CHAPTER SEVEN

THE POET (Continued)

I

The problem of salvation and the concomitant difficulties depicted in 'Gerontion', The Waste Land and 'The Hollow Men', point towards Eliot's later poems, written in purely Christian terms, like 'Journey of the Magi', 'A Song of Simeon', and Ash Wednesday. In the first two of these poems, as in 'The Hollow Men', Eliot continues to explore the theme of death required for rebirth, which is also central to The Waste Land. But, while 'The Hollow Men' has dealt with the consequences of refusing to accept that death, 'Journey of the Magi' and 'A Song of Simeon' deal with its acceptance.

Then, in 1927, nearly two months after the appearance of the second poem Eliot was confirmed in the Anglican Church, and this momentous event in his life produced remarkable changes in his poetic world. The conversion was not a sudden transformation but the inexorable culmination of a process which had been taking place during the twenties. For a long time Eliot's soul was distraught between the demands of flesh and spirit, and between rational assent to Christianity and the absence of Christian sentiments. Proceeding by rejection or elimination, wrestling with the 'demon of doubt', like Pascal,
and finding the world inexplicable by any non-religious theory, he ultimately found Christianity accounting most satisfactorily for the world and specially for the moral and spiritual world within. Before this Eliot was living in a tormented world dominated by Bradleyan idealism and irony, and Symbolist aesthetics, penetrated by metaphysical (specially ontological) anxiety and fear. After the conversion the Christian Eliot found a transcendent God establishing the objectivity of time, space and the natural world. Escaping from the 'Wilderness of mirrors', the Christian poet started to record the discovery of an objective world, separated from the experiencing 'self' which was a mere 'consciousness ... reducible to relations between objects', by a new 'self' endowed with a reality within which moral and spiritual experiences became possible and real journeys to worth-while goals could be undertaken.

However, the new poetry was in no way overtly confessional or propagandist, but it certainly showed a new tonality. The irony and the tendency to create a grotesque and bizarre atmosphere had disappeared. The transitions and juxtapositions became less abrupt and startling. There was also a new tendency to introduce scriptural and liturgical phrases into the verse. Again, the early images showing much complexity of feeling, a
The Poet (Continued)

blend of high spirits, harsh mockery, malevolence and indifference, was gradually replaced by simpler and more homogeneous ones which showed a kind of disembodifying and withdrawing of the experience leading to greater generality and creation of mystery.

The Ariel Poems were published between 1927 and 1930. They were written almost at the same time as Ash Wednesday, but 'Journey of the Magi', 'A Song for Simeon' and 'Animula' appeared before and 'Marina' after the publication of Ash Wednesday. All of them show a search for a new form for a new content embodying a progress of the soul. The first two are dramatic monologues reflecting something of the poet's spiritual struggle at the time.

'Journey of the Magi' (1927) depicts the quest of the Magi for the Christ child, the evidence of Incarnation. The quest, partly based on a passage from one of Lancelot Andrews' sermons on the Nativity, involves a long arduous journey against the discouragements of nature and the hostility of man. Here the poet uses the framework of the Biblical journey of the Magi to depict and dramatize the journey of the soul. It is a journey towards the New Testament which establishes the new Covenant between man and God, which destroys the old dispensation. It is an event in the life of the soul
undergoing a death and a rebirth. The poem is a
dramatic monologue in which one of the Magi recounts
the journey to Christ long after the event. After the
trials on the way, the Magi came 'down to a temperate
valley' with the smell of vegetation, a running stream,
a water-mill,

And three trees on the low sky,
And an old white horse galloped away in the meadow
... ... ... ... ... ... 
Six hands at an open door dicing for pieces of silver
And feet kicking empty wine-skins.

The scene is pregnant with symbolic meaning, which
eluded the Magi. The 'three trees on the low sky' is a
portent of Calvary, the 'old white horse' points to the
white horse in Revelation, and the 'six hands dicing for
pieces of silver' seem to allude to the soldiers casting
lots for the garments of Christ at the foot of the Cross
and to the blood money of Judas. But the arrival of the
Magi at the place of Incarnation was nothing more than
a 'satisfactory' experience. They could not understand
fully the implications of the long journey, and of the
mystery surrounding the birth of the child in the midst
of the cruelty and carelessness of the world. They had
accepted the fact of a 'Birth' but were mystified by its
similarity to a 'Death'.

... ... this Birth was
Hard and bitter agony for us, like Death, our death.
The Poet (Continued)

Caught in the web of uncertainty, they could not
rise up to the full splendour of the strange epiphany;
and came back to their own Kingdom, but there;

... no longer at ease here in the old dispensation,
With an alien people clutching their gods.
I should be glad of another death.

They returned to the kingdoms of the 'old
dispensation' as aliens. The Birth of Christ meant the
death of their old life and the birth of new life under
a new Covenant. Living like exiles in their own land the
Magi longed for an ending of their alienation with
'another death' which could lead them to the final con-
summation.

The next poem, 'A Song for Simeon' (1927) is based
on 'Nunc dimitis', or 'Song of Simeon' in Chapter 2 of
Luke. It was revealed that Simeon 'should not see death,
before he had seen the Lord's Christ'. He came to see the
Christ child and said, 'Lord, now lettest thou thy servant
depart in peace, according to thy word: For mine eyes
have seen thy salvation' (Luke 2:29-31). Then Simeon
prophesied to Mary on her grief and Christ's suffering.
With a prophetic vision of the suffering of Christ and the
The Poet (Continued)

glory of His Resurrection, the old man desired to miss the agony and ecstasy of the Christian life and depart with the peace of Christ. That is the paradox of his life.

The poem opens with a reference to the Roman world of the old dispensation with the hyacinths blooming in bowls. But, 'The winter sun creeps by the snow hills'; reflecting the transition between two worlds. The old life like Simeon waits 'for the wind that chills towards the dead land'; which is also the vital breath restoring life to the dead through the death of Christ. But the change or the surge of new life imposes a terrible trial upon the human soul. The vitalizing growth of the new faith points to 'the time of sorrow' and death. So, Simeon, who has lived a life of righteousness, of 'faith and fast', and 'honour and ease', prays to God to let him die peacefully. Foreseeing the Way of Sorrows and the Passion, the scourging, the weeping and the desolation, the old man wishes to be preserved from the future agonies through the peace of 'the still unspeaking and unspoken Word', at the very 'birth season of decease'. Simeon knows that suffering, destruction and death are necessary for the generation of new life, but he is not prepared to face it. Further, he does not aspire after the ecstatic spiritual
The Poet (Continued)

destiny of a saint or a martyr: 'Not for me the ultimate vision'. When all other Christians enact the martyrdom within their own lives, Simeon only sees (as a prophet) the passion and the ecstasy. He is old and tired and wants to depart, after 'Having seen thy salvation', before the act of redemption in the Passion.

The next poem, 'Animula' (1929) opens with a line from Dante's 'Purgatorio': 'Issues from the hand of God, the simple soul', and ends with an adaptation from the 'Ave Maria': 'Pray for us now and at the hour of our birth'. The poem seems to make an Augustinian variation on a Wordsworthian theme: the simple soul grows up from play to adult imperatives and spiritual deadness, and ultimately to the violent shattering of all worldly desires.

The simple soul, issuing 'from the hand of God' to the world of time, responds to things around him with innocence and immediacy,

... taking pleasure
In the brilliant fragrance of the Christmas trees,
pleasure in the wind, the sunlight and the sea.

which is the gentle 'whisper of immortality'. Then, gradually, its adulteration begins with the interpenetration of reality, thought, feeling and imagination, producing a
confusion of 'the actual and the fanciful'. As the child starts to face the responsibilities of the adult state 'imperatives' and distinctions are forced upon him; living becomes a pain, which makes him withdraw into dreams or the second-hand experience of the Encyclopaedia Britannica. Thus, 'Issues from the hand of time the simple soul'. Time distorts and corrupts what God creates. The soul becomes deadened,

Irresolute and selfish, misshapen, lame,
Unable to fare forward or retreat,
Fearing the warm reality, the offered good,
Denying the importunity of the blood,

Through denial or inertia or fear, it misses 'the offered good', the grace extended to him. It cannot yield to the behest of both flesh and spirit. It becomes a 'shadow of its own shadows' living only in the silence after the last Eucharist. This deadened soul and those of Guitierrez, Bouden and Floret, who are examoles of human failure, are in need of being redeemed by prayer and grace.

The three 'Ariel' poems discussed above are poems of crisis, depicting some incident or stage in the progress of the soul. Each of them attempts in different ways to discover the mysteries of death and birth. The
The Poet (Continued)

Magi and Simeon are souls in transit between two worlds. They have passed the stage of Gerontion and of the Hollow Men. Their souls are not vanquished by sexual frustration and unbelief. They have arrived at the boundary of a new world, but they cannot enter it because of sheer spiritual tiredness and inadequacy. They are still enchained to the past, still spiritually uncleansed of the human taint, and not able to take the decisive step towards affirmation. They have known Incarnation, but not the Atonement. But they are not completely bogged down by despair. Even the 'little soul' in the pessimistic poem, 'Animula' waits, 'in the silence after the viaticum', for death as the beginning of a journey to another birth.

II

It is quite proper to suppose that Ash Wednesday and the Ariel Poems, which were written at the time of Eliot's confirmation in the church of England, reflect the circumstances in which the important decision was made by the poet. Ash Wednesday (1930) is a poem of resignation and acceptance of faith found and held with anxiety. It is also a poem of purgation, penitence and aspiration
The Poet (Continued)

towards a higher order of existence. The title associates
the poem with an important day in the Christian calender.
Ash Wednesday is the first day of Lent, a day of penitence,
contrition and renunciation, -- a day of self-discipline,
purification and the dissolution of worldly attachments.
Leonard Unger has suggested that Eliot's poem represents
the experience of the self-purifying process described by
But the main inspiration behind the poem is that of Dante
of 'Purgatorio' and 'Vita Nuova'. Added to this is the
scripture, notably the Song of Solomon, Ezekiel, and the
Revolution of St. John. And the woman figure present in the
early poems becomes, here, the symbol of beneficent love,
and the attraction towards God.

The first part of the poem opens with an adaptation
of a line from Cavalcante: 'Because I do not hope to turn
again'. This is the beginning of a process of self-exploration
which is enacted in the poem. The mind of the speaker is
awake and aware of a loss, which cannot be recovered. He
knows that he will never know 'The infirm glory of the
positive hour' and 'The one veritable transitory power'. He
is the 'aged eagle' with 'The vanished power of the usual
reign'. Everything is temporary and belongs to the flux of

(21) Leonard Unger: 'Ash Wednesday' in T.S. Eliot: a Selected
Critique, ed. Leonard Unger (Russell & Russell, New York,
time and place :

Because I know that time is always time
And place is always and only place
And what is actual is actual only for one time
And only for one place.

So, he does 'not hope to turn again', does 'not hope to know again', that world of the buried past, with a creative awareness of his exhausted capacity for response, the protagonist will renounce everything and start again from the bottom :

I renounce the blessed face
And renounce the voice.

The 'blessed face' and the 'voice' may represent an experience transcending time and place, but they are only apparent in terms of time, place and memory. Thus, with no hope and the springs of action dried up, he reaches a condition like Pascal's despair, where he resolves to renounce everything. But there is no bitterness and tired indifference in this. There is an intensity produced by the concentration of the will, which makes him rejoice,

... having to construct something
Upon which to rejoice.

With this the 'aged eagle' may be 'renewed' as in Psalm 103:5, or it may 'mount up with wings', as in Isaiah 40:31. After the joyful acceptance of things as they are,
The Poet (Continued)

and after the joyous renunciation, the speaker feels a sense of creative release in death, and the necessity of God's mercy and of prayer:

    Teach us to care and not to care
    Teach us to sit still.

The second part of the poem presents the working of grace in a world of vision. Commentators like Mario Praz and Leonard Unger have explored the embryology of the vision, which is closely linked with the 'higher dream' of Dante. The Lady is a symbolical equivalent of Dante's Beatrice, some kind of a spiritual mediator who honours the 'Virgin in meditation' and has the power to intercede for sinners. The juniper-tree may be the tree in Grimms' Tales under which a dead boy is resurrected. It may also refer to Elijah (1 Kings 19) praying for death under a juniper-tree. The three white leopards are beautiful, satisfied and responsive. They are agents of good, effecting some kind of purifying release. The whole vision resembles that of Ezekiel and his valley of bones and the subject of the vision is death leading to spiritual renewal.

The bones of the vision 'shine with brightness' because of the lady, who has 'withdrawn, / In a white gown, to contemplation'. After this the bones 'atone to forgetfulness', and they compose into a unity leading to the
The Poet (Continued)

reconciliation of foregetfulness. And the broken fragments
of 'I who am here dissembled', hiding behind a false
appearance, also 'atone to forgetfulness', and becomes
'devoted, concentrated in purpose'. Then like the Lord
telling Ezekiel to prophesy unto the bones, God said:

Prophesy to the wind, to the wind only
The wind will listen.

In response, the cleansed and purified bones begin
to sing 'With the burden of the grasshoper' or the burden
of the failing desire in Ecclesiastes (12:5). The litany
of the bones is a salutation to the 'Lady of silences',
who is a Lady of paradoxes in whom all the paradoxes are
reconciled. This is a song, not of supplication, but of
rejoicing. Each paradoxical reconciliation acts as a kind
of charm producing a desired result, conjuring up a unity
of opposites, so that

Rose of memory
Rose of forgetfulness.

become a unity in

The single Rose
Is now the Garden
Where all loves end.

This is Earthly Paradise of man where all loves find
fulfilment. From this, the 'Lady of silences' who is the
incarnation of the 'single Rose' leads to
The Poet (Continued)

Speech without word and
Word of no speech,

which refers to the Word of God. The unspeaking voice
of human love represented by the 'Lady of silences'
disappear into the placid centre of eternal love. For
this, salutation is offered to the Virgin, because she
is the 'Garden/where all love ends'. All the loves find
their consummation in the Mother. After the litany the
'scattered and shining' bones continue to sing:

We are glad to be scattered, we did little

*** *** *** *** *** ***

... ... ... ... ... ... This is the land which ye
Shall divide by lot. And neither division nor unity
Matters. This is the land. We have our inheritance.

These lines, which recall Ezekiel's description
of the dividing of the land among the tribes of Israel;
reflect the condition of the bones which have reached
the point where distinction between separation and unity
has become unimportant.

In the third part of the poem the world of vision
or high dream is replaced by one of movement and strenuous
effort. The protagonist resumes the struggle and mounts
the stairs, which corresponds to the Purgatorial ascent
of Dante, or to St. John's mystical ladder in The Dark
Night of the Soul. The atmosphere is obviously Dantesque
The Poet (Continued)

with the fetid air and the devil on the stair. Rising
up along the flights of the spiritual stairs, the speaker
is again troubled by the demon of hope and despair. After
that he comes to a stair, 'dark, Damp and Jagged',
suggesting old age and decay. Then comes the third stair
from which a beautiful pastoral scene is seen through a
voluptuously shaped window. This is a picture of spring;
youth, love and music with a suggestion of carnal love :

Blown hair is sweet, brown hair over the mouth blown,
Lilac and brown hair.

The nostalgic loveliness of the scene and the music
distracts the mind from the ascent of the stair, but the
protagonist continues to climb with a 'strength beyond
hope and despair', and prays to God in humility and emergent
faith :

Lord, I am not worthy
Lord, I am not worthy
but speak the word only.

This petition recalls the words of the centurion,
which are associated by the Church with the rite of Holy
Communion: 'Speak the word only and thy servant shall be
healed'.

The fourth part of the poem returns to a memory and
a dream of the experience of the 'higher dream'. It is a
The Poet (Continued)

springtime scene of flowers of various colours capable of symbolical and liturgical meanings. This scene is evoked through the presence of a silent sister, 'Going in white and blue, in Mary's Colour'. She is probably the Lady in white who melted into the Mother of the Garden in Part II. This time she appears in Mary's colour and with 'knowledge of eternal dolour', which suggests the pains of Hell or that of the Passion. She walks in the garden between dawn and evening, and renews the sources of life:

... made strong the fountains and made fresh the spring Made cool the dry rock and made firm the sand.

Through her, the desert is given life, and she is petitioned, 'Sovegna vos', (the words of Arnaut Daniel), not to forget 'the years that walk between', that is, the years of futility and unreality. Mysteriously folded in the white light of illumination the beloved figure moves again, and with her

The new years walk, restoring
...... the years, restoring
With a new verse the ancient rhyme.

and distracting youth and love are borne away to burial in a 'guilded hearse' drawn by 'jewelled unicorns'. Through the Lady, the lost years -- the years of lost creativity,
The Poet (Continued)

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is again troubled by the demon of hope and despair. After
that he comes to a stair, 'dark, damp and jagged',
suggesting old age and decay. Then comes the third stair
from which a beautiful pastoral scene is seen through a
voluptuously shaped window. This is a picture of spring,
youth, love and music with a suggestion of carnal love:

Blown hair is sweet, brown hair over the mouth blown,
Lilac and brown hair.

The nostalgic loveliness of the scene and the music
distracts the mind from the ascent of the stair, but the
protagonist continues to climb with a 'strength beyond
hope and despair', and prays to God in humility and emergent
faith:

Lord, I am not worthy
Lord, I am not worthy
but speak the word only.

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Through her, the desert is given life, and she is petitioned, 'Sovegna vos', (the words of Arnaut Daniel), not to forget 'the years that walk between', that is, the years of futility and unreality. Mysteriously folded in the white light of illumination the beloved figure moves again, and with her

The new years walk, restoring
... ... the years, restoring
With a new verse the ancient rhyme.

and distracting youth and love are borne away to burial in a 'gilded hearse' drawn by 'jewelled unicorns'. Through the Lady, the lost years -- the years of lost creativity,
The Poet (Continued)

lost love, and lost devotion, are given a chance of redemption, which is now the new theme:

... Redeem
    The time, Redeem
    The unread vision in the higher dream.

The memory returns again. The gentle figure of the 'silent sister veiled in white and blue', is seen standing 'Between the years, behind the garden god'. The flute of the garden god of fertility was silent because it had no power to enchant and distract. However, the silent sister bowed and made a sign; perhaps the sign, perhaps the sign of the Cross, and then,

... the fountain sprang up and the bird sang down
    Redeem the time, redeem the dream
    The token of the word unheard, unspoken
    Till the wind shake a thousand whispers from the yew.

The word will be spoken when the wind, a divine breath of God scatters the whispers from the yew tree of death. That is why the poem ends with, 'And after this our exile', a phrase from the prayer 'Salve Regina', supplicating the Holy Virgin: 'show unto us the blessed fruit of thy womb, Jesus'. Redemption is possible through Incarnation, when the Word of God, the 'word unheard, unspoken', is made flesh in Christ.
The Poet (Continued)

The fifth poem deals with the revelation of the Word in the speaker's world of exile for which the words from the 'Liturgical Reproaches', 'O my people, what have I done unto thee', (Micah 6:3), are very relevant. Now coming back from the world of vision, the protagonist faces, the reality of his spiritual condition. Even if the intermediary word (of the Lady) is lost and gone, the Word remains. The Word is 'within/The world and for the world'.

The Incarnate Word is for the world, which is against the Word:

Against the Word the unstilled world still whirled About the centre of the silent Word.

Because of spiritual flaccidity, the 'unstilled world' resists its Redeemer. For those 'who walk in darkness', for those who 'avoid the face' and 'deny the voice', the Word will be unspoken and unheard. This is the condition of an exile. The world exiles man from the Word, though the world turns upon the Word. The result is that man is tortured upon the rack of his antithesis. Thus, in desperation and excruciating agony, the speaker asks if the veiled sister will pray for those who walk in darkness, who choose and oppose, affirm and deny, and even at last find, 'The desert in the garden the garden in the desert', 'spitting from the mouth the
The Poet (Continued)

withered apple seed', which suggests some last remnant
of the original sin in the old garden. From the agonizing
urgency of his questionings it is clear that he needs
the corrective intercession of the veiled sister. Now,
the protagonist has suggested the dire need for grace,
and thus the poem ends with a suggestion for prayer.

In the last poem the experience of the first poem
is re-examined and the inherent conflicts are resolved.
There is a change from 'Because I do not hope to turn
again' to 'Although I do not hope to turn again', and
this change is conducive to the working of grace. Although
the protagonist does not hope and wish to turn to the
world, the appeal of the world of profit and loss, lilacs,
sea voices and smell returns to him. This time, there
is no remorse or shame, because natural human weakness
is accepted. And, even if life is a 'brief transit',
'The dream crossed twilight between birth and dying',
the speaker aspires after natural vigour and unrestricted
movement:

The white sails fly seaward, seaward flying
Unbroken wings.

The senses are revived and the heart is rekindled
without any sense of painful constriction. However,

This is time of tension between dying and birth
The place of solitude where three dreams cross.
The Poet (Continued)

When the voices from the yew-tree are shaken, the unspoken Word will speak, and the protagonist wishes to die to the world with the shaking of the 'other yew', and to have a new birth in God. Now his will is true and strong, and his heart is sincere. And, standing on the boundary between a material and sensuous world movingly remembered and a new world which gradually opens up before him, he invokes the blessed sister and holy mother to

Suffer us not to mock ourselves with falsehood
Teach us to care and not to care
Teach us to sit still
Even among these rocks.

so that God's will might prevail: 'Our peace in His will'. Thus the poem ends with two poignant lines of supplication:

Suffer me not to be separated
And let my cry come unto Thee.

addressed to the blessed sister and holy mother, and to the Lord.

The writing of *Ash Wednesday* was started some time in 1927, the year when Eliot was confirmed in the Church of England. In a way the poem deals with the reasons which prompted the deeply serious man and poet to make
that decision, which again changed the whole direction of his life from that point onwards. The history of the poem's genesis is quite complicated. The second section of the poem was published first under the title, 'Salutation' in the Saturday Review of Literature in December 1927. The first and third parts were published in 1928 and 1929, and the whole poem including the three remaining parts appeared in April 1930. In this context it is quite reasonable to suppose that the second part was written first as an impassioned and eloquent response to the new sense of liberty, security and purpose given him by the conversion. The poem grows out of a vital impulse which was satisfied in the second part, and is a record of the strange enlightening crisis Eliot was passing through in 1927, of the assimilation of a curious visionary quality into the whole pattern of life and of a complex symbolical pre-figuring of a new direction and a 'high dream'. Lancelot Andrewes, a favourite writer of Eliot, also spoke eloquently of the significance of Ash Wednesday on several occasions and his favourite texts for the occasions were Joel 2:12-13 and Jeremiah 8:4-8, which deal with the Christian problems of 'falling', 'rising', and 'turning'. Now, it is quite clear that the conflict of the soul dramatized with defensive irony in the poems up to and including 'The Hollow Men' has reached in Ash Wednesday, some kind of Dantesque solution with
The Poet (Continued)

the accompanying Dantesque ease or repose praised so often in Eliot's critical writings.

Then, the next poem, 'Marina' belongs to the group called the Ariel Poems, but it was published only in September 1930, months after the publication of Ash Wednesday in March/April 1930. But the poem deals with the same theme of death and rebirth. The title and the context of the poem recall the reunion of Pericles with his daughter Marina in Shakespeare's Pericles. The aged Pericles searching for his daughter whom he had presumed dead, discovers her at last, and in finding her he has found his soul again. There was death through separation and loss, and the death is resurrected through discovery and reunion. But, the frenzied cry of Hercules, 'what place is this? what region, what quarter of the world?' from Seneca's Hercules Furens poses an antithetical situation. Because in contrast to the gracious experience of Pericles, Hercules, as the assassin of his own children, has at last discovered the horror and pain of defeat, loss and death. But, the horror of the Senecan experiences fades as the vision of Marina emerges.

The poem opens with the questioning mood of the Senecan epigraph: 'What seas what shores what grey rocks and what islands'. Standing on the deck of a ship, Pericles
The Poet (Continued)

approaches towards the shores of an island from which comes the scent of pine and the song of wood thrush. Pericles is in a kind of half-way world between dream and reality. Moving in this world, he becomes conscious of his daughter's presence in the midst of images rising out of his buried life. The images of spiritual death associated with the buried lives of sins like sensuality, pride, sloth and lust, become unsubstantial against the vision of Marina, which is a kind of 'grace dissolved in place'. The vision becomes clearer and less clear because Marina is the transformed synthesis of dream and reality:

What is this face, less clear and clearer
The pulse in the arm, less strong and stronger --
Given or lent? more distant than stars and nearer than the eye.

She is almost like the 'One who moves in the time between sleep and waking', in Ash Wednesday:

Whispers and small laughter between leaves and hurrying feet
Under sleep, where all the waters meet.

This haunting image of the dream child with its elusive whispering and laughter is very close to a religious epiphany. Then, as if awakening from a dream Pericles remembers and forgets the suffering he has endured in the building of the boat. Somehow the voyage has been
The Poet (Continued)

made and Pericles has been spiritually regenerated. In consequence, he wishes to resign his life for the vaguely perceived form, face and life which belongs to a world of time beyond him. That life with 'the awakened, lips parted', is the symbol of the reborn hope and the 'new ships', the vehicle of an established faith which will continue the voyage towards the supreme moment of final consummation.

After the frustration of the tired soul struggling through the first three Ariel poems and Ash Wednesday, 'Marina' has embodied a definitely positive advance in the spiritual journey. The dream of Ash Wednesday has become almost a reality to which a sleeper wakes. Without the dreams, the prayers, and the Christian phrases and symbols the poem has presented a vivid picture in which a voyage is made and a beloved face, another Beatrice figure, endowed with the grace of God, is seen again. The quester has met the object of his quest, and the soul is resurrected. After this there is only the problem of the protagonist 'faring forwards' towards the Still Point of the turning world.

Now in the two 'Coriolan' poems based on the figure of Coriolanus, Eliot tries to depict a certain stage of the quest for the Still Point of the turning world. In the
The Poet (Continued)

'Triumphant March' (1931), 'the natural wakeful eye of our Ego' perceives both the ancient and the modern worlds on the march. But the eyes of the leader, 'watchful, waiting, perceiving, indifferent,' look for something

... hidden under the dove's wing, hidden in the turtle's breast,
Under the palmtree at noon, under the running water
At the still point of the turning world.

In the second poem, 'Difficulties of a Statesman' (1932), which begins with a conflict between the meaning of the Biblical lines, 'Cry what shall I cry?/All flesh is grass' (Isaiah 40:6) and the practicalities of a modern statesman, there is still the yearning for something:

... hidden under the ... Hidden under the ... Where the dove's foot rested and locked for a moment,
A still moment, repose of noon, set under the upper branches of noon's widest tree
Under the breast feather stirred by the small wind after noon.

III

After the humility, the penitence and the prayer of Ash Wednesday, and after the recovery and re-integration of the soul through the Beatrice figure of 'Marina,' the questing soul of the poet widens the range of its experience to probe more deeply and exhaustively for the meaning of the mystery of the final consummation. The result is the
The Poet (Continued)

Four Quartets (1935–42), which is a religious poem, not in the sense that it propagates or illustrates a point or an aspect of faith, but that it is written by a devoutly religious and intellectual poet. The guiding force or impulse seeking expression is not belief but imaginative truth or experience coloured and nourished by the poet's belief. Haunted and illumined by a vision he seeks to shape and express it as a symbolic entity which satisfies the high criteria of aesthetics and poetic genius which is intent upon making as clear as possible the truth which has been glimpsed.

The Quartets contain the experience of a lifetime. It is a universe in music and words, in which religions, thoughts, feelings, memories and other elements are fused together by one of the most critical, conscious and imaginative minds of the century. Air, earth, water and fire; glimpses of paradise, of purgatory, are held together with visions of suffering, loss and death, and with the wisdom of Christian faith and Hindu philosophy. St. John of the Cross, Julian of Norwich, Dante, Krishna and Christ hover over and cast shadows across these poems. The previous poetic moments and symbols, the moment of the hyacinth garden, the whispers
The Poet (Continued)

and laughter of children, the rose, the fire and the

garden -- they all recur, and are sublimated in the

poet's journey towards some kind of refinement, libera-
tion and final integration, culminating in 'the crowned
knot of fire' in which 'the fire and the rose are one'.

Four levels of experience -- the level of spiri-
tual vision of higher dream, the level of nostalgic
vision, the level of ordinary experience of disillusion-
ment and distraction, and the level of asceticism or
self-denial, occur in the *Quartets*. The unifying theme
of Time and Eternity run like a thread through them.

In these poems, Bradleyan idealism has been transformed
and enriched by the wealth of Christian Tradition. As
a matter of fact *Four Quartets* may be regarded, in some
way, as poetic meditations upon the Christian understanding
of Time and Eternity, leading to some kind of an appre-
hension of unity beyond the contradictions of history and
experience. But in Christianity, Time and Eternity meet
in the Incarnation, and the Quartets point towards this.

For Eliot truth is a matter of coherence, of seeing in
human history and experience a pattern of significance,
a pattern of timeless moments which carry their own and
reinforce each other's validity.
The Poet (Continued)

The form adopted for the embodiment of this experience is not one of symbolic statement nor of logical progression. It is a musical structure embodying a transcending coherence, 'The complete consort dancing together'. The title itself implies some analogy with a musical work specially with the sonata. Helen Gardner, in her book, *The Art of T.S. Eliot* has observed that each of the poems has five 'movements' with its own 'inner necessary structure'. Through this structure the poems point to 'the still point of the turning world', which is identified as the Incarnation. The poems begin with a statement on Time and conclude with a vision out of Time, but a vision whose truth has been established on timeless moments of history. And at the heart of all lies the Christian paradox that man is capable of redeeming the times because the Word of God made flesh in Christ has already redeemed Time itself. The two epigraphs of 'Burnt Norton', taken from Diel's edition of Heraclitus, are relevant to all the poems. The two fragments indicating the necessity for the subordination of the individual to the harmony of the Logos and the reconciliation of contraries, point towards the 'still point' embodied in the poems. Again each of the poems takes its title from a place having some personal or family or historical...
The Poet (Continued)

association for Eliot, and each of them starts with meditations on a particular place.

Burnt Norton is a Costwold country house with a garden, in Gloucestershire, into which Eliot wandered in the summer of 1934. The poet was, perhaps, moved by the sight of a deserted house and a formal garden, which symbolized for him man's attempt to impose a pattern on his experience and to discipline nature. The poem, 'Burnt Norton' (1935) opens with a statement on Time, followed by a presentation of the movement of time. All time is 'eternally present' and 'All time is unredeemable.' There are only two dimensions which count: the instance of consciousness and Eternity which can only be apprehended in the present at the existential point where consciousness passes over from Time into Timelessness:

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

This is a garden haunted by other echoes and images of permanence and innocence like the 'lotos rose' and the laughter of children. In this way brief moments of eternity are attained in time, but, 'human kind cannot bear very much reality,' and the moment fades away. The
The Poet (Continued)

second movement begins with the symbol of the wheel representing worldly experience leading only to dissatisfaction:

Garlic and sapphire in the mud
Clot the bedded axle-tree.

As the world offers no enduring satisfaction
the mind is occupied with the idea of escape. This also is not available; but experience in time points towards a way of reconciling all temporal tensions:

... at the still point, there the dance is,
But neither arrest nor movement.

That will give freedom from practical desire,
from action and suffering, and from other inner and outer compulsions. Because, 'Only through time time is conquered', and only the present can bring to life 'the moment in the rose garden'.

The third movement introduces the London subway,
which suggests a limbo world or a 'twittering world' of men who are neither dead nor alive. The means of salvation for these people is the way of expectation and concentration on the present, and the way of renunciation, deprivation, solitude, silence and metaphysical despair.
The Poet (Continued)

This is the way stressed by Christian mystics and Hindu Yogis -- the negative way to reach plenitude and affirmation. The fourth movement is a lyrical prayer for intercession. 'Time and the bell (angelus) have buried the day', and man, bare and divested, wait anxiously, wondering whether Divine Grace will come down to him. Then the fifth movement poses the problem of art as a problem of the spiritual life:

... ... Words strain,
Crack and sometimes break, under the burden,

but the form and the pattern of words or music leads to 'the stillness'. 'The Word in the desert' is always troubled by voices of temptation but Divine Grace in love, while

Love is itself unmoving,
Only the cause and end of movement,

brings peace and reconciliation.

Then, East Coker is a village in Somerset in which the Eliots (Elyots) lived, and from which an ancestor, Andrew Elyot emigrated to America in 1667, and where the ashes of the poet were laid to rest in 1965. The poem, 'East Coker' (1940) opens with an inversion of Mary Stuart's motto: 'In my beginning is my end', a statement which is quite deterministic in its reference to the cyclic view of
The Poet (Continued)

life and history. There is, however, a brief vision
of the permanence of experience of the flesh in time:

... ... dancing around the bonfire
The association of man and woman
In daunsings, signifying matrimonie --

But that is only a moment in time and the pattern
and repetition leads only to despair:

Peet rising and falling,
Fating and drinking. Dung and death.

The second movement makes a lyrical attempt to
link the events of the earthly seasons with the more
spectacular movements of the stars in the sky. There
seems to be no sequence and pattern there. On the earth
also the pattern is falsified by every new moment. Human
beings are always 'in a dark wood, in a bramble/On the
edge of a grimen'. The wisdom of age is of limited value,
and the only wisdom which men can hope to acquire 'Is the
wisdom of humility : humility endless', because everything
is swallowed up by the darkness of the present:

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

The third movement opens with blind Samson's cry
of anguish in a world of darkness. But the darkness does
not merely obliterate things. It can also reveal something
valuable because within the darkness, the 'darkness of God', there is light, just as there is movement within the stillness. By following the negative way suggested by the Christian mystics like St. John of the Cross men can reach out of the darkness of the world into the darkness of God.

The fourth movement is a lyrical fusion of despair and triumph in the affirmation of intercession through Incarnation. This is a poem on the Passion. Christ, 'The wounded surgeon plies the steel' and

    Beneath the bleeding hands we feel
    The sharp compassion of the healer's art.

The Church, 'the dying nurse' tries to mitigate Adam's curse. 'The whole earth is our hospital' with mankind sick with the sin of Adam, 'the ruined millionaire'. The only way out of this is to rise to the eternal through the suffering and sacrifice of Christ dramatized in the Passion and the Eucharist:

    The dripping blood our only drink
    The bloody flesh our only food:

Then, the final movement probes into the meaning of the 'beginning' and the 'end' in the context of life and art. The past is alive in the present, modifying it and being modified by it. Every moment is a new moment and
a beginning. In art every attempt 'Is a new beginning,' a raid on the inarticulate'. There is neither gain nor loss:

There is only the fight to recover what has been lost
And found and lost again and again.

Both in life and in art 'men ought to be explorers':

We must be still and still moving
Into another intensity
For a further union, a deeper communion
Through the dark cold and the empty desolation.

And intensity is, indeed, a means of union or communion with the darkness of God.

Now, The Dry salvages is a small group of rocks off the sea-coast of New England. It is a landscape of the poet's childhood spent near the Mississippi and the Atlantic coast. And the poem, 'The Dry Salvages' (1941) opens with a reference to two symbols, the river and the sea. The river symbolizes the life of man held in bondage to nature, and the sea is the time of history and also Time itself: 'The river is within us, the sea is all about us'. The sea is a force out of the original chaos, having 'many voices/Many gods and many voices' and throwing up evidence of death. It clangs the bell, measuring 'time not our time'. The restless sea produces the rhythm of
The Poet (Continued)

the groundswell, different from the rhythm in the life
of man:

And the ground swell, that is and was from the beginning
Clangs
The bell.

This is a warning and a summons demanding a response.
Like the Angelus it reminds man of his mortality and the
Incarnation and calls him to prayer. The second movement
gives a picture of loss and destruction in the life of man.
There seems to be no end of it. Time becomes a destroyer
of the moments of illumination and the preserver of remembered
agony. The only end to this is man's response to the eternal
by praying

Only the hardly, barely prayable
Prayer of the one Annunciation.

There are several annunciations which are moments
when Time and Eternity meet -- the calamitous annunciation
of danger and terror, the last annunciation of death, and
the one Annunciation of history, when man and God become
one in Christ. The third movement opens with a reference
to Krishna with Arjuna on the field of battle. Man must
not look for the fruits of action, because 'the future is
a faded song', and every moment is a moment of death:

And do not think of the fruit of action
Pare forward,
O voyagers, O seamen,
The Poet (Continued)

The fourth movement is a lyrical prayer to the Virgin for intercession:

Lady, whose shrine stands on the promontory
Pray for all ... ...

The last movement opens with a reference to man's attempt to explore the womb of the past and the future. But,

... to apprehend
The point of intersection of the timeless
With time is an occupation for the saint.

The ordinary man can have moments of illumination, 'hints and guesses' upon which he can build up his life of 'prayer, observance, discipline, thought and action'. And through this he can reach an apprehension of the eternal:

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

And, through this time is redeemed, and the past and the future are conquered and reconciled.

Then, Little Gidding is a place in Huntingdonshire, visited by Eliot in 1936. It was the seat of an Anglican religious community established in 1625 by Nicholas Ferrar, visited by the defeated King Charles I. This is a place
of dedication. And the poem, 'Little Gidding' (1942) opens
with the description of the 'unimaginable Zero summer',
which is midwinter spring, which is 'not in time's Covenant'.
Coming back to time and reality, there is a perfectly
recognizable place, which is a sacred place of dedication
to which people came with purpose:

You are here to kneel
Where prayer has been valid.

And prayer is more 'than an order of words', It is
a means of communication with the eternal. But, 'the
communication/Of the death is tongued with fire beyond the
language of the living'. It is in such a context that this
becomes a place where such communication takes place:

Here, the intersection of the timeless moment
Is England and nowhere.

The second movement deals with the desolation of
death and the futility of life for those who have had no
conviction of spiritual values in their lives. Human emotion,
passion, effort and monuments disintegrate into the four
elements. In the midst of this the poet meets a 'familiar
compound ghost', who outlines the emptiness of the honours
given to the great men.

The third movement points to a correct attitude of
'indifference' which grows between 'attachment' and 'detachment
The Poet (Continued)

This will operate in history and produce freedom, renewal and transfiguration:

All touched by a common genius,
United in the strife which divided them.

This leads to the theme of love suggested by the words of the mystic, Julian of Norwich:

Sin is behovely, but
All shall be well, and
All manner of thing shall be well.

The fourth movement celebrates the refining fire, the terrifying fierceness of the pentecostal experience of the dove coming down with fire. This is not the fire of expiation; this is the surrender to a spiritual principle. The only way to redeem one from the miserable fires of sin, error and self-love, is through the fire of God, which is the expression of His love:

We only live, only suspire
Consumed by either fire or fire.

Then, the final movement of the poem recalls 'East Coker's problem of the beginning and the end, the problem of words, and the problem of Time. Living is the discovery of the already known, and the beginning and the end are one. History is the field of operation of the spirit; it is 'a pattern of timeless moments'. And all shall be well when all is gathered in love:
The Poet (Continued)

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

Four Quartets is a religious poem that speaks not only to orthodox Christians, but to many who do not accept Christianity. In the writing of this series of four poems Eliot has assumed the role of a cautious and meditative explorer, exploring spiritual experience — experience of timeless reality, or of God in time. In the whole structure of the Quartets place becomes important — each Quartet takes its name from a place, which helps to give each Quartet its distinctive character. But the place is made to be accidental in the sense that it merely helps the poet in the evocation of personal memories of associations. Time, too, becomes important in the structure of the poem. But, again, a particular time, like a particular place, acting as the locus of an experience, is important not in itself but as part of an expressive pattern embodying an experience which hints at a more complete and overwhelming experience.

Towards the end of 'The Dry Salvages' Eliot writes of

The point of intersection of the timeless
With time ... ...
referring to a brief moment of revelation constituting
a starting-point or introductory datum of Four Quartets.
For Eliot such a moment is a manifestation of God's
grace in His created universe. But such a manifestation
is momentary, elusive and baffling. It disappears in a
moment, and we are left the more aware of what is not
reality or of what is devoid of meaning. But for the
spiritual man starting upon the way of the soul, this
negation or denial of meaning is a necessary step to the
reality he seeks. He has to accept it, and that acceptance
will be followed by transformation and reconciliation
of opposites. Then comes the stage of communion with the
divine reality or a sense of God in the world. Finally,
following upon transformation and communion, comes
integration or formation of a new whole, glimpsed in
'Burial Norton' as an experience of:

   ... both a new world
   And the old made explicit, understood
   In the completion of its partial ecstasy,
   The resolution of its partial horror.

but fully realised in the last five lines of 'Little
Gidding'. All these stages in the journey of the soul,
all these successive aspects of spiritual experience have
been beautifully depicted in the poem. As a matter of
fact the structure of Four Quartets is based on the
progressive exploration of this experience, from one
movement to the next in a Quartet, and from one Quartet to the next in the whole group. This progressive pattern is the same in each Quartet, except for an occasional modification here and there, appropriate to the subject of a particular Quartet in question. All the first movements are movements of proposition introducing the experience. The second movements introduce the stage of negation, antithetical to the first. The third movements are movements of acceptance, transformation and reconciliation. The fourth movements are lyrics of communion between the divine and temporal, and the fifth movements are movements of integration.

Now, all through the structure of the Quartets Eliot has used and assimilated Christian concepts, categories and themes. For example, the fourth movements dealing with communion with the divine reality, are lyrics devoted to one of the divine beings. In 'Burnt Norton', the Creator immanent in the creation, is the theme. In 'East Coker', the theme is the Redeemer incarnate as a man, suffering, in his healing Passion for the sin of men. In 'The Dry Salvages', the lyric cry becomes the agony of supplication that ascends to the Virgin as Intercessor. In 'Little Gidding', the Holy Spirit descends in Pentecostal flame confronting men with the fire of justice, the fire of purification and the lambent fire of union in Paradise.
Further, the devotional exercises in the second section of each Quartet, with the exception of 'Burnt Norton', refer to some highly significant day in the Church Calendar, or to some significant incident in the symbolism of Christianity. Again, Christianity presents us with the concept of a timeless God substantially entering time -- a paradoxical and impossible union which was achieved once for all by the Incarnation, and is repeated every day in the sacraments of the Church. This idea of Incarnation dominates the religious poetry of Eliot, particularly his *Four Quartets*.

The recognition of the presence of God in the world is the central spiritual act: all the processes of self-scrutiny and self-recognition, following the agonizing metaphysical anxiety depicted in the early poems depend on it. It leads to sanctity and life with a sacramental shape, conformed to a pattern which is above human life, and ultimately free from illusion. This is the kind of life or experience, which Eliot has tried to depict in the Quartets. *Four Quartets* begins with a momentary and mysterious experience which is full of hopes of affirmation, but which disappears as you turn to look at it. It goes on to speak of the quest to complete and fulfil that experience through all the joy, longing, desire, sorrow and negation accompanying it. At last it
returns to the experience, to the affirmation, but now bound up with the negation, each as part of the other, despite the paradox:

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

The comforting words of Julian of Norwich, 'All shall be well', following the moral paradox of 'Sin is Behovely', point to the resolution of the paradox. **Four Quartets**, too, ends by pointing to such a resolution. But this resolution goes beyond affirmation and negation, and leads to a final integration. The images used by Eliot to depict this resolution leading to integration were also used by Dante to describe his vision of reality in 'Paradiso'. The tongues of flame, recalling the Pentecostal fire, become one with the rose in the concluding lines of **Four Quartets**.