

IN QUEST OF SPIRITUAL UNITY:
A STUDY OF T. S. ELIOT'S "BURNT NORTON"

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BY
MARTHA EVANS VERGARA

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Texas Woman's University

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Committee:

Dean Bishop
Chairman

Turner Kohler

Laron B. Fulwiler

Accepted:

L. L. Morrison
Dean of Graduate Studies

PREFACE

The study undertaken in this thesis is the outgrowth of a long-standing interest in the later work of T. S. Eliot. The selection of "Burnt Norton" as a subject for detailed examination was suggested by Dr. Virginia Moseley, who provided needed direction and encouragement during the early stages of this project. From its inception, this study has opened up many new avenues of interest that hopefully will be pursued in more detail in the future.

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INTRODUCTION

"Burnt Norton," the first of T. S. Eliot's Four Quartets, provides a way out of what appears to be the dead end of his first, or wasteland, period. Its theme, says Grover Smith, is "the idealist's quest for union with the vision forever elusive in this world"--the theme of all of Eliot's poetry.¹ The problems of sensual versus spiritual love, the meaning of history, and the function of the poet are all bound up in the search for this eternal vision.

Closely connected with these is the philosophical question of time, which is one of the main concerns of "Burnt Norton." The concept of time as it is treated in this poem is anticipated more completely in Eliot's essay "Tradition and the Individual Talent" than in any of his earlier poetry. In the essay, Eliot says that a work of art is judged by the standards of the past but that the art of the past is seen in a new light and is altered in meaning by the presence of each new work.² This view of the entire body of art as an ever-changing whole leads

¹T. S. Eliot's Poetry and Plays: A Study in Sources and Meaning (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965), p. 6.

²The Sacred Wood (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1966), pp. 49-50.

directly to the presentation in "Burnt Norton" of time as being both linear progression and simultaneous existence. Also anticipating this view of time, the earlier poetry first presents time as a continuum: history is deceptive; it gives too little too late, and what is over is done with. For example, in the Ariel poems, the Magi and Simeon arrive too soon to be redeemed by the Incarnation, which is viewed only as an act within linear time. That which is actual in Ash Wednesday "is actual only for one time / And only for one place." However, as Eliot enters his second period with the performance of The Rock, simultaneous time, the eternal pattern, makes its appearance, and redeeming the whole pattern of simultaneous time is the Incarnation, the supreme moment of the intersection of the temporal by the timeless.

This moment in which time and eternity meet is what Eliot calls the "still point," and it is the basic concept which unites the themes, images, symbols, and structural patterns of "Burnt Norton" into one complex design. Within this complex design, the thematic structure involves a synthesis of several different systems of philosophical thought as well as Eliot's own point of view. Supporting these themes is an equally complex system of images and symbols, which have been drawn from a wide range of sources, although, unlike The Waste Land, "Burnt Norton" contains few direct allusions. These elements are woven together

into an intricate pattern of relationships by a tightly organized structure, which itself contributes to the meaning of the poem. Therefore, the poem demands repeated readings and close study before it can be fully appreciated. Unquestionably, critics have repeatedly undertaken this task. They have analyzed the Four Quartets time after time; they have placed the Quartets within the perspective of Eliot's canon. To date, however, no one has attempted to explore "Burnt Norton" fully, to see it in all its complexity, to call attention to the success of Eliot's artistry evidenced here. Such a study of this poem as is undertaken here not only rewards the reader with a better understanding of the poem itself but also with a clearer picture of the renewed vision of life which directs all of Eliot's later work.

CHAPTER I

A MAZE OF INTERRELATED THREADS: THE THEMES OF "BURNT NORTON"

The meditations and visions of "Burnt Norton" are ordered around one central theme: there is an Absolute which orders the universe into a timeless pattern, but the pattern can be experienced by man only as a temporal progression of events that seem to have no meaning unless one becomes aware of the existence of the pattern. Within time, however, one perceives the timeless pattern only in rare moments of insight, which Eliot, in his essay on Pascal, describes as being either "communion with the Divine" or "a temporary crystalization of the mind."¹ His term for such moments is the "still point," a timeless moment which reconciles all tensions and conflicts and which governs and gives meaning to the actions of one's life. The "still point" within history is the Incarnation, or Christ, through whom the pattern of all time is redeemed. The term is also used to indicate the "unmoved mover" of the universe, whose presence is known only by means of the pattern.

¹"The 'Pensées' of Pascal," Points of View (London: Faber & Faber, 1947), p. 101.

Comprising the core of the central theme, Eliot's concept of this universal pattern, which contains both stillness and movement, is first introduced in the inter-relationship between the Greek epigraphs to the poem, two quotations from Heraclitus:

But though the Word is common, the many live as
though they had a wisdom of their own.

The road up and the road down is one and the same.

These translations from the Greek, provided by Louis L. Martz in his essay "The Wheel and the Point,"² emphasize the cyclical nature of the creative opposites in Heraclitus' system of flux, an important emphasis because of its relationship to Eliot's wheel image, which appears in Part II of "Burnt Norton." As to the upward and downward movement of the flux, Philip Wheelwright explains it in this way:

'The way up' meant to Heraclitus, outwardly, the qualitative movement from rock and earth through the intermediate stages of mud, water, cloud, air, and aether, to the rarest and uppermost of all states, which is fire; 'the way down' meant the contrary movement. Both movements are in process all the time in all things that exist, hence they are said to be 'the same'. Existence thus involves unceasing tension between upward and downward pulls--toward

²T. S. Eliot: A Selected Critique, ed. Leonard Unger (New York: Rinehart, 1948), p. 446.

the realm of rarity, warmth, light and toward the realm of density, cold, dark. The pull is not only observed in physical phenomena, it operates too in our souls.³

If all things exist through a tension of opposites, and if these opposites are means to the same end, then the search for the Absolute must be a cyclical process of knowledge and ignorance, illumination and darkness, faith and doubt.

This Absolute in Eliot's themes is the "still point" around which the wheel of flux moves. In Wheelwright's definition, this is "a mathematically pure point" at the hub of a moving wheel.⁴ In actuality the "pure point," or "still point," does not move, but it can be defined only in terms of movement. In another view of the same point, Merrel D. Clubb, Jr., also applies a mathematical principle:

A point in mathematics is merely a sign for something, say in a continuum. It has no dimensions whatsoever; it cannot be described specifically in any way, yet it is because of the point that there is a continuum. . . . In other words, the point though not moving itself contains the principle of movement,⁵ though not in time contains the principle of time.

Although, as Elizabeth Drew has noticed, in Heraclitus'

³"Eliot's Philosophical Themes," T. S. Eliot: A Study of His Writings by Several Hands, ed. B. Rajan (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1949), p. 100.

⁴P. 100.

⁵"The Heraclitean Element in Eliot's Four Quartets," Philological Quarterly, XL (1961), 26-27.

system there is no still point,⁶ Clubb suggests that it may be present:

Heraclitus nowhere says specifically that the Logos is a point of no movement, but he implies it. If the world process is an upward and downward path meeting in pure fire, there must be some mathematical point of no movement equivalent to Eliot's 'still point of the turning world.'⁷

Nevertheless, Eliot's adaptation of this Heraclitean Logos, or Word, as noted by Smith, is a synthesis of several systems of thought, for Heraclitus' Logos is equivalent to fire which motivates the cycle and is by extension the cycle itself, containing all movement. Eliot combines this Logos with the Aristotelian "unmoved mover" which exists outside the flux, and he places this unmoving source at the center of a perpetually moving wheel. The mover then "gathers" the movement into stillness.⁸ Smith therefore interprets the first epigraph as follows:

We each think that time passes, but in the logos it is eternal. We each think that the past endures in our memory, but in the logos it endures in immediate actuality.⁹

⁶T. S. Eliot: The Design of His Poetry (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1949), p. 148.

⁷P. 27.

⁸P. 256.

⁹P. 256.

All the seemingly opposing forces of the temporal world, which are apprehended as movement, are really part of an eternally existing pattern. Although the Logos encompasses all, the limited temporal consciousness is in danger of believing that the part is the whole. Thus, "the many live as though they had a wisdom of their own."

Consequently, in the fragmented existence of mankind, although there are many ways to the truth, each way is only a partial view of the whole. But as these paths to reality begin to form patterns within the larger design, a greater, though not total, understanding of the truth becomes possible. These individual ways to reality and the patterns which they form are illustrated within "Burnt Norton" by themes which seem to be irreconcilable opposites but which are finally understood as means to the same end.

One such group of interrelated themes--the concept of pattern, the sense of movement, and the presence of the still point--is brought into play when Eliot explores the question of redemption. As he contemplates the problem of redemption, he discovers the importance of history. He comes to realize that personal history and racial history, although they are experienced in time, form cyclical patterns of moments of awareness. Each new step in understanding reevaluates all that has gone before and serves as a point of reference for the future, and the past limits the interpretation of events that follow. Each moment,

then, is a type of still point, even though there may be a major moment of revelation which acts as a redeeming and unifying agent. For example, within the life of the poet stands a moment of conversion, represented in the poem by the rose garden experience in Part I, and within the history of man stands the Incarnation. However, the redeemed pattern cannot be seen in its entirety from the vantage point of time.

There is, though, a type of pattern which contains movement and yet can be seen as a unified whole, and that is the pattern of a completed poem. In Part V, Eliot introduces this theme. In his presentation of it, he offers a view of poetry as an art which unfolds in time. To him, each word as it appears adds new meaning to those which have preceded it and anticipates those which follow and thus provides an insight into the pattern of the whole. In this respect, each word is a moment of intersection of the temporal and the timeless, a still point, and the poet who sets the words in order is logos to his poem. Also, the poem itself may be a point of intersection, of reevaluation and new direction, within the body of the poet's creative world, within the life of the reader, and within the entire history of poetry.

This consideration of poetic art is related to another group of themes which are concerned with approaches to reality by different processes of the mind. At one

point in the poem, Eliot attempts to come to grips with reality through the agency of the memory, which he here interprets as the mental equivalent of simultaneous time. From this standpoint, then, imagination is capable of progressing through time. Yet imagination cannot function effectively without a storehouse of memory to supply it with points of reference, and memory is valueless unless one is able to reflect upon its meanings or to study possible alternative outcomes a given event might have had. Thus, the two work together to reach new levels of awareness:

What might have been and what has been
 Point to one end, which is always present.
(ll. 9-10)

In a similar way, intellectual reasoning and sensual experience, which are opposing means of awareness, are dependent upon each other. Again, Eliot attempts to find a way to interpret experience. Sensation supplies the raw materials for the intellect, and thought gives perspective to what the senses tell the poet. Intellect and sensibility are thus juxtaposed in "Burnt Norton" as Eliot approaches an event indirectly through abstract meditation and then gives a direct sensual impression of the same happening by means of concrete imagery. Consequently, each of these areas of mental activity contains a "wisdom" of its own, yet each is part of the patterned workings of the mind and reflects part of the same reality.

St. John . . . explains that those who would attain union with God must enter a condition of the soul called the 'dark night.' This condition is of two stages: the dark night of sense and the dark night of spirit, in which sense and spirit respectively are purged. The Ascent, counsel for the active way of purgation, is intended for proficients; the Dark Night, counsel for the passive way, for beginners. 'The passive way is that wherein the soul does nothing, and God works in the soul, and it remains, as it were, patient.'¹⁰

The elimination of the worlds of sense, fancy, and spirit leaves the beginner in a state of aridity and desolation. The descent is movement that is willed but is also the stillness of waiting, and in its stillness it resembles the other way, the "white light still and moving" of the moment of vision. This estatic moment also contains "the way down," as explained in St. John's words from the Dark Night:

Communications which are indeed of God have this property, that they humble the soul and at the same time exalt it. For upon this road to go down is to go up and to go up to go down; for he that humbles himself is exalted and he that exalts himself is humbled.¹¹

The spiritual life, then, is a cyclical process in which the way up and the way down are the same.

The way of the saint, however, is a highly specialized

¹⁰T. S. Eliot: Moments and Patterns (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1966), p. 42.

¹¹Quoted in Raymond Preston, 'Four Quartets' Rehearsed (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1946), p. 20.

profession followed by very few, and the poet in "Burnt Norton" comes to realize that there are many other ways, though perhaps less direct, that lead to the same goal and contain a similar cyclical movement. These other paths lead through a life of meaningful work which is guided by a spiritual still point, and for Eliot, this life is dedicated to the craft of poetry. His way is a continuous upward and downward movement from the achieved stillness of a completed poem to the struggle with the meanings of words, from moments of inspiration to periods of intellectual drought.

The ways through the world also contain the means for spiritual redemption, and even the darkest moments may produce worthwhile results. One such event, a moment in which a desired outcome was never achieved, prompts the poet to search for fulfillment, which he finds in the knowledge that the desire for good is itself a type of reconciliation. Smith clarifies this concept by explaining that if change or fulfillment is desired, and if desire,

in Aristotle's definition, is movement caused by an unmoved mover, which in the Christian concept is ultimately God viewed only as Love, it follows that, being good, the thing which did not happen is eternally actual in a pure form . . . in Him. Time is unredeemable because it is redeemed already.¹²

¹²P. 259.

Therefore, the present moment, which is all we have to work in, should be "aimed" toward another "end," which is all we really need.

This "end," or still point, and the many ways that lead to it are woven into an intricate structure of relationships within the poem. Although these thematic patterns may be approached by means of abstract analysis, they must be experienced directly to be understood fully, for much of Eliot's meaning is conveyed through the rich texture of images, symbols, and allusions that support and amplify these thematic patterns.

CHAPTER II

THE BACKBONE OF MEANING: IMAGE, SYMBOL, AND ALLUSION

Although "Burnt Norton" is more abstract and meditative than his earlier poetry, Eliot attempts to evoke the emotional equivalent of what it is like to experience the "still point" through concrete imagery and definite events as well as through abstract statement. He combines such traditional Christian symbols as the Dantean rose and the garden of Eden with Romantic images of nostalgic return to childhood, dream images from psychology, and private symbols from his earlier poetry in order to communicate a Christian experience through symbols that are not overtly Christian in nature to a secular world that has for the most part broken with traditional Christian expression. However, underlying these diverse images and symbols is the unifying image of the quest, a symbol of the poet's search for spiritual rebirth and artistic expression. This quest motif appears mainly in the passages in which there is a clearly defined scene or location. The first such passage is the scene in the rose garden in Part I. Here the poet takes an imaginary journey into the past and reaches a moment of mystic union with the stillness of the Absolute. Later, in seeking to regain this "stillness,"

the poet enters the actual world presented in the London subway scene of Part III. Here he finds only distraction and turns to the only way left: the way of denial which leads downward to a spiritual emptiness, the lowest point of which is another garden moment in Part IV. This garden, however, is a graveyard, symbolizing the total denial of self which is necessary before he may turn upward to another moment of union. In each of the major scenes there is a sense of being in a specific place at a specific time; yet in each, Eliot introduces a supernatural element that evokes a higher reality within the context of immediate actuality. The density of concrete images produces the sensation of an abstract "presence" as noted by D. W.

Harding:

Each [image] is checked and passes over into another before it has developed far enough to stand meaningfully by itself. . . . The abstract concept, in fact, seems like a space surrounded and defined by a more or less rich collection of latent ideas.¹

This evocation of the abstract by means of a heavy concentration of images is especially true of the first strophe of Part II, although there is no clearly defined location.

¹"T. S. Eliot 1925-1935," T. S. Eliot: A Collection of Critical Essays, ed. Hugh Kenner (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice Hall, 1962), p. 108.

This passage and the three "scenes" already mentioned contain the major groupings of imagery in the poem.

The first scene, that of the rose garden, has for its location the formal garden of Burnt Norton, a deserted manor house near Campden in Gloucestershire, which Eliot visited in the summer of 1934.² The house had no personal associations, and Preston says that it served only as a starting point for the poem and that Eliot did not know the history of the house.³ The name and the location, though, may reinforce the theme of return to an unfulfilled moment in the past in Part I. Sister M. Cleophas Costello has discovered that the Gaelic prefix burnt in a place name means "beyond the bend," a phrase similar to "round the corner" of line 22 in which the poet follows the bird "through the first gate" into the world of the past.⁴ In addition, she notes that the house, Gloucestershire, calls to mind Richard III, who had been Duke of Gloucester. A possible relationship of his era of English history to the poem is explained by Costello as follows:

Richard ruled just before the Renaissance proper was ushered in by the Tudors. . . . The

²C. A. Bodelsen, T. S. Eliot's Four Quartets (Copenhagen: Rosenkilde & Bagger, 1958), p. 39.

³P. 9.

⁴"Notes on Four Quartets," Renascence, II (1950), 105.

'rose-garden' and 'bowl of rose-leaves' may be symbolic--among other things--of the medieval period or the prelude to the modern era--the door of time which modern man has never opened.⁵

Admittedly, Eliot does return at times to the medieval period for some of his religious symbols; however in this instance, Burnt Norton is only the name of an actual place, which is used as an anchor in time and space for an excursion of the imagination.

An anchor perhaps is needed, for the two sections of Part I present a rather difficult meditation on time and consciousness followed by an equally complex scene illustrating a moment of intense religious experience. Both sections raise the question of how to redeem an unfulfilled moment which remains present in an eternal pattern of time where past, present, and future exist simultaneously.

The first ten lines of the poem deal with the problem of simultaneous time in highly abstract language:

Time present and time past
Are both perhaps present in time future,
And time future contained in time past.
If all time is eternally present
All time is unredeemable.
What might have been is an abstraction
Remaining a perpetual possibility
Only in a world of speculation.
What might have been and what has been
Point to one end, which is always present.
(ll. 1-10)

⁵Pp. 103-104.

This passage seems to suggest all of human activity occurring within the limits of time, but Preston sees these lines as a meditation on a verse from Ecclesiastes:⁶

That which hath been is now; and that
which is to be hath already been; and God re-
quireth that which is past. (iii, 15)

On the other hand, Eliot's insistent repetition of the word time seems to extend the allusion beyond this one verse to include the entire first part of the chapter:

To every thing there is a season, and
a time to every purpose under the heaven:
A time to be born, and a time to die;
a time to plant, and a time to pluck up that
which is planted;
A time to kill, and a time to heal; a
time to break down, and a time to build up;
A time to weep, and a time to laugh; a
time to mourn, and a time to dance.
(iii, 1-4)

Even if one is unaware of the possible allusion, Eliot's passage would probably leave some vague images in its wake, because one usually connects a period of time with an event that registers as an image in the brain. However, the emphasis here is on the eternal pattern, and this emphasis and the intimation of the presence of an absolute constitute what Rajan calls an "emotional preselector" for the

⁶P. 9.

scene that follows.⁷ It is the absolute for which the poet is searching.

After the abstract meditation of the first lines, the poem shifts to a scene of sensuous imagery. In this scene, all of which takes place in the poet's mind, we return with the poet to a moment in his past which he tries to redeem by imagining it as it might have been. He walks down the hallway of the manor house, opens the door, and goes through a gate into the formal garden where he encounters the ghosts of his past. Together they move to the center of the garden and look down into a dry pool that is suddenly filled with a mirage-like vision of water reflecting the sunlight. Many of the images, however, are ambiguous, dissolving the walls of reality. We are asked to step through the looking glass into the meaning behind the reflection.

The first images in this passage--the corridor, the door, and the rose garden--form a complex system of symbols:

Footfalls echo in the memory
Down the passage which we did not take
Towards the door we never opened
Into the rose-garden. (ll. 11-14)

⁷"The Unity of the Quartets," T. S. Eliot: A Study of His Writings by Several Hands (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1949), p. 81.

The "passage" is the corridor of the memory leading us into the past. It is also a passageway not taken in an earlier time, either physical--an actual moment missed--or mental--a knowledge not understood or not explored. The door into the rose garden has sexual, psychological, and religious implications, for the roses are traditionally symbolic of physical love and also carry the religious symbolism of the mystic rose of the Paradiso,⁸ and within the rose garden awaits a moment of both physical ecstasy and religious and intellectual vision, symbolic of the fusion of the natural and the supernatural. It has been suggested that this garden is an extension of another garden, the garden "where all loves end," a symbol in Ash Wednesday.⁹ Whether Eliot drew upon his earlier poem seems of little importance here, and for that matter, most of the sources suggested by the critics have little bearing upon the meaning of the scene; most of these sources are merely descriptions of parallel scenes. Of the numerous proposals,¹⁰ however, one of the more interesting appears

⁸Preston, p. 12.

⁹Drew, p. 105.

¹⁰Smith cites three other possible sources: H. G. Wells's "The Door in the Wall," Arthur Machen's "Opening the Door," in The Cozy Room, and William Morris's "The Nymph's Song to Hylas" (p. 325, note 21).

in Alice in Wonderland. In the particular scene cited, Alice opens a little door that leads into a passage which is too small for her. At the other end of the corridor is a garden which remains in her memory and which she returns to when she regains her normal size. Louis L. Martz says that Alice's experience "becomes in Eliot a symbol of the longing to be born again, a symbol of the search for spiritual refreshment, for a change of heart, a change of vision" ¹¹

In addition, Barbara Seward suggests that the roses in the garden are symbolic of Christ, the eternal rose. ¹² Again, the symbolic associations are not clear cut. What can be said with assurance, though, is that the roses in Eliot's garden are symbols of earthly love and of the Virgin and thus in combination suggest the presence of a woman, the unidentified companion who accompanies the poet into the garden. Drew sees this woman in the garden as one of the dream symbols which appear as part of what Jung calls the process of "transformation," the shifting of the personality from its center in the ego to a different

¹¹P. 448. Martz also finds a source in D. H. Lawrence's "The Shadow in the Rose Garden," in which a woman returns to a rose garden in an attempt to recapture an earlier experience of love (p. 449).

¹²The Symbolic Rose (New York: Columbia University, 1960), p. 179.

center of balance which is characterized by a sense of wholeness:

The new centre of value will . . . reveal itself under the image of some form of enclosure, which to Jung has the meaning of the Greek temenos, an isolated sacred place; visualized in dream as garden, courtyard or such. At the same time, the anima figure makes its appearance, symbol of the woman element in man, with which he must come to terms if he is to develop further. Images of a miraculous child and the sensation of renewal through it come from the unconscious. The anima figure becomes increasingly depersonalized, as the feminine function she represents becomes integrated into the total response of the personality, and diffuses itself throughout consciousness.¹³

Although the "anima" figure is not actually described, Eliot's companion is commonly assumed to be a woman.

Before the poet enters the garden, however, he hesitates, not sure of his purpose, and addresses either his companion or the reader:

. . . My words echo
Thus, in your mind.
But to what purpose
Disturbing the dust on a bowl of rose-leaves
I do not know. (ll. 14-18)

These lines suggest that perhaps everyone has a private rose garden or that the mind of the reader may be a corridor into the garden of the poet. Eliot also may be talking to the woman present in his imaginary experience,

¹³T. S. Eliot: The Design of His Poetry, p. 141.

but the dead rose leaves remind us that the actual experience is already in the past. The dead roses are symbolic of the death of desire or of withered faith; they are covered with dust, a symbol of the passage of time. The past is dead and unredeemable, and stirring up old memories would seem to be a fruitless act.

As the poet hesitates, other sounds beckon and tempt him into entering the gate into his imaginary garden:

Other echoes
 Inhabit the garden. Shall we follow?
 Quick, said the bird, find them, find them,
 Round the corner. Through the first gate,
 Into our first world, shall we follow
 The deception of the thrush? Into our first
 world. (ll. 19-24)

The "other echoes" indicate the possibility of presences in the garden other than the former selves of the poet and his companion. As they follow the bird "round the corner," they make a "loop in time" similar to that of Harry Monchesney in The Family Reunion and reminiscent of Henry James's "The Jolly Corner."¹⁴ The "loop" brings the pair face to face with their former selves and joins the actualities and potentialities of the worlds of past and present. The "first world" brings together the recent past of the adult couple, the world of childhood innocence,

¹⁴Smith, p. 260.

and the first world of mankind, the Garden of Eden. The "first gate" is therefore a symbol for rebirth, which the poet desires. There is a possible allusion here to the third book of Spenser's Faerie Queen, to the gate to the Garden of Adonis, the passageway for the souls of children as they enter the world.¹⁵

In his desire to find a renewed life in which the missed possibilities of the past might somehow be fulfilled, the poet uses his imagination to create that world, and the thrush is a miraculous messenger of poetic inspiration. However, the bird's message deceives because it is incomplete, for the poetry he inspires is an illusion of reality, not the experience itself. The thrush can lead the way to damnation as well as to redemption if those who follow him cannot distinguish between appearance and reality, between the part and the whole. Thompson compares Eliot's thrush to Whitman's bird in "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd":

Both are symbols of the poetic 'demon' in life. Both are located on the frontier between time and eternity, life and death. Both are liberators and redeemers. Whitman's thrush releases him from the 'cloud' that holds Whitman powerless at the opening of

¹⁵Eric Thompson, T. S. Eliot: The Metaphysical Perspective (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University, 1963), p. 99.

the poem; Eliot's thrush releases him from the corridor.¹⁶

Preston, however, notes that the thrush may be kin to the airy messenger of rebirth in Grimm's tale The Juniper Tree and to the bird of Ecclesiastes:¹⁷

" . . . he shall rise up at the voice of the
bird." (xii, 4)

In addition, Mark Reinsberg points out that Eliot's thrush is probably the water thrush of the Mississippi River Valley, a bird which protects its eggs by pretending to be injured and then leading animals away from its nest.¹⁸

Nonetheless, after the thrush leads the poet and his companion into the garden, the visitors sense the presence of ghostly beings:

There they were, dignified, invisible.
(1. 25)

These beings seem to belong in the garden, but their identity remains ambiguous, for the rose garden they inhabit represents more than one period of time past. They first seem to be adults, even though "our first

¹⁶Pp. 94-95.

¹⁷Pp. 13-14.

¹⁸"A Footnote to Four Quartets," American Literature, XXI (1949), 343.

world" would seem to indicate a return to the poet's childhood. The return, however, is also to the innocent first world of the human race, and "they" are our first parents, Adam and Eve. In keeping with the latter interpretation, Thompson, in a summary of theologian Paul Tillich's views on Adam and Eve as symbols, stresses the importance of Eliot's making "them" invisible:

. . . 'our first parents' must not be interpreted as actual persons who lived in a specific place and whose fall was an event that happened once upon a time. Adam must be understood first as a symbol of essential man, man, that is, in unity with God; second as a symbol of man actualizing his freedom in such a way as to estrange himself from God. The 'fall of Adam' must be taken as a symbol of the human situation universally, the universal destiny of estrangement that concerns every man.¹⁹

Thompson also finds, in the relationship between Celia and Edward in The Cocktail Party, two ideas which help clarify the meaning of "them" as invisible adults, spectres of the recent past.²⁰ Celia, in her affair with Edward, attempts through sexual love to find a spiritual unity of being which she calls "that new person us." However, when she discovers that she no longer loves Edward, she realizes that she has seen him not as he was

¹⁹P. 96.

²⁰P. 92.

but as an image of what she wanted him to be. This false image becomes only an echo when she is able to look at him objectively and see what he is really like. The poet is also looking back to a situation involving physical love which never achieved the unity of being he sought. Both he and Celia made the mistake of trying to find an absolute meaning for life in sexual union. In addition, the poet is able to see "what might have been" in juxtaposition with what actually happened, much in the same way that Celia could see the real Edward and her false image of him at the same time.

For the poet, the innocent world of childhood now represents the union of the sensual and the spiritual that he was seeking and missed in his adult experience, and "they" also represent the childhood selves of the poet and his companion as they existed in a state of harmony that he is trying to regain. In this attempted return to childhood, Eliot draws on a number of sources for his imagery. One possible source may be James's The Turn of the Screw, in which the children at Bly appear both innocent and fallen and the governess sees ghosts from the past.²¹ Kipling's "They" also contains a number of parallels to Eliot's garden scene. In this story, a formal garden of a secluded manor house is inhabited by

²¹Thompson, p. 98.

ghosts of children who have died young, and when their parents visit the garden (Eliot's "guests"), the children can be heard playing in the shrubbery, but they are never seen. Moreover, the garden is owned by a blind woman who regrets that she has never had children, and she and the dead children represent the unfulfilled possibilities in life.²² Similarities to the images and ideas of Eliot's garden scene are present, too, in the opening of Conrad's The Shadow Line. Conrad's "enchanted garden" of early youth is also entered by a "little gate" and contains "paths" similar to Eliot's "alley" and "passage." One is also warned by a "shadow line" that he must leave. Unger points out that the most important connection between the two scenes is their emphasis on the universality of youthful experience.²³ The memory, however, is probably drawn from an experience in Eliot's childhood in St. Louis. As a young boy, he lived next door to Mary Institute, a school for girls founded by his grandfather. From his house Eliot could see the girls playing, but he was not allowed to enter the gate into the schoolyard until they had left for the day. When he

²²Bodelsen, p. 41.

²³T. S. Eliot: Moments and Patterns, pp. 151-152.

finally did go in to play alone, the girls were only echoes.²⁴

Nevertheless, whatever the origin of the germ for the scene may have been, this innocent world of childhood and the mythical world of Eden symbolize the unity of body and spirit that was the hoped-for outcome of the sexual experience of the poet's recent past, and the ghosts of these three worlds meet within the imagined garden as Eliot tries to recreate the experience as it might have been and at the same time to remember it as it actually was. Furthermore, the silence of the scene reminds the reader that the events are illusory and have no substance:

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.
(ll. 26-31)

The only sound, the call of the bird, emphasizes the fact that this is poetry, not actuality, for the bird is creative inspiration that brings forth the song of poetry. The bird responds to an "unheard music" that suggests the presence of a natural harmony which the

²⁴Walter J. Ong, "'Burnt Norton' in St. Louis," American Literature, XXXIII (1962), 523-524.

poet is trying to reach through his poetry. Also, the possible allusion to Keats's "Ode on a Grecian Urn" reminds us of another silent music that inspired poetic imagination.

Although the natural harmony intimates the presence of a world of innocence, this theme is overshadowed by the emphasis on age and experience. That the music may represent lost innocence is supported by Thompson's idea that the music marks the moment of a child's awakening to the mysterious world of the spirit residing in nature but not yet actualized in him.²⁵ The music, however, also recalls a silent flute in Ash Wednesday, that of the garden god, a symbol for the distraction of desire. And the dust on the rose leaves, the dead leaves in the garden, the unnatural autumn heat are all images of decay and time past and thus suggest an adult world of experience. Furthermore, the "vibrant air" suggests a mirage, an image which emphasizes heat rather than light, desire instead of love. And the "unseen eyebeam," a reference to Donne's "The Exstasie," seems to be an intrusion on privacy, for the roses are

²⁵P. 103.

looked at²⁶ and appear to be self-conscious. There is also perhaps a connection between this eyebeam and the judging eye of God in The Family Reunion, an eye that we sense looking into our souls and finding our deficiencies. The auditory and visual images in these lines leave the impression that the song of perfect union in love, though still present somewhere, is missing from a world dominated only by self-conscious desire.

The images of desire, too, seem to indicate that when the ghosts and the visitors silently greet each other, they are communicating as equals on an adult level:

There they were as our guests, accepted and
accepting. (1. 32)

"They" seem to belong in the garden; yet it is still the garden of the mind and belongs to "us"; therefore, they are our guests. That they are guests, "accepted and accepting," shows that these are friendly ghosts, but the words imply a politeness and formal distance in the relationship, a lack of ease and naturalness. Acceptance, however, involves a certain amount of openness and giving of the self and is a necessary first step to a meaningful

²⁶Wheelwright mentions that the flowers of Botticelli's Primavera and those of da Brescia's Madonna in the Rose Garden have the same quality of being "looked at" (p. 99).

union on both the natural and spiritual levels. The spiritual significance of this line becomes more apparent in the light of Lancelot Andrewes' words which probably influenced Eliot:

Let us then make this so accepted a time in
itself twice acceptable by our accepting, which
He will acceptably take at our hands.²⁷

Man must be willing to receive God's gifts on God's terms even though he does not always understand those terms, as the poet does not yet understand the unseen inhabitants of the garden.

At this point the spiritual implications indicate a change of direction within the poet's mind as he becomes aware that "they" represent all of fallen humanity and are involved in a set of patterns that are somehow relevant to his search:

So we moved, and they, in a formal pattern.
(1. 33)

As a part of the theme of adult sensuality, "formal pattern" represents a sexual union which is merely a mechanical pattern that lacks a corresponding spiritual union, and it also suggests the continuing cycle of all nature. The words also suggest a dance, an image Eliot uses later for the pattern of the flux of time. The

²⁷Quoted in Smith, p. 325.

dancers here, though, represent the pattern of history, for the invisible beings, who represent the past of the individual and of the race, and the visitors, who are the future of the ghosts, meet in the present of the poet's mind. That mind creates another pattern, the formal pattern of the poem itself. These two words formal pattern suggest the first step in awareness, a realization of the patterns of nature, of personal and racial history, and of art, forms which point the way to a greater understanding of the ordering force which gives them meaning.

Therefore, within the ordered form of the poem, all history moves in a natural cycle, but the cycle only brings the poet to a dead end in his search:

Along the empty alley, into the box circle,
To look down into the drained pool,
Dry the pool, dry concrete, brown edged.
(11. 34-36)

The "empty alley," part of the maze in the formal garden, has obvious sexual overtones, but it contains no roses, no love. The alley also reminds us of the corridor of the imagination that leads the poet into the garden. This corridor, though, leads only to a dead end at the barren pool, and this emptiness shows that the remembered physical union was unproductive. It also shows that the poet cannot imagine into being "what might have been,"

for he now realizes that throughout history man has never been able to return to Eden. As a result, nature, history, and art are all apparently roads leading to a spiritual death.

This death, however, seems to be a necessary step in the poet's quest for meaning, and the "box circle" and the pool seem to suggest that the poet is about to find what he is looking for. The boxwood hedge that grows in a circle around the pool is an evergreen similar to the yew, which is used as a symbol for death. But it is also a symbol for everlasting life, and since "box circle" reminds us of a theater, it seems that the people in the garden may be about to witness an event that has to do with the supernatural. The other symbol of death, the pool, a bone image, also anticipates the coming event, for its dryness is reminiscent of the state of spiritual aridity described by St. John of the Cross as preceding a moment of new awareness. In addition, the "box circle" and the pool at its center form a geometric pattern similar to those which appear, according to Jung, as dream images just before the "transformation" to a new center of being reaches its completion.²⁸ One of these images is a "squared" circle, which is kin to a type of

²⁸Drew, p. 142.

mystic symbol used in many parts of the world. The circle is divided into four equal parts, and this "fourness" is the archetypal symbol for God.²⁹ On the other hand, the Buddhist symbol, the mandala, has at its center a lotus design containing a figure of Buddha, and the Christian design contains a figure of Christ within a stylized rose. In its secular form, the center of the design may contain a flower, a sun, a star, or a pool of water, but in all contexts, the circular design is the symbol of "psychic happening."

Indeed, the center of Eliot's design contains both religious and secular images, but the "happening" is religious in nature:

And the pool was filled with water out of
 sunlight,
 And the lotos rose, quietly, quietly,
 The surface glittered out of heart of light.
 (11. 37-39)

Suddenly the union looked for and not found in the patterns of temporal life arrives as a gift of divine grace. The image is like a mirage in which the water created by the sunlight shimmers in the hot air and seems to rise to meet the light. The sunlight here is a symbol for God, and the water, a symbol of life and rebirth. The

²⁹Drew, p. 143.

water reflecting the light of God recalls Canto XXX of the Paradiso in which the light of heaven is reflected in a river so that the mortal eyes of the poet may be prepared to see the vision of the eternal rose. In Eliot's scene, the lotus rises, as does Dante's celestial rose, to bask in the light of the divine sun. The glitter of the reflection and the upward movement of the lotus suggest a response by the forms of nature and by the soul of man, an acceptance or reciprocation rising from the desire to become one with the divine soul. And the lotus as a fertility symbol with phallic significance³⁰ indicates that the final consummation of all human acts is union with the divine and that all desire comes from and is redeemed by God. This image is further explained by Thompson as a religious symbol of Oriental origin:

The lotus (because it springs not from earth but from water), from remote times has symbolized the possibility of super-human or divine life existing in the context of nature and yet unsullied by its context. In Buddhist pictures it appears often at the hub of a wheel and signifies the one secure ground of human self-sufficiency--purity of motive, detachment from all desire for the fruits of action.³¹

³⁰C. L. Barber, "Strange Gods at T. S. Eliot's 'The Family Reunion,'" T. S. Eliot: A Selected Critique, ed. Leonard Unger (New York: Rinehart, 1948), p. 440.

³¹p. 100.

Although Eliot conveys through these images and symbols a moment of religious ecstasy, the image of light also contains a suggestion of terror. The "heart of light" is an image used by Eliot in The Waste Land as a figure for the "real reality,"³² but the similarity of the words to Conrad's Heart of Darkness reminds us that the reality is also terrifying.³³ In Conrad's novel, Kurtz, as he is dying, looks over the brink of life into the darkness beyond and sees in the eternal pattern the fallen condition of all mankind. His reaction to this vision is his cry, "The Horror!" Even though Eliot's vision is one of eternal beauty, it is only momentary, and he also realizes how far man is separated from divine perfection.

While the moment lasts, however, the poet sees himself as part of the divine pattern and also sees the past revealed in the light of a new knowledge gained about the past:

And they were behind us, reflected in the pool.
(l. 40)

For the first time the inhabitants of the garden are seen, as all time is gathered into the still point of

³²Thompson, p. 100.

³³Unger, T. S. Eliot: Moments and Patterns, pp. 110-111.

the vision. "They" are "behind us" in the past and are reflected with "us" in the light, which is the future or "end" of all men that is "always present." The effect is one of double vision in which the poet sees his past self standing behind his present self. The doppelganger,³⁴ or double image, in this scene echoes an occurrence in Heart of Darkness in which Marlowe experiences double vision when he visits the girl Kurtz had intended to marry. His memory of Kurtz is so strong that he can actually see him standing beside the girl, and a gesture the girl makes reminds him of a similar gesture of bereavement made by Kurtz's African mistress, "stretching bare brown arms over the glitter of the infernal stream."³⁵ The two merge into one universal image, the African woman representing the primitive past and the white girl the civilized present.³⁶ However, Eliot's vision that joins all time in one moment reveals more than the universality of human experience, for in this moment of incarnation, one is reminded of Christ the Incarnation, the "light of the world" redeeming all time.

³⁴Smith, p. 289.

³⁵(New York: New American Library, 1950), p. 156.

³⁶Unger, T. S. Eliot: Moments and Patterns, pp. 129-131.

The children in the leaves, however, remain; they are symbols of hope, of a new life to be lived in the knowledge revealed in the vision. They are the product of that union, still hidden, unborn. The poet must now wait for another birth. An analogy to these children in the leaves can be found in an old Saxon observation of Whitsunday in which a pair of children, dressed as bride and groom, symbolizing the spirit of vegetation, hid themselves in the bushes and waited until they were found by the celebrating villagers.³⁷ Thus, the time ahead of the poet must be one of waiting as well as of seeking.

Despite the anxiety of such a situation, the poet now has something to give meaning to his waiting and direction to his seeking, and we understand more clearly the meaning of the lines of the meditation at the first of the poem as they are repeated at the end of this scene:

Time past and time future
 What might have been and what has been
 Point to one end, which is always present.
 (ll. 46-48)

The poet's imagination, working with the materials of his memory, could not create the still point, but his efforts

³⁷Sir James George Frazer, The New Golden Bough, ed. Theodor H. Gaster (Garden City, N. Y.: Doubleday, 1961), p. 49.

pointed the way to it by giving him perspective and by eliminating all other possible roads to redemption. The "one end," his moment of incarnation, which revealed the Incarnation, now stands as a reality within the memory of the poet and serves as an ever-present guide.

Now that the moment in the garden is past, the poet must discover how his life is to be lived so that he might regain the experience, but before he goes forward, he tries to recall the nature of the experience. This attempt provides the framework for the three sections of Part II. In the first section, he tries to evoke the point by means of strong sensual imagery that gives an overall impression of the cycle of nature. The intention is to give one the feeling that there is a creator behind the pattern. The second section approaches the point by means of logic; Eliot tries to show what the point is by a series of paradoxes showing what it is not. In the third section he remembers what his own physical and mental sensations were at the still point, and he closes with a statement on time as the medium by which the timeless is reached.

In his first attempt to reach the point, the first strophe of Part II, Eliot creates through imagery an impression of the simultaneous pattern of natural order:

Garlic and sapphires in the mud
Clot the bedded axle-tree.

The trilling wire in the blood
 Sings below inveterate scars
 And reconciles forgotten wars.
 The dance along the artery
 The circulation of the lymph
 Are figured in the drift of stars
 Ascend to summer in the tree
 We move above the moving tree
 In light upon the figured leaf
 And hear upon the sodden floor
 Below, the boarhound and the boar
 Pursue their pattern as before
 But reconciled among the stars.
 (11. 49-63)

The governing image is a tree which one seems to be climbing, but the dominant feeling in this passage is that the life of the tree and the lives of all other living things move in harmony with an elemental pulse beat that is part of the pattern of the entire universe. Preston's observations illustrate the total effect of this passage:

. . . one's first impression is that here more than anywhere else in the poem is a symbolist construction rather than a statement. First the feeling is earth-bound, then as free as the leaves dancing in light; and we seem to see the purified essence of what we have known, with the accidents of our life removed and its conflicts resolved. . . . It is a vision of the ordered universe in which movement from one part of it to another seems so effortless that it is not movement at all, and it is the whole of which we are conscious, not the part.³⁸

The stillness of the pattern is immediately apparent

³⁸P. 15.

in the images of the first lines where the opposing forces of life are represented by the garlic and sapphires in the mud at the base of the "bedded axle-tree." This effect of stillness, Preston explains, is the result of the concentration of images:

I am inclined to think that more important than any meaning we may subsequently find for the images, is the nature of their immediate impact. Strong sense-impressions which are normally experienced in succession are in these two lines registered simultaneously; and they suggest a third sensation--arrested movement.³⁹

This sensation of arrested movement is Eliot's method of evoking the "still point" that communicates the presence of a mover existing outside the pattern. An examination of individual images, however, reveals more exactly what these sense impressions are and how they relate to the overall themes of the poem.

Apparently, the first lines were influenced by two of Mallarme's poems: "M'introduire dans ton histoire," in which an axle and rubies appear, and "Le tombeau de Charles Baudelaire," in which mud and rubies pour from the mouth of a sewer. The influence of the first poem was confirmed by Eliot,⁴⁰ and the second source is sug-

³⁹P. 16.

⁴⁰Preston, p. 16.

gested by Bodelsen, who says that the French poems are sources for the imagery only and throw no light on the meaning.⁴¹ Drew, though, sees the garlic and sapphires as flowers and bright stones, natural objects of beauty representing the order of nature and covering a symbol of disorder, the axle-tree of a gun carriage of a "forgotten war."⁴² In Wheelwright's interpretation, the garlic and sapphires represent two impediments to the attainment of the "still point," which is suggested by the axle-tree. To him, the garlic is the sordid and the sapphires are the deceptively beautiful in life.⁴³ As noted by Bodelsen, however, the ritualistic significance of the stones' blue color, which is the color traditionally associated with the Virgin, could indicate the presence of the divine co-existing with natural instincts, represented here by the garlic, within one earthly body, suggested by the mud.⁴⁴ This view encompasses both the dual nature of man and the paradox of the Incarnation, and the latter interpretation would complement Drew's idea that "bedded" and "tree" could be symbolic of the cross and manger.⁴⁵

⁴¹P. 46.

⁴²P. 155.

⁴³P. 101.

⁴⁴P. 155.

⁴⁵P. 155.

The suggestion of Incarnation within these two lines seems to fit logically into the meaning and structure of the whole passage, because the Incarnation is the "still point" within the movement of life, and the axle-tree seems to be a still point of reference for the cyclical movement in the rest of the lines. From this point to the end of the passage, the movement of the images suggests the rotation of a wheel, and the wheel is one of Eliot's basic symbols for the eternal pattern. Within time, the wheel seems to move, yet in its eternal aspect, the wheel is a fixed pattern in which all things exist simultaneously, and at its center is the axle or "still point" which moves the wheel. Eliot's wheel is comparable to the medieval Wheel of Fortune, "whirling men ceaselessly upward to prosperity and downward to misery. But always at the centre of the Wheel's movement, conditioning it, is the axle-tree."⁴⁶ Also Kenner notes a similarity between Eliot's tree and Yggdrasill, which in Norse mythology is the great ash tree binding together heaven and earth.⁴⁷ Therefore, the axle-tree,⁴⁸ which is "bedded" and does not move,

⁴⁶Wheelwright, p. 100.

⁴⁷The Invisible Poet: T. S. Eliot (New York: McDowell, Obolensky, 1959), p. 297.

⁴⁸Smith cites Chapman's Bussy D'Ambois and Shakespeare's Henry IV, Part I, as other possible influences on the image (p. 261).

seems to be a fixed point within the cycle of life depicted in the passage.

This cycle begins its ascent as new life begins to rise upward from the roots into the tree:

The trilling wire in the blood
Sings below inveterate scars
And reconciles forgotten wars.
(11. 51-53)

The "trilling wire in the blood" seems to indicate a life force moving deep within the roots of being. It also seems to be a symbol for a reborn unity of the spiritual and sensual natures of man, and in these lines, wholeness of being is apparently a universal and joyous force which heals the deep scars of prejudice and reconciles the ancient conflicts which caused such enmity. Supporting this idea of unity is Wheelwright's interpretation of the wire as an "electrical metaphor that recalls also the bird's song . . . the pulse beat by which we respond to . . . ecstasy, to the laughter in the garden."⁴⁹

After the trilling pulse in the blood rises to a spring-like awakening, the heartbeat becomes stronger, and its rhythm moves in time with the universal dance of life:

⁴⁹Pp. 101-102.

The dance along the artery
 The circulation of the lymph
 Are figured in the drift of stars.
 (ll. 54-56)

The images here represent the systems of the body and suggest the cycle of all life as it is placed in the perspective of the entire universe. The "dance"⁵⁰ or pattern of life is echoed in the fixed designs of the constellations that drift in a cyclical pattern. And the dance or pulse beat of living things seems to be guided by the stars that "figure" the lives of men. The physiological images also recall to Kenner the "Women of Canterbury's" discovery that what is woven on the loom of fate is woven also in their veins and brains."⁵¹

Thus, the discovery of a force that governs the entire pattern of nature and the universe brings a moment of ecstasy and release:

Ascend to summer in the tree
 We move above the moving leaf
 In light upon the figured leaf.
 (ll. 57-59)

The summer of the tree is its time of fruition, and from our roots in the natural order, we ascend to the fruition of the spirit and seem to transcend the physical body. Momentarily we are detached from the wheel

⁵⁰Smith sees the dance as reminiscent of the angels' "mystical dance" in Paradise Lost (p. 262).

⁵¹The Invisible Poet: T. S. Eliot, p. 297.

of temporal life in our awareness of the harmonious whole. We seem to float above the moving world as it turns on the axle-tree and see the divine light reflected in natural forms, represented here by the "figured leaf," which are part of the design.⁵²

Consequently, as we view the pattern objectively, frustration and terror are seen as an integral and necessary part of the cycle:

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

The detached point of view, which beholds the hunt as if it were a scene woven into a tapestry, gives the impression of stillness as does the image of the constellations. Yet the movement of life is suggested by the sudden downward and upward movement from sunlight to mud to the fire of stars and by the strife of opposing forces of nature, the boarhound and the boar. The animals also seem to recall the fertility myths of Tammuz and Adonis which symbolize the natural rhythms of desire and death and

⁵²These images remind Smith (p. 262) of lines from Tennyson's In Memoriam:

So that still garden of the souls
In many a figured leaf enrolls
The total world since life began.
(xliiii, 10-12)

the changing seasons.⁵³

These opposing forces and the ascending and descending movement of the rapidly shifting images in the entire first section of Part II emphasize the pattern of the cycle and serve the same purpose of the dream-like sequence of images in the rose garden. Concrete actuality is thrown slightly out of focus in order to direct our attention to the overall pattern of the universe so that we may be aware of the existence of a creator.

This treatment of concrete images in the first fifteen lines, in Rajan's analysis, determines the forcefulness of the first line of the next strophe:

At the still point of the turning world.
(l. 64)

The way in which the use of imagery in the first section contributes to the effectiveness of this line is explained by Rajan as follows:

The effect of this dissociation, this remoteness, is to emphasize the superior reality of the pattern . . . 'the still point of the turning world' does not seize your imagination because it is transcendental. You accept it for quite the opposite reason because it is the most concrete thing the poetry has produced. Mr. Eliot has succeeded brilliantly in

⁵³Bodelsen, p. 101.

his main preoccupation which is to make philosophic terms more solid and tangible than objects.⁵⁴

The "still point of the turning world" is similar to the point in the Paradiso XXIX "where every where and every when is focused." Unger further explains the relationship:

In Dante's poem the point is at the center of nine circles representing the blessed orders, and the point itself represents the creative love of God, as it does in Eliot's poem.⁵⁵

Through imagery, then, Eliot has made us aware of the still point which exists outside the dimension of time. But recognizing that it can be defined only through temporal terms, Eliot here employs several negative paradoxes in an attempt to approach the still point by eliminating what it is not:

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

⁵⁴Pp. 81-82.

⁵⁵T. S. Eliot: Moments and Patterns, p. 80.

Neither ascent nor decline. Except for the
 point, the still point,
 There would be no dance, and there is only
 the dance. (ll. 64-69)

The image of the dance, symbolic of the ordered pattern of the universe, seems to compare the stillness of the axle of the celestial wheel to the invisible axial line that controls the balance of the body. As a person moves, he shifts his weight in relation to that line in order to keep from falling. Therefore, although the movements of the dance are ordered into an artistic pattern, they are all governed by the invisible axis of the body. And when Eliot says that "there is only the dance," he apparently means that all we can actually experience is the dance itself although we sense the point of balance.⁵⁶

However, the poet finally realizes that he cannot describe the point in physical or temporal terms:

I can only say, there we have been: but I
 cannot say where.
 And I cannot say, how long, for that is to
 place it in time. (ll. 70-71)

The still point is experienced within the dimensions of time and space, but it does not belong to those dimensions.

⁵⁶Helen Gardner notes that the image of the dance is probably based on the dance of the Tarot in Charles Williams' novel The Greater Trumps.
The Art of T. S. Eliot (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1959), p. 161.

After trying to evoke the point by means of pattern and paradox, the poet turns next to a description of the sensations he experienced at the moment in the garden:

The inner freedom from the practical desire,
 The release from action and suffering, release from the inner
 And the outer compulsion, yet surrounded
 By a grace of sense, a white light still
 and moving,
Erhebung without motion, concentration
 Without elimination, both a new world
 And the old made explicit, understood
 In the completion of its partial ecstasy,
 The resolution of its partial horror.
 (11. 72-80)

These lines from the third strophe define the condition of communion with the still point, the wholeness of the experience, the release from the wheel. The Erhebung, or exaltation, gathers the movement of the wheel into a single point of concentration, eliminating nothing, resolving and giving meaning to the whole. The physical sensations of awareness are "a grace of sense" and a blinding light, reminders that the moment is occurring within time. That the temporal is necessary to understanding the quality of the eternal is explained by R. H. Coats:

. . . eternity is not a continuous, dull monotony. . . . Rather it is a quality in things, by which they gleam like the flashings of a shield, at brief moments only. We may thus speak of an 'eternal' moment, but when we do

we should remember that each half of the relationship is necessary to the other. Eternity can no more dispense with the moment, if it is to express itself at all, than the moment can dispense with eternity, if it is to acquire significance.⁵⁷

In addition, time is also important to man because it is the dimension which keeps him alive:

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. (ll. 81-84)

Man's finite mind keeps him within the limits of what he can understand and assimilate. If he were to push too far beyond those limits, he would go mad or be destroyed. These lines suggest many instances in mythology in which man confronts a god in his divine form and finds that the experience is too much to handle. One such meeting that Eliot may have had in mind here is found in the passage from the Bhagavad-gita in which Krishna reveals himself in his divine form to Prince Arjuna. The prince cannot endure the sight and begs Krishna to resume his mortal disguise.⁵⁸

Man, then, must be content with his temporal

⁵⁷"An Anchor for the Soul," The Hibbert Journal, XLIV (1946), 117.

⁵⁸Drew, p. 156.

state, even though it permits him only limited understanding, because time is the only means by which he can approach the eternal:

Time past and time future
 Allow but a little consciousness.
 To be conscious is not to be in time
 But only in time can the moment in the
 rose-garden,
 The moment in the arbour where the rain
 beat,
 The moment in the draughty church at smoke-
 fall
 Be remembered; involved with past and future.
 Only through time time is conquered.
(11. 85-92)

Full consciousness, in Eliot's terms, is full awareness of the eternal, and man is only capable of brief moments of awareness. The "moment in the arbour," according to Martz, is a reference to Joyce's "The Dead" in which a desired moment is never achieved, but the desire for the still point, Martz says, is the saving grace.⁵⁹ The "draughty church at smokefall" suggests the chapel of "Little Gidding," the home of a seventeenth-century religious community. It is here in "Little Gidding" that the poet becomes aware of the meaning of history. It is such moments as these that the mind retains and then uses as points of reference for reevaluating the past and judging the future.

⁵⁹P. 450.

Thus, with the memory of the rose garden serving as his guide, the poet returns to the actual world in search of further spiritual understanding. He returns to a London subway station, and he is appalled by the meaningless lives of the people around him. The noise and apathy of the modern world only serve to distract him from his purpose. The significance of the scene lies in the contrast of its disorder with the vision of order experienced in the rose garden. From his own experience, Eliot was fully aware of the subway as a place of disorder. As Neville Braybrooke has commented:

Mr. Eliot lived for many years in a flat near the Thames, one of whose nearest stations was South Kensington, a station famous for delays since drivers frequently put in time here so as to get back to schedule--a factor perhaps causing those merchant bankers, distinguished civil servants, and chairmen of many committees to let a few fancies, empty of meaning, 'flicker over their strained time-ridden faces.'⁶⁰

The station the poet enters in this scene is a dismal, gray place:

Here is a place of disaffection
Time before and time after
In a dim light: neither daylight
Investing form with lucid stillness

⁶⁰T. S. Eliot: A Symposium for His Seventieth Birthday (New York: Farrar, Straus & Cudahy, 1958), p. 15.

Turning shadow into transient beauty
 With a slow rotation suggesting permanence
 Nor darkness to purify the soul
 Emptying the sensual with deprivation
 Cleansing affection from the temporal.
 Neither plenitude nor vacancy.
 (ll. 93-102)

This dim world does not know the "plenitude" or fullness of the light of vision nor the "vacancy" of voluntary purgation of the soul. Unlike the "turning" of the souls in the Purgatorio, to which this scene has been compared,⁶¹ the poet finds no purifying darkness in the distracting world of the subway.

As the train moves out of the station, the passing lights flicker over the empty faces of the passengers:

Only a flicker
 Over the strained time-ridden faces
 Distracted from distraction by distraction
 Filled with fancies and empty of meaning
 Tumid apathy with no concentration.
 (ll. 102-106)

This image of flickering light suggests an allusion to an image used by Marlowe in Heart of Darkness⁶² and is also used by Eliot in The Family Reunion and The Cocktail Party. In all these instances, this image of light is employed to indicate the meaningless succession of days and nights. The strained faces reveal only emptiness

⁶¹Unger, T. S. Eliot: Moments and Patterns, p. 45.

⁶²Unger, T. S. Eliot: Moments and Patterns, p. 119.

The sickness of this world of the "unwholesome" and "unhealthy" is its lack of creative order. Even in the outdoor world, the light is faded, the souls torpid, and existence in the suburbs is monotonous in its sameness. The "eructation" of the souls from the underground and the twittering suggest to Smith bats emerging from a cave.⁶⁴

In the "twittering" world represented by the subway, the poet cannot find the spiritual understanding for which he is looking. He therefore decides to try the spiritual discipline of the saints, the way of self-denial, and turns inward to the darkness of his own soul to prepare for a period of waiting:

Descent lower, descend only
 Into the world of perpetual solitude,
 World not world, but that which is not world,
 Internal darkness, deprivation
 And destitution of all property,
 Dessication of the world of sense,
 Evacuation of the world of fancy,
 Inoperancy of the world of spirit.
 (11. 117-124)

The image of descent into darkness is that of St. John's Dark Night, the elimination of all worldly desires and distractions. This darkness of the soul is not the world for which the poet is searching, but neither is it the dim world that he has left behind. Here he must learn

⁶⁴P. 264.

the way of self-denial and rid himself of all reason, imagination, and emotion that might stand in the way of a new moment of insight. The way down into darkness, however, is the same as the way upward into the light of vision, because both have the same goal, and both involve stillness:

This is the one way, and the other
Is the same, not in movement
But abstention from movement.
(ll. 125-127)

These lines echo the second epigraph, and the image of descent turning into ascent recalls the end of the Inferno when Dante and Virgil reach the center of Hell, pass through the ice, and immediately find that they are climbing upward.⁶⁵

Nevertheless, while the poet is undertaking his lonely journey into his private Purgatory, the world he has left behind remains the same:

. . . while the world moves
In appetency, on its metalled ways
Of time past and time future.
(ll. 127-129)

This contrast of the way of the world to the disciplined way of the spirit is analyzed by Drew:

⁶⁵John Senior, The Way Down and Out: The Occult in Symbolist Literature (Ithaca: Cornell University, 1959), p. 189.

... in appetency there is a great concentration of meaning. Not only the sense of conscious and unconscious compulsive drives, but the reminder of the Lamarckian doctrine that changes in the desires and needs of an organism result in adaptive modifications of its structure. So that the 'metalled ways' on which the urban world now moves, suggest not only a picture of it as a vast network of roads and railways leading nowhere, but the whole quality of the mechanistic culture of today and its possible consequences for the future of the race.⁶⁶

But turning away from this meaningless world, the poet descends even deeper into darkness; he reaches a kind of spiritual death, a state of mind from which he fears he may never escape. To illustrate this spiritual low point, the poet, in Part IV, employs images from the rose garden in a chill setting of death:

Time and the bell have buried the day,
The black cloud carries the sun away.
Will the sunflower turn to us, will the clematis
Stray down, bend to us; tendril and spray
Clutch and cling?
Chill
Fingers of yew be curled
Down on us? After the kingfisher's wing
Has answered light to light, and is silent,
the light is still
At the still point of the turning world.
(11. 130-139)

Time, the funeral bell, and the cloud mark the end of temporal change in the death of the body. The warmth

66P. 158.

and light of the day of human existence have vanished. The poet wonders, if, after his decaying body has entered another phase in the cycle of nature, the living world will remember him, and the juxtaposition of the next image, the sunlight on the bird's wing, offers a brief reminder of the light he is leaving behind as he enters the stillness of the grave.

The images in this passage also present the state of spiritual death which the poet passes through in the negative way of denial. Time and change have darkened the memory of the vision in the rose garden, and the black cloud of doubt obscures the sun. As the roots of the plants seem to hold the poet almost immobile, a struggling prisoner of doubt, he asks if the sunflower, a symbol of Christ, and the clematis, symbol of the Virgin, will "turn to us," bringing rebirth, and whether the yew, an evergreen, will mean eternal life or eternal death. In answer, the flash of light on the wing of the kingfisher, a symbol of rebirth and of peace, recalls the reflected light and the bird of the rose garden. These remind the poet that the Light of the World is

"always present."⁶⁷

Although there is still a faint glimmer of hope, the poet's quest seems to have led him to another dead end. There is no ecstatic moment of divine revelation to release him from his dark prison. But then a solution arrives quietly as he comes to understand that his way is not that of the saint but the way of the ordinary working man, in his case the way of the poet as craftsman. This "revelation" is not explicitly given within the lines of the poem, but it is implied by the rather abrupt shift from the graveyard scene in Part IV to the meditation on poetry in Part V, in which he seems to have found a renewed interest in his work and a new center for his life. In this new awakening, the poet realizes that through art he can achieve moments of stillness and that each moment will be followed by renewed efforts to achieve another in a never-ending process of hard work. Yet as he is faced with his task, he is sustained by what he learned in the garden.

⁶⁷The kingfisher suggests to Smith the Fisher King of The Waste Land and symbolizes the "'broken wings' of poetry," the failure of the poetic imagination which is redeemed at the still point. (p. 266)

Reinsberg (pp. 343-344) cites a source for an image in the first line and a possible influence on the meter of the passage as being an anonymous fifteenth- or sixteenth-century lyric:

The bailey beareth the bell away:
The lily, the rose, the rose I lay.

Therefore, we see in the first strophe of Part V that stillness in art is achieved in two ways: a completed poem is a point of intersection in the quest for perception of a larger design, and the pattern of a poem is a "still point" that gives meaning to the words that exist as living units within it. Elucidation of the first idea is given by Eliot in his essay "Poetry and Drama":

. . . it is ultimately the function of art, in imposing a credible order upon ordinary reality, and thereby eliciting some perception of order in reality, to bring us to a condition of serenity, stillness, and reconciliation; and then leave us, as Virgil left Dante, to proceed toward a region where that guide can avail no farther.⁶⁸

Thus, according to Eliot, the word as a living unit within time reaches its own peculiar stillness or point of intersection,

from its relation first to the words immediately preceeding and following it, and indefinitely to the rest of its context; and from another relation, that of its immediate meaning in that context to all the other meanings which it has had in other contexts, to its greater or less wealth of association.⁶⁹

Eliot says in the same paragraph that this intersection

⁶⁸On Poetry and Poets (New York: Farrar, Straus & Cudahy, 1957), p. 94.

⁶⁹"The Music of Poetry," On Poetry and Poets, p. 25.

part as it is presented and therefore enables one to grasp a unity of purpose communicated by the whole poem:

Not the stillness of the violin, while the note
 lasts,
 Not that only, but the co-existence,
 Or say that the end preceeds the beginning,
 And the end and the beginning were always there
 Before the beginning and after the end.
 And all is always now. (ll. 147-152)

In these lines the memory of the entire pattern, not just the last note or word, is the key to the purpose which was always there and which in the permanence of the composition is "always now." The "stillness of the violin" suggests a vibrating string and recalls "the trilling wire in the blood," another individual movement related to a whole. Elizabeth Sewell, in her essay "Lewis Carroll and T. S. Eliot as Nonsense Poets," sees the phrase "the end precedes the beginning" as a condition in Carroll's Sylvie and Bruno when the crocodile walks up his own forehead, and in The Snark when the Bellman describes being "snarked" as "a state when 'the bowsprit got mixed with the rudder sometimes.'" ⁷⁰ Both are conditions of inhibited movement, and "movement in Nonsense is admitted only to be annulled, if

⁷⁰In Kenner, T. S. Eliot: A Collection of Critical Essays, pp. 65-72.

the control and the pattern are to be preserved."⁷¹
 The dragon on a Chinese jar also at times seems to be walking up his own forehead.

Before the poet can achieve the stillness of a finished work of art, however, he must first wrestle with the meanings of individual words:

Words strain,
 Crack and sometimes break, under the burden,
 Under the tension, slip, slide, perish
 Decay with imprecision, will not stay in
 place,
 Will not stay still. Shrieking voices
 Scolding, mocking, or merely chattering,
 Always assail them. (ll. 152-158)

Most words in a changing language carry a number of different meanings that seem to pull them in several directions at once, and the poet, aware of these meanings, finds it difficult to make the words "stay in place." Also, modern language seems to have lost contact with the history of words and as a result has lost its precision and creates a problem in communication for the poet. The poet, though, sees a purpose in his struggle and also finds consolation when he compares the "word" of poetry to the "Word" of life:

The Word in the desert
 Is most attacked by voices of temptation,

⁷¹Sewell, p. 71.

The crying shadow in the funeral dance,
The loud lament of the disconsolate chimera.
(ll. 158-161)

The "Word in the desert" is a reference to the temptation of Christ. Likewise, the poet, in his lonely calling, is tempted by voices of doubt. He is assailed by the "crying shadow," which represents his self-pity as he sees himself as an unheeded prophet, and by the fear that the pattern of life may be only a "funeral dance" ending in oblivion, nothing more than the purposeless existence of the men on the subway. The "disconsolate chimera," which is both a meaningless fancy and the beast slain by Bellerophon, suggests the anguish and terror caused by the poet's imagined fears. The poet's consolation, then, is his realization that the Word of God was also beset by temptations and fears in a "desert" moment that corresponds to the poet's own descent into the darkness of doubt.

Along with this consolation comes a renewed sense of purpose rising from the knowledge that the message of the Incarnation has been distorted and obscured by a language that constantly changes and by traditional symbols and myths that have ceased to communicate effectively in the modern world. Therefore, just as the purpose of Christ, the Word of God, is to communicate through love the redemption of the world by its creator, the

purpose of a poem, the "word" of the poet, is to communicate through art the poet's redemption of the language. In this respect, the poem may achieve a "stillness" of its own and, in addition, also communicate the eternal "still point."

Now that the poet has learned that the way of poetry, redeemed by the memory of the still point, is redeeming in itself, he meditates on what he has learned, beginning with the temporal view of the pattern:

The detail of the pattern is movement,
As in the figure of the ten stairs.
(11. 162-163)

Man's life, a detail within the universal pattern, can be understood within time only as movement through time, and it is a continuous cycle of understanding and doubt. The cycle is represented by the "figure of the ten stairs," an image similar to the ten-step ladder of St. John of the Cross, which represents the disciplined way of the saint. The figure which ascends and descends the ladder in ecstasy and humiliation refers to the "Bride," which, according to Stephenson, "is used symbolically of the Soul in its upward movement toward God."⁷²

This movement is desire for unity, and unity is

⁷²T. S. Eliot and the Lay Reader, 2nd ed. (London: Fortune, 1948), p. 78.

the goal that redeems all desire:

Desire itself is movement
 Not in itself desirable;
 Love is itself unmoving,
 Only the cause and end of movement,
 Timeless and undesiring
 Except in the aspect of time
 Caught in the form of limitation
 Between un-being and being.
 (ll. 164-171)

Desire, whether it be sensual, intellectual, or spiritual, is "undesirable" unless its ultimate goal is union with God, Love in its pure form. Love is at once the mover and the goal of all movement, for its very presence creates in all things a desire to seek it. However, although Love is "timeless and undesiring" itself, its temporal form is desire, because temporal love is incomplete and therefore seeks completion. Man, then, existing within time between "unbeing," or nothingness, and "being," or total consciousness, is moved to search for Love in its timeless form, which he can apprehend only in a moment of heightened awareness, a "still point."

The still point for most of us, though, is only a brief moment, but it can illumine and redeem all human action:

Sudden in a shaft of sunlight
 Even while the dust moves
 There rises the hidden laughter
 Of children in the leaves
 Quick now, here, now, always--
 (ll. 172-176)

The "shaft of sunlight" recalls the sunlight of the rose garden, and the moving dust is the earthly life of the poet which can now be lived in the light of that moment as he remembers the laughter of the children, a symbol of ever-present hope. "Quick now, here, now, always" seems to say that we are alive, quick, in the present moment and that each fleeting moment by means of memory is a small "still point" because it contains that which is "always present," the eternal still point.

From this perspective, the last two lines then are a comment on a life without a still point:

Ridiculous the waste sad time
Stretching before and after.
(ll. 177-178.)

Time that stretches "before and after" has no present, no center, no still point. It is as empty of meaning as the lives of the people on the subway train, who are whirled by the wind "that blows before and after time." In this final passage, the direct experience of emotional and spiritual awareness presented by the imagery is united with abstract meditation in order to achieve a reconciliation of the tensions created within the poem. Viewed as a structural unit, it is the whole poem that achieves the final reconciliation. In fact, the structure of the work makes a valuable contribution toward this final synthesis.

CHAPTER III

A COMPLEX DESIGN IN FORM:

THE STRUCTURE OF "BURNT NORTON"

In the imagery of Part V of "Burnt Norton," Eliot compares the individual word in a poem to the musical note and emphasizes that it is the form of the composition that gives meaning to the individual unit within a work of art:

Words move, music moves
Only in time; but that which is only living
Can only die. Words, after speech, reach
Into the silence. Only by the form, the
 pattern,
Can words or music reach
The stillness. (ll. 140-145)

It has already been noted that in his essay "The Music of Poetry" Eliot defines the "music" of a word as the intersection of its meaning with the meanings of the words surrounding it and with the pattern of the entire poem. In addition, Eliot says in the same essay that the structure or pattern of a poem as a whole may also draw on principles of musical composition:

. . . the properties in which music concerns the poet most nearly, are the sense of rhythm and the sense of structure. . . . The use of recurrent themes is as natural to poetry as to music. There

are possibilities for verse which bear some analogy to the development of a theme by different groups of instruments; there are possibilities of transitions in a poem comparable to the different movements of a symphony or a quartet; there are possibilities of contrapuntal arrangement of subject matter.¹

All of these elements seem to be present in the structure of "Burnt Norton." In addition to the variations in rhythm and the recurring themes, Eliot uses methods which suggest different groups of instruments and a contrapuntal arrangement of subject matter. For instruments, Eliot employs what Lloyd Frankenberg describes as "voices."² These voices, which are composed of different combinations of rhythm, diction, and syntax, are either lyric, didactic, narrative, or apocalyptic. The juxtaposition of different voices and the same treatment of subject matter gives an impression of counterpoint or simultaneity, as B. H. Fussell remarks:

The device by which such contrasting lines as 'Whisper of running streams, and winter lightning' and 'You say I am repeating / Something I have said before' are placed in immediate sequence is not unlike the device whereby an impressionist painter, to produce the color grey, places on his canvas two dots of blue

¹On Poetry and Poets, p. 32.

²Pleasure Dome: On Reading Modern Poetry, Dolphin Books (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1949), pp. 123-124.

and orange. The process of fusion occurs not in the details but by means of the overall structure.³

In poetry it is the memory, not the eye, that retains and fuses images, but at the same time, the images, like the two dots of paint, continue to exist in tension as separate entities. There are, though, passages which, through the use of symbols, come closer to musical counterpoint. In the rose garden scene, for example, the roses suggest both sacred and profane love and thereby contain the themes of simultaneous time and divine redemption, two distinct strains that move in parallel lines throughout the entire passage.

This use of ambivalent symbols and the unresolved tensions of juxtaposed opposites are among a number of elements noted by critics as corresponding to similar effects in Beethoven's later work, especially the Quartet in C# Minor, which, as Harvey Gross comments, bears a striking similarity to Eliot's Four Quartets:

. . . the musical gestures of Beethoven's later quartets evoke responses relevant to Eliot's poetry: we respond to ambiguity, surprise, contradiction, unexpected delay: we

³"Structural Methods in Four Quartets," Journal of English Literary History, XXII (1948), 219.

experience a world of stress, of exultation of resignation, and final affirmation.⁴

Furthermore, both are based on a tension of opposites:

They develop organically out of a single controlling idea. . . . Each of the Four Quartets elaborates on a central theme Every theme contains its opposite, its musical inversion. Man, alienated from self and society, finds reconciliation in God; despair becomes the way of joy; time and history become ways leading out of time and beyond history.

To express such a context of opposition and contradiction, Eliot came, almost by necessity, to employing the form and method of music. For music has the striking ability to express simultaneously opposite states of feeling.⁵

Another similarity between Eliot's Quartets and Beethoven's is, of course, the division into movements. Herbert Howarth, for instance, compares the five-part structure of "Burnt Norton" to Beethoven's Quartet in A Minor, Opus 132:

Beethoven's movements are:

- (1) allegro
- (2) a scherzo and a contrasting trio
- (3) a slow movement: which begins in somber depths; then changes, "neue Kraft fuhlend."
- (4) a very short alla marcia

⁴"Music and the Analogue of Feeling: Notes on Eliot and Beethoven," The Centennial Review of Arts and Sciences, III (1959), 282.

⁵Gross, p. 282.

(5) allegro appassionato--in rondo form, with an extended coda.

"Burnt Norton" is divided into:

- (1) a rapid first movement
- (2) a scherzo in short, rhyming lines, excited, "trilling"; followed by a contrasting section in long, reflective lines
- (3) a slow somber movement; if there can be said to be a contrasting section, it is yet slower and more somber
- (4) a very short rhyming lyric
- (5) a movement of statements or "answers": first passionate, even agitated; then more serene with sudden clearings and visions.⁶

In addition to these comparisons that have been made between Beethoven's quartets and those of Eliot, a similarity between Eliot's poetic structure and the canon cancrizans, or medieval rondeau form, has been noted by Elizabeth S. Dallas. She is inclined to see the "mirror image" pattern of the rondeau in the overall design of alternating passages of abstract meditation and concrete imagery in "Burnt Norton."⁷ From her argument, the structural pattern of "Burnt Norton" would adhere to the following outline:

Part I: abstract (a)
 concrete (b)

⁶Herbert Howarth, Notes on Some Figures Behind T. S. Eliot (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1964), p. 279.

⁷"Canon Cancrizans and the Four Quartets," Comparative Literature, XVII (1966), 193-208.

Part II: concrete (b)
 abstract (a)
 concrete (b)

Part III: concrete (b)
 abstract (a)

Part IV: concrete (b)

Part V: abstract (a)
 concrete (b)

This analogy with the rondeau, however, has its limits as does the comparison to the sonata, and neither should be followed too closely, for Eliot departs from musical form whenever the poetry demands his doing so. Of the two musical forms, though, the sonata seems to have had the stronger influence. Certainly, the five-part division of the sonata form offers the more satisfying parallel to the structural pattern of "Burnt Norton."

Just as the first movement of a sonata is divided into an Exposition and a Development, the first movement of "Burnt Norton" is divided into corresponding parts, first, the expository abstract philosophical meditation on time and then the development of the idea in the concrete presentation of the imaginative excursion into the garden. Within this framework these two sections also provide the elements for counterpoint in that these sections offer two different modes of apprehending reality, the intellectual and the sensual, and their juxtaposition indicates that they are opposing yet complementary pro-

cesses working within the same mind. The first section, or Exposition, begins with a four-stress line containing a strong medial pause and a varying number of syllables:

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. (ll. 1-5)

This basic metric pattern is employed, with some variations, throughout the poem. Here, though it provides the framework for the abstractions of the dry, intellectual Didactic Voice, the Voice of ideas, and introduces the major theme of the poem: an eternal pattern in which all events exist simultaneously and which, as a result, seem to be unredeemable. Next, the second theme, or counter-statement, is a presentation of a possible way to redemption through the workings of the memory and the imagination:

What might have been is an abstraction
Remaining a perpetual possibility
Only in a world of speculation.
What might have been and what has been
Point to one end, which is always present.
(ll. 6-10)

Although the relationship between the two themes is not clear at this point, they create a contrapuntal tension which is to be resolved by the poem. Moreover, another tension, created by the syntax of this first section, produces the sense of suspension of movement:

The syntax is static: the noun Time, the modifiers past, present, future, the copulatives is or are, all follow in strict order. We hear the literal sense modified by each repetition of word and phrase; we hear how each repetition fits into an overall pattern of incantation. . . . Eliot tells how time can be immovable, without direction. But there comes a point where Eliot must resolve his meaning, where a composer would introduce a cadence to tell us where his music is going, harmonically speaking. Then Eliot changes his syntax; he drops the copulatives and allows the movement of the preceding lines to pivot on the transitive verb point. . . . Eliot has suspended syntactical movement by using only the verbs is and are for nine lines running. The verb point releases us into a new idea, and we modulate into a new syntactical unit.⁸

The next unit introduces the Development, in which the themes of the first section are expanded while being intricately woven into the complex fabric of the rose garden scene:

Footfalls echo in the memory
Down the passage which we did not take
Towards the door we never opened
Into the rose-garden. My words echo
Thus, in your mind.
 But to what purpose
Disturbing the dust on a bowl of rose-leaves
I do not know. (11. 11-18)

Here the imagery becomes concrete, the verbs active, and the Voice more nostalgic and emotional. It is the Lyric Voice we hear singing in this passage, and the

⁸Harvey Gross, "T. S. Eliot and the Music of Poetry," The Structure of Verse: Modern Essays on Prosody, ed. Harvey Gross (Greenwich, Conn.: Fawcett, 1966), p. 205.

syntax again creates a melodic pattern: "Down the passage . . . Towards the door . . . Into the rose-garden." Also, with the sentence "My words echo / Thus, in your mind," a ramification of the original theme, the problem of communication, is introduced. Other inter-related themes are explored when the poet begins looking for a redeeming purpose for his poetry. In addition, the theme of the simultaneous existence of past, present, and future and the theme of memory and imagination are woven together in the imagery of the scene. Further development of the scene is reflected in the change in movement and Voice, for as the poet enters the garden, the Voice of the poetry shifts to the Narrative, which is concerned with events, and the repetition of syntactical units marks a rapid movement forward:

Other echoes
 Inhabit the garden. Shall we follow?
 Quick, said the bird, find them, find them,
 Round the corner. Through the first gate,
 Into our first world, shall we follow
 The deception of the thrush? Into our first world.
(ll. 19-24)

After the lines "Round the corner. Through the first gate, / Into our first world" have moved us forward, the repetition of "Into our first world" brings the movement to a halt, and the poet is in the garden inhabited by the invisible beings:

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 in the shrubbery,
 And the unseen eyebeam crossed, for the roses
 Had the look of flowers that are looked at.
 (11. 25-31)

There seems to be no movement forward until the moment
 of acceptance:

There they were as our guests, accepted and
 accepting.
 So we moved, and they, in a formal pattern,
 Along the empty alley, into the box circle,
 To look down into the drained pool.
 Dry the pool, dry concrete, brown edged.
 (11. 32-36)

Again, the movement is stopped. The "dead end" reached
 at the pool is emphasized by the repetition of the word
dry. In this passage another Voice is heard along with
 the Narrative Voice. It is the Apocalyptic Voice, which
 Frankenberg describes in this way:

It is the spirit of soul that is speaking. Its
 incantatory speech is in the form of symbols.
 These symbols are images with a greater weight
 of meaning than the experience of the senses
 alone could have left in them; images with an
 other-worldly, non-physical import. . . . It is
 concerned with . . . a prescience of the super-
 natural.⁹

This Voice is especially apparent in the events that
 occur at the pool:

⁹P. 124.

And the pool was filled with water out of
 sunlight,
 And the lotos rose, quietly, quietly,
 The surface glittered out of heart of light,
 And they were behind us, reflected in the pool.
 Then a cloud passed, and the pool was empty.
 Go, said the bird, for the leaves were full
 of children,
 Hidden excitedly, containing laughter.
 Go, go, go, said the bird: human kind
 Cannot bear very much reality. (ll. 37-45)

The movement in this latter passage is not forward but
 up and down. The sunlight descends, and the lotus rises.
 The repetition of the word and in the two lines preceding
 and in the two following "The surface glittered out of
 heart of light" suggests the movement of time, but at
 the mid-point, there is no connective. This is the "still
 point," which is timeless. After this moment, the repeat-
 ed imperative of the bird hastens the poet out of the
 garden.

At the end of this scene, the Development section,
 there is a brief return to the themes of the Exposition:

Time past and time future
 What might have been and what has been
 Point to one end, which is always present.
 (ll. 46-48)

This repetition of themes from the first section of the
 movement is similar to the Recapitulation of themes at
 the end of the first movement of a sonata.

The second movement of Eliot's poem also follows

the structure of a sonata. Gardner sees it as variations on a theme:

The second movement is constructed on the . . . principle of a single subject handled in two boldly contrasting ways. The effect is like that of hearing the same melody played on a different group of instruments, or differently harmonized, or hearing it syncopated, or elaborated in variations, which cannot disguise the fact that it is the same.¹⁰

The single theme treated here is the stillness present at the center of patterned movement. Following the quick, shifting movement of a scherzo, it is presented first in highly symbolic, sensual imagery depicting the cycles of nature and the universe as they revolve around the "still point" of the "axle-tree":

Garlic and sapphires in the mud
Clot the bedded axle-tree.
The trilling wire in the blood
Sings below inveterate scars
And reconciles forgotten wars.
The dance along the artery
The circulation of the lymph
Are figured in the drift of stars
Ascend to summer in the tree
We move above the moving tree
In light upon the figured leaf
And hear upon the sodden floor
Below, the boarhound and the boar
Pursue their pattern as before
But reconciled among the stars.
(ll. 49-63)

¹⁰P. 38.

Here the singing, emotional Lyric Voice celebrates the patterns of life in harmony with the Apocalyptic Voice of the soul that responds to their spiritual significance. Underlying the Voices is a traditional meter of irregularly rhymed octosyllabics, a meter that subtly emphasizes the theme of pattern by its more regular beat and more noticeable rhyme. Also, the diction carries us in an ascending and descending pattern from stillness to motion to stillness again. We are earthbound and immobile, as the "mud" and the verb clot suggest stillness. Then movement begins as the "trilling wire" begins to sing. From its position "below," we move upward and outward to "dance" and "circulation," which suggest several patterns of cyclical movement. Suddenly, there is a shift upward to the "drift of stars," a phrase that implies stillness rather than movement, as does the passive "are figured." From there the movement is both downward and upward, for we descend from stars to tree, yet we "ascend" the tree and move "above" the tree to look down at its leaves. Then we descend abruptly to the sodden floor of earth, only to be transported once again to the stillness of the stars.

This stillness is taken up by the first line of the next section, which presents the theme of stillness within motion through the language of abstract reasoning.

Here the liveliness of the scherzo shifts into a quiet, reflective mood:

At the still point of the turning world. Nei-
 ther flesh nor fleshless;
 Neither from nor towards; at the still point,
 there the dance is,
 But neither arrest nor movement. And do not
 call it fixity,
 Where past and future are gathered. Neither
 movement from nor towards,
 Neither ascent nor decline. Except for the
 point, the still point,
 There would be no dance, and there is only the
 dance.
 I can only say, there we have been: but I can-
 not say where.
 And I cannot say, how long, for that is to
 place it in time. (ll. 64-71)

The Didactic Voice of ideas is dominant in this passage, but counterpointing it is the Apocalyptic Voice that comes through in the symbolism of the mystic dance. The rhythm of this dance comes from both the meter and the syntax. The meter is a six- or seven-stress expanded form of the basic four-beat line of the first movement, and the syntax again involves a repetition of phrases. Each of the paradoxes, "neither flesh nor fleshless / Neither from nor towards . . . neither arrest nor movement . . . neither ascent nor decline," contains a feeling of rising and falling movement suggestive of the shifting of weight in a dance. The movement of the dance ends with the statement "there is only the dance," and the passage ends with a statement on the timeless quality

of the still point.

The sense of release from time is explored in the next passage, in which the Didactic Voice continues to speak:

The inner freedom from the practical desire,
 The release from action and suffering, re-
 lease from the inner
 And the outer compulsion, yet surrounded
 By a grace of sense, a white light still and
 moving,
Erhebung without motion, concentration
 Without elimination, both a new world
 And the old made explicit, understood
 In the completion of its partial ecstasy,
 Protects mankind from heaven and damnation
 Which flesh cannot endure. (ll. 72-84)

Again, behind the Didactic Voice we hear the Apocalyptic Voice revealing the supernatural nature of the still point, and there is also a hint of the emotional Lyric Voice telling us how the poet felt during the timeless moment. As these Voices, within a framework of loose blank verse, reveal the physical and mental sensations experienced at the point, there is no forward motion, for there are no finite verbs until we come to the active "protects."

At this point there is a shift from the timeless moment to the world of time:

Time past and time future
 Allow but a little consciousness.
 To be conscious is not to be in time
 But only in time can the moment in the rose-garden,

The moment in the harbour where the rain beat,
 The moment in the draughty church at smokefall
 Be remembered; involved with past and future.
 Only through time time is conquered.

(11. 85-92)

Although the Voice is still the Didactic, these lines return to the concrete imagery and to the themes and slow four-stress line of the first movement. The emphasis here is on the acceptance of the value of temporal existence, for it is only within time that the still point can be apprehended and remembered, and the memory, by retaining the point, is itself a type of stillness that conquers time. This concept is summed up in the last line, which by its structure and placement illustrates stillness within temporal movement. The sentence is a balanced four-stress line, having two strong beats on either side of a very definite pause:

Only through time time is conquered.

(1. 92)

The caesura is a "stillness" surrounded by "time," and the entire statement is a pause and a turning point coming very near the exact center of the poem.

The change that comes at this mid-point in the poem shifts the emphasis away from the still point itself to the meaning it has for the life that is to be lived following the experience in the garden. Therefore, the third movement takes us back into the every-

day world, represented here by the subway scene, which is the first of the two parts into which this movement is divided. The similarity between this movement and the third movement of a sonata is less obvious than the comparisons made between the first two, but it is slow and rather somber. Gardner says that this third movement, in its quiet, reflective manner, contains the core of the poem, "out of which reconciliation grows: it is an exploration with a twist of the ideas of the first two movements. . . it falls into two equal parts, divided by a change of mind, with no change of meter."¹¹ The meter is still the basic four-stress line. Like the first two movements, the third contains a passage of concrete imagery and one of abstract meditation, but the imagery here depicts the absence of a still point rather than its presence, and the movement is downward rather than upward.

The first section, containing the imagery, is introduced by the Narrative Voice:

Here is a place of disaffection
Time before and time after
In a dim light. (ll. 93-95)

The theme of the first movement, "time past and time future," briefly reappears in a setting that offers no

¹¹P. 41

redemption because there is no stillness, no "present."
 Then the Narrative Voice is momentarily overshadowed by
 the Lyric and Apocalyptic Voices:

. . . . neither daylight
 Investing form with lucid stillness
 Turning shadow into transient beauty
 With slow rotation suggesting permanence
 Nor darkness to purify the soul
 Emptying the sensual with deprivation
 Cleansing affection from the temporal.
 Neither plenitude nor vacancy.
 (11. 95-102)

The two Voices here depict the poet's yearning for the stillness of the soul, which can be reached either by the way of light, the moment in the rose garden, or by the way of darkness, a voluntary purgation of the soul. These two paths to the same goal are introduced as a new theme which will be developed later, but at the moment, the poet is caught up in the dim world in between, and the Narrative Voice again picks up its description:

Only a flicker
 Over the strained time-ridden faces
 Distracted from distraction by distraction
 Filled with fancies and empty of meaning
 Tumid apathy with no concentration
 Men and bits of paper, whirled by the cold
 wind
 That blows before and after time,
 Wind in and out of unwholesome lungs
 Time before and time after.
 Eructation of unhealthy souls
 Into the faded air, the torpid
 Driven on the wind that sweeps the gloomy
 hills of London,
 Hampstead and Clerkenwell, Campden and
 Putney,

Highgate, Primrose and Ludgate. Not here
 Not here the darkness, in this twittering
 world. (ll. 102-116)

"Time before and time after" echoes in the midst of this scene like a dimly heard voice of judgment. Its appearance seems to suggest that the poet is trying to collect his thoughts but is having no success in the noise and confusion. The whirling motion of the scene in the subway leads only to the monotonous succession of suburbs, and there seems to be no exit until the poet turns away in search of the world of darkness.

The poet's descent into the somber world of spiritual darkness begins a development of the theme mentioned briefly in the first part of this movement. As he descends, we seem to overhear him talking to himself:

Descend lower, descend only
 Into the world of perpetual solitude,
 World not world, but that which is not
 world,
 Internal darkness, deprivation
 And destitution of all property,
 Desiccation of the world of sense,
 Evacuation of the world of fancy,
 Inoperancy of the world of spirit;
 This is the one way, and the other
 Is the same, not in movement
 But abstention from movement; while the
 world moves
 In appetency, on its metallated ways
 Of time past and time future.
 (ll. 117-129)

The Didactic Voice of this passage indicates that the poet's descent is a conscious effort of the will, and

the Apocalyptic Voice, appearing mainly through the syntax, reminds us of his goal. The imperatives of the first line and the heavily Latinized language suggest the mental effort involved in the disciplined purgation of the soul, and the repetition of "world" and the parallel construction of the three lines beginning with the words desiccation, evacuation, and inoperancy, have the quality of mystic incantation. These lines leave us in the darkness for a moment until the meaning is made clear by the statement that follows. We learn that all ways which achieve a stillness within time are ways to reconciliation. Therefore, the return to the imagery of the subway scene reemphasizes that the way of the world is not one of the ways to reconciliation, for it moves in time past and time future and is unaware of a redemptive pattern.

The theme of darkness is continued in the fourth movement, which can be compared to the short lyric movement of a sonata. In the poem, the Lyric Voice presents the sensation of fear that accompanies the spiritual "death":

Time and the bell have buried the day,
 The black cloud carries the sun away.
 Will the sunflower turn to us, will the clematis
 Stray down, bend to us; tendril and spray
 Clutch and cling?
 Chill
 Fingers of yew be curled

Down on us? After the kingfisher's wing
Has answered light to light, and is silent, the light
is still
At the still point of the turning world.
(11. 130-139)

The fear that the darkness may be permanent grows stronger as the irregular iambic contracts to the phrase "clutch and cling" and then to the lonely "chill." But the Apocalyptic Voice returns as the kingfisher's wing reflects the light and reassures the poet that the eternal light still exists. There is a moment of hesitation, however, before the final assurance is given. In the clause "the light is still," the word still comes at the end of the line and, by its ambiguity, withholds the meaning of the last sentence until the last line. At first it seems to be an adjective, but then we see that it can also be an adverb and that the last sentence can be paraphrased to read "the light remains unmoving at the still point of the turning world."

Following the brief iambic lyric of the fourth movement, the final movement becomes a "movement of statements" and, in part, a recapitulation of themes. The first section of this movement returns to the four-stress line, and the Didactic Voice takes up the theme of redemption for poetic communication which was first introduced in the opening movement. Before the theme appears, however, there is a brief bridge that connects

this passage with the themes of the third and fourth movements:

Words move, music moves
Only in time; but that which is only living
Can only die. Words, after speech, reach
Into the silence. (ll. 140-143)

Words and music, just like the men in the subway, are headed toward oblivion if they are "only living." They can only reach the "silence" of death, which the poet feared in the graveyard scene.

On the other hand, if words are ordered into a pattern, they may reach the "stillness" of eternal life:

Only by the form, the pattern,
Can words or music reach
The stillness, as a Chinese jar still
Moves perpetually in its stillness.
Not the stillness of the violin, while the note lasts,
Not that only, but the co-existence,
Or say that the end precedes the beginning,
And that the end and the beginning were always there
Before the beginning and after the end.
And all is always now. (ll. 143-152)

The pattern, then, presents a wholeness of meaning which governs and redeems the words within it. A cyclical pattern within these lines illustrates the idea of order in that following the visual image of the unmoving Chinese jar, motion begins with the vibration of the violin, picks up momentum in the discussion of co-existence of beginning and end, and finally comes to rest

again in the stillness of "all is always now." These words echo a line of the first movement, "point to one end, which is always present," and the "one end" in this passage is the purpose in the mind of the poet which is revealed by the pattern.

However, the theme of pattern as a way of redeeming language is countered by another theme, the problems involved in setting words in order:

Words strain,
Crack and sometimes break, under the burden,
Under the tension, slip, slide, perish,
Decay with imprecision, will not stay in place,
Will not stay still. Shrieking voices
Scolding, mocking, or merely chattering,
Always assail them. (ll. 152-158)

The complex meanings of individual words and a changing and imprecise language create difficulties for the poet who is trying to order them into a formal design. Here the confusion of a disordered language parallels the confusion of the subway scene. The uncentered words, like the uncentered lives of the travellers, are "empty of meaning." This comparison is made more explicit in the conclusion of this passage, where the distractions of life assail the Word, the communication of God, just as decaying language obscures the "word" of the poet:

The Word in the desert
Is most attacked by voices of temptation,

The crying shadow in the funeral dance,
 The loud lament of the disconsolate chimera.
 (ll. 158-161)

Redemption, then, for language as well as for people comes with the awareness of a pattern which gives meaning to its parts. This realization of the importance of order draws together all the themes of the poem, which are summed up in the second section of the last movement, or the coda. In this last passage, the meter becomes a three-stress line, and the Didactic and Apocalyptic Voices fuse the two modes of experiencing reality--intellect and sensibility:

The detail of the pattern is movement,
 As in the figure of the ten stairs.
 Desire itself is movement
 Not in itself desirable;
 Love is itself unmoving,
 Only the cause and end of movement,
 Timeless, and undesiring
 Except in the aspect of time
 Caught in the form of limitation
 Between un-being and being.
 Sudden in a shaft of sunlight
 Even while the dust moves
 There rises the hidden laughter
 Of children in the foliage
 Quick now, here, now, always--
 Ridiculous the waste sad time
 Stretching before and after.
 (ll. 162-178)

The Didactic Voice explains and the Apocalyptic Voice reveals that all time--past, present, and future--and all ways--memory and imagination, emotion and intellect, desire and self-denial--are moving parts of a pattern

which will eventually lead to the still point that reveals the light of eternal purpose. This summation is the "one end," or stillness, of "Burnt Norton," to which all its parts have "pointed," and we now know that the emptiness of "time before and time after" can be redeemed if one desires redemption.

Therefore, when one comes to the end of the poem, he realizes the full significance of elements which are present at the beginning. As K. Verheul notes, awareness of meaning in Eliot's Quartets grows out of the same sort of psychological process which one uses in the interpretation of music:

we can never perceive the significance of the first note . . . right from the start. After the last note we have to go back in time to the first to see its full function; and at a certain stage we move into the future and more or less anticipate what is coming in order to establish the function of the present and previous notes . . . as we read or listen to a poem, we become gradually aware of a pattern in the meanings and we try to reconstruct the pattern continually as we proceed through the poem by re-arranging in our memory what has gone before, until, in the silence after the last line, everything has taken its proper place . . . in the ultimate "meaning" of the poem.¹²

"Burnt Norton" thus not only reaches "into the silence" after the last word, but it also achieves the stillness

¹²"Music, Meaning and Poetry in 'Four Quartets' by T. S. Eliot," Lingua, XVI (1966), 282.

of a finished and complexly structured composition in which one can say that "all is always now."

CONCLUSION

The cyclical structure of "Burnt Norton" orders the various themes and modes of expression into a pattern that conveys more clearly than any individual passage a sense of wholeness of experience. As one reviews the poem, he is able to see that it contains many ideas which are really the same theme seen from different points of view and that the different approaches to the same experience are all part of the same mind. One then realizes that Eliot is saying that absolute truth may be approached in many ways but that no one vision of truth is final and that it is the pattern of these moments of partial awareness that brings a larger understanding, for each moment is an evaluation of the others.

This pattern that includes many approaches to one complex theme can be seen as a review of themes in Eliot's poetry up to the publication of "Burnt Norton" in 1935 and as an indication of what was to follow. One can see Prufrock in the unfulfilled moment of desire that prompted the journey into the rose garden, The Waste Land and "The Hollow Men" in the alienation and despair within the fragmented subway scene, Ash Wednesday in the patient suffering of the descent into darkness, and The Rock and Murder in the Cathedral in the acceptance

of the limitation of the wheel of time and of a life of significant action. The theme of alienation in a fragmented society runs through all his poetry, but the early search for unity is complemented, after Eliot's conversion, by an exploration of the turning point that determines what one is to do with his life. Also, the confrontation with one's past, which is the turning point in "Burnt Norton," is developed further in the other Quartets and foreshadows similar events in The Family Reunion, The Cocktail Party, The Elder Statesman, and The Confidential Clerk, all of which involve a return to the past that forces one to make a choice that points the way to his redemption.

Throughout these poems and plays, the same images and themes are seen from different points of view in different contexts, gathering depth and richness of meaning with each new application. The hyacinth garden of The Waste Land becomes the rose garden of Ash Wednesday and "Burnt Norton"; "the still point of the turning world" is first mentioned in "Triumphal March" and later is explained fully in Murder in the Cathedral and the Four Quartets, and the image of the decaying house is employed in "Gerontion" and also in "East Coker" to include not only individual decay but also the history of the "House of Eliot."

As a result of the recurrent themes and images running throughout Eliot's work, the earlier poetry prepares the way for the later work, and the later poetry sheds new light on all that has gone before. The entire body of work, like the completed pattern of "Burnt Norton," presents a unity of experience which contains a variety of themes and modes of expression that are the product of one mind trying to apprehend and communicate a central complex truth.

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