

10 “Into our first world”

Return and Recognition in *Burnt Norton* and *Little Gidding*

Home is where one starts from.

Eliot, *East Coker* V

Eliot’s First World: St. Louis and Gloucester

I have spent many years out of America altogether; but Missouri and the Mississippi have made a deeper impression on me than any other part of the world.

Eliot to M. W. Childs, Missouri Historical Society (1930)

The last poem that Eliot wrote before his long-anticipated return to America, “Marina,” is a paean to the landscape of coastal New England. In the opening lines, the persona sees the gray rocks on the Atlantic shore and hears the music of the wood thrush “singing through the fog” near the Eliot summer home; in the closing lines, he hears the same bird “calling through the fog.” The thrush is calling him home, to his first world. “I find that as one gets on in middle life the strength of early associations, and the intensity of early impressions, becomes more evident; and many little things, long forgotten, recur” (L5.282). In 1932, Eliot finally ended his long exile in England and attempted to reclaim the world of his American childhood and youth—St. Louis and Gloucester. Over the next nine months, he visited the graves of his parents and spent time with his surviving siblings and old friends, including Emily Hale. In 1933, he returned to London, and in his first major poem, *Burnt Norton*, he again hears the thrush calling him to return to his first world, but in this scene, he realizes that the thrush is a tempter and the first world a chimera. In juxtaposition to this fanciful first world, he presents another, which consists of timeless moments and which gradually,

over the course of *Four Quartets*, evolves into the Edenic moments of *Little Gidding*.

The desire to return to one's first world is part of the larger theme of exile. It is inextricably connected to the attempt to regain what has been lost by completing a "loop in time" (*CPP* 229), and it inevitably involves self-deception and an idealization of the past. Eliot describes the mindset in "Shakespeare and Stoicism of Seneca," published in the watershed year of 1927, as "the human will to see things as they are not." He names this oxymoronic quality "*bovarysme*" and illustrates it by pointing to Emma Bovary's romantic illusions (*Prose* 3.248). In Eliot's poetry, the most memorable representation of such willful self-deception is the "water-dripping song" in part V of *The Waste Land* (331–58). He told Ford Madox Ford that these were the only "*good lines in The Waste Land* . . . The rest is ephemeral" (Eliot's italics; *L2*.188). The first half of this passage describes the absence of water. "Here is no water but only rock/Rock and no water." The jagged rocks are seen as "carius teeth that cannot spit," and the thunder is dry and sterile. The second half responds to this desperate desire with two conditionals: "If there were water"; and "If there were the sound of water only." But as the narrator knows, "there is no water." In spite of this, he longs to hear what he knows is a counterfeit: "the hermit-thrush sing[ing] in the pine trees/Drip drop drip drop drop drop drop," a song that mimics the sound of water falling on rocks. Although the imaginary water does not assuage his thirst, it generates a smidgen of joy, in part by establishing a dialectic between desire and deceit.

The "water-dripping song" also introduces one of Eliot's major symbols for the complications of desire—the hermit-thrush, a small, shy bird that sings from hiding places. Eliot associated its seductive, ostensibly disembodied music with his early childhood summers in Gloucester and Quebec Province, where his uncle kept a family camp (*L1*.2n2). In a note in *The Waste Land*, he mentions hearing the bird in Quebec and quotes Chapman's *Handbook of Birds of Eastern North America* on its habitat and song. It lives in "secluded woodland and thickety retreats" and sings in notes that are unequalled "in purity and sweetness of tone and exquisite modulation" (*WL* n357).¹ At the end of the 1920s, the thrush reappears in "Marina," and in the early 1930s in *Burnt Norton*. In both, the bird is associated with the tension between desire and various forms of self-deception. The birds that Eliot loved in childhood are related to the theme of exile, which pervades the

work of his middle and late poetry: *The Waste Land*, *Ash-Wednesday*, and "Marina"; the American landscapes of "New Hampshire" and "Cape Ann"; and *Burnt Norton* and *Little Gidding*.

In a cameo appearance in *Ash-Wednesday*, the bird is associated with the idealization of Emily Hale and with the speaker's desire to reclaim the possibilities of youth. The lyric is a tribute to a lady who is part Mary and part Beatrice and whose presence restores the years by "restoring . . . the ancient rhyme. Redeem the time" (AW IV.17-19).

The silent sister . . .

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bent her head and signed but spoke no word

But the fountain sprang up and the bird sang down

Redeem the time, redeem the dream

The token of the word unheard, unspoken (IV.22, 24-27)

The grammar of these lines suggests that the bird who sings "redeem the time" does so at a signal from the silent woman and that his song is accepted as a token for her unspoken word. Although assigned to external messengers, the imperative originates from within the speaker, who longs to move forward by looping back and retrieving possibility. The biblical phrase, "redeem the time," literally means to "buy back the time"—in this context, to reclaim the years between the poet's departure for England and his return; "redeem the dream," similarly, means to recover the lost dreams of childhood and youth.

In 1919, as previously noted, Eliot confided to his brother that he would always be a foreigner in England (L1.370). In 1927, he attempted to resolve this issue by changing his citizenship and joining the English church. These gestures, however sincere, are another reminder of the cleft Eliot, for at the same time that he was pledging allegiance to England, he was working to arrange his return to America, pushed by the misery of his life with Vivien, drawn by his reconnection with Emily Hale, and more urgently, by his desire to see his mother, Charlotte, the most intimate link to his personal paradise lost. Seriously ill from the mid-1920s, she died in September 1929, before he could complete his travel arrangements. Grief-stricken, he wrote to his brother that now, more than ever, he wanted to return to St. Louis. In 1932, having received an invitation to give the Norton Lectures at Harvard, he was finally able to set sail for Boston. Three areas of his life in America are rele-

vant to understanding the tension between knowledge and desire as it relates to a reformulation of his exilic imagination. The first is his relationship with his family, especially his only brother, Henry; the second is his relationship with Emily Hale; and the third, intersecting the other two, is his critique of Unitarianism.

Eliot in America: Between the Idea and the Reality

Whatever I hoped for
Now that I am here I know I shall never find it.
The instinct to return to the point of departure
And start again as if nothing had happened,
Isn't that all folly? It's like the hollow tree.

Eliot, *The Family Reunion*

Eliot arrived in America on 25 September 1932, the day before his forty-fourth birthday. The nine months that he spent in America constitute a turning point in his life and in his poetry. His primary activities were related to work—the Norton Lectures at Harvard, the Page-Barbour Lectures at the University of Virginia, the Turnbull Lectures at Johns Hopkins, and various engagements requiring him to cross the country from Boston to Los Angeles and Buffalo to Charlottesville. He lectured at Scripps College in California, where Emily Hale was teaching, and at Washington University in St. Louis, where he visited the graves of his parents. Generally speaking, the reunion with family was satisfying. He spent time with his siblings in Cambridge and visited his Aunt Rose in St. Louis. Between 29 December and mid-January, he visited Emily Hale in California, and they remained in touch throughout the spring. When she arrived in Boston at the end of the semester, he called on her at the home of her aunt and uncle. In June, she was with the Eliot family for a vacation in New Hampshire, and on 17 June, she joined them for his lecture at Milton Academy. As his time in America drew to a close, he wrote to Paul Elmer More, "There is something I want here (domestic affection), and something I want in England, and I can't have both. . . . One side suffers from dullness, the other from nightmare" (L6.584).

It was inevitable, however, that there would have been a gap between Eliot's expectations and his experience. Of the elements contributing to the de-idealization of America, one was paramount, and it had to do with religion. Because of his family's eminence in Unitarianism, the clergy invited

him to address them in King's College Chapel in Boston. Reluctantly, he agreed, and on 3 April 1933, he spoke to the Boston Association of Unitarian Ministers. The audience included not only distinguished Unitarians but also his brother and sisters and presumably the surrogate parents of Emily Hale, Dr. and Mrs. John Perkins. The title of Eliot's lecture, "Two Masters," is taken from the Sermon on the Mount, in which Christ says, "No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon" (Matt. 6:24).²

Eliot's argument deals with the importance of choosing between polar opposites—good and evil, black and white—and with the moral peril of trying to avoid saying yes or no. This was not a new issue for Eliot. The inability to choose is behind Prufrock's paralysis, and moral neutrality characterizes the inhabitants of *The Waste Land*. The moral significance of choosing pervades Eliot's criticism, evident in his fascination with *Inferno* III (the region of the undecided)³ and, more explicitly, in his discussion of morality in the 1930 essay on Baudelaire: "So far as we are human, what we do must be either evil or good; so far as we do evil or good, we are human; and it is better . . . to do evil than to do nothing: at least, we exist" (*Prose* 4.162). In the Boston lecture, Eliot applied this logic to religion, maintaining that a faith based on fence-straddling is doomed to collapse. He predicted that a Christianity anchored in humanitarianism would wither and be succeeded by more robust alternatives, namely, orthodoxy or atheism. When the audience received his talk as an attack on liberal Protestants and Unitarians, Eliot seemed surprised, and he complained that the Unitarians "attacked me for not being a Papist" (L6.582). Their criticism points to an underlying problem with Eliot's argument. Given his logic, he should have espoused Calvinism or Catholicism; instead he embraced Anglo-Catholicism, the position of which epitomizes the *via media* between religious extremes.

Eliot's brother was among those who were shocked by the lecture. After Eliot returned to England, Henry wrote to ask why he had chosen "to address to the clergy of Boston, a city saturated with associations of your ancestors . . . a fanatically intolerant and shocking tirade" (L7.754). He accused Tom of insulting his Unitarian hosts and dishonoring his Unitarian parents. Particularly upset by the tone of the lecture, Henry comments at length on Eliot's religious conversion.

The step toward the Church was . . . in line with the best hagiological traditions that the monstrous sinner, the author of "The 'Potamus'" and "Mr. Eliot's Sunday Morning Service" should, passing through the travail of the soul . . . of *The Waste Land*, arrive, barefoot, in sackcloth, and penitent at the foot of the Cross. The tableau is, I must say, perfect. (L7.755)

Henry suggests that the authenticity of Tom's faith is belied by the inclusion in his collected work of "blasphemous poems (and they certainly are blasphemous, despite your fallacious . . . reasoning that one cannot blaspheme unless one believes)" (L7.757). Pierced to the core, Eliot was especially distressed by the suggestion that he had joined the church for show. "If it is not an accusation of . . . humbug in the most serious matter of all—what is?" He insisted that he would never knowingly dishonor his parents and denied that his poems were blasphemous.⁴

The American interlude, culminating in the devastating analysis in Henry's letter, highlights two factors that were to be reflected in Eliot's poetry. First, it completed the de-idealization of his memories of his first world, including those of his relationship with his brother and Miss Hale. Second, it underscored the importance of religious convictions. Eliot was an uncompromising Trinitarian, for whom the Incarnation was the central doctrine. His siblings, Emily Hale, and his hosts in King's College Chapel were Unitarians, who believed that the Incarnation was a myth among other myths. In several papers written at this time, Eliot insists that "*religious* differences are at least as important as racial, linguistic or geographical" differences (*Prose* 4.321; Eliot's italics). A central point of his Boston speech was that taking religion seriously means choosing between two masters; a central notion of his audience was that it means tolerance for a wide spectrum of views. In retrospect, these factors explain why he would never marry Emily Hale, and why he had to reimagine the motif of return that was to permeate the *Quartets*.

The turn in Eliot's imagination that occurred between April and June 1933 in Boston was sealed when he received Henry's postmortem on the visit. The change can be traced in his poetry, beginning in "New Hampshire" (1933), written after a farewell vacation with his family and Emily Hale. He juxtaposes images of childhood and seasonal cycles, not to idealize his lost years, but to acknowledge that they are unredeemable. The most telling lines are addressed to a dark bird: "Black wing, brown wing, hover over; / Twenty years and the spring is over" (ll. 5-6).

***Burnt Norton*: Reimagining the "first world"**

Into our first world, shall we follow
 The deception of the thrush? Into our first world
 Eliot, *Burnt Norton* I

In *Burnt Norton*, written after his disillusionment in America, Eliot reimagined the concept of "redeeming the time" by creating in poetry a new "first world," which is represented in two versions. In the first, he dramatizes entering a world generated by memory and desire, and in the second, a world made possible by immediate experience and freedom from desire.⁵ The first version imagines returning to the past, to a moment *in time* before the future was fixed, in order to redeem a might-have-been present; the other concentrates on a present moment, in which there is an intersection of movement and stillness that opens a window on ultimate reality. The overall structure of *Burnt Norton*, in keeping with the predominant tendency of Eliot's thought, is dialectical, progressing from one first world to the other and ending in a return to the beginning that includes and transcends both in a more comprehensive form. This pattern is substantiated and deepened when Eliot adds the three wartime *Quartets*. The two worlds have the same goal (redeeming the time) and both involve a meditation on time's puzzles. The common features lead most critics to conflate the rose-garden moment and subsequent mystical moments in the poem. Steve Ellis, for example, one of Eliot's most astute readers, sees the intersection of time and timelessness in the Incarnation as "once more recapitulat[ing] the rose-garden experience of *Burnt Norton*" (106).⁶

Eliot returned to London in 1933, and in 1934, Emily Hale spent the summer in England. In September, they visited the gardens of Burnt Norton together. Within a year, the memories of that visit would be represented in the poem that would later become the first of *Four Quartets*. The opening lines originated as part of the second temptation scene in *Murder in the Cathedral*. In the play, a tempter tells Thomas, "The Chancelorship that you resigned / When you were made Archbishop—that was a mistake / On your part—still may be regained" (*CPP* 185). The desire to return to the past and create a different present is precisely the temptation that Eliot faced in the rose garden at Burnt Norton. In the draft of the play, Thomas rebukes his tempter, declaring "What might have been

is a conjecture/Remaining a permanent possibility/Only in a world of speculation" (Gardner, 82). The visitor to the garden, similarly tempted, repeats Thomas's answer, with one substitution. Instead of "conjecture" (possibly true and thus a genuine temptation), the visitor in the garden says "abstraction" (knowingly unreal). In its new context, the meditation introduces a major theme of the garden scene and of the poem as a whole—redeeming the time.

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. (*BN* l.1-5)

These lines are a reflection on the imperative presented by the bird of *Ash-Wednesday*—"redeem the time" (IV.26-27), recontextualizing the directive by putting it at the center of a temptation scene.

The opening lines of *Burnt Norton* are impersonal, but in an abrupt shift, they become deeply personal. In remembering a recent moment in a rose garden in Gloucestershire, the speaker recovers the memory of a lost moment two decades earlier in America. Given the presence of the poet's former fiancée and the emphasis on the "might-have-been," the reactivated memory points to a Prufrockian moment in which not choosing was actually choosing, in which indecisiveness had determined the course of a lifetime. The *mise-en-scène* of the remote memory is the Massachusetts of Eliot's youth, and of the more recent, the rose garden of *Burnt Norton*. The scene in the rose garden is one of temptation in which two might-have-been lovers attempt to redeem a lost world.

Footfalls echo in the memory
Down the passage which we did not take
Towards the door we never opened
Into the rose-garden. My words echo
Thus, in your mind.

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Other echoes

Inhabit the garden. Shall we follow?
Quick, said the bird, find them, find them,
Round the corner. Through the first gate,

Into our first world, shall we follow

The deception of the thrush? Into our first world. (BN l.11-15, 17-22)

The visitor to the garden not only acknowledges self-deception; he desires it. The key line is "shall we follow the deception of the thrush?" This is different from "shall we follow the thrush?" or even the "song of the thrush." The emphasis falls on the word "deception" ("of the thrush" is a modifier, an adjective). The answer, given in the same line, is yes, in spite of the guilty knowledge that is attached to it. Here, as in other passages, the bird has a tag line—"quick, quick"—and speaks in imperatives—"go, go"; "follow, follow"; "redeem the dream"; "find them, find them." The protagonist and his companion gladly follow the bird into an imaginary world in which they dance with flowers, and the thrush sings along with "unheard music in the shrubbery." Their minuet is cut short by a change in the weather that cancels the luminous might-have-been. A passing cloud drains the pools, and the bird that had urged them to enter demands that they leave. "Go, go, go, said the bird: human kind/ Cannot bear very much reality" (BN l.43-44). The expulsion is justified, ironically, in words that Thomas uses to console the grieving women of Canterbury, "Human kind/ Cannot bear very much reality" (CPP 271). The return to *Murder in the Cathedral* as the coda to this part of *Burnt Norton* frames the experience of the visitors with the greater temptations of Becket in the cathedral and Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane. Even Christ, who prayed that he would be spared the cup of suffering, could not return to the past and alter the present.

The framing of the garden vignette with passages used in *Murder in the Cathedral* identifies the scene as one of temptation. The motif is bolstered by the reference to dust on roses, which brings to mind the conclusion in the primeval garden of temptation: "Thou art dust and unto dust shalt thou return" (Gen. 3:19). In Eden, the tempter comes in the form of a serpent, but in Eliot's poetry, he appears in the guise of the thrush first met in the water-dripping song. Here, in the garden of *Burnt Norton*, the tempter returns, and as in *The Waste Land*, he appears by invitation. The temptation in *The Waste Land*, however, is to see things as they *are* not; here it is to see things as they *were* not. The first is generated by the desire for water; the second by a mixture of memory and desire, mingled with regret.

Eliot's experience in the rose garden did not cause him to abandon his attempt to redeem the time, but to reimagine it in spiritual terms. In part II of *Burnt Norton*, he goes beyond the fanciful garden scene by describing an al-

able to redeem the time. As in the rose-garden episode, everything hinges on memory. Without memory, the experience in America as a young man and in the rose garden as a pensive exile would have been irredeemably lost. The solitary experience had a beginning and an end, which means that it was "in time," but given that it was a form of immediate experience, time was not in it. The memory in time of a moment outside of time grounds the possibility that time, and with it the Adamic exile, can be overcome.

Burnt Norton ends with a return to the beginning. In both form and theme, the last paragraph mimics the opening section—a philosophical meditation followed by references to a garden world. The subject of the meditation is the interdependence of three parallel antitheticals—movement and stillness, desire and love, and time and timelessness.

Desire itself is movement
 Not in itself desirable;
 Love is itself unmoving,
 Only the cause and end of movement,
 Timeless and undesiring
 Except in the aspect of time
 Caught in the form of limitation
 Between un-being and being. (V.25-32)

As in the first section of *Burnt Norton*, the abstract musing is succeeded by concrete and sensuous images of a rose garden ringing with the laughter of hidden children, and the deceptive thrush returns for a curtain call.

Sudden in a shaft of sunlight
 Even while the dust moves
 There rises the hidden laughter
 Of children in the foliage
 Quick now, here, now, always—
 Ridiculous the waste sad time
 Stretching before and after. (V.33-39)

This return is not a loop back to a replica of the rose garden but to a more comprehensive vision, which incorporates both models of the first world in the poem: (1) the moment in the rose garden and (2) the memory of the moment that grounds the quasi-mystical experience described in part II. As in all dialectical returns, the final place cannot be identical to the starting

place because it is in time and includes intermediary contradictory experience. It is, in Eliot's words, "both a new world/ And the old made explicit, understood/ In the completion of its partial ecstasy,/ The resolution of its partial horror" (ll.29-33). This phenomenon is beautifully represented in various poems by Wordsworth, including the *Prelude* and, with special clarity, "Tintern Abbey," in which the narrator returns after five years to the same place and finds that it is and is not the same.

The key to understanding the conclusion of *Burnt Norton* as a higher stage, which includes and transcends opposing models of a first world (also the oppositions of desire and love, movement and stillness), is the line "Sudden in a shaft of sunlight." Literally speaking, this image refers to a sharply delineated beam of light breaking through the clouds; metaphorically, to a sudden moment of clarity connecting heaven and earth. It is used in *Murder in the Cathedral* by the Women of Canterbury, who, in their opening chorus, foresee the terror associated with the return of Thomas.

Some malady is coming upon us. We wait, we wait,
And the saints and martyrs wait, for those who shall be martyrs and saints,
Destiny waits in the hand of God, shaping the still unshapen:
I have seen these things in a shaft of sunlight. (CPP 176)

"Sudden in a shaft of sunlight" is one of a cluster of meteorological images used in the *Quartets* to indicate a connection between heaven and earth, initiated from above. In *Burnt Norton*, sunlight fills pools with water and clouds empty them. In *East Coker* and *The Dry Salvages*, winter lightning is associated with the timeless moment, and in *Little Gidding*, the winter sun flames the icy pond. Significantly, the sun in the rose garden of *Burnt Norton* is associated with an illusion, but in the yard of *Little Gidding*, it is associated with the tongues of Pentecost.

The dialectical shape of *Burnt Norton* is doubly confirmed in the closing lines. First, the return to *Murder in the Cathedral* both frames the poem and, when combined with the allusion to the figure of the ten stairs from St. John of the Cross, integrates temptation into a pattern of the soul's ascent to God; second, the return to a rose garden, with hidden laughter coming from unseen children, but now purged of desire, highlights the necessity of transient moments in the achievement of transcendence. The presence of the thrush is signaled by the line "Quick now, here, now, always," but he has evolved from the deceptive bird in the rose garden and is on his way to

becoming the bird of blessing at the end of *Little Gidding*, whose song blends with that of Julian of Norwich.

Moments on the Way to *Little Gidding*

We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time.

Eliot, *Little Gidding* V

Burnt Norton first appeared in Eliot's *Collected Poems* in 1936 as a separate poem. Several years later, it was reconceived as the first of the sequence that was to become *Four Quartets*. The last three poems, composed on the *Burnt Norton* model, appeared during the early years of the war—*East Coker* in 1940, *The Dry Salvages* in 1941, and *Little Gidding* in 1942. Although clearly linked to *Burnt Norton*, the wartime *Quartets* have considerable integrity as a unit, due in large part to their shared context. They were all composed at a moment when Hitler was ascendant and victory uncertain. To a greater extent than *Burnt Norton*, they deal with big picture issues related to history (war, international order) and morality (good and evil). The crisis in *Burnt Norton* is personal; in the wartime *Quartets* it encompasses the survival of England and Europe. The wartime poems are linked to each other and to *Burnt Norton* thematically and imagistically. All deal with redeeming the time, and the last three recapitulate the symbols and images of their precursor. Timeless moments in sacred places occur in each of the *Quartets*, but although the moments are parallel, they are not replicas of the moment in the rose garden or of its spiritual successor at the still point of the turning world. Time does not exist in these moments, but they exist in time in that they are transitory and progressive, moving toward the Edenic moment in *Little Gidding*.

In *East Coker*, the images from *Burnt Norton* recur, not in the mind—as memories or as a reflection on the mechanics of redeeming time—but in the senses, as whispers and echoes. They arrive suddenly, involuntarily, as a gift.

Whisper of running streams, and winter lightning,
The wild thyme unseen and the wild strawberry,
The laughter in the garden, echoed ecstasy (III.29–32)

This passage is linked to *Burnt Norton* by the laughter in the rose garden, where "the leaves were full of children,/Hidden excitedly, containing laughter" (I.39-43). The echo of ecstasy is itself an echo, harking back to the hope in the *Burnt Norton* scene that the protagonist will come to understand the "new world" as completing the "partial ecstasy" of the old (II.31).

In *The Dry Salvages*, the images return, not as a memory or a whisper of ecstasy, but as a post-ecstatic rumination, an interpretation of a pregnant moment.

For most of us, there is only the unattended
 Moment, the moment in and out of time,
 The distraction fit, lost in a shaft of sunlight,
 The wild thyme unseen, or the winter lightning
 Or the waterfall, or music heard so deeply
 That it is not heard at all . . .
 . . . These are only hints and guesses,
 Hints followed by guesses . . . (V.23-28)

Earlier in the poem, the narrator muses that certain experiences can only be understood retrospectively; Eden can only be imagined after the fall and expulsion.

We had the experience but missed the meaning,
 And approach to the meaning restores the experience
 In a different form, beyond any meaning
 We can assign to happiness. (II.45-48)

The struggle to interpret the experience in and out of time acknowledges its dialectical shape, in which the middle term, the felicitous moment, can only be known by a return that redeems it "in a different form." The images—the rose garden, wild thyme, winter lightning, and hidden waterfall—cease to be "mere sequence" and converge into a "sudden illumination" (II.38, 44): "The hint half guessed, the gift half understood, is Incarnation" (V.32).

In *Little Gidding*, Eliot reflects on the problem of evil in a time of global conflict, and I discuss the poem in that context in chapter 11. But to understand his claim that the end (goal and destination) of his journey has been to return to his first world and know it for the first time (*LG* V.27-29), one must have followed the unfolding presentation of the timeless moments that pave the path from the rose garden of *Burnt Norton* to the secluded

chapel of *Little Gidding*. The "sudden illumination" that occurs at the end of the third quartet is that the significance of timeless moments is confirmed by religious experience. This illumination includes an awareness of the relation of his own exilic existence to that of the first Adam in the Genesis account of the expulsion and of the second Adam in the New Testament account of the Christ event, both of which are dialectical. In possession of this theological validation of his experiential moments, Eliot begins *Little Gidding* by describing a phenomenon used in Christian literature to symbolize the Incarnation.⁷

Midwinter spring is its own season
 Sempiternal though sodden towards sundown,
 Suspended in time . . .

 . . . This is the spring time
 But not in time's covenant. (l.1-3, 13-14)

The snow-draped hedges and ice-glazed ponds are suddenly changed, not only by the shaft of winter sunlight but also by the transfigured imagination of the visitor to Little Gidding.

The brief sun flames the ice, on pond and ditches,

 Stirs the dumb spirit: no wind, but pentecostal fire
 In the dark time of the year. (l.5, 10-11)

As the afternoon rays are reflected in nature's icy mirror, the observer sees them as tongues of fire, an allusion to the first Pentecost after the resurrection, when the Holy Spirit descended from Heaven and filled Jesus' followers (Acts 2:1-4). In the Jewish tradition of these disciples, Pentecost is the Festival of First Fruits, in which the new grain, that which augurs the harvest, is made into loaves to be presented at the altar (Num. 28:26). The timeless moments, though ephemeral, allow a similar foretaste, grounding faith that the moments are miniatures of a greater reality. Following the epiphany by the frozen pond, the pilgrim wonders when the Adamic curse will be lifted—"Where is the summer, the unimaginable/Zero summer?" (LG l.19-20).

The corollary of "living in time's covenant" is living in a particular place. As often noted, the final scene of *Little Gidding* incorporates place identifiers from the first scene in *Burnt Norton*—roses, children, a bird, a gate—and in

both scenes, the images are perceived in part, not in whole—half-hidden, half-seen, half-heard. The reappearance of images and motifs suggests a dialectical movement that is foreshadowed throughout the sequence by the reciprocal play between beginnings and ends. That the two scenes have much in common, however, should not obscure their fundamental and revealing differences. The garden in *Burnt Norton* is the site of temptation and expulsion; the ground of *Little Gidding* is the site of mystical experience and reconciliation. In the first, a couple is trying to end their exile by turning back the clock; in the second, a pilgrim has accepted his exile and embraced the reality of an “unimaginable Zero summer.” The most important difference is that in *Burnt Norton*, the timeless moment is triggered by memory and desire, whereas in *Little Gidding*, it comes as a moment of clarification unclouded by desire, a moment of *kairos*,⁸ a definite and unrepeatable moment in time best described in *The Rock*:

A moment not out of time, but in time, in what we call history:

transecting, bisecting the world of time . . .

A moment in time but time was made through that moment: (VII.19–20)

A comparison of the opening and closing scenes of the *Quartets* reveals a progression from the exilic to the Edenic imagination. The place in *Burnt Norton* is the rose garden of a vacant house; in *Little Gidding*, the grounds of a bygone community. Although the final meditation in *Little Gidding* contains garden imagery, it does not occur in a garden, but in a secluded family chapel. Moreover, the season is different. The garden experience occurs in late summer (“in the autumn heat”), and the chapel experience in midwinter (21 December, “the dark time of the year”), the season of Advent.⁹

So, while the light fails

On a winter's afternoon, in a secluded chapel

History is now and England. (V.22–24)

Both places have gates: in *Burnt Norton*, a “first gate”; in *Little Gidding*, an “unknown, remembered gate.” Both open onto a world of happiness, but whereas the joy in the first is transient and followed by exile, in the second, it is permanent with the permanence that time has. The latter gate is unknown, because when in one's first world, one is in a state of immediacy, in which knowing is subsumed in being; nevertheless, and paradoxically, the gate is remembered, because leaving it enables one to realize, however imperfectly, that one has been there. The epiphany regarding his first world

enables the explorer to reconfigure himself as a pilgrim and to imagine the end (purpose, destination, and conclusion) of his long exile.

And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time. (V.27-29)

The cluster of exilic images in the first and fifth parts of *Burnt Norton*—a garden, a tempter, a lost world—recurs in the closing scene of *Little Gidding*, but although the images retain traces of their initial meaning, they have been transfigured. The bird that prompts the couple in *Burnt Norton* to enter the garden—"Quick, said the bird, find them" (BN I.19)—is succeeded in the coda of *Little Gidding* by a bird who begins with the "Quick now" tag line, but is a new creation. His predecessor is a deceptive thrush who needles the couple to "redeem the dream," to grasp the might-have-been happiness with might-have-been children. When they bite the apple, however, they discover that he is a trickster, and they are evicted—"Go, go, go"—with only their memories. In *Little Gidding*, the thrush returns.

Quick now, here, now, always—
A condition of complete simplicity
(Costing not less than everything) (V.39-41)

Transformed from tempter to comforter, he reassures the pilgrim in a time of war that God is aware of human suffering. Eliot emphasizes the theme by superimposing the image of a gray dove on the image of a gray German bomber.

The dove descending breaks the air
With flame of incandescent terror (IV.1-2)

The dove is the symbol of the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Trinity, who descended in the form of a dove at the baptism of Christ and who descended on the disciples at Pentecost. This dove is present in the "pentecostal fire" flaming the ice in the midwinter pond, but also, paradoxically, in the destructive fire falling from the bombers. In the final lines of *Little Gidding*, the Comforter, as the New Testament calls the Spirit, appropriates the words of Julian of Norwich to console uncomprehending suffering humanity, including the pilgrim.

And all shall be well and
All manner of thing shall be well

When the tongues of flame are in-folded
Into the crowned knot of fire
And the fire and the rose are one. (V.42-46)

The image of tongues of flame as petals of a rose is concrete, but the reconciliation of suffering and beauty that it projects is spiritual and aesthetic—"an abstraction/Remaining a perpetual possibility/Only in a world of speculation" (*BN* I.6-8). Although the conciliation is thoroughly grounded in the experience of reading, imagining, and believing, it still requires faith if it is to be fully realized.