who, while virtuous, have never sought the life of the spirit, those who have suffered human loss, and those who are spiritually lost. The prayer reiterates the penitent's cry in "Ash Wednesday":

Will the veiled sister pray for
 Those who walked in darkness, who chose thee and
 oppose thee,
 Those who are torn on the horn between season and
 season, time and time, between
 Hour and hour, word and word, power and power,
 those who wait in darkness? Will the veiled
 sister pray

For the children at the gate
 Who will not go away and cannot pray:
 Pray for those who chose and oppose

In contrast to the profound simplicity of the prayer to Mary in the fourth movement is the dry cataloging of "false gods" invoked by sophisticated modern man at the beginning of the fifth movement:

To explore the womb, or tomb, or dreams; all
 these are the 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

Such preoccupations, says the poet, are further manifestations of man's limited view of time as sequence. To perceive of time on a deeper level is the result of a supreme act of love, a continual praying of the "hardly, barely prayable Prayer of the One Annunciation":

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.

The poet, however, is not writing a description of sainthood; he is simply attempting to describe how it feels

to believe. The language with which he expresses this universal search for total spiritual commitment is explicit beyond need or point of paraphrase. It is enhanced, however, by the reappearance of nature images which symbolized the persistent longing of the cleansed soul for the beauties of life in "Ash Wednesday." In this context, they symbolize the brief awareness in life of the beauty of immortality:

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 sun-
light,
The wild thyme unseen, or the winter lightening
Or the waterfall, or the music heard so deeply
That it is not heard at all, but you are music
While the music lasts. There 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.
Here the impossible union
Of spheres of existence is actual,
Here the past and future
Are conquered and reconciled.

Eliot's predisposition to seek the life of the spirit through negation of the world pervades all of "The Dry Salvages," particularly in the reflection on the Bhagavid

Gita. Even the significance attached to the Annunciation prayer can be construed as a passive acceptance rather than an active commitment to life. But this misinterpretation of the value of human action is precisely what Eliot means when he reappraises his previous attitudes in the light of his developing beliefs regarding the nature of man's relationship to God:

We had the experience but missed the meaning
And approach to the meaning restores the experi-
ence in another form.

In "The Dry Salvages," Eliot denies the world for the last time when he accepts the fact that doubt and error are unavoidable aspects of the human condition:

There are only hints and guesses
Hints followed by guesses; and the rest
Is prayer, observance, discipline, thought
and action.

The "action" to which he refers is the perpetual effort to pray the Annunciation prayer, to actively embrace the Will of God and to devote one's life to divining that Will:

For most of us, this is the aim
Never here to be realized;
Who are only undefeated
Because we have gone on trying.

In construing the Annunciation prayer in these terms, Eliot acknowledges human action as a valid means of achieving union with God.

"Little Gidding"

"The Dry Salvages" concludes with a definition of the state of life committed to Divine Will as a condition of "prayer, observance, discipline, thought and action." "Little Gidding," the final Quartet, deals with a specific act of faith: a pilgrimage to the deserted chapel of a seventeenth-century Anglican religious house. The site of the pilgrimage is particularly suitable to a meditation concluding the entire poem sequence for it symbolizes the main themes of the poem: the limitations placed upon man by his mortality and the fact that only by virtue of his humanity can he become united with God, the Source of his immortality. The religious community at Little Gidding had been abandoned at the death of its founder, Nicholas Ferrar, less than twenty-five years after its origin. Three hundred years later, the monastery buildings are also in ruins. But the ideal upon which the community was founded survives: men still come here to commune with God:

You are not here to verify
 Instruct yourself or inform curiosity
 Or carry report. You are here to kneel
 Where prayer has become valid.

While men have always sought God in this place, their
 prayer has not become "valid" simply because of their
 presence:

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 fulfillment.

The poet now believes that the only "valid" prayer is that
 of the Annunciation: "Let it be done unto me according to
 Thy Will." He is also aware that such a prayer requires an
 interaction between the will of man and the Will of God, for
 God will not force His Will upon man, but neither is man
 capable of perceiving Divine Will without supernatural assis-
 tance. In "Little Gidding," the poet describes how this
 dilemma is resolved through reciprocal acts of love. Divine
 Love manifests itself through the gift of grace, the super-
 natural power which illuminates Divine Will and gives man
 the strength to embrace it. Human love manifests itself by

accepting that grace and using it not to gratify human desires but to seek a deeper union with God:

We must be still and still moving
 Into a deeper intensity
 For a further union, a deeper communion.

The traditional symbol of grace is the Pentecostal fire, and it is this symbol which dominates the imagery in "Little Gidding."

The poet begins his journey to Little Gidding on a winter day, but this is no "dead season" in the Waste Land. It is "midwinter spring," a day of unnatural beauty and vitality, "not in time's covenant." The highly specific nature imagery recalls the Biblical description of the Pentecostal feast:

When the day of Pentecost came round, while they were all gathered together in unity of purpose, all at once a sound came from heaven like that of a strange wind blowing and filled the whole house where they were sitting. Then appeared to them what seemed to be tongues of fire, which parted and came to rest on each of them; and they were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in strange languages, as the Spirit gave utterance to each.⁵

5 Acts 2:1-5.

The poet links the "pentecostal fire" of the particular day on which he makes his pilgrimage to the experience of all pilgrims. To each, the original intention of the journey is "altered in fulfillment." Touched by grace, the pilgrim moves beyond the limitations of temporal preoccupations to commune for a moment with God:

Here the timeless intersection of the timeless
moment
Is England and nowhere, Never and always

In the second movement, the poet describes the ruined monastery through the eyes of one here to "verify, instruct or inform." Little Gidding is nothing more than a symbol of the inevitable destruction of the fruits of human thought and action. The imagery in this movement recapitulates the central image of each Quartet. Air and roses, symbols of the human faculty to think and to love in "Burnt Norton," are reduced to:

Ash on the old man's sleeve
Is all the ash the burnt roses leave
Dust in the air suspended
Marks the place where a story ended.

The natural cycle of regeneration, symbolized by the rich harvest and the laughing harvesters in "East Coker,"

becomes

The parched eviscerated soil
[which] Gapes at the vanity of toil
Laughs without mirth.

Finally, water and fire, symbols of the rejuvenated human spirit in "The Dry Salvages" and "Little Gidding," stand for agents of decay:

Water and fire shall rot
The marred foundations we forgot
Of sanctuary and choir.

The idea of the inevitable destruction of human achievement is extended into the realm of art. In a vision which deliberately echoes the language and rhythms of the Inferno, the poet finds himself on a gutted London street at the end of an air raid. The image of the dove as a symbol of the Holy Spirit is ironically applied to a bomber plane, "the dark dove with the flickering tongue." Amid the wreckage, before the all-clear signal has been sounded, the poet encounters a ghost that represents the creative artist, "some dead master, both one and many." He recognizes the spirit as an extension of himself, and hears, as from his own lips, the fate of the artist:

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 shallow 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;

.

From wrong to wrong the exasperated spirit
 Proceeds. . . .

This is the end to which exercise of his talent will bring the artist unless "restored by that refining fire where you must move in order like a dancer." Here, the fire image symbolizes the humility which leads the artist to deny his ego and to submit to the discipline described in "Tradition and the Individual Talent":

What happens is a continual surrender of himself as he is at the moment to something which is more valuable. The progress of an artist is a continual self-sacrifice, a continual extinction of personality.⁶

⁶ Eliot, "Tradition and the Individual Talent," Selected Essays, op. cit., pp. 6-7.

In "Little Gidding," the "something greater" to which the artist must subordinate his ego is recognized as Divine Will. The exhortation to seek artistic fulfillment through this commitment is the "kind of valediction" with which the creative spirit leaves the poet.

The third movement begins with a recapitulation of the states of mind and soul the individual must experience in order to achieve spiritual fulfillment, as described in the earlier poetry. First, there is worldly attachment, the ephemeral source of pleasure and vitality found in the hyacinth garden; then indifference, the weary, passive self-knowledge of the Fisher King, the Magus, and the penitent at the beginning of "Ash Wednesday." Ultimately, however, the soul must strive for detachment: the active manifestation of the Annunciation prayer, for detachment, unlike indifference, does not limit the exercise of human virtue but deepens and enriches it:

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

From self and from things and from persons;
 and growing between them, indifference
 Which resembles the others as death resembles
 life,
 Being between two lives.
 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 from the past.

The history of men who, like the poet, have made the pilgrimage to Little Gidding, exemplifies this journey of the soul: Charles I, a broken "king at nightfall"; Stafford, Laud and Charles, "three men on the scaffold"; Milton, the poet-reformer who "died blind and quiet" and the nameless others, including the soldiers in the World War, "who died forgotten in other places, here and abroad." All began with a worldly attachment to country, "united in a strife which divided them":

These men and those who opposed them
 And those whom they oppose
 Accepted the constitution of silence
 And are folded in a single party.

Yet all found that the purpose of their prayer and action was "altered in fulfillment":

Thus love of country
 Begins as attachment to our own field of action
 And comes to find that action of little importance
 Though never indifferent.

The genuine significance of their deeds did not rest in worldly desires which were often based on error and doomed to failure, but in the spiritual motivation behind them. In the words of the English mystic, Julian of Norwich, "Sin is Behovely" (an inevitable aspect of human existence):

But all shall be well and
 All manner of things shall be well
 By the purification of the motive
 In the ground of our beseeching.

Throughout "Four Quartets," Eliot has repeatedly described the awareness of grace as "the intersection of the timeless with time." This movement of "Little Gidding" attempts to convey such moments. Each historical figure is firmly situated in place and time. Even the mystic, Dame Julian, is an Englishwoman who lived in the sixteenth century. But underlying these specific "moments in time" is the message which exists out of time. "Sin is Behovely," Dame Julian affirms in now-archaic language. Yet, even though human nature inevitably contains the potentiality for sin and error, it is also capable of love, and this

aspect of humanity provides the link between the frailty of man and the perfection of God, "the Ground of thy Beseeching." Her message echoes the language of Genesis:

And he said
Behold Adam is become as one of us,
Knowing good and evil:⁷

Genesis continues with an account of man's rejection from the Garden of Eden

Lest he put forth his hand, and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live forever. And the Lord God sent him out of the paradise of pleasure, to till the earth from which he was taken. And he cast out Adam, and placed before the paradise of pleasure Cherubims, and a flaming sword, turning every way, to keep the way of the tree of life.⁸

This symbol of the flaming sword which barred man from eternal life with God, once he had committed Original Sin, merges with the flames of purgation leading to his redemption, which dominate the powerful lyric that climaxes "Little Gidding":

⁷ Genesis 3:22.

⁸ Ibid., 23-24.

The dove descending breaks the air
 With flame of incandescent terror
 Of which the tongues declare
 The one discharged from sin and error
 The only hope or else despair
 Lies in the choice of pyre or pyre--
 To be redeemed from fire by fire.
 Who then devised the torment: Love.
 Love is the unfamiliar Name
 Behind the hands that wove
 The intolerable shirt of flame
 Which human power cannot remove.
 We only live, only suspire
 Consumed by either fire or fire.

The "shirt of flame" is intolerable because it represents the choice each man must make between commitment to the burning love of God and the destructive fire of self-love. The poet now recognizes this choice as the "personal and private agony" which shaped not only his artistic intention but his entire existence, an agony he shares with all men who, like himself, possess sufficient grace to accept or reject Divine Love. For Eliot, that agony had originally manifested itself in the need to determine what, if anything, constituted order in the universe. Ultimately, he believed that order was achieved through the commitment of human will to Divine Will and that such commitment involved more than intellect. It resulted from the reciprocal love between man and his Creator in which each exerts his will

to achieve union with the other through the instrument

of grace freely given and freely accepted:

And sentence that is right (where every word is
at home,

Taking We shall not cease from exploration
The And the end of our exploring
An ca Will be to arrive where we started
The c And know the place for the first time.

The formal word precise but not pedantic
The complete consort dancing together).

The journey toward this union takes place in time,
beginning.

the "immense panorama of anarchy and futility" Eliot had

attempted to reject in "The Waste Land" and "Ash Wednesday."

In "Four Quartets," his recognition that "only through time,

time is conquered" leads him to a new awareness of the posi-

tive value of human action. Thus, history is significant as

the record of human effort "in time" to achieve a union with

God Who exists "out of time":

In this state of loving detachment the human spirit is

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

With the drawing of this Love and the voice of
this Calling.

This is the condition in which the human Annunciation

Art is significant because it symbolizes the order that
prayer, "Thy Will be done," unites with the Divine Act of

redemption, and the journey to spiritual fulfillment is

completed at "the point of intersection of the timeless

with time."

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 phase
 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 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.

To reject the human potentiality for action, then, is as
 erroneous as undue attachment to it. The ideal human condi-
 tion is detachment:

 not less of love but expanding
 Of love beyond desire, and so liberation
 From the future as well as the past.

In this state of loving detachment the human spirit is
 closest to God. Here the "immense panorama of endless
 anarchy and futility" is transformed into a "condition of
 complete simplicity costing not less than everything."
 This is the condition in which the human Annunciation
 prayer, "Thy Will be done," unites with the Divine act of
 Redemption, and the journey to spiritual fulfillment is
 completed at "the point of intersection of the timeless
 with time."

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

At the conclusion of "Four Quartets," T. S. Eliot

explains his personal search for spiritual fulfillment as
 a lifelong pursuit shared by all men:

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.

For Eliot, the "exploration" began with an awareness of a
 "personal and private agony" initially manifested as a re-
 jection of the values of modern society. This agony was
 assuaged when he recognized it as the yearning of the
 human spirit not simply to reject the world but to be
 united with God. Because this search for spiritual iden-
 tity is the most significant act of human existence, it is
 a worthy subject for poetry, but it is only a subject,
 not poetry itself. Consequently, the poet must fulfill
 the remainder of his artistic intention: "to transmute
 his personal and private agony into something rich and
 strange, something universal and impersonal" if other men

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

At the conclusion of "Four Quartets," T. S. Eliot envisions his personal search for spiritual fulfillment as a lifelong pursuit shared by all men:

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.

For Eliot, the "exploration" began with an awareness of a "personal and private agony" initially manifested in a rejection of the values of modern society. This agony was assuaged when he recognized it as the yearning of the human spirit not simply to reject the world but to be united with God. Because this search for spiritual identity is the most significant act of human existence, it is a worthy subject for poetry, but it is only a subject, not poetry itself. Consequently, the poet must fulfill the remainder of his artistic intention: "to transmute his personal and private agony into something rich and strange, something universal and impersonal," if other men

are to participate aesthetically as well as spiritually
in his exploration.

Therefore, Eliot returns to the nature imagery which
has been the objective correlative for spiritual vitality
in all of his poetry to express his conception of the nature
of grace which reaches a climax in "Four 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 the waves of the sea.

Once again, the dominant image is water, no longer an
ambiguous symbol of spiritual vitality. In this context,
it recalls the myth pattern Eliot had originally utilized
in "The Waste Land." The waters have been freed, the
Fisher King restored, and the poet assumes the role of
Percival, the medieval descendant of the ancient fertility
gods:

This land whose streams no waters fed
 Its fountains dry, its fields unplowed
 His word, once more with health endowed.¹

By "Four Quartets," however, Eliot has moved far beyond the negative delineation of spiritual aridity in the Waste Land to commitment to the Christian dogma of the Incarnation and Redemption. Why, then, are nature imagery and myth not replaced by traditional Christian symbolism? In color, detail and pattern, Christian symbolism is surely "rich and strange." Moreover, it shares with mythology the universal intention of conveying spiritual realities in tangible terms. But to the Christian poet and his reader, Christian symbols can never be "impersonal." Formal liturgy relates them in a specific manner to certain religious exercises. More important, they invariably engender an emotional response which the individual considers part of the deepest and most personal level of spiritual experience. Consequently, he is either unwilling or unable to view these symbols with aesthetic detachment. This accounts for the delicate

¹Weston, op. cit., p. 14.

balance Eliot has attempted to create between nature mythology and traditional Christian symbolism in his poetry. Occasionally, as in "Ash Wednesday," the results are ambiguous, but on the whole, Eliot's development of a pattern of nature imagery founded in myth which ultimately is expanded to express Christian mysteries proves his ability to achieve his artistic intention.

That Eliot was successful in transmuting his deepest personal experience into an artistic reality is significantly borne out by comparison of the thesis on which he first based his approach to art and the poetic statement with which he climaxed his artistic achievement. In "Tradition and the Individual Talent," Eliot had recognized the poet's need to develop a perspective embracing the concept of eternity. He called it the "historical sense":

This historical sense involves a perception, not only of the pastness of the past, but of its presence. . . . This historical sense, which is a sense of the timeless as well as of the temporal and of the timeless and the temporal together, is what makes a writer traditional. And it is at the same time what makes a writer acutely conscious of his place in time.²

²Eliot, "Tradition and the Individual Talent," Selected Essays, op. cit., p. 4.

Such a "historical sense" provides the poet with "an awareness of the past to an extent which the past's awareness of itself cannot show."³ This aesthetic principle achieves full dimension in spiritual terms in "Four Quartets":

placidity costing not less than everything.

It seems as one becomes older,
That the past has another pattern, and ceases
to be a mere sequence--
Or even development:

.

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.

T. S. Eliot's ability to perceive and to convey the experience of man in time as he moves toward the timelessness of union with God provides the most significant relationship between the man's resolution of his "personal and private agony" and the poet's attempt to transmute it into something "universal." His awareness of the scope of his

³Ibid., p. 6.

subject and his ability to control it are clearly indicated by the clarity of structure and imagery which characterizes his major poem, "Four Quartets." Both require what Eliot terms "A condition of complete simplicity costing not less than everything."

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