From *The Waste Land* to *Four Quartets*

—T.S. Eliot’s Reconciliation with Time and Futility

Mineko Honda

*Introduction*

T. S. Eliot’s poetry has changed greatly around his conversion to Anglo-Catholicism in 1927, especially in terms of style. Yet, on the other hand, his central spiritual concern pursued in the poetry is persistent: concern about “time” and its futility which is almost an obsession in the early poems; and his effort to overcome the general meaningfulness he felt about this temporal world continued till the end.

In this article, we shall first see that his yearning for timelessness has been so keen as to be conspicuous not only in his poems but also revealed in his literary criticisms as well. Secondly, we shall see that in *The Waste Land*, there expressed no way out of the desperate meaninglessness of the world: although Eliot was attracted by Buddhism when he wrote it, he dared not to get deeply involved in that philosophy, which he felt to be incompatible with Western European culture and tradition; and such inner conflict must account, to some degree, for the poem’s hopeless, ironical tone. Thirdly, we shall see some suggestions that when he was converted to Anglo-Catholicism, his decision was greatly influenced by the attraction of English tradition and universality of Catholicism. Fourthly, although he might have been conscious of his faith’s lack in depth and real sincerity, by the time he wrote *Four Quartets* he might have come
to see some positively important meaning in such cerebral, or what he might call "devotionless" faith: while observing Christian life steadily whether or not it was accompanied by the sense of pious "feeling," he might have after all experienced some revelation of eternal meaning which gave him a deep religious reassurance.

**<Permanence and universality—in search of timeless significance>**

In an address on Ghoethe, delivered at Hamburg University in May 1955, Eliot listed "Permanence and Universality" as two of the criteria of "the Great European." He said these are qualities held by such representative European literary figures as Dante, Shakespeare and Goethe.

In his famous article, "Tradition and the Individual Talent," he says,

Tradition . . . involves, in the first place, the historical sense, . . . and the historical sense involves a perception, not only of the pastness of the past, but of its presence; the historical sense compels a man to write not merely with his own generation in his bones, but with a feeling that the whole of the literature of Europe from Homer and within it the whole of the literature of his own country has a simultaneous existence and composes a simultaneous order. This historical sense, which is a sense of the timeless as well as of the temporal and of the timeless and of the temporal together, is what makes a writer traditional. And it is at the same time what makes a writer most acutely conscious of his place in time, of his own contemporaneity.

Having thus stressed the importance of holding a place in the whole tradition, Eliot gives what is, by this article, well known as his "impersonal theory":

Poetry is not a turning loose of emotion, but an escape from emotion; it is not the expression of personality, but an escape from personality.

Yet, he immediately added to this, “But, of course, only those who have personality and emotions know what it means to want to escape from these things.”⁵ So, characteristically of him, his impersonal theory is not negation of personality, but “escape,” or sacrifice (in the sense of giving up something for greater benefit) of personality in order to achieve something higher, a sort of super-personality.

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.⁶ (emphasis mine)

This is an attempt to get a lasting hold in the solid tradition by assimilating his individual personality with the whole tradition, yet at the same time keeping his particular individuality.

Later, he modified this “impersonal theory” of “Tradition and the Individual Talent” a little, and says in “Yeats” (1940):

There are two forms of impersonality: that which is natural to the mere skilful craftsman, and that which is more and more achieved by the maturing artist. The first is that of what I have called the ‘anthology piece’, of a lyric by Lovelace or Suckling, or of Campion, a finer poet than either. The second impersonality is that of the poet who, out of intense and personal experience, is able to express a general truth; retaining all the particularity of his experience, to make of it a general symbol.⁷
In this, he says he appreciates this second personality.

Then, in, "What is minor Poetry?" (1944) he also says,

The most that I should venture to commit myself to, about the work of any living poet when I met it for the first time, is whether this is genuine poetry or not. Has this poet something to say, a little different from what anyone has said before, and has he found, not only a different way of saying it, but the different way of saying it which expresses the difference in what he is saying?  

Therefore, he is highly valuing poets' genuine personality and originality. Thus, his "impersonal theory" is in fact not a theory of simply giving up individual personality. This will be clear when we remember the more radical impersonal theory of C. S. Lewis: "In the New Testament the art of life itself is an art of imitation: can we, believing this, believe that literature, which must derive from real life, is to aim at being 'creative', 'original', and 'spontaneous'?" As Eliot was himself a poet, he must be aiming to get the quality which he is appreciating in other poets, that is, to say something different in a different way from anyone before, and thereby to achieve permanence and universality.

With such concern about permanence, or timelessness, Eliot in his early poems was solely pessimistic. Those early poems are filled with negative feelings with cynicism, as Prufrock characteristically shows self-contempt and despair to find any meaning in the world. He says,

There will be time, there will be time,

To prepare a face to meet the faces that you meet:
There will be time to murder and create,
And time for all the works and days of hands
That lift and drop a question on your plate;
Time for you and time for me,
And time yet for a hundred indecisions,
And for a hundred visions and revisions,
Before the taking of a toast and tea.

Here, after a lot of speculation, all he would do is to take some tea. Even that speculation does not seem to be deep or sincere, as he is still postponing the time to get engaged with decisions or even with "indecisions," and he knows that if he should, or could, raise any question, he would drop it soon as a petty insignificant thing as if it were a peace of bread to be lifted from the plate and dropped again without being chewed at all. He is vainly wasting his life, doing nothing significant. Yet he knows his inactivity is different from that of Hamlet and nothing philosophically high or heroic. Thus, he is deriding himself: "I am not Prince Hamlet, nor was meant to be." "I have measured out my life with coffee spoons." In his withdrawal, he is thus alienated both from the outer world as well as from himself.

Conspicuously, people in the early poems are alienated from each other, from the world, and even from themselves, and this is also true of The Waste Land, as we shall discuss now.

〈The Waste Land〉

The world of The Waste Land is "A heap of broken images" ("Burial of the Dead," I), and seems to be refusing to give any concrete messages. Yet,
conversely, this refusal to give messages may itself be a loud message that when Eliot wrote *The Waste Land* he could not see any meanings in the world. Later, he says about John Donne,

> It seemed as if, at that time, the world was filled with broken fragments of systems, and that a man like Donne merely picked up, like a magpie, various shining fragments of ideas as they struck his eye, and stuck them about here and there in his verse.¹⁰

This seems also true with Eliot. Stephen Spender, who was a friend of Eliot and wrote his biography, also thinks likewise, and commented on the passage above, “perhaps at the time of writing this, in a world filled with fragments of systems, the thought at the back of Eliot’s mind was that in relation to his age he was like Done.”¹¹ Another friend of Eliot, Conrad Aiken, “considered its incoherence a virtue because its subject was incoherence,”¹² and I think he is right, too—though Eliot is reported to have later said, “in the early poems it was a question of not being able to—of having more to say than one knew how to say, and having something one wanted to put into words and rhythm which one didn’t have the command of words and rhythm to put in a way immediately apprehensible,”¹³ and this must also be a reason of incomprehensibility of *The Waste Land*.

In this Waste Land, there is no salvation. Not only Christianity but also pagan ethics are collapsed. Madame Sosostris, the wisest women in Europe with tarot cards is supposed to have a power to heal, but she is herself sick (“Had a bad cold”) and we can no longer count on her to be capable. London is depicted with an image of *Inferno*, or hell, where people are like ghosts. Decay of sexual morality is especially stressed in a lot of episodes, and even quotation from St. Augustine is used to imply sexual promiscuity, with Eliot’s own note to the text,
"to Carthage then I came, where cauldron of unholy loves sang all about mine ears." In a state of sexual corruption, people are not respecting each other as a human being but each treating the other as nothing more than a thing. In the world of *The Waste Land*, accordingly, people are failing to make true communication, because true communication can be established only between human individuals:

‘What is that noise now? What is the wind doing?’

Nothing again nothing.

‘Do

You know nothing? Do you see nothing? Do you remember

‘Nothing?’

I remember

Those are pearls that were his eyes.

‘Are you alive, or not? Is there nothing in your head?’ (“A Game of Chess”)

I can connect

Nothing with nothing (“Fire Sermon”)

This scene of miscommunication is most conspicuously filled with a keen sense of meaninglessness of the world, or of life. Things without meaning are "nothing", and since they have no substance, it cannot be connected with anything. They are to remain broken bits and so nothing comes from nothing. Besides, these people are not really listening to each other. While talking, one’s attention is to some noise or wind, and although she (or he) appears to ask the other “You know nothing? Do you see nothing? Do you remember Nothing?” she does not give him (or her) time to answer before condemning him “Are you
alive or not?"; and as for him, his mind is anyway absent and when he is asked "Do you remember nothing?" that question does not work as a question but distortedly works only as a prompt to remember Shakespeare's lines, which is a *memento mori*, and ironically echoing with her almost hysterically impatient: "Are you alive, or dead?" This tone of irritation and alienation from each other is a dominant one throughout this poem.

The deleted part from the original manuscript of "Death by Water," an episode of a long voyage and shipwreck, somehow reminds us of Coleridge's "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner," with its hopelessness and sense of damnation that strike the crew on board, especially of the stanza:

And through the drifts the snowy cliffs
Did send a dismal sheen:
Nor shapes of men nor beasts we ken—
The ice was all between.

The ice was here, the ice was there,
The ice was all around:
It cracked and growled, and roared and howled,
Like noises in a swound! "The rime of the Ancient Mariner," ll. 55-61)\(^15\)

Yet, different from Coleridge's "Ancient Mariner," where Albatross suggests salvation and redemption, there is no salvation here. In the discarded draft,

And dead ahead we saw, where sky and sea should meet,
A line, white line, a long white line,
A wall, a barrier, towards which we drove.
My God man theres bears on it.
Not a chance. Home and mother.
Wheres a cocktail shaker, Ben, heres plenty of cracked ice. (Facsimile, “Death by Water”)

Though as a figure in a tarot card, Phlebas, the drowned sailor, may be connected with a pagan God who is likewise drown to death but then comes to life again, and who might be taken for an image of Christ, he does not have any hope of resurrection. Unlike Christ Jesus, he did not come back to life when three days passed since he was killed, and is already “a fortnight dead.” It only ends with a memento mori to all human beings (“Gentile or Jew”):

O you who turn the wheel and look to windward,
Consider Phlebas, who was once handsome and tall as you. (“Death by Water”)

In “What the Thunder Said,” where the narrator says,

He who was living is now dead
We who were living are now dying (“What the Thunder said”).

the end of Christianity is stressed, for this “He” sounds like referring to Christ and his influence; and it becomes especially true when we see the manuscript where Christianity is shown to have no longer real power. Eloise Knapp Hay remarks,

... in “What the Thunder Said” Eliot leaves no doubt in his allusions to Christ: “He who was living is now dead.” In a preliminary draft, he made the
pastness of the Christian past—and its failure to survive in the present—so explicit as to be banal:

After the ending of this inspiration
And the torches and the faces and the shouting
The world seemed futile—like a Sunday outing. (Facsimile, p.109)\textsuperscript{17}

In this Waste Land, there is no rain to bring back fresh life.

Here is no water but only rock
Rock and no water and the sandy road...
And no rock
If there were rock
And also water
And water
A Spring...
If there were the sound of water only...
But there is no water. (“What the Thunder said”)

Here, there is not even a little hope (“the sound of water only,”) but the land is completely dried up.

After these lines, although there is an image of risen Christ who met the disciples on the way to Emmaus, the travellers do not notice his identity, nor even can tell if he is real or not.

Who is the third who walks always beside you?
When I count, there are only you and I together
But when I look ahead up the white road
There is always another one walking beside you. . .
— but who is that on the other side of you? ("What the Thunder said")

Eliot in his own note stresses the point by referring these lines not to the Christ's epiphany but to a report from an Antarctic expedition: "it was related that the party of explorers, at the extremity of their strength, had the constant delusion that there was one more member than could actually be counted." 18 His note sounds rather far fetched but all the more meticulous to stress that the fellow traveller was only a delusion, and also Christ's epiphany, that Christians believe in in our actual world, was nothing but an illusion of the disciples. Hay remarks,

Nowhere in the poem [i.e. The Waste Land] can one find convincing allusions to any existence in another world, much less to St. Augustine's vision of interpenetration between the City of God and the City of Man in this world. How, then, can one take seriously attempts to find in the poem any such quest for eternal life as the Grail legend would have to provide if it were a continuous motif—even a sardonic one? . . . It was also irresistible, in a culture still nominally Christian, to hope that The Waste Land was about a world in which God was not dead. But the poem was not about such a world. 19

As Hay also points out, although there are a lot of allusions in The Waste Land to Christian legends and to the Holy Grail (which is often taken for the chalice Jesus used at the Last Supper and the first Holy Communion), those allusions are always put in a negative context, thereby to stress the lack of salvation, rather than possible hope for salvation. Besides, Eliot says in his note, "Not only the title, but the plan and a good deal of the incidental symbolism of the poem were suggested by Miss Jessie L. Weston's book on the Grail legend: From Ritual to
Romance (Cambridge)," and since Jessie Weston's point in that book is unh- Christian origin of the legend, it will be all the more unlikely that Eliot suggests Christian salvation by the Grail symbolisms. It seems more appropriate to see the Waste Land as a pagan land after the decay of Christianity, where there is no way of salvation that people can turn to instead of Christianity.

It is often reported that around the time Eliot was writing The Waste Land, he was attracted by Buddhism, but he dared not throw away European culture and tradition, which he felt to be inconsistent with Buddhism. As Eloise Hay remarks,

[In] Gerontion ... The rain that will follow the "dry season" will fall only on stonecrop, and as in The Waste Land, the trouble is so far back in history that there is no place to look for help. In fact the Savior toward whom the world looked is seen in this poem as the chief destroyer.\(^{21}\)

The characteristic of the supreme God being the creator as well as the destroyer is seen in a lot of pagan myths, and it is true also of the Hindu Creator, Shiva, who is also the merciless destroyer. The fact that this God is often expressed as androgynous also seems relevant here, where a main character Tiresias is also hermaphroditic.

Then "The death of Saint Narcissus" which was in the manuscript and later deleted, not only reminds us of Greek metamorphosis myth but also of Buddhist metempsychosis, or transmigration of the soul.

First he was sure that he had been a tree ... Then he know that he had been a fish ...
Then he had been a young girl
Caught in the woods by a drunken old man
Knowing at the end the taste of her own whiteness
The horror of her own smoothness,
And he felt drunken and old.\textsuperscript{22}

Takaji Shibata in his book on Eliot and Indian philosophy points out how deeply Eliot was impressed by Indian philosophy. He reminds us that Eliot wrote in \textit{After Strange God} (which has gone out of print and not been reprinted because Eliot did not want to have it out again) that although he wanted to know the mystery of Buddhism, he dared not because, in order to do so, he would have to cease to think and feel either as American or English, and for the practical and sentimental reason, he did not want to do so.\textsuperscript{23}

Thus, in \textit{The Waste Land}, we may read not only the powerlessness of Christianity but also his cynic despair, which comes from consciousness that although he sees hint of salvation only in Buddhism, he would not take that course, and thereby closing the way by himself. It is significant to see Hay’s suggestion here:

\textit{The Waste Land} ends repeating the words of the thunder in the \textit{Bryhadaranyake Upanishad}: “Datta. Dayadhvam. Damyata. [Give. Sympathize. Control]/ Shantih shantih shantih.” . . . His last note in the early editions of the poem (1922-1926) identifies the last words of the poem as the “formal ending to an Upanishad.” He added rather brutally that the Christian “‘Peace which passeth understanding’ is a feeble translation of the content of this word.”
With this remark, Eliot virtually dismissed the Christian’s peace, announced by the angel of the Nativity and again by Jesus, parting from his disciple before the Crucifixion. Here Eliot again echoed Babbitt, who also saw the Buddha's peace as superior to the Christian’s. In 1917 Babbitt had written, “One should grant the Buddhist his Nirvana if one is willing to grant the Christian his peace that passeth understanding. Peace, as Buddha conceives it, is an active and even an ecstatic thing, the reward not of passiveness, but of the utmost effort.” 24

I suppose Eliot was greatly influenced by Babbit indeed, for he seems to have written his note actually with Babbit’s words in mind. His note, ‘Peace which passeth understanding’ is usually regarded as taken from Philippians (4, 7) which, as Hisao Kodama suggests, is also used as a part of the last Blessing given in Holy Communion in Anglo-Catholic Church. Yet as Professor Kodama suggests, both in the Bible and in the Prayer Book, the passage in question goes “peace which passeth all understanding,” from which “all” is missing in Eliot’s note.25 We may, then, notice that the same is true with Babbit’s writing in 1917, which Eliot must have read. Eliot has later revised the note to: “Shantih. Repeated as here, a formal ending to an Upanishad. ‘The Peace which passeth understanding’ our equivalent to this word.”26 From Hay’s remark above, we see it was around the time of his conversion (1927) that Eliot rewrote the notes, demonstrating Eliot’s change in his view both of Christianity and Indian philosophy.

〈Conversion to Anglo-Catholicism〉

It is often remarked that Eliot’s conversion was in a large measure an intellectual matter. Although it is reported that when he was twenty-one years
old, he had a mystical experience of timeless moment given in a sense of great silence, 27 his conversion does not seem to have been because of such experiences. Many feel that when Eliot turned to Anglo-Catholicism, it was greatly because of its cultural value. Later he wrote in Notes Towards The Definition of Culture (1979),

... a main culture will remain a main culture, and a sub-culture will remain a sub-culture, even if the latter attracts more adherents than the former. It is always the main religious body which is the guardian of more of the remains of the higher developments of culture preserved from a past time before the division took place. Not only is it the main religious body which has the more elaborated theology; it is the main religious body which is the least alienated from the best intellectual and artistic activity of its time.

... such phenomena as the progress to religious faith through cultural attraction are both natural and acceptable. 28

This suggests that he may himself have been attracted by Christianity as the greatest cultural body in European tradition. He takes it natural that “the convert of the intellectual or sensitive type is drawn towards the more Catholic type of worship and doctrine.” 29 And as Masaho Hirai points out, this can be read, in a sense, as Eliot’s Apologia pro Vita Sua. 30

Nancy Gish, too, remarks,

The necessity of a timeless and immutable God in order for truth to exist at all characterises Eliot’s later religious beliefs. It has, however, an interesting relation to his pre-conversion attitudes about truth and value. In
1928 Eliot made a remark that suggests the nature of his developing ideas.

At a meeting of an undergraduate club attended by Eliot, conversation turned to the question of permanent aesthetic value:

... T., an undergraduate who was reading philosophy ... said that he did not believe there could be any absolute aesthetic criterion unless there was God. Eliot bowed his head in that almost praying attitude which I came to know well, and murmured something to the effect of: 'That is what I have come to believe.' (cf. Stephen Spender, 'Remembering Eliot', *T. S. Eliot: The Man and His Work*, p. 38.)

Thus, in Eliot's conversion, there seems to have worked his yearning for an absolute, objective aesthetic standard, which led him to the Absolute giver of the standard, that is, to the Absolute God, that he took for the Christian God, though I do not think this aesthetic demand was not all the cause of his conversion.

Yet, still, it is almost certain that his desire for some permanent and universal thing was working in his choice of Anglo-Catholic church. Keiji Yatani suggests,

If he had followed his own intellectual conviction of European unity ... the natural goal should have been to Roman Catholicism. But he chose Anglo-Catholicism. ... Eliot personally needed intellectual and dogmatic religion, which alone could regulate his personal emotions. Therefore Anglo-Catholicism satisfied his intellectual thirst. But perennial prejudices against Roman Catholics which he shared with the English helped him to formulate an extremely interesting idea that "where a sub-culture has in time become established as the main culture of a particular territory, it tends to change place, for that territory, with the main European culture. In England, the main cultural tradition has for several centuries been Anglican..." For this
reason Eliot had to choose a church that seems contradictory, but to Eliot surely synthetic, and that satisfies both intellectual and emotional aspects of faith. He found it in the Catholic Church in England.”

Peter Ackryd reports on Eliot’s conversion thus:

And yet his was still the expression of aesthetic preferences or psychological needs (it is impossible to separate the two) rather than the formulation of any religious belief as such. V. A. Demant has recalled Eliot’s conviction in later life that ‘religious emotion without God as the object of faith was really a pathological condition’.

Yet Ackroyd immediately adds to suggest that Eliot in the succeeding years attempted to escape from that condition. Eliot seems to have continued his spiritual pursuit to attain real faith. *The Hollow Man* (1924) and *Ash Wednesday* (1930) conspicuously mark his turning point. Yet, it is also reported that Eliot once in a conversation with K. Hazareesing “wondered if, in writing ‘Ash-Wednesday,’ he had not been unconsciously influenced by some aspect of Indian philosophy.” Around 1930, then, Eliot was still conscious that he was still attracted by Indian philosophy. Stephen Spender also remarks “Buddhism remained a life-long influence in his work.” We can then see his development in *Four Quartets*. In the next section, we shall see how his faith get deepened in the course of *Four Quartets*, and also how through that development, he gets reconciled with time and its futility.
In a letter to William Force Stead, 9 August 1930, Eliot wrote:

\[\text{... between the usual subjects of poetry and devotional verse there is a very important field still very unexplored by modern poets—the experience of man in search of God, and trying to explain to himself his intenser human feelings in terms of the divine goal.}^{37}\]

When he wrote this, he did not yet conceive of the whole *Four Quartets*, but it is exactly developing religious feelings of a man in search of divine goal that is expressed in the *Quartets*. The poem consists of four parts, “Burnt Norton” (1934), “East Coker” (1940), “The Dry Salvages” (1941), and “Little Gidding” (1942); and mainly because each part has roughly the same pattern, each consisting of five sections, the similarity and consistency of each corresponding section of the four quartets is often discussed.\(^{38}\) Such a critic as Moris Weits sees the whole *Four Quartets* as statically based on the first notion of “Burnt Norton,” and says “The remaining three parts of the *Four Quartets* rest, in great measure, upon immanence theory of ‘Burnt Norton’, and constitute either expansions, modulations or ‘recapitulations of it’.”\(^{39}\) Yet, we shall now see that the narrator shows steady progress in his religious search and that “Little Gidding” is much more than a recapitulation of the previous three parts.

In an address in 1943, Eliot said,

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.\textsuperscript{40}

Thus Eliot does not see any real meaning in writing religious poetry unless it is based on the real feeling. Then it would be safe to assume that \textit{Four Quartets} is also based on his spiritual experience.

"Burnt Norton" opens with a statement:

\begin{quote}
Time present and time past
Are both perhaps present in time future
And time future contained in time past...
What might have been and what has been
Point to one end, which is always present (I)
\end{quote}

This "one end" to which both what might have been and what has been are pointing may mean first of all the "end" of time, when the whole order of the universe has achieved its final form. It echoes Eliot's view of tradition, presented in "Tradition and the Individual Talent" (1919), that the past and the present together form a whole existing order where "the past should be altered by the present as much as the present is directed by the past."\textsuperscript{41} That final form will be determined both by the world of possibility and by the actual world, and in that sense will include both worlds. Then, in addition to the meaning of temporal "end", this also has the connotation of God, for God is the ultimate "end" in the sense of the ultimate object of life. And this connotation is supported by the words "which is always present." Yet, on the other hand, this "end" in "Burnt Norton" cannot be wholly identified with the Christian God. It is expressed as
"the still point" around which the world is turning. It is true that some passages imply Christian notion of God: "Neither flesh nor fleshless" (II) paradoxically reminds us of Incarnation—paradoxically, because actually the state of Incarnation is both flesh and fleshless and not "Neither... nor..." Yet, presented thus negatively, this image has lost the overwhelming Reality of God that is the ultimate existence who has defined himself as "I AM." "The Word in the desert" that is "attacked by temptation" (V) has an implication of Jesus Christ, the Logos, but still, with general lack of movement throughout the quartet, the "still point" is rather like Aristotle's primum mobile, Unmoved Mover, or Plotinus's One. Unmoved Mover turns the world without itself moving. And neither does Plotinus's One move, or descend unless it falls and loses the state of Good. They are, in that sense, "still." Therefore, these Greek notions of the supreme being are nearer to the "still point" in "Burnt Norton."

The "still point" is:

Neither from nor towards...
But neither arrest nor movement. And do not call
it fixity.
Where past and future are gathered. Neither ascent
Nor decline. (II)

This is quite different from God who incarnated Himself, died on the cross, descended into the world of death and resurrected up on earth in order to bring a new regenerated life to the humankind. In "Burnt Norton," "Love is itself unmoving./ Only the cause and end of movement," and such love is not agape, that is, the Christian love which is usually translated into English as "charity," and whose characteristic is wholly disinterested, unselfish lovingness as can be
seen in the self-sacrificing act of Christ. Rather, the Love in “Burnt Norton” is the object of eros, or desire, which moves those who love it by its superiority and attraction.

“Burnt Norton” shows us a negative inoperant world. As God is expressed in negative terms, so are men described negatively as living “In a dim light: neither daylight/ Investing form with lucid stillness... Nor darkness to purify the soul” (III). They cannot concentrate on anything in the world. These men do not see any meaning in this world, nor do they have any belief in another Real, “timeless” world either. So all they can do is be “Distracted from distraction by distraction” (III). The smothering atmosphere here, together with “Men and bits of paper, whirled by the cold wind” (III), reminds us of the world in “Prelude” (1917), where “a gusty shower wraps/ The grimy scraps/ Of withered leaves about your feet/ And newspapers from vacant lots” (“Prelude,” IV). The sense of futility in the lines in “Prelude”, “The worlds revolve like ancient women/ Gathering fuel in vacant lots” (IV) is also felt about the world of “Burnt Norton” which is turning around the still point, though in “Prelude,” there is no “still point,” no centre, in the turning world, and in that the world in “Prelude” is much more meaningless and hopeless than that described in “Burnt Norton.”

Thus, in “Burnt Norton” men are given no concrete vision or assurance of the Real World. Though songs of birds give hint of the timeless world, and the lotus, a traditional symbol of the trinity, of Jesus Christ or sometimes of Virgin Mary, as well as a symbol of Nirvana in Buddhist arts (“in his Harvard notes for 1913-14, Eliot had observed that in Tendai Buddhism ‘the lotus 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’”42), quietly flowers in the imagination, the songs seem to be mere deception, and the lotus soon vanishes away. Northrop Frye says that
"the first Quartet, is an apocalyptic, and gives us a bird’s-eye view of the whole range of experience covered in its successors." 43 However, what is important here is that people in "Burnt Norton" fail to grasp the significance of that apocalyptic vision.

Yet, it is also important here that they, different from the voices in The Waste Land, no longer dismiss the hint cynically as mere illusion. Lines in the second section, "human kind/Cannot bear very much reality" admit that man is not capable of grasping reality as it really is. God in the Old Testament told Moses, "Thou canst not see my face: for there shall no man see me, and live" (Exodus 33, 20). Yet admitting that it is a human condition that we cannot bear the Reality Itself, the narrator of "Burnt Norton" at least believes in the existence of the real world. This is a radical difference from the voices in The Waste Land.

In this world of unreality and negative neutralness, where there would come no saviour from above, man in "Burnt Norton" has to seek peace of mind by escaping from all desires and movements. It is rather nearer to the Buddhist way, trying to get over intrinsic delusions of human life:

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;

(Burnt Norton, III)

This is not yet the positive evacuation of self which leads to total commitment to God. The narrator still doubts if there would really be salvation. He cannot yet wholly believe in God. Yet he may have a faint hope for a salvific power from
above, which is expressed as:

Will the sunflower turn to us, will the clematis
Stray down, bend to us; tendril and spray
Clutch and cling? (IV)

Eliot wrote “Burnt Norton” when he had decided to part from his first wife Vivien, who was neurotic and had been too heavy a burden for him. He was taking procedure to obtain a divorce. Though the poet and the narrator of the poem are not the same, perhaps the reason why “Burnt Norton” has both a heavy suffocating air and cheerful glimpse of a new world is partly that Eliot wrote this poem in considerable fatigue from years of cares and troubles but also at the same time in the hope for liberation and a new life. It is significant that this poem concludes with the calling of children, inviting the narrator to the eternal world. “Quick now, here, now always,” suggests that if one has an eye for the eternal world, that world will be open at any place and at any moment.

In “East Coker” we see more of a positive attitude than in the first quartet. Although it begins with the recognition that everything in this world is in a flux and those who had happy moments in the past are now under the ground and, having returned to the earth, nourishing the corn, the implication is not negative. Those people are still in the cosmic harmony; and the flux of all the things in nature is seen as a great whole. As Julia Reibetanz points out, although the poet follows the dance to the point where all the dancers have been reduced to “Dung and death,” these dancers are “at least keeping time of the seasons and the constellation.” 44

Then in contrast to this great harmony, the pettiness of human knowledge is
recognized. The narrative voice in the second section is of an old man who has been disillusioned about the calmness of the old:

\[ \ldots \text{Had they deceived us} \\
\text{Or deceived themselves} \ldots \\
\text{The serenity only a deliberate hebetude} \ldots \\
\ldots \text{There is, it seems to us} ,\]

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

This awareness leads to another recognition that:

\[ \text{The only wisdom we can hope to acquire} \\
\text{Is the wisdom of humility: humility is endless} . \text{ (II)} \]

This "wisdom" seems to be a deeper insight than merely intellectual knowledge or philosophy. It may be Christian but even deeper than any dogmas and, in that deeper level, compatible with Indian Philosophy that Eliot felt he had to give up. He wrote in 1955,

Of revealed religions, and of philosophical systems, we must believe that one is right and the others wrong. But wisdom is λόγος ζυγός, the same for all men everywhere. \ldots For wisdom is communicated on a deeper level than that of logical proposition.\textsuperscript{45}

It is significant that he has attained humility in this deeper level of wisdom. The narrator in "Burnt Norton" does not have any humility. Humility is felt only
when one is conscious of some superior being to himself. In "Burnt Norton," however, the "still point" has no personality which makes men humble, and all other things seem so thoroughly meaningless that men do not feel humble before anything. In "East Coker," however, the narrator is conscious of his own limitation, or rather, of the limitation intrinsic to all humankind.

In the opening part of section III, the narrator is keenly aware of the mutability of any of human achievements, aware that all the civilization with all its capitals and fame, symbolized by the Stock Exchange Gazette, the Directory of Directors, etc., is bound to sink into the dark nothingness in the passing of time. He is aware that the striving life after money or fame is in fact no real life because it is not animated with anything that lasts. Today, men are not alive in a real sense, so even when one dies, there is "Nobody’s funeral, for there is no one to bury" (III). Here is keen feeling of absolute emptiness of human life in the present society. With this awareness, he is now getting ready to surrender himself to God:

I said to my soul, be still, and let the dark come upon you
Which shall be the darkness of God. (III)

This darkness is different from the internal darkness in "Burnt Norton" which is the darkness coming from total meaninglessness and emptiness. This "darkness of God" will swallow all the vanity in human life and bear the soil where true light will be born. Sondou Ninomiya has remarked that in Eliot, really hopeless state is not darkness but twilight, and that the darkness is a necessary step in order to reach the ultimate goal of salvation.46

Still, in "East Coker," the narrator is conscious that his faith is not yet a genuine one. He probably sees his own fear of belonging to God in other old
people's "Fear of possession/ Of belonging to another, or to others, or to God" (II), and yet simultaneously knows, as he is waiting for God's darkness, that total self-surrender is essential to get true peace. With this ambivalent attitudes, he is still doubtful about the three cardinal virtues of Christianity, Hope, Love and Faith.

I said to my soul, be still, and wait without hope
For hope would be hope for the wrong thing: wait without love
For love would be love of the wrong thing: there is yet faith
But the faith and the love and the hope are all in the waiting. (III)

Yet, now, this doubt is balanced by the hopeful lines, humbly accepting his own inner ambiguity at the moment:

Wait without thought, for you are not ready for
Thought:
So the darkness shall be the light, and the
Stillness the dancing. (III)

Thus, one of the characteristics of this quartet is the inner conflict of the narrator between the hesitation in surrendering his whole self to God and the consciousness that nothing but surrender would lead him to salvation. Reminding the readers of the prayer in Holy Communion, like "That thy grace maye always preuente and folowe us" (Book of Common Prayer, Collect 17th, Sund Trinity), he says,

The whole earth is our hospital...
Wherein, if we do well, we shall
Die of the absolute paternal care
That will not leave us but prevents us everywhere... The dripping blood our only drink
The bloody flesh our only food:
In spite of which we like to think
That we are sound, substantial flesh and blood—
Again, in spite of that, we call this Friday good. (V)

He is aware of God's mercy that "prevents us everywhere." (Here, we can take "prevent" in the proper theological sense of "pre-venire, guide," not cynically as the modern "hinder"). He is aware that human beings are intrinsically sinful like patients who need radical surgery in order to recover health, but who, being afraid of surrendering themselves to a surgeon, hesitate to admit their own illness at all. Even when they know the effort of the surgeon to restore their health, and even when they appreciate his effort as such, they still would like to think themselves to be healthy enough to need no surgery.

It is significant, on the other hand, that toward the end of "East Coker," there come the first words showing real readiness on the part of the speaker. It is readiness which comes from his awareness of his own limitations and newly gained humility. More important still, with this humbleness, the narrator somewhat paradoxically finds it meaningful for him to act positively. It is not because he boasts that his work will be itself of great importance, but because he has found that the action itself will be meaningful when his will and the will of God is in harmony, because, then, he will be in communion with God.

... perhaps neither gain nor loss
For us, there is only the trying. The rest is not
Our business...
We must be still moving
Into another intensity
For a further union, a deeper communion. (V)

These lines, reminding us of Hamlet’s “readiness is all,” insist on the importance of action with the commitment of result to God’s providence. Here he at last gains “stillness” of mind, that comes from faith and not from lack of movement.

* * *

In “The Dry Salvages,” we see yet more positive attitudes than in “East Coker.” This poem begins with the awareness of human agony, especially that of those who are at the mercy of the sea which represents the irresistible power of fortune, or maybe of God. It is true that in this poem, what is expressed is not yet unreserved religious faith. The prayers of the drowned sailors’ bones are said to be “the unprayable/ Prayer” (II), and, though there are some faith, it is “The unattached devotion which might pass for devotionless” (II). Yet, now the narrator believes that at least Mary’s prayer has been valid. While he is conscious that the mere passage of time never erases the original sin of humankind, he has now acquired positive hope. He can ask Mary to pray for man.

Lady, whose shrine stands on the promontory,
Pray for all those who are in ships, those
Whose business has to do with fish, and
Those concerned with every lawful traffic
And those who conduct them...
Figlia del tuo figlio,
Queen of Heaven (IV)

Those strongly evocative lines, with the striking use of Italian Figgia del tuo figlio, "the daughter of your son," cannot but be seen as an overflowing of devotional feelings. The people for whom the narrator asks prayer include not only himself but other ordinary people—fishermen, their wife, everyone living in the society under the laws. He asks prayer even for those who are spiritual leaders (fish is a symbol of Jesus, and as Peter was originally a fisherman, fishermen can represent apostles and ministers) and also for the social leaders, i.e. the conductors of the laws. This concern about others was not seen at all in Pruflock and his world, where people were all self-centredly alienated from each other.

The narrator’s view of the world also has begun to change. He has come to see some meaning in the ordinary experience, thereby coming to see the past in a new bearing. Thus, not only the present but the past moments are getting possibility of redemption.

It seems, as one becomes older,
That the past has another pattern, and ceases to be a mere sequence...
The moments of happiness—not the sense of well-being,
Fruition, fulfilment, security or affection—
Or even a very good dinner, but the sudden illumination—
We had the experience but missed the meaning.
And approach to the meaning restores the experience
In a different form, beyond any meaning
We can assign to happiness. (II)
This change in the view of the world is accompanied by a clear change in the view of action. Here, positive movement is for the first time strongly recommended. The words “Fare forward” are here connected with the teaching of Krishna, who is identified with the supreme God Vishnu in *The Bhagavad Gita*. In the *Gita*, Krishna exhorts Arjuna, who is a representative, or an embodiment, of the soul of man, to the battle against his own relatives for a kingdom. This battle can be interpreted as allegory of spiritual battle with his own self for a spiritual kingdom. What is recommended here is unselfish positive action as “The renunciation of work and work in devotion are both good for liberation. But of the two, work in devotional service is better than renunciation of works.” (*The Bhagavad-Gita*, 5.2)⁴⁷ Helen Gardner has reported that an Indian scholar and orthodox Hindu, B. P. N. Sinha, in an unpublished essay commented on the use of *Gita* in “Dry Salvages”: “As Mr. Sinha points out, Eliot does not accept the metaphysics of the *Gita*, particularly its doctrine of the soul as being ‘unborn, eternal, everlasting’ successively re-incarnated in flesh, or its conception of the material world as illusion. The fundamental concept that he takes from the *Gita* is the concept of disinterested action: Karma-Yoga. Action (Karma) is Arjuna’s duty: the fruits of action are not his business.”⁴⁸ Here, then, the suggestion is that man’s active faring forward or taking action accords with God’s will.

Especially significant here is the fact that this positive suggestion is given through the Indian God. Perhaps, since getting the recognition of what he called “wisdom” in the deeper levels of both Christianity and Indian philosophy than their stated doctrines, Eliot has ceased to worry about what he saw as incompatibility between the Western Christian tradition and the Oriental thought.

Although the narrator does not see the eternal world clearly with his own eyes, he has come to accept it as coming from natural incapacity that is intrinsic to an ordinary man: this is also acceptance of his mediocrity and reconciliation.
with his real self.

... to apprehend

The point of intersection of the timeless
With time, is an occupation for the saint...
For most of us, there is only the unattended
Moment, the moment in and out of time...

... These are only hints and guesses.
Hints followed by guesses... (V)

This hint is no longer dismissed as a mere deception or illusion. He is ready now to commit himself to God even without clear vision of eternal world. The narrator has come to believe that through observant meditation, prayer and action, timeless meaning and salvation will be given. This also seems to be in accord with Eliot's own practice in his actual life, and significant to our eyes.

... 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,
Here the past and future
Are conquered, and reconciled... (III)

The union of the temporal and the eternal is in nature impossible, but he believes that by the intervention of the omnipotent God, and with true prayer and commitment on the part of believers, there must be redemption of the temporal
through the Incarnation of Christ. Therefore, while accepting the limited condition of man, the narrator is aware of the necessity of "prayer, observance, discipline, thought and action." He believes that "right action is freedom/ From past and future" (V), i.e. from all enchainment of time.

This voluntary commitment to God without a concrete experience of eternal moment is actually taken as a form of sincere belief by many people, both laymen and churchmen, ordinary people and theologians. As the narrator himself admits, mystical religious experience is not open for all men, and without such an experience, man can have real faith in God. Some people even think that it is God’s will that we should believe in Him voluntarily without empirical (or even any other type of) proof for the existence of God, and that if we were to believe in God because we had enough proof, our faith could not be voluntary commitment, and therefore would not be real faith.

In "Little Gidding," "the timeless moment" is felt for the first time by the narrator as a concrete reality. Little Gidding, an old English village where there used to be a Christian community formed under the direction of Nicholas Ferrar, is a place where not only saints but also ordinary people sincerely prayed and were heard by God. It is also a place where English tradition (in the sense of old English way of life) and Christian faith were in harmony. The narrator finds in the village a place for purgation and an entrance to the timeless world.

Eliot said in 1950:

I wrote, in "Little Gidding" a passage which is intended to be the nearest equivalent to a cant of the Inferno or Purgatorio, in style as well as content, that I could achieve. The intention, of course, was... to present to the mind of the reader a parallel, by means of contrast, between the Inferno and the
Purgatorio, which Dante visited and hallucinated scene after an air-raid. 50

In a letter to John Hayward, who gives advice to Eliot in the composition of Four Quartets, he also says, "I wish the effect of the whole to be Purgatorial which is much more appropriate." 51 Thus, in the purgatorial scene of the second section, Eliot uses an image of the Holy Spirit as a dove (cf. John I. 32). The fire and water are God's tools to purify the earth. But Eliot's contemporaries seem to have seen, in these, overlapped images of German bombards and the air-raid. Helen Gardner remarks, "Anyone who lived through the London raids must link water and fire as equally destructive, remembering the charred and sodden ruins and their smell the morning after as the great hoses played on the flaming and smoking ruins." 52 Eliot ingeniously connects wartime England and purgatory so that the hope of salvation later in this poem may have had strong effects on the minds of contemporary readers who wished for peace and salvation from dangers during the war. That is, contrary to The Waste Land, "Little Gidding" is suggesting hope, in face of actual destruction from the war.

In this last quartet, faith becomes stronger than ever. The narrator sees in the ruined scenery the purgation of moral hope and despair, of the self-centred ego which has been "The sacrifice that we denied" (II). In section II of this poem we are presented with death of the four elements. The four elements are metaphors of various objects of our worldly desire and attachment, which should be purified, or dead, before we enter the real life. This is the purgation of "Attachment to self and to things and to persons" (III).

In the third section, the narrator distinguishes the three states in our life, that is, attachment, detachment, and indifference. Of the three, the state of detachment, which is also sought for in "Ash Wednesday" (1930) as "Teach us to care and not to care" (I), is here regarded as the ideal state.
Now, the narrator finds in love a way to go out of attachment into
detachment without falling into the state of indifference:

Thus, love of a country
Begins as an attachment to our own field of action
And comes to find that action of little importance
Though never indifferent. (III)

The love for the country is not agape, or the totally unselfish love, charity,
but it can be an important step to go out of egotistic love. Besides, since it
demands action, it is more positive than the speculative asking for interceding
prayer of Mary, as we have seen in “The Dry Salvages.” So, soon in this poem do
we see the appearance of the concept of Christian agape. The narrator thinks of
“three men . . . on the scaffold” (III). This is the scene of Calvary, and we notice
that the concept of Love in “Burnt Norton,” that is “Love is itself unmoving” (V)
has now completely changed into an image of the self-sacrificing, active God.

The greatest difference between Platonic or Aristotelian Supreme Being and
Christian God is that while the former is impersonal and unmovingly moves the
world below, the latter is personal and, more importantly, is humble enough to
descend down into the world in order to save man by Himself suffering on the
Cross. Without the faith in the active, self-sacrificing love of Christ, there cannot
be true Christian faith, which the narrator has at last attained.

The narrator has now come to hold faith in the atonement by Christ. He
says, in the words of Julian of Norwich:

Sin is behelyely, but
All shall be well, and
All manner of things shall be well (III)

In these lines we see a faith in God who has brought a good result even out of Adam's curse. God is now conceived as Love, and human suffering is accepted as agonies in purgatory where dove's fire consumes our fire of desire and self-attachment.

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... Quick now, here, now, always—...
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. (V)

Reibetanz is illuminating in pointing out that all the impossible antithetical unions of the opposites seen in Four Quartets—e.g. Erhebung without motion, the end which is also beginning—stem from Incarnation. She comments on the transformation of fire into roses at the end of "Little Gidding" which concludes Four Quartets:

The paradox of the image does not lie in this transformation... but in the fact that the fire so constituted is one with the rose. The pureness of its flame is in no way mitigated by its union with the rose, nor is the rose consumed by
its union with fire... In this amazing unity, fire and rose are each themselves and yet the other. It is really impossible for us to conceive... In this union, Eliot suggests the ultimate unification of all experience and all reality.\textsuperscript{53}

If we have unreserved faith and sincerely look for the eternal world, the door of the eternal world will be always open to us. This is the recognition of the narrator in the last of the four poems. Nancy Gish finds in \textit{Four Quartets} a "movement towards affirmation," and says this last poem is the poem of affirmation.\textsuperscript{54} Indeed, \textit{Four Quartets} has a movement toward faith and, though, as Frye points out, the four poems "form a single cycle that begins and ends at the same point,"\textsuperscript{55} i.e. the rose garden, the narrator's attitudes never return to the original state in "Burnt Norton." Eliot finds the ultimate reconciliation of time and timelessness, and gets over the sense of futility finally at the end of \textit{Four Quartets}.

\textit{Conclusion}

In the present time, people are living in a Waste Land, where a lot of people have lost meaning of life. It is significant then to see how Eliot has found a way out to salvation through constant spiritual search and observance in faith. It is also significant to see how he finds meaning in "wisdom," which he finds to be deeper than, and so beyond the narrow boundaries of, stated dogmas of separate religions. In Japan, where the majority of people have no particular religion but see some truth in various religions, Eliot's way out of this world's hell, with his religiously pluralistic acceptance of the eternal reality, must have some meaning.
Notes

1 Quotations from Eliot’s poems are from T. S. Eliot, The Complete Poems and Plays (Faber and Faber, 1969; rep. 1990) unless otherwise stated.
5 Eliot, Selected Essays, p. 21.
6 Eliot, Selected Essays, p.17.
14 Eliot, The Complete Poems and Plays, p. 79.
17 Hay, p.51.
19 Hay, p.49.
21 Hay, p. 33.
24 Hay, p. 67. Here she is referring to Irving Babbitt, “Interpreting India to the West,” Spanish Character and Other Essays (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1940), pp. 159-160.
26 T.S. Eliot, Complete Poems and Plays, p. 80.
28 T.S. Eliot, Notes Towards The Definition of Culture (Faber and Faber, 1948, rep., 1979), pp. 80-81.
29 Eliot, Notes Towards The Definition of Culture, p.80.
33 Peter Ackroyd, *T.S. Eliot: a life* (Simon and Schuster, 1984), pp. 138-139. Demant's words are from "Requiem Address for Eliot at Church of St Stephen, 17 February 1965".
34 Ibid.
35 Hay, p.93.
48 Gardner, *The Composition of Four Quartets*, p.56
49 Origen, Kierkegaard, Pascal, William James, F.F. Tennant etc. are all stressing the importance of will to believe.
53 Reibetanz, p.186.
54 Gish, p. 119.
55 Frye, p. 79