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NEGATION IN T. S. ELIOT'S FOUR QUARTETS

By

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ABSTRACT

The idea of negation is such a pervasive one that we are likely to take it for granted. It is only when it is isolated in a work of art that we begin to grasp its depth and reach. T. S. Eliot does this in his last and longest poem, the Four Quartets. Not only is negation a major theme in the poem, but it is also an influence upon the poetic theory in the poem and the artifact of the poem itself.

In Chapter One, I examine briefly the dimensions and the implications of negation, and provide a profile of the tradition of the negative way, a Christian technique of transcendence. The negative way, we find, is intimately related to a poetic way, a linguistic way, an ethical way, a cognitive way, a psychological way and a metaphysical way.

Chapter Two brings the discussion to the Four Quartets, and traces the exposition and development of the negative way in the first quartet, Burnt Norton. Here we will see how Eliot makes use of and departs from the tradition, in terms of, for example, a dialectic operating within the negative way. If Burnt Norton is the most extreme expression of the negative way, the second quartet, East Coker, is a close rival, and Chapter Three looks at the theme as it appears here, and considers the relation between the negative way and the poetic way, which is the theory of aesthetics as it is revealed in the poem (abetted by readings in Eliot's essays).

The concluding chapter deals with the two final quartets, The Dry Salvages and Little Gidding, together, for we find that they are in a certain way less negative than the former two, while they still maintain the theological and spiritual values of Burnt Norton and East Coker. In the final movements of the poem we are told that the via negativa is also a via dolorosa, an association implied from the beginning. Each chapter is a close examination of its respective quartet(s), and therefore the concluding remarks of the thesis attempt to gain a perspective on the poem as a whole.

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Chapter One

The principle of negation operates throughout T. S. Eliot's final poem, the Four Quartets. Its most accessible articulation is the theme of the negative way, which is the central dynamic of the Christian mystical tradition. The negative way is a process of purification through denial and suffering, and it forms a major theme in the first two quartets, Burnt Norton and East Coker. However, in the latter two quartets, The Dry Salvages and Little Gidding, the focus becomes less negative and a balance is found between denial and action. The concern of this thesis is negation, and accordingly the bulk of it will deal with Burnt Norton and East Coker.

Negation also has aesthetic implications: the negative way is similar to the poetic way as it is described in the poem. Both processes are explorative and seek to put into words and make known that which is just beyond comprehension. The negative way is not just negative, therefore: it not only is a denial of the value of the world, but it is also positive in that it has the creative dimension of exploration allied with it. The creative and explorative aspect of negation thus also influences the style and the structure of the poem itself. On this level of the poem an attitude of humility is developed, as the poet seeks to speak precisely of his own feelings and of the relationship to the divinity.

The theme of negation in the Four Quartets is broader than the Christian via negativa which it incorporates.

In the poem it is revealed to be a comprehensive and catholic approach to life, one which is so inclusive that it contains elements of Pre-Socratic philosophy and Buddhism within it.

Negation is, as Paul Ricoeur notes in his study on Freud's article on negation, a cognitive function: "consciousness implies negation--both in the process of 'achieving insight' into its own hidden richness and in the 'recognition' of what is real" (317). The consciousness, through the agency of negation, is able to explore both the inner world and the outer world: it is a process of learning, and when this process is refined into a technique through the use of exclusion, detachment, denial and contrast, for example, it is known as the "negative way." It is important to keep in mind that this cognitive technique is a process, as the term "way" implies. "Way" suggests, on the literal level, both movement and direction, and on the figurative level, a refining process or distillation, and it therefore provides the context in which cognition will occur: however, by providing a context it denies its claim to catholicity, for it rests upon the assumption that there is a "way" to "somewhere." The questing consciousness, embarked on the negative way, travels along both the psychological way (inner reality) and the metaphysical way (outer reality) to an unspecified end. This is the central paradox of the negative way, that

the consciousness, through exploration of itself, will discover an ordering principle that has its origin beyond itself. Along the negative way, this ordering principle, or absolute, is approached through an act of transcendence, which permits the recognition of the divine immanence within the individual, and this, we will see, has implications for Eliot's theory of poetics.

The underlying premise of the negative way is a dualism which posits that beyond material reality there exists an immaterial supraréality. Both are independent of each other and mutually exclusive, but it is within the capacity of the trained consciousness to transcend the mundane for the supraréal. This transcendent act is never completed, however, for it is by definition beyond human capacity. As George Steiner observes

It is just because we can go no further, because speech so marvellously fails us, that we experience the certitude of a divine meaning surpassing and enfolding ours. (39)

From a linguistic point of view, the limitations of language are the cause of our dissatisfaction with language, and our consequent search for a meaning that lies beyond language. The mechanism of transcendence is essentially a rejection and denial of all that is limited and mundane; the underlying impulse of the negative way is a profound dissatisfaction with material reality. In his essay "The Idea of 'Nothing'," Henri Bergson declares that "there is no absolute void in

nature" (305), both within and without the consciousness. The negative way is a statement of longing for such an absolute void. Bergson clarifies:

The conception of a void arises when consciousness, lagging behind itself, remains attached to the recollection of an old state when another state is already present. It is only a comparison between what is and what could or ought to be, between the full and the full. In a word, whether it be a void of matter or a void of consciousness, the representation of the void is always a representation which is full and which resolves itself on analysis into two positive elements: the idea, distinct or confused, of a substitution, and the feeling, experienced or imagined, of a desire or regret.

(307-08)

Bergson says that, from a psychological view, the void that the consciousness seeks is actually a condition that can only be full, and it is full rather of a longing for something other than that which is. It represents a condition of nostalgia for an idea of a previous satisfaction and fulfilment. The Four Quartets is an expression of such a longing, a longing for that which was lost by the "ruined millionaire" (Adam) who bit the "bitter apple," and a longing for that which will come, "When the tongues of flame are in-folded / Into the crowned knot of fire / And the fire and the rose are one." Ironically, the Quartets seeks to repress all desire, but

the desire for a fulfilment which temporal existence cannot provide is the strongest motivating force in the poem.

The distinction is signalled by the first fragment from Heraclitus that serves as an epigraph to Burnt Norton:

"Though the law of things is universal in scope, the average man makes up the rules for himself" (Smith 255). What is contrasted is a man-centered universe and a God-centered universe, which is the difference between a secular, humanistic society that views psychology as its foundation for knowing about the world, and a religious perspective that sees God as being the foundation for human existence. While the fragment is imperative in that God-centered reality is the "true reality," it is also an implicit demand that the individual transcend this man-centeredness for God-centeredness. As J. Hillis Miller says, the choice is either God or eventual nihilism:

When God and the creation become objects of consciousness, man becomes a nihilist. Nihilism is the nothingness of consciousness when consciousness becomes the foundation of everything. (3)

The negative way is precisely that attempt to prevent God from becoming an object of consciousness, for negation is a postponement of an ultimate affirmation. As Bergson noted, "the negation of a thing implies the latent affirmation of its replacement by something else" (321): the negative way seeks to postpone that affirmation until the temporal and spatial status of the soul changes (i.e. death). Rather it

attempts to deny consciousness insofar as is possible, thus allowing for an infusion of God-centeredness. Note the irony of Miller's comment, for the consciousness is annihilated if it does not have an absolute reference to anchor it. The negative way is a method of deliberate annihilation.

The negative way is thus the method for the attempted integration of individual consciousness and God. By making God simply an object of consciousness, the integration between the two becomes impossible. Thus, strictly speaking, the negative way is not a theology, for theology is "language about God," and by speaking about God, God becomes an object of consciousness. As E. J. Tinsley notes,

In essence the via negativa is a way of using language about God which keeps constantly before the attention of its user the fact that human language is hopelessly inadequate to use of the ineffable God. The method begins by trying to reduce, as far as possible, the effects of the necessarily anthropomorphic character of human theological language. . . . The via negativa is therefore a method of theological speech which is a constant reminder that speech originated and developed to deal with human relationships and is not equipped to deal adequately with the divine human encounter. (596-97)

Therefore, the negative way is a cognitive technique, not to gain knowledge about God, but to learn what is not God. By

gaining knowledge of what is not God, the individual consciousness learns what it must deny or negate, thus allowing for what theologians call "infused contemplation," which is a wordless integration with God. Integration occurs after the movement towards God along, as Eliot calls it, the "way of ignorance."

The "way of ignorance" is the attempt to deny consciousness, for disintegration results, not only because the divinity becomes an object of consciousness, but also because consciousness itself is a product of the dualism that divides reality into subject and object. Hence the negative way is also a way of denial, for all things that stand as objects to the subjective consciousness are denied: the material world is thus the object that must be denied. By denying the world, consciousness is denied, and thus integration with the divinity is effected. The consciousness proceeding along the negative way attempts to expand infinitely to the point that it encompasses God. As Miller expresses it,

If the separate ego could bring itself to sacrifice its centrality it might dissolve the walls of its prison and find itself in possession of a universal kingdom of subjectivity, a kingdom as wide as all time and space. The self by abnegating itself might achieve that all-inclusiveness it seeks. (156).

Thus the separate consciousness hopes to overcome his individual subjectivity by expanding to the point that

everything is included within it. From a psychological point of view, what would appear to be an act of supreme humility (self-surrender), is really an act of pride (self-exaltation).

Material reality is seen by the negative theologians as the culprit for the suffering consciousness, for it is the object of our perceptions. "I" and "It" form two polarities, and by denying the perception and involvement in "it," the "I" can thus be integrated with God. The subject/object dualism is reflected in negative theology by the duality of the Creator/creation. The Creator is a Pascalian deus absconditus, and creation does not lead toward the Creator but away from him. God is understood as being totally "other," apart and distinct from creation. Only by denying creation, can God be approached. The inverse of this system is the via positiva, which posits that God can be approached through creation: God is at the apex of the great chain of being, and is thus accessible to man. God is immanent in creation, and creation acts as a pointer towards God. Eliot, however, rejected this cataphatic theology (as it is called-- [Webb 20]), in favour of the apophatic (negative). We see this wholesale rejection in a passage from Murder in the Cathedral:

The natural vigour in the venial sin
Is the way in which our lives begin.
Thirty years ago, I searched all the ways
That lead to pleasure, advancement and praise.
Delight in sense, in learning and in thought

Music and philosophy, curiosity,
 The purple bullfinch in the lilac tree,
 The tiltyard skill, the strategy of chess,
 Love in the garden, singing to the instrument,
 Were all things equally desirable.
 Ambition comes when early force is spent
 And when we find no longer all things possible.
 Ambition comes behind and unobservable.
 Sin grows with doing good. (CPP 258)

Becket denies the value of both creation and of those parts of the consciousness that delight in creation. We learn from the final remark, "Sin grows with doing good," that the negative way is also an ethical way. The negative way is a questioning of motive; it is not enough to do the right deed, but one must also do it for the right reason, and this is the last and most difficult of Becket's four temptations. Becket elaborates on this central denial:

A martyrdom is always the design of God, for His love of men, to warn them and to lead them, to bring them back to His ways. It is never the design of man; for the true martyr is he who has become the instrument of God, who has lost his will in the will of God, and who no longer desires anything for himself, not even the glory of being a martyr.
 (CPP 261)

The central negation is the surrender of the individual will (man-centered) to the will of God (God-centered). This is

achieved through a continuous purification of motive, as Eliot declares in Little Gidding III ("And all shall be well and / All manner of thing shall be well / By the purification of the motive / In the ground of our beseeching"). This purification is affected by rigorous contemplation. The individual attempts to find out the will of God, and to act in accordance with it; however, from a psychological standpoint, what the individual chooses to construe as the will of God is up to him. The negative way is also, therefore, a way of self-examination, atonement and purification, an ethical way in which the difference between right and wrong, as revealed by Becket's fourth temptation, becomes increasingly subtle and difficult to distinguish.

The negative way, we see, is a psychological way, a metaphysical way and an ethical way. While Eliot makes much use of the Christian tradition of negative theology, his negative way seeks to be more inclusive and all-encompassing. Efforts like those of Sister Corona Sharp to apply the system of the negative way as expounded by St. John of the Cross in a most literal fashion (each movement represents a stage along John's mystical way for her) are naive. Eliot intended no such formal exposition of the doctrine of the negative way in the Four Quartets. The Quartets do not follow a pattern of purgation, illumination and union, which are the three stages of the negative way according to the tradition, as such: they are not present in the poem in a systematic or formal way. Rather the spirit of negation imbues the whole

poem. Burnt Norton and East Coker are more severely negative, and deal more with the negative way, while The Dry Salvages and Little Gidding, though still very negative, are not so concerned with the negative way. They are introspective and self-absorbed, while the latter two are more concerned with history and place, society and action. Eliot himself appears to have been proceeding along a negative way, one which got, if not brighter, at least less bleak by the end of the Quartets. It is precisely because the Quartets are not just a doctrinal tract upon the negative way, because we feel that they are more vital and that they have the flavour of a lived experience, that we can see its implications for his poetics. While the Quartets are didactic, they are also explorative, and it is this explorative quality that best defines the poetics as outlined in the poem.

That the Quartets are didactic is borne out by the inherent negativity of the poems. As Bergson points out, negation is not only an expression of dissatisfaction but is also a moral judgement: "An affirmative proposition expresses a judgement on an object; a negative proposition expresses a judgement on a judgement" (313). This "affirmation of the second degree," as Bergson calls negation, is of an essentially didactic nature:

When we deny, we give a lesson to others, or it may be to ourselves. . . . He was affirming something: we tell him he ought to affirm some-

thing else (though without specifying the affirmation which must be substituted). . . .

It is of a pedagogical and social nature. (313-14)

As suggested, the Quartets are not just didactic, but are also explorative. What they are attempting to do is find the proper attitude or posture before God. As Martin Buber said, "the Being that is directly, most nearly, and lastingly, over against us, that may properly only be addressed, not expressed [is God]" (qtd. in Hepburn 27): if it is impossible to talk about God, which is the central premise of the negative way, then it is only possible to "address" or talk to God, to indicate to him that one is receptive. This can only occur if the aspirant is "pure" enough, and purity is effected through the negative way. The three stages of the negative way--purgation, illumination and union--are operative in the poem in a modified manner. Purgation is dialectical, with thesis and anti-thesis being thought and action. Disciplined thought, which is an introspective self-examination, yields that which must be purged. Then, through an act of the will (action) the individual denies that element: with this new awareness, that purgation yields, he then proceeds with more self-examination. This is a continuous process, and occasionally, at the divinity's initiative, the aspirant receives illumination. The individual is "cleansed" sufficiently of mortal imperfections to allow the divinity to approach. Eliot circumvents the usual rapturous hyperbole that

describes the third stage, union with God, by postponing this union to a point outside of the framework of the poem, and this greatly decreases its mystical flavour. What concerns the poet most in this regard, is creating a state of grace, developing the proper attitude toward the divinity. The poet, the consciousness within the poem, labours toward this state, which is marked by an even and controlled tone, rather than ecstatic meanderings. The controlled tone of the poem, which never falls too deeply nor soars too high, is a reflection of this properly disciplined attitude. The poet is less concerned with union than with communication. The poem, in this sense, is a prayer, anguished, thoughtful, beseeching and explorative. The poem, like the negative way itself, is experiential: apophaticism is not "talk about God" but is an attempt to approach God, to experience God, and this is the affirmation that negation is a postponement of. The poem is not, for Eliot, to be valued for itself ("The poetry does not matter") but for what it is doing, and what it does is try to approach God. Because language objectifies, both the negative way and the Four Quartets leave words behind at some point, in order to experience this integration. As Eliot says in his essay "Poetry and Drama"

. . . it is ultimately the function of art, in imposing a credible order upon ordinary reality, and thereby eliciting some perception of an order in reality, to bring us to a condition of

serenity, stillness, and reconciliation; and then leave us, as Virgil left Dante, to proceed toward a region where that guide can avail us no farther. (OPP 94)

Art is responsible for bringing the individual from his man-centered universe ("ordinary reality") to a God-centered universe ("order in reality"). Like the negative way, it brings us to a state of grace ("serenity, stillness, and reconciliation"), and must then leave us, as we pass from thinking and talking about God to experiencing God.

Before proceeding to examine how Eliot uses the theme of the negative way in the Four Quartets, a brief look at the tradition would be helpful here. Most studies of the negative, or apophatic, way trace its origins to Platonic thought, which separated "reality" into the material and the immaterial. The dualism is represented best in the famous cave analogy in the Republic, in which man in the cave can only see the shadows from the outside playing on the gloom at the back of the cave: the immaterial reality is, therefore, the true reality. The Platonic God is the "simple transcendent Reality of absolute perfection which is the ultimate cause and explanation of the universe" (Armstrong qtd. in Spencer 135). God is the "ideal form of the Good" which is "'beyond being, surpassing it in dignity and power'" (Louth 12). The Good is beyond knowing, but the soul, through "intellectual discipline and inquiry" (Spencer 134) is capable of touching it or of being united

with it (Louth 13). Therefore, beginning with Plato, we can see a theory of a transcendent divinity developing, whose integral features are its complete otherness and unknowability (Louth 13), but who is also capable of being experienced in some way.

Philo is regarded by some to be the "Father of negative theology" (Louth 19), and his significance lies in his distinction between God being "'unknown in Himself, but known in His activities'" (Louth 19). The pattern of existence is the proof of God, and it is through contemplation of the pattern that the soul rises in union with God (Spencer 137). However, Philo thought that the individual had responsibilities not only to God but also to society, and he therefore balances the demands of society (a theme of increasing importance in the latter quartets) with that of the soul: after the first are met, then the soul may seek "'God for himself alone'" (Louth 29). This involves negation of self and creation: "'He who has completely understood himself renounces himself completely, when he has seen the nothingness of all that is created'" (Spencer 139). For Philo, creation becomes a barrier to the union with God: the divine pattern in creation points the contemplative toward the divinity, but then he must transcend the actual material nature of creation to reach union. It is also with Philo that we see the first mention of God as being represented as darkness, an image which recurs continually in the Quartets. He says, "'So see him enter

into the thick darkness where God was, that is, into the innermost sanctuary'" (Louth 32). Darkness will come to symbolize for later theologians the otherness of God.

Plotinus, the founder of Neoplatonism, develops the notion of the otherness of God: He is "perfect, remote, aloof," and has "no relationship with finite, mortal existents" (Maio 32). Paradoxically, however, the "One" is also found within: with Plotinus transcendence and immanence are not opposed. The One is "'above reason, mind, and feeling,'" "'beyond all statement,'" and comprises a nature of which "'nothing can be affirmed'" (Spencer 160); it is also "'within, at the innermost depth'" (Spencer 167). "For Plotinus," Louth declares, "the higher is not the more remote; the higher is the more inward: one climbs up by climbing in, as it were" (40). Transcendence is achieved therefore through withdrawal from the world and a concentration on the One within (Louth 45). Plotinus describes the soul as being engaged in "'the flight of the alone to the Alone'--when the soul 'has in perfect stillness attained isolation'" (Spencer 167). Eliot also uses the idea of stillness to represent the divinity in the Quartets.

Another aspect of Plotinus' philosophy that has made it influential among later Christian thinkers is the methodology of the negative way. It is essentially a "way" of "Katharsis," or purification. "The purpose of the way," as Louth states, "is to achieve simplicity, and the means is purification" (44), and this purpose is fulfilled in

Little Gidding, for the "condition of complete simplicity" is achieved through the "purification of motive." It is through both moral and intellectual purification that the soul reaches this state of simplicity: the former provides the tranquility necessary for contemplation (Louth 44), and the latter includes a "dialectic and mental training" which places the individual in a position that he does not scorn material reality nor value it above the immaterial. This state of simplicity brings a mystical union of sorts, but one which "is not a substitute for intellectual effort. . . . Nor is it a substitute for moral effort" (Dodds 138). We see in The Dry Salvages that Eliot does not eschew this kind of effort, for it is through "prayer, observance, discipline, thought and action" that the proper state is brought about.

There is no evidence that Eliot was aware of these early theologians, and my purpose in discussing them is not to find sources, but rather to see similarities in the conception of the negative way. He was, however, versed in St. Augustine, who is most important, in the view of our discussion, insofar as he developed the doctrine of the Incarnation: "'By assuming man's nature he [Christ] became the way. Walk by [him] the man and you come to God. By him you go, to him you go. Look not for another way except himself by which to go to him.'" (Bonner 34). The Incarnation is central to both mystical and dogmatic theology (Louth xi), and is usually understood in terms of

the metaphor of ascent and descent: the soul desires to ascend to God, while the Incarnation represents the descent of God into the world (Louth xiv). It is, as Augustine states, the "mediator between God and men, Jesus Christ, who is a man, like them, and also rules as God over all things, blessed for ever" (Confessions VII:18) who bridges the reality of men and the reality of God.

Another seminal influence on Christian negative theology was Denys the Areopagite (alternately Pseudo-Dionysius), who largely articulated the method of negation:

For this is to see and to know truly, and to praise in a transcendent way Him who is beyond being through the negation of all things, just as those who make statues with their own hands cut away everything which obscures the clear beholding of the hidden form, and thus make it manifest its hidden beauty solely by the process of cutting away.

(qtd. in Louth 174)

Denys also elaborates upon the image of darkness. He disdained Gregory of Nyssa's formulation of darkness into three categories, viewing instead the otherness of God as deep darkness. The soul as it transcends itself, goes further into the darkness of the Other, and the darkness increases as the individual becomes aware of the separation between them. While the soul attempts to transcend, the Other is also attempting to communicate itself, and Denys describes this with his well-known image of the "ray of darkness" which

reaches out toward the soul, while the soul is similarly reaching. "'By going out of yourself and everything, casting aside every restraint in pure and absolute ecstasy, you will raise yourself to the ray of Divine Darkness that is beyond being, leaving all behind and released from all'" (qtd. in Louth 175), he declares, demonstrating the paradox of human and divine communication. The ray of darkness, as Lossky points out, represents God communicating himself as light, combined with his essential unknowability, described as darkness (Williams 104).

St. Thomas Aquinas developed the philosophy that lies behind negative theology. He understood it as a theory of epistemology, declaring that "since we cannot know what God is, but rather what God is not, our method has to be mainly negative" (67). God is both beyond human knowledge and language, as he says that "What is most strikingly certain is that the first cause surpasses human wit and speech. He knows God best who owns that whatever he thinks and says falls short of what God really is" (89). However, negative theology is not a system for gaining knowledge about God, but for experiencing Him. Aquinas understood the otherness of God, but still sought union with God: "When you reach a proper appreciation of a thing through negative demonstration you know where it differs from other things, but not what it is in itself. We have such knowledge about God through demonstration. It is not enough for our contentment" (263). Mere knowledge of God, especially negative knowledge,

therefore, does not content us: we desire some form of communion.

The fullest systemization of the negative way comes from St. John of the Cross. Most influential are his two treatises, The Ascent of Mount Carmel and The Dark Night of the Soul, which elucidate his brief poem "On a Dark Night." The negative way, according to St. John, is a series of stages upon which the individual progresses in his attempt to seek union with God. There are three stages, or ways: the purgative way, the illuminative way, and the unitive way. In the first the individual cleanses himself of sensible and sensual desires, the second is marked by a moving closer to the divinity, and the third is actual union. Between the first two stages occurs the so-called dark night of the senses, and between the latter two occurs the dark night of the soul. The first night is for beginners, and the second for proficients. Two modes also operate within these nights. During the "active" night the individual reaches out to the divinity, and during the passive part of the night the divinity reaches out to the individual.

"On a Dark Night" is a religious poem expressed in erotic imagery, following the precedent of the "Song of Solomon." The eroticism is not just an analogy for the kind of love and desire existing between the divinity and the human, however, but is itself the motivating force: intense sexual desire is not an analogy for intense spiritual desire, but rather, sexual desire is the same as spiritual desire.

As Mallory notes, God is the "source of erotic desire. The force of God's love reaches out and attracts man's heart to mystical union" (161). The poem describes the soul escaping from the prison of her house on a dark night; she meets her lover (God), and both are sexually united. These are the last four stanzas (the entire poem consists of only nine):

Oh night that was my guide!
 Oh darkness dearer than the morning's pride,
 Oh night that joined the lover
 To the beloved bride
 Transfiguring them each into the other.

Within my flowering breast
 Which only for himself entire I save
 He sank into his rest
 And all my gifts I gave
 Lulled by the airs with which the cedars wave.

Over the ramparts fanned
 While the fresh wind was fluttering his tresses,
 With his serenest hand
 My neck he wounded; and
 Suspended every sense with its caresses.

Lost to myself I stayed
 My face upon my lover having laid
 From all endeavor ceasing:
 And all my cares releasing

Threw them amongst the lilies there to fade.

(trans. Roy Campbell 11, 13)

The soul journeys through the dark night of negation (of sense and spirit) and is rewarded with union. The nature of this union is erotic and it is between equals, for the lover "sank into his rest." The dynamism of this relationship, according to Eugene Maio, is an eroticism that operates between the two polarities of emptiness and fulfilment. By following the negative way of denial, the self is emptied of all desire, except the desire for God. Thus being empty, the self is open to the Other which fills it. As John said, "To arrive at being all, desire to be nothing" (Ascent 1:13:11): in order to be filled with God, be empty of what is human. This process of renunciation is fraught with great suffering ("With his serenest hand / My neck he wounded"), and the sight of so much suffering on the part of the individual, who is undergoing all of this in order to be united with God, causes God to be filled with compassion. Consequently, the soul reaches up to God, and God reaches down to the soul, and both form a union in their mutual suffering (for God is wounded by the anguish of the soul). The union, therefore, is not of superior and inferior, but of equals meeting in the middle. The process is summarized by John as "This union is so effected that the two wills are mutually paid, surrendered, and satisfied" (Maio 57-79). God is, therefore, not an abstraction that assimilates the individual into itself, but is rather some-

thing with which the individual establishes a very personal and intense relationship. We will observe in our study of the Quartets that although Eliot embarks on the negative way, he has a much different conception of the kind of God he will meet at the end of it. His is a stern, authoritarian God who is absolutely demanding: his God is a father rather than a lover.

I will refrain from discussing other thinkers and philosophies of apophaticism, such as Eliot mentions in the Quartets (Dame Julian of Norwich, The Cloud of Unknowing, the Bhagavad Gita) because they do not illuminate negative theology much further than has already been examined. What is worthy of note at this point are the two tendencies that appear to be integral to negative theology and which Eliot makes much use of in the Quartets. Here I am speaking of the essential dualism which conceives of "reality" in terms of polarities. At one end of the spectrum lies all that is "human"--knowledge, language, time, space--and on the other end all that is not human, or divine, and which can only be expressed in negative terms, like the unknowable, the infinite, the immaterial, or in abstract terms, like the Good, or the Perfect. The imagery and the metaphors used by these thinkers are also polarized: the light of this world is opposed to the darkness of the other; the speech of this world is the opposite of the silence of the other. The way up is the opposite of the way down. Here, however, we see another aspect of the nature of negative theology,

for the way up and the way down are polarities but they are "also the same": contraries lend themselves to paradoxical fusion. It is through the techniques of contraries and paradox that apophaticism attempts to be all-inclusive. Thus equipped with a preliminary understanding of negation and the negative way, we can proceed to explore how they function within the Four Quartets, and here we return to the Heraclitian epigraphs that introduce Burnt Norton.

Chapter Two

The second epigraph to Burnt Norton is also from Heraclitus, the Pre-Socratic philosopher, and it translates as "The way up and the way down are one and the same" (Smith 255). Heraclitus was describing the cyclical transformation of the four elements of earth, fire, water and air. Air is at the top of the cycle, and earth at the bottom. Eliot appropriates the fragment for inclusion in his own personal Weltanschauung, and uses it as a metaphor for spiritual growth and movement. Eliot is not the first to do so, however: St. Thomas Aquinas, whom Eliot read as an undergraduate, also used it as a metaphor for spirituality:

For, since all the perfections of things come down from God the summit of all perfection, man begins from the lowest things and rising by degrees advances to the knowledge of God: thus, too, in corporeal movements, the way down is the same as the way up, and they differ only as regards their beginning, and end. (qtd. in Hay 158)

Eliot, however, uses the expression to refer to the negative way, rather than the via positiva as outlined here by Aquinas. For Aquinas the way down was along the negative way, and the way up was along the positive way, and both end in God. As Eliot understands it, and I take the Four Quartets and its apophatic emphasis as my evidence, the negative way is both

the way up and down--down through introversion and exploration of the self, which produces a simultaneous upward movement of the spirit as it becomes progressively purified. I might note that the word "spirit" is itself but a term denoting the divine element within the human. Thus a metaphor like this entails several levels of signification: "spirit" is a signifier for what is interpreted to be divine; the spirit "grows" or moves toward God; this movement can either be up or down. The result is a series of compounding abstractions that are the opposite, or negation, of the concrete and particular: it becomes therefore more open-ended and open to interpretation. According to Raymond Preston, the fragments appealed to Eliot because of their "poetic suggestiveness" (viii).

Burnt Norton begins with a contrapuntal meditation on time, as the poet spins a philosophic web that intends to undermine the kind of discursive rational thought which we use in the everyday world to solve problems, such as the building of bridges ("Then only a problem confronting the builder of bridges," DS I). While the opening lines do possess a logic which can be arrived at by patiently separating their various threads, the aural effect of the repetition makes them incantatory. Because the logic is somewhat obscure, the actual sounds of the words are what makes the initial impression upon the reader. Eliot introduces us into the world of the Quartets with a passage

that demonstrates two polarities of poetry--sense and sound--and which also finds both of these operating paradoxically, for each somewhat undermines the other. Caught between the poetry of sense (i.e. the logical meaning of the lines) and the poetry of sound (the incantatory repetition) the reader is required to jump above them into a third and unspecified kind of poem, where the attempt is made to reach beyond words. As Eliot writes in his essay "Johnson as Critic and Poet," there is a third kind of poetry which attempts to transcend:

Besides the poetry of sound--and, from one point of view, occupying an intermediate position between the poetry of sound and the poetry of sense--there is poetry which represents an attempt to extend the confines of the human consciousness and to report of things unknown, to express the inexpressible. . . . (OPP 193)

The logic of the first three lines discloses a determinism in which the human will is locked. The idea is an extension of the first fragment from Heraclitus, which contrasts the God-centered world with a human-centered one. Each individual considers himself to be the point on the time line that separates what has happened before him (the "past") from what will happen after him (the "future"): the present is always his subjective present. In the God-centered universe, however, all time is always present, for all individual and subjective present moments meet for all time in God

simultaneously. I think it is a distinction between finite time and infinity, between historical time and divine time. Divine time has no temporal qualities, and can only be described negatively (as "timeless"), much the same way "infinity" is merely the negation of "finitude." What is being measured in divine time is the state of the relationship between the divinity and the individual, at every moment of his existence, and whether he has turned toward or away from God. Similarly, Ash-Wednesday is concerned with this posture, for it begins "Because I do not hope to turn" and concludes with "Although I do not hope to turn." What is gained in Ash-Wednesday is the ground between "Because" and "Although," which is the difference between a clause of cause, arguing from existing facts, and a clause of concession, which declares that despite the facts, there is more to be considered. "Because" is closed and "Although" is open. Eliot manipulates the syntax in these lines because he wishes to suggest something rather than express it, and this is the hope of some kind of communion with the divinity. He omits the main clause in the concluding remark, thus leaving it to the reader to supply the affirmative main clause implied by the negative subordinate clause: "Although this, (there is that)."

Another interesting parallel between Ash-Wednesday and Burnt Norton is the incantatory effect of the opening lines. The initial lines of Ash-Wednesday are repeated with little variation:

Because I do not hope to turn again

Because I do not hope

Because I do not hope to turn

The final section begins with an identical structure, replacing "Because" with "Although."

In Burnt Norton the first lines run

Time present and time past

Are perhaps present in time future,

And time future contained in time past.

The incantation comes from the repetition of the word "time" five times, and the repetition of the aspects ("past," "present" and "future") repeated twice (although the second "present" is used as a verb, it still has the same sound). The effect is heightened by the repeated voiced plosives ("t" and "p"). The repetitions continue in this passage and combine with the "thought," which, according to F. R. Leavis, is "searching, basic and rigorous" (159), and which serves to draw the reader into the poem, because the sound of the incantation is accessible, and at the same time the obscure logic of the passage bars him from the poem.

"If all time," the poet continues, "is eternally present / All time is unredeemable." If time is thus determined, and all three modes are contained in each other, "in the sense that every event or action is caused by preceding events and actions, and is itself in turn the cause of subsequent events and actions" (Bergsten 155), then there is also no hope for redemption. The paradox of

"eternally present" only becomes clarified later in the poem, when we realize that from the point of view of the divinity all time is simultaneous and eternally present. The past is irrevocable and irredeemable. What has happened in the past, both "What might have been" and "What has been," point to the "one end which is always present." The possibilities of "What might have been" are mere speculation and cannot be changed. Thus locked within the prison of time, the poem begins in doubt and uncertainty, and progresses to the certainty of escape via the Incarnation.

The poet feels guilt and this is revealed by the double negation in the next few lines--"Down the passage which we did not take / Towards the door we never opened": the double negation stresses his sense of failure for not having done what should have been done, which is to take the door "In to the rose-garden" and be in communion with the Other. His doubts are then given an image:

But to what purpose

Disturbing the dust on a bowl of rose-leaves

I do not know.

He is not yet aware of the purpose, which will become clear to him and to the reader through the course of the poem. The poet negates knowledge in this instance, declaring his ignorance, which is a crucial first step along the negative way. The use of the personal pronoun here is moving, for it adds a personal note to the rather abstract twistings thus far encountered. As the poem continues the poet

retreats from this intimacy with the reader, using the plural pronoun instead. The rose is a symbol borrowed from Dante and it represents in the Paradiso and in Little Gidding paradise or union with God. By disturbing the dust on the rose-leaves the poet makes fresh, real and possible the rose of communion: the dust hides the rose, and it would appear to me to be roughly equivalent to cobwebs in the mind, for they also prevent one from thinking clearly, and need a breath of fresh air to blow them away. Disturbing the dust is a metaphor for the initial confused thoughts, and thought later becomes part of the negative dialectic: careful thought, coupled with purgation which is accomplished through denial, provides for closer union with God, or a cleansing of the rose-leaves. The abstract introduction to the poem is just that careful thought, and the negative sequence following is the denial, producing the subsequent rose-garden vision.

The rose-garden vision has been interpreted by many readers to stand for the Affirmative Way. Harry Blamires sees it as being "freely given" (11), and therefore an example of this other way. I disagree, however, for the introductory passages have not been taken into account. In the first two passages there are the promptings of thought which lead to some kind of purgation, which then yields an illumination. Thought (self-examination) and action (the act of denial) operate in conjunction with the advances of the divinity to facilitate communion:

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

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

Here the impossible union

Of spheres of existence is actual. (DS V)

The divinity provides hints in the way of illuminations, and the rest is up to the individual; the aspirant cleanses himself through the agencies of thought and action in order to be receptive to the divinity. The rose-garden vision is one of these "hints," but it comes after the preparatory "thought and action." Therefore, the vision would appear to be an affirmation arising out of the initial negation: negation is, after all, a postponement of affirmation. The Affirmative Way is the recognition of divine elements in creation, and these point to the Being which sits atop the great chain of being. One approaches communion through creation, instead of despite creation, as is the case in negative theology. The divinity manifests itself to men in negative theology: this is the "gift." As the poet tells us later, "We had the experience, but missed the meaning" (DS II): the divinity attempted to make itself known to us, but we did not understand it at the time. It is what theologians call "infused contemplation." The two spheres are exclusive and unbreachable by man (it is the "impossible

union"--impossible for man): Creator and creation are distinct and separate. The Incarnation, however, is the historical "proof" of the existence and concern of the divinity, and it appears in space and time in order to make the divinity known to man. Thus the vision here occurs in the rose-garden, and the other visions also occur in time and space: they are not just the results of an individual's spiritual febrility, or hallucination borne out of neurosis.

The poet hesitantly invites the reader to join him: "Shall we follow?" he repeats twice. Someone else must lead for we are in a condition of ignorance and receptivity. We are led by the bird, who is our Vergil and guide and possible deceiver (is the vision merely a "deception of the thrush"--we find that it is not), to the place of vision--"Quick, said the bird, find them, find them." "Them" are "they"--the impersonal plural pronoun that tells us "someone" is there, but does not further specify as to gender, number (more than two?) or identity. "They" are the complement of "we" of "Shall we follow." "We" are also unidentified, and are opposite to "them," for they are "invisible / Moving without pressure." "They" is the pronoun which points to a noun which is undisclosed, just as the Quartets point to a transphenomenal reality which is also undisclosed. They are "dignified," implying that they are more dignified than we are. They have dignity because they are intermediaries between man and God, for it would be inappropriate to say that God has dignity. They are intermediaries also because

of their multiplicity: material reality is multiplistic and various, opposed in principle to "that which causes unity" (Dictionary of Philosophy 181), which is God. Since the divinity is unified and singular, "they" are not manifestations of the divinity, but rather lower representatives.

We are led into "our first world," which, besides the suggestion of nostalgia for lost innocence, is variously open for interpretation (i.e. childhood, Eden, etc.): The garden becomes mysteriously alive and full, where dying autumn ("the autumn heat") becomes vitalized spring. The air is "vibrant" with the presence of them, and flora and fauna respond: the "bird called," the shrubbery produces music and the roses appear aware of being looked at. We notice the negative quality of these manifestations: the music is "unheard" and it is "hidden," and the eyebeams that crossed are "unseen." We and they perform a religious ritual, making a "formal pattern" which initiates the process of union between place (the garden), we and they. Following this we all proceed along a real via negativa, a way of emptiness and descent: "Along the empty alley, into the box circle, / To look down into the drained pool." Thus cleansed and emptied we are ready for the affirmative vision: the empty pool "was filled with water out of sunlight, / And the lotos rose, quietly, quietly, / The surface glittered out of heart of light": this is the way up following the way down. Light here is the light of the divinity, contrasted to the darkness that we shall encounter later,

which is the darkness of man. Hay suggests that the lotos flower represents simultaneously both physical reality and its resolution in divine reality:

Eliot had observed that in Tendai Buddhism 'the lotos alone is perfect, because it has many flowers and many fruits at once. The real entity is represented in the fruit, its manifestation in the flower. Mutual relation of final reality and manifestation.' (167)

Of course by saying that the lotos "rose" Eliot also reminds us of Dante's paradisaic rose. Much of the intensity of this passage is due to the successive conjunctions, which breathlessly accelerate the lines ("And the pool was filled. . . . And the lotos rose. . . . And they were behind us. . . . and the pool was empty"). The radiant pool is a beatific vision shared by "we" and "they," who almost become visible in the reflection of the pool, and hence a preliminary kind of incarnation occurs--certainly some kind of intersection between the two spheres. The vision does not last too long for a cloud passes before the sun and obliterates it and all returns to prosaic reality. According to the poem, however, this prosaic reality is not reality: the moment of vision is what is really real, for the bird tells us to "Go, go, go . . . human kind / Cannot bear very much reality." Leavis identifies this as the overriding concern of the poem:

At last we get the word itself, 'reality'--the word that gives us the nature of the adult quest, though it doesn't give us the nature of the upshot, goal or answer; it takes the whole complex work to do that. (162)

If the moment is "real," then what are we to consider our normal quotidian existence, is the question that the poem asks us. Not only is the moment "real" but capable of annihilating us, and the bird our guide turns protector and urgently calls us to go. It is this line which intimates to us the extent and the depth of the negation of the world that the poem is working toward.

We might pause here to note the tone of the poem so far. The tone of much of the literature of negative theology, especially the poetry of Denys the Areopagite and St. John of the Cross, is emotional, intense and often distastefully cloying: we might observe the title St. John gives to the poem usually referred to by its first line ("On a dark night"):

Songs of the soul in rapture at having
arrived at the height of perfection, which
is union with God by the road of spiritual
negation.

(trans. Roy Campbell 11)

We notice that Eliot's poetry has a much more restrained and controlled air. The humble tone of the poem demonstrates the attitude of the speaker to the listener, whom I have

already tentatively identified as the divinity, for the poem, to my view, is like a prayer. The tone of the poem expresses the "discipline" which goes with "thought and action," and it demonstrates a synthesis of thought and feeling. The "vigorous" intellectual thought of the poem acts as a governing device upon the potentially intense emotions. The emotions are potentially so intense because there is in Four Quartets, just as in the verse of St. John, an erotic dynamic operating. The eroticism in St. John's verse is explicit ("Oh flame of love so living, / How tenderly you force / To my soul's inmost core your fiery probe!" [Campbell 29]), whereas the eroticism in the Quartets is much more subdued. The "unseen eyebeam crossed" suggests Donne's "The Ecstasy" ("Our eyebeams twisted, and did thread / Our eyes, upon one double string"), in which the rapture of carnal love is celebrated. Ecstasy is ekstasis, which means to put a person out of his senses. St. John's ecstasy involves the coming out of one's worldly and profane self and going into union with the Other. Donne's ecstasy is the corporeal union which provides the analogue for St. John's ecstasy. The "roses / Had the look of flowers that are looked at," which suggests, because the rose is also a symbol of erotic love, some erotic tension between lovers. The "lotos rose" can also be interpreted as a biological metaphor (erection). The moment of consummation is intense and brief. I believe that the almost visible nature of the "guests" during the moment of vision has that quality of

mystery that informs eroticism, and it almost verges on the voyeuristic. However, my intention is to point out that the machinery of the passage is erotic, but that the tone is substantially restrained. This is significant, for despite Eliot's disclaimer to the contrary ("Desire is itself not desirable"), he does desire communion with the divinity, and this union has an erotic flavour: this conflict will be addressed in greater detail below.

The moment of rapture, for that is what it is even if the style subdues it, is a "gift" from the divinity, a reward, as my premise goes, for right thought and action. Right thought and action confer upon the individual a state of grace. This is a condition of spiritual cleanliness resulting from katharsis. The style and the tone of the poem itself reflect this state:

Dry the pool, dry concrete, brown edged,
And the pool was filled with water our 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.

The lines are lengthened by an increase in the syllable count: while most of the passage has four beats to a line, the syllable count exceeds the standard eight syllables for an iambic tetrameter line (the third line, for example, contains eleven syllables). The second line is lengthened by its many monosyllables. Most important, however, is the conspicuous "unmusical" nature of the entire passage, and

the paucity of images. There is little assonance within the lines, no end rhymes nor internal (save "lotos rose") rhymes. The flatness of this verse will become more apparent when we discuss a passage that Eliot wanted to be lyrical--Burnt Norton IV, for example. While the poet uses symbols here, they are rather abstract, and the imagery borders on obscurity (what does "water out of sunlight" look like? We can think it looks bright, but not really see, not easily; likewise with "surface glittered out of heart of light": heart of light would appear to be one of Eliot's "dislocations" of language. In The Waste Land the poet looks into the "heart of light" as he realizes that romantic and sexual love will not save him--a definite negative connotation). This stylistic control and restraint, therefore, suggest a degree of effort and sincerity upon the part of the poet.

The second movement begins with a more controlled, more patterned style, and it is a meditation upon patterns that are observable in the universe. Just as the first movement indicated to us its meditative quality through its counterpoint and repetition, so too the initial passage calls attention to itself through its regular "pattern" of iambic tetrameter lines. The opening lines, however, begin with trochees:

Garlic / and sapp/hire in / the mud

Clot the / bedded / axel-/tree.

Eliot chooses to begin many passages as assertively, as we

have already noticed with "Time present . . .," or "Here is a place of disaffection" (BN 111). The initial assertion alerts us that a point is indeed being made. Eliot even chooses to include a rough rhyme scheme in this passage (a b a c c b d c b b d e e e c). While this scheme does not identify the passage as any type of poem, it does demonstrate the poet's concern that the sound of the poetry itself is never forgotten by the reader. We notice also the repetition ("We move above the moving tree") and the parallel patterns which operate at the micro and macro levels:

In light upon the figured leaf

And hear upon the sodden floor

or

The dance along the artery

The circulation of the lymph.

The "trilling wire in the blood" identifies an historical pattern of aggression in men. The following lines describe the mechanical or physical pattern that operates within and without, from our arteries to the stars. The lines following suggest a polarization (also implied by garlic, which is earthy and sensual, and sapphires, which are hard and cold). We (the same "we" of movement 1) ascend above the earth, ensconced in "light," and "below" we hear the natural patterns of the earth taking place. The animals are predator and prey (again the polarization). We are above and they are below on the "sodden" floor of mulch, while we glide "upon the figured leaf." We notice also the polarization

of the macrocosmic ("the drift of stars") and microcosmic (the "dance along the artery"). There is, finally, a sense of being locked within these patterns: the trilling wire still "sings," and boarhound and boar "Pursue their pattern [of predator and prey] as before / But reconciled among the stars." The boarhound and boar are forever trapped in their endless chase, just as the stars will always drift, just as we will always engage in wars. Is there, we ask, no escape from this physical and temporal prison? We can see the large patterns within us and without, but they do not lead anywhere.

The next section provides the clues for our escape from this turning prison. It contrasts markedly with the last section, and in so doing emphasizes the release it expounds. The solution is provided by the centre of this patterned movement which is the "still point." This is the "one end which is always present" of Burnt Norton I, and this description of the still point is one step further toward the final knowledge of the Incarnation. The still point is the point of freedom from the turning world. The metaphor is another example of polarization, for the moving wheel is opposed to the unmoving hub. Eliot expands these oppositions in a series of negative definitions in order to approach what the still point could be:

neither flesh nor fleshless

neither from nor towards

neither arrest nor movement

neither ascent nor decline.

The attempt to define the still point by what it is not forces the reader to leap familiar semantic boundaries. It becomes a kind of word game, for the parallelisms and repetitions echo because of the incantatory effect. Spinning from the sounds, the reader is propelled beyond words, attempting to grasp the silence of the still point. It is neither flesh, or of the nature of the material world, nor is it fleshless: it is beyond language and knowledge. Here, the negation is itself negated, and the still point is established as being completely Other. However, the poet is also dismantling our customary conceptions of the divinity, for he denies the metaphors that we conventionally use to describe our relationship with the divinity: while he says that no such relationship is possible, he also says that the way we think of it is inadequate. It is neither ascent nor decline, but it is an encounter: the inference is, I think, that while we must use words and metaphors to describe the Other and our relation to it, we must remember that they are just words.

Eliot reverts to the indefinite pronoun to affirm "I can only say, there we have been": "There" is "where we started" as he says in Little Gidding, and what we have gained by then is knowledge of our situation, for we shall "know the place for the first time." Like Ash-Wednesday, which only moves from "Because" to "Although," Four Quartets only moves from the place we are at to the knowledge of where we are at:

all that can be done is to increase awareness and develop the proper attitude. It is not a place ("where"), nor is it in time ("how long"), but a state of mind. It only becomes an actual place later in the Quartets.

Eliot expands on the relation between "action and suffering" in Murder in the Cathedral, a play in which the negative way figures prominently:

They know and do not know, what it is to act or
suffer.

They know and do not know, that action is suffering
And suffering is action. Neither does the agent
suffer

Nor the patient act. But both are fixed
In an eternal action, an eternal patience
To which all must consent that it may be willed
And which all must suffer that they may will it,
That the pattern may subsist, for the pattern is
the action

And the suffering, that the wheel may turn and still
Be forever still. (CPP 245)

Certainly the imagery is familiar, and the sense is the same: the wheel of existence involves pointless action and suffering, and the only escape is surrender to the will of the divinity, which is identical to the still point.

As the individual approaches the still point via the negative way, he becomes detached from the things of this world, and is consequently "surrounded / By a grace of

sense." The paradoxical inversion is a deliberate attempt to deflate our expectations: we expect to read a "sense of grace," and translate the inversion back to the original to get its "meaning," and then invert it to its displayed order and simultaneously attempt to negate the "meaning" and find its reversal. The reader ends up confused, with the potent word "grace" coming in and out of grasp. Other paradoxes follow, and the reader is required to respond differently to the paradoxes than to the double negations. The negations force us to transcend them and language altogether. The paradoxes, on the other hand, force us to go between them. Both propositions are true, but on different levels, whereas with the double negations, both propositions are false. Therefore "Erhebung without motion" suggests ascent, or more properly transcendence, without motion--"spiritual" movement rather than physical movement.

The other paradoxes present no real problem. "Concentration without elimination," for example, indicates a single-mindedness free from distraction. The technique of paradox is useful to the poet in two ways: it forces the reader to slow down and sift through the meaning, and it is also open to a variety of interpretations.

From a discussion of what the still point is, the poet now turns to what the nature of this world is. It is, as suspected, to be negated, but not absolutely. There are two ideas operating in the rest of this movement: one, a perverse idea that our very physical nature protects us from

the immaterial suprareality:

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.

This is the same notion encountered previously, that "human kind / Cannot bear very much reality," but the perversion lies in the fact that the premise of the poem is transcendence: here the "prison" of the body protects us, whereas elsewhere we are asked to transcend this "prison." It is this "reality" that will provide the "completion of its partial ecstasy" and the "resolution of its partial horror"; the fleeting visions we have of "reality" will ultimately find completion after death, and the "horror" of this world will be finished.

While it is, ironically, this mundane reality which protects us from the suprareality we desire, it is also only through the mundane that we are able to apprehend the Other in the first place. Only "in time" and only at a place can we experience those moments:

The moment in the harbour where the rain beat,
The moment in the draughty church at smokefall.

It is only by being alive that these moments come to us, and are then capable of being "remembered." The lyrical passage conceals a troubling paradox, however, for it would appear that it is only through time that the timeless can be known: "Only through time time is conquered." The question that

arises is "why"? The answer is provided in movement V, where the poet depicts this life as being caught between "un-being and being." It is a process of transformation from a condition of nullity to plenitude. "Life" itself does not even merit a name, for it is not a state but only a movement from one pole to another. We are caught in a condition which allows "but a little consciousness": only after this condition has passed will we have "being" and "consciousness." Therefore, what would appear to be an acceptance of the world is actually a denial of it: this world only has value in that the "Other" is manifested in it.

At this juncture of the Quartets the reader begins to realize that the poem is a celebration of the inadequacy of this existence. It seeks to explore the limitations of material reality and the frailties of mankind and then uses them as inverse pointers to a perfect reality. By plumbing the depths the poet infers the heights. "The contemplation," he once wrote, "of the horrid or sordid or disgusting by an artist, is the necessary and negative aspect of the impulse toward the pursuit of beauty. The negative is the more importunate" (qtd. in Gordon 18). Negation is more than just an esoteric quasi-mystical pastime for Eliot, we realize, but a way of approaching all of reality.

In 1945 Eliot wrote the essay called "The Social Function of Poetry," in which he expressed his gravest reservation about contemporary society:

The trouble of the modern age is not merely the inability to believe certain things about God and man which our forefathers believed, but the inability to feel towards God and man as they did. A belief in which you no longer believe is something which to some extent you can still understand; but when religious feeling disappears, the words in which men have struggled to express it become meaningless. (OPP 15)

It is not only that Eliot feels that men today are corrupted by secularism and are no longer convinced, as he is, of the "primacy of the supernatural over the natural life" (SP 105), but also that a whole tradition of the attempts to articulate this primacy is lost to contemporary man. The Four Quartets is one of his attempts, and this struggle to put those feelings into words is another theme of the poem, and one which we will encounter later in the fifth movement. The third movement of the poem, however, attempts to direct us toward religious feeling. "We need," Eliot said, "to recover the sense of religious fear, so that it may be overcome by religious hope" (SP 291): this third movement would appear to be nothing else than an evocation of the nightmarish quality of this world. Eliot is trying to make us feel fear, in order that we may feel hope: he wishes to take us down, via the negative way, in order that we may go up. Our problem, according to Eliot, is that we only want to move sideways and dismiss notions of damnation or

salvation as being irrelevant. The via negativa is, for Eliot, a means for exploring both possibilities. Existence as it is defined by time and space--our material existence--is neither one nor the other, and it is up to man to morally "force" the situation. How we are to do this Eliot explains in this movement.

"Here," it begins, "is a place of disaffection": the first half of this movement is a description of our quotidian world, and the second passage is prescriptive, telling us what to do about it. The poet uses images of light to describe this place: it is a place of "dim light," possessing neither "daylight" nor "darkness." We recognize these images borrowed from mystical literature, but Eliot does use them in his own way. He does not say here that this is a place of darkness, but that it lacks darkness: it is "dim," it is the place where "Falls the Shadow" of "The Hollow Men." It is a place where neither outer nor inner perfection is possible:

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 the perfect aesthetic form is possible, which prefigures the Chinese vase of the fifth movement, nor is

moral perfection derived from purification of the soul possible. The form is a paradigm of the universe, for it has "stillness" while it is also "turning," which suggests the image of the wheel encountered in the previous movement. Plenitude is the fullness of God, approached in the rose-garden vision, and vacancy is the absence of God. Through the negative way, which involves "emptying the sensual with deprivation" the individual explores the absence of God in creation, and thus prepares for the infusion.

What is described is a subterranean world that becomes a metaphor for existence. The scene has a quality of surreal cinematography: the poet, acting as our Vergil, shows us the Underground, where the lights of the stations flicker on the moving cars, illuminating the "strained time-ridden faces" of the passengers. They are "Distracted from distraction by distraction," from which Partridge elucidates "three different implications": the first signifies "'drawn away from,' the second madness, the third pleasure" (223). These anonymous passengers, which reappear later in the Quartets, possess a plenitude and vacancy, but of the wrong kind, for they are "Filled with fancies and empty of meaning." Rather than contain "concentration / Without elimination," which is the state of grace described in the previous movement, they have a "Tumid apathy with no concentration," a condition which Blamires rightfully links with the indifference of Little Gidding III (29), and which is opposed to attachment and detachment: here the tumid apathy

opposes real plenitude and real vacancy. The subway train itself becomes a symbol of this world, for, as the poet says at the ending of the movement, the "world moves / In appetency, on its metalled ways / Of time past and time future." "Desire itself is movement" we are told in the final movement: our desire is the cause of the continuous movement of the world, symbolized here as a moving subway train. The train's coming and going causes a suction and a blowing in the subway, and the whole thing is seen as a horrific monstrosity:

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.

The underground train, capable of great speed, becomes a symbol of man's relation to reality: material reality is seen as a chthonic gargantuan, which belches out pale and anonymous individuals ("eructation of unhealthy souls / Into the faded air"). The train represents the world and time ("whirled by the cold wind / That blows before and after time": the wind caused by the train) and its mastery over men. "Not here / Not here the darkness in this twittering world" the poet moans, for this is the shadow world which imprisons us with its sensible reality: because we perceive it through the senses we hold it to be real, rather than what is really real, which we apprehend through a "grace of sense."

There are two themes working in this second section of the movement--one of descent and one of denial. Descent is a metaphor for introspection, which produces the insights that lead the individual to know what to deny. It is the familiar dialectic between thought and action, which allows for "infused contemplation." Hugh Kenner interprets the descent theme as a kind of road map on how to get from where one lives to where one works (Faber and Faber) via the Underground:

Whoever would leave the endless circle [of the Circle Line] and entrain for the offices of Faber & Faber must 'descend lower,' and by spiral stairs if he chooses to walk. 'This is the one way, and the other is the same'; the other, adjacent to the stairs, is a lift, which he negotiates 'not in movement, but abstention from movement.' (257)

We may chuckle at Kenner's cleverness, but we feel that Eliot had more sublime intentions in his prescription. The "descent" into the self involves more than just introspection, however: a communication takes place with the divinity. Eugene Webb suggests that "the sacred . . . is always apprehended experientially as simultaneously transcendent and immanent, and its transcendent and immanent aspects may serve as poles between which the experience moves" (7). Eliot seems to agree, for he finds at the "bottom" of the descent an "awful mystery," which is

immanence of the Other. In response to Arnold's "Poetry is at bottom a criticism of life," Eliot says

At bottom: that is a great way down; the bottom is the bottom. At the bottom of the abyss is what few ever see, and what those cannot bear to look at for long: and it is not a 'criticism of life.' If we mean life as a whole--not that Arnold ever saw life as a whole--from top to bottom, can anything that we say of it ultimately, of that awful mystery, be called criticism? We bring back very little from our rare descents, and that is not criticism. (qtd. in Gardner 79)

Eliot is not specific about what lies at the bottom of the internal "abyss," but the passage and the images suggest that there is something terrifying down there: perhaps the absence of God, which, from a more distant point of view, means the same thing as the presence of God, for absence indicates a belief in an absolute. The inner void has such tangible reality that it points to its inverse--complete plenitude, which is God.

We are to descend into the inner "world of perpetual solitude," where we are separate intrinsically from other humans and where God is absent. In our quotidian, subterranean lives, the inference runs, we do not descend and hence do not confront the abyss. It is through confronting the magnitude of the abyss, which is described negatively (twice) as "World not world, but that which is

not world," that the individual becomes aware of something which he will interpret, according to the poet, as the absence of God. The radical nature of this polarization is common to mystical theology. St. John explains that

The reason, as we learn in philosophy, is that two contraries cannot exist in the same subject. Darkness, an attachment to creatures, and light, which is God, are contraries and bear no likeness toward each other. . . . Consequently, the light of divine union cannot be established in the soul until these affections are eradicated.

(Ascent 1:4:2)

Eliot goes on to expound what should be eradicated.

Few critics offer any explication of this text, preferring, it would seem, to allow it to speak for itself:

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.

Partridge does offer an etymology of the abstract terms (224), while Reibetanz notes that this abstraction is used as a negation: "Once again, Eliot's abstractions have a real point, conveying in all their absence of particularity that very absence of particularity in the negation of sense, fancy, and spirit that is of the essence" (42). Reibetanz does not mention "property," and I think that that term can be

particularized. While it is inadvisable to relate Eliot too closely to any sources, St. John among them, observing like tendencies does, I believe, throw light on the Quartets (despite Gardner: "The sources are completely unimportant" [54]). Therefore, "property" to me suggests St. John's "goods," which is a loose term for an array of things possessed. St. John perceives six categories of "goods": "temporal goods," by which he means "riches, status, positions, and other dignities, and children, relations, and marriage, etc." (Ascent 3:18:1); "natural goods," which are "beauty, grace, elegance, bodily constitution, and all other corporeal endowments; also in the soul, good intelligence, discretion, and other talents pertinent to the rational part of man" (Ascent 3:21:1); "sensory goods," being "all the goods apprehensible to the senses of sight, hearing, smell, taste, and touch, and to the interior faculty of discursive imagination" (Ascent 3:24:1); "moral goods," which are "the virtues and their habits insofar as they are moral; the exercise of any of the virtues; the practice of the works of mercy; the observance of God's law; urbanity and good manners" (Ascent 3:27:1); "supernatural goods," being "all the gifts and graces of God that exceed our natural faculties and powers. . . . Examples of these are the gifts of wisdom and knowledge . . . faith, the grace of healing, working of miracles, prophecy, knowledge and discernment of spirits, interpretation of words, and also the gift of tongues" (Ascent 3:30:1): and "spiritual goods," which are "all those

that are an aid and motivating force in turning the soul to divine things and to converse with God, as well as a help in God's communications to the soul (the reference is to things that direct prayer--icons [Ascent 3:33:2]).

Essentially, the concern is that any of these goods might become the object of attention in and of their own selves, rather than aid the individual towards God. Some things must be denied, but mostly they must be controlled and used properly: "The motive for rejoicing in them," he says, "should be the service they render to God" (Ascent 3:18:4).

The abstract quality of Eliot's terms--what exactly does he mean by "sense," "fancy" and "spirit"--indicate his desire to emphasize the explorative rather than the didactic aspect of the negative way: as such he is more concerned with the spirit rather than the letter of denial. The reader is left to interpret the poet's terms, and as he progresses himself along the negative way in the poem, comes to a more profound understanding of the terms. By being abstract they are open and suggestive, and they lead to an attitude of detachment that itself becomes a subject later in the Quartets.

Movement IV is an imagistic phrasing of the dark night. Through the two agencies of thought and denial (denial is an act of will, and thus an action) the individual experiences the night of God's absence. According to St. John the dark night, especially the second one (of the soul), is extremely painful. The "dark contemplation" causes the

individual to feel "dryness," "emptiness and poverty and abandonment" and "terrible annihilation." "Both the sense and the spirit, as though under an immense and dark load," he says, "undergo such agony and pain that the soul would consider death a relief" (Dark Night 2:5-6). This purgative suffering is so intense because of the extreme polarity of the relationship between God and man:

There are two reasons why this divine wisdom is not only night and darkness for the soul, but also affliction and torment. First, because of the height of the divine wisdom which exceeds the capacity of the soul. Second, because of the soul's baseness and impurity. (Dark Night 2:5:2)

This short poem is the expression, I feel, of that kind of anguish. It begins with a deceptively accelerated couplet that differentiates it from the more monotonous previous section:

Time and the bell have buried the day,

The black cloud carries the sun away.

The frequent plosives ("t," "b," "k" as in "cloud") occur on the stressed position of the iambs (except for the initial trochee) in the first line ("the bell have buried the day") and the heaviness of "black cloud carries" is lightened by "the sun away." The end rhyme certainly lends some lightness to the couplet, this despite the ominous subject matter. Not only is the day "buried," and is therefore dead (and also night); the sun is also carried away by the

black cloud, which makes it a sort of double night. Caught in this dark night, the poet wonders fearfully

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?

As flowers, both the sunflower and the clematis are heliotropic, and they symbolize the two intercessory figures of Christ and Mary, for they turn their "faces" to the sun (God). They receive light from the sun and then "turn to us," reflecting some of the divine light. The fear expressed is whether they will turn to us in our abandonment? or will we really be annihilated? Will the roots of the yew, symbol of death, wrap around our skull? This intense doubt and despair are rendered visually and metrically, for the lines taper down to the monosyllabic "Chill": the tetrameter line has been reduced to two beats in "Clutch and cling," and to one in "Chill," and there is, therefore, a corresponding silence of two beats and then three beats--life almost seems to have stopped in this line, for silence has more time than the word (the underlying pattern of four beats to the line gives "Chill" one beat and silence three beats). The silence here is a negation of the word, another subtheme that will be developed later (in the next movement). The silence has been prepared for by the moments of silence that follow the

questions (the interrogative silence that waits for a response). The questioning lines are longer and more expansive, and they contrast sharply with the sudden halt of "Chill"; the parallel structures of those questions form a pattern which is also brought to a dead stop by the monosyllabic line. The "il" sound resonates throughout, in "Will" (twice) and "tendrils," and the "i" sound in "clematis" and "cling" all draw the lines together to make more effective their stopping. After this close brush with annihilation comes the affirmative response:

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.
The lines become longer and less metrically regular, in pointed contrast to the stop above. We are infused with divine light, for the light of the purged and cleansed soul answers "light to light," the light of the King and fisher of men (as well as the revitalized Fisher King of The Waste Land). The silence here is the silence of God, the opposite of the word of man. Both silence and light are at the still point at the centre of the turning world. Silence has met "us" halfway in this movement, whereas in the following movement, it is the poet who attempts to reach out into silence.

"Immediate experience," Eliot once wrote, "at either the beginning or end of our journey, is annihilation and utter

night" (qtd. in Miller 131). Movement IV represents such an end of a journey (the end of the journey through Burnt Norton) and the immediate experience of "annihilation and utter night" is expressed through the imagery and the formal techniques discussed above. Instead of just telling us what the dark night feels like, the poet attempts, through the techniques, to make us feel the horror of the dark night. The poem has been working its way to this emotional climax in the fourth movement, and now that this "cup has passed," the poet, in a more relaxed and objective frame of mind, turns to the problems of aesthetics. The tone is quite similar to the tone in which the poem started: rather dry musings on some intellectual matter. The matter at hand here is the nature of language. The poet here questions and meditates upon how language is like reality itself, and how it can be used to explore reality. His conception of language is consonant with his world picture, and the basic premises of the negative way hold for both.

The major assumption of the negative way, as discussed, is that a dualism exists: reality and a suprareality. Because a separation is assumed, a re-integration is also assumed, and this is the capability (of humans) to transcend the mundane sphere and reach the sacred sphere. So too language:

Words move, music moves

Only in time; but that which is only living

Can only die.

Words belong to the mundane reality. Like music, they move only in time: they are limited to a linear sequence. They are bound up in the mortal and finite world and live and die like every organic entity in it. The poet continues this theme in the middle of the passage: "Words strain, / Crack and sometimes break, . . . / Decay with imprecision, . . . / Will not stay still." This is an organic and empirical view of language, that understands language as a barrier to reality:

The empirical tradition in philosophy tends to imagine that the root of the problem lies in the existence of language itself and that, because language obstructs our encounter with external reality fully as much as it serves as a means of recording this encounter, somehow it must be surpassed. We cannot do without it, certainly, yet we must so tame it that it will cease to mislead us. (Hamilton 22)

As Susan Sontag notes, the material nature of language is what frustrates the poet:

The 'spirit' seeking embodiment in art clashes with the 'material' character of art itself. Art is unmasked as gratuitous, and the very concreteness of the artist's tools (and, particularly in the case of language, their historicity) appears as a trap. . . . Art becomes the enemy of the artist, for it denies him the realization--the

transcendence--he desires. (5)

If language is an organic phenomenon, as Eliot suggests in the poem, then we are trapped within this world and cannot go beyond it: we come ultimately to Wittgenstein's assessment that "the limits of my language means the limits of my world" (Tractatus 5.6).

Eliot, however, makes a distinction in language. He views a polarization operating within language; between the spoken word on the one hand, and the formal word on the other.

Words after speech, reach
Into the silence. Only by the form, the pattern,
Can words or music reach
The stillness . . .

The spoken word is uttered by the living person, and hence both are organic: the living person dies, and the spoken utterance dissolves into silence. After the word is spoken, "after speech," it reaches into "the silence," but cannot make it. It reaches into the silence that is the silence of the absence of the Other, but it fails to reach it. "Only by the form, . . . / Can words . . . reach / The stillness," which is the still point of the Other. The living word cannot transcend the world but words in poetic pattern can, for they form, as Rajan says, "an aesthetic mimesis of motion to stillness and of time to eternity" (86). The word uttered in prayer is an attempt by the speaker to transcend the world and reach the immaterial sphere, but it is doomed to fail

because of its material nature. The artistic pattern of words transcends the limitations of material reality. As Miller observes, "Pattern is not so much a good in itself as it is a means of reaching the otherwise unattainable stillness at the centre" (143). By approaching the stillness located within the pattern, poet and reader momentarily transcend the world; the serenity achieved is an analogue to the calm found at the divine still point.

The poet uses music as an analogy to poetry throughout this section. While sound is organic in the way that uttered speech is (the material instrument produces the sound which dissolves into silence), the pattern of sound known as music is also capable of transcending the material. Because poetry and music are patterns, they seem to Eliot to point toward an ideal ordering principle, one which he sought to approach, for as he says, he wished to write a "poetry so transparent that in reading it we are intent on what the poem points at, and not on the poetry. . . . To get beyond poetry, as Beethoven, in his later works strove to get beyond music" (qtd. in Matthiessen 90).

The poet continues the musical analogy, referring to the relation between the individual note and the pattern in which it fits: "Not the stillness of the violin, while the note lasts, / Not that only, but the co-existence." The prolonged note only reaches beyond itself in the context of the musical pattern in which it appears. The end of the pattern precedes the beginning, and because the pattern is

simultaneous rather than sequential, the end and the beginning imply each other. The artistic pattern is expanded into a metaphysical pattern (cf. the microcosmic and macrocosmic patterns of the first section of the second movement), for the pattern is "always there / Before the beginning and after the end. / And all is always now." The cosmic pattern existed before linear time "began," and will exist after time "ends": God, in other words. All is always now, for eternity has only one mode--simultaneity.

The passage ends with the first overt reference to Christ as the "Word in the desert" who "is most attacked by voices of temptation": the Word is tempted to exercise his power for his own end, rather than the end of God; just as words can slip into profanity rather than achieve transcendence in a meaningful pattern.

The second half of the movement is a recapitulation of what has passed. Thus we read, "The detail of the pattern is movement," which suggests that to our myopic perspective, caught in our human self-centeredness, we can see only the detail of the larger overriding cosmic pattern, and that detail is movement and continual change. If we could step back, detach ourselves, become "God-centered," we would be able to behold the immutable pattern. Eliot told Ethel Stephenson that "the figure on the stairs recalls the mystical Bride, personifying the Soul" (Partridge 228). The mystical bride is a symbol from mystical literature, found in the "Song of Solomon," the poetry of Denys the

Areopagite and St. John of the Cross. The "ten stairs" is a reference to the ten steps of St. John's negative way, and we notice again the erotic metaphor: the first step "makes the soul sick in an advantageous way," the second "causes a person to search for God unceasingly," the third "prompts the soul to the performance of works and gives it fervor that it might not fail," in the fourth "a habitual yet unwearisome suffering is engendered on account of the Beloved," the fifth "imparts an impatient desire and longing for God," the sixth "makes the soul run swiftly toward God and experience many touches in Him," the seventh "gives it an ardent boldness," the eighth "impels the soul to lay hold of the beloved without letting Him go," the ninth "causes the soul to burn gently . . . in God," and the tenth step "assimilates the soul to God" (Dark Night 11:19-20). Again the underlying eroticism is discrete but nonetheless there in Eliot's passage. He uses it as a simile ("As in the figure . . .") because the negative way itself, with its upward and downward movement, is also but a detail in the larger pattern of all of creation gravitating toward the centre.

This centre, the still point, is clarified in the following lines:

Desire itself is movement
 Not in itself desirable;
 Love is itself unmoving,
 Only the cause and the end of movement,

Timeless, and undesiring
 Except in the aspect of time
 Caught in the form of limitation
 Between un-being and being.

"Love is opposed to "desire," for, as the poet states the difference, desire is "movement" while love is "unmoving": desire seeks its own satisfaction, while love operates from purer motives, perhaps the recognition of the intrinsic value of the Other. Love is God, the unmoved Mover, who is defined by a series of negatives--"unmoving," "Timeless" and "undesiring": he is eternal and perfect except in the manifestation of his creation. In creation he is "Caught in the form of limitation / Between un-being and being." Humanity, therefore, is trapped in the netherworld between pre-existence and existence, for existence, like "consciousness," begins with death and communion with God.

The final coda rephrases the vision in the rose-garden. The "shaft of sunlight" strikes through the gloom of this life and illuminates us. "Ridiculous the waste sad time / Stretching before and after" is the final and comprehensive negation of the value of life. This denial of the world for the sake of the transcendent is complete. From this harsh evaluation of the value of the world, the poet moves to a somewhat more yielding position in the following Quartets.

Chapter Three

Although written five years later than Burnt Norton, East Coker continues the same dark vision. The first movement repeats the pattern of the first movement in Burnt Norton: thought precedes purgation precedes illumination. The first passage is again a meditation on time, but here time is reduced from a continuum to a pattern of cycles that end in decay. The passage presents a negation of time, for the fatalistic cycles arbitrarily reduce time to its degenerate aspect. The poet does not celebrate the beginning of cycles, the renewal of life: it is the reverse, but the same kind of negation as found in the opening lines of The Waste Land--"April is the cruellest month." If the beginning is cruel, then the end is celebrated, for it is a release from the cycles of time:

In succession

Houses rise and fall, crumble, are extended,
 Are removed, destroyed, restored, or in their place
 Is an open field, or a factory, or a by-pass. . .

This is the detail of the pattern, which is movement. "Houses rise and fall" and generations come and go: by abstracting humanity into a generative process he negates and dehumanizes humanity. Life is reduced to the equation of "flesh, fur and faeces," and we read in these lines a real abhorrence for life. The detail of the pattern is decay. The passage ends with an echo of Ecclesiastes:

there is a time for building
 And a time for living and for generation
 And a time for the wind to break the loosened pane
 And to shake the wainscot where the field-mouse
 trots
 And to shake the tattered arras woven with a silent
 motto.

The lines referring to growth are abstract--mere tokens it would seem. The lines referring to decay are given poetic weight and elaboration. Images are used to give an emotional impact and words are repeated ("And," shake"), creating an emphatic echo. The lines become progressively longer and gather more authority and finality accordingly. By the end of the passage we have seen the succession of humankind and civilization, and all that is left are ruins and a forbidding silence. No one lives to speak the motto of earnest human endeavor (as family mottoes usually urge specific virtues: e. g. Eliot's family motto "tace et fac" ["Be silent and act"]), but only the window panes are rattled by the same wind that whirled the luckless passengers of the tube in Burnt Norton III.

Sufficiently numbed, the reader proceeds to the next passage in the purgative dialectic. The descent passage repeats the first sentence of the movement: "In my beginning is my end." The line is a reduction in brief and it becomes the motto of the negative way. All that matters

is the end of the cycle; all that matters are the beginning and the end. The interim, life, is valueless, for life is only the transition from "un-being" (the beginning) to "being" (the end). The impersonal "you" proceeds along a "deep lane" that is "dark in the afternoon"--as Blamires suggests, this is the "rural equivalent of the Underground" (43) of Burnt Norton III. The dark descent is oppressive: the "electric heat" and "warm haze" sap the will and "you" become hypnotized. Here the light "falls" (our Fall, the cause of Original Sin and subsequent loss of integration) and is sultry--the opposite of the "heart of light" of the rose-garden. The light is "absorbed, not refracted," unlike the "kingfisher's wing" answering "light to light." The grey stone becomes a symbol for the grossness of material existence: it is a vortex which sucks light and life into itself, and will not reciprocate, for it is incapable of reflecting the divinity. Like the sleeping dahlias, it is mere matter, and the divinity is not immanent within the physical world. The open field is a place of empty silence: cleansed, it awaits the illumination. We wait for the "early owl" as we waited for the bird of Burnt Norton I. We wait for the owl, for in this approaching dark vision we need the night sight and the wisdom of the owl.

The repeated caution of the fairy tale opening ("If you do not come too close") signals the moment of enchantment, which occurs on a "summer midnight," traditional time

for such enchantment (A Midsummer Night's Dream). We join the poet and even more so than before become voyeurs. The music now is not "unheard" but "weak" and "little." The guests do not move in a "formal pattern" like the guests of the rose-garden vision, but rather dance, which is a more vital movement. They dance around a bonfire, a man-made source of light (versus "heart of light") and which is also a fertility symbol. Fertility is the beginning of the human cycle (conception), and death and decay are its end. This is not a vision of beatitude but rather a continuation of the successive cycles of the introductory passage. Man is just a part of the organic cycles, which all eventually end in death and decay:

Keeping time,
 Keeping the rhythm in their dancing
 As in their living in the living seasons
 The time of the seasons and the constellations
 The time of milking and the time of harvest
 The time of the coupling of man and woman
 And that of beast. Feet rising and falling.
 Eating and drinking. Dung and death.

Again the incantatory repetition gives an air of finality to the lines: this is a passing of judgement, and there is no appeal. Caught in the prison of the dance (the detail is movement), these anonymous figures are doomed to decay (indeed they are already long dead), and the lines themselves decay into fragments, and the fragments into fewer and fewer

syllables . The organic way up and way down ("Feet rising and falling") are also one and the same, for they both end in "Dung and death," which is an even stronger expression of disgust than "flesh, fur and faeces." "Dung and death" is the final pronouncement on the quality and purpose of material life, and this is knowledge that no bird hastens to protect us from. The silence following "Dung and death" is palpable: it is caused by the steadily decreasing sentences, and this silence is more powerful than any kind of exclamation for it holds us and will not release us from the abhorrent vision until we have really seen it. The passage suggests an engraving by Albrecht Dürer: the poet is the hooded figure pointing a bony finger to a skull as young courtiers trot by on plump horses.

The imagistic coda offers an escape from this biological prison. After this dark night, "Dawn points" to the possibility of salvation. Temporal and spatial reality is characterized by "heat and silence," an oppressive condition (much like that of the "deep lane" passage) in which we are forced to wait, while "Out at sea the dawn wind / Wrinkles and slides": the dawn wind is cooling and makes a sound, and it comes from and cavorts upon the sea, symbolic of eternity in the Quartets. "I am here," the poet says, "Or there, or elsewhere": this remark is an indication of the poet resisting spatial identification, in favour of something more metaphysical. "In my beginning," the poet murmurs, as the line trails off into resigned silence.

As Julia Maniates Reibetanz points out, the first passage of the second movement is usually given short shrift by readers because of the following disqualification: "That was a way of putting it--not very satisfactory" (62).

What this first passage presents is a continuation of the cycles encountered earlier in this quartet. The cycles here end not in decay, however, but in destruction, and ultimately destruction on an apocalyptic scale. The "end" of the seasonal cycle, which is the beginning of winter, causes everything to die--all the life that flourished in the other seasons receives its annual negation, in the sense that it dies. This does serve as an analogy for the poet, that we too must continually undergo annihilation in order to be reborn, for this kind of death is not permanent: April will once again stir the "Dull roots with spring rain." The poet longs for an end to seasonal flux, this world "whirled in a vortex," for it is like the spinning wheel which stops only at the end of time, signalled by the "destructive fire / Which burns before the ice-cap reigns." In this end the poet seeks his new beginning. The bombastic personification of the passage ("Comets weep and Leonids fly") causes the poet to reject the style as being unsatisfactory: it is just a "periphrastic study in a worn-out poetical fashion." It has the sound of the "empty verbalism" that Waldrop says poets accuse their predecessors of using (74). In denying the human and the personal the poet expresses himself in an impersonal style, relying on

impersonal pronouns, abstractions, allusions, and stolen quotations, but here, as he indicates, he has gone too far. His words are full of empty rhetoric, and no longer contain "meaning." He begins again, in a more self-conscious, hesitant and authentic, and more personal, voice: "It was not (to start again) what one had expected." The poet has taken these cycles of destruction to a hortatory extreme, realizes it, and returns to a calmer tone in which he expresses more personal concerns.

These concerns are really a recognition of human impotence. The tumult of everyday life, of desiring and of satisfying desire, is past rejection here. The poet bemoans the fact that after having endured this life, one still does not gain the "Long hoped for calm, the autumnal serenity / And the wisdom of age." Experience of the world does not render any knowledge of things except of this world, for knowledge "derived from experience . . . imposes a pattern, and falsifies." Empirical knowledge does not confer knowledge of transphenomenal reality. As Harry puts it slightly differently in The Family Reunion, "people to whom nothing has ever happened / Cannot understand the unimportance of events" (293). Events allow us to generalize about past actions, which makes us blind to the spiritual possibilities that present themselves continually:

For the pattern is new in every moment
And every moment is a new and shocking
Valuation of all we have been.

The pattern is new because it is in its larger perspective the divine pattern, and it is revealed to us occasionally through moments of illumination. "We had the experience," the poet tells us in The Dry Salvages, "but missed the meaning": we missed the meaning because we were caught within our own knowledge unaware that this "moment" was a "hint" from the divine, a moment which evaluates the history of our attitude toward the divine. Our impotence lies in our inability to initiate the moment of illumination: we can only prepare for it through thought and action and then we must wait for the divinity to make the advance. Our wisdom is just an evasion of active purgation and passive receptivity, for it denies the possibility of illumination. There is no way to protect ourselves from the power of the divine moment except through illusion. "Christ the tiger" will devour us if we turn to him; therefore we turn away and flee the rose-garden. We lose our illusions only after we no longer need them to protect us ("We are only undeceived / Of that which, deceiving, could no longer harm"). While we are incapable of bearing too much of this kind of reality, we are also deceived about the grim nature of material reality, and this is what the poet takes great pains to impress upon us. He presents a metaphoric fragment that contains no main subject or verb, which describes this world as it "really" is:

In the middle, not only in the middle of the way
But all the way, in a dark wood, in a bramble,

On the edge of a grimpen, where is no secure foot-
hold,

And menaced by monsters, fancy lights,

Risking enchantment.

The horror of this world causes syntactical incoherence. We are in a worse plight than Dante, for we are lost "all the way" in a "dark wood." Benvenuto comments on Dante's dark wood: "And he says oscura [dark] because of ignorance and sin, which blind us and make things dark. Ignorance and sin seek darkness, for those who do evil hate light" (qtd. in Singleton 5). The dark wood is a metaphor for material reality, and our attachment to it. The poet stresses the point by piling phrase upon phrase ("in a dark wood, in a bramble, / On the edge of a grimpen . . ."). We are, he says, truly lost in this nightmarish world of "monsters" and "fairy lights."

The darkness of this world is the opposite of the darkness within, the darkness that proves impenetrable with our conventional wisdom ("Useless in the darkness into which they peered / Or from which they turned their eyes"). The task is to plunge from the outer darkness of the world into the inner darkness, which is the darkness of God. The method is the negative way, and the manner is one of humility:

The only wisdom we can hope to acquire

Is the wisdom of humility: humility is endless.

Humility is endless because it is God-centered and eternal. Only by humbling ourselves, by ridding ourselves of the pride

acquired through our humanistic endeavors can we be open to God and salvation. Humility is the negation of all that is human, for it is the negation of wisdom which is one of the highest humanistic values. We must understand that Eliot distinguishes between different kinds of wisdom:

But the wise man, in contrast to the merely worldly-wise on the one hand, and the man of some intense vision of the heights or the depths on the other, is one whose wisdom springs from spiritual sources, who has profited by experience to arrive at understanding, and who has acquired the charity that comes from understanding human beings in all their variety of temperament, character and circumstance. (OPP 258)

The wisdom that Eliot disparages in the Quartets is that "worldly-wise" kind, whereas he does seem to fit the description of the man of intense vision rather than the man who has synthesized worldly and spiritual wisdom: the poet of the Quartets is noticeably lacking in charity. "Goethe as a Sage" was written some fourteen years after East Coker, and the softening attitude evident in the essay can already be discerned in the latter two quartets. However, in the same essay, he also discusses how wisdom and poetry are related:

For wisdom is communicated on a deeper level than that of logical propositions; all language is inadequate, but probably the language of poetry is

the language most capable of communicating wisdom. The wisdom of a great poet is concealed in his work; but in becoming aware of it we become ourselves more wise . . . but that the wisdom and the poetry are inseparable, in poets of the highest rank, is something I have only come to perceive in becoming a little wiser myself.

(OPP 264)

I mention this because it is my contention that the poem itself is an expression of wisdom, and hence, humility. Since the only wisdom we can hope to acquire is the "wisdom of humility," then the humble and sincere tone of the poem also expresses wisdom. This humility and sincerity are enshrined in the phrase, "the poetry does not matter," for it is what the poetry points toward--the divinity--that is important. This concern will be more adequately dealt with later in this chapter, however.

The movement ends with a reference to the houses and dancers of the first movement:

The houses are all gone under the sea.

The dancers are all gone under the hill.

The movement again trails off into silence: the gap between the two lines introduces a silence which is repeated and magnified after the second line. The silence points toward the end of temporality, and the beginning of eternity.

The third movement of East Coker echoes the corresponding

movement in Burnt Norton: both are devoted to the descent of the negative way. "Here," is still a "place of disaffection." The poet dons his oracular robes and pronounces judgement upon society: "O dark dark dark," he intones, invoking not only God but also Milton to act as witness to decaying civilization. However, by alluding to Samson Agonistes, the poet does manage to maintain some distance from the object of his criticism: the reader is aware of the rhetorical position and of the allusion. This distance is required because he is not addressing God (which requires humility), nor is he musing to himself ("Had they deceived us, / Or deceived themselves, the quiet-voiced elders"): he is here in his public role, the prophet admonishing society. He chastises the leaders of society, for they are the most culpable:

The captains, merchant bankers, eminent men of
letters,

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

Distinguished civil servants, chairmen of many
committees,

Industrial lords and petty contractors.

They have the power to influence society, and therefore they are responsible for its corruption. It is precisely because they have this power that they are "vacant," for they barter upon the secular and material nature of the world. They not only maintain the status quo, but they manipulate it for

their own ends. Business, politics, government and the arts all substitute their man-centered activities for God-centered actions.

They are "vacant" in a different sense than the poet meant when he declared in Burnt Norton that "here" is "neither plenitude nor vacancy." Plenitude and vacancy are terms specific to the negative way, whereas "vacant" is a perjorative term that declares that these leaders of society are devoid of either plenitude or vacancy, if we consider that plenitude refers to a fullness of God, and vacancy an emptiness of men. They are, unlike Baudelaire, too middling:

So far as we are human, what we do must be either evil or good; so far as we do evil or good, we are human; and it is better, in a paradoxical way, to do evil than to do nothing: at least we exist.

It is true to say that the glory of man is his capacity for salvation; it is also true to say that his glory is his capacity for damnation. (SE 377)

According to Eliot, Baudelaire was fascinated by evil, but at least he was something. These leaders of society uphold relative and materialistic values rather than absolute spiritual values.

Similarly, the darkness into which civilization is falling is different from the darkness into which the poet consigns himself:

I said to my soul, be still, and let the dark come
upon you

Which shall be the darkness of God.

The former darkness is the darkness of the "dark wood" or ignorance, whereas the latter is the unknowability of the Other. What is required for this communion is simple passivity. Various readers have taken pains to interpret active and passive modes in the poem, corresponding to the scheme of St. John of the Cross, which has active and passive modes in both dark nights (Sister Corona Sharp, for example). However, the negative way as it appears in the Quartets is, despite Eliot's borrowing from St. John, far more general than the schema of the Spanish mystic. Passivity is an aspect of the negative way: after active thought and purgation, the aspirant awaits the divinity's initiative.

What follows are three similes that illustrate this state of passivity: it is a condition that is the opposite of the condition of the movers and the shakers of the world who all go into the dark. All three similes--the hiatus in the theatre during the scene change, the stalled subway train and the etherized patient--have anonymity, darkness and silence in common. The anonymity is due to the universal nature of the poem--all mankind must descend along the negative way. The darkness is an analogue to the darkness of God. The similes describe a condition of passive waiting and receptivity, with the "mind conscious, but conscious of nothing." The third aspect, silence, is passive in the sense of yielding: as Bernard Dauenhauer points out,

silence is anticipatory:

In attributing to silence its third characteristic, namely, that silence involves a yielding, I am simply spelling out what is implicit in the acknowledgement that the performer of silence is not radically autonomous. This yielding is a yielding before some power which is beyond one's control. It is a yielding which is experienced as motivated by finitude and awe. In performing silence one acknowledges some center of significance of which he is not the source, a center to be wondered at, to be in awe of. (25)

The silence which Dauenhauer speaks of is the silence into which the poet places his "soul." The silence indicated in the three similes is an analogue to this more profound silence: they are not equivalent. The anonymous subjects are waiting for something concrete--the next scene, for the train to start, and for the operation to begin.

While the poet may be called unfair for his many vituperations, he is particularly savage with the ubiquitous Underground passenger: "And you see behind every face the mental emptiness deepen / Leaving only the growing terror of nothing to think about." The impersonality of the pronoun ("you") is especially caustic and aggressive: "you" is American usage, and is more direct than the English "one." Rather than be irritated or annoyed at the delay, which is the most normal response, these unfortunate passengers sink,

after their initial consternation, into a metaphysical void, in which, according to the poet, the absence of God seems to thrust itself upon them. Apparently, one either embraces the dark ("let the dark come upon you") or falls into it anyway ("they all go into the dark"). The darkness that one embraces is the darkness of the negative way, which leads to eventual light ("So the darkness shall be the light"), whereas the darkness into which one falls is a darkness which remains.

The poet continues his address to the soul, and gives some more of the conditions of its passive wait. Hope, love and thought are to be avoided, for they would be of the "wrong thing." These admonitions are direct from St. John, and they are integral to the traditional notion of the negative way. By following the "positive way," one could rise through these good qualities to God, in whom these qualities are thought to exist in a perfect state. Along the negative way, however, these qualities are finite and human and lead away from God. Hope, love and thought are inescapably man-centered, and the "thing" hoped for, loved for and thought of would be in one's own self-interest. "There is yet faith," the poet says, again following St. John:

From what has been said it is to be inferred that, in order for the understanding to be prepared for this Divine union, it must be pure and void of all that pertains to sense, and detached and freed

from all that can clearly be apprehended by the understanding, profoundly hushed and put to silence, and leaning upon faith, which alone is the proximate and proportionate means whereby the soul is united with God. . . . (Ascent 2:9:1 [Peers])

Following this allusion to St. John is a passage borrowed almost verbatim from the Ascent. It is introduced by the poet's insistence that we all go over this ground once more. In the manner of a pinched pedagogue he overrides our objections:

You say I am repeating
Something I have said before, I shall say it again.
Shall I say it again?

Like recalcitrant school children, we endure the lesson again, this time phrased a little differently. "In order to arrive there, / To arrive where you are, to get from where you are not . . .": "There" it would appear, hearkens back to Burnt Norton II ("I can only say, there we have been: but I cannot say where") and looks forward to the last movement of Little Gidding:

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.

"There" and "where" are hypothetical places where integration with God occurs. Limited integration is possible now for

every moment is "new and shocking" and capable of revelation. In order to allow the revelatory or integrative moment to occur, the aspirant must go the way of negation.

The passage that Eliot borrowed originally served as a caption for St. John's sketch of Mount Carmel, and it runs thus:

In order to arrive at that wherein thou hast no pleasure,
Thou must go by a way wherein thou hast no pleasure.

In order to arrive at that which thou knowest not,
Thou must go by a way that thou knowest not.

In order to arrive at that which thou possessest not,
Thou must go by a way that thou possessest not.

In order to arrive at that which thou art not,
Thou must go through that which thou art not.

(Ascent 1:13:11 [Peers])

Eliot supplies a coda of his own which restates the passage:

And what you do not know is the only thing you know

And what you own is what you do not own

And where you are is where you are not.

While Eliot's slight rewording of the passage above from St. John does not change the meaning or emphasis, this coda does, for it has an even more negative orientation. St. John's focus is on the positive arrival or acquisition of something ("In order to arrive . . ."). Eliot's focus is what one lacks here and now ("What you own" is nothing).

Although it may just be due to different translations, Eliot uses "ecstasy" instead of "pleasure": as a poet,

however, he has the choice of which word he will use, despite whatever term might have appeared in his translation. He chose "ecstasy" because of its definite erotic connotation. The consummative end of eroticism is denied with the denial of ecstasy. It does not, however, deny the machinery of eroticism, which we found latent in the rose-garden vision. Intensity of erotic desire becomes an analogue for intensity of spiritual desire. While this desire is outwardly repressed ("Desire itself is movement / Not in itself desireable"), the motivating force behind the wish to have no desire is an equally strong desire. The poet desires to not desire. The desire for nullity and emptiness is based upon the desire for complete satisfaction and fulfilment. Just as the ascetic fans his appetites by denying them, so the poet whets his desire by denying it. He is not content with small satisfactions that the rest of the human race is damned for accepting, but is holding out for the one big satisfaction: union with the Other.

The rest of the paradoxes in the borrowed passage continue the paradoxes of hope, love and thought above. Because our knowledge (wisdom), possessions (goods) and identity are contrary to the divine, only by denying them do we make the divine accessible. The terms are necessarily vague, for the process of the negative way is essentially exploratory. It is not simply a matter of becoming ignorant, or discarding one's possessions, or of denying one's identity. Literally, these measures are all

but impossible. In its most extreme form we must suspect the psychological state of the aspirant, for it is a special kind of death wish: only by annihilating all that is human, by denying life and affirming death, can the aspirant reach that which is beyond life and death. Admittedly, Burnt Norton indulges in this obsessive extremism: as noted, only in death does one acquire "consciousness" (BN II) and "being" (BN V). However, the rest of the Quartets seeks only to approach a nullity within life, a condition which resembles death. To this end the poem is negative, searching for a nullity which will bring new life, and always frustrated by this "twittering world." Each new level of nullification that the aspirant descends to yields yet more things that must be denied. Each circle accomplished in this Dantean Inferno gives new insight and subtlety. As Becket's Fourth Tempter says in Murder in the Cathedral, "You know and do not know, what it is to act and suffer. / You know and do not know that action is suffering, / And suffering action" (255). Becket knows and also does not know, but his knowledge will increase and become finer as he descends. The suffering of the negative way engenders the ability to make increasingly subtle distinctions, such as Becket's "the right deed for the wrong reason" (258). As one becomes increasingly subtle in distinguishing between right and wrong, one is increasingly able to choose and do what is right, and in this manner the negative way is also an ethical way. The negative way expands awareness of one's

motives to the point where one is able to then purify those motives.

Interspersed between the statement of the negative way and its repetition are five lines that suggest the kind of heightened awareness produced as a result of following the negative way. Proceeding along the negative way, the aspirant is instructed to deny all sensual pleasures, and paradoxically this yields a sensual fruit that transcends this world. The evocative images appeal to all the senses:

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

Each image contains a magical potency, and these rarified images operate as sublimated analogues, much like the eroticism discussed above. They refer not to an earthly reality but to a transcendent reality. Spiritual fulfilment can still only be expressed in terms of sensual fulfilment (either analogously or negatively). A similar pattern is at work in Ash-Wednesday.

In the third section of Ash-Wednesday a figure ascends the three stairs. At the first stair the poet renounces the world, leaving behind the "deceitful face of hope and despair," hope caused by the arousal of desire and despair over the inability to satisfy desire. At the second stair, after having passed through a "dark night" (the "stair was

dark"), the poet sees behind him the Pauline "old man" that he has left behind (Smith 148); the images of the "old man's mouth drivelling" and the "toothed gullet of the aged shark" describe the "old man," who only has a material nature which is doomed to corruption, rather than also possessing a spiritual nature (of the "new man") which will never decay. Having progressed this far the poet sees a pastoral scene from the window of his prison-house:

At the first turning of the third stair
 Was a slotted window bellied like the fig's fruit
 And beyond the hawthorn blossom and the pasture
 scene

The broadbacked figure drest in blue and green
 Enchanted the maytime with an antique flute,
 Blown hair is sweet, brown hair over the mouth
 blown,

Lilac and brown hair. (93)

In Ash-Wednesday, however, the sensual images are a final snare to be overcome. After the dark night the sensual world appears especially inviting, but the world indicated is too fecund (the "slotted window bellied like the fig's fruit") and too bestial (the broadbacked Pan figure). This overt sexuality is definitely to be transcended. The images of the East Coker passage, however, are free of any such taint, and they point toward, like the children's "laughter in the garden," the death of the old man and the birth of the new.

The birth of the new man is the subject of the Fourth Movement. It is essentially a statement of doctrine, dealing with Original Sin, the Incarnation and the Crucifixion, and it is couched in allegory that is complicated by paradox. What distinguishes it from the third and fifth movements structurally is its regularity: five five-line stanzas in iambic tetrameter and a b a b b rhyme formalize the formal statement. The poet is not exploring in this passage, but declaring a credo. The movement deals mainly with the Passion, and it relates to the negative way because the negative way is man's Passion: suffering is purgation. Until this movement the Quartets has only dealt with the suffering that the aspirant must undergo, or the suffering that others are apparently avoiding ("they all go into the dark"). The poet has not offered a reason for us to undertake this onerous task, and does not do so until Little Gidding. Now, however, the poet invites the aspirant to join in the Passion of Christ. He is the "wounded surgeon," who, with "bleeding hands" "questions the distempered part": we suffer as well as Christ, and this communion of suffering is incorporated in the medical allegory. Physical suffering forms an allegory for spiritual suffering. The power of the movement resides in the images of suffering: the "wounded surgeon," "bleeding hands" (Crucifixion), the "dying nurse" (Church), the "ruined millionaire" (Adam), and the "dripping blood" and "bloody flesh" (Eucharist). The modifiers and the personal nature

of the suffering (someone is suffering) enclose the suffering that the "I" must do: "If to be warmed, then I must freeze / and quake in frigid purgatorial fires." Suffering, as Eliot noted in his essay on Dante, is essential for purification:

The souls in purgatory suffer because they wish to suffer, for purgation. And observe that they suffer more actively and keenly, being souls preparing for blessedness, than Virgil suffers in eternal limbo.

(SP 220)

The fault for this suffering lies, of course, with the "ruined millionaire." As J. Hillis Miller observes.

All men are guilty of original sin. This keeps them separated from God, locked within a consciousness which may contract to a private ego or expand to universality but will forever be peripheral, spun on the wheel of suffering that is man's distance from God. (178)

The aspirant on the negative way recognizes the nature of this universal suffering and embraces it.

The fifth movement here, like the corresponding movement in Burnt Norton, deals with poetics. It begins with a confessional intimacy which distinguishes it from the formlessness of the previous movement and which also lends the following disquisition on the creative process a feeling of authenticity:

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

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

The conversational manner and the repetition put us at our ease, and makes the theory following less remote. We can see that the process outlined here is similar in some respects to the negative way. Just as the negative way is a recognition of human weakness and impotence, so too the poet is doomed to failure. Here he is,

Trying to learn to use words, and every attempt
 Is a wholly new start, and a different kind of
 failure

Because one has only learnt to get the better of
 words

For the thing one no longer has to say, or the way
 in which

One is no longer disposed to say it.

Just as the negative way is an explorative process (in terms of refinement of motives), so too is the writing of poetry. Once the "thing" is discovered, brought to the surface, it loses its value: the poet, like the aspirant, is always doomed to failure because that which is sought is always beyond reach. The Other supplies the meaning, and it is for this reason that the poet is still left with the "intolerable wrestle / With words and meanings." That meaning is found deep within the self, and is supplied by the immanence of the Other that lies at the centre of the self, and which is yet unattainable. Immanence, as noted earlier, does not

reside within nature, in the Eliotic scheme of things, but resides within the individual.

The poet must wrestle with language because of the basic dualism which is the premise of his Weltanschauung. Just as the aspirant must "wrestle" with his material existence and subdue it in order to make it subordinate to the spirit, so too the poet must subdue the words he uses, for they too exist in the material world and are subject to "decay," and they must be made subordinate to the deeper feelings which inspire them:

And so each venture
Is a new beginning, a raid on the inarticulate
With shabby equipment always deteriorating
In the general mess of imprecision of feeling,
Undisciplined squads of emotion.

Each attempt to write poetry is a "new beginning," a "wholly new start"; the explorative nature of poetry is revealed in its experimental forms. The effort to write poetry is conceived of as a battle: the temporal nature of language is resistant to the efforts of the poet to transcend temporality. What the poet is trying to articulate is "feeling" and "emotion." Since words are our way of thinking, the essential conflict is between thought and feeling. The difficulty of the struggle points toward a conception of sincerity that is based upon the greatest possible integration between thought and feeling--an integration which can never be complete, because every attempt is a "different kind of

failure." Each attempt is successful in that some progress has been made, but it is through that experience that new barriers are discovered that make this success seem a failure. And so similarly the negative way--the dialectic between purgation and thought is unending, for each illuminates each.

The wrestle with words and meanings, therefore, is the wrestle with thought and emotion. In some unspecified way, the Other is the source of deeper feeling. By bringing these feelings to the surface one dredges out one's inner self, and while the debris on top is unimportant ("the poetry does not matter"), the depth that has been attained is important, for somewhere at the bottom of those depths, at the very centre, resides the Other. What is at the centre, according to Eliot, is "unknown, dark psychic material--we might say, the octopus or angel with which the poet struggles" (qtd. in Miller 152). As Miller expresses it, the

'unknown, dark psychic material' is divine as well as human, and to bring it to light is to bring God within the sphere of the self as an irradiating presence, emotive like the deep-buried self and, in conjunction with that self, fusing the disparate elements of consciousness into a harmonious whole. (153)

Poetry makes us from "time to time a little more aware of the deeper, unnamed feelings which form the substratum of our being, to which we rarely penetrate" (SP 96). It is the

Other who draws both the aspirant, according to the negative way, and the poet, according to Eliot, down toward itself.

To Eliot the two processes are similar:

That there is an analogy between mystical experience and some of the ways in which poetry is written I do not deny . . . I know, for instance, that some forms of ill-health, debility, or anaemia, may (if other circumstances are favourable) produce an efflux of poetry in a way approaching the condition of automatic writing--though, in contrast to the claims sometimes made for the latter, the material has obviously been incubating within the poet . . . it gives me the impression . . . of having undergone a long incubation, though we do not know until the shell breaks what kind of egg we have been sitting on. To me it seems that at those moments, which are characterized by the sudden lifting of the burden of anxiety and fear which presses upon our daily life so steadily that we are unaware of it, what happens is something negative: that is to say, not 'inspiration' as we commonly think of it, but the breaking down of strong habitual barriers--which tend to reform very quickly. (SP 89)

Both the mystical experience and the creative experience operate upon the individual--the Other, located deep within the self, attempts to communicate itself. The poet and

mystic delve down, while the Other rises up: the way up and the way down are one and the same. The poet experiences a "moment" of illumination when anxiety and fear are lifted and the Other is able to communicate itself. He is not inspired, in that the creative material does not originate in him and come from him, but it comes from the Other. It is a negative process, for it breaks down the human barriers; this causes and is a release from suffering, for the Other, the "unknown, dark psychic material," is a force that compels the poet to write.

Poetic inspiration is, for Eliot, analogous to prophetic inspiration, and both poet and prophet are the mere mediums through which inspired material finds its way into the world:

If a prophet were by definition a man who understood the full meaning of what he was saying, this would be for me the end of the matter. But if the word 'inspiration' is to have any meaning, it must mean just this, that the speaker or writer is uttering something which he does not fully understand--or which he may even misinterpret when the inspiration has departed from him. This is certainly true of poetic inspiration. . . . A poet may believe that he is expressing only his private experience; his lines may be for him only a means of talking about himself without giving himself away; yet for his readers what he has

written may come to be the expression both of their own secret feelings and of the exultation or despair of a generation. He need not know what his poetry will come to mean to others; and a prophet need not understand the meaning of his prophetic utterance. (OPP 137)

The poet is impelled to write because he has something germinating in him for which he must find words; but he cannot know what words he wants until he has found the words; he cannot identify this embryo until it has been transformed into an arrangement of the right words in the right order. When you have the words for it, the 'thing' for which the words had to be found has disappeared, replaced by a poem. (OPP 106)

The poet, in responding to the Other, makes carnate the thing germinating within, transforms the embryo into a pattern of the right words and produces a poem--a Virgin who realizes the Incarnation of the Word.

The labour of birth is difficult, and the poet goes through

all that trouble, not in order to communicate with anyone, but to gain relief from acute discomfort; and when the words are finally arranged in the right way--or in what he comes to accept as the best arrangement he can find--he may experience a moment of exhaustion, of appeasement, of

absolution, and of something very near annihilation,
which is itself indescribable. (OPP 107)

What we would consider a personal psychological difficulty, Eliot considers universal. From a humanistic and psychological point of view, the poet works through the negative way in all of its manifestations in order to gain relief from psychological problems. From the poet's point of view, these problems are universal ("the exultation or despair of a generation"), and the fact that others are not noticeably troubled by them is simply their own ignorance ("they all go into the dark").

In order to gain relief from his "acute discomfort" the poet must endure the "intolerable wrestle." The entire process is full of suffering: he must suffer to escape suffering. Being purged by his suffering, the poet then experiences a "moment" of relief: he is exhausted after his wrestle with the "octopus or angel"; he has appeased the dark force within; the force has absolved him for the sin of his humanity, and has almost annihilated him in the process. The Other has almost overwhelmed him, and the experience is in itself ineffable. Therefore, while the poet is engaged in articulating the ineffable, the very process itself consumes him in a way that is ineffable. Like Moses, the poet is compelled to climb to the top of the mount, which is inverted in the psychic self, and commune with the divinity that threatens to annihilate it. This is the reality which human kind "cannot bear very much" of. The annihilation is

a result of the poet's surrender to something that is greater than himself. Eliot speaks of surrender to art and the consequent "annihilation" which is analogous to mystical surrender:

What happens is a continual surrender of himself
as he is at the moment to something which is more
valuable. The progress of an artist is a
continual self-sacrifice, a continual extinction
of personality. (SP 40)

The Other is more valuable, and by surrendering the self to it the self is almost lost. The aspirant likewise surrenders to the divinity, and is almost annihilated. By thus being emptied of the ego, the poet/aspirant becomes capable of being filled by the plenitude of the Other.

The poet himself suggests this association in the last movement of East Coker by juxtaposing the problems of poetry with the difficulties of the saints:

And what there is to conquer
By strength and submission, has already been
discovered
Once or twice, or several times, by men whom one
cannot hope
To emulate.

What there is to conquer is human desire, and this is done by actively resisting desire and by submitting ("surrendering") one's will to the will of God. This has, as the poet says, been accomplished by some saints. One

cannot hope to emulate them because they are superior in their ability, unlike us, and for what reason, he does not say. The poet can also not emulate them because he is progressing along the negative poetic way. Religious belief in general is considered next--it is "lost / And found and lost again and again." But all of that does not matter he says, and perhaps is not even true: "For us," he says, "there is only the trying. The rest is not our business." We are to merely go on with our personal struggles, and leave the larger pattern to God, for we do not know what the plan is.

"Trying" is really the common denominator of both ways--the negative way and the poetic way. One can only "try" because the goal is by definition beyond reach. The effort to approach that which is unattainable is based on faith and produces an attitude of humility and sincerity. Rather than seek union, the poet seeks the correct disposition. While the tone of the poem constantly changes from light to dark and back again, the fluctuation always occurs within the overall tone of humility and sincerity. The intensity of the vision in the rose-garden and the depths of the darkness plumbed in the third movements of Burnt Norton and East Coker have different tones, but both speak out of humility. As Helen Gardner points out, "in Four Quartets one is aware of a perpetual effort towards communication, a desire to speak plainly" (73). The Four Quartets demonstrates the difficulty of speaking plainly. This "trying," this "effort"

is reflected in the controlled and disciplined style. Emotion, both rhapsodic and despairing, is contained within the rigorous structure and style of the poem.

The key to the structural and stylistic control is the poem's formality. Each quartet is divided into five movements, and the five movements somewhat parallel the corresponding movement in each respective quartet. As Gardner has observed, the first movement contains a "statement and counterstatement," the second a "single subject handled in two boldly contrasted ways," the third involves "an exploration with a twist of the ideas of the first two movements," the fourth is briefly "lyrical" and the fifth both "recapitulates" and "resolves" the previous contradictions (37 ff.). While there is considerable experimentation with form in the poem, the basic stress pattern is iambic tetrameter and pentameter. Eliot could be speaking of the Quartets when he wrote

But the most interesting verse which has yet been written in our language has been done either by taking a very simple form, like the iambic pentameter, and constantly withdrawing from it, or taking no form at all, and constantly approximating to a very simple one. It is this contrast between fixity and flux, this unperceived evasion of monotony, which is the very life of verse. (SP 33)

The poem never "lapses" into free verse. The experimentation itself is always controlled, as we see in the five stanza

movement of East Coker IV, where the meter and rhyme are regular throughout, even though the versification of this movement differs from the movements before and after. The variation on the sestina in The Dry Salvages II is similar--although a modification, it remains regular throughout, following its own internal principles.

Stylistically what is most characteristic of the Quartets is its dignified and rather plodding manner. The dignity is due to the poet's expertise. As he notes in his essay on Dante,

[in] the science or art of writing verse, one has learned from the Inferno that the greatest poetry can be written with the greatest economy of words, and with the greatest austerity in the use of metaphor, simile, verbal beauty, and elegance.

(SP 217)

His style is occasionally plodding because it is explorative, but also because it is at times anti-poetic. Consider

There is, it seems to us,

At best, only a limited value

In the knowledge derived from experience which reads more like good prose than poetry. One has the feeling in reading the Quartets that someone very educated and very intelligent is trying very hard to articulate something very difficult. Each word seems carefully chewed and enunciated--there is nothing rash or spontaneous in the poetry. Rather than hide the artifice involved in the

crafting of poetry, and pretend that an outpouring of feeling is "sincere," the poet reveals his sincerity to lie with his unconcealed effort to say what is accurate. His conversational manner occasionally lightens the poetry and saves it from its own seriousness, but even then we feel it is more studied than not:

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

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

Even when he is attempting to be more intimate we recognize the allusion to Dante, and the repetition sounds affected and rhetorical; the use of French also places the reader at some distance.

Each line seems to have the right number of words because of the greater use of adverbial modifiers and the lack of contractions. "Only," for example, is used thirty-eight times in the poem entire. In the second passage of the second movement of East Coker, "only" is used six times in nineteen lines. "Not" is used seventy-six times in the Quartets--a startling indication of the poem's negativity ("no" is used twenty-six times, while "yes" does not appear [Concordance]). This reliance on adverbial qualifiers indicates the poet's attempt to bring precision and discipline to the poetry, qualities which are missing in the emotions he is trying to fathom ("the general mess of imprecision of feeling, / Undisciplined squads of emotion"). The lack of

contractions indicates a high formality of style: "cannot," for instance, is used twelve times, while "can't" does not appear (Concordance). Also contributing to the poem's formal precision are lengthy and specialized terms: "Impropitious," "periphrastic," "peregrine," "sempiternal," "eructation" and "dessication" are some. The Quartets are thus given a tone of humility and sincerity by the visible effort on the poet's part to be exact in his thoughts and words. Discipline, precision, control and restraint are all qualities of this "trying." The resultant sense the reader gets of honesty and integrity makes it possible for the poet to address others and be heard. As he says in his essay "Charles Whibley," "there are only four ways of thinking: to talk to others, or to one another, or to talk to oneself, or to talk to God" (SE 449). Eliot addresses all of these groups in the Quartets, and he has a different tone for each. To the "others" he is usually scornful and caustic ("they all go into the dark") if not damning; to "another" he is confidential ("Shall we follow?") and perhaps condescending. To himself he is often contemplative and simple ("I do not know much about gods; but I think that the river / Is a strong brown god"). He does not address God as such in the Quartets. In Ash-Wednesday, this was not the case:

Lord, I am not worthy

Lord, I am not worthy

but speak the word only

or the more haunting last line:

And let my cry come unto thee.

If the poet does not address God directly in the Quartets, he does so indirectly, through the tone of the poem, which reflects his proper attitude. While the structure of the poem--its formal pattern--is an "aesthetic mimesis" of the divine reality, the tone of the poem is an indication of the receptivity of the poet to the divinity. As such, we can say the poem functions as a prayer, for it is intended to communicate to the divinity. Therefore, not only does the poem deal with the attempt to communicate with the divinity in terms of subject matter (the negative way), it also attempts to do so through the creative process and through the artifact of the poem itself.

The final passage of the movement restates the themes encountered in East Coker. As one gets older, the poet suggests, one's experience enables him to see the pattern evident in the world as "more complicated": the complication arises out of the pattern of "dead and living," those who are physically alive but spiritually dead ("to be restored, our sickness must grow worse"). The "intense moment" is union or communion with God, but this is not always to be isolated; rather it points toward a future possibility of such intensity lasting all of life--to be in union with God for all time. This will be a time when all generations will feel this burning (the undecipherable tombstones). There is a time for remembering the past "under lamplight" and a time for communing with God "under starlight": we explore the

ways of man and the ways of God. Love is its most integral, however, when independent of time and space--of material reality, for materialism corrupts the immaterial. Old men "ought to be explorers" rather than just be worldly-wise. The compression of these images and their juxtaposition serves to obscure this passage. The latter half, however, is more straightforward: the "further union" and "deeper communion" is "Through the dark cold and the empty desolation." This is the familiar theme of the negative way: through darkness and emptiness one reaches the fullness of the Other. The cold and desolation also refers to this world, and as such is a denial of its value. Like the end note of Burnt Norton ("Ridiculous the waste sad time / Stretching before and after"), East Coker also ends on a comprehensive negation: the world is inhospitable, for here "The wave cry, the wind cry, the vast waters / Of the petrel and the porpoise." There is no place for man here. The last phrase is a reversal of the first line of the movement: "In my end is my beginning," suggesting that the goal of life is union, and that one only begins with that knowledge.

East Coker is as equally concerned with negation and the negative way as was Burnt Norton. The following two quartets depart from the introversion associated with the negative way, and are more concerned with action and society. Negation, however, is still the operating principle in those Quartets.

Chapter Four

As Grover Smith observed, the third quartet discovers "how man can find the still point not only through fugitive insight but through ordinary action" (277). This is true not only of The Dry Salvages, but also of Little Gidding: the negative way ceases to be a major theme, and action provides an escape from the intense introspection that accompanies the negative way. This is not to say, however, that these latter two quartets are positive, for they continue the negative orientation of the earlier quartets. The poet finds that "right action" is more efficacious than the negative way, and this leads him out of the prison of the self but not out of the prison of the world: thus the poem becomes more social and less psychological.

The Dry Salvages, with its central image of the sea, carries on from the concluding utterance of East Coker's "vast waters." The quartet begins with the river, which the poet envisions as a primitive masculine deity--a "strong brown god--sullen, untamed and intractable." Men have become "worshippers of the machine," and follow the golden calf of technology rather than recognize their true god. The river god is the judgemental god of the Old Testament, for he is "implacable" and a "destroyer": he is not the Christ of the New Testament, merciful and forgiving, but God the Father, responsible for the Deluge, and now "watching and waiting" for his opportunity to punish wayward

man again.

"The river is within us, the sea is all about us" the poet declares, suggesting an immanence within us and an omnipresence of God all about us. The rest of the movement develops the theme of eternity, represented by the sea, and finite time, represented by the river (the river is a part of the sea within the land). The river is "within us" for we are created in time by God. The land is profane by nature, for our physicalness is still to be abhorred, and it is also profaned by the fact of our first fault, Original Sin. On the land, in space and time, we can see "hints of earlier and other creation," the "hints and guesses" of God's existence. Men of the sea become symbolic of those who explore the nether reaches of reality, and by so doing seek transcendence. Their accidents at sea become "our losses," humanity's losses, for they seek the unknown for we who are landlocked. The sea has "many voices, / Many gods and voices": it can speak to us, on land, if we only listen, if we tell our souls to "be still." Now, rather than descend into the self, we are also able to detect God in nature. However, the poet is not suggesting that God is really immanent in the world, for as we shall see later, this world is still a place to be renounced. Land and sea become analogies for the world and for the immaterial sphere, respectively. God broaches this world in mysterious ways, just as the sea broaches the land:

The salt is on the briar rose,
The fog is in the fir trees.

The salt and fog are hints of God, being almost insubstantial. The image is also very beautiful, intimating the mysterious and haunting otherness of God.

If the river is capable of being partially tamed, the sea is untamable. In the face of the sea we must become "other-centered," and the sailors who explore the sea have the proper humility before its omnipotence. The sea's many voices speak of its vastness and desolation. The sea can barely contain its rage, and its destructive capacity is enormous:

the whine in the rigging,
The menace and caress of wave that breaks on water,
The distant rote in the granite teeth,
And the wailing warning from the approaching
headland.

If the river god is strong and brown, the gods of the sea go unnamed and undescribed, much as the god of the negative way is also nameless and indescribable. Only their voices are heard, and they warn in apocalyptic terms the coming destruction. The "tolling bell" tolls for thee, and the eternal rhythm is beyond the power of the sailors' wives to have any effect upon or even to penetrate. The sailors' wives become a synecdoche for mankind, who are still on land in their dark night "Between midnight and dawn," which is the dark night of ignorance. God watches and waits,

patiently clanging the bell of finite time, time which is running out.

The formal pattern of the first section of the second movement (a variation on the sestina) and the rhetorical posture taken by the poet ("Where is there an end of it") create a distance between poet and reader which is a contrast to the less formal styles of the first movement and the second part of this second movement, with their consequent personal manner ("I do not know much about gods"; "It seems as one becomes older"). The formality is due to the doctrine supplied, for here the poet, for the first time, articulates the doctrine of the Incarnation. In the sixth stanza the poet decides

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

Paradoxically, there is no end to time, nor is there any end to the suffering in the world, the "voiceless wailing" of open-mouthed anguish so deep that no sound can be uttered. There is no end to decay or pain: the revolving ("drifting") wheel of the world is our rack upon which we are spun, incapable ("voiceless") of wailing. The bone on the beach

can only offer a futile prayer to the death it has already undergone: the material remanent of worldly existence can only hope to die, and thus its only god is death. Like the bones of Ash-Wednesday II, they embrace death for it brings with it the possibility of spiritual renewal. The bones, despite their dryness, can "chirp" a prayer, not to Death its God, but to the

Lady of silences

Calm and distressed

Torn and most whole . . .

The bones of Ash-Wednesday are our bones, and they are symbolic of our spiritual centre, and are hence capable of renewal: once the corporeal body is eaten away by the devouring leopards (who are "Christ the tiger"), the spiritual structure can renew itself. The bones of The Dry Salvages, however, represent the corporeal body, and sing only to death: these bones do not reach beyond death. For us, however, there exists a prayer beyond death, the "Prayer of the one Annunciation" of the Incarnation. This is a "hardly, barely prayable / Prayer" not only because the hints are so weak, but also because the poet in his Passion can barely utter it.

The reference to Krishna that opens the third movement is an allusion to the Bhagavad Gita. In retrospect, we remember that the third movements of Burnt Norton and East Coker were devoted to an explication of the negative way ("Here is a place of disaffection"; "O dark dark dark").

This third movement is also an expression of negation, but it is much less dark. Essentially, the concern here is with the ethics of action. Earlier I discussed the negative way as also being an ethical way, concerned with the purification of motive, and this theme is elaborated here. The poet adjures us to not quit action, which is what the reader might think is the only alternative after the first two movements. He declaims "Fare forward, travellers," urging them to be explorers upon the sea: the travellers are the usual anonymous representatives of humanity. "At nightfall," he says (notice that we are again in the dark) the voices of the sea call to one to "Fare forward" and to think of two things:

At the moment which is not of action or inaction
 You can receive this: 'on whatever sphere of being
 The mind of man may be intent
 At the time of death'--that is the one action
 (And the time of death is every moment)
 Which shall fructify in the lives of others:
 And do not think of the fruit of action.

The first thought, a quote from the Bhagavad Gita VIII:6, has been expressed earlier, but in a different way. Each moment is a "new and shocking valuation," and the idea is that each moment is capable of being a "hint" from the divine, because our patterns of wisdom gained from experience cannot fathom the divine pattern. Each moment is a possible communion, and with that comes the revaluation of all that

one has been, and what one has been, it is implied, has not been very good, and hence, must be denied. A similar valuation occurs at the time of death: what happens to one at death (vis à vis the afterlife) apparently depends on how one has progressed ethically. Eliot adds the comment "And the time of death is every moment," suggesting that death could happen at any time, but more so it reflects an "other-centeredness," and a denial of self-centeredness: one should act as if the time of death and valuation and judgement could happen at any moment. By not acting out of self-interest one enriches ("fructify") the lives of others. As we saw in Philo, man also has a duty to society, and it is fulfilled by acting selflessly. Society is a more concrete example of "other-centeredness," for in acting for society's benefit we participate in something larger than the self. This is restated in the following line, where we are told not to think of the fruit of action: we are to be selfless and perform actions regardless of their results for us, either good or ill. The disregard of the fruits of action is a central tenet of the Bhagavad Gita:

Let your concern be with action alone and never
with the fruits of action. Do not let the results
of action be your motive, and do not be attached
to inaction. (11:47)

By disregarding the results one operates out of pure motives, for one is not concerned with satisfying one's own desires, but is rather concerned with performing one's duty.

"Inaction" is equivalent to the "indifference" of Little Gidding, and it is to be avoided even though it would seem to be the natural outcome of the negative way and its emphasis on denial of the world and passivity. "Right action," which is performed in the spirit of detachment (different from "indifference") is desired. In The Rock, Eliot also discusses the virtue of motiveless action:

I have trodden the winepress alone, and I know
That it is hard to be really usefull, resigning
The things that men count for happiness, seeking
The good deeds that lead to obscurity, accepting
With equal face those that bring ignominy,

The applause of all or the love of none. (CPP 148)

Indifference to the results of action involves a surrender of the will. "I say to you," the Rock continues,

Make perfect your will.

I say: take no thought of the harvest,

But only of proper sowing..

The emphasis in The Dry Salvages, then, is less upon the negative way and upon a more generalized negation. The world, while still a place of horror ("Like the river with its cargo of dead negroes, cows and chicken coops") is to some extent accepted, for to accept action is to accept the world. In this way, negation is challenged in this quartet by the composite figure of the sailor, the warrior and the explorer, for they pursue action which argues an acceptance of the world. As Smith observes, "In both Eastern religions

[Hinduism and Buddhism] the goal of action or non-action is release from the Wheel. But in 'The Dry Salvages' it is rather the fulfilment of the premise that only through time, time is redeemed" (282). The world gains acceptance through default, however, for just as the world and time have value in being the place in which the divine manifested Himself to mankind in the form of the Incarnation, so too the world only has value in that the possibility exists to perform right action. Action, therefore, is the fulfilment of the negative way. Since the longed for transcendence that is integral to the negative way is impossible to achieve during material existence, eventual union is postponed and a union of sorts is attained in this life by performing right action which benefits the larger society.

The prayer that the poem has been all along is openly expressed in movement four. The poet prays to the Virgin asking for her intercession ("Pray for all those . . .") for the explorers of the sea ("all those who are in ships"), their wives and those who have already perished in the sea ("for those who were in ships"). Pray for them, the poet implores, because they are the explorers of the unknown and the dark: they are explorers of the spirit. The sailors, of course, represent all those who actively believe in a divinity: not those who just repeat the refrains and consider the divinity a source of comfort, but those who explore the varieties of possible communication with God.

The poet scorns those, who, like the passive believers

in God, resort to supernaturalism. To try to divine the immaterial sphere through "sortilege" and other means is a feature of mankind that "will always be," especially during bad times such as war. "But," he says, "to apprehend / The point of intersection of the timeless / With time, is an occupation for the saint": only saints can comprehend the mystery of the Incarnation and act accordingly. This is done through "Ardour and selflessness and self-surrender." "For most of us," however, "there is only the unattended moment," the moment of vision, the hint of the other sphere. For us there is "prayer, observance, discipline, thought and action." The emphasis is not upon mysticism and the negative way, but rather on our continual and everyday efforts. As Eliot said in his essay "Virgil and the Christian World" (1951),

at least Christianity did establish the principle that action and contemplation, labour and prayer, are both essential to the life of the complete man. (OPP 141)

Written nine years after the completion of the Quartets, the excerpt here is a continuation of the same kind of thought of the latter quartets, that of a more balanced view. If we take "thought" and "contemplation" to be rough equivalents of meditation, we find that Louis Martz's comment is helpful:

Meditation, then, cultivates the basic, the lower levels of the spiritual life; it is not, properly speaking, a mystical activity, but a part of the duties of every man in daily life. It is not

performed under the operations of special grace,
but is available to every man through the workings
of ordinary grace. (16)

Meditation, however, also has implications for the writing
of poetry. As Martz continues later, the human mind has
a tendency to work from a particular situation,
through analysis of that situation, and finally
to some sort of resolution of the problems which
the situation has presented. Meditation focused
and disciplined the powers that a man already
possessed, both his innate powers and his
acquired modes of logical analysis and rhetorical
development. (39)

The "logical analysis and rhetorical development" we have
seen operating generally in the negative way: as an
exploratory process, the negative way always stands on the
edge of the ineffable, and it is through the agency of
poetry, as Eliot has it, that attempts are made to articulate
this ineffability, and for this task considerable rhetorical
development must take place.

The rest of the passage in this movement is a reiteration
of familiar ideas. The Incarnation redeems the world,
"Where action were otherwise movement"; the Incarnation
allows for the possibility of "right action," which gives
"freedom / From past and future," and this is essentially
salvation. As we saw in East Coker V, we are "only
undefeated / Because we have gone on trying." Our physical

beings have value only in that they can respond to the sacred and "nourish / The life of the significant soil." The soil is significant because it has a history of observance, and Little Gidding is just such a place.

In its final image of the paradisaal "crowned knot of fire," Little Gidding resolves the tensions encountered earlier between the various polarities of dark and light, denial and illumination, and negation and affirmation. Before this can occur, however, we must proceed further along a way that still contains darkness, suffering and negation. The first movement presents a scene very much similar to the rose-garden vision. This, we remember, was a brief and brilliant moment in a generally dark quartet. The scene in Little Gidding resembles it, for it occurs "when the short day is brightest" in "the dark time of the year." In Burnt Norton the guests arrive and remain momentarily in the coolness of autumn, and they are reflected in the pool which is filled out of the "heart of light." In Little Gidding, it is an empty glare, a kind of "heart of light" that is reflected in the "watery mirror" of the melting ice. There are no visitors, but the "hedgerow / Is blanched for an hour with transitory blossom / Of snow, a bloom more sudden / Than that of summer." This too is also a moment out of time, for this is the "spring time / But not in time's covenant." This natural scene is quite unnatural, much as the rarified images of East Coker III are ("Whisper

of running streams . . ."): here "there is no earth smell," and the blossoms that grow are merely snow, and the heat is only as strong as the cold, and both are therefore neutralized ("windless cold that is the heart's heat"). Although a natural place, it is removed from the earthly cycles that we saw operating in East Coker which ended in "Dung and death": East Coker is full of the smell of life and death, whereas Little Gidding is devoid of the smell and is physically sterile--there is no smell, no wind and no temperature. There is only the "glare that is blindness," a glare that symbolizes God's presence and which is a reality man cannot bear. The intense glow "stirs the dumb spirit": this is the "pentacostal fire" of the Holy Spirit, third member of the Trinity, responsible for the gift of tongues and prophecy. It is traditionally associated with the creative impulse (Dunn 357) and is so here, for it "stirs the dumb spirit" into articulacy.

The paradox of heat and cold that plays throughout the scene recalls the apocalyptic destruction foretold in East Coker II ("The world to that destructive fire / Which burns before the ice-cap reigns") and the "frigid purgatorial fires" in East Coker IV. Heat and cold neutralize each other ("Suspended in time, between pole and tropic"). Fire does not perform a purgative function here, but is rather like the divine fire that the quartet culminates in, for it allows for a freeing of the spirit: "Between melting and freezing / The soul's sap quivers." The purgative fire

which causes suffering is quite different from heavenly fire, which is the gentle burning experienced in the ninth stage of St. John's ten stairs. As with Dante, union with the divinity is described as a healing fire, one that is gentle, but which still carries the intensity of fire. The reconciliation of contrasts and paradoxes is not a final one, however, and it is not the unitive way of the via negativa, which results in union. Union does not occur within the framework of the Quartets, and this is what keeps it from being an overtly mystical poem. The midwinter spring vision is still just another hint: it is not union but it does point toward eventual union, for the passage ends "Where is the summer, the unimaginable / Zero summer?" If this vision is the spring, then what can the summer of union be like? Notice how the state of union is described: "unimaginable" and "zero." God, and union with God, are still unknowable and other.

While the negative way is not so dark in Little Gidding, we still proceed along the way of ignorance and denial. "If you came this way in may time," the poet says, "you would find the hedges / White again, in May, with voluptuary sweetness." Harry Blamires notes the difference between this real spring and the midwinter spring:

The chaste, spiritualized loveliness of the sudden bloom in midwinter spring was well caught by the word 'blanched' (LG 15), but the white beauty of the actual may-blossom, as it has the

added taint of that which might too dangerously
and seductively allure. All this is sharply
hinted at in the words 'voluptuary sweetness.'

(127-28)

The same voluptuary sweetness as encountered in Ash-Wednesday
III also had to be resisted.

The way to Little Gidding, the place, is a journey,
one which

If you came at night like a broken king,
If you came by day not knowing what you came for,
It would be the same.

If you came like the defeated Charles I, or if you came a
casual visitor, it would be the same, for "what you thought
you came for / Is only a shell, a husk of meaning": whatever
reason you came for is the wrong reason--

Either you had no purpose
Or the purpose is beyond the end you figured
And is altered in fulfilment.

This is the way of ignorance, for it is a negation of man's
knowledge: he does not know what he wants or what his
purpose is, and only by being in the sacred spot will the
meaning, the meat in the shell and the kernel inside the
husk, become clear to him. If you came this way, the poet
says, "you would have to put off / Sense and notion," for
the meaning of this place of significant soil is beyond our
sense or any notion we might have. We are given a series
of negative commands: "You are not here to verify, /

Instruct yourself, or inform curiosity / Or carry report."
 We are warned not to approach this sacred place as a
 humanist investigating a certain phenomenon. The only
 proper attitude is humility, expressed physically by
 kneeling ("You are here to kneel"). Prayer is defined
 negatively: it is "more / Than an order of words, the
 conscious occupation / Of the praying mind, or the sound of
 the voice praying." Prayer is not just speaking, or
 thinking, or the earnest sound of the prayer: the prayer
 of the living, no matter how humble and sincere, is still
 to some degree corrupt. Only the dead are capable of real
 prayer:

And what the dead had no speech for, when living,
 They can tell you, being dead: the communication
 Of the dead is tongued with fire beyond the
 language of the living.

The opening lyric of the second movement reiterates some
 of the denials that we have encountered earlier in the
Quartets. In the first stanza, ash and dust and the old man,
 the old house--these are all aspects of the decaying cycles.
 "The death of hope and despair" is borrowed from Ash-Wednesday,
 and signifies a detachment from organic cycles, which
 inevitably end in death and decay. This particular
 negation the poet terms the "death of air," which reminds us
 of Heraclitus' transformation of the elements, and which is
 also a negation of the world on an elemental level.

The "death of earth" informs the following stanza, in

which all of our struggles to satisfy our desires are mocked by the "parched eviscerate soil": it "gapes with the vanity of toil." This soil is the opposite of the "significant soil" that concluded The Dry Salvages. The soil of that quartet is significant because we return our dust to the soil ("Dust to dust, ashes to ashes"), and participate in the cosmic scheme. The parched soil mocks us because we worship it and the hope of wealth that it will bring, rather than the divinity who is responsible for it. This toil is for our own gratification, and thus mocks us, whereas the toil of The Dry Salvages is for the benefit of society. Similarly, the death of "fire and water" is the concern of the last stanza, and it is a denial of the civilization ("the town, the pasture and the weed") that has denied its god ("the sacrifice that we denied").

The long second passage of the second movement returns to the themes of language and age. As Eliot declared of this section,

Twenty years after writing The Waste Land, I wrote, in Little Gidding, a passage which is intended to be the nearest equivalent to a canto of the Inferno or the Purgatorio, in style as well as content, that I could achieve. The intention, of course, was the same as with my allusions to Dante in The Waste Land: to present to the mind of the reader a parallel by means of contrast, between

the Inferno and the Purgatorio, which Dante
visited and a hallucinated scene after an air-
raid. (qtd. in Blamires 146)

The "dead master" who visits the poet in the darkest part of
the night,

In the uncertain hour before the morning

Near the ending of interminable night
is unlike the guests of Burnt Norton: by Eliot's own
admission, this scene is hallucinatory. It certainly
resembles an Inferno or Purgatory, for the night fires are
burning, left by the retreating German bombers, which Eliot
associates with the pentacostal dove: "After the dark dove
with the flickering tongue / Had passed below the horizon
of his homing." As Blamire notes, both "Homing plane and
homing Dove leave behind a painfully cleansing fire" (143).
The dove is another intermediary figure and as the agent of
purgation returns in the lyrical fourth movement. Here, the
"dead master," a composite figure of literary influences
upon Eliot ("Both one and many"), is incarnated briefly
"In concord at this intersection time / Of meeting nowhere,
no before and after." Because he is dead, his is that
"communication" that is "tongued with fire beyond the
language of the living," (LG I) for as he says, "So I found
words I never thought to speak." Following the logic of
the negative way, that assumes that knowledge of the Other
is impossible during this life, it would appear that once
dead, a certain amount of knowledge would be gained.

Part of the knowledge is the awareness of the responsibilities of the poet:

Since our concern was speech, and speech impelled
us

To purify the dialect of the tribe

And urge the mind to aftersight and foresight,

Let me disclose the gifts reserved for age.

The "duty of the poet," Eliot remarked in "The Social Function of Poetry," "is to his language, first to preserve, and second to extend and improve" (OPP 9). Language is preserved in poetry, and extended and improved by using it with discipline and precision. It is used to explore reality, and as such acquires a nimbus of sacredness: the "dead master" and the poet, as guardians of the sacred flame of language, are required to "purify" the language, as if it were an organic entity. Language, like the individual, is capable of corruption, and misuse or abuse. The individual is required to search out the ways of God willingly through a process of suffering ("I said to my soul, be still, and let the dark come upon you"): according to the poet, this is our purpose. As he says in the fourth movement, "We only live, only suspire / Consumed by either fire or fire." This reiterates our old theme, of either embracing or being embraced by suffering. The embraced fire purifies, while the fire that embraces us damns. It is essentially a question of denial of self-centeredness in favour of other-centeredness. Our "intended" use is to be

other-centered; otherwise we are corrupt. The "intended" use of language is to direct us to this end: if it gets baggy or imprecise it fails to do so. While language is incapable of ever expressing the truth of the Other, it can, as can the aspirant, approach the Other. Language is purified by the poet/agent, who is also responsible for purifying his will. The method for this purification is careful thought, both "aftersight and foresight": careful thought is required to choose the right word for the unwieldy emotion, as careful thought is also necessary to evaluate the proper motive for action.

The "gifts" reserved for age are not the "Long hoped for calm, the autumnal serenity / And the wisdom of age." These "gifts" that "set a crown upon your lifetime effort" demonstrate that the poet has not come very far in the course of the Quartets as far as accepting the world. His bitterly ironic use of "gift" gives to those aspects of old age--decrepitude, empty awareness and remorse--a weight that goes beyond the emotion: the "objective correlative" is not parallel. As he says of Hamlet, he "is dominated by an emotion which is inexpressible, because it is in excess of the facts as they appear" (SP 48). So too Eliot's bitterness: it appears in excess of the facts, and is revealed through the heavily ironic tone.

The first gift, physical deterioration, is the most obvious failing of age ("body and soul begin to fall asunder"); the second gift is the awareness of human

imperfection:

the conscious impotence of rage
At human folly, and the laceration
Of laughter at what ceases to amuse.

The third gift is one of remorse and guilt: the remorse for "all that you have done, and been," and the guilt of "motives late revealed." The depth of the vilification on the part of the poet is barely countered by the apparent motive of a higher good: his hatred is not disguised by the fact that it is done in the name of love. And ironically, that is what he is attacking--the lack of love in the world. There is neither love for the self, and therefore the disgust at one's aging process; nor love for one's fellows, and therefore a desperate lack of charity for others; and again, a real lack of love for oneself, that one has never acted out of anything but the basest motives. Only the most flagrant self-interest has prompted every-one's actions, except for a few saints. What he denounces is an appalling lack of love. The poet, in the guise of an Old Testament prophet, claims the licence of the prophet and slanders mankind. Love is a stern, masculine deity, much like the river god, whose only concern is absolute surrender. He is an authoritarian god and a strangely cruel god:

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. (LG IV)

We cannot remove the Nessian shirt because it is the ground of our existence. The cruel god has fashioned an existence of suffering which is either embraced or embraces. The poet offers no other explanation for this suffering, other than this cruel god had also sent his son to endure an extremity of suffering (EC IV), and that we should follow the example of the Passion. The negative way is the way of suffering, and the via negativa is also a via dolorosa.

In the third movement the poet distinguishes between attachment, detachment and indifference. Indifference "resembles the others as death resembles life." Attachment gives physical vitality at least, even if it is morally wrong; detachment gives spiritual vitality, and between them, indifference, is mere apathy. The denial that we are adjured to make here is not to make us care less about things, but to care more. Attachment is personal, the result of desire, and is selfish. Detachment is impersonal, the result of pure motives and is unselfish: love motivates detachment. It is the "expansion / Of love beyond desire." The ultimate detachment is the kind of self-sacrifice performed by those involved in the War of the Roses. They believed in something larger than themselves, and their sacrificial deaths are a "symbol perfected in death." The gifts of age, therefore, are reserved for those who are too attached. The escape from the self is through attachment to something beyond the self, which is the struggle of

history, which is "now and England" (the war), or through attachment to God.

The negative way is a personal way, both psychologically and metaphysically. While the poet becomes no less negative in these last two quartets, as shown, he is less concerned with the individual than with the society. So, while the poem enters its last dark night ("While the light falls"), the poet foretells of the coming union:

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

What is left of the negative way is the symbol of fire, which symbolizes the purgative suffering that is integral to the negative way and the heavenly fire which is its reward. Having achieved a "condition of complete simplicity / (Costing not less than everything)," the remaining purgation and unification can take place outside of the framework of the poem.

The title that Eliot gave to the Four Quartets suggests two things: one, that the poem is an organized whole, of which each quartet contributes its share, and that its beginning implies its end and its end its beginning; two, that the poem is in some way analogous to music, for the term "quartet" is of course a musical one--it is "any work

or musical number written for four vocal or instrument parts" (Blom 539). How does negation contribute to the pattern of the poem as a whole and to the voice of each quartet?

Eliot wrote Burnt Norton first and did not intend to produce the other three quartets: Burnt Norton was intended to stand by itself, and perhaps this is why it is the most intense expression of negation, for it is here, we remember, that the poet tells us that "To be conscious is not to be in time" (II), and that life itself is a "form of limitation" caught "Between un-being and being" (V). The final dismissal of life as the "waste sad time" places the poet in the unfortunate position of having an extreme aversion to a condition he can do nothing to alter--life itself. Burnt Norton takes place almost completely within the mind, and we can guess that mind to be mired in despair and passivity. It is the most abstract and philosophical of the quartets ("Time present and time past . . ."), and it is also the most alienated from place. The garden in which the illumination occurs is barely described and most attention is directed to the moving pattern of the guests. The subsequent quartets deal far more with real places that actually figure in the poem. Even East Coker, the second darkest poem, contains a vision of earthly rather than heavenly patterns. The way to the village is described ("deep lane") and the "open field" of the vision is the place which witnesses the passage of time ("In succession / Houses rise and fall"). The Dry

Salvages is concerned not only with place (the sea, the river, the land), but also with action. Little Gidding is unmistakably a real place, one which is sacred (the "significant soil" of The Dry Salvages points to it), and it is related to history (Charles I), England (and hence society) and action (the war):

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

From the philosophic abstractions of Burnt Norton, the poem grows successively more affirmative. As demonstrated above, the Quartets does not become less negative, for we must still wear the "intolerable shirt of flame." The poem is a pilgrim's progress, for we journey from darkness to light and "the end of all our exploring / Will be to arrive where we started / And know the place for the first time." On a personal level the poem becomes less dark and obsessive, and more affirmative and balanced, as the possibility of salvation is apprehended. The condition of life and the state of the world, however, remain to be denied, and all that we have by the end of the poem is the knowledge of where we are.

By becoming the "complete consort dancing together" (LG V), the Four Quartets attempts to transcend, like a piece of music, the temporal world and "reach / The stillness." Silence and stillness are characteristics of the Other, and as Gisèle Brelet observes, music and silence are intimately

related:

Music is born, develops, and realizes itself within silence . . . upon silence it traces out its moving arabesques, which give a form to silence, and yet do not abolish it. A musical work, like all sonority, unfolds between two silences: the silence of its birth and the silence of its completion. In this temporal life where music is born, dies, and is born again, silence is its faithful companion. (qtd. in Bruns 113)

Silence, for Eliot, is what the poem "points at," and his intention, in the Four Quartets, was to get "beyond poetry" and approach the silence. In the light of this, we might remember the "significant soil" of The Dry Salvages, and consider the silence here at the end of the poem to be a "significant silence."

Thus negation operates on many levels and in many ways in the Four Quartets. The theme of the negative way in the first two quartets is balanced by the need to perform "right action" and accept history and place in the last two quartets. Negation works in conjunction with the poetic process as Eliot expounds it in the poem, and as such has aesthetic properties and qualities. The poem as artifact is the result of this kind of creative exploration, for it seeks to articulate those deeper feelings that reside within and which define the nature of the relationship of the poet to the divinity. The negative way becomes the

poetic way, as the poet lifts himself out of his brooding introspection and comes to terms with the world he lives in-- a world whose value is still to be denied.

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