

IMAGES IN THE LABYRINTH:  
A READING OF SYMBOL AND ARCHETYPE IN *FOUR QUARTETS*

by

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April 2007

*In Memory of Wayne Carl Berg, Sr.*

*1939 - 2006*

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Throughout this thesis the following abbreviations will be used to refer to *Four Quartets*:

(BN) “Burnt Norton”

(EC) “East Coker”

(DS) “The Dry Salvages”

(LG) “Little Gidding”



## ABSTRACT

Since the publication of *Four Quartets* as a complete poem in 1944, the question of meaning, of how to understand the poem, has remained foremost in the mind of the reader. Insight into T.S. Eliot's last major work of prose has run the gamut of interpretive (and evaluative) schools; yet, as perhaps should be the case, exact meaning eludes the critic. That this is a major work of modernism goes without saying, but the analysis of historicism is tied to one, timely dimension. As a religious poem the reverence of its lines ascends into the realms of metaphysics, but simultaneously they lack a dogma and just as easily connect the reader to the corporeal, gritty fundamentals of life. A rhetorical reading resonates with the overt linguistic structures prefigured by Eliot himself, but after it is all said and done the experience remains architectural at best.

The purpose and method of this thesis are interconnected. The attempt is not to assume or criticize any discipline of analysis, but rather to "care" for, or "curate" the images that Eliot has placed in this work. Through the overlay, the map if you will, of the labyrinth, the effort has been made only to suggest that *meaning* is a movement, like a river, developed between the poem and the reader. How or why such a relationship works is not the focus; the "focus," if that is the word to be used, is simply to cultivate an awareness *of* movement, and an awareness *of* meaning. Just as when we are lost in a maze we ask "what if," what if we were to follow this path here, where does this thread take us, and how deep?

## INTRODUCTION

The thesis you are about to read is an endeavor to understand *Four Quartets* through the lens of a labyrinth. However, I cannot say if I have been talking of a labyrinth in terms of the poem, or the poem in terms of the labyrinth. As one of the greatest literary minds of the twentieth century, a plethora of books, essays and studies exist exploring *almost* every tangible aspect of T.S. Eliot's writings and life. In terms of publishing and academics, it at first seems as if the field has already been settled; what remains for the industrious are navigable passageways between concepts, schools, and theories. If the Quartets were a city, these interconnected corridors would work like the drainage system, a back alley, or uncharted road—the byways that do not appear on the map.

At first I was tempted to feel that I was “butchering” the poem in an anxious attempt to “write something” about them, but then my postmodern sensibilities kicked in and I realized, finally, that the map has already been torn, shredded—or that it never existed at all. Writing this introduction after the fact, I see the “study” more as a motion, a journey in itself. The *sparagmos*, the rending of flesh, is undone through the ceremony of re-gathering, trying to reconstruct something that was lost. Of course, *Four Quartets*, among other things, reveals the futility of this plan in its own language, on its own terms. I am reminded of that image at the beginning of *The Waste Land*, after the garden scene: In the hellish midst of the dry, rocky waste we are summoned to a shallow cave or overhanging rock where we find a “*heap of broken images*,” millions of fractures and partitions, “*fear in a handful of dust*”. What follows in that great poem is the scrap book

of the soul's journey, the patchwork quilt of one person's life, or of many lives, each stitched together as if in a sad attempt to reconstruct some magnificent creature. The image of Isis starts to play, searching the dark earth for the brilliant remains of her lover and brother, Osiris—these she will try to put back together, to remake the god; as at the end of *The Waste Land*, the script reads, “*These fragments I have shored against my ruins*”. Here the *hierogamy*, the sacred marriage, is incanted. Sometimes when I read this I envision a giant stabbing “fragments” into his flayed body, reconstructing himself from all the broken images.

After a prolonged, intense reading of *Four Quartets*, I again feel that the images being explored are not static, are not segregated by school, theory, opinion or notion; rather, they are fluid, they bleed into each other, becoming invisible here, visible there, until, at the last, at the end (which is also a beginning) we experience for ourselves this fusion, this sacred marriage, the creation of a metaphor, a living image.

## CHAPTER I

## “BURNT NORTON” SEDUCTION TO THE UNDERWORLD

Time, or the Fall

The labyrinth begins in the center, it might be said. *We* (the journeyer, the hero Theseus) start at the center and move outwards. From here we become lost; we enter a state of confusion inside the meanders where the walls, if we understand them as merely walls, provide little help in returning us to the place of vision. Such are the consequences of exploration without a guide or without a thread linking us back to the origin. We have forgotten something important, and what follows is profoundly simple: We attempt to remember.

Labyrinth, as it is used here, is intended to be a reading, a map that allows Eliot's images to be placed in a mythic and poetic context of depth. By “depth” I am referring to the underworld as the post-Jungian psychologist James Hillman expresses it in much of his work, particularly *The Dream and the Underworld*; it is a place where images are kept and encountered by the dreamer as meaningful within the dream (80), but faded and bizarre outside of it. Or, as the mythologist Joseph Campbell finds the labyrinth as that place where the hero journeys (Campbell 23-25).

Geographically and historically, “Burnt Norton” refers to an abandoned manor near Chipping Camden in Gloucestershire, England (Moore 24). Ronald Moore in his Stanford Honors Essay reports that this house “derived its curious name from a fire set by its owner in October 1741” (24).

The principal of this poem is the paradox of time: the ambiguity of time, the loss of past, the expectation of the future, and the present tense that permeates and is perhaps no time at all. By placing the reading of this text inside the mythical timelessness of the archetypal labyrinth, the opening lines may present the first of any number of contradictions that soon become repetitive in such an exploration.

*Time present and time past  
Are both perhaps present in time future,  
And time future contained in time past.  
If all time is eternally present  
All time is unredeemable.*

Moore's explication searches out Christian philosophical and metaphysical influences, yet he is sure to state that what we are presented with is a proposition (26), an uncertainty indicated by the key words "*perhaps*" and "*if*". The nature of time is obscure; moments are contained one in the other, or *perhaps* they are, and *if* they are it is as Heraclitus suggests in the epigraph, that time and direction of the soul are nonsensical when viewed with a rational mind: up is down, down is up—time is that river that we cannot step into twice.

Gaetano Cipolla, in his doctoral dissertation, draws up a convincing argument that compares poetic riddles on time and other abstract concepts to the Gordian Knot, the solution of which will lead the hero to the arcana of the cosmos, the seat of God, and knowledge of self (Cipolla 82). As knotted time emerges here and there in *Four Quartets*, certain themes make themselves available in their repetitions and symbolic connections to less abstract foundations. The re-cycling of seasonal time is one example that provides structure to the overall poem as well as this critique of it: spring-summer for

“Burnt Norton,”<sup>1</sup> summer-autumn for “East Coker,” autumn-winter for “Dry Salvages,” and winter-spring for “Little Gidding”.

Out of this precept of seasonal time there is also time as it exists for man, which might be called the time of the clock. The chronometer works to document historical time, a division of human events as they are continuously and endlessly recorded, without falter, in almanacs and newspapers. The chronometer is also a time in humankind’s experience of the growing and dying body that begins with the infant and child, proceeds to full strength of adulthood, and finally terminates somewhere in old age when the body and mind have been fully etched by years of wear and tear. The second time is a “*time not our time*” (DS I), the time of the body as a biological entity governed by the same rhythms that drive the seasons, the tides, the stars, and the ebb and flow of human constructions: the house that is built and burns, the bridges and the highways. Finally, there is the time out of time, a time of the divine that is observed in moments of “*sudden illumination*” (Bodelsen 36; DS II), *anamnesis*, or hyper-recollection, of the past in terms of the present—this is a time of meaning.

Following the introductory meditation on time in “Burnt Norton,” we are first distracted by the echo of footfalls.

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<sup>1</sup>Bodelsen, as do I, finds it difficult to ascribe exact correlative seasons to the Quartets, seasons that Eliot suggested himself. I agree with Bodelsen’s move to relate seasonality with the primary elements of earth, water, air, and fire—where “East Coker” is earth (summer), “The Dry Salvages” is water (autumn), and “Little Gidding” is fire (winter) (32). “Burnt Norton” seems to lack a definable element and season, unless, that is, we take its circularity at face value and read this not as simply a beginning to the poem, but a beginning that emerges out of the winter-spring of “Little Gidding,” thereby fusing the elements of air and fire, each being contingent upon the other. However, we must also keep in mind the biological clock of the human body: birth, prime, old age and death.

*Footfalls echo in the memory  
Down the passage which we did not take  
Towards the door we never opened  
Into the rose-garden.*

Passages not explored and doors not opened are two of the more concrete allusions to the labyrinth theme in the poem. It is fitting that these lines follow the introductory contemplation on time, for they cut across it in the vehicle of memory and enhance the idea that the labyrinth is a metaphor to that which connects the present moment back through experience, or back through literature, mythology and religion. The rose-garden is a place of personal mediation, but also of communal imagery, first the pronoun of “we” summons the “sexual fantasy” in the garden of Dante and Beatrice (Moore 28). It is also the Garden of Eden with “*footfalls*” being the fall of man from a state of bliss, suggesting “we” may also be a realization of the first Adam and the first Eve. If “Burnt Norton,” by its accumulation of motifs, avoids the systematic classifications of seasons and elements into which fall the other quartets, these few garden lines are the summer of its season. Pushed further back into the depth of an embryonic-myth stage, it is the womb that contains the center found at the end of “Little Gidding,” a oneness that is lost upon the utterance of the word “*time*”; the oneness that shattered into many different images and that recedes quickly into twisting, turning, ascending and descending passageways.

Lost is the single unity of that timeless fetal position at the center where meaning coalesced into an ambiguity of all meaning. It is replaced, now, with the echo of the self, the hero, the ego that will continue as a theme and is given a name later in “The Dry Salvages” as Arjuna, the warrior from the Bhagavad Gita in the Indic tradition. Echoes

and ego are emanations from the myth of Narcissus that Eliot's poem will continue to summon up and shatter.

Moving on, it will be necessary now and then to recap and foresee the narrative of the action in the poem. As a technique of analysis I will simply ask a series of leading questions in regards to symbols that I feel have not been (or cannot be) followed deep enough to come to a precise enough answer. What remains should be a conclusion of questions, a vagueness as to the precise meaning of the image, but a feeling, at the very least, of familiarity.

Up to this point we have contemplated the knot of time, we've been introduced to the garden-labyrinth and two characters, probably lovers, who contemplate a dusty bowl of rose-leaves. About the rose-leaves: is this just a memory, or an image of time? Why only rose-leaves and not rose-petals, or the flowers themselves? Moore chooses not to interpret this image, but suggests the garden, as a whole, is dusty and "gone to seed" (27). Bodelsen seems to think that disturbing the dust is akin to "awakening" a memory of former love (Bodelsen 43). This interpretation is not obtuse, but provides for the perception the of unanswerable, which should be sufficient: why would there be leaves in a bowl? Are these leaves representative of appendages that have fallen off of the main plant, gathered up by someone for some purpose, maybe an attempt to clean, to put in order a garden gone left to go wild?

Burnt Norton is a deserted country manor that was visited by Eliot in the summer of 1934 (Moore 24), the years between WWI and WWII; and like every untended place there is entropy, the inevitable work of nature. Here is a place of time, the dwindling



sands of time, a person observing this relationship between dead leaves and the dust that has settled.

### The Talking Bird

*Other echoes  
Inhabit the garden. Shall we follow?  
Quick, said the bird, find them, find them,*

Of romance Northrop Frye writes, “The perennially child-like quality of romance is marked by its extraordinarily persistent nostalgia, its search for some kind of imaginative golden age in time or space” (Frye 186). Romance, in its ideal form, follows an ageless hero on her or his adventures toward an epic struggle of dynamically opposed forces. This is the hero’s journey in which Frye declares the stages of *agon*, *pathos*, and *anagnorisis*, or “conflict,” “death-struggle,” and “discovery” (187). This is the hero’s quest of separation, initiation, and return.

Of the many poetic symbols and clues that inhabit the first movement of “Burnt Norton,” the significance of the talking bird is the introduction of the reader-hero to the world of romance. Much like in the *Wizard of Oz* when Dorothy incants, “We’re not in Kansas anymore, Toto” or when Alice follows the talking rabbit into Wonderland, we know we have left one reality and entered a world of phantasm and *otherly* perception. So too when the little bird, the deceptive thrush, orders us to quickly “*find them, find them,*” we have left the untended garden of the “real” and entered the dominion of the surreal, the world of talking animals. “*Shall we follow the deception of the Thrush? Into our first world*” (BN I).

Of animal symbols in dreams James Hillman uniquely suggests that these creatures, like humans, are “carriers of soul” (Hillman 148). Animals are our familiars, that silent, intuitive aspect of our selves that make us pay attention to the secret door or passageway “*into our first world*” (BN I.20), the journey, the underworld, the labyrinth.

[T]here are many animal ways into the underworld. We may be led or chased down by dogs and meet the dog of fear, who bars the way to going deeper. We may be driven down by the energetic rapture of hard-riding horsepower; go down through the air like a bird in its many modes—twittering, sailing, diving—a sudden seizure of the spirit, the impulse suicide of a quick mental move. (Hillman 149-150)

The bird, for the remaining twenty-five lines of Movement I, becomes a spirit guide for the hero’s timid introduction into the mandala of the garden’s center. It is the bird that finally coaxes the reluctant *puer*, the uninitiated youth, into the next phase of the cyclical pattern. In a sense, the bird represents that carne at the county fair who chides and brags until we finally pay him for a trip through the madhouse.

Suddenly, the secret forgotten garden is inhabited by a presence, perhaps another form of the earlier echo, perhaps not. we are perplexed by these mysterious ‘*they*’.

*“There they were, dignified, invisible, / Moving without pressure, over the dead leaves”.*

There is a ghostly impression. Is it autumn, for dead leaves scatter the ground, yet the air is “*vibrant*,” an indication to the proximity of winter-spring that we will fully experience later in “Little Gidding”. The guide bird now alerts us to “*unheard music hidden in the shrubbery*,” and something called an “*eyebeam*” crosses next to the roses that are *seen*; symbols not simply noticed, but gazed upon, for they “*had the look of flowers that are looked at*.” This scene of reminds me of that technique done in cinematography where the

same old ruin phases between a blossoming fantasy and what it was before, the juxtaposition of old and new, as if the hallucinatory experience threatens to override what we thought was reality. The new world fluxes in and out—we move with the “*they*” in consort along the paths of the garden to a pool, a circular bowl within a box of cement. In the “real” world this pool is empty and dry, but in the “green” world, the “new” world, it is “*filled with water out of sunlight,*” and the mystical flower, the lotos, which is the same as the rose; or, there is a lotos flower rising up out of water of sunlight.

This difficult passage does feel like either an initiation, a dance (if only the beginning) or both; and the little bird does three things: first, it commands us to follow the echoes, which is the catalyst to further exploration of the garden; second, it alerts us to the unheard music that is concealed—music that is closely associated with the laughter of children, and the possibility that the source of both are one and the same; third, the little bird banishes us from the garden and the heart of light. We are returned to the ponderings of time, the knot, and the journey through the labyrinth that awaits.

### Axel-tree

In the first movement of “Burnt Norton” we are guided or tricked by the thrush to the center of the rose-garden. Now we are alone. The cloud that broke the sunbeam, and thusly the phasing in and out of the historical lost garden and the experience of an otherworldly paradise, has receded along with the symbolic specters. We are left, one feels, still at the center: “*Garlic and sapphires in the mud / Clot the bedded axel tree*” (BN II).

Bodelsen informs us that “in the Quartets the subdivisions of a Movement often deal with the same idea regarded from two different points of view, or expressed in two different kinds of language” (Bodelsen 46). The conceptual relation to the labyrinth is that of a spiral or concentric circles moving out from the focus, where, as we continue, the image and interpretation of what constitutes the center changes. What was once a dry pool has blossomed into a summer tree, here an “*axel-tree*,” but later in “The Dry Salvages” it will be translated as the yew-tree, a pagan and Christian icon of death and immortality; in “Little Gidding,” when we have come full circle, it will also be the timeless yew-tree, and the apple tree full of children.<sup>2</sup>

Like the pool in the boxed circle, the axel-tree is a metaphor that should be approached as a polymorphic creature. On the surface, along with the rest of the decaying garden, we have come upon the axel of a car imbedded in the mud. The purpose of the axel is to provide a still point on which the wheels pivot, moving the vehicle forwards or backwards: “*the still point of the turning world*” (BN II). The axel is the pivot on which spins the wheel of fortune that drives the carriage, the vessel of the soul. This is the *axis-mundi*, the center, and the bo-tree under which Buddha entered the field of contemplation to gain enlightenment (Campbell 33). It is the Tree of Life in Eden, and in Christian

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<sup>2</sup> “*We, content at the last / If our temporal reversion nourish / (Not too far from the yew-tree) / The life of significant soil*” (DS V).

“*The moment of the rose and the moment of the yew-tree / Are of equal duration*” (LG V).

“*At the source of the longest river / The voice of the hidden waterfall / And the children in the apple-tree / not known, because not looked for / But heard, half-heard, in the stillness / Between two waves of the sea*” (LG V).

symbolism it is the Cross and the body on the Cross. Of the tree in this aspect Campbell writes:

The tree is the World Axis in its wish-fulfilling, fruitful aspect—the same as that displayed in Christian homes at the season of the winter solstice, which is the moment of the rebirth or return of the sun, a joyous custom inherited from the Germanic paganism [...] (Campbell 213)



Image 1. Evelyn de Morgan. *The Dryad*. 1885.



Image 2. The Visconti-Sforza Tarot Deck. *The Wheel of Fortune*. cr. 1440 – 70.

In the trans-substantial realm the tree is a human body, first because a tree with its branches pointing to the sky resembles a person with her arms waving in the air; when the wind blows she dances, perhaps even sings, or whispers hypnotically. In the winter, absent of leafage, we see her skeletal frame that transforms her branches scraping the windowpane into dead, boney fingers.

Greek and Roman myth gives us the dryad, the female spirit of the tree. Ovid tells that Apollo, struck by Cupid's arrow, becomes enraptured with the beautiful virgin Daphne, daughter of the river god Peneus; but the instant before he satisfies his desire, Daphne prays to her father for transformation—granted, her delicate arms become the limbs, and her body the trunk of the laurel tree.

And yet  
 Apollo loves her still; he leans against  
 The trunk; he feels the heart that beats beneath  
 The new-made bark; within his arms he clasps  
 The branches as if they were human limbs;  
 And his lips kiss the wood, but still it shrinks  
 From his embrace...<sup>3</sup>

In “Burnt Norton” the tree is a mix of sequential metaphors: first a pool of water inside a circle that draws our attention to the Renaissance boxed circle design of *Vitruvian Man* by Leonardo da Vinci, in which proportions of man are considered universal and central, artistic and scientific. The “*lotos rose*,” the figure we gaze upon rising out of the lighted pool, has also been interpreted as a bridge between the Eastern concepts of enlightenment and sexual fertility and the Western idea of “logos” which suggest spiritual and philosophical salvation (Moore 30-31). Moore's metaphysical scansion reveals the tree as

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<sup>3</sup> *The Metamorphoses of Ovid* 1.505-560

the Cross and the bodily lyric that follows as the stages of Christ's earthly journey of suffering and salvation (31).

The World Tree is the filament that connects the heavens and the earth. It is the communal point where the profane and the sacred merge and are confused with each other. (At this point of our labyrinthine interpretation we have passed the threshold, yet still we are presented with images of portals and of gates.) The tree is the body, and the body is clotted in the mud oozing with garlic and sapphires, its roots twisting and extending into the underworld while its appendages brush the heavens.

If we connect to the mystery religions we find that death and resurrection share lineage with the myth of Venus and Adonis, Eurydice and Orpheus, and Osiris and Isis. Each one is a *sine qua non* of transformation: life into death, death into life. In essence, the tree is a *daimon*, the go-between, that which is not completely human, but also not completely earth, heaven or Hades. If we read this image according to what Frye says about the liaison between comedy and romance, what we are witnessing can also be expressed as a transition from spring into summer, or the lower realm of confusion into the upper world of harmony and light (184). Structurally, this tree mimics the elemental scheme that helps structure *Four Quartets*: the roots are submersed in the mud (the mud left from the water of the dry pool?), the branches extend into air, and sapphires (the fire stones) are related to Saturn and Saturnalia, the god of agriculture and festivities of lights that mark the return of the sun and the death of winter and darkness.

“*Garlic and sapphires in the mud*” continue to explain the labyrinth's center, the *axis-mundi*, and themes of death and rebirth. The gems have been discussed above, but



garlic is a magical and mythic plant, a traditional ward against evil that arose from the left footprint of Satan as he left the Garden. Its pungency is representative, one might say archetypal, with the summer feast; it was and is eaten by field workers as an antidote to the sun's heat and is considered a cure-all in folklore. It is a staple of the rural and rustic, the sailor and traveler. In antiquity the Greeks offered garlic to Hecate at crossroads,<sup>4</sup> thus bringing together the symbol of the axis and the underworld, for Hecate is closely associated with Hermes and doors. She is a boon to birth and death, aiding both women in childbirth and soldiers on the battlefield.<sup>5</sup> James Hillman finds Hecate without family, her essence avoids direct manipulation in the life-force realms of marriage, birth, and agriculture, but extends into the purview of ghosts and fear, associations of the *chthonic* spirituality of the underworld (Hillman 42).

Mud is the bonding agent of herbal and mineral, garlic and sapphires. The cement pool was once mud, and before that it was the earth itself mixed with water, ash, and lime. As a corporal lyric this verse mimics the seasonal round from spring to winter. Spring and summer is the time of *plerosis*, of feasting and filling up, it is the time of plenty in which the community “galvanizes” and assures its continuance (Appendix A). If Christian morality sees garlic as a symbol of gluttony (Moore 31), then the image of mud might represent faeces oozing out of the body of the tree, revealing what has been consumed: the firestone cure-all, things of value, precious and important, mixing with earth and underworld. Hillman states, “the discovery that one has soiled himself, and the like—can be read as underworld initiations” (Hillman 184). Shit is taboo, it is at once

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<sup>4</sup> <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Garlic#History>

<sup>5</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hecate#Goddess\\_of\\_the\\_crossroads](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hecate#Goddess_of_the_crossroads)

loathsome and a necessary fertilizer, a compost that carries the odd fortune of being disposable upon its introduction into existence. If all time is eternally present, all shit is eternally present (185), “*prima materia*,” an immediate and unavoidable fact of existence. It is a spewing forth, a slap in the face of the notion that “cleanliness is next to godliness” (184). As Hecate is a ruler of doors and crossroads, so shit marks the liminal zone into Hades and the dwelling of Pluto. It suggests entry into the anus, which is a portal to the labyrinth of the intestines (183) of the tree, the body. Hillman writes,

We are crossing a border. Diarrhea signals the daylight order is at its “end.” The old king falls apart and shits like a baby—  
decomposition and creation at once: incontinence, humiliation,  
ridicule, from Saturn, lord of privies and underwear, to Saturnalia.  
(184)

We are not in Kansas anymore, nor are we in the rundown garden of Burnt Norton, walking the passages with a secret sweetheart. The tree is many things, so too is it a symbol of the live and the living, and the dead and the dying. It is strong, verdant summer, it is the tattered, bleeding corpus. It is a dancing body containing the stories of war and survival written in scars, which are in turn written in the stars, the memory aides of myth. We are now the little bird, nesting in the branches of a tree that trills with the vibrancy of change and the confluence of meaning, the movement of metaphor.

The first strophe of Movement I concludes with the journey down through the trunk of the tree into the myth of Venus and Adonis, and the story of eternal return represented by the pattern of the boarhound and boar.

*Ascend to summer in the tree  
We move above the moving tree  
In light upon the figured leaf  
And hear upon the sodden floor*

*Below, the boarhound and the boar  
Pursue their pattern as before  
But reconciled among the stars.*

Similar to Apollo's lust for Daphne, Venus, according to Ovid, is accidentally scratched by her son's arrow and becomes filled with mad-love for the *ephebe* Adonis, a boy born from a myrrh-tree, whose beauty no one could resist. After the consummation of their love, Venus pleads with the fresh young man to be careful in his exploits. Certainly his beauty would be no match for the savage beasts of the forest. But Adonis is himself brash and wild, and pays no heed to the goddess's warning. One macabre day while out hunting, Adonis' hounds chase a vicious boar out of the forest. The pig is enraged.<sup>6</sup> Adonis only has time for a glancing blow with his spear before the boar is upon him, goring the boy's groin with its razor tusks. Fallen, Adonis bleeds to death. Venus is struck with grief over the loss of her young lover; she declares that each year a feast and ritual reenactment of his beauty and suffering will be performed. And as his blood mixed with the mud, there she sprinkled scented nectar, and from this concoction rose the anemone flower, none other than the color of sapphires.<sup>7</sup>

### The Dance

*At the still point of the turning world. Neither flesh nor  
fleshless;  
Neither from nor towards; at the still point, there the dance  
is,*

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<sup>6</sup> Following the influence of the underworld in this story, Robert Graves has traced the death of Adonis to events initiated by Persephone, who informs Ares that his lover has become smitten with a mortal. Overtaken with jealousy, Ares turns himself into the boar and savages the youth in front of the sex goddess (Graves 18.j).

<sup>7</sup> Adapted from *The Metamorphoses of Ovid* X.511-739.

*But neither arrest nor movement.*

Commenting on the general structure of *Four Quartets* C.A. Bodelsen reveals that the second movement of each quartet reverses the themes of the first, and itself is separated into an initial symbolic lyric and then a meditation upon a similar theme (Bodelsen 30) – the connection at this point is that of the axel-tree and its associated mythic, religious, and secular metaphors: fertility rites, the tree of life, and the human body. The result produced by this poetic technique can be compared to initiation and the following contemplation of that experience, or the journey into our metaphor of the labyrinth and our attempt to translate what is witnessed into graspable language. The tree is confused between its concrete appearance as an old, forgotten axel and its metaphorical power that allows it to extend out and become any number of images. There is no objective reality that allows us to say for certain—the tree is neither flesh, nor is it fleshless. It is constantly changing, never still, yet acquiring a sense of stillness, a dance.

As an initiatory experience the labyrinth (here the axel-tree) works as what Jungian scholar Joseph L. Henderson terms the “*abaissement du niveau mental*” (a lowering of the mental experience): it is, writes Cipolla, “a necessary step for the introduction of man into the other realities of life [...] so that the world may more freely be experienced” (Cipolla 29). This statement is written after Gaetano Cipolla quotes from Henderson’s book *The Wisdom of the Serpent*:

The experience of the labyrinth, whether as a pictorial design, a dance, a garden path or a system of corridors in a temple, always has the same psychological effect. It temporarily disturbs conscious orientation...I myself once followed this maze, slowly walking through it in and out or following it with my eyes from beginning to end with the striking discover that my mental

threshold was lowered, not just through dizziness, but in such a way that when I emerged from out of the maze I could respond more naturally, more genuinely to the beauty of the great church beyond.<sup>8</sup>

In the Quartets the dancer is us, the initiate-reader, Theseus himself; we are following those heroes, as Joseph Campbell mentioned (25), that have gone before. Scholar Károly Kerényi has stated that “any serious study of the labyrinth ought to begin with the ‘dance of the Crane’” which was enacted around an altar constructed out of the bulls’ left horns, where “young men and women moved from right to left mimicking with their movements the meanders of the labyrinth” (Cipolla 51).<sup>9</sup>

Mythically, we are fully engaged in the dance around the may pole, where the “*still point*,” the pole itself, is cause and motive of the dance; and if it is a braided dance, the reversal of the pattern must be followed by the dancers holding the ribbons lest they tangle themselves and ruin the hypnotic atmosphere. The effect is the breathing pole that is life for the dancers and given life by the dancers. Michael Beehler in his book *T.S. Eliot, Wallace Stevens, and the Discourse of Difference* writes that it is this difference of negation, the “limbo-image” out of which the “*still point*,” and therefore the dance, manifests (129). Rhetorically, these are “tensive relations,” tensive “differentiations” (130), images, and encounters that recall the ritual of the dance throughout the Quartets.

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<sup>8</sup> Quoted in Cipolla, 28-29.

<sup>9</sup> In book XVIII of the *Iliad* (Samuel Butler translation) Homer depicts the crane dance: “Hereon there danced youths and maidens whom all would woo, with their hands on one another's wrists. The maidens wore robes of light linen, and the youths well woven shirts that were slightly oiled. The girls were crowned with garlands, while the young men had daggers of gold that hung by silver baldrics; sometimes they would dance deftly in a ring with merry twinkling feet, as it were a potter sitting at his work and making trial of his wheel to see whether it will run, and sometimes they would go all in line with one another, and much people was gathered joyously about the green.”

From the pages of the pen into myth, Joseph Campbell relates such negations to one of the many figures of the World Navel as the Hindu dancing goddess Kali (Campbell 41), a deity who, when coupled with Shiva, is like the dance of *neither-nor*, simultaneously creation, preservation, and destruction. The hero sees Kali as a goddess emerging from the river of time to give birth and nourish an infant, before devouring it with her jaws, and then descending back into the sacred waters of the Ganges (115).

The dance is ecstasy, literally standing outside of one's self. Eliot writes "*Erhebung without motion*," German for "up lifted." If the dance is a ritual it is also the reconciliation of dream, the power to confront the awful fact of Kali (time) eating her own young, or the inevitable journey of the weakening body. Dance mimics the cycle of the grotesque image of the axel-tree, the circular boarhound and the boar is reconciled here in the movement where, by its circular nature, it resolves the horror of the old world, the winter, with the *reverdi* of nourishing spring.

Like most things, perhaps Shakespeare got closest in "A Winter's Tale," a program that allows time, the chorus, to knit together a play gapped by an absence of sixteen years. Again, we are in the world of romance when Florizel, our hero, utters these lines to Perdita, whose name means "the lost":

When you do dance, I wish you  
A wave o' th' sea, that you might ever do  
Nothing but that, move still, still so,  
And own no other function. (IV.iv)

### Descend Lower

Like the dry pool of the first movement or the mud clogged axel of some forgotten vehicle in the second, in Movement III our experience now turns to the descent into the metro lines where the passengers adopt the vacant faces of those who are between work or home, between destinations, a theme of transience that affects, in some way or another, each of the quartets. There is an image of bits of paper, receipts and old tickets, blowing in the “*unwholesome*” lungs of the London tube, inbreathed by denizens of the passageways that connect the various stops, “*Hampstead and Clerkenwell, Camden and Putney*” (BN III). The light beneath the city, perhaps the *unreal city* visited in *The Waste Land*, is unnatural, electric, and heatless. One almost feels the overwhelming cement and steel contraption of a modern world.

As a metaphor for the descent into the belly of the beast, the third movement of “Burnt Norton” might be taken as a further explanation of the dancer’s psychological state of mind, of the transmutable axel-tree, and the boxed circle at the center of the rose-garden with its pool of lotos-rose and phantasmagoric reflection of “reality”. Again we revisit the contemplation of time from the present moment, a moment dimly lighted, not by the movement of the sun, or by darkness—but by the heart’s ability to perceive.

The entry into the labyrinth is here associated with the *via negativa*, the way that *is not*. But *that which is not* works to reveal the aesthetic beauty of *that which is*: daylight does invest “*form with lucid stillness*,” it is the existence of one thing in contrast to the non-existence, or fading relevance, of another. The rotation of night and day is fabled by the pattern of the sun who chases the moon, and the moon who flees from the sun with

her hoard of stolen fire. Perhaps there is an effort here, in the metro dungeon, to understand the center of the rose-garden in terms of the possibility of no center. Traditionally, in architectural and artistic renditions, the labyrinth has been shown with a center holding a mystic rose, a fountain, or the Minotaur. It has been a *via meditatio*, or positive road of meditation where the mind can rest upon the certainty that the path does lead upward to spiritual awakening. Such an understanding of labyrinths seems to suggest an act of faith, perhaps an “*occupation of the saint*,” as Eliot will later write in the Quartets, referring to those whose minds rest continually upon the “*intersection of time with the timeless*” (DS V). W.H. Matthews, in his foundational study of mazes and labyrinths, writes that to consider the concept entirely as a system of confusion, as a “torturous branched path designed to baffle or deceive” (Matthews 2) forgets the paths that have only one direction. Equally important is for the mind not to fixate on the popular depiction of “walls and hedges,” for to do so would leave out the buildings with series of inter-joining chambers and secret passageways. Kenneth Branagh’s *Hamlet* depicts a convoluted Elsinore Castle where the mirrored hallways work to enhance the theme of Hamlet’s descent into the chaotic structure of his own mind. Similarly, Alain Resnais’ *Last Year at Marienbad* presents a sprawling baroque hotel in which two characters, a man, X, and woman, A, engage in a fragmented conversation about whether they have met before, last year, at the same place.

We were near some stone figures on a plinth... a man and a woman in the classical style... whose suspended gestures... seemed to hold some significance. You asked me who they were. I said I didn't know. You began to guess, and I said... it could as well be you and I... (*Last Year at Marienbad*).





Image 3. *Hamlet*, Dir. *Kenneth Branagh*. Castle Rock Entertainment, 1996.



Image 4. *Last Year at Marienbad*, Dir. *Alain Resnais*. Astor Pictures Corporation, 1962.

Additionally, Ovid's description of the labyrinth built to jail the monster is not a centripetal one. Daedalus' construction is of intertwining corridors that "trick the eye with many twisting paths that double back—one's left without a point of reference" (Ovid VIII.151-70).

The second strophe of the third movement is a call to "*Descend lower, descend only / Into the world of perpetual solitude.*" Such a direction, downward, summons us towards darkness. As the Everyman in a medieval morality play is abandoned by the Virtues at the moment of his death, so too does the passage into the underworld leave behind such artifacts as property, sense, fancy, and spirit. These are trinkets of the day world, of a mechanism concerned with the "*metalled ways / Of time past and time future.*"

#### Detail of the Pattern

The fifth and final movement of "Burnt Norton" reflects on the philosophical experiences of the day. Words are the tools of the poet, yet to capture the moment that *was* experienced they feel somehow inadequate, they "*strain, / Crack and sometimes break, under the burden,*" that compromises the "co-existence," that feeling of being at once in and out of time. This is the meaning of words, that *their* meaning is imprecise, difficult to capture such existential experiences as the confluence of beginning and ending.

How is one to record it, he writes, that moment of ecstasy? How was it achieved earlier in the rose-garden and then forgotten when we became fully absorbed into the

time of the clock? A contemporary parallel to this sense of loss can be found in the Pink Floyd song “Comfortably Numb” that narrates a rock star’s exhaustion with fame and his inability to recapture the moment of awe he experienced when he first fell in love with music. True to the experience of the Labyrinth, the song begins with a cry of loss and abandonment (“Is anybody out there?”) and continues to create a moment of disjointedness and distance of from the present moment. In this moment of feverish delusion the artist recalls:

When I was a child I caught a fleeting glimpse,  
Out of the corner of my eye.  
I turned to look but it was gone.  
I cannot put my finger on it now.  
The child is grown, the dream is gone.<sup>10</sup>

What about that poem you read that shook you to the core? That moment alone with the Quartets in an abandoned church, or a hill overlooking the village, in the gloaming hour? Or better yet, what of those words *you* wrote that seemed to have their own vibration?

The poetry as labyrinth might be described as dipping in and out of time; it brushes against the local, here or in an England that has never looked so plain. It is a masque of the unreal that evokes the edge-wear road, the every-city. The Passion is in literature, always present, as we are present in our time. Writing can attain to the stillness in a way that the jar itself never can.

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<sup>10</sup> “Comfortably Numb” by Pink Floyd



Image 4. Floor Labyrinth at Notre Dame Cathedral, Chartres, France. cr. 1200 A.D.

## CHAPTER 2

## “EAST COKER” DARKNESS AT NOON

Bull, Dung and Death

In the space and time presented by the title page that separates “Burnt Norton” from “East Coker,” there has been both a displacement of time and place. The garden scene that laments the endless “*before and after*” of wasted time has faded. We journey from the spring of 1935 and the ghostly inhabitants of the abandoned manor to the summer of 1940 and Eliot’s ancestral home in East Coker. We may now read the scarification of the axel-tree like a dark set of auguries; what was once the image of a body can also be interpreted as the metaphor of a nation experiencing a return to conflict in World War II.

Summer, according to Frye, is the season of Romance. It is a time for the manifestation of contentment when both protagonist and antagonist are in their prime. In this age the presiding social order attempts to glorify the power of its rule by appropriating “beautiful” heroes as state ideals, and villains as threats to its future (Frye 186). As a collective genre this season exhibits a psychological element of “extraordinarily persistent nostalgia,” which is used to connect the romantic vision to a lost “golden age.” The food of romance is hopes and desires, and if there are concealed sub-plots in the crafting of this season, they hover beneath the immediate surface so as not to interfere with the powerful progression of the adventure being played out on center stage. Frye finds that the “newspaper” is the exemplar of romantic fiction:

However, no book can rival the continuity of the newspaper, and as soon as romance achieves a literary form, it tends to a sequence of minor adventures leading up to a major or climactic adventure, usually announced from the beginning, the completion of which rounds off the story. (186-87)

Similarly, the roundness of “East Coker” might be described in terms of a cyclical visual pastiche: the picture of inevitable battle already foreshadowed in the mythology of the boarhound and boar running an endless circuit that must eventually find its way into the starry night. Next we move to a sequence that recalls time-lapse cinematography: we view a panorama of sturdy houses eventually breaking, peeling, and finally burning, and then the growth of new trees that will furnish new buildings to follow in the tradition of the old. The hero of this poem is not young, but someone who has already witnessed the destruction of one war and is now, in late summer, realizing that whatever lessons should have been learned were forgotten.

One of Northrop Frye’s revolutionary moves was to view the “*mythoi*,” “structures of imagery in movement,” of literature, and ask the critic to radically *re-consider* their approach to the work as a field of meaning in which we can detect “mythopoeic designs,” similar to the contemplation and perspective one allows to come upon himself when confronted, for example, with abstract art (140). Following Frye’s lead, if “East Coker” were a modernist painting, and if we were to step back from it, we might see a hill of dark fertile green, fully bloomed flowers in the hue of nighttime, and a splotch of red-orange barely visible in the darkness that encroaches over most of the canvas. The general feeling of the hero’s movement is from a ritual dance into the chthonic underworld, and then out again with a renewed perspective. In terms of a body

analogy, the poem begins with an image of powerful adulthood and transitions to the later years of middle age—streaks of grey, if you will. This would be that liminal point of human existence when it is realized we are physically shifting into old age, and we start to question the fabric of our own understanding, as we realize there is no escape from the decline of a weakening body, and eventual death.

The first line of “East Coker” finds that where one starts from, there too will we return, summoning up the biblical expulsion, and revealing the apocalyptic conclusion stated at the very end of the poem: “*In my end is my beginning*,” a translation on the motto held by the tragic figure of Mary, Queen of Scots during her imprisonment at Tutbury Castle: *En ma fin est mon commencement* (Aurora 40). The tone throughout “East Coker” is summer-darkness, and the first movement propels this recycling motif of a house becoming ashes, just as Adam is made from dust, and to the dust he returns.

As we watch, the circular theme that was begun in “Burnt Norton” is translated now as a time-shift from the confusion of modernity to an ageless and pagan past. The modern highways and houses that have sprung up around the homestead fade into the background, and we emerge upon a scene in an open field at midnight, with the warning not to approach too close. What we behold, like the *Others* in the garden, is a moment outside of time: on a hill in the middle of a field there can be heard the soft music of “*the weak pipe and the little drum*,” and we see the ghost-figures, the dream-figures, of a man and a woman dancing around a fire in celebration of a wedding sacrament. At first there is lightness to this rhythm—as if in a forgotten ritual the movement is in a prefigured pattern that includes the necessity to jump through the flames. But as we continue to

observe, the time-shift transforms gaiety into a solemn, hypnotic vision connecting the significance of a wedding and its implied fertility to that of death and earth, where the rebirth is now agrarian, and what must be rejuvenated is the fleshy material of life:

*Lifting heavy feet in clumsy shoes,  
Earth feet, loam feet, lifted in country mirth  
Mirth of those long since under earth  
Nourishing the corn.*

We watch the secretive scene: the actors morph into earth-giants, their very feet part of the ground which can be nothing other than the bodies of dead ancestors. At this moment time is not time partitioned down to hours, minutes, and seconds, but it is a necessary time. Just as the rhythm, the form, of the dance is crucial to the existence of the dancers and their ceremony. The ecclesiastical invocation of time means participating in the harvest, the husbandry of livestock, and human mating—all this is part of the dance, which leads to the feast, and ends, inevitably submerged in “*dung and death.*”

Again let us phase-shift from the upper world into the depth of the labyrinth where this perceived ceremony takes on archetypal significance. The dance around the bonfire symbolizes the *axis-mundi*, and the dance itself is the following of the centripetal path downwards toward the ultimate underworld. The vision presented is of the hero and his guide: Theseus being led by Ariadne on the negative journey that will find its exit in death and rebirth. The female entity here, one feels, is that same presence back at Burnt Norton, only now, upon the hill at midnight, the erotic atmosphere is more concrete, more certain. She is a guide into the depth, a “helpful maid” to a hero “in search of consciousness” (Labyrinth 17).



Some Eliot scholars have mentioned the change in tone and rhythm between lines 36 and 46 of the first movement. This is the metamorphosis of the significant action, where a happy event becomes the inevitable, malignant face of what some depth psychologists term the “Great Mother”. The spiral towards death in this first movement is an invocation of the Hindu goddess Kali, or the Greek goddess Hekate, the female devouring presence of the underworld and the Terrible Mother who must be vanquished in order that the hero may take his princess bride, thus ensuring the cycle of fertility.

The agrarian presence here also calls attention back to the fertility cults of the *Magna Mater* where the coupling of the “beasts” align with the The Great Bull, the phallic principle of creation, of “violent sexuality,” and guardian of the underworld (19-12). An ironic reading of this passage (“*The time of the coupling of man and woman / and that of beasts*”) recalls the creation of the Minotaur when Minos’ wife Pasiphae fell in love and consummated with a beautiful white bull that was supposed to have been sacrificed in honor of Poseidon. The progeny of this union was Asterion (whose name means “of the starry sky” or “of the sun” (Graves, Index 383)), the minotaur for whom Minos ordered Deadalus to build the labyrinth at Crete.

The hypnotic spiral of “East Coker” I, if we are considering its relationship in the literature of rituals and labyrinths, is a path to the beginning and end represented by hierogamy, sacred marriage, and finally death. Cipolla maintains that the labyrinth is a place of initiation (Labyrinth 28) where the hero emerges transformed after conquering the “confusion of matriarchal consciousness” and receives the gift of a bride, his supernatural guide through the twists and turns of the passageways.

Movement I now prepares the hero to meet the Great Father of Movement II, an overwhelming presence of time, philosophy, and wisdom that must be overturned by the hero in order to find his proper place and power in the cyclical dance.

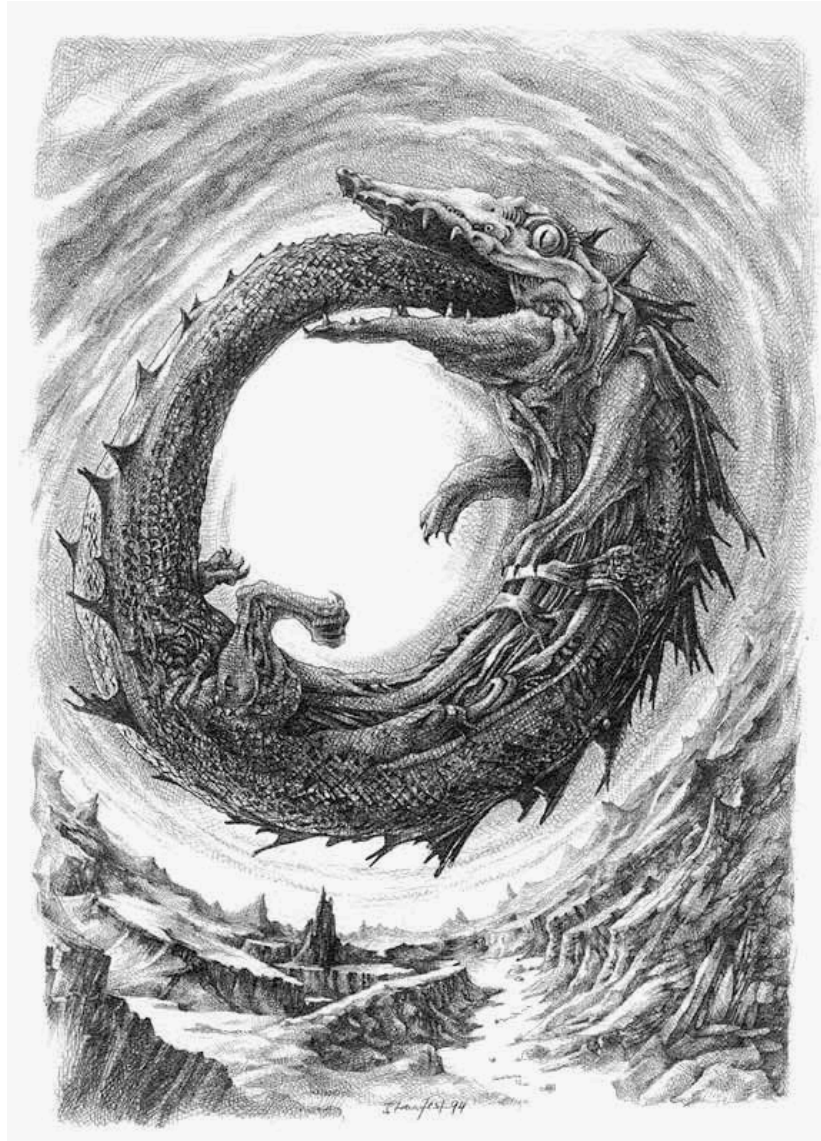


Image 5. Jiri Stamfest. *Uroboros*. 1994.

Where is Consciousness Found?

Part of the meaning in “East Coker” finds its parallel in books of wisdom and the lamentation of wisdom—Ecclesiastes, The Book of Job, and the Bhagavad Gita, for examples. The first strophe of the second movement presents us with a series of highly symbolic images that are analogous to the matriarchal confusion of the Uroboros, the image of a snake devouring its own tale, and recalls the similar cycle presented in the corresponding movement of “Burnt Norton.”

Our hero is now old, but feels young: “*What is the late November doing / With the disturbance of the spring*”; he is in the November of life’s cycle before a death found in winter, but still attracted to the “disturbances” of youth and springtime—perhaps the sexual desire that was first suggested in the garden of “Burnt Norton”—or maybe ambition to get into the war that has divided continental Europe, or a turmoil over the resulting foolishness of such ventures. Strength and the passionate heat of summer are again invoked, but it seems illusory, for beneath our shoes there are the snowdrops, signs of real age and physical limitations. The late bloom of life blossoms powerful roses, but like Adonis’ anemone, the reality of their vibrancy will be short lived in the early snowstorm that beckons approaching days of bitter cold.

Just as in the poem of the axel-tree, our attention is raised to the sky and the zodiac where sun and moon play the game of boarhound and boar, and the scorpion, our hero, resists the inevitable sundial. Alas, he is left at night upon a hill in the middle of November to watch the Leonid shower and comets, symbols of the end of days.

*Scorpion fights against the Sun*

*Until the Sun and Moon go down  
Comets weep and Leonids fly  
Hunt the heavens and the plains  
Whirled in a vortex that shall bring  
The world to that destructive fire  
Which burns before the ice-cap reigns.*

The mood has dramatically shifted from visions of dancers and a movement downward into the dung and depths of the earth to eyes upon the heavens and the patriarchal, masculine images contained therein. The battle suggested is that of one against the Sun, a symbol of masculinity in which the hero himself has lineage. A mythological interpretation of these heavenly bodies tells the tale of Father Sun and Mother Moon who follow their timeless pattern to the last. Again we have not gone far from the trope of the labyrinth, for Pasiphae is a moon goddess (Graves 90.1), and Minos is a son of Zeus. The scorpion himself is a creature created to torment the god Orion in the Greek myths, but in Egyptian lore he stands for the trickster deity, Set; and his relation to the spider family might bear representation to a creature of the underworld, however hostile.

More historical interpretations of this passage place it in a time a war where “*Late November*” is the movers and shakers of international politics, and the “*disturbance of the spring*” stands for the youth who are drafted to fight and die upon the failure of diplomatic relations. “*The creatures of the summer heat*” are the romantic ideals, taken from their conventional quest and thrown into the confusion of battle represented by “*snowdrops*,” again, the interference of an old order disturbing the Fryean progression of traditional romance. Here we are presented with colors and sounds of battle, the red flesh placed into grey combat uniforms; an old teacher (the late rose) debating a commission;

and thunderous bombs and vehicles of destruction. Bodelsen describes this passage as a “confusion of the seasons, [...] and a corresponding confusion among the constellations” (Bodelsen 67). The scorpion is a painful creature of battle, armored and ready to strike the old world order, until finally war leaves the land burned by fire, and the final ending of a frozen waste.

War is the domain of the Terrible Father, philosophic in its justification, irrational in its law and wisdom. The primary function of the second part of “East Coker” II seems geared towards two dimensions of labyrinth thinking. First, there is the lament at the futility of the ecclesiastical wisdom espoused in the first movement; this is a critique of the masculine ruminations on death and rebirth that manifest in a circular pattern and that works in a decidedly literary fashion to draw away from the direct, existential experience in order to create the illusion of a mapped terrain. An example might be the pictorial representations of mazes found on church walls (Matthews 56) versus the actual experience of traveling through the difficult and obscure passages of a life-size creation; or better yet, the manifestation of confusion in literature that cannot be declared an actual labyrinth, but is only related via the intensity of experience.<sup>11</sup> The second direction of this section of the poetry is to realize the negative influence of the Great Father so that darkness may fall in Movement III. Just as the feminine concepts sucked us down into a world of death and dung, so too do the masculine symbols of poetic form, wisdom, and knowledge lead us toward the darkness of the unconscious.

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<sup>11</sup> See the experience depicted in “East Coker” III where darkness, fear, doubt, and confusion prevail.

A clue from Gaetano Cipolla's *Labyrinth: Studies on an Archetype* helps reveal both forces now in play. If "East Coker," in its work as both a geographical-historical location and a movement in poetry, to Eliot, may be viewed as an inside and an outside (inside in that it is his ancestral homestead where his ancestors are buried beneath his feet, and outside in that he is an foreigner who has, in actuality, no claim on the land besides what his poetry makes of it), then a labyrinth might possess both feminine (inside) and masculine (outside) characteristics:

The labyrinth is the perfect oxymoron which opposes the chaos of its torturous and dark corridors to the geometric precision of its external forms; in the precision of its external order it embraces being, form and the tendency to become fixed; in its internal confusion, it embraces the constant becoming, the uninterrupted flowing of life. (Labyrinth 120)

In essence, we have moved away from the encounter with the feminine faces of flesh, dance, fertility, and death in order to deal with the external, masculine faces and the philosophical understanding of the poetry.

At this juncture Eliot is working in a literary convention that calls into question time-honored traditions of received knowledge. One is reminded of the teacher in Ecclesiastes who after uncovering the arcana of the universe finds that wisdom can be vexation and a propellant of folly, and knowledge is a source of sorrow and suffering. Similarly, in the Book of Job we are presented with a hero who declares wisdom to be ephemeral and ultimately God's theodicy. For the reader of Job, wisdom loses its grip on reality when it is considered that the prime deity inflicted suffering because of a wager with Satan, a trickster god. This same irony finds its way into Eliot's words when we see

that all the knowledge of the great teachers is insubstantial when put in context to the ultimate spiral towards the underworld and darkness:

*Had they deceived us  
Or deceived themselves, the quite-voiced elders,  
Bequeathing us merely a receipt for deceit?  
The serenity only a deliberate hebetude,  
The wisdom only the knowledge of dead secrets  
Useless in the darkness into which they peered  
Or from which they turned their eyes.*

This darkness is impending death, and the deceit spoken of is not an intentional motive, but rather the impossibility of knowing anything about the undiscovered country. Unlike the repetition of the feminine aspect in the first movement, masculine philosophy in this excerpt is powerless in the face of oblivion. And with that the attention returns to the theme of the pattern, where understanding it is misleading if, indeed, “*the pattern is new in every moment*” (EC II).

In the Bhagavad Gita of Hindu mythology, the hero Arjuna, by the wheel of fate, finds himself upon the “field of righteousness, the Kuru field” facing his kinsman’s army (Gita 29; I, 1). As the horns of war bellow and the chariots begin charging towards each other, Arjuna suddenly becomes aware of the immanent darkness. Fear seizes his heart and he pleads with his charioteer, the great god Krishna, to halt the action. Krishna grants this request, and all becomes still: with the armies on either side, the prince and the god take up position at the center of the battlefield.

Arjuna turns his gaze upon the mighty warriors he has personally known: kings, teachers, archers, kinsmen. Seeing all these relations before him, moments away from death, the prince becomes lost in a confusion of emotion and doubt, he is paralyzed:

Seeing my own kinsmen, O Krishna, arrayed  
 And wishing to fight,  
 My limbs collapse, my mouth dries up, there is  
 Trembling in my body and my hair stands on end;  
 (The bow) Gandiva slips from my hand and my  
 skin also is burning; I am not able to stand still, my  
 mind is whirling. (Gita 32; I, 28-30)

Where is the wisdom, he asks, in bringing arms against family members? Where is the honor in death, the *dharma* of fratricide? What remains after all this? Such is the psychological disposition of those who are lost in darkness, finding no comfort in knowledge or wisdom of any sort. This darkness, as we approach the end of “East Coker” II, conjures a similar situation:

*In the middle, not only in the middle of the ways  
 But all the way, in a dark wood, in a bramble,  
 On the edge of a grimpen, where is no secure foothold,  
 And menaced by monsters, fancy lights,  
 Risking enchantment.*

The image here is that of a foggy bog, a deep passage that has no certain exit, and more than likely is the place of your death. At this moment the “hero” of the Quartets calls out, “Do not let me hear / Of the wisdom of old men, but rather of their folly, / Their fear of fear and frenzy, their fear of possession, Of belonging to another, or to others, or to God” (EC II). In the face of such adversity the only wisdom is the wisdom of Job and the teacher of Ecclesiastes, which is “*the wisdom of humility: humility is endless*” (EC II). Humility is neither masculine nor feminine, but the final realization of the cycle of life and death, that the direction of the conscious mind is towards the unconscious, and inevitably the underworld:

*The houses are all gone under the sea.  
 The dancers are all gone under the hill.*



What takes place on the field of Kuru, which, like Eliot's grimpen, is the battlefield of the mind, is one of the great revelations of religious literature. Krishna, the archetypal teacher, guides his student through the labyrinth of the Vedic texts: *The Yoga of Knowledge*, which is the sacrifice of knowledge (Gita 58; IV, 33); *The Yoga of Renunciation of Action*, which is detachment from the fruits of action (62; V, 12); *The Yoga of Meditation*, which is the calming and freeing of self (69; VI, 28); *The Yoga of Wisdom and Understanding*, which is the "eight-fold [lower] nature: earth, water, fire, wind, ether, mind, intellect and self-consciousness," the divine's "higher-nature" is the "life-soul" which sustains the earth (72-73; VII, 1-12); *The Yoga of the Imperishable Brahman*, which is the concentration of the mind on God at the moment of death (77; VII, 5); *The Yoga of Sovereign Knowledge and Mystery*, which is that the god in his "unmanifest form" pervades all things (82; IX, 4); *The Yoga of Manifestation*, which is that God is the beginning, the middle and the end (90; X, 20); *The Yoga of the Vision of the Universal Form*, which is that God is the moving and unmoving world (100; XI, 43); *The Yoga of Devotion*, which is that those who attempt the path are dear to God (104; XII, 10); *The Yoga of the Distinction Between the Field and the Knower of the Field*, which is that the field is the Self and the Knower is also the Self (110; XIII, 24-26); *The Yoga of the Distinction of the Three Gunas*, which is that there is transcendence of the attachments to knowledge, greed and negligence (115; XIV, 26); *The Yoga of the Highest Spirit*, which is that God is the imperishable peepal tree that permeates the world, and he is the way of no return (117-18; XV, 1-3); *The Yoga of the Distinction Between the Divine and Demonic Endowments*, which is that the divine has already been

articulated, and that the demoniac is desire, anger and greed (122; XVI, 6-19); *The Yoga of the Threefold Division of Faith*, which is that faith is liberation, action, and consciousness (128; XVII, 21-27); *The Yoga of Freedom by Renunciation*, which is that freedom is the way of abandonment and devotion to God (130; XVIII, 2).

### Darkness

It is assumed by researches that the ur-labyrinths were probably caves in which our Paleolithic ancestors dwelled and ceremonialized their daily lives (Labyrinths 26). Caves are natural, lasting structures against the change and erosion found in the aboveground world. Where else except in the depths of Lascaux or Altamira were they to find a canvas sheltered from the incessant seasons? Caves are where we once found magic, practiced sacred marriages, and buried the dead (26). These labyrinths, literally “galleries of stone” (26), are wombs of the earth, and spaces of the female principal called “yoni,” the border that is crossed in order to “return into the body of the Earth Mother” (27). And continuous for all such depths is the prevailing darkness.

The darkest I have ever experienced was deep in the passageways of the Lewis & Clark caverns outside of Three Forks, Montana. A State Guide Book, commissioned by the Federal Writers Project of 1939 describes the ascent to the natural mouth of the caverns as an arduous effort only accomplishable with the use of a rope. From there the descent follows a path of hundreds of unsure steps to reach an initiatory Large Chamber carved from the bedrock through millions of years of surface water “seeping down the bedding planes of the Madison limestone.” The walls are of a translucent rock “that



Image 6. Paleolithic Cave Art, Lascaux, France.

varies in color from pure white to deep amber.” What can only be described as a “journey” takes the explorer downward through a number of vaulted chambers, and finally to the “Cathedral Room.”

From its ledged floor great spires rise toward the domed ceiling, in sepia hues and lighter shades of brown. Beyond and below is the Brown Waterfall. From a rocky ledge above the floor a cascade of rock seems to spill down the chamber wall like a plunging brown river. A rough corridor known as Hell's Highway is traveled with the aid of ropes and leads into the Organ Room. The stillness of this room, with its mass of pipe-like columns, faintly golden, gleaming amber, and rich brown, is impressive. The columns give off musical sounds when struck with pieces of broken rock, as do many of the stalactites and stalagmites in other chambers. The smaller corridors and chambers vary in formation and coloring. The walls of some are intricately filigreed, others seem hung with draperies of weird pattern. At one place a Coffin is surmounted by a stalagmite candle; the Lion's Den, enclosed by joined tites and "mites," is strewn with pieces of fallen stalactites that suggest the bones of victims.<sup>12</sup>

At one point the guide will shut off the lights and you realize that you are blind. You see nothing except blackness. The moment of void lasts about a minute, and then by whatever trick of the retinas suffering for any breath of light, you begin to *see* colorful blotches. I experienced a deep circular emerald that dimmed to violet and then a dark grey. In a total absence of sight the colors are not bound to a second dimension; they swarm about you and cross through your body. After a few more moments your eyes begin to believe they are dead, the mind's defense is to resort to what might be called “photographic memory” and imagination. You begin to think that someone has turned on a light, and you can “see” every detail of the cave's twisting faces born out of the tortured

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<sup>12</sup> [http://www.mtlinks.com/Parks/lewis\\_clark\\_caverns/lewis\\_clark\\_caverns.htm](http://www.mtlinks.com/Parks/lewis_clark_caverns/lewis_clark_caverns.htm)

earth...and then that recent memory, like the splotches of colors, passes and you *see* familiar faces that you have kept so very close to you, and you *see* memories like you have never seen before. For me it was a long dusty road of my childhood, the buildings and streets of Bozeman, and then dark combinations of places I could not name, perhaps because they never existed, or only existed in the darkness that fuses image to image.

Then the guide flicks the switch and you are resurrected into a world of electric light, and the tour continues with jibes of wit on how the ageless rocks have grown to resemble celebrities and dead presidents. “*Go, said the bird, humankind cannot bear very much reality*” (BN I).

However each of us comes to understand darkness, it shares sanguinity with the way we understand death. It is its own language and *logos*. Hamlet ironically reveals it in a play that finds its action in the representation of the afterlife: “To be or not to be...,” should we live with the great suffering of life, or should we seek the “undiscover’d country” of which we know nothing, “from whose bourn no traveler returns” (*Hamlet* III.i)?

*O dark dark dark. They all go into the dark*

This line belongs to Prospero who wove the vision of life enwombed in darkness, it belongs to Beckett’s Vladimir and Estragon, to Job, to Arjuna, or to any character that has seen the true form of God and lived to tell the tale. We know from our religions and myths the great risk of theophany is death. Eliot conjures this theme from the modern tubes beneath London:

*Or as, when an underground train, in the tube, stops too  
Long between stations*

*And the conversation rises and slowly fades into silence  
 And you see behind every face the mental emptiness  
 Deepen  
 Leaving on the growing terror of nothing to think about;  
 Or when, under ether, the mind is conscious but conscious  
 Of nothing—*

As we go under the city we descend into the unconscious. Like the dancers we are now beneath the hill, beneath any rite of fertility and initiation. Like the houses we are now beneath the water of destruction and the water of rejuvenation. The image worked backwards from line 109 to 101 of Movement III presents a visual of the great era of economics vanishing into the void. The secular world of modernism's shallow consciousness follows the path into which all things fall. And after these have gone we see the empty galaxies also vanishing. Darkness is the great equalizer.

So we return to Arjuna and his psychological battle at the frozen moment between two warring armies when he beholds the *Yoga of the Vision of the Universal Form* from his teacher Krishna. At this moment in the Quartets and in the Gita we are again at the center, the "*middle of the way*," in the cavern, "the intermediary space between heaven and hell" (Labyrinths 26), between life and death, stalled in the subways of London, and halfway through the teachings of a great master. Believing that the path to freedom is indeed what the god has declared, Arjuna asks to see the face of the divine as it truly is. The great Krishna agrees, but on one condition: "...thou canst not see Me with thine own eye. I give thee a divine eye. Behold, My divine yoga" (Gita 95; XI, 8). In essence, Krishna must blind Arjuna so that he may see without the interference of his physical, mortal nature. At this moment we are timeless, for the consciousness of the chronometer cannot withstand the time of God, "*time not our time*," writes Eliot. This is the vision of

the Kabalistic Aleph, the point Jorge Luis Borges described that contains all points, even the point that is ourselves, so that like an omniscient mirror we *see* ourselves in context to everything, and everything in context to the darkness.

The Gita describes in awesome detail the wonder that Arjuna beholds, a vision of infinite radiance. The face of God has many eyes and many mouths; it is a face that is “turned everywhere,” radiating with the “light of a thousand suns” sprung forth “simultaneously in the sky” (95; XI, 12). It is the god that contains all gods:

I see Thee, with many arms, stomachs, mouths,  
and eyes. Everywhere infinite in form; I see no end  
nor middle nor beginning of Thee, O Lord of all,  
O universal form! (96; XI, 16)

Seeing Thy mouths, terrible with tusks, like  
time’s devouring fire, I know not the directions  
of the sky and I find no security. Have mercy, O  
Lord of gods, Abode of the world! (97; XI, 25)

Swallowing all the worlds from every side, Thou  
lickest them up with Thy flaming mouths; Thy  
fierce rays fill the whole world with radiance and  
scorch it, O Vishnu! (98; XI, 30)

Are we witnessing the vortex of darkness, the comprehension of time flowing into the timeless moment that is the cycle of death and rebirth, the cycle to which all succumb, be they military leaders, great warriors, wise men, petty contractors, patrons of the arts, the dancers at East Coker, or the empty galaxies themselves? What are you? Arjuna begs of God, and god responds:

Time am I, the world destroyer, matured,  
come forth to subdue the worlds here. Even with-  
out thee, all the warriors arrayed in the opposing  
armies shall cease to be. (98; XI, 32)

In depth psychological terms this description is the downward spiral into Tartaros, Hades, the unconscious, or death. What T.S. Eliot conjures in this vein is a description of physical and psychological *rigor mortis*. As we perceive ourselves dancing along the corridors deep into the bowels of the labyrinth, so Arjuna sees himself sliding into the devouring mouth of God. The battle does not matter, there will be no burial rites, “*for there is no one to bury*” (EC III) as we are pulled helplessly towards this winter non-existence. If this is a romance, this moment is a battle with the dragon (Frye 184), or the underworld’s version of the mountain top epiphany (203). We have escaped the grasp of the malignant parents and entered the deepest chamber of Armageddon. The path to this place, to the holy of holies, is the path of the Gita and the mystic St. Juan de la Cruz, the *via negitiva*. This way provides no ecstasy; it is the way of ignorance, bewilderment, confusion, dispossession, and nonexistence. This face of darkness is the devouring face of Krishna.

Hillman describes this type of darkness as “Zeus-*chthonios*,” The black, umbric aspect of the god of light. Not the fertility darkness of the Great Mother (*Ge*), nor the absent, useless darkness of the Father’s philosophy, but the darkness of the pit at the beginning, where out of the “Brood of Night” arose the distinct and luminous gods such as Eros (Hillman 33) whose dominion of love and fire can only exist in darkness. This is the invisible shadow world that “touches” all points at once; it is the Freudian “death drive” of Thanatos (30). Most important, it is the endlessness characterized in the language of *Four Quartets*; it is a return to the fragment that finds Heraclitus describing



the domain of the soul as depthless. This darkness of Hades is the purpose of the soul, and “all psychic events have a Hades aspect” (30).

*Four Quartets* describes this as the “darkness of God”

*As, in a theater,  
The lights are extinguished, for the scene to be changed  
With a hollow rumble of wings, with a movement of dark-  
ness on darkness*

Hillman understands this as the invisible world that touches us everywhere through our own language, for underworld is psyche (46). It is part and parcel of our reality, though to encounter it requires an experience of unreality, an experience of that which we are not, to return to the verse of negative theology. It is the Hades-Hermes (unconscious as Trickster) manipulation of words that Eliot laments as brittle, fragile forms of communication. Almost as if in the breaking down of our effort, in its failure, there is a victory.

What do we know of God and our dream-like existence outside of communication? From the grotto to the theater, the experience of the underworld and that *Other* face of the divine is enacted. And we *know* God just as we *know* “*that the hills and trees, the distant / panorama / And the bold imposing façade are all being rolled away—*” Or as in *The Tempest*, which is also a metaphor of the soul, the great stage director Prospero weaves a drama of Ceres and Juno that evaporates, like spirits, into the night. Shakespeare gives us the stage direction: “*Enter certain Reapers, properly habited. They join with the Nymphs in a graceful dance; towards the end whereof Prospero starts suddenly and speaks; after which, to a strange hollow, and confused noise, they heavenly vanish*” (IV.i.139-143). Like Krishna, who must repeat the same yoga in seventeen

different forms, or Eliot who has repeated the same directions several times by now, Prospero's next words connect the young lovers, the students, Ferdinand and Miranda to the aborted play, a change in scene, and a figment of the imagination.

You do look, my son, in a moved sort,  
 As if you were dismayed: be cheerful, sir.  
 Our revels now are ended. These our actors,  
 As I foretold you, were all spirits and  
 Are melted into thin air;  
 And, like the baseless fabric of this vision,  
 The cloud-capped tow'rs, the gorgeous palaces  
 The solemn temples, the great globe itself,  
 Yea, all which it inherit, shall dissolve,  
 And, like this insubstantial pageant faded,  
 Leave not a rack behind. We are such stuff  
 As dreams are made on, and our little life  
 Is rounded with a sleep. Sir, I am vexed.  
 Bear with my weakness: my old brain is troubled.  
 Be not disturbed with my infirmity.  
 If you be pleased, retire into my cell  
 And there repose. A turn or two I'll walk  
 To still my beating mind. (IV.i.146-163)

If we could read Shakespeare's poem into the darkness of this movement in the Quartets, or the darkness that Arjuna must feel after watching the world dissolve, we might understand these actors for what they are, and the darkness for what it might suggest: "*So the darkness shall be the light, and the stillness the / dancing*" (EC III). When Prospero departs from his daughter and Ferdinand, might he hear and see what we see when we emerge from that harrowing subway experience and realize that our end is, indeed, our beginning. To hear, and to see:

*Whisper of running streams, and winter lighting.  
 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.*

## CHAPTER 3

## “THE DRY SALVAGES” A TOLLING BELL

To step back and look at the entire movement of the *Four Quartets* would be similar to looking down on a labyrinth of concentric circles where each ring away from the center encompasses the same message but in differing variations, or levels of intensity. If the initial physical experience of the labyrinth was a descent into the cave, then the archetypal image provided to the imagination might be similar to dropping a stone into a still pond and watching the circles caused by the displacement of mass spread out until they lap against the shore. Indeed, every ring is an essence of the stone at the center, now hidden somewhere beneath the unconscious waters. To arrive at the stone is impossible, for it was the beginning that is now gone; however, remaining is the understanding that the each wave is a manifestation of that same initial event, not “other” but *is*.

River of Time

Upon reading “The Dry Salvages” in juxtaposition to “Burnt Norton” and “East Coker” the feeling is similar to having traveled far away from the earthy seasons of spring and summer previously created. The journey has been from a deserted garden into the underground of London, back up to the late summer day into the evening at the ancestral home, then back down into darkness. Now we seem to have emerged in the first movement, to a world of water beginning with a river and ending in the chaos of an

ocean. Yet, we are no farther than when began, for it is becoming clear in thinking parallel to theories of labyrinths, that Eliot's poem does not stray into the winding corridors, but is anchored at the center, or is invested with a spirit of centers. And if the center fades and we lose our way it is only because it has been temporarily concealed, until the next timeless moment. The center, like the ocean in "The Dry Salvages," is all around us; we have only managed to crest another wave, similar in purpose, different in intensity, but encompassing, all together, the middle.

The extreme margin of reality that was approached in the middle way of "East Coker" is brought even closer now (Kearns 245), and is expanded into the language and metaphor of water. The dry pool at of the garden has become Earth's ocean, and the axel-tree is now the "*rank ailanthus*," the tree of heaven (Bodelsen 86). In finishing the last poem, Eliot wrote that old men should become explorers, not of the "*Here and there*" of geography, but into the depth of the mind, a calling to the deep, "*vast waters / Of the petrel and the porpoise*" (EC V) In answer to this call we now are standing on a bridge overlooking a taciturn river, be it the Mississippi, the Ganges, or the Thames.

*I do no know much about gods; but I think that the river  
Is a strong brown god—sullen, untamed and intractable,  
Patient to some degree, at first recognized as a frontier;  
Useful, untrustworthy, as a conveyor of commerce;  
Then only a problem confronting the builder of bridges.*

We must also remember that we are Arjuna the warrior, and we are still in the company of Krishna. What is assembled here is the progression of the mind of man as it moves from the animistic past and its concern with the spirit of water (Bodelsen 84) through the ages of technology until the only experience of the river is that it can easily

be crossed with barely a second thought. In speaking of rivers we are also speaking of gods, and in speaking of gods we are speaking of the mind; a mind that cannot be tamed which is similar to the spring and summer in the garden where metaphor is always in bloom. Now, if there are dreams and nightmares, it is given over to the psychologist, the builder of bridges, whose job it is to take away the problems of the unconscious and the tumultuous floods of the underworld. Eliot calls us to acknowledge the conscious forgetting of the psyche, for it is there, hidden, just as the river is there “*Keeping his seasons and rages, destroyer, reminder / Of what men choose to forget*” (DS I).

Steffan Bergsten makes an interesting suggestion that the river with all its rages and moments of quite is symbolic of man himself (Bergsten 220); perhaps it is that our experience of the world is indicative of the path or the “way” the snakelike body of water follows to the encompassing mass into which it spills. The river as a god, as a geological formation, or a psychic function, is there at every seasonal moment:

*His rhythm was present in the nursery bedroom,  
In the rank ailanthus of the April dooryard,  
In the smell of grapes on the autumn table,  
And the evening circle in the winter gaslight.*

Bodelsen, as well, thinks that this river of time is the time of man, where the future is the upstream source, and the past is the direction towards the humongous churning mass, while the point at which we perceive the flowing waters is the “now” (Bodelsen 83). The ocean is inevitable for us; it surrounds the “scene of our existence” (83) just as the darkness of god is the great mouth into which Arjuna perceives all formations flowing. And so Eliot reverses that vision, and instead the depths spits up its creative treasures onto the beaches that signify the borderland between the conscious and unconscious:

*The starfish, the horseshoe crab, the whale's backbone;  
 The pools where it offers to our curiosity  
 The more delicate algae and the sea anemone.  
 It tosses up our losses, the torn seine,  
 The shattered lobsterpot, the broken oar  
 And the gear of foreign dead men.*

These are only a sampling of the many “*gods and many voices*,” a partial list of *the list* that encompasses everything. Arjuna, of course, is not present, nor is Job, to describe the epiphany; there is only the personification of the waters, the howl and yelp, the breakers, the smash against the rocks, and the wailing of the lighthouse indicating the shoreline of conscious thought. And lastly, in this movement, before the final bell, we are presented with the image of “*anxious worried women / Lying awake, calculating the future*”—again, creation, the female entity that recalls Penelope waiting for lost Odysseus to return. To stave off suitors we remember that every day she weaves the threads of the funeral shroud, and will not wed until it is complete. But every night she unweaves, unwinds, and unravels her work, and it is in this time, this extended moment that we are given the adventures, the stories. So too should we remember Scheherazade whose own narratives forestalled her execution, indeed, eliminated it. Ever so briefly now, in subtle language, we see generative power of the creative will. The past is only a story, the future is nothing. Time has stopped, “*and time is never ending*” (DS I).

### Water

According to the diagram of seasonal patterns (Appendix A) autumn is the time of “mortification,” “[s]ymbolizing [a] state of suspended animation which ensues at the end of the year.” Its season is autumn-winter and its literary archetype is an elegy or *carpe*

*diem*. Here we find the king dead, “All flesh is grass,” (Isaiah 40; 1 Peter 1:24; Appendix A). Here we are Hamlet, psychologically crazed (or so it might seem), the playwright altering the lines of some Italian drama into *The Mousetrap* suggesting that the good king is in the underworld, musty, and feeding the grass (*Hamlet* III.ii.337): “Something is rotten in the state of Denmark”. As the prince is pulled towards inevitable tragedy, so does the movement of “The Dry Salvages” flow towards “chaos and dissolution” (Appendix A) in the sea.

The call to adventure at the end of “East Coker” was a call to depth. Our experience of God’s darkness in the tube was purgation, and as we exited we felt empty. “The Dry Salvages” could be considered a deeper exploration of the psychological after effects of that theophany. Our bodies, if not our minds, are now old. We have encountered and accepted sickness (EC IV), our “*shabby equipment always deteriorating*” (EC V), and we have realized that all-and-all we’ve not gone very far, not far at all, from where we started. A fact of modernity is that the physical body is imprisoned within the realms of empirical existence, but the mind can detect the patterns of darkness. Now we turn inward; the centering labyrinth dissolves into the de-centering maze. It does not matter where and when we are, just that we are, and that our direction should be downward to the “*old stones that cannot be deciphered*” (EC V).

I will have little reserve stating that “Little Gidding,” the last quartet, is a dream, but of “The Dry Salvages” I will only suggest that perhaps we are dreaming, or approaching the dream with a sense of inevitable foreboding, for water, the element of this section, *is* synonymous with dreaming, the underworld, and the unconscious. If we

are the rivers, as it was suggested above, then we are the movement incarnate of water, and the “essence of psyche is the principal of motion” (Hillman 125) towards the large confusing body of the ocean.

Of bodies of water in dreams James Hillman wants to move away from the common symbolism of baptism, womb, and energy. In its place he wants to develop the relationship between water and death (151). In dreams, the “dry” “ego-soul” dissolves in water, “it fears drowning in torrents, whirlpools, tidal waves” (152). Water is the “element of reverie,” the “element of reflective images and their ceaseless, ungraspable flow.”

The waters may be cold or warm or hot, turgid, shallow, clear—as Bachelard says, the language of water is rich for metaphorical reverie. The underworld differentiates at least five rivers: the frigid Styx; the burning Pyriphlegethon; the mournful, wailing Cocytus; the depressive, black Acheron; and Lethe [forgetfulness (153)].” (152)

If this water is the fear of the ego-soul, then it is a natural habitat of the “image-soul,” that aspect of the psyche that embraces the seemingly unconnected, morphological visions of dreams. These are the endless image-upon-image that we conjure up at nighttime in the REM state—they are graphics that we seem helpless to remember upon waking. This is an aspect of the river Lethe at work, and if we follow her, the direction is towards the underworld (154). Here Hillman introduces the idea of life as continuous “running on” so that the daytime images that we ought to remember can only be forgotten; this is the ego weakening, letting loose so that an experience of the underworld is possible, “a movement out of ego into psyche” (155).



Likewise, exhaustion is a primary motif in “The Dry Salvages”. Movement I presents the permeation of wetness everywhere; at every phase of life the river has impressed upon us its rhythm, and the sea gives us its endless litany of voices, its constant confusion of time. In Movement II we are finally compelled to ask,

*Where is there an end of it, the soundless wailing,  
The silent withering of autumn flowers  
Dropping their petals and remaining motionless;  
Where is there an end to the drifting wreckage,  
The prayer of the bone on the beach, the unprayerable  
Prayer at the calamitous annunciation?*

The answer points towards no finite goal, no center of the labyrinth: “*There is no end, but addition: the trailing / consequence of further days and hours*” (DS II). And the “*final addition*” is that same understanding to which Arjuna was indoctrinated: in all the wreckage that flows into the dark mouth of God, you too are there, a “*drifting boat with a slow leakage*” (DS II), that leakage being one of memory. In light of this interpretation what is presented is like a surrealist filmstrip of an old man in a boat “*forever bailing*” out the water of the final oceanic destination, the water of mutable dream images that will finally replace the memories of our lives. Or is it that the memories of our lives will simply join in the confusion of all others?

*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 motionless,  
To the drift of the sea and the drifting wreckage,  
To the bone's prayer to Death its God.*

The Agony Abides

Suffering is the trope of tragedy, and while “The Dry Salvages” presents us with no solid character on which to heap this mythos we, nonetheless, are presented with the metaphysical strophes and the demonic images that swamp up and overwhelm us in this tradition.

Frye’s analysis of tragedy gives us a hero, who, because of his story is “authentically” human (Frye 206). The spring-summer comedy of “Burnt Norton” creates the atmosphere of a dance dappled with dream-like characters that continue into the high late summer of “East Coker” and its powerful confrontation with the darkness that parallels the dragon fight of fantasy, only conjured with the psychological hues of that encounter with the darker self, our own shadows. This then gives way, and in the latter half of “East Coker” we read a meditation on an ageing body in terms of sickness (EC IV) and confusion (EC V). “The Dry Salvages” is a lonely place from the beginning and the first encounter with “*les trois sauvages*” (the three savages) to a forgotten river that lies in wait for its own flooding—these are aspects of ourselves: the rock facing time, the subconscious anxieties that almost drown us.

In the tragic mind the hero is “bound to nature” (Frye 207). There will be no *deus ex machina*, no festive invitation at the end to celebrate the new husband and wife (207), and no heroic struggle in the fleshy garden of summer. This is a time of suffering; almost divine yet “all too human” (207). With no precise character it is the tragic air that is human, and out of all the mythos it is tragedy we can believe to be real, and it is tragedy that forces us turn away, “*the backward half look*” (EC II) because the hero’s isolation

(208) is our isolation; his delusions are our own; and we understand his bondage as ours, be he Theseus, Antigone, or Hamlet.

Commencing “The Dry Salvages” we have the small group of rocks “*off the N.E. coast of Cape Ann, Massachusetts*” that project their mood depending on nature’s weather; interminably, though, in Eliot’s poem, they are images of the individual against the “manifestation of natural law” (213). These are artifacts consumed by the currents of action: postlapsarian Adam being washed down stream, perhaps long after turning to dust, or the icon of Christ as a rock, but a rock in the ocean that could be either salvation, direction, or destruction. Frye finds that Adam’s condition is only resolved in a “world where existence itself is tragic” where “merely to exist is to disturb the balance of nature,” a balance that will be corrected by “avenging death” (213). The paradox, again, is time, a concept containing a revelation that there is a larger order of fate that will decide our matter between life and death. Krishna’s great revelation was that he was equally generative time and destructive time, and the vision that the warrior could not stare at for long was his place in this whole sequence. This is the *Augenblick* (213), the moment that was first expressed in the garden of Burnt Norton rising out of the first conscious thought: “*What might have been and what has been / Point to one end, which is always present*” (BN I). This moment can only be seen after graduating from the Yogi’s lessons of humility, “*humility is endless*” (EC II), meaning that it is imperative for the mind to be fixated on the divine at every moment, for the turn around a corner may, it just may, lead into an open field where you suddenly find yourself standing between two charging armies. It is easy to profess the doctrine of death and rebirth, to meditate on it

beneath a tree, in a draughty church, or in an arbor during a torrential downpour. But to be prepared, to understand that this is *you* in that time and place, calls for a truly saint-like cognition. That the audience should know your predicament, and not you, is the manifestation of irony in tragedy (Frye 214), just as tragedy is “an episode in the divine comedy, the larger scheme of redemption and resurrection” (215).

The motif upon which “The Dry Salvages” fixates is the “*agony of death and birth*” (EC III), an extended contemplation on that part of the narrative which is hardest to stomach. Here we are presented with demonic images absent of desire (147) – isn’t that what Krishna wanted, to be, exist, or to act with no desire for the fruits of action? Here you are, a piece of debris tossed around in the “vast, menacing, stupid powers of nature” “[isolating] the sense of human remoteness and futility in relation to the divine order which is only one element among others” (147) in this tragic time of year.

Two important elements of tragedy are pity and fear, concepts that Virgil, the dream teacher, will reiterate to us later in “Little Gidding” but which we encounter as our spec in an infinite field of endless addition (EC II). At this point the river (that *is* us and that carries us) is not life giving, it is Lethe at best, more accurately the hellish waters of Cocytus, “*littered with wastage*” an impression of pain so profound it takes on the moving motionless properties that hereto have been reserved for beauty, the “*heart of light*” (*The Waste Land*).

How is it that at the heart there is also this anguish? It doesn’t seem fair. This river is literally littered, dipping into the most perverse historical moments, the Mississippi’s flood carries a “*cargo of dead negroes, cows, and / chicken coops*” (DS II).

*“We had the experience but missed the meaning”* (EC II), writes Eliot. What is the meaning of this, this dead slave drifting towards the Gulf of Mexico? Is this his final addition? If so it is truly demonic imagery, the juxtaposition of a human worth no more or no less than the chicken coup or a bloated heifer. Could this be a comment on the idea of the freedom or servitude of history? Our vegetable world *has* become a “sinister forest” (Frye 149), and the delta that should be the navel of procreation is the “burning city of Sodom” (150), where any look back is sure to turn you into a pillar of salt. In tragedy, this river, this sea, is the furthest thing from that light-giving pool, this is death’s water of “spilled blood,” the “unplumbed, salt, estranging sea” (150) it does not matter at this moment that rebirth is inevitable; we have become lost in the grotesque slideshow.

Eliot is sure to comment that we do not understand our own past, and the reason we possess these stories of the suffering of others is so that we may enter into a pact of common compassion.

*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. I have said before  
That the past experience revived in the meaning  
Is not the experience of one life only  
But of many generations*

This communal theory asks for acceptance of suffering, of agony, not one moment in just your particular pain, but that same moment (because we do not assign relative value) extended to allow for the pain of others, so that *“we come to discover that the moments of agony [...] are likewise permanent”* (DS II); this is the law of time, the

great mouth we all share, and we appreciate this because we have made room for common suffering, a fiery shirt indeed.

To be sure, there are the traditional decorations of a tragedy. There is the movement inside the Quartets from heroic to ironic, “The Dry Salvages” is only the amplification, the climax of tragic sensibilities. We were dignified in that garden, the years between two world wars when our mind had settled into philosophy. We were still rather young and courageous, expatriating to England, in many ways we were newly born.

There was love, there was a garden, and we were expelled from that garden. And the only presence of children was hidden in apple trees. The bird had to tell us where they were because maybe we had quit listening for them, or for any music. We were rather full of ourselves then, and did not see the dark shadow approaching. The shadow of our bondage, and lastly the horrific world of nature that we cannot avoid. Images of hurricanes and tsunamis: how does one simply step out of the world of suffering, let alone the churning earth? There is nothing heroic about all this, when we’re part of the wreckage, another piece of detritus bobbing down stream. This is our demonic vision: that we are the unhealthy souls being puked out, expelled.

And what of that woman scared, ageing, no longer the voluptuous damsel of the romance. She is the suppliant (Frye 217) waiting for her lost lover to return from war. How does she enter the story at this phase? Weaving what, and to what end does she amend the past into the future?

We seem diminutive now, but have to be in the larger perspective of our approaching doom. This is the story of the suicide, nothing outrageous, nothing that doesn't make it into the papers. Whitman described it in his great song, just a passing melody, the "dappled" brains strewn across the kitchen floor—Like Timon's suicide, it just feels like it didn't "make a fully heroic point" (221).

Maybe we turn to tragedy because we are tired of the failings of social morality. In tragedy our thoughts mingle privately with what seems to be so true. Here is a person consumed by their desires, seated in the middle of the tracks, blinded to the freight train bearing down. And if we share their passion, could we also share their fate? So the mind turns to the metaphysical, the theodicy (222).

### The Bell

The first time we hear the bell in *Four Quartets* is at the metaphorical burial of the day in "Burnt Norton" IV, a prayer for the Intercession at which time the spirit of God takes flight in the form of a Kingfisher, a solitary bird that often perches over a flowing river in search of catch. Of course the image and metaphor of Christ as a fisher of men comes to mind, but also, in re-reading this passage in light of the above explication of tragedy, the imagery is that of nature stretching out to provide a desperate hold for those who have fallen into the waters:

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

*Chill  
Fingers of yew be curled Down on us? (BN IV)*

When next we hear the bell it is in “The Dry Salvages” I, after the interpenetrating river has become the all-surrounding sea, and the sea’s voices have quieted in the presence of a “*silent fog*” – this time the bird aloft is a sea gull heading home. Somewhere, perhaps from the groaner, the bell’s toll ushers us to think upon time that is older than man made mechanisms, “*rung by the unhurried / Ground swell*” “*That is and was from the beginning, / Clangs / The bell*” (DS I).

To aide in unearthing the archetypal bell I turn to Noel Cobb and his book *Archetypal Imagination: Glimpses of the Gods in Life and Art*. Cobb’s interest in bells grows out of the final scene of the long Soviet era film based on the life of the religious iconographer Andrei Rublev. In this final scene the master cinematographer Andrei Tarkofsky tells the story of an orphaned boy, Boriska, who rises to the challenge of bellfounding, a mysterious, alchemical trade once practiced by his now dead father. The boy’s connection to Rublev, the main character of the movie, is mostly coincidental, on the surface at least. By whatever twists of fate they have both been summoned to Moscow; Rublev would have been painting the icons had he not forsworn the art form and taken a vow of silence; the boy, however, must prove that he has mastered his father’s secrets by founding a huge bell for the Prince. He labors day and night, ordering around men many years older, haggling for more silver, for more rope, for a deeper hole that he must eventually dig himself. There is a passion and faith in the urgency of his work, to which the painter seems to be a knowing spectator. Finally the molten alloys are poured, and we wait while the bell cools, the work is done. All are present for the rising and gonging of the bell, and noticeably Boriska is pushed aside, out of the glory of his



achievement. Andrie Rublev is the only one to find him after the commotion has settled and the bell has been taken away to serve its purpose.

In this scene the boy is weeping. He was only able to do his work, and perhaps even stay alive by convincing everyone that he, and he alone, knew the secrets of the craft, that of all the bellfounders who died in the plague, his father only told him the secrets. This is his confession to Rublev, the man who cradles him in his arms:

“My father,” the boy sobs, “never told me. He took the secret to his grave.” And without realizing that he has broken his vow of silence, Andrie consoles him, ignoring the stupendous confession, saying, “What a treat for the people! You’ve created such joy—and you cry!” (Cobb 47)

The story of Andrei Rublev as presented by Tarkovsky is that of a man, an artist, whose heroic pursuit to capture beauty and transcendent humanity in religious symbols is quelled by the harsh reality of human cruelty. After the action of one deeply disturbing scene is when Rublev loses faith in his art, his religion, and in humanity itself. *Episode V: The Raid Autumn 1408*. Commences with betrayal of one brother upon another, and the Tartar army attacking the church in which Rublev and his apprentices have been working. The peasants and faithful pray in fear as the great doors are smashed down and the soldiers commence an orgiastic bloodbath (Bird 54). At one point in the jaded sequence Andrei kills a Mongol who is attempting to rape a mute woman to whom the artist has grown fond and who represents, claims Cobb, Andrei’s soul, the soul of Russia and the *anima mundi*, “the soul of the world” (Cobb 28). In another scene the cruel commanders mock the iconostases; they melt a crucifix and pour the molten lead down the throat of a

priest. Out of this gruesome violence we are left with a broken and silent artist, and the ghostly echo, “Still, it is beautiful.”

From this tragic, lonesome silence we enter the sequence of the bell; this is only in place in the long, almost tiring, sequence of events where the bell’s importance is made abundantly clear. “It needs the huge, silent Russian darkness of Rublev’s mind in which to toll” writes Cobb (36). The word “bell” in our language possesses the idioms of clarity and soundness: “clear as a bell,” “sound as a bell” (38). It is exactly what it is, the sonorous resounding of man’s action upon earth’s minerals; and it is exactly what it is not, for the ringing of the bell has meant any number of things: fire, flood, marriage, death, and an angel gets its wings. The bell attains to the heavens, and it “connects downwards into the physical realm through its resonance, its power to set things ringing” (38). The bell is a keeper of time, demarcator of communal events and rituals of significant proportions. “There’s something in *bell* that wants to come out” (39) It is green and growth so that the cups of flowers are nature’s perfect replicas of man’s primal musical instrument.

And, likewise, Eliot’s bell needs the huge, silent exhaustion to be heard over the clamor of sea noises. Just when you think the waters are going to drag you under, there is the realization that the whole earth itself, the ground swell, is part of the resonant bell. It is the “*final addition*” when the strength of the ego has been exhausted from rowing against the continuous current, and we have set up our oars because we realize we are fighting ourselves. That *this* is what Krishna meant when he said that it is only with humility we can approach the lessons. In this frame of mind the direction is always the

right direction, forwards or backwards does not matter: “*You cannot face steadily, but this thing is sure, / That time is no healer: the patient is no longer here*” (EC III). This lesson is the “*absolute paternal care / That will not leave us, but prevents us everywhere*” (EC IV). In the boat out at sea, in the time of inevitable drowning, there tolls the bell that calls for the “*Prayer of the one Annunciation*” (DS II), and we know it tolls for us.

### The Yoga of Devotion

Movement III reflects upon the meditation that agony, like all things, is the lot of life. When Arjuna requested to look upon the true form of God, what he saw was no absolute manifestation, he saw the entire existence at once, and he saw his place in that pageantry. We are all subjects of our own suffering, but what of the suffering of others? If all that, along with us, is floating on a raft down the Mississippi, then should we too be a part of the whole? After all, we are the heirs of Adam, the “*ruined millionaire*” (EC IV); our lot is the same as his. The great metamorphosis of Adam and Eve was from life into death, from the garden of delights into the darkness of a fallen world, and so in that same pattern we change. But what remains is not our transient agony; rather, it is the story of suffering that holds weight over the endless flux to which we are part, and no erosion can remove this. There is no need for the list of fortunetellers that arise in Movement V. Like the paths of the labyrinth, the road is well traveled and we’re fairly certain on the direction we are heading. Like the country lane from East Coker, the end is common, we’re all going into town, towards the mutual gathering place. Our only regret

is that everyone will eventually have to learn this same lesson, though we have no way to reveal it, for like the ghosts that accompanied us in the garden to look down into the pool filled with heart's light, "it" and "they" are in the future. They have yet to follow the passages and hear our echoes, just as we heard the echoes in our own time.

The sequence before us reminds of the moment in the subway, but this is a longer journey of a hundred hours, a night train between Paris and Rome, or a sea voyage. We are voyagers, "*travelers*" who might possess some romantic notion that the new world will rescue us from the old one; we want to believe that our escape means an unwritten future that will somehow negate the law of the past which it turns out is simply the tracing of the same pattern. At this part I imagine a Kate Winslet and Leo DiCaprio moment aboard the Titanic, where the furrowing water represents the perspective that maybe the past is larger than we thought; or the philosophical reverse when looking at the railroad tracks and how they seem to become one long line representing a cohesive union of history—the *both-and*.

But then the voice of Krishna rises up in Eliot's words, asking us to think equally on what we have experienced and what is yet to come.

*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)*

Such was the lesson revealed to Arjuna; that he was upon a battle field preparing to slaughter his kinsmen was no different from any other moment of death which is

unknowable. This is the face of oblivion in which there are no fruits of action, there is only the act. There is only the call, “*Not fare well, But fare forward, voyagers*” (DS III).

If this is troubling, and it should be to anyone who is not partly divine, it is reconciled in the *finale* of “The Dry Salvages”. Whatever the “*distress of nations*” the pacifying drug is as inevitable as the illness. The magic potions against fear are as old as war: reading the future in the entrails of animals, visiting the medium, the crystal ball, tarot cards, or visiting the psychoanalyst. We are not above the desire to seek comfort in such opiates. But it is the saint, the holy man who is mediator of that moment in-and-out of time. This experience might further be described as a consistent proximity to the underworld, the unconscious, and death. It is to be in the constant presence of the god in his unmanifest form—not obtainable for most of us, because “*For most of us, there is only the unattended / Moment, the moment in and out of time*” (DS V).

What we understand is what Krishna seems to be teaching, that man is composed with faith according to his nature, and this, despite the nature of the man, is the division of faith (Gita 125; XVII). Krishna knew that the saint’s life on the border of love and death was an unobtainable convention, that to practice the yogas perfectly was itself an impossibility, so he asked only that one put forth the effort, that the only thing to do was to try (125; XVII, 3). So Eliot, at the end of autumn, at the end of tragedy, returns to the familiar image of lighting in winter, a deep music, and the reassuring note that the music we are hearing is within.

The passages have brought us back to the dancers and to the garden. We are compelled to continue out of this exhaustion because what drives us is deeper and more

transient than can be articulated, our daemons and the darkness of God that we remember. We are victorious because we only continued; our place is here, beneath the yew-tree, the pagan and Christian symbol of life and death. In the shade and the “*significant soil*” is the earth in which our ancestors are buried, in which we will be entombed, in the fecund, rotting soil of life.

## CHAPTER 4

## “LITTLE GIDDING” A DREAM READING

Fire

As predicted, it has frozen—the last in the cycle of seasons from birth to adulthood, old age, and death. The scene presented in the first paragraph of Movement I is a defeated king’s journey towards the village church (Bodelsen 102) in what seems to be the heart of winter, the short, dark days following the solstice. The task of fire in this first movement suggests an involvement with past instances of what we have found are the various centers of the labyrinth. As it was in “Burnt Norton” when the dry pool was transformed by the heart-light, so now the frozen pond touches back as its icy surface becomes a sheet of fire. This is the flame of revelation that will aid the persona of the poetry in the apocalyptic sequences that await him on the streets of Little Gidding, a village whose history of religious experience and sanctuary was founded in 1626 by devotee Nicholas Ferrar, before it was razed by Cromwell in the English civil war (102).

The atmosphere, now, is eternal (“*Sempiternal*”), and heading dully, and saturated towards sundown and nighttime. The vision presented is as if the world is trapped in viscous, crystalline sap.

*The brief sun flames the ice, on pond and ditches,  
In a windless cold that is the heart’s heat,  
Reflecting in a watery mirror  
A glare that is blindness is the early afternoon.*

This day, however archetypal, is “*suspended in time*”; it is one of those moments in-and-out-of-time, those little jewels or epiphanies that rise up from all the monotonous refuse of life. We recall the rose garden and the rendezvous with the ghosts at the dry pool that morphs into a holy grail; there is the smoky church we shall soon revisit, the saturated arbor, and the oneiric vision of the dancers on the hill; also the descent into the darkness of the cave and its theatrical allegory. All this is experienced in a “*windless cold that is the heart’s heat*,” conjuring the visceral sensation of subzero days—the irony of describing its barren frost using the words of fire. This day, though in the furthest recesses of winter, is clear and sunny, like a cold diamond held up to the light. The reflection off the encrusted ice returns the power of the distant sun with blinding force. “*Midwinter spring*” sounds like a riddle, but in context with the subplot of rejuvenation it becomes prophetic and almost natural that the sunset transforms the crust of the new-fallen snow to the imaginative summer of bloom, a “*zero summer*,” which is the constant flowing forth of metaphor, evoking the organic, seasonal summer, and the summer of the mind.

Fire and air are the elemental tensions of this final quartet, the two dancing through these last movements until they are finally pressed together at the source of creation, the center that is a knot of fire and rose. Indeed, it might not be altogether unworthy to suggest that “Little Gidding” takes the most succinct care to channel what has been accomplished in the other quartets into the beginnings of a metaphor. This metaphor, like the Minotaur, is bi-form; it is the rose that has often been associated with



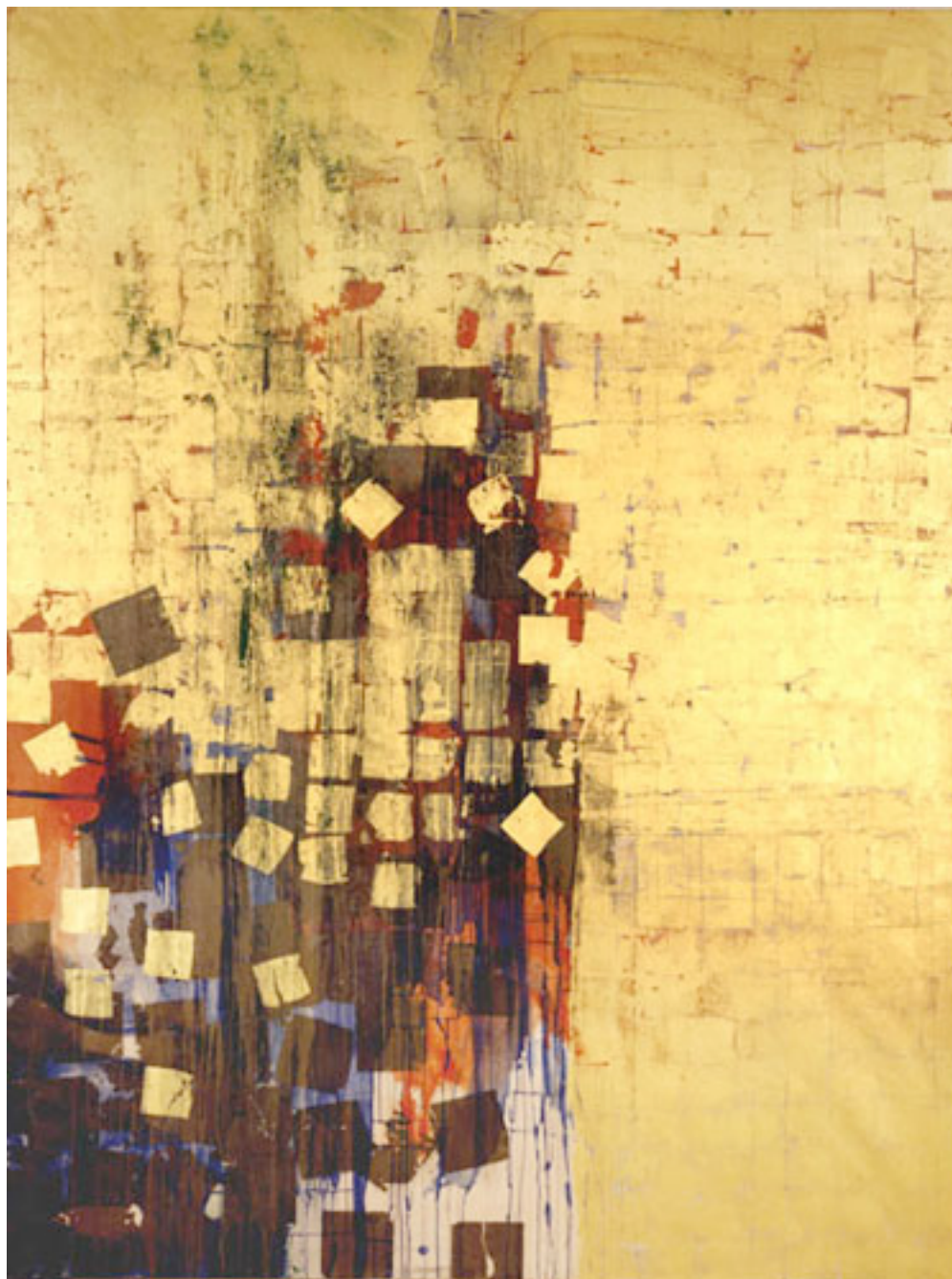


Image 7. Makoto Fujimura. *Zero Summer*. 2006.

the garden at the middle of the labyrinth, and the fire that has traveled the paths of this maze from generative, to destructive and purgative roles.

An archetypal explanation of fire goes to the earliest cosmogonies of ancient Greece, to a beginning born out of darkness. The orphic poems weave the story that the Wind impregnated Night who bore a silver egg in the “womb of Darkness” (Graves 30). From this egg rose Eros—the four-headed, bi-sexual love-god flew on golden wings (30-31) and was of solar influence. “First-born shiner,” *Phaeton Protogenus*, whose four faces looked towards the quaternary monsters that presided over the seasons: the ram of spring, the lion of summer, the snake of winter, and the Bull of the new year (31). The synonymous nature of love and fire that is articulated in the fourth movement of “Little Gidding” can be traced back here as we find Eros wielding fiery arrows of a love so powerful not even the lightning bolts of Zeus can resist (*Oppian, Cynegetica* 2.410).<sup>13</sup>

In 2003 the artist Makoto Fujimura exhibited “Water Flames and Zero Summer” at the Katzen Arts Center in Washington, D.C. This series was inspired by the final image in “Little Gidding” of a “*crowned knot of fire*” and “*the fire and the rose*” as one.

Fire can be illustrated easily," states Fujimura. "And the abbreviated forms can be found everywhere. But how is fire's essence to be captured? What is its shape? How do you describe its energy? When fire becomes more than merely a symbol, but a phenomenon, then the depictions of flames become a difficult, if not an impossible, task. The attempt is to capture the essence of something you think you see, but in reality is elusive to capture. Fire is at once recognizable and yet mysteriously abstract at the same time."<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> *Oppian, Cynegetica* 2.410 as quoted in <http://www.theoi.com/Protogenos/Eros.html>

<sup>14</sup> <http://www.absolutearts.com/artsnews/2006/05/17/33916.html>

These words mirror the meta-linguistic phenomenon that troubles every fifth movement of *Four Quartets*. In “Burnt Norton” words are described as living and therefore mortal, they “*strain, / Crack and sometimes break, under the burden, / Under the tension*” (BN V). In the midst of World War II the images of broken down machines and “*undisciplined*” troops depict the artist’s handicap in capturing his own thoughts, finding that when the right words come to him, what he means to say has shifted to a realm of new words that he must now pursue; and the anxiety that our attempt to contribute pales in comparison to the great monoliths of literature. “The Dry Salvages” does not mention the craft of writing overtly; instead, our attention is drawn to the “*here,*” a place where union happens, where the spheres mutate together, and that all one can hope to accomplish is to continue trying. The culmination of these explorations in “Little Gidding” finds the writer in the same situation as the explorer; now each sentence is either an end or a beginning, and it is the words that must now be tested by fire and the transformations that fire demands.

In the Christian tradition the Passion has ended, the unaccounted journey into the underworld concludes with resurrection and a short tenure of divine wisdom; finally ascension removes the hero from the minds of the faithful. The biblical story that composes The Acts of the Apostles is the narrative of a small group of mystics trying to preserve a tradition in the days following the teacher’s disappearance. The new Christians have rented a room in Jerusalem; they meet to cast lots for one worthy to replace the gap left by the suicide of the betrayer, Judas Iscariot. The requirements: the apostle elect must have been present at the baptism of John the Baptist, and have actively witnessed the life

of Jesus (Acts 1:21-23). These are dark times for the faithful, they have seen the *truth* of the hero, but in the wake of his departure they must suffer to keep faith alive; there has already been internal arguments about doctrine, the order of events, the importance of miracles, the inclusion of names. Genesis saw the destruction of the monolithic symbol in the Tower of Babel and the confusion of words; Acts 2 solves the problem one night in that apartment above street markets. With a rushing wind like that which expels the unhealthy souls from the boroughs of London, cloven tongues of fire descend upon each of the faithful bestowing a universal language. In the story fire is the element that allows one thing to become another, the active ingredient, so to speak, in the chemistry of metaphor.

### Fire Dream

Eliot's response to the Pentecost happens on this cold-hot, dark-bright day in the pit of winter, when we turn the lane by the pig-stay and face one of the images that have been haunting us, that of a church, a graveyard, and a tree. This is the destination of the pilgrimage, "*Here, the intersection of the timeless moment / Is England and nowhere. Never and always*" (LG I). At spots such as these, which are "*the world's end*," the connection is made between earth and heaven. It is here, alone, where all have come for respite, broken kings, terrified warriors, poets. Here there is a lack of purpose because we have been, over the course of the journey, depleted by action's motives, nothing but a shell that might have contained something, though now is unimportant. There is no logic to this place; just as nothing can be brought in, so nothing can be taken out. The aims and

purposes of the day world (fact checking, pedagogy, reportage) are impossible. The ritual of this place is prayer, a communion with the dead, the underworld, or the shadow-self. The churchyard is the churchyard of the mind, and this is a dream.

“Little Gidding” is the fourth and final sequence on the seasonal wheel. Winter is the time of purgation; here the community will attempt to expel the unbalanced element in a satirical carnival, playing with the image in an attempt to goad the king off of his throne that symbolizes egoistic, totalitarian power. An archetypal dream analysis begins with the figures of satire and winter, sleeping and death, and calls us deep into the house of Hades, where we are confronted with the great expanses of darkness. Vast, empty floating, like the depth of the cave, in which move glimmering pools of light, a light that is almost indistinguishable from the surrounding sleep. This is not a source light, but rather the *heart of light* that brought us *The Waste Land’s* dream-image of the hyacinth girl, wet and bearing flowers. Now we should try to think of dream and death almost synonymously, since we have no other metaphor of that experience except the world of slumber and its associate phantasms.

Ovid does justice to the *Brood of Night* (Hillman 32) when he tells of the god Sleep, Somnus or Hypnos, in a deep, secretive cave. Here time is always twilight, forbidden to the creatures of alarm: dogs, cocks, crows, doors with creaking hinges, or the wind—this land of silence is impermeable to any symptom of the waking day. In the bottom of the deepest room the passage leads to a chamber flowering with night poppies, and a large bed, whereupon sleeps Hypnos. At his feet and by his side are glimmers of

our shapeless dreams. And from the absolute bottom of the rock chamber flows Lethe, its murmuring sound of forgetting (Ovid XI: 581-627).

The dark family tree reveals twin brothers, Hypnos and Thanatos, sleep and death, both sons of Nix, the dark caped goddess of night who concocts her elixir from the poppies at the feet of her son's bed. These two brothers exist only in a world that never wakes, as it is said that the sun, Helios, cannot touch them. These two are shadowed fruit, pictured in the arms of a woman, one black for sleep, and the other pale with death. Their metaphorical relationship to their nighttime mother is tenderness, of being caressed and nourished in her dark wings (*Pausanias, Guide to Greece* 5.18.1.).<sup>15</sup> Hypnos is father to the animators of dreams: Morpheus is the deity that mimics human form, Phobetor finds his shape in animals, while Phantasmos constructs intrigue and deception—he is lifeless things, rocks, water, earth and trees (Ovid XI.627-49). The movement of dreams before they manifest are, to Ovid, like what was witnessed in the subway, the movement of darkness upon darkness, “noiseless wings across the darkness” (XI.650-71).

Hillman's theory of dreams follows the familial lines that never pierce the surface into day: dreams, dreaming, and the language that allows us to speak of dreams are part of the underworld, the unconscious, and the realm of death. Even love, Eros, also a son of Nix and distant brother to Sleep, runs his errands in the dark—and now the association with eroticism should point downwards to where the meaning of love associates with destruction (Hillman 33), to the death pacts of Romeo and Juliet, Pyramus and Thisbe, Orpheus and Eurydice. Hillman describes an underworld Eros who traffics in unions (33),

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<sup>15</sup> <http://www.theoi.com/Daimon/Hypnos.html>

the unions of lost lovers, or the union of the dead with meaningful symbols of their death. Along with fire, in this winged god we have another alchemical element in the quest of metaphor.

*“The way in which a dream comes already is part of its statement, expressing an elemental condition”* (124). Dreams, like works of literature and art, are compositions of genre. They should not merely be thought of as indicators of the dreamer’s psychoses, but also (and perhaps above all) we should consider them as works of *“poesis,”* (124) or the movement towards metaphor. Bert O. States, in *The Rhetoric of Dreams*, suggests that to dream might just be a sort of “nocturnal thinking” (States 38), similar to the vivid, “rational” day thoughts that control our waking lives. Dreams might be the pause, the *in media res*, that uses its power to position us into a mythological perspective (38).

Northrop Frye has suggested a number of useful correlations to aid in the literary interpretations of dreams, the foremost of which places Archetypal Criticism into the work of dreams where the conflicting goals in the analysis are based upon the tension between desire and reality. “Ritual and dream, therefore, are the narrative and significant content respectively of literature in its archetypal aspect” (105). Dream, like poetry, attempts to articulate both the “fulfillment of desire” and those structures that block this goal; and ritual is the act that expresses the “dialectic” movement, or dance, from fulfillment to its antithesis (106), whereby we begin to put the *Four Quartets* in motion: Spring and Summer are birth and fertility marked by lush images such as gardens and evenings under starlight, bonfire dances and feasting; Autumn and Winter parallel this with narratives of an ageing body and mind, the spewing out of all that was consumed in

the earlier seasons, evenings under lamplight, and then finally a metaphorical darkness indicating that the heroic forces have departed.

The phantasmagoria in Movement II begins with a litany on the destructions of the elements. Air is man's life force, and when we depart we take our stories with us, for who can carry this once the bard ceases to be? The death of air is marked by the figure of burning roses, and their final remnants of dust. Just as man keeps the oral tradition of storytelling alive, the water saturates and nourishes the earth.

Water and earth are also natural forces of decomposition, together they break down a dead body, grappling for the "*upper hand*". Flood and drouth are equal extremes, both savagely destructive in their seasons. Eliot might have been envisioning the dust bowl of the depression where the dry-land farms bore gothic resemblance to a mosaic of sardonic sneers full of mirthless laughter (Bodelsen 107). My personal water image comes out of the pictures and video clips shown in the aftermath of hurricane Katrina, and the 2004 tsunami that divested costal regions of Southeast Asia. The radical death of elements being articulated here are the pastiches of nightmares.

Water and Fire, the two most important alchemical tools, remain after the contraptions of humanity have passed away. Gone is the vegetative earth, down to the very weed that would otherwise grow in the harshest environments. Water is the metaphor of the unconscious, a force, like fire, of both destruction and creation. Fire is the element of the heights and the trans-mortal world, a symbol of divine consciousness along with its history in the realm of darkness.



As the elements' dance recedes into the past, the scene has been changed. The "All Clear" passage begins after a midnight air raid, "*After the dark dove with the flickering tongue / Had passed below the horizon of his homing*" (LG II) we are wandering the streets of some English city, still dazed from the violent assault. Or is this the hour after the tongues of fire, after the epiphany has ended and the disciple, once again, feels alone and scared? In the phases of satire there is the realization that the hero has left the scene; what remains are mock heroic elements that attempt to mimic the life of the hero, only failing because what is left are "theories and dogmas" (Frye 230).

Satire is anxious because it is far from its romantic ideal, the story of action told in the heart of spring-summer. This is "*A time for the evening under lamplight / (The evening with the photograph album)*" (EC V) where we huddle in the frozen waste telling of times that were better and what should be done to make things as they were.

When the ghost appears in the second half of Movement II, we have slipped out of time, just as we are walking between places, from the bomb shelter to home, expecting that the Germans have hit our dwelling. Behind us are the bombed out remains of buildings and the reminiscent smoke. Still shell shocked, the dead leaves remind us of weightless shrapnel, and the leaves in the garden so long ago. The person walking toward us is hidden, yet approaches in the morning wind; suddenly we recognize him, or do we? Because this is a dream figure he has the impression of being known, but it is impossible to say.

*I caught the sudden look of some dead master  
Whom I had known, forgotten, half recalled  
Both one and many; in the brown baked features  
The eyes of a familiar compound ghost*

*Both intimate and unidentifiable.*

In approaching this as a dream image we can turn to Bert O. States who theorizes that the person in our dreams needs to be thought of in terms of the “Frankenstein principle” (States 146), an idea that the denizens of the dream are creations patched together out of everyone we have ever met, a collection of our lifetime’s faces, and the faces we’ve watched change over the years. This face is not precise, it is not “precisely itself. It shimmers with likeness, not only itself but also to everything it is like” (149).

This is an old teacher, passed away, and we, the student, have forgotten the lesson. The great pedagogical moment we witnessed as Arjuna has passed, all that was revealed there seemingly forgotten as we settle into the absurd pattern of a country at war. And we, the dreamer, watch our self separate, becoming equally vague, and greet this figure, walking the streets with him in the eerie silence of the timeless moment. In this meeting we implore the sage to relate the lesson that was forgotten. He replies that the time for such fanciful, magic doctrines has passed, and instead recites what, by now, should have already been experienced, learned and internalized. The teacher has now become our own memory, rehearsing, first, our anxiety over the difficulty inherent in language, and then our changing perceptions as we are pulled out of the metaphysical world and into the process of death and rebirth.

In this age our perception is that of irony and satire; we commence to mock the idealistic notions that accompany the artistic genres of comedy (too green), romance (too magical), and tragedy (too much suffering). Satire’s mind first realizes that our individual perception is fallible, even fatal. There is no reward for our season except this calm

critique of place and time. There is no hope in rage, divine or otherwise, for our path follows that of the hero, only we go unnoticed, the broken king of a broken kingdom. In this time the body and the soul weaken, and the rustic laughter of romance has become lacerative and cruel, for the scapegoat of the previous seasons moves from a world of balances into a realm fraught with fright and fear: the role of victim. Satire is deconstructive, it complicates theatrical drama to the point of contention, where the game can be played against itself. If the chronicle of romance was the never-ending, daily comic strip, that of satire is the exposé that finds lies and corruption at the heart of all the grand narratives. The satire is what critiques war, for war, no matter how well intended (no matter the form), is among the *“things ill done and done to others’ harm”* (LG II). The virtue, we realize, was worse than the vice. And finally the post-modern appeal of the ironic, satirical critique that returns us to the image of the labyrinth, to the source of *“refining fire”* and the associate symbols of dancers that now push off of the crumbling structures that are part of the cyclical process in nature, and natural to the grotesque morphology of dreams.

### The Use of Memory

Movement III follows the “All Clear” with a philosophical meditation that reminds us of the divine Indic and Christian lessons of detachment. Here, however, the either/or of detachment versus attachment is gulfed by a third alternative, the *“indifference”* to the concern of these living fields of action. Indifference is death, and it relates to actions of the living as *“death resembles life”*; it is the perspective that has no

motive, but simply *is*. Or it is the *daemon* who we walked with upon the streets, the teacher who took no clear form because there was none to take, and no reason to choose. Speaking of the labyrinth of human cognition, it might be fruitful to imagine this figure as Hermes-Ariadne, the mercurial guide who has finally come to teach us the great lesson, but true to her trickster character, the lesson was not what we expected, or was beyond us.

The use of memory is similar; it has no motive but to liberate in the expansion of love “*beyond desire*”. If our hero was in another season, less broken down, the meeting after the blitzkrieg’s attack might have spoken to the moral ends in terms of the convention, but like memory, its aim is only to expand the moments of Love, those in-and-out-of-time experiences that we can only speak of in terms of having experienced. Memory, in effect, *sees* what Krishna was trying to show Arjuna, that all things will finally commingle, even the sinner is “*behovely*” and “*All shall be well, and / All manner of thing shall be well.*” Suddenly the image of the Crucifixion enters the dream, three crosses, and then the “*scaffold*” changes to include the anonymous, forgotten sufferers who are no less heroic than the figures of religious and mythic stories. Memory is now playing the role of comedy where all the actors gather, at the last, upon the stage—but the stage here is hued with impressions of war, men lost in ships or u-boats, their death, like the laughter of children in the garden, is unseen and unheard. Now the comedic act is simply to list, to remind us of our common end.

*We cannot revive old factions  
We cannot restore old policies  
Or follow an antique drum.  
These men, and those who opposed them*

*And those whom they opposed  
Accept the constitution of silence  
And are folded in a single party.*

### The Unfamiliar Name

In my mind's eye I see the final two sequences of *Four Quartets* playing across the screen in slow motion. Perhaps we are a soldier waiting for the expected attack that will come like a German bomber descending down through the bank of clouds. At this moment what is there to learn that has not already been rehearsed? Like all great lessons the Bhagavad Gita ends before the resumption of the action; this is that action: Krishna has again taken his human form, the humbled warrior is ready to do battle as the chariots continue their thunderous roar. But this time the fear and trembling are replaced by symbolic meaning; this one aircraft is only the first of an entire flock of dark doves, their machinegun tongues flickering as they fire.

Equally important, Movement IV recalls the holy moment of the Pentecost as it has been depicted in Western art: The dove's reentry comes with terrible beauty, and the equally terrible message of one end is reiterated: "*The only hope, or else despair / Lies in the choice of pyre or pyre— / To be redeemed from fire by fire.*"

The second verse returns to our meditation upon Love. Everything has been heading in the same direction, and the feeling is that—chances are—we won't survive this battle. In spite of all we've learned, we can say little about Love: we know that is somehow all bound up with "torment," it is "*the unfamiliar Name / Behind the hands that wove / The intolerable shirt of flame / Which human power cannot remove.*" This is the

story of suffering, the image appears: the darkness of Hades before the pantheon of gods, and the movement, like a dream, was Eros-Psyche, a psychological rumbling of hotness and darkness that “*prevents us everywhere*” (EC IV). Eros is a vague understanding of something that probably cannot be quantified—he interweaves the psychic with the corporal so that to separate them is only another intensity of turmoil. The shirt of flame is that abiding agony: suffering and love go hand in hand. “*We only live, only suspire / Consumed by either fire or fire.*”

### The Drawing of this Love

To understand the terminus of the Quartets is a trick of the imagination, or if you are a saint, a feat of contemplation. In the poem proper we return to the center of the garden in “Burnt Norton” and place it into our archive. Then, as now, there was only the present moment at the end of either path, and that moment took us to a gate, and through that gate we could not comprehend our experience of stillness and movement. “East Coker” will never be forgotten because the end and beginning was a story told in the pagans’ dance that we secretively witnessed. The end and beginning in that open field was our body, and we were, then, wholly in our body. “The Dry Salvages” begins with a river that merges in the fertile delta where the ocean is of all forms—our ending, similarly, is in a churchyard “(*Not too far from the yew-tree*)” (DS V). We also remember the motto of Mary, Queen of Scots whose final freedom was in death, when the blood of her execution splattered the spectators.

Life mimics the meta-linguistics. Movement V of “Little Gidding” finds that the words of the poet are at home, and their impossible form and function move much like the dancers whose choreography has already been preformed. “Little Gidding” is a Church, a cemetery, and a tree. The tree is yew (poison fruit and leaves), symbolic of both eternal life and death. It is a production of the dead, the earth, and heaven. The tombstone has been made smooth again by time; now the name is unreadable, only a relief of what once was, perhaps a little bit of dirt in the dent of a letter—someday it will be invisible, a new stone.

Metaphor is trans-migratory thought. We find this in the title of Ovid’s work, *Metamorphoses*, where in chapter fifteen he writes:

There is no thing that keeps its shape; for nature,  
the innovator, would forever draw  
forms out of other forms. In all this world  
you can believe me—no thing ever dies.  
By birth we mean beginning to re-form,  
a thing’s becoming other than it was;  
and death is but an end of the old state;  
one thing shifts here, another there; and yet  
the total of all things is permanent.

So in the *finale* we return again to where we started, down the passage we did not think to take, but remembered that we did. And somehow we *know* this place, and it makes its impression, deeply, as it is the first impression. Here we are again out of time, in the time measured in the lull that falls “*Between two waves of the sea.*” As always, the tree is full of children, and there is a bird to guide us. When we have reached the center of the labyrinth, the *heart of light* shines, and the center is every point along the journey,

and at the center all things are significant in the two mutual eye-beams of Love and Death.

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



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APPENDIX A

The Seasonal Pattern

## Appendix A

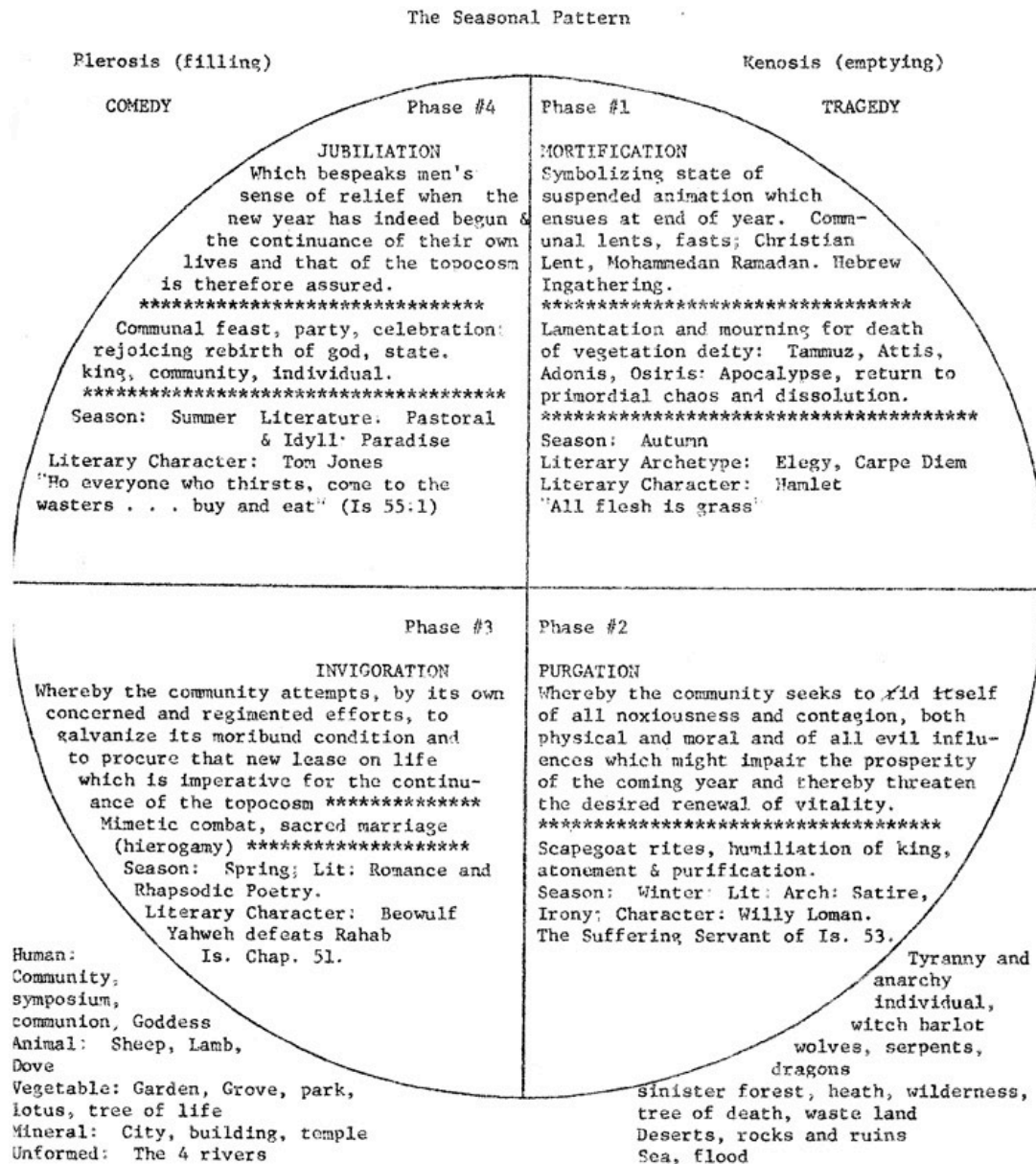


Diagram suggested in part by T. H. Gaster's *Thespis* and Northrop Frye's *Anatomy of Criticism*

Chart presented by Dr. Michael Sexson to the English 510 Graduate Seminar *Studies in Critical Theory: Displacement in Freud and Frye*. Spring 2007.