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A synthesis of Eastern and Western time-consciousness in T. S. Eliot's "Burnt Norton"

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Eliot's "Burnt Norton"**

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San Jose State University, 1991

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**A SYNTHESIS OF EASTERN AND WESTERN
TIME-CONSCIOUSNESS IN T. S. ELIOT'S
"BURNT NORTON"**

A Thesis

**Presented to The Faculty of the Department of English
San Jose State University**

**In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts**

**By Terry Jih-yuan Li
December, 1991**

**APPROVED FOR THE DEPARTMENT
OF ENGLISH**

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ABSTRACT

A Synthesis of Eastern and Western Time-Consciousness in T. S. Eliot's "Burnt Norton" by Terry Jih-yuan Li

Despite more than thirty years of commentary, there is little agreement on the nature of T. S. Eliot's Four Quartets. However, there is an increasing agreement on one important point, that the Quartets are not a monotonous composition and should be listened to with an intercultural interpretation. And the challenge of this thesis in part is to make the readers recognize Eliot's effort in "Burnt Norton."

Starting from the research on Eliot's time logic, evaluating all the spiral movement inspired by the Eastern texture, especially by Buddhism, this paper will close with this writer's own Chinese reflection of the ultimate harmony between the Eastern and Western time-consciousness the poet offers. In the final analysis, this research can deny neither Western nor Eastern contributions to "Burnt Norton." It is precisely the intricate connections between Eastern and Western consciousness of time that allow Eliot's "Burnt Norton" to resonate at many levels of meaning.

謹以此書獻給我
最親愛的父母、
兄弟們

及 T.

—— 李濟媛 ——

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List of Abbreviations

AW	"Ash Wednesday"
BN	"Burnt Norton"
CL	Clark Lectures
CPP	<u>Complete Poems and Plays</u>
DS	"The Dry Salvages"
EC	"East Coker"
FA	"Fragment of an Agon"
FR	<u>The Family Reunion</u>
LG	"Little Gidding"
LP	"The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock"
MC	<u>Murder in the Cathedral</u>
P	"Preludes"
SE	<u>Selected Essays</u>
Use	<u>The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism</u>
WL	<u>The Waste Land</u>

Throughout this paper, the Four Quartets text used is the version published by Harcourt Brace Jovanovich in 1980, New York.

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CHAPTER ONE:

From West to the West in a Christian "Burnt Norton"

Eliot made "Burnt Norton," though published originally as a separate poem, the basis and formal model for "East Coker" (1940), "The Dry Salvages" (1941), and "Little Gidding" (1942). Together they comprise Four Quartets (1943). Exploring the meaning of time in a search for its pattern, the Quartets seek to capture those rare moments when eternity intersects the temporal continuum while treating also the relations between those moments and the flux of time. For example, in the first section of "Burnt Norton" Eliot states:

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. (BN, 1-5)

Because we can neither undo the past, those "what might have been" and "what have been" (BN, 9), nor predict the future, what we possess is only now, or "time present" (BN, 1). There is a possibility of the recurring of history, in which the past repeats in the future; therefore, "time present and time past / Are both perhaps present in time future" (BN, 1-2). Following

this time logic of Eliot's, the past has justifiably included a potential future, as he writes, "[T]ime future contained in time past" (BN, 3). Fortunately, though, all time is not "eternally present" (BN, 2), and the dimension for our existence can be only either present, past, or future. Yet, there is always a chance for change in our present; that is, there is also an opportunity of change in our future and its counterpart, time past, because time is not steadfastly "unredeemable" (BN, 5).

However, there is a timeless point, the pivot of the whole time process which is free from the spatial and temporal limitation of time. Time future, past, and present intersect at this exclusive timeless point and all the earthly activities become void and insignificant. In section II of "Burnt Norton," even though Eliot tried to locate this point exactly within the boundary of time, he could only conclude: "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" (BN, 68-9). This point resides in the same space of time; however, it is nevertheless timeless. Eliot called it "the still point of the turning world" (BN, 62), which is similar to the pivot of a turning wheel, or the still center of a spiral movement. This point does not join the overall rotation for it "neither move[s] from nor towards, / Neither ascent nor decline" (BN, 65-6); and neither is it a "fixity" where "past and future are gathered" (BN, 64-5).

Eliot further indicated that since "human kind / Cannot bear very much reality" (BN, 42-3), it seems natural that human beings' backward-looking nature is an indirect search for some solace from the past, and for a possible hope for the future from the abstract past, and from the memory:

What might have been is an abstraction

Remaining a perpetual possibility
 Only in a world of speculation....
 Footfalls echo in the memory
 Down the passage which we did not take
 Towards the door we never opened
 Into the rose-garden. (BN, 6-8, 11-4)

Eliot euphemized our memory of the past as a "rose-garden" (BN, 14), as our "first world" (BN, 23) where there are full of bright and happy images as "[children's] laughter" (BN, 41), "sunlight" (BN, 35), "birds" (BN, 21), "shrubby" (BN, 27) and "roses" (BN, 27), all appealing to our sense of sight, hearing, touch and smell to invite us to pass "the first gate" (BN, 22) to join them. We believe, or at least expect, that over there we will find the "unheard music" (BN, 27), more satisfaction and fulfillment, more "freedom" (BN, 70) and "release from ... suffering" (BN, 71). We want to move into this rose-garden to compensate our past, and therefore assure ourselves of an optimistic future; we want to break free from the limitation which time has imposed upon us. And Eliot indicates to us that only at "the still point of the turning world" (BN, 62) could this break-through of time be achieved. Yet, we are always too conscious of time, we are too aware of the only dimension our intellect can ever imagine, we are always reminding and constraining ourselves with the idea that we are living in time present, the now. But we fail to recognize that "time past and time future only point to one end, / which is always present" (BN, 45-6). We shall see our past and future running into each other at "the still point of the turning world" (BN, 62). How do we hesitate at the threshold of "the first gate":

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, ...
 Be remembered; involved with past and future
 Only through time time is conquered. (BN, 83-6, 89-90)

The whole logic of this passage can be presented by the following clustering:¹

Fig. 1. Illustration of Eliot's time logic

In order to unfetter ourselves from the inner compulsion of time in our mind, we have to, first of all, be unconscious of it before we can fearlessly start at a timeless point to revolve into the rose-garden, into our memory, and to travel liberatedly between time future, time past and ultimately, time present. It is now completely appropriate for Eliot to say, "Only through time time is conquered" (BN, 90).

Indeed, there are paintings by Salvador Dali of a timeless, melting clock, which faces against many wasted desert spaces, that reminds us of one of

¹ This flow chart and the next clustering figure on page 34 are a result of a personal realization of Eliot's grand time logic, and both of them are inspired by Dr. Gabriele Rico's book, Writing the Natural Way (Los Angeles: J. P. Tarcher, Inc., 1983).

Eliot's principal time symbols--time that merges past and future in time present, a place like a wasteland, which the Buddhists describe as the still point. If we can conquer time through time, then this still point is within reach and it will guide us from the wasteland of present to the ultimate Buddhist nirvana, which is the equivalent to Christian paradise or God's province. This aspect of specific relation of time past and future also underlies all the time-consciousness in "Little Gidding":

The moment of the rose and the moment of the yew-tree
Are of equal duration. A people without history
Is not redeemed from time, for history is a pattern
Of timeless moments. (LG, 233-6)

History is generally accepted as the synonym of time past; it is nevertheless a foreshadowing of the future and at the same time, interactive with the present. When the history is changed, the past is counteractivated, then the consequent present and future cannot stay indifferent. Therefore, it is well said that "History is a pattern / of timeless moments" (LG, 235-6) because we cannot confine it to a one-dimensional space. The argument about time in the poem ends here, giving way to the reexperienced moment in the rose-garden. But the moment's new meaning depends on a new understanding, on our recognition that "the moment of the rose" is both past and future, eternal and temporal. "The brief, ecstatic illumination in the garden is one with the moment of the yew, eternity; yet its perpetual presence within time gives meaning to history," Nancy K. Gish writes as she expands her Christian interpretation to look at the relation of the still point with God; she feels that only after we break through the wall of time can we arrive at the still point, "The still point [will] connect with every point on the circle [of

time], and God is present in time.”²

There is little argument that Eliot’s obsession with the problem of time and the essence of his thought is best expressed in his Four Quartets. The series and each Quartet in it recapitulate the central theme through variations while moving gradually toward the explicit naming and more full revelation of the most apparent, but not the only, looks of its Christian element. Central to its structure, and particularly in “Burnt Norton,” we can see the mysticism of St. John of the Cross (1542-91), in which the ascent of a soul to the union with God is facilitated only by memory and by a disciplined meditation. But Eliot also shows us that this Christian meditation will later be replaced by a descent into darkness that is paradoxically deepened the nearer one approaches to the light of God. As we can see in the third section of “Burnt Norton”:

Descend lower, descend only
 Into the world of perpetual solitude,
 World not world, but that which is not world,
 Internal darkness, deprivation
 And destitute of all property.... (BN, 115-9)

To elaborate the image of descent and ascent, and the idea of a still point, the movement of Eliot’s time logic will be best visualized as a spiral animation. Every slice of human existence is minute and temporal out of the whole flow of human history; during the process of this spiral exercise, time future (what

² Nancy K. Gish, “A Pattern of Timeless Moment: Four Quartets,” Time in the Poetry of T. S. Eliot: A Study in Structure and Theme (New Jersey: Barnes & Nobles Books, 1981) 91-120.

will be) and time past (what has been) can not come joining time present because "If all time is eternally present / All time is unredeemable" (BN, 4-5). These three continuums could never come across each other except at one tangent point--the still center--borrowed from the Eastern idea for which we can hardly find a Western equal term. As Eliot has said: "I can only say, there we have been: but I cannot say where" (BN, 68). From this point on, the subtle blending of the Eastern and Western ingredients in the poem has fermented successfully to break through a purely Western Christian mold. No matter how hard we strive to cross the border line of time with all the human exploits, all our efforts will eventually rest in some place unknown to this space and the far later generations. Nonetheless, Eliot still discovered a solution to eternalize human deeds from the Eastern philosophy for our discouraging trivial strife:

Words move, music moves
Only in time; but that which is only living
Can only die. Words after speech, reach
Into the stillness, like a Chinese jar still
Moves perpetually in its stillness. (BN, 137-41)

Here, the Chinese jar symbolizes the Eastern philosophy of merging action into passiveness, of moderating two extremes into a middle point to reach one unreachable end which is before the first beginning and after the last ending of time. Thus, the movement coexists with the stillness and is getting into a timeless eternity:

Not the stillness of the violin, while the note lasts,
Not the only, but the co-existence,
Or say that the end precedes the beginning,
And the end and the beginning were always there.

Before the beginning and after the end,
 And all is always now. (BN, 144-9)

No doubt we can redeem neither the progressing time present, nor the irrevocable time past and the unpredictable time future, yet this sense of our impotence over the unreconcilable time is diagnosed by Eliot's unique treatment and we may feel motivated again:

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

How can we deny the disclosure that what we are striving for throughout our transient lodging is but a solution to make us live a better present? We brood over what has happened and what might have happened because they are most significant only when they both serve to consummate time present, the moment we are living in right now. Present and past join, for now the speaker of the poem and we, his unnamed companion and the "they" in the poem are all reflected in "water out of sunlight" (BN, 36). This inexplicable moment is both timeless yet dependent on time, for it rests on memory. And though it is outside of time and somehow more real, all time--present, past and future--points to it: "Time past and time future / What might have been and what has been / Point to one end, which is always present" (BN, 44-6).

This evocative passage thus leads us back to a statement of meaning, a movement reiterated throughout the Quartets. For the focus is consistently on an understanding through both our remembered experience and thought.

The opening passage begins and ends in consideration of meaning; it encloses the moment itself which is immediately captured in memory. If the very presence of the moment answers the opening question, the final line then affirms its future significance: time has value only when it points to such a transcendent moment where the fetter of time is unbound. As in "Ash Wednesday," time and the timeless remain separate; however, in "Burnt Norton" the intensity and certainty of the timeless experience deliver a far more positive tone to this poem. The view of time and eternity from a Christian angle helps us to appreciate the whole structure of Eliot's "Burnt Norton" even though the moment itself is not here strictly applied to Christianity. One might describe it as what Claude Tresmontant, in a study of Christian metaphysics, calls the "vectorial time":

It has been said that Christian time was linear whereas Hellenic time was cyclic. To say that time is linear is obviously an unfortunate expression, since time is precisely not spatial. But what remains correct under the unhappy term, is that Christian time measures a creation irreversibly directed towards a unique and definite end. Christian time is vectorial.³

Time is by no means either linear or cyclic in "Burnt Norton" since Eliot did not head for only one cultural destination; the movement of this poem is launching toward a mingling of the East and the West, Buddhist and Christian salvation. This idea of movement towards a unique end--being "vectorial" as Tresmontant has suggested--the timeless moment, is central to

³ Claude Tresmontant, Christian Metaphysics, trans. Gerard Slevin. (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1965) 68.

"Burnt Norton" and to the rest of the Quartets. We can read from the surface that this concept is increasingly presented in Christian terms as well as in the allusions to Christian saints. While in the essence of "Burnt Norton," Eliot emphasizes the wonder and intensity of the timeless moment; the whole poem presents time as empty and meaningless except when it reaches and moves towards the timeless still center. Gish again suggests that "if one conceives of time and eternity in the Neo-Platonic image of the moving circle with a still center," two kinds of movement are possible: within the circle or up and down toward the still point.⁴ Only the latter image of a circle which moves up and down has value for us here, and the center, as depicted in "Burnt Norton," recalls the abstract "One" of the Neo-Platonist known only by negation:

For the nature of the one being generative of all things, is not any one of them. Neither, therefore, is it a certain thing nor a quality nor a quantity, nor intellect, nor soul, nor that which is moved nor against that which stands still. Nor is it in a place or in time, but is itself uniform, or rather without form, being prior to all form, to motion and permanence.⁵

This passage provides a solid similarity to Eliot's still point which is located before the beginning and after the ending because it is, as Plotinus described, "the generative of all things" yet "not any one of them."⁶ In

⁴ Gish, 99.

⁵ Plotinus, Select Works of Plotinus, trans. Thomas Taylor, ed. G. R. S. Mead. (New York: G. Bell & Sons, 1895) 180.

⁶ Plotinus, 180.

"Burnt Norton" the exalted timeless moment is actually a memory of what might have but has not yet happened in the idealized rose-garden behind a door never opened. Just as in a wandering land, the temptation to get into the garden is called "deception" (BN, 24) and the whole experience has a quality of illusion as: the "unheard music" (BN, 27), water in a dry pool, and the children's "containing laughter" (BN, 41). To our eyes which are thirsting for a more soothing scenery, this "deception" is a promise created with imagination and is recalled with longing, surrounded by "waste, sad time" (BN, 175). Human beings' dissatisfaction with the present always generates the eternal conflict between memory and reality, and we always beautify those unexperienced experiences; as a result, "the passage ... not taken" (BN, 12), "the door ... never opened" (BN, 13) is always the best one, and the rose-garden of childhood becomes synonymous of God's province which every Christian soul strives for. Even though Eliot declares that "to what purpose / Disturbing the dust on a bowl of rose-leaves / I do not know" (BN, 16-8), the poet still determines to follow the thrush's calling of "deception" to enter "our first world" (BN, 23-4) based on the fact that "human kind / Cannot bear very much reality" (BN, 42-3). Actually, this statement of our tendency to escape from reality has answered Eliot's initial question. Only down memory lane will we find the compensation for the present; even though it is sometimes deceptive, we expect the dreamy past to encourage us when we have to face the unpleasant present or unpredictable future of this world. Eliot is interweaving human beings' backward looking conflict with the forward progressing time into a beautiful tapestry when he describes:

Footfalls echo in the memory

Down the passage which we did not take
 Toward the door we never opened
 Into the rose-garden. (BN, 11-4)

In a purer Christian word, the rose-garden is the first paradise for the first human being; it is the Garden of Eden. However, Cleo MaNelly Kearns perceives this Edenic presence as extremely fictive as he described it as "A trick of light, a nostalgic impression based on an imperfect memory recovered only indirectly, behind us in the past."⁷ He suggests that whether with "immediate experience" as the ground of knowing or "complete experience" as the goal, such end points are fictions, pointing, if they do point, to a condition so far beyond the human spectrum that we can figure it equally well as heart of light or heart of darkness, as "plentitude" (BN, 99) or "annihilation and utter night," as fullness or emptiness.⁸ In any case, the pursuit of that vision is, in this poem at least, a "might have been," (BN, 54) a course of action laid aside, whether rightly or wrongly, long ago. When Kearns' narration of our desperate pursuit of a "vision" corresponds to Eliot's statement (before the poet steps into the rose-garden) of "But to what purpose / Disturbing the dust on a bowl of rose-leaves / I do not know" (BN, 16-8). Indeed, Kearns would rather leave the bowl of rose-leaves--the symbol of his nostalgic memory--alone, even dusted. Kearns does not appreciate such human struggle which challenges our limitation much because he feels that

⁷ Cleo MaNelly Kearns, T. S. Eliot and Indic Tradition: A Study in Poetry and Belief (London: Cambridge University Press, 1987) 233-4.

⁸ T. S. Eliot, Knowledge and Experience in the Philosophy of F. H. Bradley (New York: Farrar & Straus, 1964) 31.

neither that nostalgic past nor its projection into an unpredictable future can give us any "ontological certainty."⁹

The Greek epigraphs of "Burnt Norton" are from the pre-Socratic philosopher Heraclitus (540?-475 B. C.) and may be translated as: "But although the Word is common to all, the majority of people live as though they had each an understanding peculiarly his own" and, "The way up and the way down are one and the same."¹⁰ This is just one of the fragments from Heraclitus that serves as the epigraph to "Burnt Norton" and as Grover Smith points out, "would be suitable to the whole series [of the Four Quartets]"¹¹ too, since this epigraph "invokes the *logos xunos*, the common, open, available word which Eliot thinks of as wisdom, "the same for everywhere."¹² In a whole, "Burnt Norton" recapitulates this critical examination of the intense meditation in section II with a brief "symbolic fantasia," a term borrowed from Kearns' coinage, ruminative and conversational even when elevated, to the metaphysical or symbolist styles,

⁹ Kearns, 233.

¹⁰ This is Kearns' translation of the epigraph of "Burnt Norton." Among the other translations offered the Heraclitean fragments are "Although the law if reason (the Logos) is common, the majority of people live as though they had an understanding (or wisdom) of their own" (Traversi), and "Though the Word governs everything, most people trust in their own wisdom" (Grove Smith). Another of Grove Smith's suggestions, although he recognizes it as the least literal rendering, --"Although there is but one Center, most men live in centers of their own"--is also suggestive.

¹¹ Grove Smith, T. S. Eliot's Poetry and Plays: A Study in Sources and Meanings (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1956) 255.

¹² T. S. Eliot, Selected Essays (London: Faber & Faber, 1951) 264.

perhaps more common modes for apprehending or suggesting these intensities.¹³ At the end of the spiral animation of human existence and of this fugue of "Burnt Norton," it moves through many kinds of parody and imitation to the sublimation of the still point:

Here is a place of disaffection
 Time before and time after
 In a dim light: neither daylight
 Investing form with lucid stillness
 Turning shadow into transient beauty
 With slow rotation suggesting permanence
 Nor darkness to purify the soul
 Emptying the sensual with deprivation
 Cleansing affection from the temporal.
 Neither plentitude nor vacancy. (BN, 91-9)

In such passages, we can see that Eliot is trying out a poetic exploration of the suitability of various conclusions of their inadequacy. These conclusions are at the same time, deliberately "periphrastic stud[ies] in a worn-out poetical fashion" (EC, 19) and their purpose is to draw attention both to their own effect and to their own weakness and hence, by indirection, to the strength of that which they attempt to portray:

Garlic and sapphires in the mud
 Clot the bedded axle-tree.
 The trilling wire in the blood
 Sings below inveterate scars....
 The dance along the artery
 The circulation of the lymph

¹³ Kearns, 233-4.

Are figured in the drift of stars

Ascend to summer in the tree.

(BN, 47-50, 52-5)

From the fantasia in the "Burnt Norton" section II, we are reminded of the image of a turning wheel for our earthly existence, "the circulation" of blood and lymph in the body, the "scars," of past trauma, both public and private, the great tree of *karma*, the individual predestined existence, extending its many branches of cause and effect above and below, and the endless repetition of opposites that creates the world of human beings. The effect, predetermined by the opening "garlic and sapphires in the mud," itself a "symbolist-metaphysical conceit," is precious in the extreme.¹⁴ In the last line, "reconciled among the stars" (BN, 61), we see that Eliot creates something quite original, a kind of demonstration, a rendering or trying out of a style and mode the insufficiency of which he wishes to make quite clear.

As if to point out the contrast, Eliot immediately returns from Kearn's "symbolist fantasia" to one of his central presentations, of a mystical immediacy, the passage that begins:

At the still point of the turning world

Neither flesh nor fleshless;

Neither from nor towards; at the still point, there the dance is

But neither arrest nor movement. And do not call it fixity,

Where past and future are gathered. Neither movement from nor
towards

Neither ascent nor decline. Except for the point, the still point,

There would be no dance, and there is only the dance. (BN, 62-7)

Primal vision here affirms, though still not with complete assurance or

¹⁴ Kearns, 236.

adequacy, its connection with intellect as opposed to fancy; it becomes through meditative practice, a form of concentration rather than of a mere romantic expansion. And this is approached not through "metaphysical conceit," as Kearns claims, but through a conversational and philosophical style, in the common sense and in tone. This tone gives us not an ecstatic, astral, dreamy effect when we are wandering about the rose-garden, but rather a subdued, intimate, and above all, communicative accent. And only when we have reached the still point where both the Christian God's light and Buddha's grace exhale their grandeur, can we break through the bondage which time has imposed upon us, and hopefully, can leave our own inner desires behind:

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. (BN, 71-4)

The poem speaks of something apprehensible, a "grace of sense," "a white light still and moving"; obviously, these are the satisfying Christian images of God and the destiny of the life-long pursuit of every Christian. Even such a character as Dr. Faust, who has long been the mouthpiece of human beings' unrest about their physical and temporal limitations, will have to repent and call for God's forgiveness at his time of damnation.¹⁵ Faust's repentance symbolizes the human surrendering to God and to time

¹⁵ Here, I am referring to Goethe's character, Dr. Faust, who regrets in time so that his soul is consequently guided to heaven to enjoy God's grace to demonstrate the Christian faith, a character created at a time of Darwinism and religious doubts in the existence of God.

because now he realizes that, even the expansion of human existence and the free licence of experiencing time in our dimension could not make him feel really happy and therefore contented. Following this Christian track, God does position Himself in a dimension where time present, past and future coexist in harmony, and only when we step on the still point can we, these mean and trivial human beings, experience the reason for Dr. Faust's obedient penance before such an omnipotent being in such an omnipresent spatial and temporal universe far beyond our comprehension.

Thus far the Christian interpretation make us undeniably agree that in "Burnt Norton" Eliot is trying to point out that the reason why human beings should desire so much for the rose-garden of the past in our memory, or for our first world, is because we cannot "bear very much reality" (BN, 43). To satisfy our such our need for escapism, we are pining to arrive at the timeless "still point of this turning world" (BN, 62); for we now both expect and understand that God's grace is there to release us from every earthly "suffering" (BN, 71), dissatisfaction, "compulsion" (BN, 72), or to release us from our "desire" (BN, 70). This "light" stresses not its out-of-time dimension, though that is affirmed, but its reinscription back into time because:

The enchainment of past and future
Woven in the weakness of the changing body,
Protects mankind from heaven and damnation
Which flesh cannot endure. (BN, 79-82)

This targeted destination is "both a new world / And the old" (BN, 85-6), and it is made understood in "the completion of its partial ecstasy" (BN, 87). Nonetheless, this mystical ecstasy is valuable but not ultimate; the fall back

into natural life is both a form of protection for those who are facing the reality and a return to a medium, a body, a material again, since we are made out of ash and dust, and earth is both our origin and resting place.

In section III of "Burnt Norton," Eliot underscores two methods, the positive and the negative, to approach a primal vision, the ultimate spot we are looking forward to resting upon. The positive method is a passage of "daylight / Investing form with lucid stillness" (BN, 93-4); the negative one is a way of darkness, "Emptying the sensual with deprecation / Cleansing affection from the temporal" (BN, 97-8). The second, the negative way, or the way of darkness, seems more compelling for Eliot since there are more explicit negative words or imagery in section III. The approach through negation and cancellation appeals to Eliot in part because it allows him to avoid or at least to reframe a philosophically and culturally questionable language of presence. Both negative and positive ways, however, have their uses for poetry and for meditation, and within both are various degrees and oppositions of negativity and affirmation¹⁶. Here, almost more than anywhere else, Eliot's study of Eastern tradition gives him a sense of the difference between the Heraclitan "the way up and the way down,"--the Christian via negative--, the *neti neti* of the Upanishads, and the far more radical negations of early Buddhism. Among these three, the negations of the early Buddhism especially allows "Burnt Norton" to be a very sophisticated

¹⁶ This dichotomy of positive and negative is by no means very original, yet Kearns adopts this foil and does establish his solid expansion on it in his book, T. S. Eliot and Indic Traditions: A Study in Poetry and Belief.

and subtle rendering of philosophical terms, as well as a wise estimation of their differing values.

However, it is impossible for us to reach the still point only by either a positive or a negative approach. Extreme asceticism that seeks to conquer time by deliberate severance of all worldly bonds is common to all religions, but it has often been discouraged as an extreme measure unfit for most human beings. Eliot apparently regards it as an escape from the place of disaffection and not as a means to transcend time:

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. (BN, 114-24)

The negative way resembles emptiness to Eliot, and so his description of it is rather grim. Such total renunciation enables the individual to attain the steadfastness of a rock against the flux and against the suffering of the turning world so that he can intuit the still point:

The detail of the pattern is movement
 As in the figure of the ten stairs.
 Desire itself is movement
 Not in itself desireable;
 Only the cause and end of movement,
 Timeless and undesiring.... (BN, 159-44)

Even though we may well feel an irresistible escapism undertone in "Burnt Norton," the music of this composition does not conclude on the negative side, but it is perfectly appropriate to say that this composition closes on the wholly positive side of granting the greatest possible Christian significance to our temporal beings as part of a pattern to reflect God's will:

Sudden in a shaft of sunlight
 Even while the dust moves
 There rises the hidden laughter
 Of children in the foliage
 Quick, here, now, always--
 Ridiculous the waste sad time
 Stretching before and after. (BN, 169-75)

Now we finally witnessed God's light, God's grace in the rose-garden, which is proved to be not a "deception" (BN, 74), and now we can hear "the unheard music" (BN, 29), "the laughter of children" (BN, 173) which is at first "hidden in the shrubbery" (BN, 27) or in "the foliage" (BN, 172) before we step into this garden. The question of "to what purpose / Disturbing the dust on a bowl of the rose-leaves" (BN, 16-7) is now being answered positively: "Even while the dust moves / There rises the hidden laughter / Of children in the foliage" (BN, 170-2). It seems now the travel into the garden is requiring of us a renewed exploration; yet the goal of which is still unknown. Eliot elaborates this tour of remembrance further in the final section of "Little Gidding," and we are thus moved back to the present without breaking from this immediate experience of the past:

With the drawing of this Love and the voice of this Calling
 We shall not cease from exploration
 And the end of all our exploring

Will be to arrive where we started
 And know the place for the first time.
 Through the unknown, remembered gate ...
 Is that which was the beginning; ...
 The voice of the hidden....
 [C]hildren in the apple-tree
 Not known, because not looked for
 Not heard, half-heard, in the stillness....
 Quick now, here, now, always-- (LG, 240-5, 247, 249-54)

Because there is no static perfection in human life but a union of being and becoming, the process of discovery can never cease. The "end" (LG, 242), both in time and purpose, is to rediscover "our first world," the rose-garden of innocence and of those sweet memories, yet it is said to be known "for the first time" (LG, 243). When it occurred in "Burnt Norton," the end of time and purpose seem to be a fleeting transcendence of the empty time: "Burnt Norton" ends not on a reiteration but on a new level of apprehension, the timeless moment understood in relation to all of life. Though the rose-garden reappears, the imagery is significantly altered; there we witness God's province in it, too.

As a contrast to the positive way of reading "Burnt Norton" to arrive at the final destination of the rose-garden and the paradise, the sketch of the negative way in "Burnt Norton" has one set of roots in the via negative of certain Christian traditions, notably those associated with the Spanish mystics. "Descend lower," the poet thus commands us:

[D]escend only
 Into the world of perpetual solitude,
 World not world, but that which is not world,
 Internal darkness, deprivation

And destitution of all property,
 Desiccation of the world of sense,
 Evacuation of the world of fancy,
 Inoperancy of the world of spirit.... (BN, 115-23)

The Christian point of reference here is St. John of the Cross, who leads souls toward God through darkness or immediate exaltation by way of the ladder of contemplation, or "the ten stairs" (BN, 160) which produces the pattern of the universal movement. Though these stairs are the stairs which at times lead through emptiness, destitution, or the abandonment of the spirit in darkness downward, they are also the vehicle carrying our souls up to God's dwelling. Therefore, this stair image corresponds to the opening epigraph, "The way up and the way down are one and the same." Such passages, however, can all too easily be seen as an affirmation in another form, or the negativity that afflicts the active as well as the contemplative life. The allusion to St. John of the Cross and the Christian via negative is in counterpoint to the allusion to the Buddhist "way down" in "Burnt Norton." The "evacuation of the world of fancy" (BN, 122) suggests something of the emptiness of *shunyata* and of Buddhist meditation both as a technique and as a goal. There is, furthermore, in this passage an emphasis on the deliberate, willed cultivation of this state of emptiness, which gives it a dimension often lacking in Western texts. This passage and others in Four Quartets gain from St. John of the Cross an emotional intensity, a dimension of feeling is needed to carry conviction, but they gain, too, from their Eastern and especially Buddhist dimensions, a special rigour and emphasis.

However, in her response to the positive affirmation of the Christian salvation culminated at the end of "Burnt Norton," Elisabeth Schneider has

quite a different expression. She defines the way up and down of "Burnt Norton" to be a "transcendent moment," or the "the fleeting ecstasy out of time" to illustrate "the still point of the turning world."¹⁷ Thus, Schneider concludes that the speaker of "Burnt Norton," if not autobiographically identified as T. S. Eliot, seeks first to understand and then express the nature and meaning of this "transcendental" or "fleeting" experience. One of the two epigraphs of "Burnt Norton" is "The way up and the way down are one and the same," and this movement is the Heraclitean ascent, beginning in the mud and ending among the stars:

Garlic and sapphires in the mud
 Clot the bedded axle-tree.
 The trilling wire in the blood
 Sings below inveterate scars
 Appeasing long forgotten wars.
 The dance along the artery
 The circulation of the lymph
 Are figured in the drift of stars
 Ascend to summer in the tree. (BN, 47-55)

"The trilling wire in the blood" that "sings" as the violins, "the dance along the artery," "the circulation of the lymph," are all part of the ascending spiral motion--this is a recovery from illness in blood, artery, lymph; and it is the now unreluctant revival of life in spring. The past, though it cannot be quite undone, is healed into mere "scars," and past wars are both reconciled and "forgotten" (BN, 51):

¹⁷ Elisabeth Schneider, "Four Quartets," T. S. Eliot: the Pattern in the Carpet (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975) 168-208.

We move above the moving tree
 In light upon the figure leaf
 And hear upon the sodden floor
 Below, the boarhound and the boar
 Pursue their pattern as before
 But reconciled among the stars. (BN, 56-61)

In this positive elation, we soar with the violins above the trees, above the old patterns of earth, the patterns of the pursuer and the pursued (the boarhound and the boar), which now like the wars are reconciled among the constellations. Schneider elevates the lyric to be “a parable of recovery of creative power” and “the elation that goes with it”: 18

By a grace of sense, a white light still and moving,
Erhebung without motion, concentration
 Without elimination, both a new world
 And the old made explicit, understood
 In the completion of its partial ecstasy,
 The resolution of its partial horror. (BN, 72-9)

From this context, Eliot suggests to us that this “new world” has to be “understood” and be “made explicit” by our understanding of the old world first; the arrival at the still point, the paradise, is grandly completed by its partial ecstasy and, of course, its partial horror of this fulfillment. We cannot help but feel thrilled and horrified when we suddenly come to the realization that we are now moved into God’s province. But, we are puzzled because this new world made out of the old, this new experience made out of our past memory, is so full of contrasts which seem to be so hard to get close; there are

18 Schneider, 208.

conflicts from "*Erhebung* without motion" (BN, 73) and "concentration / Without elimination" (BN, 73-4). Yet, if we really listen to "Burnt Norton" full-heartedly, its lightness, the spirit of its *Erhebung* will then be quickly and naturally felt.¹⁹ Yet, the mixture of all these paradoxical contrasts results in an even greater power of the Grace of the Christian God: e.g., the "*Erhebung* without motion," the "concentration without elimination," and both the "old" and "new" world.

However, the ascent of this lyric of section II is balanced by the descent at the close of section III. Life-giving though both are, neither can represent the ultimate spiritual experience by itself; and so between the ascent and the descent stands the expository prosaic sequel to the lyric, defining what the experience truly is, and the opening of section III, which presents what it most is not:

Here is a place of disaffection
Time before and time after
In a daylight: neither daylight....
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. (BN, 91-3, 96-9)

The ultimate experience is "the still point of the turning world" (BN, 63), as it is "Neither movement from nor towards / Neither ascent or decline" (BN,

¹⁹ Schneider suggests the reason that Eliot used the German word in the prosaic passage which follows is that, at least to a foreign ear, it seems to carry more of its pure literal sense of lifting up and fewer other connotations than such possible English equivalents as "exaltation" or "elevation" only.

64-5) even its *Erhebung* is “without motion” (BN, 75). Looking for the timeless spot is not purely an activity of escaping from time or pretending not to be aware of it; the timelessness can be found only through time. As Eliot has said rightly, “Only through time time is conquered” (BN, 90). Eliot thus demonstrates to us that only in the timeless moment can the chains of past and future be loosed and gathered freely; and even though we can experience the moment briefly, we will retain it only by bringing it back with us through memory into time where it can still cast its radiance over our earthly body:

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 smokefall
Be remembered; involved with past and future.
Only through time time is conquered. (BN, 86-90)

Let us not interpret the moment in the draughty church at smokefall into anything else; as Eliot has said, “There is a logic of the imagination as well as a logic of concepts,” and this is it; we have all been there.²⁰ We have already seen the enchanting glory in the rose-garden after we ascend from the still point to it. However, there is a counteraction of descent in “Burnt Norton” too, which introduces a more hellish hell, an underground beneath our world:

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. (BN, 101-5)

²⁰ Preface to Eliot’s translation of St. J. Perse’s *Anabasis*.

The sketching of this horrifying landscape inevitably reminds us of our own world, which makes us feel very unsafe and insecure about our value and position in this boundless universe and boundless time. But, Eliot does not stop here. He further intensifies the outgoing collapse of our nerves by juxtaposing "our world," his contemporary England, or generally, the whole human dominion, with the pit of our descent without any reservation:

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. (BN, 108-13)

Even though Eliot assures us that "this twittering world" is not where the descent will stop, the *here* is not the *there* which is of full darkness; still, the shock is too prophetically dynamic for us to ignore the experience of being identified with the "unhealthy souls" (BN, 108). And now in his asserting the dark world to contrast the ecclesiastic rose-garden, it's time to see the poet's techniques in reconciling polarities to achieve a last harmony instead of creating a dissonance. We have to "descend lower" to enter:

Into the world of perpetual solitude,
 World not world, but that which is not world,
 Internal darkness, deprivation
 And destitution of all property,
 Desiccation of the world of sense,
 Evacuation of the world of fancy,
 Inoperancy of the world of spirit.... (BN, 115-21)

From the experience of Western writings on the Christian hell, Eliot has not at all yielded to his predecessors such as Dante or Milton. Eliot is certainly not

the first one who describes all the horrors the Christian hell as "perpetual" (BN, 115), or "internal" (BN, 118), or as deeply rooted from within or fundamentally surrounded from without. However, not till Eliot does someone associate "the way up" with "the way down" as he reminds us that:

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 mentalled ways
Of time past and time future. (BN, 122-6)

Even though this conclusion seems to focus mainly on a kind of paradoxical movement (such as the examples of "*Erhebung* without motion," or "concentration without elimination" in section II), it has subtly linked the two opposite movements together; one is the way up, the other, down. One action is ascending towards the "release from action and suffering, / release from the inner compulsion" by "a grace of sense, / a white light still and moving" (BN, 71-2), while the other is descending to the place of "perpetual solitude, ... Internal darkness, deprivation / And destitution" (BN, 115, 117-8). From the observation of our physical world, section III of "Burnt Norton" properly moves all the way into the Christian hell where the human world is conceived as a living hell. Section III thus juxtaposes two opposite kinds of darkness and descent, our world and the Christian hell.

The first darkness of our world reflects on the daily life of those classes of persons who are at the farthest from the timeless rose-garden; they are the "men and bits of paper," men with "strained time-ridden faces" (BN, 100) in the London Tube with its "dim light" (BN, 93), and the characteristic stale chilling draught of underground systems, men in perpetual purposeless

movement from one to another of the "gloomy hills of London" (BN, 110). This frightening underworld of the London subway becomes an abbey where men and women are in limbo, neither dead nor alive, whirled about by circumstance like bits of paper in the wind. They are, in fact, inhabitants of death's twilight kingdom, latter-day incarnations of the hollow men, whose souls have shriveled up, and revealing only straw or emptiness. The overtones of irony and pathos reinforce the basic existential fact of impermanence. The destination of this descending is by no means a paradise but a place more threatening than the purgatory of Dante's dead souls or Milton's hell:

Here is a place of disaffection
 Time before and time after
 In a dim light; neither daylight
 Investing form with lucid stillness
 Turning shadow into transient beauty
 With slow rotation suggesting permanence
 Nor darkness to purify the soul
 Emptying the sensual with deprivation
 Cleansing affection from the temporal. (BN, 92-9)

The descent of our souls from this world has turned out to be explicitly a landing on the hell's soil and darkness. But again this descent is set for the other, that of St. John of the Cross, for whom, as for Heraclitus, the way up and the way down are one and the same. The recovered self that "sings below inveterate scars / Appeasing long forgotten wars" and "ascen[ds] to summer" (BN, 50-1, 55) in the second section is balanced now by the soul's descent: the ascent has seemed to imply the renaissance of a poetic creativity, the decent, spiritual renewal. However, the overall tone of this poem

becomes inevitably low and frustrated when section IV continues with other concrete images of darkness and depression and queries:

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? (BN, 127-34)

If Eliot stopped right here, "Burnt Norton" would be more justifiably categorized as negative or depressive without any doubt, since the other extreme of leaving our present world to arrive at our rose-garden, the paradise, is simply a living in an even more diabolic hell than our transient existence. But, Eliot put something more, a very short yet dynamic stanza right after section III to reveal more messages:

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. (BN, 34-6)

This short passage has united image and experience and expresses those deeply felt needs despite the unpleasant imagery it projects. "Burnt Norton" section IV is often favorably considered as the most effective and decisive turning point in "Burnt Norton." It is a need for assurance that meaning remains when the moment passes, that the light still exists when it is hidden. The lyric moves from a simple statement of a loss to a question of whether the moment of intense consciousness--of light or dark, sunflower or yew--will recur, and this section ends with an optimistic reaffirmation when the

poet can still see "the light is still / At the still point of the turning world" (BN, 136-7); that is a perfect reassurance of hope, expectation is still there despite all the preceding passages on our hellish earth or an earthly hell; it is also the inspiration for the poet, as well as for us, to finish, or at least to continue this tour in the rose-garden.

From such brief lines in section IV, we can thus concentrate its central themes and its messages to be the experience of the intense meaning of our existence, the parallel of the natural world and a higher reality in the kingfisher's wing which reflects the light, the loss of the moment and our need for it to recur. Moreover, this section, a short lyric as it is in all the Quartets, refers us back to the rose-garden first brought up in section I. Our experience in the garden had been momentary, like the drained pool which is "dry concrete" (BN, 35) ending in "a cloud passed, and the pool was empty" (BN, 39); but this is also the pool which is "filled with water out of sunlight" (BN, 37), just like the mirage of water reflected in the middle of the dry, drained concrete highway, the vision is so realistic as to resemble illusion. We are not, however, either in illusion or in reality. Now this is taken up again--"The black cloud carries the sun away" (BN, 127)--and the question is asked: do we really possess the garden? does the wandering land store all our past, our earlier memory? The images are all of what we were not shown before this section, such as "sunflower" (BN, 129), "clematis" (BN, 129), and the yew tree (BN, 133) which are all full of life, hope, and positivity about now, past, and future. But we ask for more: will the garden be ours--really for us, not just a deceptive vision? "Will the sunflower turn to us, will the clematis ... bend to us?" (BN, 129-30) Eliot only revealed to us answers we are

granted to know: the rose-garden exists all right; it is still there to represent "the still point of the turning world" (BN, 137) to which "the ten stairs" (BN, 160) will carry our souls. Reading "Burnt Norton" from a more Christian perspective now achieves its ultimate expectation: the Christian salvation is over there, and God is awaiting. There is reassurance if not quite a promise.

And Eliot has sufficiently demonstrated to us that because of human beings' backward looking nature and desire to break through the limitation of time imposed innately with our birth, we have exposed ourselves to two possible polarities: if we do not stop at the timeless point, the golden mean of Chinese philosophy,²¹ when we soar any higher or dive any lower than the still point, we will either be up to the heaven, or get stranded eternally in damnation by the enchainment of time:

Yet the weakness of past and future
Woven in the weakness of the changing body,
Protects mankind from heaven and damnation
Which flesh cannot endure. (BN, 79-83)

Happily, the beginning of the final movement keeps up the optimistic tone, though in a more philosophical way. It first refers to the world of the artists, those who give birth to the "words" and "music" (BN, 137) among human creation, the artists of music as well as of words, who are both targeting their

²¹ If choosing between two extremities, Chinese philosophy always prefers the middle way, or the Golden Mean. The earlier philosophers such as Lao Tze or Chong Tze both preach this principle to their followers or in their writings. This school believes that the two extremes of too little or too much, over or under, will only cause discordance and destruction rather than achieve the goal. Moreover, Lao Tze even declares that if we carry anything to its extreme, it will always result in another unexpected extreme which is going to destroy the whole balance scheme in this universe.

works beyond the spacial and temporal boundary to approach the eternity. Now poetry and music are conceived as an analogue of the spiritual still point once the timeless moment is captured. Their medium--language or musical tone--exists in time; but the essence of art is its form and pattern, for only through them, can the art of human creation and the timeless moment of a mystical vision intersect rather than just die out into a permanent silence once after they are projected:

Words move, music moves
 Only in time; but that which is only living
 Can only die. Words, after speech, reach
 Into the stillness....
 Not the stillness of the violin, while the note lasts,
 Not that only, but the co-existence
 Or say that the end precedes the beginning,
 And the end and the beginning were always there
 Before the beginning and after the end.
 And all is always now. ... (BN, 137-40, 142-9)

The constant pursuit of artists is the moment, the dimension where their creation can last outlast time before and time after, "all is always now" (BN, 149); which is a timeless still point. Eliot here seems to imply that the human creation of art, the moving world is now detached from the claims of before and after. The great quartet, of music or of words, should be a union or co-existence of motion and stillness; otherwise, the artistic work is only a piece of still, static fraction taken out of the entire flux of time stream. Even when the sounds of word or music stop, we will still experience the whole, beginning and ending at once:

Only by the form, the pattern,
 Can words or music reach

The stillness, as a Chinese jar still
 Moves perpetually in its stillness. (BN, 141-4)

fig. 2. the pattern of time in section V

Eliot has thus expressed his concern with the capacity of words and music to achieve, through the pattern, a stillness analogous to the moment of a supreme eternity in section V. Language and music are temporal; they occur in succession. Yet the artists' problem is to create unity from succession, in this case, to attain silence through speech itself, a paradoxical goal fulfilled through pattern and "the detail of [which] is movement" (BN, 159) (figure 2).

This goal specifically matches the opening concept of this poem about time in its emphasis on simultaneity and on value only in the achieved silence, not words themselves, which "strain, / Crack and sometimes break, under the burden" (BN, 149-50) in their attempting to reach stillness. The return to the rose-garden is formally necessary since "Burnt Norton" does circle around a point to establish the moment as profound, supremely real and

opposed to ordinary temporal experience. In the end, this experience is reaffirmed and judged: "Ridiculous the waste sad time / Stretching before and after" (BN, 175). While the moment remains out of time, joined with it only through memory, our temporal life seems pointless and meaningless; hence is defined as non-temporal. But Eliot let us see that time does point to a timeless end, and there are clear supporting statements from Gish as she indicated:

By drawing on both Heraclitus and Neo-Platonism, Eliot unites both being and becoming. The flux is real but order is immanent in change. The still point at the center is real and the changing world is dependent on it. The changing world, moreover, is capable of a pattern reflecting the still center, and humanity can glimpse this pattern.²²

Up to now, the synthesis is generally Christian, portraying time neither as flux alone nor as an illusion to be escaped, but is "vectorial," as Tresmontant suggested, and is moving toward an end.²³

This is not only to say the poem is singly "Christian" in the sense that it expresses specifically and exclusively a Christian vision or attitude, but rather that it assumes a Christian view of time. Christianity, in any case, takes many forms and many modes. What matters to us here is that despite Eliot's revulsion at purely temporal experience, he accepts time as part of a larger whole, an essential part when seen in proper relation to eternity. But distaste for time in itself remains, and the separation between time and timelessness remains for all but rare moments. Only through memory can knowledge of a

²² Gish, 102-3.

²³ Tresmontant, 68.

timeless order be retained and time conquered, so we understand and practice this reconciliation in our backward looking nature:

Footfalls echo in the memory
Down the passage which we did not take
Towards the door we never opened
Into the rose-garden. (BN, 11-4)

Yet, Grover Smith states that "The ecstasy of direct apprehension, which alone seems of value, gives way to vast stretches of 'waste sad time'" (BN, 175) when he reads lines like:²⁴

Sudden in a shaft of sunlight
Even while the dust moves
There rises the hidden laughter
Of children in the foliage.... (BN, 171-4)

Compared to the positivities radiated from these lines, Smith's conclusion is very pessimistic: "this poem closes with the fact of time, [being] a 'ridiculous' (BN, 174), partial one, isolating the intense moment and leaving most of temporal life joyless and empty."²⁵ However, more than the other three Quartets, "Burnt Norton" most outstandingly focuses on a non-fixed but transcendent moment. The fleeting ecstasy out of time is defined as "the still point of the turning world" for us to pursue and achieve because, though the passage is tough, the hope, the "sudden in a shaft of sunlight" (BN, 171), the children's laughter is all present. Eliot, through the medium of the speaker in this poem, leads us first to seek to understand and then express the nature

²⁴ Smith, 54.

²⁵ Smith, 54.

and meaning of this transcendental, fleeting experience. Gish also offers her Christian interpretation of Eliot's interweaving the image of St. John of the Cross into "Burnt Norton:"

Here it (St. John of the Cross) is most useful in providing a metaphor for the relation between motion and stillness, the world and the Word, or order within change. We may well say that the poem "Burnt Norton" concentrates most intensely on the still point.²⁶

And there is a corresponding echo from P. S. Sri's Buddhist perspective as he says: "From one point of view, then, the still point of peace is the paradoxical intersection (or the impossible union) of the timeless with time; to the Christian, it is represented by the Word made of flesh in Christ."²⁷

Taken alone, we may not be able to deny that the occasional mystical or transcendental experiences in "Burnt Norton" partly justify the objection that this poem depends on an inhuman ideal and a loathing of life. However, even though in this poem Eliot does present time as "waste" and "sad" (BN, 175) and upholds an ideal wholly outside time and space, that ideal is not wholly outside human experience. The garden, if not actual, is real; it is concentrated from our memory and imagination in the form of an idealized human world. In Christianity, this ideal world will be the Paradise or the Garden of Eden, which is perfectly designed for human species, while in the Buddhist term, it is the state of the Thousand-Petalled Lotus, and nirvana.

²⁶ Gish, 97.

²⁷ P. S. Sri, T. S. Eliot, Vedanta and Buddhism (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1985) 98.

Nor is this ideal world really at odds with any philosophical passages, for these passages do not contradict its human form; they merely assert its existence and define it as transcendent. The focus of the whole poem is to insist that precisely this transcendence is within human capacity because this is our way to achieve salvation--in the Christian sense--and that while it can be apprehended only in apprehensive images, it is nonetheless felt to be beyond them.

Throughout this poem, Eliot is trying very hard to arouse our individual inner capacity to transcend the moment of the past beyond the confinement of time. More importantly, the quality of the poem does not rest on our ability to accept this value judgment. It rests, rather, on the degree to which the moment is convincingly evoked and the movement of thought sustained. "Burnt Norton" is perhaps the finest of the four poems in this respect: the moment in the garden is intensely felt and expressed, and the assertions about it remain convincing as meditation, as the speech of one trying to explain to himself his intensest human feelings in terms of the divine goal. And so the question of section IV is answered affirmatively or, at least, not as pessimistically as Smith's assertion: in the garden, there is for us, a revelation of truth; "I have seen these things in a shaft of sunlight," and "Burnt Norton" concludes in bright and joyous revelry:

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. (BN, 171-7)

Along with the poet, we have come to know this optimistic reality neither through an intuitive apprehension, nor through a direct experience which is full of mystical union with the Divine, be it God or the Buddha. This realization is accomplished through the meditative explorations that have radiated out from the timeless moments in the rose-garden, that have come to know this experience as a type and contingent promise of the real, for which we may strive because after Eliot's guiding tour we have had a glimpse. And this glimpse of ours is not only a look into Western culture but also into Eastern ideas.

涅槃

CHAPTER TWO:

From East to the East in an Eastern "Burnt Norton"

Words move, music moves
 Only in time; but that which is only living
 Can only die....
 Only by the form, the pattern,
 Can words or music reach
 The stillness, as a Chinese jar still
 Moves perpetually in its stillness.... (BN, 137-9, 140-3)

It is broadly recognized that in the Chinese philosophy of Yin and Yang that the conjunction of two opposite energies will always create an even more dynamic new power, and the preferable balance of these opposites often becomes the source for a third greater dominant power, while the discordance of them must always bring up terrible predicaments.²⁸ For example, in the Chinese version of Genesis, the formation of our earth is appropriately recorded as the final truce and reconciliation of two long conflicting super

²⁸ Interestingly enough, there is much overlapping in this Chinese philosophy and the Romantic poet William Blake's famous line: "Without contraries is no progress" (from "The Marriage of Heaven and Hell"). Both ideologies interpret the motivation of an action as the result of two conflicting, or two contrary powers.

powers, the Yin and the Yang. As a result, Yin is elevated to be both the noun and adjective for all things negative, passive, feminine, dark and all things opposed to Yang, when Yang, in turn, signifies all things active, positive, masculine, bright, and all the counterpoints of Yang. Basically, Chinese people believe that the movement of this universe is motivated by the balance of Yin and Yang; therefore, any disagreement between these two will certainly cause such fatal natural disasters as famine, plague or flood. Sometimes this disharmony is even capable of terminating a whole society or dynasty. They call the sun "tain yang" and the moon, "tain yin" to symbolize the importance of this polarity in the composition of a harmonious world.²⁹ Back to the early writings of Ming Dynasty in the twelfth century, those Chinese Metaphysicians literally announced that every organism in this dimension could always be extracted to be an uneven combination of Yin and Yang.³⁰ After this cult of Metaphysics reigns in the realm of Chinese philosophy for almost two centuries, it then becomes a fashion to analyze the

²⁹ Literally, "tain" means great, extreme, and "tain yang" consequently means the collection and origin of all the Yang energy, and "tain yin," of all the Yin powers. Even though in Chinese the term "tain yin" has now become archaic and used only in classic writings, fortunately, "tain yang" is still preserved in our modern language.

³⁰ I will not go much further into the field of the Chinese Metaphysics. However, there is a subtle analogy between the modern biological analysis of every animate form as the result of its X and Y gene in their DNA and that of Yin and Yang as the decisive atoms of the final state of every animate and inanimate in our world. There are other Chinese Metaphysical scholars tracing the origin of beings and un-beings to five different elements, the Five Fluxes: gold, wood, water, fire, and earth (very similar to the four humours which determine a man's temper in the West). But the Five Fluxes focuses more on human beings while Yin and Yang is applicable to almost every organism in the universe. Chinese Metaphysics emphasize more philosophical theories rather than just verse forms.

ingredients of every being and every phenomenon to be two contraries.

Through "pattern" (BN, 141), "timeless" (BN, 166) perfection, the music and Chinese jar of "Burnt Norton" reflects a "co-existence" (BN, 147) of beginning and end (BN, 147-80), as well as of "move[ment]" and "stillness" (BN, 144). The general reaction to a Chinese jar is an immediate association with history, the long past, or the time when China originally was only soil before it was elevated to be the index of an ancient culture established by the Chinese people. Combining the sense of history, a piece of China is also a cognate of elegance. For example, a Chinese jar is in itself a symmetry, a balance, a harmony. The shape of it is always a beautiful curve, like a piece of silk, smooth, lustrous, yet still very solid. Thus, the turning of a Chinese jar becomes more than a simple movement; it is a movement of something still, something full of energies yet well-balanced. Every side of it is the same, the angle, the material, yet the luster reflected from each angle is so different because each stands for a different stage of human culture, from a rough muddy container, to porcelain, to a piece of water-tight delicate art. Looking at it is an action, while its still existence itself is an action in that it is a progressing of human history and time. And no matter how we try to inspect it, from the inside or from the outside, from its top or from its bottom, we just won't be able to decide from which point this jar is shaped, modeled, and to which point this pattern is closed. It is simply an inseparable whole, a unity as the the complete progressing of human history. Hence, we may now fully accept the poet's discovery:

Or say the end precedes the beginning,
And the end and the beginning were always there

Before the beginning and after the end.
And all is always now. (BN, 145-9)

The beginning and the end are blended perfectly and cannot be abstracted, and every turning of the jar is a common vibration to every particle of it; the beginning, the end, the past, the future. Eliot has also rightly announced:

Only by the form, the pattern
Can words or music reach
The stillness, as a Chinese jar still
Moves perpetually in its stillness.... (BN, 139-42)

The details of the "pattern," the "form," are "movement" (BN, 159); words and music therefore have to move and proceed along with time so they can achieve a perpetual existence. With the initiation of this unique pattern of movement, a lot more actions and human behaviors throughout our history are also applicable to it:

At the still point of the turning world. Neither flesh nor fleshless;
Neither from nor towards; at the still, there the dance is,
But neither arrest nor movement. And do not call it fixity,
Where past and future are gathered. Neither movement from nor
towards,
Neither ascent nor decline. Except for the point, the still point,
There would be no dance, and there is only the dance. (BN, 62-7)

When a man crashes the limitations of our existence and gains even a momentary apprehension of the still center, he then has an intuitive revelation of:

[B]oth a new world
And the old made explicit, understood
In the completion of its partial ecstasy
The resolution of its partial horror. (BN, 75-8)

The moment of ecstasy does not belie the agony that comes before and after; it

merely leads man with fresh insight into both the change and suffering that pervade the world. The apprehension of the still point enables him to understand the merry-go-round of our temporal life in the light of eternity; he learns to live in harmony with the noumenal reality so that the flux and suffering of the phenomenal world will no longer cause him any spiritual anguish. The wheel turns smoothly around its central axle; its movement is no longer inspected by the standards of the imperfect human beings. Such a harmonious life is charmingly depicted in "East Coker" through the dignified dancing of the country people around a bonfire:

Round and round the bonfire
 Leaping through the flames, or joined in circles,
 Rustically solemn or in rustic laughter
 Lifting heavy feet in clumsy shoes,
 Earth feet, loam feet, lift in country mirth
 Mirth of those long since under earth
 Nourishing the corn. (EC, 31-37)

It is a scene of wholesome rustic simplicity, very different from the dismaying spectacle of the Wastelanders going round and round in circles or of the Hollow Man enacting a horrible caricature of a dance round and round the prickly pear:

Words strain,
 Crack and sometimes break, under the tension, slip, perish.
 Decay with imprecision, will not stay in place,
 Will not stay still....
 The world in the desert
 Is most attacked by voices of temptation,
 The crying shadow in the funeral dance. (BN, 149-52, 153-6)

Not only does this image of a funeral dance signify death, it also reflects the

concord of death and rebirth, the greatest cycle of replacement since the creation of this universe. This cycle is itself another turning wheel which revolves with a fixed rule, the pattern of funeral and wedding, to terminate a temporal human existence and to start another. Men and women who order their lives in obedience to the natural rhythms, "The time of the seasons and the constellations / The time of milking and the time of harvest" (EC, 41-2), are living in harmony with the universe. Their lives are even intimately associated with those of the "beasts": "The time of the coupling of man and woman / And that of beasts. Feet rising and falling, / Eating and drinking. Dung and death" (EC, 42-4). The cycle of birth, reproduction, and death remains the same for the men and women dancing round the bonfire, but it assumes a greater significance, because it contributes to a harmonious whole.

The motionless rose jar with its constantly moving but unified scroll pattern, holding the rose leaves of the past in a perpetual present, is now, like the "word" and "music," becoming a figure of art. It is a perfection to be achieved only with the greatest difficulty. Eliot further embodies his idea of a spiral movement with the reference of the Hinduistic holy book, Upanishads. In the book, the spiral movement is described as the turning of a wheel, an image which is not new in Eastern culture:

This vast universe is a wheel. Upon it are all creatures that are subject to birth, death and rebirth. Round and round it turns and never stops. It is the wheel of *Brahman*. As long as the individual self thinks it is separate from *Brahman*, it revolves upon the wheel in bondage to the laws of birth, death and rebirth. But when through the grace of *Brahman* it realized its identity with him, it revolves upon the wheel no

longer. It achieves immortality.³¹

From his Vedanta standpoint, P. S. Sri calls for his readers' attention to the application of the Eastern idea of the wheel to Eliot's turning universe.³² And this passage corresponds to Eliot's concern with human kind's loss in time and the consequent suffering of living in death:

The crying shadow in the funeral dance,
The loud lament of the disconsolate chimera
The detail of the pattern is movement....
Desire itself is movement
Not in itself desirable; ...
Only in the cause and end of movement,
Timeless, and undesiring
Except in the aspect of time. (BN, 157-9, 161-2, 164-6)

As Sri has indicated, the human predicament in the midst of an omnipresent and universal change and suffering is often expressed in Vedanta and Buddhism by the image of the wheel. And Sri cited Krishna, in the incarnation of the infinite Being of God, when he speaks of the terrible wheel of birth and death which binds the individual down to the phenomenal world of time and circumstance: "The spirit of man when in nature feels the ever-changing conditions of nature. When he binds himself to things ever-changing, a good or evil fate whirls him around through life-in-death."³³ And the Buddha alludes to the wheel of existence, which he calls *samsara*:

³¹ "Svetasvatara Upanishad," The Upanishads, trans. Juan Mascaro (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1965) 91-2.

³² Sri, 35-50.

³³ The Bhagavad Gita, trans. Juan Mascaro (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1962) 101.

The Wheel of Existence is without known beginning ...
 The Wheel of Existence is empty with a twelvefold emptiness.
 Respecting the Wheel of Existence it is to be understood that the
 two factors [of] ... ignorance and desire are its roots.
 Ignorance, desire and attachment form the round of the
 corruptions ...
 And it is through these three that this Wheel of Existence is said
 to have three rounds ... it is incessant ... it revolves.³⁴

The Buddhist idea of a spiral turning wheel, which is also without a known beginning, resembles the beginning in "Burnt Norton" which should be preceded by the end, or even presented as co-existing with the end since the time logic here is no longer a linear process. It is a circular journey around a still center, where the beginning is the end, the end is the beginning, and time past, future, and present all intersect here, too. In "Burnt Norton," there is also this kind of ritual dance which is a running-around movement. In the second section, the animal activities in the lush summer scenery secretly imply the terrible circle of life and death under the surface of a vigorous orbiting:

The dance along the artery ...
 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

³⁴ H. C. Warren, Buddhism in Translation (New York: Atheneum, 1963) 175-9.

But reconciled among the stars. (BN, 52, 54-61)

This dance is a revolving around a certain still center, the pivot. And it is a circular movement because:

At the still point of the turning world ...
 Neither from nor towards; at the still point, there the dance is,
 But neither arrest nor movement. And do not call it fixity,
 Where past and future are gathered. Neither movement from nor
 towards,
 Neither ascent nor decline. Except for the point, the still point,
 There would be no dance, and there is only the dance. (BN, 62-7)

This dance has to take place in the still center, and cannot be fixed or strained with one direction, either forward or backward. It is the marriage of the past and the future; it is a rejection of the borderline of time. This seemingly happy dance of the turning of the wheel, or the cycle of life and death, is gradually transfigured into a "crying shadow" (BN, 157) since it is revealed as a "funeral dance" (BN, 158) later in the last section. "Only in time ... that which is living / Can only die" (BN, 138-9). Sri, too, agrees with Grover Smith in saying that the suffering of men's searching for "always" (BN, 174) is useless and is mocked by the "ridiculous," "waste and sad time" (BN, 175).

What we witness in Eliot's Four Quartets, particularly in "Burnt Norton," is the acting out of his philosophical theme of time-consciousness, what we perceive is "the pattern behind the pattern,"³⁵ unity in diversity, and what we gain is the awareness that we, too, are part of the greater pattern, while our attention is centered on the actors who are all orbiting around the

³⁵ Eliot, Selected Essays, 189-90.

still point. Eliot does not elaborate on the nature of the still point. Instead, he leaves us the task of piercing together the hints scattered throughout his work, and of forming a coherent picture: the still point is thus "a liberation / From the future as well as the past" (LG, 195); it does not, however, negate time, for when we are liberated, we consider "the future / And the past with an equal mind" (DS, 188); in other words, past and future are reconciled in an eternal now. The still point spells "Inner freedom from the practical desire" (BN, 70). The still center is a "release from the inner and outer compulsion" (BN, 72-3), but it is not inaction, for "right action is freedom / From past and future also" (DS, 190), and we act freely when we have surrendered our will to the source of all our strength within ourselves, the strength produced by the bouncing Yin and Yang, which is also the noumenal reality within us:

The inner freedom from the practical desire,
 The release from action and suffering, release from the inner
 And the outer compulsion, ...
 [S]till and moving,
Erhebung without motion, concentration
 Without elimination. (BN, 70-2, 73-5)

We attain freedom *tout court* when we reach the still point. And as those who have attained freedom in this life itself, we live unattached and cling to nothing in the world, transcending, not denying, impermanence and suffering. Or, as Iqbal Singh expresses it eloquently in his book, Gautama Buddha:

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

and does not turn. Here the paradox is no longer a paradox, but rather a luminous certitude. Here we are in the very heart of peace.³⁶

Thus, Singh sufficiently convinces us that the still point is thus not freedom from time and space, but freedom from the feeling of being confined by time and space; not freedom from desire, but freedom from the slavery to shifting desires; not freedom from suffering, but freedom from the crushing power of suffering, through understanding and compassion; not freedom from death, but freedom from the fear of death.

The experience of a supertemporal reality, negatively implied in the previous sections of "Burnt Norton" and tersely indicated in the penitential searching for the still point is central to Four Quartets. The intimations of time and eternity, which have so far been churning in a rather vague and uncertain manner in the poetic consciousness, now become crystal clear. The dynamic contrast that prevails between the temporal world of constant becoming and the eternal world of being is illustrated through Eliot's striking imagery:

At the still point of the turning world. Neither flesh nor
fleshless;
Neither from nor towards; at the still point, there the dance is,
But neither arrest nor movement. And do not call it fixity,
Where past and future are gathered. Neither movement from nor
towards,
Neither ascent nor decline. Except for the point, the still point.
There would be no dance, and there is only the dance. (BN 62-7)

Eliot's negative and paradoxical mode of expressing the nature of timeless

³⁶ Iqbal Singh, Guatama Buddha. (np) qtd in Humphreys: 215.

reality finds here its fullest flowering. This attitude is common to both Vedanta and Buddhism, and Eliot probably adapted it to suit his own needs. He has not added essentially to the Vedantic or the Buddhistic description of the ultimate enlightenment. But he does articulate in moving words the psychological aspects of an experience which the individual may attain through Patanjali's yoga or the Noble Eightfold Path of the Buddha or the Adoration of the Madonna--the experience of the still point:

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.
 The inner freedom from the practical desire,
 The release from action and suffering, release from the inner
 And outer compulsion, yet surrounded
 By a grace of sense, a white light still and moving,
Erhebung without motion, concentration
 Without elimination, both a new world
 And the old made explicit, understood
 In the completion of its partial ecstasy,
 The resolution of its partial horror. (BN, 68-78)

In the Buddhist concept, the evocation of the definition of the still point illuminates at least three aspects of the experiential reality: first, the "still point" is a state of enlightenment to be attained in this life itself and not some world beyond death--the state of nirvana is within and at hand; secondly, it is a condition that transcends the senses, spells freedom from desire, action, and suffering, and bestows peace that passes understanding; and thirdly, it is both momentary and unforgettable, temporal and eternal, in time and out of time; a present where past and future are gathered, and where the opposites are reconciled. That Eliot who explores their oriental "subtleties" in such rich

detail, without ever sacrificing his fundamental Christian framework, speaks volumes for his poetic power of reconciliation and amalgamation. The central emphasis of Krishna and Buddha is that nirvana can be achieved here and now, in this very life, through renunciation of all selfish craving and through compassionate service to one's fellow beings. Then the "darkness" (BN, 113) of ignorance is destroyed, the veil of *maya* is rent, and the timeless reality is realized in one's own being.

The limitations of language are obvious when it comes to describing either the "still point" or the "dance," since the condition they hint at belongs to the eternal realm, while the words employed belong to the temporal world:

Words move, music moves
Only in time; but that which is only living
Can only die. Words, after speech, reach
Into the silence.... Words strain,
Crack and sometimes break, under the burden,
Under the tension, slip, slide, perish,
Decay with imprecision, will not stay still. (BN, 138-44)

The "tension" is both fundamental and profound, between time and eternity, the phenomena and the noumenon, the relative and the absolute. The central paradox is that man, who is enmeshed in *maya*, can still emancipate himself from constant becoming, the future, and be one with the eternal state, the always. Man has dual citizenship, therefore, in both time and eternity and is capable of apprehending a point of intersection of the timeless with time.

Eliot's time clock turns spirally instead of being based on the conventional image of a linear progress; the latter can neither combine past,

present, and future nor find a tangent point shared by these three dimensions. In this sense, the still point in "Burnt Norton" is the still center of the whole temporal / spatial revolution. Lucien Stryk strengthens the plausibility of applying Eastern philosophy to Eliot's poetry as he states, "Yugen is the sense of the mystic calm in things (in T.S. Eliot's phrase, in 'Burnt Norton,' 'the still point of the turning world' (BN, 63), which is always there, below the surface, but which reveals itself only to the 'ready'."³⁷

The turning of the dance is exactly the same case. Any action animated by a single power supply will naturally stop once the source is burned out and ceases to provide energy. From then on, any new automation will require a new start; the whole process has to be repeated all over again. The example Eliot has is the length of the life span of music and words; if they cannot reach the still state of a turning Chinese jar, they will survive only when "the notes last" (BN, 44). Therefore, "what is only living / Can only die" (BN, 138-9). The music cannot be *only* living if eternity is the goal, if freedom from the bondage of time is the purpose; it has to die at the same time. It has to reach the turning state of a still Chinese jar. There is also a solid explanation for this noumenon in the basic concept of Yin and Yang in Chinese philosophy. That is, if a movement is motivated by a harmony of two opposite powers, like that of Yin and Yang, this movement will never end because there is no need to restart or to refuel the burned out energy. However, this kind of

³⁷ Lucien Stryk, "Poetry and Zen," Encounter with Zen (Chicago: Swallow Press, 1981) 61.

harmonious movement does not always proceed in one single certain direction; therefore it best explains the paradox of a pattern which is “neither from nor towards” and “neither arrest nor movement” (BN, 63, 64). It is consequently by no means a “fixity” (BN, 74) since there are vigorous confrontations and reconciliations developing under a fixed surface. Literally, there should not be any action at the still center since it is still, so “there would be no dance” (BN, 67). Yet, the still state is not as static as it seems; it is a balanced state of a tug of war, of two ongoing conflicting energies like a still Chinese vase sitting or turning quietly there. Hence, “there is only the dance” (BN, 67). In this dance the action can only take place in a still state. The Chinese philosophy of Yin and Yang has sufficiently explained the seemingly paradoxical juxtaposition of active and inactive and the amazing power of balance it brings up.

As the still turning of the Chinese jar can suitably symbolize the processes of human history, from the rough inside to the elegant outside, from the primitive to the sophisticated, from the past to the future (though there is no way of telling where is the beginning and where is the end), the dance at the still point then also becomes a symbol of the product of human creativity. The image of the Chinese jar is applied to all human history as those living and dead share the ultimate end to which all life is directed. This still point rests in the center, the pivot of a spiral turning where the exercise of time continues, the ascending and descending, the beginning and the ending “co-exist” (BN, 145). Without achieving this simultaneous state of stillness, the words we say and the music we play will just evaporate into the air right after they are projected:

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. (BN, 149-53)

The music now becomes dissonant, cracked and broken. Under the pressure and burden of time, it slips into the dark hole of time and eventually disappears. At this moment of time, even the "shrieking voices, / Scolding, mocking, or merely chattering" can "always assail them" (BN, 153-5). Eliot then dives into the play of opposite words and this exercise produces a great poetic thrill:

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. (BN, 161-8)

Indeed, the regular stillness usually comes when the action is over, but Eliot's lasting stillness is the supreme coordination of the active and the static. Only by this pattern or form will the man-made "words" (BN, 138) or the "music" (BN, 138), the artificial art, survive the tide of time rather than eventually be washed away and be absorbed by the eternal "silence" (BN, 140). No matter how the two forms of "being" and "un-being" (BN, 168) restrict all human beings' actions, time is conquered by the conflict of this pair of contradictory forces, and desire becomes "undesiring" (BN, 165) in the "timeless" moment (BN, 165). Time now becomes "timeless" too because "now" and "here" have

ascended to be “always” (BN, 174). At last, we have shattered the bondage and entered the rose-garden. In a “sudden ... shaft of sunlight,” this state of nirvana finally emerges before us:

Even while the dust moves
 There arises the hidden laughter
 Of children in the foliage
 Quick now, here, now, always--
 Ridiculous the waste sad time
 Stretching before and after. (BN, 170-5)

When the present moves into the same dimension of the past and future, naturally the old frustration for the unredeemable past, all that “sad waste time” now appears to be “ridiculous” (BN, 174), and can only lamely try to stretch toward before and after.

If “Burnt Norton” is a self-sufficient world, there is also a power from within which makes it rotate and proceed all the way. What is the source of this animation? In an attempt to understand Eliot’s trinity of ascending, descending, and a stillness, we have already examined beyond the surface of the Eastern culture, especially Buddhism and Hinduism. There lies the source of this animation, and a transcultural interpretation of the great imagery in “Burnt Norton.” In both Buddhism and Hinduism, there is a similar symbol to the Western idea of the Wheel of Fortune. That is the spiral movement of a wheel which symbolizes either the rise and fall of a man, or the unredeemable past and the unpredictable future of life. For all the Buddhists, they believe in that every human being can live more than once; their previous and after life experiences are all tightly knitted together and closely related. In the Buddhist term, our life is a turning wheel. It keeps

on going all the time, and there is neither a beginning nor an end in this exercise. Since every one has more than one round, or one turn of life to live, all these lives are connected as cause and effect to each other. We are not likely to find out which turn is the beginning of the whole existence circle and which is the end.³⁸ However, at the end of every round, or turn, after the soul leaves the physical body, it is to drink the water from the River of Oblivion to forget all the past, and to start from point zero all over again.³⁹ Finishing a former round and waiting for the next turn, the point of drinking the water becomes timeless because all the memory of past experiences and the foresight of the future will become crystal clear. So, the end of the last life precedes the beginning of next life, as is well said by Eliot: "the end precedes the beginning" (BN, 146), and "the end and the beginning [are] always there / Before the beginning and after the end" (BN, 147-8). Thus, the ascent toward the future and the descent to the past intersect at one timeless point, like the

³⁸ But, there is no guarantee that every round would be a *human* life, since sometimes we have to redeem, to compensate certain persons for the debt we owe them in our last round. Therefore, to be their servant, their pet, or even their unrequited lover will be justifiable ways of paying back the debt. In addition, one interesting Chinese Fatalism concept is "predestination," that explains why there are many old fashioned Chinese wives who suffer from their marriage and obey without a little complaint. A Fatalist woman believes, for example, if she is mistreated by her husband, it must be that she still owes him something from the former life circle, and as a result, she has to suffer so she can redeem her life. Otherwise, she might be degraded to be his servant or his dog next life round. The longer she owes this debt, the worse she will become to pay it back.

³⁹ This myth perfectly corresponds to the Greek mythology where Lethe, the river of Oblivion, serves the same function, though there is no clear indication of such things as continuous life rounds (as in Buddhist myth). A very famous Chinese music drama, Leung Shan-po and Zue Inn-tai, is such a romance about two lovers who went through seven life-rounds to achieve the final union in marriage.

still movement of a Chinese jar, or the co-existence of the activity of a wheel and the stillness of its center, where there is no beginning and no end in its action since it is the supporting center, the pivot and the fulcrum of the whole process. And of course, the poet is honest in saying that "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" (BN, 68-9). It is indeed unlikely that anyone who has drunk the water of Oblivion can recall anything from his pre-existence though he feels familiar and is sure that he has experienced something other than this round of life.

Nowhere else but in "Burn Norton" does Eliot completely elucidate the concept of the wheel and its relation to the still point. We may understand its significance by piercing together his overt and covert allusions to the wheel. The wheel keeps spinning, apparently symbolizing the ceaseless flux of time and existence, just like the same pattern in section II:

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

But reconciled among the stars. (BN, 47-61)

The various forms of life in the world, vegetable, animal, and human, are whirling about the wheel, finding themselves at a higher or lower point on the curve of the wheel, according to their individual *karma*, the predestined existence, in their successive lives; consequently, they are all bound to the wheel. It is possible, however, for a sensitive human being to be free of this bondage and to live harmoniously by his apprehending the still center of the wheel in terms of the still point, so that the apparent contradictions from his life are resolved in the light of eternity. In the Christian tradition, this moment of apprehension comes not by human will but by divine grace, and in the Buddhist idea, this salvation is achieved only when we can get rid of every desire and are consequently sublimated to nirvana. Yet, every Buddhist does believe that one has to be ready for this moment, repenting of his past errors and preparing himself through prayer, observance, discipline, meditation and action.

From a Christian angle, the best end of a spiral movement is the ascending to the paradise, or the rose-garden of our past memory. However, in the Buddhist term, the final resting place every Buddhist aspires to is nirvana, symbolized by the Thousand-Petalled Lotus. There is a spiral cord circling from the root, the stem, up to the top of the flower. This spiral coiling represents growth or spiritual ascent in the act of becoming, as illustrated in the image of the process of the rising from the root unto the top of the Thousand-Petalled Lotus--the ultimate nirvana, or paradise. The creative coiling of the feminine energy, or Yin in Chinese philosophy, and the flow of the energy current symbolically assumes the supple, undulating

form of a spiral. The unmanifested Yin is symbolized by a serpent coiled into three and a half circles with its tail in its mouth and spiraled around the central axis, ready to ascend upwards and unite with the cosmic consciousness. The sinuous movement of the energy currents around the central subtle nerve, and their contraction and expansion when the Yin awakes, are depicted in a spiral form. The spiral symbolically projected in the inward odyssey is a microcosmic reflection of the cosmic rhythms.⁴⁰ And with the understanding of this Buddhist concept, we can now read Eliot's "Burnt Norton" without failing to find out the beautiful Eastern threads in the intricately interwoven tapestry. When we accept the invitation of the messenger from the rose-garden and get into the wanderland, the floor plan of this place is now revealed:

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.
 And the pool was filled with water out of sunlight,
 And the lotos rose, quietly, quietly.... (BN, 31-6)

We will roughly scan the background information of Eliot's adoption of the lotus symbol from the context first before we move further into the Eastern interpretation.⁴¹ In 1913-14, the Harvard Department of Philosophy sponsored an extensive series of lectures by the Japanese scholar Masaharu

⁴⁰ Ajit Mookerjee and Madhu Khanna, The Tantric Way: Art, Science, Ritual (Boston: New York, Graphic Society, 1977) 66-69.

⁴¹ Kearns, 76.

Anesaki on "later," or Mahayana Buddhism. Anesaki devoted his lectures to an exposition of the Saddharma-pundarika, or Lotus Sutra, to a sketch of the position of the Madhuamika, or Middle Way, school and its chief exponent Nagarjuna, and to a survey of later Japanese developments, including Tendai philosophy and the nationalist and apocalyptic mysticism of Nichiren. Eliot took copious notes at many of these lectures and must have read at least the handouts that accompanied them and that remain among his papers in the Houghton Library⁴². These handouts include excerpts from some of the texts under consideration, outlines of the development of various Buddhist systems and of various expository schemes, and an offprint of an article Anesaki had written on Buddhist ethics for the Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics. The article by Anesaki is now in Hastings's Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics. These terms are particularly important in Four Quartets, where they help Eliot to define his own version of the intense mental asceticism needed to realize any form of religious truth.

In her book, T. S. Eliot: the Pattern in the Carpet, Schneider has collected systematic information about the place Burnt Norton.⁴³ Historically, Burnt Norton is a manor in the Cotswolds the grounds of which Eliot visited while staying in the neighbourhood in 1934. Unlike the scenes of the other place-named Quartets, it had no particular associations for him; these were merely

⁴² Eliot's notes on the Anesaki lecture, together with copies of selections from Buddhist texts in translation, apparently distributed at the lectures, are at the Houghton Library at Harvard.

⁴³ Schneider, 125.

the empty gardens of an estate with trees, a pleached alley or one bordered by trees or shrubbery, box-wood-bordered walks, a rose-garden, a drained concrete pool. There were other features too, but these are the materials of Eliot's opening scene. The garden itself is both natural and formally ordered, a curiously non-sensual thought illustrated through all sense imagery by Eliot. Music is unheard, flowers unseen and a lotus rises in water that is not water but the shimmer of light in a drained pool. "They" (BN, 38) are invisible and exert no pressure. The natural world is transfigured, timeless in its strangely non-physical nature and in its emphasis on pattern. It is a formal garden filled with ordered sound and motion: echoes, reflections, and patterns. The combined effect is paradoxical, a world known yet beyond known experience. The imagery creates a sense of silence, stillness and invisibility known through the analogy of sense. And the bird calls it "reality" (BN, 62), a judgment which does not seem strange. This moment of vision works both as experience and statement; were we disposed to reject the "reality" of the timeless moment, it would not be here.

Yet it is precisely right here that the rose-garden appears most cut off from any particular place or time. That this garden is not wholly divorced from time and place is suggested by the key image of the lotus, a sacred symbol in especially Eastern religions.⁴⁴ Suggesting purity and perfection "because it grows up out of the mud but is defined," it signifies meditation, an

⁴⁴ Daniel J. Fleming, "Religious Symbols Crossing Cultural Boundaries," Religious Symbolism ed. Earnest Johnson. Religions and Civilization Series (New York: The Institute for Religious and Social Studies, 1955) 83.

awaked heart and the spiritual enlightenment: with its roots in the mud and its blossom towards the sun, the lotus symbolizes the union of the earthly and the divine. The entire experience in the rose garden builds dramatically to the moment of heightened awareness it evokes:

Dry the pool, dry concrete, brown edged,
And the pool was filled with water out of sunlight,
And the lotos rose, quietly, quietly,
The surface glittered out of heart of light,
And they were behind us, reflected in the pool. (BN, 34-8)

Present and past join, for the speaker and his unnamed, almost ephemeral companion and "they" (BN, 38)--echoes from a past experience--are all reflected in "water out of sunlight." The laughter beneath leaves recalls our experience of those unexpected blissful moments, such as when our longed-after hope had been gratified therefore ceased. We should discover a lotus world of innocence which implies hope and Buddhist salvation from the statement of "Burnt Norton."

And now, when we look back at the line, "And the lotos rose quietly, quietly, / The surface glittered out of heart of light" (BN, 36-7), the assertion of the lotus image becomes even more valuable. The invocation of the image of the lotus at this point indicates something of its centrality to Buddhist doctrine and its deep links to the concept of *shunyata*, which is both immediacy and distance, ignorance and knowledge, samsara and nirvana, at one and the same time. The lotus is, of course, the central figure of the Saddharma-pundarika that develop its meaning frequently. A Tendai text cited by Anesaki offers an extended allegory: plants bear fruits, which stand for latent potentialities, and it also bears flowers, which stand for

manifestations. The lotus is the most perfect of plants to represent the heart of Buddhist doctrine because it bears both its flower and its fruit at the same time, indicating the mutual relation of latent and manifest meanings. Hermann Oldenberg, too, whose book, The Buddha: His Life, His Doctrine, His Order, was a standard text in Eliot's student days, cites a use of the image of the lotus from an early account of the Buddha's life. The account tells of a vision of the enlightenment which one had during the period when the gods were pressing him to preach his doctrine but he was reluctant to do so. "Surveying the universe with the glance of a Buddha," observing Buddha, Oldenberg saw that just as the lotus stalk bore some flowers that bloomed in the water, some that bloomed at the surface, and some that rose above the surface, so:

[There were] beings whose souls were pure, and whose souls were not pure, from the dust of the earthly, and with sharp faculties and with dull faculties, with noble natures and with ignoble natures, good hearers and wicked hearers, many who lived in fear of the world to come and of sin.⁴⁵

Seeing these various degrees of enlightenment, Buddha was moved by compassion to preach the right way. Eliot's use of the image of the lotus at the beginning of "Burnt Norton" is deeply informed by its central place in Buddhist tradition and its close connections to *shunyata*:

And the pool was filled with water out of sunlight,
And the lotos rose, quietly, quietly,
The surface glittered out of heart of light, ...

⁴⁵ Hermann Oldenberg, The Buddha: His Life, His Doctrine, His Order, trans. William Hoey, (Delhi: Indological Book House, 1971) 74.

Then a cloud passed, and the pool was empty. (BN, 35-7, 39)

As we dive into the Eastern religious text deeper, we can not only comprehend the music of the lotus symbol in "Burnt Norton" from the Eastern perspective, but also the echo of the rose image from the Western undertone. In "Burnt Norton," the first poem in Four Quartets, there is a specific allusion to the lotus flower, the symbol of ultimate reality in Hindu-Buddhist thought. The lotus emerges in the rose garden, and its apparition brings up a new powerful contrast between the Western rose and the Eastern lotus, two religiously and philosophically symbolic plants from two different cultures. The single rose is essentially "a symbol of completion, of consummate achievement and perfection," and figures prominently in Western mystical literature as an image of unity.⁴⁶ To Dante, the "white rose" represents the fulfillment of his quest for the eternal Being of God. The "multifoliate rose" as a symbol of the reality beyond appearances is the Western equivalent to "the Thousand-Petalled Lotus" (*sahasrara*) of Eastern mysticism.⁴⁷ Tantrism, an esoteric branch of yoga, symbolizes the spiritual current in man as a serpent coiled up at the base of the spinal cord. When the *yogi* (one who seeks to yoke or unite himself with the divine essence) advances spiritually, the current gradually uncoils and rises upwards, enfranchising a series of lotuses or spiritual centers in the body; as we can

⁴⁶ J. E. Circlot, A Dictionary of Symbols (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1967) 275.

⁴⁷ Dictionary of Symbols and Imagery (London: North Holland Publishing, 1974) 305.

visualize in "Burnt Norton" this boundless and soaring action at the top of the Thousand-Petalled Lotus of the still point:

Reconciled among the stars,
At the still point of the turning world. Neither flesh nor fleshless;
Neither from nor towards; at the still point ...
But neither arrest nor movement. And do not call it fixity,
Where past and future are gathered. (BN, 61-5)

The powers and perceptions of the *yogi* increase as the current travels from center to center without a fixed direction just like "the [timeless] still point of the turning world" (BN, 62). When the current culminates in the *sahasrara* or the Thousand-Petalled Lotus in the brain or the crown of the head, the *yogi* attains enlightenment; he has now become one with the reality behind all appearances.⁴⁸ Has Eliot then attempted an East-West ideosynthesis of symbols? Has he fused Dante's "white rose" (*candida rosa*) and Tantrism's "Thousand-Petalled Lotus"? Quite probably, especially since he uses the oriental and occidental symbols of the ultimate reality simultaneously in "Burnt Norton" to indicate a momentary experience of enlightenment as the lotus blooms in the rose-garden.

Three deeply perceptive moments seem to be experienced by the poet himself and are eloquently described: "in the rose-garden" (BN, 88), "in the harbour where the rain beats" (BN, 86-7), and "in the draughty church at smokefall" (BN, 88). Of the three, the moment in the rose-garden seems to be most vividly remembered and is movingly evoked at the beginning of

⁴⁸ Mookerjee and Khanna, 66-69.

"Burnt Norton." Speculating on the nature of time, like St. Augustine in his Confessions, the poet is arrested by the memory of an earlier moment in his life which he had not fully explored:

Footfalls echo in the memory
Down the passage we did not take
Towards the door we never opened
Into the rose-garden. (BN, 11-4)

The sharpening recollection of "what might have been" (BN, 145) urges him to investigate the possibilities of the present moment:

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. (BN, 19-23)

Suddenly, the poet recalls the earlier experience with such intensity that it seems to unfold before his mind's eye; the present and the past moments fuse into each other; time stands still and he experiences a momentary rapture:

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. (BN, 26-9)

In this blessed mood, the poet and the companions of his memory move "in formal pattern" (BN, 31) and make their way to the dry concrete pool in the garden, now mysteriously filled with "water out of sunlight," and witness the miraculous flowering ecstasy in the midst of sterility:

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

And the pool was filled with water out of sunlight,
 And the lotos rose, quietly, quietly.
 The surface glittered out of heart of light,
 And they were behind us, reflected in the pool.
 Then a cloud passed, and the pool was empty. (BN, 31-9)

"And the lotos rose, quietly, quietly, / The surface glittered out of heart of light" (BN, 37-8). The lotus is a peculiarly oriental symbol, associated with the ultimate reality in not only the Buddhist but also the Hinduic thought. The Tantric Way, an examination of esoteric yogic practices, throws further light on the significance of this symbol in plain language:

Potent as it is, in tantric art the lotus is a symbol of the unfolding of the self and expanding consciousness, which cuts through psychic opacity and ultimately raises the aspirant from the dark depths of ignorance to the radiant height of inner awakening.⁴⁹

Just as lotus plants grow in the darkness of mud and gradually bloom out on the surface of the water, unsullied by the mud and water which nourished them, so the inner self transcends and transforms itself beyond its corporeal limits uncorrupted and untarnished by illusion and ignorance.

In The Tantric View of Life, an account of the tantric practices extant in Tibetan Buddhism, we read this interesting interpretation of the lotus symbolism:

Since early times the lotus flower has been a symbol of creativity producing the world of things from its fertile seeds, and of purity, because water does not cling to its leaves.

This symbol is used to describe the peak experience of Being which is *in* this

⁴⁹ Mookerjee and Khanna, 69.

world, but not just this world. A blue or white lotus flower or jasmine flower can enthrall a person with its lovely color, its softness and fragrance. That the lotus flower can do so lies in the fact that it grows in the unclean ponds of villages and hamlets, but is not affected by their uncleanliness.⁵⁰ In addition to connoting the rose garden as the Christian archetype of the Garden of Eden from his Western cultural origin, Eliot was probably aware of the profound significance of the lotus. Certainly he was conscious of its mystical implications since he uses the lotus in conjunction with the rose, a symbol of the ecstatic union of the human soul with God in Western mysticism. And in most Buddhistic symbolism studies, the lotus is regarded as an archetypal symbol. When the divine life substance is about to put forth the universe, the cosmic waters grow a thousand-petalled lotus of pure gold radiant as the sun. This is the door or gate, the opening or mouth, of the womb of the universe. It is the first product of the creative principle, gold in token of its incorruptible nature.

It is also quite likely that Eliot knew something of Tantra.⁵¹ He speaks of entering the rose-garden through "the first gate"--presumably there are other gates--(BN, 22), of moving into the "box circle" (BN, 33), and of looking down into the drained pool; the pool is mysteriously filled with "water out of sunlight" (BN, 35), and the "lotus" blooms in the pool. The floor plan of the

⁵⁰ Herbert V. Guenther, The Tantric View of Life (London: Shambala Publications, 1972) 82-83.

⁵¹ Sri, 112-3.

rose-garden can be pictured like the following:

fig. 3. the floor plan of the rose-garden

The appearance of the lotus, then, at the climax of the experience in the rose garden marks the transformation of earthly desire into divine love. The moment of ecstasy, however, is short-lived, and the poet is once again caught up in time, "the form of limitation / Between un-being and being" (BN, 167-8). Like St. Augustine, he is left with the thoughts of childhood and innocence; they are the tokens of his brief visit to the lost Eden of the race. "Burnt Norton," then, makes use throughout the language of metaphysics as well as of meditation, and it draws deeply on the Buddhist grasp of *shunyata* as a process of "emptying," essential not only to the purification of the soul but to a grasp of the nature of reality, the transitory and painful non-ego or nonexistence of all apparently stable objects of thought—including the thought of mystical immediacy itself. "There is Buddha even in depravities and [there is] Nirvana even in life and death," as Eliot had noted during one

of Anesaki's lectures, and the reality, as opposed to the thought of mystical liberation comes into full play only when it infuses the present and informs the ongoing sense of community and history through faith. We are also informed that Eliot's note on Nichiren had read: "Vain is the holding the Lotus of the Truth without this heritage of faith."⁵² The timeless still point is as relevant to Christianity as it is to most Asian Buddhism; only in the "here and now" (BN, 173), and not in a nostalgic dream of lost vision, can there rise the hidden laughter of children in which knowledge and experience are one.

The pathos and the power of this vision of a lost immediacy do not, however, cease to illumine our hope of the present and the future because it has been submitted to critical analysis. Eliot evokes it with the greatest force in the lines where, with Milton as an echo, he describes a fleeting sense or Edenic vision of Adam and Eve as they must have been in the Garden, uncorrupted, before the Fall:

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,
 And the pool was filled with water out of sunlight,
 And the lotos rose, quietly, quietly,
 The surface glittered out of heart of light,
 And they were behind us, reflected in the pool.
 Then a cloud passed, and the pool was empty. (BN, 31-9)

⁵² Eliot's notes on Anesaki lecture, Houghton Library.

Here Eastern and Western points of reference meet without fuss, the “lotos” of the Buddhist and Upanishadic scriptures, the Garden of Eden, and the “emptiness” of *shunyata*, brought into correlation with the “heart of light,” which returns us to the vision in the first paradise-like hyacinth garden in The Waste Land.

In addition to the Vedantic and Buddhist viewpoint, “Burnt Norton” is also applicable to the traditional Christian foundation. The movement of the world against the Word has already been described strikingly and unforgettably in the second section of “Burnt Norton,” which begins by alluding to the temptations of the turning world which cloud human perception and hinder the apprehension of the still center: “Garlic and sapphires in the mud / Clot the bedded axle-tree” (BN, 47-8). According to Grover Smith, garlic and sapphires stand for “gluttony” and “avarice,” while mud suggests “filth” and “the weakness of the flesh.”⁵³ These imperfections prevent the wheel from turning freely. The “bedded axle-tree” corresponds to the image of “the still center” introduced a few lines later and represents the point of contact between man and God, around which all activities, human and non-human, revolve. When this central axle is clogged by the impurities of the flesh, the movement of the wheel, man’s active life in the world, is impeded and appears to be meaningless and futile. Nevertheless, it is still possible for man to overcome his limitations and apprehend a divine order in which the impediment is nullified, a greater pattern in which the

⁵³ Smith, 343.

apparently contradictory forces of his being are reconciled. In other words, it is still possible for man to intuit the still point of the turning world. The cryptic yet precise description closely brings to mind the image of the wheel turning about its central axis. This image has multiple connotations: it highlights the apparent opposition between the unmoved Mover and the cyclical activity of His creation, between eternity and time, and illustrates the intimate relationship between God and the world, the eternal and the temporal.

This unstilled world is strikingly described in the third section of "Burnt Norton" as "a place of disaffection / Time before and time after / In a dim light" (BN, 93-5). "Disaffection" stands for indifference or "tumid apathy" (BN, 103) towards the sufferings of others. This indifference, no less than attachment to the transient beauties and pleasures of the phenomenal world, is like a wheel which confines man with its slow rotation. Apathy brutalizes and stupefies most human beings so that they become hollow men and can only inhabit the cactus land. And because of them, the turning world appears to be in opposition to the still point. The seemingly contradictory movement of this unstilled world in time is comparable to the confined motion of a train on its rails: "the world moves / In appetency, on its mentalled ways / Of time past and time future" (BN, 127-9). Appetency is that which impels man to cling to present existence and to yearn for its continuation. This appetency, in the form of will to live against all odds, is repeatedly associated with the approach of spring in Eliot's poetry, but also with overtones of pain. For instance, in "East Coker," craving and pain are projected through a complex image of spring out of season, wherein birth is aborted and hopes of life are

crushed:

What is the late November doing
 With the disturbance of the spring
 And creatures of the summer heat
 And snowdrops writhing under feet
 And hollyhocks that aim too high
 Red into grey and tumble down
 Late roses filled with early snow? (EC, 49-55)

This unnatural conduct of the seasons represents the disorder of the human spirit that results when earthly desires are given free rein, because "Desire itself is movement / Not in itself desirable" (BN, 162-3), binding man down to the flux of the turning world and causing him endless anxiety and misery. In other words, desire confines man to the circumference of the wheel in "[a] form of limitation" (BN, 167), clots "the bedded axle-tree" (BN, 47), and prevents him from attaining the still center, which alone can impart "The inner freedom from the practical desires / The release from action and suffering, release from the inner / And outer compulsion" (BN, 71-3).

On an empirical level, then, progress towards the freedom of the still point, expounded by Eliot and endorsed by the Gita, denies us any "free will."⁵⁴ A spiritual level, however, does require us to make the right choice. Our accumulated *karma* (deeds, act, or work) is bound to have its effects, good

⁵⁴ The Bhagavat Gita ("Song of the Blessed Lord"), is the most famous section of the poem, "The Mahabharata," which is the earlier of the two greatest Sanskrit epics of Western India. This section of 18 chapters, often reprinted separately as The Bhagavat Gita, is the greatest devotional classic of Hinduism. For more details, please see A Source Book in Indian Philosophy, edited by Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan and Charles A. Moore, and published by Princeton University Press at Princeton, New Jersey, in 1973, page 110-63.

and bad. Nevertheless, if we choose to act in a spirit of self-surrender, giving up the fruit of our action, we will be free of the good as well as the evil effects of our *karma* (predestined individual existence) and attain nirvana. Eliot suggests that the life-negating indifference of asceticism lies between the living and the dead. It grows, but does not flower; it strives to create, but is impotent; it is a living death. Eliot does not favour it as a means to emancipation; rather he advocates the positive way of detached action described in the Gita. The still point is better attained through detachment than through insensibility. Also, freedom from the bondage of attachment does not mean the end of love or compassion, similar to that of Krishna, the Buddha, or Christ.

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CHAPTER THREE:

From East to West in a Polyglot "Burnt Norton"

Except for Four Quartets, all the major poems of Eliot--from "Prufrock" to "Ash Wednesday"--focus on the finite human consciousness and our gropings in Eliot's time tunnel. These gropings and the accompanying thoughts and feelings all fall, in each poem, within the protagonist's own circle--a circle, we might say "closed on the outside" (WL, 80), constituting a private world of appearances. And the embodiment of these "closed on the outside" private circles is both implicitly and explicitly described in "Burnt Norton." For instance, the most monumental landmark of this whole poem, the rose-garden, is immediately a perfect example of a private world of appearance itself with "the door we never opened" (BN, 13). The garden is an enclosed world full of mysterious images:

Into our first world....
 There they are, dignified, invisible,
 Moving without pressure, over the dead leaves,
 In the autumn heat, through the vibrant air....
 [F]or the roses
 Had the look of flowers that are looked at. (BN, 24-7, 28-9)

In this world of appearance, "invisible" (BN, 24) are these images of

"[u]nheard music" (BN, 27) and "unseen eyebeam" (BN, 28), there is still a loss of those timeless moments in the rose-garden abstracted from our past to constitute "our first world" (BN, 23). Even though before our intrusion into this closed world, these roses are living quietly "around the corner" (BN, 22), the roses now are conscious of the visitors who are here to look for the present as they now have "the look of flowers that are looked at" (BN, 28-9). So we "[disturb] the dust on a bowl of rose-leaves" (BN, 18). Again the bowl is also a good image of a closed, private yet mysterious enclosure. After we follow "the deception of the thrush" (BN, 24) to get "into our first world" (BN, 25), we and the poet, can now both witness many more rich closed circle images:

Along the empty alley, into the box circle,
 To look down into the drain pool....
 The pool was filled with water out of sunlight,
 Then a cloud passed, and the pool was empty.
 Go, said the bird, for the leaves were full of children,
 Hidden excitedly, containing laughter. (BN, 32-3, 39-41)

We see "the empty alley," "the box circle," "the drained pool;" all are closed on the outside, and responding to the gloomy atmosphere when we first adventure into this world of our dusted memory: "the dead leaves" (BN, 26), "the autumn heats" (BN, 27). We, human-kind, are said to be unable to "bear very much reality" (BN, 42) though we are trying to look for it in the rose-garden. Then, the stale and quiet scenery transformed, it turns out to be very active, energetic, and this very same surrounding seems to start to move, to breathe, and to become alive. The tint of the scene also changes from the monotonous black and white, grey and gloomy, to a gorgeous and fancy

baroque picture:

Garlic and sapphires in the mud
 Clot the bedded axle-tree,
 The trilling wire in the blood...
 The dance along the artery
 The circulation of the lymph
 Are figured in the drift of stars
 Ascend to the summer in the tree. (BN, 47-50, 52-5)

Not only are the plants now animated and breaking the closed self in the garden from the past as they create a vigorous summer; but also the animals, even we, the human beings, are now becoming so full of actions and energies:

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. (BN, 56-61)

We finally regain our power of life when we, among those moving animals, "pursue [our] pattern as before" yet "reconciled among the stars." It is true that if we want to keep our superiority over the trees, the leaves, and be able to look down upon other animals, we have to break through the enclosed past and to reconcile with the reality, not just escape from it. None of the protagonists in other poems succeeds completely in breaking out of the closed self and apprehending what the reality is. At best, some are vouchsafed tantalizing glimpses of the peace this reality entails; they can only be patient, endure, and await grace in their "unstilled world" (AW, 96). In Four Quartets, however, we sense for the first time that the poetic self has achieved at least a partial breakthrough. What has so far been obliquely

alluded to as "the heart of the light" (WL, 62) or the "multifoliate rose" (HM, 85) or "the center of the silent Word" (AW, 96) is now precisely defined as "the still point of the turning world" (BN, 62):

The inner freedom from the practical desire
 The release from action and suffering, release from the inner
 And the outer compulsion, ...
Erhebung without motion, concentration
 Without elimination, both a new world
 And the old made explicit, understood
 In the completion of its partial ecstasy.... (BN, 70-2, 74-6)

The "freedom" (BN, 70), the "release" (BN, 71) of the resolution is to break away from the "practical desire" (BN, 70), the "action and suffering" (BN, 71) as well as from the "inner and outer compulsion" (BN, 72). The spiritual harmony we desire to achieve has to come from the conflicts of time, just as a new energy has to be rendered from the reconciliation after the confronting Yin and Yang, the paradox of "*Erhebung* without motion," or "concentration without and elimination":

The enchainment of past and future
 Woven in the weakness of the changing body,
 Protects mankind from heaven and damnation
 Which flesh cannot endure. (BN, 79-83)

On one hand, we are looking for a religious, philosophical sublimation to free ourselves from the physical limitation that time has imposed upon us; on the other, we are trying to trade our protection with our freedom. Even though:

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 smokefall
 Be remembered. (BN, 86-9)

But we cannot be too conscious of time because we will then understand how horrible our final destination of this pursuit is; but "Time past and time future / Allow but a little consciousness" (BN, 83-4), since "to be conscious is not to be in time" (BN, 85). Therefore, the poet's task is to lead us to a certain period of memory from our past yet not with our consciousness of time, its bondage, and limitation. Indeed, this is to conquer time through time.

Moreover, the peace and freedom that ensue after the human soul reaches "the still point" is dwelt on in the paradoxical language of the mystics. Of course, "the turning world" is still very much with us; it has not disappeared from the Quartets. But the apprehension of the still point, partial though it may be, seems to have subtly altered the poetic perspective, so that what goes on in the world is viewed not only within the boundaries of time, but also in the light of a timeless eternity. The creative word of the poet, like the all-engendering "Word" (BN, 155) of the universe which can be either the Christian Scripture, or the Buddhist Gita, brings order out of chaos. Consequently, the poet's efforts to find the word and the Word often appear to be the identical mirror images of each other. Nevertheless, the poet's creative efforts ultimately take place in the temporal world of appearances; hence, they are subjected to change:

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. (BN, 149-53)

Moreover, the "shrieking voices" of unreason and chaos assail his words, forcing them to change continuously. Then, in a daring leap of thought from

the temporal to the eternal, Eliot shifts from “word” to “Word”:

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. (BN, 155-8)

To a Christian ear, the Word is a reminder of the Scripture, yet Eliot’s poetical implication has also caught the Buddhist attention. In addition to the literal interpretation of Word into Christian words, Sri has a very moderate Eastern view of it :

The Word is *logos*, the complete meaning, the one reality that is, permanent and unchanging. When the Word becomes flesh, however, as in a Christ or a Buddha, it too is subject to the power of *maya* and is assailed by ‘voices to temptation’ and death.⁵⁵

Indeed Sri has spelled out the attitude one should take in reading “Burnt Norton”; it should by no means become an exclusive Christian and Western, or a pure Buddhist and Eastern bias, but a humble tolerance of the Word itself. The rendering of the ultimate harmony of Eliot’s great scores is accomplished only when the music is not only composed but listened to with an intercultural interpretation. The Word has to struggle against “the disconsolate chimera” (BN, 157). Yet, in the eternal perspective, there is only the Word:

Shrieking voices
Scolding, mocking, or merely chattering....
The Word in the desert
Is most attacked by voices of temptation,

⁵⁵ Sri, 78.

The crying shadow in the funeral dance,
 The loud lament of the disconsolate chimera. (BN, 153-5, 156-9)

However when we try to decode the riddle in the first three lines of "Burnt Norton", we are surprised to find out that the answer is already there in the minds of various writers before Eliot. In his book The World as Will and Idea, Schopenhauer has already suggested one very interesting point which can be perfectly applied to the initial enigma at the beginning lines of "Burnt Norton":

We might compare time to a constantly revolving sphere; the half that was always sinking would be the past, that which was always rising would be the future; but the individual point at the top, where the tangent touches, would be the extensionless present.

"The deeper design," Eliot writes in his introduction to Djuna Barnes' Nightwood, "might be that of human misery and bondage which is universal."⁵⁶ As Eliot has written:

Art reflects the transitory as well as the permanent condition of the soul; we can not wholly measure the present by what the past has been, nor by what we think the future ought to be.⁵⁷

And the Buddha speaks to his disciples of nirvana or freedom from the universal bondage in uncompromising terms:

Monks, there exists that condition wherein is neither earth nor water nor fire nor air; wherein is neither the sphere of infinite space nor of infinite consciousness nor of nothingness nor of neither consciousness-nor-unconsciousness; where there is neither this world

⁵⁶ T. S. Eliot, Introduction. Nightwood By Djuna Barnes (London: Faber & Faber, 1936) 5.

⁵⁷ Criterion 4, no. 1, Jan. 1926: 5.

nor a world beyond nor both together nor moon-and-sun. Thence,
monks, I declare there is no coming to birth; thither is no going (from
life); therein is no duration; thence is no falling; there is no arising. It
is not something fixed, it moves not on, it is not based on anything.
The indeed is the end of Ill.⁵⁸

Eliot introduces the theme of time abstractly and expresses his skepticism about the redemption of time and the significance of a "might have been" (BN, 45) in any but theoretical terms. Both sections I and II of "Burnt Norton" close with an ultimate reconciliation: "Only through time time is conquered" (BN, 90). Yet if time is accepted on these terms, it remains a thing to be "conquered," meaningless except in its end. The timeless moment and the affirmation of its special reality remain as a central concept throughout "Burnt Norton." In a pointed and specific contrast, "Burnt Norton" section III presents time as disaffection and dim light. In place of sunlight there is the flicker of light in the unwholesome air of the London Tube; in place of autumn heat is the cold wind. Instead of silence, stillness and concentration, there is twittering, whirling and aimless wind sweeping the hills. Instead of *Erhebung* there is distraction. In response to this contrast, the negative way appears not only acceptable but essential. The third section thus presents empty time opposed to timeless ecstasy and counsels leaving one for the other:

Descend lower, descend only
Into the world of perpetual solitude,
World not world, but that which is not world,

⁵⁸ "Udana 8," The Minor Anthologies of the Pali Canon, Part II, trans. F. L. Woodward (London: Oxford UP, 1935) 97.

Internal darkness, deprivation
 And destitution of all property,
 Desiccation of the world of sense,
 Evacuation of the world of fancy,
 Inoperancy of the world of spirit; (BN,115-12)

At this point, the poem again moves from concrete image to a statement of meaning, this time not meditation but a chant-like admonition offering a response to empty time and to the endless human sufferings. Like the sands in the hour glass which have come to the right height, the movement of time now turns from an infinitely linear procession to the spiral whirling wheel. However, the bottleneck of the hour glass, it's center becomes a vacuum area where is free of dust, sands and the sufferings of this phenomenal world. Thus, the motion of time sustains a sense of urgency.

In "Burnt Norton," Eliot not only exposes the human internally but also asks for actions externally. Indeed, man's intimate association with both time and eternity, properly understood, constitutes the core of religion, and is what binds us to God or Buddha. But to most of us, the understanding has not dawned; we are so caught up in our regrets about the past or in our worries about the future that we are never quite conscious of the innocence and promise of the present: "What might have been and what has been / Point to one end, which is always present" (BN, 45-6). We look before and after and pine for what is not. Consequently, we are dragging out a maimed half-existence throughout our lifetime:

Neither plentitude nor vacancy. Only a flicker
 Over the strained time-ridden faces
 Distracted from distraction by distraction
 Filled with fancies and empty of meaning

Tumid apathy with no concentration
 Men and bits of paper, whirled by the cold wind
 That blows before and after time,
 Wind in and out of unwholesome lungs
 Time before and time after. (BN, 99-107)

This bleak, horrifying, time-conditioned existence is, however, not quite bereft of hope. There are intense, isolated moments when we glimpse the eternal:

For most of us, there is only the unattended
 Moment, the moment in and out of time,
 The distraction fit, lost in a shaft of sunlight,
 The wild thyme unseen, or the winter lightning
 Or the waterfall, or music heard so deeply
 That it is not heard at all, but you are the music
 While the music lasts. (DS, 207-13)

This is the moment both in nirvana that Buddhists are groping for and in paradise that Christians are searching for. At such deeply perceptive moments, music is heard with such intensity that there is no longer a separation between the person listening and the music listened to; there is simply the music and "you are the music" (DS, 212). Such intense moments of aesthetic rapture, when the egotistical self is so completely submerged in the object of contemplation that it no longer seems to exist, are the closest most of us ever get to liberation from the flux of time-bound existence.

Eliot seems sometimes to set human passivity and activity at odds before he extracts the ultimate harmony from these apparent conflicts. In Christian theology, a mysterious reconciliation is effected where the individual is considered really free only when he acts under the grace of God. The Gita, too, is unequivocal in declaring that self-surrender and right action

ultimately mean the same thing and unite us with the eternal. Nowhere in "Burnt Norton" does Eliot explicitly reconcile divine grace and individual effort; instead, he leaves us free to effect our own imaginative reconciliation even though he has pointed out to us earlier:

[U]nderstood
 In the completion of its partial ecstasy,
 The resolution of its partial horror.
 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. (BN, 76-82)

Indeed, the poetic appeal of "Burnt Norton" lies in a "voiceless invitation" to participate in the searching for the still point and the final reality, while the poetic power of this poem resides in "the apparently unresolved conflicts of freedom and limitation."⁵⁹

The fundamental perceptions of Vedanta as well as of Buddhism are those of the impermanence or ephemerality of all phenomena and of the universality of suffering. As Eliot has already indicated in "Burnt Norton," what the human beings are pining for is represented by "the inner freedom from the practical desire, / The release from the inner / And the outer compulsion" (BN, 70-2). Human beings are eventually threatened when we realize that our disconnection with time and a final freedom from time is also a loss of protection. Therefore, this is a "partial ecstasy" and a "partial horror" (BN, 77, 76). These insights are, of course, universal. We find them

⁵⁹ Sri, 91-2.

in the Old Testament, particularly in Ecclesiasties and Job; in the New Testament, we find Christ and His disciples repeatedly urging men to give up the things of this world since they do not have a lasting value for the human soul. A chief characteristic of seventeenth-century English literature—a main source of literary inspiration to Eliot—was its acute awareness of the transience of life and the tyranny of time. However, in Vedanta and Buddhism, impermanence and suffering are essential perceptions; they are the bedrock on which the entire philosophical system rests:

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. (BN, 1-5)

The unbreakable linkage of time is accepted, and there is no doubt about it; still, there is some speculation: supposing one had made the other choice, the choice that remains always a possibility when regarded speculatively. In a further sense, what might have been is even a part of what is, all the possibilities of the past being part of the present by virtue of having existed as possibility. Hence, "What might have been and what has been / Point to one end, which is always present" (BN, 9-10). Such an opening states a theme from which the question is posed: is there any way of breaking, or of transcending these unbreakable links of time? Ultimately the poem is about those seemingly timeless moments that do "redeem" time spiritually; if not historically. We hear the footfall of memory echoing down the corridor of the choice we did not take into the rose-garden we might have entered: "we," "I," "you," each his own footfalls, moving differently but together.

The pattern is complicated: for there is the rose-garden of the past which the poet did not enter but might have entered, and the actual rose-garden of Burnt Norton which he now enters, and the rose-garden which is the mystical timeless moment or the non-mystical sense of the pure Now which contains the past but is free of its enchainments. And there is, further, the rose bowl, holding last year's rose petals spiced and still fragrant with the memory of last summer's roses:

Footfalls echo in the memory
Down the passage which we did not take
Towards the door we never opened
Into the rose garden....
But to what purpose
Disturbing the dust on a bowl of rose-leaves
I do not know. (BN, 11-4, 16-8)

In the poem the rose bowl is an important and natural symbol for our memory of the fragrant past. Representing a past, the bowl is old and full of dust; but later we can see that this same rose bowl has turned out to be dustless and fragrant to represent the timeless consummation of our past. The scene as represented in the poem reads as though the actual visit of Eliot had perhaps been the occasion of one of those timeless moments, not a true mystical experience, but one similar to the release from whatever chains us to time past and time future. Either Eliot had that experience at the time or, knowing it from other occasions, he chose now to place it here in the garden, where it is blended with the imagined innocence (innocence, too, is without past or future) of "our first world" (BN, 23) of both our childhood and the Garden of Eden, partly a garden we knew, but mainly one we might have

entered.

It may be objected that Eliot's commitment to Christianity which inhibits his vision and results in contradictions (for example, his rather unconvincing effort to reconcile that Christian Incarnation with the Hindu avatar). On the other hand, critics like Helen Gardner find it difficult to deal with Eliot's apparent idiosyncrasy in venturing far beyond the bounds of his Christianity. Though a professed Anglo-Catholic, Eliot includes unorthodox and even non-Christian elements in his works. Unable to understand this, the critics tend to slight the Eastern aspects--especially those of the Buddhist and Indian traditions--of Eliot or even disapprove of Eliot's habit of accumulating various sources. Gardner, for instance, finds the introduction of Krishna and the Gita in "The Dry Salvages" an error.⁶⁰ From the strictly Christian point of view, Christ is the Incarnation, the only means of salvation for the individual and Eliot obviously accepts this interpretation. Why, then, does he incorporate odd ideas from other religions to create the unnecessary dissonance? A valid question, no doubt. But the poet T. S. Eliot does not pronounce a clear-cut answer himself, leaving his poetry to speak for itself. Unfortunately, his critics take his silence to be a confession of failure to reconcile apparently contradictory doctrines.

We can see that Eliot's affinity to the Eastern view of life, particularly that which finds expression in the Upanishads and Gita, is apparent along with his strong early attraction towards Buddhism. In his book, T. S. Eliot,

⁶⁰ Gardener, The Art of T. S. Eliot (New York: Dutton E. P. & Co., 1959) 173.

Vedanta and Buddhism, Sri indicated that Eliot was tremendously impressed by the noble and compassionate life of Buddha and "at the time of writing The Waste Land he contemplated becoming a Buddhist."⁶¹ And we have seen how he borrows Buddhist ideas and symbols (which have a great deal in common with Hindu ideas and symbols) and makes use of them to compile "Burnt Norton." In a word, even though we listen to the words and music of "Burnt Norton" from either Christian or Eastern religious angles, we will not miss the respectful human struggle against the gigantic rival, time, that Eliot makes us, at least he wishes us to, understand—if he has not succeeded in making us agree with him to appreciate these noble human desires for freedom from the time bondage. However, a broader and deeper intercultural comprehension of this composition will further enhance our sensitivity to a great poem's durability, and the multi-lingual messages behind the mask of an English poem. The threads of this beautiful tapestry are various even though some of them need to be analyzed and identified. It is impossible for us to deny the attribution from the Eastern culture which stands side by side with Eliot's native Western breeding, and the denial of either influence will doubtlessly crack the harmony we hear in "Burnt Norton" because in this whole performance, Chinese philosophy indicates the inner conflicting energies, the Yin and Yang and the movement which these two opposites have animated. Buddhism provides the contrasting Eastern concept of the turning of a wheel and corresponds to the wheel-like,

⁶¹ Sri, 113-4.

spiral animation of "Burnt Norton" with its center of a still point; Hinduism supplements a luxurious coloring to the contrast of the Thousand-Petalled Lotus as well as the rose symbol, and upgrades the rose-garden in "Burnt Norton" from a superficial nostalgic memory to a Christian paradise, or to our first world--the Garden of Eden, or even more than all these, to the Hindu-Buddhist nirvana. To achieve the final appreciation of the optimism on human beings' fearless struggle, Eliot concludes:

Except in the aspect of time
 Caught in the form of limitation
 Between being and un-being.
 Sudden in a shaft of sunlight
 Even while the dust moves
 There rises the hidden laughter
 Of children in the foliage.... (BN, 165-71)

Eliot has justified the meaning of our life, and at this point, so long as we have succeeded in finding the timeless still center, or its higher level, if it is identified steadfastly as purely the Christian paradise or the Hindu-Buddhist nirvana, or even both of them, does not matter that much. Although we are caught in time, between being and un-being, living in eternal darkness or the hellish London city, the modern cosmopolitans, our efforts now are spoken out loud because the poet, one that follows the thrush's "deception" to enter the rose garden of the past, is now showing us the sudden shaft of sunlight he perceives. There rises the laughter of the children, our innocent and happy past and the next generation, who are very likely to continue human beings' seemingly ridiculous pursuit. "Even while the dust moves" (BN, 169) and time keeps on flowing ahead of us, our life becomes significant and full of

meaning. Now we realize when the poet declares, "Quick now, here, now, always— / Ridiculous the waste sad time / Stretching before and after" (BN, 173-5), Eliot has not only found the answer to his initial question in the opening stanza: "To what purpose / Disturbing the dust on a bowl of rose-leaves / I do not know" (BN, 16-8), but he has also honored our pitiable temporal existence which survives time's ridicule on us and makes time surrender to an everlasting life of ours, of our ancestors', and of our offsprings'. With this hope that we, or our offspring, will eventually arrive at the still center and the timeless point, we dedicate our temporal lives to this task because we believe, through Eliot's implicit prediction, there will be God, Buddha, and Krishna, or hope, joining us together to ridicule the "waste sad time" (BN, 174) to its face. Out of the confrontation of human beings and reality in time, a final harmony is now achieved; and this optimism will last as long as our reconciliation with or re-recognition of time and reality survives. One day we shall find out that the first world of paradise is already in our mind, not only in our memory.

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