The confirmation of meaning in imaginative literature

Mary M. Bromell

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THE CONFIRMATION OF MEANING IN IMAGINATIVE LITERATURE

A THEORY APPLIED TO ONE OF THE SOURCES:

FOUR QUARTETS BY T. S. ELIOT

MARY M. BROMELL

W. E. Speller

D. E. Shanks
PREFACE

The introduction of this paper is to explain a theory about imaginative literature, and the body of the paper is an application of this theory to T. S. Eliot's poem Four Quartets. The theory is not original; it is, at best, a fresh look at old truths. It evolved from readings in imaginative literature, primarily Dante's The Divine Comedy and the poetry of T. S. Eliot, and it was sparked by a criticism of The Divine Comedy by Charles Williams, The Figure of Beatrice. The primary difficulty of the theory results from trying to say in prose something which, as far as I know, can only be said in poetry. The unoriginality of the ideas to be expressed only completely appeared when I realized how many professors, literary criticisms, and prose explanations by poets of poetry suggested these same ideas. They had not been understood until the imaginative quality of poetry had revealed them.

Difficult or impossible as it may be to present this theory in clear and convincing terms, it is something I must attempt; and the knowledge that this attempt can only be unsatisfactory and lead to repeated attempts serves but to confirm my conviction that I am approaching the meaning of imaginative literature. How far away I am can only be observed by the organization and presentation of my material, and this, in itself, offers a value to others as well as to myself. This thesis is the best summation I can presently
make of the effect and understanding of the teaching and learning which have gone into my master's degree work. As Mr. Eliot says, we are the sum of everything we have and have not done. If an idea from Charles Williams suddenly exploded with great meaning in the poetry of Dante and Eliot, that was only the result of the ideas presented by work done on Eudora Welty and Salinger, Milton, Virginia Wolff, Homer, Aeschylus, and Poe. Since this idea works backwards, bringing something new to the studies which prepared for it, and forwards, suggesting a different kind of reading for future studies, I consider it, not in the form which I will give it but in the form which it has as an idea, a testament to the process of education and to those whose interest this process is.

Four Quartets serves not only as an opportunity to demonstrate the method I believe to be suitable to proving my theory, but it is a poetic statement of the theory itself. The presumption of stating what Mr. Eliot can so much better state for himself is no greater than the possibility that I am completely wrong in my interpretation of his poem. The only excuse for continuing in the face of such obstacles is my belief that Eliot is saying something so important as to warrant attempts to understand it, and I can only ask of the readers of this thesis that they accept in good faith my assertion that any importance which attaches to the study does so for its attempt and not its result.
INTRODUCTION

The theory is that: the existence of meaning is confirmed by imaginative literature; that the process by which the writer creates his work is, in fact, a recreation of the only process which confirms the existence of meaning; that this recreation is the ultimate meaning of imaginative literature and that the extent to which an imaginative writer recognizes this ultimate meaning is discoverable in the techniques he uses to reveal a meaning particular to him.

The only process of confirming meaning is not to be thought of as confined to literature; it is, rather, that imaginative literature is capable of imaging that process which is the source of all meaning, whether it be sought in the arts, sciences, religions, philosophies, or activities of mankind. The great meaning of imaginative literature is, therefore, to be found in the recreation of this process rather than in the particular meaning which is the result of the writer's own imaginative process. The more aware the writer is of his imaginative articulation as an image of that process which confirms meaning by imaginative assertion rather than by conclusion, the greater will be the experience of his work. The extent to which this awareness exists is to be found in the nature and use of the techniques of imaginative literature. The writer primarily employs these techniques to reveal his own interpretation of the meaning of life, and to appreciate the techniques they must be examined in exactly those terms. The choice and use
of techniques can, however, indicate not only the writer's particular understanding of life but also his understanding that meaning lies essentially in the imagination and is confirmed by the attempt of articulation, rather than by that articulation itself.

There is a paradoxical nature in this relationship of articulation and imagination. The more imaginative the articulation is, the more precise it must be. To invite the greatest imaginative play can only be done by the greatest precision of image but the greater the precision of image the more susceptible it is to an exact definition which precludes further imaginative play.

Four Quartets by T. S. Eliot contains a choice and use of the techniques of form, structure, and imagery and a precision of articulation which reveal the particular meaning of life discovered by that poet. They also reveal a conscious recognition that his poem and its meaning can at best be an image of that great search for meaning which confirms meaning by the attempt rather than by meaning found.

Before examining the form, structure, and imagery of Four Quartets to demonstrate the stated relationship of that poem and the theory of this thesis, I would like to indicate how the theory itself evolved from imaginative literature. It is essential to the theory that it be a summation of something learned from imaginative literature and not an external philosophy or criticism imposed upon the reading of imaginative literature.
In the world of imaginative literature, with all its different, even opposing, concepts of life, and all the different forms, structures, and images which make up the world, there is one point of agreement. This is that the ultimate meaning of life can only be imagined and that a writer's particular vision of such a meaning can only be presented through devices which are the articulation of his view and through which he must communicate to the imagination of the reader. This process of imagining—whether it be in the arts or the religions or even in the symbols of science—is all that we have to suggest what mankind is forever seeking: the meaning of life. The reality of life lies more in this process than in any result of it, for images tend to acquire a fixed identity and symbols tend to lose their identity under the pressures of the great unknowables which they represent.

The primary appeal of imaginative literature is the extent to which it stirs the imagination of the reader, and the primary purpose should be, I believe, for the reader to determine the extent to which his awakened imagination can consciously participate in the imaginative experience of the writer. This determination must be based on three lines of inquiry. It is necessary to understand, insofar as possible, what the writer says, why he says it, and what the total process of imaginative articulation means in terms of the imagination.
What the writer says is his story and all the techniques he uses to tell that story. He tells such a story because of the compulsion to relate, or explain, whatever may be the meaning of such a story or, in other words, because of his concept of life. The total experience of the work is certainly dependent on an exploration of what and why the writer writes but it lies completely in the extent to which one is aware of the poetic process which created the work. It is this process which has declared itself in the articulate mind ever since articulation became necessary, through cave paintings, myths, and religions, and still declares itself in our response to contemporary images. It has been the burden of mankind to seek a meaning to the mystery of life and the paradox is that while we never find it, the persistence of our search suggests its reality. Whatever meaning has ever been found has been imagined and imaged, and as long as we reject the images but maintain the search, the absolute meaning can lie only in that search itself.

Imaginative literature offers participation in this search, first, in seeking the writer's meaning and, secondly, by thus taking an active part in the imaginative, poetic process which caused the particular meaning to be sought and articulated. Examination of the work provides the first. The second is contingent upon two measurements: the degree to which the reader is able to
consider the work as, in fact, an image of the process he is seeking, and the degree to which the writer is able also to affirm his work as an image.

All writers of imaginative writing participate in the process of imaginative articulation, but some to a greater extent than others. The writer who forever keeps his concept in the realm of imagination while successfully suggesting this concept by use of the appropriate technique is the greatest participator. The writer whose concept becomes opaque is less of a participant. When the writer, or reader, fails to consider the reality of his work and conclusions as valid only in terms of some greater reality which they suggest, the poetic process ceases.

When Ernest Hemingway's reality of life was a kind of malignancy that became so real as to be an enemy of humanity, it could be nothing more than that. Despite the extraordinary imaginative achievement of arriving at and leading his readers to such a point, that point itself marks an imaginative failure. The Old Man and the Sea is, I believe, the artist's attempt to reaffirm that, whatever the malignancy, there is a further meaning and if this meaning can only be found in a valiant human performance in the face of the apparent malignancy, the true meaning of that performance can be found only in imaginative terms greatly different from those of cruelty or indifference.
The *Divine Comedy* of Dante Alighieri is distinguished for the completeness with which he affirms all aspects of life to be images of a greater reality. The meaning of this great intangible reality can be seen only in the tangible aspects of its images; the actual present and presence of people, events, and activities; but those tangibles are truly meaningful only in the terms of the greater reality which they image.

The reader can only hope to recognize an imaginative failure on the part of the writer, and do his best not to ascribe such a failure on his own part to the writer. Many criticisms are leveled at the rigidity of certain writers' concepts. Dante is often considered no longer meaningful because of the religious nature of his concept. The important question here is whether this religiosity was, in Dante's poetry, an absolute or an image and which it is in the mind of the critic. The most logical way to guard against confusing one's own impressions and convictions with those of the writer is to examine his work insofar as possible in the writer's terms.

The terms of the writer are those of his professional skills and abilities: the form and structure and images he uses to convey his ideas. It seems unavoidable that the techniques which best reflect the concepts of the writer will be those that most closely approach what he sees and the way in which he sees it.
An examination of the techniques of a work, then, promises a method by which one may regard these devices, not for what they mean to the reader, but for what they mean to the writer. Furthermore, in discovering what these techniques mean to the writer, this kind of an examination should approach the total meaning in the work. The success of the search, conducted according to the abilities of the reader to see and the writer to reveal, will be the degree to which meaning is found; not just the trophy which is the writer's concept of meaning, but the experience of meaning itself.

To begin such an exploration into *Four Quartets*, or any imaginative work, it is well to consider what kind of concept a writer might be expected to have in order to have some idea of what is being searched for. There are three possible concepts of life: that it has no meaning, that it has an acquirable meaning, that it has some unobtainable meaning. In terms of the theory, all three of these are correct, but for different reasons: to have no meaning suggests that there is a meaning; an acquirable meaning asserts the existence of meaning but suggests that it might not be possessable; an unobtainable meaning asserts the existence of meaning and the desirability of meaning but that both are demonstrable only in a search for meaning. This third concept suggests the theory itself, and it is, I believe, this concept which underlies *Four Quartets*.
In speaking of the personal experience which in itself afforded the only sense of a meaning to life, Mr. Eliot writes of "the sudden illumination"

We had the experience but missed the meaning
And approach to the meaning restores the experience
In a different form, beyond any meaning
We can assign to happiness . . . .
Now, we come to discover that the moments of agony . . . are likewise permanent.

The Dry Salvages, II: 92-107

The sense of these lines is that the meaning of life, considered in terms of happiness which has been experienced but not understood by the poet, is comprehended neither in the meaning of happiness nor meaning of its absence. If, in fact, happiness gives a meaning to life, its absence is synonymous with non-meaning. Man is caught between these two conditions and the explanation of his position lies in both and neither of those conditions. Whatever the explanation, it is discoverable in content and distress but different from and greater than either.

If this is, indeed, a correct interpretation of a description of Mr. Eliot's concept, the theory of this thesis maintains that an examination of the techniques of Four Quartets will not only confirm this to be his concept but will discover the poem to be a
poetic statement of the theory. The following examination of the
form, structure and imagery of Four Quartets will attempt to demon-
strate that by these means Mr. Eliot suggests a great intangible
which, while identified in some way as to make it meaningful, depends
upon something suggested by, and not contained in, a name to give
it meaning.

We only hope, or else despair

Lies in the choice of pyre or pyre—

To be redeemed from fire by fire.

and a recognition of the question asked and answered by the poet
concerning this condition:

Who then devised the torment? Love.

Love is the unfamiliar Name

Behind the hands that move

The intolerable skirt of flames

Which human power cannot remove.

We only live, only aspire

Consumed by either fire or fire.

[Little Gidding, IV: 205-213]

The words need no elucidation. It is perfectly clear what Mr. Eliot
means, but to understand the meaning itself requires much more
than an intellectual appreciation of the precision of the words.
To find this meaning, one must look into the poem, where one's first
discovery is that the poem itself is a search for meaning. To look
into the poem, to join Mr. Eliot's search, one must first determine
the terms of the search, or the kind of poem it is that is being
FOUR QUARTETS

The form, structure, and imagery of Four Quartets is designed to bring the reader to a recognition of the condition of life described in Little Gidding as:

The only hope, or else despair

Lies in the choice of pyre or pyre--

To be redeemed from fire by fire.

and a recognition of the question asked and answered by the poet concerning this condition:

Who then devised the torment? Love.

Love is the unfamiliar Name

Behind the hands that wove

The intolerable shirt of flame

Which human power cannot remove.

We only live, only suspi"re

Consumed by either fire or fire.

[Little Gidding, IV: 205-213]

The words need no elucidation. It is perfectly clear what Mr. Eliot means, but to understand the meaning itself requires much more than an intellectual appreciation of the precision of the words. To find this meaning, one must look into the poem, where one's first discovery is that the poem itself is a search for meaning. To look into the poem, to join Mr. Eliot's search, one must first determine the terms of the search, or the kind of poem it is that is being
looked at. Mr. Eliot explains what kind of a poem he would like it to be:

... Only by the form, the pattern,

Can words or music reach

The stillness ...  

[Burnt Norton; V: 140-141]

"The stillness" contains the meaning sought by Mr. Eliot, and, since he is seeking it in a poem, it is obvious that he intends a form and pattern, but, equally obvious, a form which will carry him, and his reader, to something beyond the form. If, however, "the stillness" can be reached in words only by form and pattern, then, whatever the meaning of the stillness, it is recognizable in a form and pattern. Thus, Mr. Eliot must intend the poem to image the experience in form and, therefore, somehow in meaning. The inter-relation of poetry to life and of this poem to the poet's experience of life is understood in terms of the writer's comprehension. He intends Four Quartets, not only to lead to experience and meaning, but to somehow represent experience of meaning.

The intention is clear, but to understand if and how the poem succeeds in fulfilling the intention, the actual form and its construction must be explored. If the exploration reveals how the poem succeeds, it will also reveal why it does, and such success can be a result, not only of the skill of the writer but of the authenticity of his design.
The form of a poem is its general shape or outline; the structure is that which gives it substance or its particular character; and the imagery is the ornamentation which heightens the suggestion of the form and structure and enhances the imaginative qualities of the poem.

The general shape or outline of *Four Quartets* is immediately observed by the descriptive nature of the title. The poem is composed of four sections, each of which, being a quartet, is a whole in itself but only a part of the whole experience of the poem. Each quartet derives its meaning from the whole quartet of which it is a part, but Mr. Eliot finds the only way to the present the meaning of that whole is through the fragments of which it consists and which it transcends.

It has already been noted that the nature of the poem is a search. The poet’s idea of the relationship of his poem to its meaning requires the form of the poem to be that of a search. The personal note introduced in the first quartet and maintained, in contrast to a kind of general description, throughout the poem, indicates that the poem reports a personal search.

The course of the search is given. *East Coker* opens:

In my beginning is my end, and Section V of *Little Gidding* opens:

What we call the beginning is often the end
And to make an end is to make a beginning.

Knowing that the poet intends the form of his poem to image the experience of the poem, and recognizing that the experience is, at
least on one level, a personal search, it is understood that these lines, indicating the form of the experience, also indicate that of the poem. The idea of this particular design is repeated:

We shall not cease from exploring
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started

The search that begins where it ends and ends where it begins is that of an odyssey, and the personal nature of the poem designates it an odyssey of the poet going out and returning with the meaning of life.

A consideration of the odyssey form in general and its particular characteristics in *Four Quartets* must bring the reader closer in understanding to the concept of life which engendered the poem.

The general characteristics of the odyssey form are the hero, the external forces which necessitate his journey and which he must in some way propitiate to successfully conclude the journey and the adventures of the hero in carrying out his mission. The prototype is, of course, Ulysses, and discussion of this form is most logically carried out in reference to Homer's poem.

While the particular characteristics of Eliot's odyssey in *Four Quartets* are clearly determined in their differences to those
of Homer’s *Odyssey*, the meaning of these particular and different characteristics lies in a similarity of the imaginative concept of life of the two poets.

Homer’s hero is a personalized heroic figure who, if he can be thought of as everyman, remains remote from human experience. The emotions evoked by Ulysses are those of the audience reaction to his adventure while he himself is curiously beyond our emotions. Eliot’s hero is himself, depersonalized but hardly to be thought of as everyman. The heroic actions of Ulysses evoke admiration and awe. The actions of Eliot’s poet are of the mind and reveal that hero’s sense of despair, frustration, and sterility in opposition to a desire for peace, fulfillment, and beauty. Involvement in *The Odyssey* is occasioned by curiosity as to how the hero does what he does, and in *Four Quartets* by curiosity as to why the hero feels as he does. Basically, Ulysses’ experience offers emotional responses and Eliot’s emotional responses offer experience. This difference is, I believe, the result of Mr. Eliot’s conviction that the human condition of today is such that emotions are meaningless unless they lead to an experience which will make them meaningful, and his odyssey is his search for such experience. Homer, on the other hand, suggests that experience itself, without the appropriate emotion, is meaningless.

The imaginative concept which created Ulysses created a hero whose existence, actions, and experiences are meaningful in terms
of the imaginative responses they evoke. The hero of Four Quartets is the direct creation of a personal experience, he exists in those terms and yet is truly meaningful to the reader only in the terms of the imaginative responses he evokes. The heroes are so different as to make them almost opposites: Ulysses, man of action, cunning, successful, leader of men; Eliot, man of intellect, wise, conscious of failure, alienated from man. The imaginative concepts, however, which created these disparate heroes had something in common which relates the two heroes in meaning. Both poets put an equal emphasis on experience and imagination, on emotional response to experience; and both poets believed that the meaning of life, for either Ulysses or Eliot, lay not only in that character itself but in the experience of his life. For Ulysses, life was experience; for Eliot, life was such that only experience could make it life.

There is another aspect of the hero of an odyssey that requires attention and that is the question of what makes a hero. There is no doubt but what Ulysses is the prototype of the hero, but what about Eliot’s poet? Can a writer make a hero of himself? Is there any indication that this is the intent of the writer of Four Quartets? and, if not, can there be an odyssey without a hero? The answer to these questions lies, I believe, in the terms in which the reader regards the poem. If he persists in seeing it as an autobiographical account that has no meaning except one personal to
Mr. Eliot, then it can only have a hero in those same terms. In those terms, there is no hero. Mr. Eliot's self description, such as it is, is more concerned with personal failure than success. He nowhere says I have done well or bravely, or have even accomplished my mission. And yet he does intend an odyssey and an odyssey must have a central figure who inspires enough interest and admiration to lead the reader to the conclusion. This is certainly true of Ulysses, but, truly, in whose terms? Ulysses' boasting is in the terms of his day and the reader of today no more believes he is a hero because he says he behaved heroically than could the contemporary Greeks have so believed. If, today, his boasting tends to alienate him, we compensate for this by recognizing that his statements were factual. He is a hero because we think he is and because Homer must have so intended us to think. If we can see Eliot's poet as a hero, it is a result of Mr. Eliot's hope or intention that we do so, but this can only occur in our terms, which are quite different from the factual terms of the poet. If Ulysses is a recognized hero, and Eliot's poet an unrecognized hero, the creators of these heroes believe that the true recognition of heroes is on the part of the audiences.

The external forces which were the primary cause of Ulysses' odyssey are discovered in the harsh pronouncements of the gods concerning his fate. If it is the gods' will that Ulysses be punished despite Athena's plea for leniency, their will is the reflection of some absolute law of cause and effect. Ulysses is not
being punished because the gods so indicate; they so indicate because that is the way they, being gods not man, know it must be. Ulysses' participation in the Trojan War, his headstrong willfulness, and bravery are the causes which affect his odyssey. These are all external to the extent that he participated in history and was born with his personality.

The external forces which were the primary cause of Eliot's odyssey are discovered in the harsh realities of the world around him: The history that led to world war and that created the horror of urban life and his participation, willing or not, in such a history. In conjunction with these forces are those of his own personality, which dictates that he must explore a moment, not won by him, but given to him.

Both heroes act, then, under chronological, geographical, and psychological pressures. Ulysses acts within them, Eliot attempts to get beyond them, but both act because of these forces.

With Ulysses there is a sense of his carrying out a preordained pattern rather than a voluntary undertaking. His difficulties are announced by the gods, and so is his ultimate success. If he is completely at the mercy of the fates which dictate both his punishments and his rewards, wherein lies the extraordinary sense of excitement with which one follows his career? This is a question which I cannot answer because I believe it to be both the riddle and answer of life itself, and it is a recognition of this
that Homer provided in his account of Ulysses.

With Eliot there is a certain sense of this being a voluntary odyssey. Having once known a moment of illumination which in itself reconciled the apparent contradictions of such an experience and the actual realities of an ugly and sterile world, the poet determines to either recapture the moment or to arrive at an understanding of the moment. However, careful attention to Eliot's words proves something quite different. In *Burnt Norton* he writes,

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

and in *Little Gidding* he articulates a belief that, aware or unaware of love—the absolute principle which he believes governs human life—

one dies consumed by the fire of imperfect knowledge or consumed by

the fire of which he was ignorant.

There is, then, only one voluntary action for Eliot, and it is the one of Ulysses:

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

and in *Dry Salvages*:

> . . . And right action is freedom

> From past and future also.

> For most of us, this is the aim

> Never here to be realized;

> Who are only undefeated

> Because we have gone on trying;
Ulysses achieved a freedom from past and future by devoting all his efforts, regardless of the over-all effect of the gods, to doing his best. He certainly made mistakes and he was never master of his fate but there is no doubt that we regard him as having made a tremendous achievement. Eliot, too, is aware that life is governed by certain absolutes which permit little human initiative. Ulysses and Eliot are equally victims of time, experience, and character, which determines reaction to experience, and some great unknowable force which refuses meaning to life and death and yet without which neither life nor death could have any meaning which Homer imagined as the power behind the gods and Eliot as "Love," "the unfamiliar Name," "behind the Hands that wove." Ulysses' achievement is the result of his particular character, the persistent and unthinking bravery of the hero in action. Eliot's achievement is also characteristic. For him, right action can only come, if at all, as the result of right thinking. His desire for the unattended moment of illumination must be subjugated to doing what the actual moment requires much as Ulysses relegated his return to Penelope and Ithaca to the end of his voyage. The requirements of the actual moment are not Ulysses' feats of valor, but conscious efforts at self purification, preparation for illumination which may never come, but may be sensed:
For most of us, there is only the unattended
Moment, the moment in and out of time,
The distraction fit, lost in a shaft of sunlight,
The wild thyme unseen, or the winter lightning
Or the waterfall, or music heard so deeply
That it is not heard at all, but you are the music
While the music lasts. These are only hints and guesses,
Hints followed by guesses; and the rest
Is prayer, observance, discipline, thought and action.

[The Dry Salvages; V: 206-214]

The external forces controlling Ulysses and Eliot are in reality
different explanations of similar beliefs, and the code of conduct
articulated by Eliot in the face of these forces is hardly differ-
ent from the heroic code.

The difference in the nature of the adventures of the heroes
has already been mentioned and is more a matter of structure than
form. Before examining structure, however, it is necessary to
take into account the vast difference of landscape against which
the heroes move.

Ulysses, while pitted against it, is very much a part of the
grandeur of the Greek landscape. The protagonist of Four Quartets
is immediately observed as out of harmony with his landscape. In
the Odyssey, the landscape changes only in the sense that Ulysses
moves from place to place, some places hospitable, others threatening.
In *Four Quartets* the landscape changes in a somewhat similar fashion from the rose garden of *Burnt Norton* and the "gloomy hills of London" to a countryside where "dahlias sleep in the empty silence," to the river and sea of *The Dry Salvages* and the "winter's afternoon, in a secluded chapel" of *Little Gidding*. What is seen in these various landscapes is, however, either an ugliness, sterility, and meanness, unacceptable to the poet, or a beauty, distorted by the inability of the poet to see it except in opposition to the ugliness, meanness, and sterility of his own condition. There is another landscape in *Four Quartets*, one much more akin to Homer's. It is the landscape of Eliot's moment of illumination.

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.

*Burnt Norton*, II: 56-61

Homer gives us his natural landscape of classical Greece to make of it what we will. Eliot's natural landscape reflects exactly what has been made of natural beauty: the sterility of the rose garden, the ugliness and vapidness of the city, the distortion of rural simplicity by human behavior in *Burnt Norton*. The indifferent grandeur of the sea of *The Dry Salvages* is not
so different from that of Homer's Aegean, but Ulysses can accept the indifference and still act, whereas Eliot is immobilized by indifference.

The supernatural landscape of Four Quartets, while effecting the same atmosphere as Homer's natural landscape, has a great difference. Homer's is vivid and precise and apparent to all. Eliot's is so particular to him that we can never see it. This is, however, an essential quality of Four Quartets and reveals a great deal about the poet's concept of life, not only in its differences from Homer's but in its basic similarity.

For Homer, the actual landscape was the world of gods and men—this union of supernatural and natural is the special quality of the Odyssey. For Eliot, that world was lost but the sense of it existed and had been experienced by Eliot.

The history of humanity from Homer's time through the centuries which made the Odyssey out of what was remembered of, and what was substituted for, his poetry, up until the twentieth century is such that the sense of Homer's world must be, not felt, but understood in different terms. An elementary acceptance of its existence, an awareness of its absoluteness was perhaps possible for an ancient Greek, but the years and experiences which have moved man further and further from such a clear simplicity necessitate a highly complex return to such a condition:

A condition of complete simplicity
(Costing not less than everything)
To live in such a world, man now must find it. Where the Greeks knew their gods, man now must discover his; and his gods must somehow account for the human experience of losing and discovering these images, which are articulated by a conscious awareness of a supernatural force and pattern which controls the destinies of men. The loss of such an awareness and the subsequent loss of its images makes it necessary to determine what has been lost before it can be refound. And each search for new gods requires a greater and more explicit image to explain the failures of other gods and the consistent failure of humanity to accept any god for long. Homer could live with familiar gods, but Eliot had to identify the force behind the "unfamiliar Name."

If it is no longer possible to live in harmony with a conscious awareness of supernatural forces, it was also, for Eliot, no longer possible to live without such an awareness. His odyssey is his search for such an awareness and the external forces of his life demands that he go beyond the limits of this conscious world to one of unlimited by time, space, or personality, and limited only by the intensity of consciousness with which he can experience such a venture.

The difference, then, of Homer's and Eliot's landscape is one of visibility. Homer's is seen and felt as being both natural and reflective of the supernatural. Eliot's is seen with a distortion necessitated by the condition of the hero, or not seen because this
condition prohibits true recognition; the eye can only relay to
the mind something which the mind is capable of receiving. Despite
the difference, the imaginative concept which can conceive a
natural-supernatural landscape is particular to Eliot and Homer.

The form of the Four Quartets has been seen as appropriate to
the idea of the personal search of the poet and suggestive of
the idea that this search has implications far beyond the immediate
adventure of the hero. The landscape, which is actually a structural
composition, has been included in the form because its nature is
more suggestive of form than structure. The landscape of
a poem is the result of how the poet sees landscape, but landscape,
or nature, is an absolute condition of life. As form attempts a
recognition of life, the recognition of nature is more easily
placed with form than with the characteristics of the recognition
itself.

The characteristics of the poet's recognition of life are those
of structure. Structure has been defined as that which gives a
poem its substance and particular character. The structure of a
poem is necessarily closely aligned to its form and in Four Quartets
the alignment is so close as to make separate discussion difficult.

The structure of Four Quartets is the pattern which fulfills the
form. The characteristics of this pattern are given by the title:
the order, harmony, rhythm, and suggestiveness of a formalized
musical composition. While the entire musical significance may be apparent only to a musician, the schematic division of the whole into four parts and each part into five parts, the variations of the second and fourth sections of each quartet, the lyricism of the poem as a whole, and the precision of the vocabulary are obvious to the reader. Mr. Eliot's use of the suggestiveness of music implies a wish to circumvent the rigidity of words in dealing with a subject which can be intimated but which begs a description by words.

The pattern of Four Quartets describes the nature of the incidents which make up Eliot's odyssey. In the discussion of form, the idea of exploration was dealt with as it gave shape and outline to the poem. The nature of the form is the pattern within. It is this that gives the poem its characteristic substance.

The substance of Four Quartets is such as can only be guessed at by following the intimations of the writer, and is more easily described in terms of what it is not, rather than what it is. To again take the example of Homer's odyssey, one finds its substance, structure, or character lie in the particular adventures of the hero. Ulysses' adventures take place in a recognizable geographic and chronological pattern. Eliot's whole effort is to remove the adventures of his hero from the limitations of space and time. However, this effort is occasioned by his belief that if the present reality can only be meaningful in terms of some other
reality, that other reality can only be grasped in the moment that is the present. Moreover, as Dr. Doris Shoukri pointed out in her remarks on the predecessor of this thesis, there is the idea of the redemption of time; that it is not so much that one can only be conscious of time in time, but that one can only regain possession of whatever time is in a moment's awareness.

Four Quartets begins:

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.

[Burnt Norton, I: 1-57]

and concludes:
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. So, while the light fails
On a winter's afternoon, in a secluded chapel
History is now and England.

[Little Gidding V: 232-237]

The idea of redemption implies a thing once possessed. The particular redemption that Eliot speaks of operates only in a moment's consciousness that this moment, so keenly felt, is only a part of
the past and future, and that the past and the future can only be known in this very moment. If such a consciousness is a redemption of something that existed, we must ask when and where it existed. By definition we know its existence cannot be limited to one time or place. A time and place distinguished by such an awareness was in the mind and poem, if not the location and moment of general history, of Homer.

The whole impact of Ulysses' voyage lies essentially in the sense of freedom with which he moves within the stated boundaries of time. The audience knows, and Circe tells Ulysses, that he will get home at the end of ten years. If the point of his journey is to get home, he, like Eliot, acknowledges that to get home will only be to leave again. Eliot writes, not just of the desire to get somewhere in opposition to time, but of the reconciliation of time and action, of past and future:

Here the impossible union
Of spheres of existence is actual,
Here the past and future
Are conquered, and reconciled,
Where action were otherwise movement
Of that which is only moved
And has in it no source of movement—
Driven by daemonic, chthonic
Powers. And right action is freedom
From past and future also.

[The Dry Salvages V. 216-225]
Homer’s *Odyssey* is a frame of reference for an exploration of *Four Quartets* and therefore should be subjected here only to the most general kind of analysis. However, as the *Odyssey* assists understanding of *Four Quartets*, so does that poem illuminate Homer’s. Therefore, I suggest that Ulysses was, indeed, driven by "daemonic, cthonic powers" from the time he left Ithaca until he realized, thanks to Circe, his true condition. The drama of the situation lies in the suggestion of Homer’s presentation. The audience is informed of the course of events; if Ulysses’ behavior in retrospect and at the beginning of the *Odyssey* suggests that he was driven by demonic forces, the reality of this lies in his unawareness and unacceptance of the external forces of life. From the island of Circe on, Ulysses moves to move, not to overcome time but in the knowledge that time is unconquerable. His action is, indeed, that "right action" which "is freedom from past and future always." This is not to say that Eliot is trying to redeem Homer’s time, but only that he is trying to redeem the concept of time which Homer envisioned and articulated in his own particular way. It is, essentially, a conscious awareness of time, and Eliot’s own particular way at articulation is part of the substance of his poem. Where Homer could indicate his concept through his hero’s indifference to time, Eliot can only indicate his by striving for this indifference. The structure of his poem records this striving, not only for indifference to time, but to things and to self.
Each of the four quartets describes, in odyssey form, such an adventure, and, while the pattern-structure is designed to evolve in the realm of imagination, it must start from and return to the actual world.

From the actual rose garden, the hero goes to one of the imagination, where he hopes to re-experience, redeem, his timeless moment. He returns without the experience but with a greater knowledge of the experience because he learns that the willful attempt to go against time into the past is of itself the kind of action which prohibits the experience. *East Coker* is an attempt to leave all desire, all time, all of self, all things. The poet returns without accomplishing his mission because to leave everything would be never to return, and that is the knowledge with which he returns. Rejection must be a way to something and not an end in itself.

To arrive where you are, to get from where you are not,

You must go by a way wherein there is no ecstasy.

*East Coker* III: 136-137

The *Dry Salvages* is an attempt at indifference, neither desiring nor rejecting. The actual structure and imagery is not that of a voyage but that of a participation in the vastness of a sea which is at once real and imaginative. Such indifference does not achieve the goal because, as with desire and rejection, it gets the poet nowhere. If there is a meaning to life, it cannot be in indifference.
to life. One must seize upon life itself and be indifferent to all else. Life may be surrounded by a mystery as unfathomable as the sea; it is at best a journey from birth to death, and meaning and reality can be found only in that journey. It is this knowledge that is recognized by the poet in the wisdom of Krishna.

Not fare well,

But fare forward, voyagers.

[The Dry Salvages III. 169-170]

It is an awareness of time which brings acceptance. Within that acceptance is the only freedom from time and the only field of sensible action.

The pattern of Little Gidding is the return of the hero, but it is a return which is also a beginning. It is at this point that the pattern of the whole poem reveals itself as a dance, one composed of intricate but ordered choreography. There is a stateliness to the over-all tone of the poem which gives a dignity to the dancer hero, a dignity, however, that would be impossible to achieve without the suggested humility of a dancer absorbed in the dance. It images, in its way, the celestial dance of the stars, for there has been movement and yet no movement. The action has been in the imagination and has given the same sense of moving that is felt with a long visual examination of an object.

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.

It is in this measure of Eliot's dance that he meets, with almost
a courtly bow, his partner. If the form of *Four Quartets* is an
odyssey and its structure a pattern of a dance, the imagery should
enhance the imaginative quality of Eliot's particular ideas of the
voyage and the dance. The central image of both ideas is the
voyager, or the dancer, and this is the image met by the reader and
by the hero in *Little Gidding*.

The partner met is the image of the hero. He is at once the
hero and something other. However, as we regard this image, the
same conceptual relationships that have been observed between the
*Odyssey* and *Four Quartets* are again apparent. Ulysses is the image
of a hero, and yet, as we have said, Ulysses is a hero because of
something different and greater than himself—something that lies
in the human imaginative recognition of heroism. Scrutiny of the
image of *Little Gidding* reveals that the poet hero is really an
image of this image, for the stranger is identified as everything
that led to the hero being what he is and what he will be. The
stranger is at once the poet and something undefinably greater. Thus, the stranger is the hero and Eliot his image, for the function and essence of images is that they reflect something the same and yet different and greater. If Eliot is an image, the stranger which he images is also an image and they are both sad images of the accepted hero. It has been said that the odyssey form requires a hero and, therefore, Eliot would not use this form without supplying a hero. There is, furthermore, a suggested quality of heroism in the imagery of the stranger, and I believe that the reader regards this image as heroic. The basis for this regard can only be determined by leveling

That pointed scrutiny with which we challenge

The first-met stranger in the waning dusk

\[ \text{Little Gidding II. 91-92} \]

As with an exploration of form and structure, the scrutiny should reveal not only Eliot's personal concept of life but the consciousness with which he images, in his own creation of meaning, the process of the only creation of meaning.

Appended to this thesis is a particular study of the image of the stranger of \textit{Little Gidding} which identifies him textually with Eliot himself, with Dante, the poet Eliot most admired, and with Ser Brunello, a character from the Inferno. This kind of study is essential to reading imaginative literature according to the theory of this thesis, because it is only by such careful
inspection that one can hope to understand the writer. The results of such a study can, however, never be conclusive because nobody but the writer can know what he wants to say and not even it he can know if he has said/to anyone else. The real value of such a study is the opportunity it offers to participate in the poetic process. This can be suggested by a diagram.

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The process can be outlined:

A. The poet's observation of life transcribed by an image of reality
B. The reader's observation of life brought to the image in new regard
C. The sense of the poet's observation flowing through the reader and into his own observation of life
D. The denial of the image to reflect back to the poet the reality which it meant
The dotted lines indicate:

A. The poet's observation of life transmitted by an image of reality
B. The reader's observation of life brought to the image in his regard
C. The sense of the poet's observation flowing through the reader
   and into his own observation of life
D. The ability of the image to reflect back to the poet the
   reality which it imaged
While the meaning of the image reflects the reality imagined by the poet, it will, as long as it is an image, also demonstrate the process of revealing meaning through images and that the meaning itself lies not in the image but in what is being imaged. Since what is being imaged is beyond imagination, its reality to us can lie only in the process which approaches the unimaginable. At the same time, the process affirms that what is unimaginable has meaning and order, unperceivable in its totality but recognizable in the forms which approach it. The process continues as long as the image images, which is dependent upon the skill and concept of the writer and the receptivity and active capabilities of the reader's imagination. To the extent that this process continues, one is experiencing that extraordinary sensation which asserts meaning and order, not because they are known, but, on the contrary, because they are searched for, suggested by their absolute absence and implied by the idea of their presence. It is in these terms that I would like to discuss imagery and Eliot's image of the stranger.

The poetic process I have attempted to describe is what Charles Williams calls the affirmation of images. It is the writer's skill in making images recognizable to the imagination, both in their apparent and greater reality. An image of heroism must, like Ulysses, be believably real and heroic. However, since reality and heroism
Charles Williams, The figure of Beatrice (London: Faber and Faber, Ltd., 1943)

This affinity is in no way a denial of the poetic process. It is, rather, as has been suggested, a transcendence confirmation of that process, for Ulysses is neither completely real nor completely unreal and is constantly both. His heroism is neither completely in his actions nor in some external concept of heroism but is eternally in both.

As the timeless world and landscape of Homer have been lost to and by humanity, so, too, has the clarity of imagination which can recognize the images proper to such a world. This clarity exists, however, in Homer today and in the minds of poets today, but, having been lost, it, too, must be redeemed. This pure imagination is the quality of Mr. Eliot’s timeless moment, and he attempts to redeem it through his affirmation of images.

That the poet is an image of an image is Eliot’s affirmation. He is what he is, an image of all that has created him, which is itself an image of creation. The shadowy figure of the stranger has no meaning except in terms of time and experience past, present, and future. He is an image of the imagination.
are intangible concepts, this image must constantly reflect their intangibility. If the image becomes an absolute in itself, then it is no longer an image. Whatever it was imaging becomes non-existent and meaning is thus not only denied to the image but is itself denied. The affinity of Ulysses, the image, and the things he imaged in *The Odyssey* have already been remarked on. This affinity is in no way a denial of the poetic process. It is, rather, as has been suggested, a tremendous confirmation of that process, for Ulysses is neither completely real nor completely unreal and is constantly both. His heroism is neither completely in his actions nor in some external concept of heroism but is eternally in both.

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Time and imagination have no meaning except through the creation of their images, and, while these images may only have meaning because of what they image, their creation, the creation of images, holds the only meaning we can know. That is Eliot's affirmation of images; that images constantly reflect the great unknowable of life but in their creation they prove that something can be made of nothing, that while we know nothing of creation it exists. In its existence lies the only meaning which is emphasized by death.

How can an image of creation be heroic? He has no control over his condition, he cannot triumph over being born and dying, and yet there is an air of triumph about the image of the stranger. As Ulysses found freedom from time by accepting it, so the stranger, being dead and yet alive, effects the only possible triumph.

The moment of the rose and the moment of the yew-tree are of equal duration [Little Gidding IV. 232-233]
(And the time of death is every moment) [The Dry Salvages III. 159]

It is obvious again that this image is heroic in the eyes of the writer, and in our eyes, because, like Ulysses, he has done the only thing possible. He has lived and he has striven to make the best of an impossible situation. This image of creation and of imagination is an image of the creative imagination. The
effort of the creative imagination has been forever to create meaning out of nothing. If Eliot is paying tribute to his own creative imagination, he is doing so with the understanding that his is but an image of one such as Dante's, and all human creative imagination is but an image of a greater creative imagination which makes itself felt through the imaginative powers of poets and people.

The form of *Four Quartets* has been seen to be that of an *Odyssey*, the structure a musical pattern which leads the hero-poet through intricate imaginative experiences back to the present moment of *Little Gidding* and the imagery, as represented by the stranger, has revealed Eliot's particular concept of creative imagination.

The *Odyssey* form has been understood as appropriate to the exposition of the personal search of the poet, and also, by its nature, suggestive of the conclusions of the poet. I would go further and say that, in fact, the conclusions of the poet are appropriate to the *Odyssey* form. The ultimate meaning of *The Odyssey* is, I believe, that this voyage was the condition of Ulysses' life, and the ultimate meaning of *Four Quartets* is not the personal discovery of the poet so much as it is a recognition that life is a condition un-understandable except in the intangible terms which speak only through the imagination.
The substantive shape of Mr. Eliot's individual ideas are equally suitable to arrangement in the dance pattern of the poem. Taken separately, they are indeed steps in the dance of life; as a whole, they arrange themselves in such a way as to offer the experience of harmony and order that are recognized in the sense of their absence as well as their presence.

Mr. Eliot's refusal to limit his images, his recording of the eternal ability of images to reflect meaning makes his poem an affirmation of the meaning of the imaginative process.

If this analysis is true, those lines near the end of Little Gidding which describe, with as much exactitude as possible, Mr. Eliot's personal vision must be understandable in the same terms. It has already been said that they are intellectually understandable in the terms of the poet. Do they intimate something beyond his understanding?

The only hope, or else despair

Lies in the choice of pyre or pyre—

To be redeemed from fire by fire.

Who then devised the torment? Love.

Love is the unfamiliar Name

Behind the hands that wove

The intolerable shirt of flame
Which human power cannot remove.

We only live, only suspire

Consumed by either fire or fire.

[Little Gidding IV. 204-213]

The condition described, while it has connotations that go beyond, is the condition of the odyssey. It is a statement that one will die in the attempt of the journey which is life. The only hope is that the journey will have some meaning greater than life. The meaning greater than life is death. There is a suggestion, but only a suggestion, in the apparent reality of this situation that there is a greater reality whose meaning is found both in life and in death but whose totality is different and greater than either.

The explanation of this condition is in the form of the condition itself, a paradox, a riddle answering a riddle. The structure of the paradox is composed of conflicting ideas: Love... devised...torment; unfamiliar Name, a shirt that cannot be taken off, life-death, fire or fire. The imagery is vivid and suggestive in its impossibility: hands weaving a flaming shirt; who could devise such a torment as the poet has described in the entirety of the poem? The question, conflict, and impossibility are resolved only by the paradox that if they exist there must be the resolution of their opposite. If the poet names the resolution "Love," we can appreciate that he is not the first to do so, but we cannot
say he has answered the question or confined meaning to one image. What is love? Something known enough to be sought after, known more in its absence than in its presence, and in both its absence and presence experienced with a sense of meaning, order, and harmony. If love is more than this to Mr. Eliot, it is because he has approached it, in imagination, to this point of precise articulation. The extent of his understanding clearly indicates the enormity of what is still to be understood.

In the introduction, it was said that the reader of imaginative fiction was faced with a search that had three goals, the exact meaning of the writer, the conceptual meaning of the writer, and the imaginative meaning of that concept. I have attempted to show that the techniques of form, structure, and imagery also work on three levels, their exact meaning to the writer, their meaning to his concept of life, and the imaginative meaning of their very nature. There is in this idea of three a form which has been suggestive of meaning throughout history. It is the idea of the Trinity and the Incarnation of which Mr. Eliot writes:

The hint half guessed, the gift half understood, is Incarnation.

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

[The Dry Salvages V. 214-219]
This form represents something in man which is imagined and named by man to represent something beyond—nameless, unimaginable, and yet its existence is the only possible reason for man's instinct and desire to name it. There is, so far, only one thing in the experience and imagination of man that can make sense of this form; love is the only possible explanation.

The form can be applied to any aspect of human endeavor: intellect and imagination = ?, intellect and action = ?, desire and imagination = ?. The resolution of these variables must be in each case something containing the two but greater and different than either, and love is the only known quality which can make the equation sensible.

The Christian religion is probably the most precise articulation of this form and quality. In its precision lies both its failure and success. One may criticize someone like T. S. Eliot for maintaining the validity of certain images for something with which he, in fact, endows these images. Such criticism is unrealistic for it implies at once a belief in the equation but denies the only possible way such an equation can function. If T. S. Eliot endows the images of the Incarnation with love, one must seek the source of that endowment.

The experience and meaning of Four Quartets lies ultimately in the recognition of this search. To gain this, the reader must
determine Eliot's particular exploration and conclusion, and the
most logical way to do this is in the terms in which he conducts
them—of form, structure, and imagery. For the reader to stop at
Eliot's conclusion is, however, to miss the essence of imaginative
literature, and, in defining his own conclusions, Mr. Eliot most
clearly indicates his conscious awareness of this paradox, which
is both a question and the answer to the search for meaning.

... And what you thought you came for
Is only a shell, a husk of meaning

. . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .

If you came this way,
Taking any route, starting from anywhere,
At any time or at any season,
It would always be the same: you would have to put off
Sense and notion. You are not here to verify,
Instruct yourself, or inform curiosity
Or carry report.

Little Gidding I. 31-45

There is, it seems to us,

At best only a limited value
In the knowledge derived from experience.

The particular knowledge gained from the experience
of others
The knowledge imposes a pattern, and falsifies,
For the pattern is new in every moment
And every moment is a new and shocking
Valuation of all we have been.

[East Coker II. 81-89]

We cannot revive old factions
We cannot restore old policies
Or follow an antique drum.

[Little Gidding III. 186-188]

The exploration of life is the thing, and, if the only terms that make the search sensible are those of love, then one must search for love. If love does not make sense of the condition of life, then one must search for something else. The commitment to the demands of exploration require the disposition of everything unnecessary to the voyage. This commitment is greater than most care to make. It is

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

[Little Gidding V. 253-254]

The poets are among the great explorers, and, for the many that remain behind, their work offers the only opportunity to hear of the great exploration and to, at least in the imagination, have a sense of participation.
The Stranger in Little Gidding

Four Quartets reveals that, for Mr. Eliot, the whole reality of life is, in effect, a kind of conundrum: a riddle of what is apparent which can only be solved in terms of the riddle of what is not apparent. The adequacy of poetry lies in the ability of the poet's creative imagination to reveal the meaning in which they were conceived. Little Gidding provides an opportunity to determine how Mr. Eliot's imagery reflects his concept of the riddle of life. The image of the mysterious stranger in part II is a precise articulation of the characteristics found throughout the imagery of Four Quartets. The precision is at once observable but has the paradoxical nature of ambiguity. Its presence puzzles, and indicates a solution but it perplexes through its exactness and suggests by its mystery.

On the very first level, the image puzzles by its literary connotations and by its implicated identity as being certainly one and certainly more than one. The literary connotations, while probably not necessary to the imaginative recognition of the stranger were included because Mr. Eliot felt they established the identity of his compound ghost. It is, therefore, reasonable to penetrate, as far as possible, these connotations. The literary identity should provide a contrast with the other elements of the compound ghost.
Reading in Eliot's critical essays affords an immediate identification of the dead master as a compound of Shakespeare and Dante, who are themselves compounds—Holinsted and Virgil. And all poets, before and after Shakespeare and Dante, trace their source to Homer, who "died quiet and blind" [III: 179], and whose own source lies behind the curtain of articulated literature in the mysterious first world of our existence.

The generality of this compound ghost must be imaged with some precision to make it intelligible. There is a very direct comparison between this image and that of Ser Brunetto in Circle VI, Ring III, of Dante's Inferno. Since Eliot has said that of all poets Dante is the most meaningful to him, it is appropriate that Eliot's image should resemble one of Dante's. Eliot has indicated that the stranger, "Both intimate and unidentifiable," is also himself;

So I assumed a double part, and cried
And heard another's voice cry: 'What! are you here?'

Although we were not.

It is necessary, therefore, to see what similarity Eliot perceives in his own condition, the condition of The Poet and that of Brunetto, a damned soul in that part of hell reserved for the violent against Nature. The situation is described:

Between three districts whence the smoke arose
On the edge of Circle VII, Virgil explains to Dante the arrangement of hell. There are three circles between them and the pit of hell:

... of those three circles, all the first
Holds violent men; but as threefold may be
Their victims, in three rings they are dispersed

So the third ring sets its seal on double shame
Of Sodom and of Cahors, and on the speech
Of the froward heart, dishonouring God's great name.

It is in the third ring of the first of the last three circles that Eliot finds himself. In this ring, the violence against Nature is the final compound of violence against three victims—self, neighbor, and God. There is no need to linger over the implication of Sodomy—it is an imagery of the defamation of the natural universe and our concern is to discover the reality imaged and not to make of the image a thing in itself. Eliot explains precisely the reality he conceives of as being imaged by the three rings:

There are three conditions which often look alike
Yet differ completely, flourish in the same hedgerow.
Attachment to self and to things and to persons, detachment
From self and from things and from people; and, growing
between them indifference.

Attachment to self, things, and people is violence against nature:
against the inherent nature of the three and against the order
of a natural universe which is universal rather than personal. 

_East Coker_ was an attempt to reject this attachment but it proved in itself a violence, for it rejected all the things which, in a natural universe, have a rightful place. It was primarily the violence against others of the first ring because it denied their participation in the natural universe. The poet realized that rejection was, for him, no solution; he must accept himself and things and persons but change his attitude toward them.

_The Dry Salvages_ was his attempt to change his attitude but it proved to be the second ring of violence against self. The great indifference of that experience denied the participation of self, as well as of others, in any meaningful experience of life.

_Little Gidding_ is the experience of the third ring: violence against God. It is a detachment from self, persons, and things which begins in the violence of hell, for absolute detachment is a condition of solitude that nullifies everything. Rejection denied a meaning to things, indifference a meaning to self, and detachment denied a meaning to meaning. It is in this kind of hell that Eliot meets himself. In his recognition of self, he recognizes the others who have made him what he is and with this recognition is the awareness that, as he is, the violence will repeat itself, against all the things of the natural universe:

... offering no promise

But bitter tastelessness of shadow fruit
and against himself:

... conscious impotence of rage
At human folly, and the laceration
Of laughter at what ceases to amuse
and against self, others, and the image of the only possible mean-
ing to life, God.

... rending pain of re-enactment
Of all that you have done, and been, the shame
Of motives late revealed, and the awareness
Of things ill done and done to others' harm.

This recognition is, however, as positive as it is negative, for Eliot is there and he is all the things that he is. If the only thing that can give this existence meaning is Love, as imaged by God, then that meaning also exists if it is affirmed. In the third ring of violence and detachment, the poet affirms an attach-
ment to love. The attachment to love requires rejection of all else, indifference to self, detachment from all else, but love makes all else meaningful. For Eliot, prayer is communion with Love and the reality of the struggle is to see, and to write:

With the drawing of this Love and the voice of this

Calling.

The literary connotations of the image of the stranger are seen to be very helpful in solving the problem posed by his presence. The information granted by knowledge of the literary
heritage of the image an, however, be appreciated without that knowledge. The image speaks clearly to the imagination that is fully receptive. It is one of Mr. Eliot's characteristics to realize the possibilities of imagination while acknowledging the limitations of his own, and others' imaginative perception. That desire for knowledge distorts the receptive imagination is the irony of the human condition imaged by The Fall and compounded by the realization that only by the perfection of that desire can the power of the imagination be restored. Mr. Eliot writes to, and out of, the human condition

By the purification of the motive

In the ground of our beseeching.

The image of the stranger is that of the poet who is Eliot, and of the compound of poets from whom Eliot germinated. The condition in which this image finds itself is that of Eliot and of all poets who attempt to wrest meaning from the inexorability of life. It is a hell of their own making, which is distinguishable from the condition imposed by the inexorability of life on all life only by the struggle which created it and the poet's awareness of its existence. The distinguishing quality is what affords the heroic tone which is heard before, and after, it faded on the blowing of the horn

Eliot's imaging of the stranger is such that his concept of himself is understood to be that he actually is an image of the
stranger, who has, in fact, many other images. The stranger himself is an image of man against nature, poetry against chaos; it is for the bravery and dignity and beauty perceptible in that imagery that Eliot sounds his horn.

"Dante and Shakespeare divide the modern world between them there is no third." Eliot, Dante, p. 16.

Eliot's poetry is full of phrases suggestive of another poet's work. Mr. Eliot's intent is obviously to use the emotions and ideas of these poets in a context of his own, not to change these ideas or emotions, but to add them to the experience of his own. When identification of these phrases can be made, it is helpful to the experience of Eliot's poem. It was Mr. Eliot's design that this be true and, therefore, if such identification is plausible, the pressure is toward acceptance rather than doubt. The phrases from Dante are from Dorothy Rayner's translation. Dante, Alighieri. The Comedy of Dante Alighieri, Garden J. Hall. Trans. Dorothy Rayner (Baltimore: Sagae Books, 1961). Phrases taken from context of a poem often fail to maintain their meaning unless they remind of the experience of the particular part of the poem from whence they come. Furthermore, experiences vary. The following list is, therefore, purely academic and can indicate little but a personal identification.
FOOTNOTES

1/ T. S. Eliot, Dante (London: Faber and Faber, 1965); The Sacred Wood (London: Faber and Faber, 1966); The Use of Poetry and The Use of Criticism (London: Faber and Faber, 1933).

2/ "Dante and Shakespeare divide the modern world between them; there is no third." Eliot, Dante, p. 46.

3/ Eliot's poetry is full of phrases suggestive of another poet's work. Mr. Eliot's intent is obviously to use the emotions and ideas of those poets in a context of his own, not to change those ideas or emotions, but to add them to the experience of his own. When identification of those phrases can be made, it is helpful to the experience of Eliot's poem. It was Mr. Eliot's design that this be true and, therefore, if such identification is plausible, the pressure is toward acceptance rather than doubt. The phrases from Dante are from Dorothy Sayers' translation.

Dante, Alighieri. The Comedy of Dante Alighieri, Cantica I, Hell. Trans. Dorothy Sayers (Baltimore: Penguine Books, 1967). Phrases taken from context of a poem often fail to maintain their meaning unless they remind of the experience of the particular part of the poem from whence they came. Furthermore, experiences vary. The following list is, therefore, purely academic and can indicate little but a personal identification.
ELIOT

While the dead leaves still rattled
As if blown toward me like the metal leaves

DANTE

And as, by one and one, leaves drift away
In autumn, till the bough from which they fall
Sees the earth in all its brave array,
So from the bank there, one by one,
Drop all Adam's ill seed [III: 112-115]

There are obvious differences: blown-drift, but one phrase is suggestive of the other in atmosphere.

Episode of Eliot's Stranger

That pointed scrutiny with which we challenge
The first-met stranger in the waning dusk

Episode of Ser Brunetto

... who eyed us much as passers-by eye one another when the daylight fades. [XV: 17-18]

Same scrutiny but Eliot's confrontation is at dawn, after a night of hell; Dante's is at dusk, before that long night.

ELIOT

... brown baked features

... What! Are you here?

He left me with a kind of valediction
And faded on the blowing horn

DANTE

... his scorched face...

... shriveled skin and features scarred

What, you here, Ser Brunetto, you?

Then he turned round
And seemed like one of those who over the flat
And open course in the fields beside Verona
Run for the green cloth; and he seemed at that
Not like a loser, but the winning runner [XV: 121-124]

"One does not need to know anything about the race for the roll of green cloth, to be hit by these lines; and in making Brunetto so fallen, run like the winner, a quality is given to the punishment which belongs only to the greatest poetry." Eliot, Dante, p. 21
ELIOT

"... last season's fruit is eaten
And the fullfed beast shall kick
the empty pail."

DANTE

"... For where the bitter sloes are
rooted
Is no fit orchard for the sweet fig-tree
[XX: 65-66]

Let Miozole's wild beast scratch up
their sour [XX: 73]

4/ "If I ask myself ... why I prefer the poetry of Dante to that
of Shakespeare, I should have to say, because it seems to me to illustrate
a saner attitude toward the mystery of life." Eliot, The Sacred Wood, p. X.


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