1973

Between Two Worlds Become Much Like Each Other: Man In and Out of Time in the Four Quartets

James Thomas Jones
Eastern Illinois University

PAPER CERTIFICATE #2

TO: Graduate Degree Candidates who have written formal theses.

SUBJECT: Permission to reproduce theses.

The University Library is receiving a number of requests from other institutions asking permission to reproduce dissertations for inclusion in their library holdings. Although no copyright laws are involved, we feel that professional courtesy demands that permission be obtained from the author before we allow theses to be copied.

Please sign one of the following statements:

Booth Library of Eastern Illinois University has my permission to lend my thesis to a reputable college or university for the purpose of copying it for inclusion in that institution's library or research holdings.

2/5/73
Date

I respectfully request Booth Library of Eastern Illinois University not allow my thesis be reproduced because _____

_____

_____

_____ _____
Date Author

pdm

Between two worlds become much like each other:

Man in and out of time in the Four Quartets

(TITLE)

BY

James Thomas Jones

THESIS

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF

Master of Arts

IN THE GRADUATE SCHOOL, EASTERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY
CHARLESTON, ILLINOIS

1973
YEAR

I HEREBY RECOMMEND THIS THESIS BE ACCEPTED AS FULFILLING
THIS PART OF THE GRADUATE DEGREE CITED ABOVE

5 Jan '73
DATE

5 Jan 73
DATE

Since I am already willing to admit that T. S. Eliot's Four Quartets is one of the great poems of the English language, of what possible use is the critique which I have undertaken? As a statement of my intention, I would like to borrow the words of R. P. Blackmur, who has described the purpose of critical reading so succinctly:

> The whole thing increases in ambiguity the more it is analyzed, but if the poem is read over after analysis, it will be seen that in the poem the language is perfectly precise. In its own words it is clear, and becomes vague in analysis only because the analysis is not the poem. We use analysis properly in order to discard it and return that much better equipped to the poem.[1]

To use Eliot's own phrase from the poem, the purpose of this paper is to return to the place from which I started and to know it for the first time. Only in analysis does the poem truly spring to life, and only in its own words is the poem truly itself, truly beautiful. The prolonged and concentrated effort of my critical reading of the Four Quartets over the past year has made me familiar with several aspects of the poem, but this familiarity makes the poem even more complex. To me, this is one assurance of its greatness: that familiarity is not complete knowledge, but potential

for new meaning. The act of reading a poem is at once a triumph and a failure, a paradox which I readily accept.

If there is no perfect poem, as Blackmur says elsewhere, then there certainly is no perfect analysis of a poem. In the following exegesis I am fully aware that in defining the poem in terms of one theme which I have tried to trace through it--namely, man's image in and out of time--I have severely limited the complexity of the Four Quartets. I am also conscious that in making a positive statement of theme, I am negating, to a certain extent, the presence of other themes. I have felt the constant deflation of this awareness in my reading. In trying to avoid over-defining the poem, I tend to be abstract. I do not excuse this fault; I merely present the extenuating circumstances. This paper marks only the beginning of a long association with the poem for me. I hope it will be taken in the full sense of an introduction, not as a summary or substitute, to one of the many facets of an intricate work of art. If this analysis is used at all, it must be used "properly," as Blackmur says.

I

"Burnt Norton" is dominated by one of Eliot's most famous metaphors, "the still point of the turning world." It would be futile for me to attempt to explicate it again within the context of this paper, since the notion of the "still moving"

has been so beautifully explained by Murray Krieger in his essay on the Ekprastic Principle.[2] I will choose a simpler task, relying on Mr. Krieger's insight to relate the notion of the ekphrastic to my own act of reading. Obviously, the chief theme of the first quartet is time, or rather, man in time. Eliot's use of time must always contain some slight irony, since poetry, his medium, has traditionally been considered one of the temporal arts, as opposed to sculpture or painting, the spatial arts. The poet who chooses time as his metaphor is relying partially on the temporal progression of the poem for his effect, to achieve meaning. In the Four Quartets (as in any great poem) Eliot creates meaning by making the movement of the poem circular. He accomplishes this by interweaving an almost agonizing number of images. "Burnt Norton" is a profusion of echoes and inflections. Eliot, the symphonist, is at work making a poem grand enough to reflect the complexity of the universe. I think it indisputable that this poem is one of the richest poems ever created. If the multiplicity seems overwhelming, it reveals, at times, Eliot's success in realizing a monumental goal. One catches a glimpse of this success by tracing a theme or image through the poem. I am assuming that any one theme, the theme of the unheard music for instance, is typical of the richness and complexity of the many themes of the work. One can "see" the unheard music as it relates to the heard music of the thrush in the first section of "Burnt Norton." It recurs and expands in "East Coker" and near the end of

"The Dry Salvages." Finally, the music is enacted in "Little Gidding." Its meaning by then is both incremental and reciprocal; that is, it becomes richer as one understands its intrinsic significance better and also as one understands its relationship to the significance of other themes. So the poem's complexity is multiplied.

With some small sense of the intricacy of the individual images and themes and of the relation between and among themes and images in the whole of the Four Quartets, I am ready to show how the "ekphrasis" of the poem provides the setting for an image of man from which Eliot has pared all but an essential attitude of mortality. He does this paring in the ironic atmosphere which I mentioned. Man is, in a sense, the Four Quartets. Like the poem, he is trapped in a specific temporality. Eliot, the poet-man, is trying to liberate simultaneously both his poem and himself from time. He accomplishes this, I would argue, by making both the poem and the poem's image of man timeless.

Man is constantly being placed in the present in "Burnt Norton." Eliot is calling in question the common metaphor of time in order to make himself and his fellow men free, absolutely free. "Human kind/ Cannot bear very much reality,"[3] says the thrush (or is it the poetic voice?), implying early in the poem that reality is a cross which each man bears to a common Golgotha. Reality here is not merely what is agreed upon as reality, but a state of peril. In the midst of this menace man builds his world:

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

The movement of the blood, the organization of the lymph system and the circulatory system are analogous to the movements of the external universe. In this very important sense, man is the stillpoint of his own turning world. The individual is the center of both a personal and an impersonal universe. Man is the present, the point at which "past and future are gathered."

There. Eliot has begun to extricate man from his own complex creation, time. Without man there is no dance in time. He engenders time and the timeless so that there can be a dance, movement for its own sake, the kind of dance that Helen performs in W. B. Yeats' "Long-Legged Fly":

She thinks, part woman, three parts a child,
That nobody looks; her feet
Practice a tinker shuffle
Picked up on a street. [4]

The point of her dance is unself-consciousness. The object of the dance, like the poem, is to be effortless through sublime effort. Man, Eliot is saying, has instituted temporality in order to escape from it. This escape is partly accomplished in art. The image of the stillpoint expands to include both man and his art. With this expansion the poet finds himself encountering his own creation, which has attained a life of its own. The stillpoint, or the ekphrastic in the poem, is the image of man out of time, living only in the present moment. This mirroring of man in the unity of the poem is central to Eliot's concept of man in action, if

for no other reason than that he will repudiate the notion of man as stillpoint at the end of "The Dry Salvages."[5]

If the dichotomy between time and the timeless seems too simple, Eliot has proleptically provided more complexity:

> Here is a place of disaffection
> Time before and time after
> In a dim light: neither daylight
> Investing form with lucid stillness
> Turning shadow into transient beauty
> With slow rotation suggesting permanence
> Nor darkness to purify the soul
> Emptying the sensual with deprivation
> Cleansing affection from the temporal.

Eliot is preparing for the icon of the Chinese jar. So that the jar will be accepted in the proper spirit, he confirms that vision of art which Wallace Stevens proposed in his "Anecdote of the Jar," that the artifact is not a replacement for God or for Nature, but an experience equivalent in complexity to both God and Nature. As Stevens says of his jar:

> It took dominion everywhere.
> The jar was gray and bare.
> It did not give of bird or bush,
> Like nothing else in Tennessee.[6]

To prevent the roundness of the jar from taking absolute dominion, Eliot, like Stevens, builds a flaw into the artifact. Now art can be no more than an experience which man meets as he meets other experiences. Man will still be the center of attention despite the autonomous and autotelic nature of art.

It is with this idea of the importance of man as the incarnation of the poem in mind that I read the last section of "Burnt Norton":

Words move, music moves
Only in time; but that which is only living
Can only die.

Words in the poem move in temporal progression, but the movement of the poem itself cannot be temporal alone. The lineaments of temporality cannot account for the circularity, the unity, of the poem. What the speaker of the Quartets says of himself in "East Coker"--"In my end is my beginning" (EC V, p. 129)--is here equally true of the poem and of the man. And the poet eloquently includes man in his prologue to the Chinese jar. His assumption is that man can do more than "only" live, and that, therefore, he does not merely die (as an animal dies). Man can die with agony, with tragedy, if that is any consolation.

The syntax draws a deft comparison between the life of the poem and the life of man: man also moves only in time, because time is his measure of movement. But he also moves outside of time, because the concept of mortality includes the possibility of immortality. The idea that "Words move, music moves/ Only in time" is not an explicit comment on man, but it stands opposed to an idea that is definitely about man. Eliot makes the concept of man inseparable from the concept of man's poetic utterances. Throughout the rest of this section the tension of the words is dependent on this implicit analogy between man and the Chinese jar. Although man cannot become the jar, nor the jar live in the way a man lives, the two are here joined, as, by further analogy, any reader is joined with a poem which he is experiencing. In

the reciprocal experience of the poem man gives his sense of mortality to the poem, while the poem gives its stillness to man.

Immediately, Eliot introduces his equivalent to Wordsworth's cuckoo, Keats' urn, and Stevens' jar, as Krieger demonstrates. But it is more than a simple introduction of the Chinese jar. A duplicity, the duplicity of the still movement of poetry, is implicit in it:

> Not the stillness of the violin, while the note lasts,
> Not that only, but the co-existence.

In order to explain the duplicity of co-existence, I want to make use of a stanza from another of Stevens' poems, "Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird." In that poem the speaker notes a duplicity similar to that of "Burnt Norton":

> I do not know which to prefer,
> The beauty of inflections
> Or the beauty of innuendoes,
> The blackbird whistling
> Or just after.

Words, as sounds, are closely related to music. It is the spoken phrasing, rhythm, and accent of words which still most clearly distinguish one poet from another. But sound alone, according to both Eliot and Stevens, cannot make words "reach/ the stillness." It is the form or pattern of words which creates, in Stevens' words, "innuendoes." In other terms, it is the plasticity, or spatial form, which allows poetry, like the Chinese jar, to achieve meaning. So, the still movement of poetry incorporates the complex relationship between poetry as spoken word and poetry as printed word. While the word

articulated by a man's voice in time dissipates into the stillness, the word articulated in a man's imagination continues to echo of its own accord. In this way also, the words are able to achieve a pattern, because they are no longer limited, as they were in oral poetry, to time. The suggestion, to this point of "Burnt Norton," is that the pattern of words is "heard" by a man's imaginative ear. However, the reader in whom this intuitive ear is functioning as he perceives the poem is always forced to deal with the poem's dealing with time. As the poem approaches stillness, that is, as the reader approaches his most perfect hearing of the poem, there is a reciprocal release from time. At those infrequent moments of total clarity of perception, the poem lives within the reader as still movement, and the reader is released from time in his own intensely personal experience of the poem. Those unique moments, in which the reader's perception is the same as that of the poet, serve to emphasize the poles of time and the timeless. In the complete experience of a poem man realizes most painfully that his glimpse of the timeless is available only within the complex structure of time. I think that here, as always, Eliot is moving towards the reconciliation of opposites. The Four Quartets (any successful poem) is expressly designed so an individual man can simultaneously experience himself in an out of time, in body and in spirit, in himself and in what is not himself. The final result is to yoke the wilderness and the jar, to use Stevens' language. One must move into the remainder of the

Quartets with the notion that the wilderness and the jar are the extremities of a unified and homogeneous human experience, rather than mutually exclusive phenomena.

The burden placed on the poet, according to Eliot, is to make words in poetry "stay still." But the poet-man is liable to solipsism and self-pity. Imprecise uses of the language (scolding, mocking, chattering) assail the words of the poet. Proponents of these other uses of language attack the effort of the poet, just as his own humanity makes him unsure of himself. Eliot reveals that his experience as a poet has been that of the "disconsolate chimera," of a man creating meaning in the face of meaninglessness. However, hinging on this image is another ambivalent statement, which begins as a statement on poetry and moves into a statement on man. Again, as at the beginning of section V, the speaker makes man and poetry inseparable. Both poetry, as still movement, and man, in desiring and loving, are caught in the form of limitation "between unbeing and being." Eliot affirms that the antithesis which man has established for himself in temporality (now extended into metaphysics) actually produces and sustains meaning. Midway between the extremities of Love and man loving, Desire, and man desiring, is the place at which Love and Desire are embodied in man. Likewise, poetry, between the extremes of sound and silent pattern, becomes both sound dissipating and pattern pervading the silence. Continuing the implied relationship between man and poem, midway between the extremities of man and poem is the incar-

nation of meaning through the poem in man. At just this moment in "Burnt Norton" Eliot forces his way back into one's conscious reading to remind him that the relationship of poem to man is not in any way abstract, that in fact one is participating in it at this very moment in this very poem.

As the recognition of poem made incarnate sinks into the imagination, as the poem approaches the reconciliation of extremes, Eliot returns to the image of the rose-garden. Like Stevens in a similar situation, he illuminates the multiplicity of the human condition in a bright, harsh light. With the piercing "shaft of sunlight," the thrush which had been protecting us from reality is gone. The "hidden laughter" of the children, implying innocence and unself-consciousness, is allowed to rise from the foliage. The complex nature of man confronts a new reality. The extremes of innocence and maturity are coupled in the realization of the movement of time, time which has now been tacitly accepted by the speaker of the poem. The earlier dictum, "only through time time is conquered," is beginning to be enacted.

II

Now, in "East Coker," it is appropriate for the poetic enactment of the reconciliation of the extremes of time and the timeless to begin. The second quartet begins with an extended but subtle pastiche of Ecclesiastes 3:1-3, combined

with an anachronistic description of a midsummer night's festival. The festival, celebrating "the association of man and woman," is set in the open where the sun shone brightly only hours before, rather than in the shaded lane where the poet walked among the random beams of light. The theme of "East Coker," "In my beginning is my end," articulated at the beginning of each of the first two stanzas, is expanded from the abstract in the pristine ritual of fertility. The dancers are an aspect of the unheard music. Here the music is played on "the weak pipe and the little drum;" it is beginning to be heard. It will recur in "The Dry Salvages" after a further metamorphosis. But for the moment, the speaker is converned with his unself-conscious antecedents. The poem pauses to investigate the implications of the key phrase of "Burnt Norton," "Only through time time is conquered" (BN II, p. 120). To know time, the speaker is obliged to return to the auroras of human awareness. In these primitive marriage rites Eliot discovers man with his roots in Mother Earth: "Earth feet, loam feet." In the scene, he feels a lost akin to the loss described by Gerard Manley Hopkins in the poem "God's Grandeur":

> Generations have trod, have trod;
> And all is seared with trade; bleared,
> smeared with toil;
> And wears man's smudge and shares man's
> smell: the soil
> Is bare now, nor can foot feel, being shod.[7]

Eliot senses a reciprocal loss in man's temporal progress. As man becomes more self-conscious he makes less of his vital relationship to the earth. At the same time, he arranges the

earth more and more to resemble his own consciousness. The poem points to another pair of antinomies, earth and man, which need to be restored to their original unity. Eliot's goal is a reclamation of man's innocent conjunction with nature within the structure of his mature self-consciousness. He recognizes an essential paradox in the antique setting: that the "coupling of man and woman" was once the same as "that of beasts." Time was barren of meaning because man was barren of selfhood. It was impossible then for people to have "rhythm in the dancing/ As in their living in the living seasons." Time then was a natural cycle of generation and decay. Eliot sets himself the task of regaining man's "earth feet" without returning to a state of mere animality. At last, he identifies his own beginning with the dawn of consciousness and before: "I am here/ Or there, or elsewhere. In my beginning."

The next step in the reformulation of history is to present a poem in the poem, simulating "the deception of the thrush," the Romantic deification of nature. As the thrush said earlier, "human kind/ Cannot bear very much reality" (BN I, p. 118). Until now, that is. The poet sees clearly that Romantic poetry ignored its own way of seeing the world, ignored the idea that it was only a way of seeing it. The Romantics and the Neo-classicals had all practiced this same deception. The knowledge of the past is inadequate to the strain of facing certain death; this knowledge must be a pattern reformed at every instant, a "lifetime burning in

every moment" (EC V, p. 129). The central question of "East Coker" now becomes, is all that knowledge of the past, that poetry of the past, simply a "receipt for deceit"? Is the wrestle with words "intolerable"? At this impasse the poem seems to stop itself in a syntactical and logical roadblock: "We are only undeceived/ Of that which, deceiving, could no longer harm." The speaker has reached a sort of anticlimax. Dispelling the comfortable deceptions of the past has only forced him into a position in which the truth is that which does not harm. The deceptions, once disavowed, cannot be reclaimed. Some comfort may be derived, the poet thinks, from hearing of the fears of the old wise men, from hearing that they too had been undeceived. The "wisdom of humility" seems a rather weak dogma outside this immediate context, but the derivation of the word can be brought to good use here. Humility comes into English, indirectly, from the Latin word humus, for earth. Like the houses and their history, like the dancers, the speaker realizes that he comes from the earth and is bound to return to it. Nevertheless, he too is a dancer, choreographing his new dance by dispelling the old deceptions. Having failed to pierce through these deceptions to a deceptionless world, he must now settle for a world which incorporates the idea of the deceptionless into its new deception:

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

Already there is an indication of the change which occurs in the catch phrase of "East Coker." Death now precedes birth in the temporal movement of the poem. Death cannot precede birth in the temporal movement of a man's life, but it can in the poem. As the man reads the poem, his temporality is rearranged by that of the poem. In his consciousness, death can now precede--and supersede--birth. Eliot prepares for the end of "East Coker," when he will rearrange this temporal progression more permanently.

If "Burnt Norton" is the manifesto of change, "East Coker" is the genesis of that change. In the latter part of the third section, the speaker utters his new fiat: "So the darkness shall be the light, and the stillness the dancing." Immediately, the poet shows an Oriental propensity for including opposites in a single statement. Life is a process of opposition, as this section demonstrates. Directly, the image proceeds into that of the world as hospital, to which all men are admitted with a terminal disease, life. This hospital, "endowed by the ruined millionaire," brings to mind Stevens' phrase, "We live in an old chaos of the sun."[8] The analogy between the rest of "East Coker" and "Sunday Morning" bears out well, I think. Eliot moves from the clinical directly into the religious metaphor. Perhaps it is indicative of the difference between the two poets that for the purposes of metaphor Eliot chose Good Friday, while Stevens chose Easter Sunday. Eliot brings into his poem an acceptance of man fixed in flesh and blood. There can be no transcen-

dance in the reality of human flesh, which is as unsubstantial as anything else which is involved in the "scheme of generation." "In spite of that," the speaker says, "we call this Friday good." Man must now choose to call his mortality good. As Kierkegaard says of Christion suffering, "the mark of it is that it is voluntary."[9] I will try to show through the next two sections, how Eliot develops this poetic necessity by insisting that the only choice man has is the choice to recognize in his own mortality the means of his salvation. The salvation, it follows, does not transcend, but is a salvation in the flesh, for the duration of the flesh.

Rooted in the flesh, the poet rejects words because they fail to give him immortality. He fears that the poetic act might merely be his wish to be "distracted from distraction by distraction" (BN III, p. 120). Humility forces him to realize that the standards of art have already been set by men who have conquered "what there is to conquer." The only way out of a suicidal dilemma is this: "there is only the trying." Only as man places himself in a continuing state of choice does he fulfill his humanity. Man and poetry become analogous again. The individual man learns to complicate his pattern so that not only his life but the existence and meaning of his race are in the balance of every instant. The poem, as well, calls forth not only its entirety (its complexity, its various readings by various individuals), but, if it is truly a poem, it also changes the meaning of the entire body of literature in itself. The corollary of the

infinite and constant repetition and reformulation is that each man must live in the "here and now," allowing the "here and now" to "cease to matter" as he lives it. "We must be still and still moving," Eliot says, exactly like the poem. Now, the speaker is thoroughly prepared to disavow the initial statement of "East Coker" and to replace it with a statement very much like one in "Sunday Morning." "In my end is my beginning," it seems to me, is not so very different from what Stevens means when he says, "Death is the mother of beauty." Perhaps the change in attitude from the beginning to the end of the quartet[10] more closely approximates the maturing of Crispin in on of Stevens' longer poems:

> Nota: Man is the intelligence of his soil.
> Nota: His soil is man's intelligence.[11]

In all of the poems mentioned, as in "East Coker," the poet assumes that the reader is self-consciously embodying the poem as he reads it. The poem is the poet's attempt to give man a circular temporality to replace the traditional linear one. Ideally, it takes man, trapped in a time without purpose, and puts him in a time which defines its own movement as a poem. This is, as I perceive it, the goal of the Four Quartets.

III

At the end of "East Coker" Eliot prefigures the movement of "The Dry Salvages," the actual movement into the time of the sea and the time of the river, as opposed to the time of man's chronometers:

> Through the dark cold and the empty desolation,
> The wave cry, the wind cry, the vast waters
> Of the petrel and the porpoise.

In order for man and the poem to be simultaneously in time and out of time, Eliot feels that he must penetrate the natural world and its own scheme of time. After two entire quartets devoted to the theme of time and man's temporality, the speaker of the poem suddenly begins to muse upon a "strong brown god." Finally he has wound around his circuitous path to the river of Heraclites, whose words begin the Four Quartets. The river here is the source of the metaphor of time, as the sea to which it flows is the source of the metaphor of timelessness. Each is dependent on the other for its meaning. The river god and the voices of the sea are all-pervasive. They are the essential qualities of nature upon which all meaning is dependent. The images are made archaic and impenetrable to reproduce a primeval state of nature stripped of all historical and philosophical implications. The heaving of the waves marks an elemental time "Older than the time of chronometers." Man's timepieces are sensationally dull metaphors when they are contrasted to the bell rung by "the unhurried ground swell." The undulating sea encompasses

two opposites, the impassive measure of time and the violent menace of oblivion. The same sea which rocks the groaner causes the wind that whines in the rigging. The voice of the eternal ground swell is also the "distant rote of the granite teeth." Eliot expands the notion of time while keeping it closely tied to his image of man:

> The river is within us, the sea is all about us.

The river, the natural phenomenon from which Heraclites derived his inspiration, is within man as an image of time. Man runs his course in a river of time, but like the river and like time he is never the same at one instant as he is at the next. The sea, which includes both "the menace and caress" of waves, surrounds man. Man is, indeed, an "island solitude."[12] He is beset by the directional flow of the river to the sea and the undulating movement of the waves themselves, aspects each of the other. The river cannot flow down to the sea if there is no sea to receive it, nor can the sea exist if there is no river to feed it. The water imagery is all-inclusive in "The Dry Salvages." Even the salt of the sea is "on the briar rose," and its "fog is in the fir trees." At last, Eliot is able to place man in a setting which is not dependent on man for its meaning. The time, "not our time," is older than the mechanical time of chronometers or the emotional time of sailors' wives, for whom "time stops and time is never ending."

For Eliot, unlike Stevens, this notion of a world in which man finds himself only a part, the external world, is

barely tolerable. The speaker in "The Dry Salvages" asks for the end of

> The silent withering of autumn flowers
> Dropping their petals and remaining motionless.

Still movement is not present in nature except in the measure of the sea. When the falling leaf reaches the ground, it remains still. The beginning of section II marks a low ebb in the poet's vitality and resilience. The metaphors have been reduced to their starkest for the moment. Eliot approaches a vision of the world without meaning, "the prayer of the bone on the beach." Then, without eagerness, he presents the alternatives. Man, he takes for granted now, is in a "drifting boat with slow leakage." Because "we cannot think of a time that is oceanless," that is, because the metaphor of time cannot be separated from the world which it describes, the only way to dispel "the voiceless wailing" is to voluntarily choose the "hardly, barely prayable/ Prayer of the one Annunciation." Because man cannot supersede the power of the sea, the only alternative is to choose to live a life where the pain is painful, the movement full of motion: "forever bailing, setting and hauling," rather than "making a trip that will be unpayable/ For a haul that will not bear examination." I think that Eliot chooses the particular New Testament sense of the Annunciation, but I do not find it bothersome, since it can never be more or less than a metaphor. In general terms, the Annunciation is the announcement of God's intention to become incarnate. Again, the idea of poetry is brought to the surface in this image. Not only

is it important that God is to become man, but also that the poem, as one speaks it, is incarnate. The point of incarnation is drawing near, the point at which man will be God. The poem is being embodied at every moment of its reading. The action of the poem is both intrinsic and extrinsic to it. Ideally, one is learning to confront the reality which the poem presents, while the poem achieves an end in itself. The poem may be still moving, as I said earlier, but man must find salvation in action and movement. Only in reading the poem does he approach still movement himself.

For a moment, the old poet sees the pattern of his life changing. He asserts again, as he did at the end of "East Coker," that the experience of the individual man is not his solitary experience alone. It is "not the experience of one life only/ But of many generations." This accretion of previous generations is Eliot's attempt to describe the intensity of agony in the context of time. Individual man, living in the present moment as he must, turns to glimpse the "primitive terror" which lies beyond the "assurance of recorded history." He experiences this primitive terror as "the bitter apple." Only since symbolic man, Adam, ate of the apple has man in general begun to live in the progression of time. This terror, then, is man outside of time in a condition of primal unself-consciousness. Only as man creates his image of temporal movement does he realize that "Time the destroyer is time the preserver." Man <u>is</u> because he is in time. Now, in Eliot's image, man can choose to live in time, rather than

being forced to live in it. As Adam bit the apple, one of the things he came to know was that the apple was not himself, but a part of something very different from himself. Christian man has seen it as a bitter apple. And it becomes daily more bitter as he realizes what has been lost. The poem is exploring the loss to know the gain. The speaker wants to know if an why "the bite in the apple" may be truly called the felix culpa. During a pause in this inquiry, the image of les trois sauvages also becomes an image of time:

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

Man, the sailor piloting the slowly leaking boat, has found a seamark in the midst of the moving water. This rock, so dependent on the sea and its weather, is a monument to man erected by man himself. On those infrequent halcyon days, he sees it as a monument. "In navigable weather" it is no more than a tool, a method of measurement. Since man is no longer sensitive to the fixed measure of the sea he must make use of his own standard "to lay a course by." However, in the fury of the storm, when the sea forces man's separation from it into the foreground, the rock, as time, "is what it always was," a function of is and was, a fiction.

The speaker then continues his inquiry into the nature of time and man's relation to it. Having once speculated that the future is a maudlin sentiment for those who will inherit his present, the speaker reduces supposed movement in

absolute time to no movement at all. The old axiom that time can heal all will not work from this point on in the poem, because, if the speaker's exhortations are heeded, man will no longer submit to time as physician. The wounded physician of "East Coker" is now dead. The image of man in the Four Quartets is freed from the absolute doctor-patient relationship with time. Man must now choose to move in time, to act, to "fare forward," with the notion that past and future are facets of the present. The traveler on earth no longer leaves or arrives; he who arrives is not the same as he who departed. The action of living voluntarily in a time which is no longer absolute commits the individual to living for others, those who are to come. There is a temptation to make an individual life merely an offering to the future. Eliot proleptically rejects this temptation: "do not think of the fruit of action." Think instead, he says, of the physical act of moving in a physical world. Think of moving in a structure of time which is only meaningful because it is voluntarily accepted as meaningful by each particular man.

I would note, finally, that this rejection of the traditional concept of time is spoken by an extra-human, extra-linguistic voice descanting in the rigging. In the temporal movement of the poem, written by a human poet, spoken by a human reader, a fictional speaker posits an ethereal voice. The irony is severe, to say the least. The poem is demanding that the imaginative ear (not the physical ear, which is the "murmuring shell" of the time of the sea) accept

a time which moves only as an individual man devotes his attention to the physical world in the present moment embodying the past and future. Man himself approaches a meaning analogous to the meaning of the poem, a meaning which rises in counterpoint to the meter. The sea marks its regular time unfailingly, while man stands within this movement phrasing the sea in his own time.

The sound of the perpetual angelus inspires in man a fear of his own physicality. Instead of thoroughly investigating the "bitter apple" and the loss it represents, or man's gain in having bitten it, some people choose to concentrate on the manner in which Adam took his bite. These are the persons who busy themselves with the magic, extrasensory perception, drugs, psychology of the poem. "Passtimes and drugs," Eliot calls them disparagingly. How appropriate is "passtime," since the unchecked passing of time is the object of criticism in the whole of the Four Quartets. Any activity which distracts a man from his constant agony, as those men in the place of disaffection are distracted (BN III, p. 120), is an inexcusable waste of human effort. Such a distraction is a weakness in the heroic sense, since one of the purposes of the poem is to force each person to recognize and realize his own personal heroism, or sainthood, as it is called in the poem.

The actual climax of the poem, for me, is now near:

> 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.

These words almost force one to attend to the beauty of the poem, through which I have only been arduously proceeding. Nearly three full quartets precede, but this passage is the culmination of all the previous images. Now Eliot is going to tell in so many words how to find the intersection of the timeless with time. He asserts now, after much insistence on the voluntary nature of the agony of man in time, that in another sense, the sainthood of that degree of perception is an exclusive and predetermined sainthood. The speaker suddenly includes himself in an "us" who are not to be favored with such beatitude. The saint's lifetime of death in love is something given and taken, not voluntarily accepted. Only the true religious saint can know the timeless in time by loving God. The intersection is the very idea of God. For the rest of us, lacking the transcendant God of the saint, there is no intersection of time with the timeless. For us there is only the moment in and out of time. Each moment we place ourselves in the context of time as an act of giving meaning to an otherwise empty movement.

There are various fit distractions now to be opposed to the unfit distractions at the beginning of section V:

The wild thyme unseen, or the winter lightning
Or the waterfall, or music heard so deeply
That it is not heard at all.

This is the poem's spectrum of beauty, from the assumed beauty of the unseen thyme in nature, to the unusual beauty of winter

lightning, or the magnificent natural beauty of the waterfall. As it moves from the visual to the auditory, the end of the spectrum opposite the unseen thyme is an internal music. The unheard music represents an extreme in which man assumes that the perception of beauty depends entirely upon a quality, infused or innate, within himself, a quality which itself cannot be apprehended. The unseen thyme, as its opposite, refers to a principle of beauty postulated of nature, but likewise unknowable. Eliot's own addition to these fit distractions is to say that "you are the music while the music lasts." Meaning exists independently of man, but it is temporally dependent upon him. This, it seems to me, is a much more apt preparation for what follows in the stanza. Among the distractions which are acceptable to Eliot, the condition in which man depends upon himself as the creator-discoverer of beauty is most acceptable. Of course, the "you" of this central phrase refers directly to the voyagers at the end of the third section, but it also addresses the reader. The name of the poem is, after all, Four Quartets. These are quartets which are not played upon an absolute instrument, but in the flesh of the individual ("the trilling wire in the blood"). In this light the phrase becomes much more complicated. The reader is the music of the poem as he embodies it during his reading, but the poem is a music with a duration of its own. The reader is also music in a larger sense, since he both engenders order and appreciates this order once it is created. The reader is the embodiment of the music of

his culture and the music of the poem, while they last and while he lasts. "The moment of the rose and the moment of the yew-tree / Are of equal duration." (LG V, p. 144)

All these hints and guesses are tempered by the occupations of the saint, even though the individual has slight hope that he will become a saint. The liberating notion that man is the music is always tempered by discipline. Freedom and responsibility come at one moment for the man charged with creating a meaningful world. For Eliot, the Incarnation is the real image of man. In it man is as close as possible to any intersection of the timeless with time, the "impossible union." In the spirit incarnate which is every man, "the past and future are...reconciled." This reconciliation has been prefigured in the "garlic and sapphires in the mud" image of "Burnt Norton." The image of man as conjunction of past and future, the life of the race and of an individual burning in every moment, <u>is</u> the Incarnation. The action of which the poem speaks is only moved by the physical force of the world. Man performs actions in the midst of the movement of the sea (his race), and in the context of the movemnt of the river (his lifetime). He is free from both past and future because they exist only in him. The final reconciliation of the poem necessitates man's choice of a time which he knows to be artificial (in the full sense of falsity and artifice). This is "our temporal reversion": returning to the time described in past and future after having perceived the time of the perpetual angelus. The sea bell continually

sounds the prayer of the Annunciation. We move from the Annunciation to the realization of our Incarnation. And then, only then, we choose "our temporal reversion."

Because the end is the beginning, the temporal reversion occurs in the valley of the shadow of death. It nourishes "the life of significant soil." The similarity of this phrase to that of Stevens is inviting. Crispin's voyage (he too is a voyager) is marked by the change of his initial dictum, "Man is the intelligence of his soil," to the later "his soil is man's intelligence," to the eventual "haphazard denouement." In "The Dry Salvages" man, voluntarily choosing to live in time, nourishes a soil which is responsible for the life which is responsible for intellignece. This life is constructed by man as analogy to the duration of the yew-tree, but the significance of the soil, the paradox, is the motive for the analogy. Whether man endows the soil or the soil endows man with meaning is beyond the ken of human perception, which rises itself from the antinomies of soil and life.

IV

"Little Gidding" begins with a long series of opposites centered around the image of "midwinter spring." In the development of the poem the last quartet will be the setting for Eliot's image of man in and out of time. Past and future, beginning and end, river and sea are the three major sets of

antinomies that must be reconciled before the poem ends. Like the speaker of Yeats' "Vacillations," Eliot's speaker has been running his course "between extremities."[13] At the outset of the final major division of the poem the Incarnation has been accepted and completed, and the Spirit descends in a sort of poetic Pentecost. In the dead of winter a "transitory blossom" appears. It is altogether a perfect bloom, one which neither buds nor fades. This bloom happens only in the life of a man (and perhaps only in the time of old age); it is not part of the "scheme of generation." In a sense, the poem is the transitory blossom, in the respect that it does not partake of the beauty of nature.[14] The poet has managed, through his own wrestle with language, to create a temporal and spatial movement peculiar to his own lifetime. As the timeless moment occurs in the garden chilled by winter, the speaker turns to a questioning of its opposite. "Where is the summer, the unimaginalbe / Zero summer?" He wants to know why there could not have been a midsummer fall in his own youth. Why, he asks, did the rose garden of "Burnt Norton" not include a premonition of winter? Why, in fact, cannot the summer be "sempiternal"?[15] Placing oneself in the time of the scheme of generation, the scheme in which the dancers of "East Coker" participate, is not possible. Yet it is not possible to escape from it. The time of budding and fading is always the same. There is nothing in it to distinguish the individual man, and man's purpose with respect to it is only a "husk of meaning." The explanation of "the poetry

does not matter" (EC II, p. 125) is here at hand. If the poem "matters" in the same way that the other motives of man's life matter, then it is liable to the same deflation in wintertime. Eliot's man is on earth finally to pray, and "prayer is more/ than an order of words." Prayer, then, is the expression of man's facing death in time. It is not an end, because ends have been rejected in the Four Quartets:

> Ash on an old man's sleeve
> Is all the ash the burnt roses leave.

It is meaning, not salvation:

> the communication
> Of the dead is tongued with fire beyond the
> language of the living.

The language of the dead, after all, is the spirit which descends upon modern man, who is, if he is living properly, the intersection of the timeless with time, "never and always."

Despite the efficacy of action, the reconciliation continues to be described in terms of opposites. A formal apocalyptic vision in which the four elements take turns destroying man is followed in the poem by a meeting between the speaker and his alter ego in a scene of present destruction. The speaker's opposite self is a self of extremes, "both intimate and unidentifiable." This meeting is the culmination of the paradoxical operation of the entire poem. The speaker is joined with the self that he is not. The persona of the poem becomes a unified persona at last. Time becomes completely a function of human perception in "aftersight and foresight." At the same time that the speaker is informed of

the unification of meaning in man, however, he is also informed of the bitterness of this unification. The "right action" (DS V, p. 136) which gives freedom is the movement of the human spirit "in measure, like a dancer." Spirit, like all other words in the poem (in every poem), is a deliberate choice. The image of the Holy Spirit descending in tongues of fire is being converted into the human spirit indwelling:

> The dark dove with the flickering tongue
> Had passed below the horizon of his homing.

The Spirit is returning to take up residence in earth. He is homing to the place of his origin. The spirit of man, his inspiration, allows him to make a dance of life within the artifice of time. The dance is movement in time for its own sake, movement which does not participate in the "scheme of generation," but in the scheme of man's invention. The dove descending and the thrush are one.

The cycle of a day has passed as the dawn breaks to begin the final resolution of the Four Quartets. In the third section an allusion to the "three men on the scaffold" places the Crucifixion of an undistinguished Christ after the Pentecost in Eliot's own scheme. The speaker explains the meaning of the Crucifixion as symbol, "a symbol perfected in death." The motive for meaning in the life of the individual is purified by its having been removed from the generative process of nature. The significant soil of the previous quartet becomes the "ground of our beseeching" in "Little Gidding." Meaning is finally limited to "midwinter spring." The only

symbol is a symbol perfected in death (again referring both to man and to the poem); "In my end is my beginning."

The ponderous movement of the poem is intensified in the short, lyric fourth section. The complex problems of man's accepting an artificial time, struggling within the sound of the perpetual angelus, are curtailed by the second appearance of the dove. The inspiration of the spirit is an incandescent terror, "the one discharge from sin and error." Whether the choice of "pyre or pyre" is hope or despair depends upon the choice of the individual. The speaker himself avers that Love devised the torment:

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

Love is the action of a man realizing that he is mortal. The shirt of flame makes each man painfully aware every instant that he is living, that he is dying. "The time of death is every moment." (DS III, p. 134) Making life the "choice of pyre or pyre" is a difficult, but considered, articulation of Eliot's own love. It leaves man with but one option in his personal act of love, the option envisioned by Marvel in "To His Coy Mistress":

> Thus, though we cannot make our sun
> Stand still, yet we will make him run.

If this seems but small consolation and compensation for life, it is because Eliot has elected to work within the Christian tradition. The Christian mythology assumes an end quite different from that of the Four Quartets, but the tension

between the two creates a confusion about the meaning of the poem. The love that Eliot draws is not Divine Love. It is an essential metaphor, a name for the unnamable. The power of this love is that it is mortal; it occurs despite an impending death which brings no salvation. It is love because Eliot chooses to see death as a benign end to the relationship between a man and his world. Each reader of the poem has the same choice: to declare or deny the importance of his own humanity.

The poem approaches the coda of its last period with a practical application of love to the theory of poetry. "Every poem is an epitaph" marks, in the reader's mind, the successful conversion of poetry from an end in itself to an immortal creation of mortality. The poem itself is the "complete consort dancing together;" that is, it is an artistic construct moving in a rarefied time. The poem is not action, since every action is "a step to the block" (although reading the poem is an action). Rather, it is a monument to a man's action, a pattern which is engendered by his relation to the world. Time at the close of "Little Gidding" is summed up like this:

> The moment of the rose and the moment of the yew tree
> Are of equal duration.

The time of death, every moment, is the same as the moment of beauty, the moment in the rose garden. History, withal, is composed of these moments, and makes them into a pattern. A people without history is not redeemed from time because it

never comes to know time. For Eliot, time and the timeless are the necessary antinomies which must be chosen to give meaning to a lifetime. Individual choice is of the highest importance when it has no absolute significance at all, when history is a pattern of timeless moments.

The end of a person's life, the end of the poem, the end of the symbol perfected in death is to arrive at the beginning. In the Four Quartets the last stanza is closely related to the first, naturally. The circularity of the poem's movement is being affirmed. The life of the individual man returns at last to a knowledge of innocence. The man cannot become innocent again, but he knows his lost innocence in the valley of the shadow of death. At the end of an exploration as monumental as the search for the source of the longest river, the Nile, the children of "Burnt Norton" are heard again. In a trough between two waves of the relentlessly moving sea, at the point where one wave becomes another, man achieves a condition "of complete simplicity." Having taken himself out of time in order to see its artifice (and in order to be able to love voluntarily), he now chooses to act in time, realizing that it is a sacrifice of everything for the possibility of meaning. The redemption of the fire and the beauty of the rose are one. Man lives, "Quick now, here, now, always-" (BN V, p. 122 and LG V, p. 145), not in the

> Ridiculous the waste sad time
> Stretching before and after, (BN)

but in

A condition of complete simplicity
(Costing not less than everything)
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.

FOOTNOTES

[1]R. P. Blackmur, "Examples of Wallace Stevens," in Form and Value in Modern Poetry (New York, 1957), p. 186.

[2]Murray Krieger, "The Ekphrastic Principle and the Still Movement of Poetry; or Laokoon Revisited," in The Play and Place of Criticism (Baltimore, 1967).

[3]T. S. Eliot, The Complete Poems and Plays 1909-1950 (New York, 1952), p. 119. Subsequent quotations from the poem are noted in the text only when they are taken from a quartet other than the one under discussion. To facilitate location of these quotations, I have noted the quartet (BN for "Burnt Norton," etc.), section, and page number. For instance, this footnote is a reference from BN II, p. 119.

[4]William Butler Yeats, The Collected Poems of William Butler Yeats (Toronto, 1956), p. 328.

[5]Cf. p. 27 of this thesis.

[6]Wallace Stevens, The Collected Poems of Wallace Stevens (New York, 1971), p. 93.

[7]Gerard Manley Hopkins, The Poems of Gerard Manley Hopkins (London, 1967), p. 66.

[8]Stevens, "Sunday Morning," p. 66.

[9]Soren Kierkegaard, The Point of View for My Work as an Author (New York, 1962), p. 8.

[10]The placement of these phrases also pointedly refers to the nature of the poem's unity, much the same as the lines repeated at the beginning and end of "Sir Gawain and the Green Knight."

[11]Stevens, "The Comedian as the Letter C," p. 27 and p. 36.

[12]Stevens, p. 70.

[13]Yeats, p. 245

[14]Cf. p. 9 of this thesis on Stevens' "Anecdote of the Jar."

[15]Compare this notion to the construct of summer in Stevens' "Creedences of Summer," in which the speaker postulates the effects of an eternal summer.

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

Blackmur, R. P. Form and Value in Modern Poetry. New York: Doubleday & Co., 1957.

Eliot, T. S. The Complete Poems and Plays 1909-1950. New York: Harcourt, Brace, & World, 1952.

Kierkegaard, Soren. The Point of View for My Work as an Author. New York: Harper & Row, 1962.

Krieger, Murray. The Play and Place of Criticism. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1967.

Stevens, Wallace. The Collected Poems of Wallace Stevens. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1971.

Yeats, William Butler. The Collected Poems of William Butler Yeats. Toronto: MacMillan, 1956.