

ages and thus the message]...must often be vague, necessarily, because the sources or inspiration from which they arise are themselves vague, having their origin in the inexplicability of life itself. In such verses, the poem does not reside in any one line or image or symbol but in an interplay between all elements that set up correspondences and incongruities and connote more than they denote." See Kimon Friar and Kostas Myrsiades, *Yannis Ritsos: Selected Poems 1938-1988* (Brockport, New York, 1989), 434.

Classical Roots of T.S. Eliot's Christian Odyssey

ELLEN LANZANO

A circular pathway illustrating the journey of a soul through time winds through both pagan and Christian sources. For both Homer and T.S. Eliot, for example, using the pattern of a circle to signify a spiritual odyssey proceeded out of both authors' perception of the soul as a map to be read and followed from the beginning to the end of the journey, for both of whom the points of departure and return are the same. The odyssey of a modern individual bears parallels to the odyssey of Homer's ancient traveler in such a way as to reveal the psychological point of homecoming on the map of the mythical journey as the unconscious depths from which myth arose. Ancient Greek and Christian sources overlap when narrators tell the story of a traveler through time as the representation of the soul yearning for the home that reunites self with meaning. Centuries before Eliot published his *Four Quartets* in 1944, Homer wrote of Odysseus' return to Ithaca as a return back in time to the ground of his being. His journey is repeatedly diverted by god-sent worlds of pain and pleasure, each intermixed and borne within the other, the pleasure heavy with the threat of death to the soul, and the pain, conversely, offering life if overcome.

The point for both travelers of the pagan and Christian narratives is to avoid the temptation to lose faith in the goal, to continue to endure the process of getting there no matter what experiences have transpired along the way. In Book 13 of *The Odyssey*, entitled "Ithaca At Last," Odysseus cries out

in gratitude to Athena that, but for her warning, he himself might have had a homecoming like Agamemnon's, "bled white in my own house" (439). Homer here reminds us of homecomings that end in an accounting for past sin. The end result, rebirth or death, is the closing of a circle, an arrival into the voyager's own life fully and at last, all diverse selves – warrior, infidel, lover, comrade – converging on the shores of home: one, like Odysseus, awash in triumph, and the other, like Agamemnon, drowned in the blood of retribution.

At the end of "East Coker," Eliot says that our homecomings are what we spend our whole lives formulating. He cautions that even "Old men ought to be explorers" (EC 202); they should not be dissuaded by "the dark cold and the empty desolation" (207), for the destination of reaching home once again is one and the same as reaching a new and better beginning. For Eliot the gods of modern life, not unlike Homer's ancient ones, tempt us to lose faith in the goal. Eliot's subject, like Homer's, is that of a wandering consciousness pursuing rest. To the ancient Greeks as well as to Eliot the quest for order as the final resting place of the soul was of utmost importance. Both for Eliot's quester and for Homer's, homecoming is hard-won. In fact, for each, the last movements of the journey come only after encountering a descent into hopelessness, and a dying in order to be reborn.

If *Four Quartets* is an odyssey toward homecoming and 'home' is a place of extended consciousness, it justly fits into the canon of religious verse as well as secular. But whether predominantly sacred or worldly, the perceptual range of Eliot's odyssey is such that his modern Christian journey to search for sources of meaning and order in the universe overlaps with Homer's pre-Christian poem. This is so not only because each journey is an answer to a gravitational pull toward the root of the soul's identity, but also because both poems suggest the same destiny, a place of re-experiencing

the original order of things. Reaching the goal, the epic temptation to rest no longer needs to be resisted – it can finally be yielded to – and the soul at rest is the soul in its place in the order of creation. Fittingly, when Odysseus can at last rest, he beholds the marriage bed that he fashioned out of a tree twenty years before, completely unchanged, still firmly rooted in the ground. By the same token, in reflecting on the classical concept of order, Eliot says that the purpose of art itself is to lead us to that very place of rootedness. In "The Sacred Wood" and elsewhere art supports the individual's life and his intimacy with the power of creation.

Although for Homer it was the language of the epic that could best describe an arranged pattern of movement in the world, for Eliot, it was the language of the sacred lyric, and for both, the destination is the place where the soul departs from the hell of chaos and enters the stillness of order in the universe. Whereas in Odysseus' ancient world, the chaos is the hell of battle, for the moderns, it is a hell of despair borne in the contagion of cities, where grasping for survival eclipses Being itself and the will to endure. As the idea of Eliot's objective correlative suggests, it is ultimately the function of art to lead us to a belief in the order of things. Art then brings us to a condition of serenity, stillness, and reconciliation, and then leaves us, as Virgil left Dante, to proceed toward a region where the guide can avail us no further (*On Poetry and Poets*, 94). J. Hillis Miller states in *Poets of Reality* that the central theme of the *Four Quartets* is the "abnegation of any humanly imposed pattern in order to recover the divine pattern" (139). The "pattern" is the spiritual way, or the course of a soul through time. Trying to decipher a design in the universe has always been crucially important to Eliot, as many of his essays indicate, but much of his early poetry is, in one sense, a lament at discovering an absence of pattern or order (125).

While this may be true of the *Four Quartets* as well, these

poems are an undaunted attempt to explore an expanded teleology, beyond the reach of any other he envisioned. He continually tests and rejects patterns of a journey for the soul because he cannot make the "leap of faith" required to believe that a divinely arranged spiritual journey is a viable way to perceive the design of all things. And of course, in Homer, how can Odysseus sustain a leap of faith from the beginning to the end of his journey when the supreme powers of the gods, the winds, and the ocean, are levied against him in terrifying chaos? How can either the modern Eliot, living in wartime London, or the ancient Odysseus as the sole survivor of the gods' rage, say, like Job, "I know that my Vindicator lives?" (Job 19:25).

Although Odysseus' steadfastness is driven by faith not in the arrangement of things, neither is he permanently disabled by the lack of them. What drives him onward is the memory of his wife, his son, and his land, or, one could say, by his faith in the arrangement of things *as they ought to be*, based on his memory of the way things were as he plowed his field or played with his son twenty years before. Love is the memory of the soul's home toward which he drives himself unwaveringly.

Likewise, Eliot, moving toward a greater intensity, is sparked by wisps of memory, of the country dancers' rising and falling steps, the smell of grapes on the autumn table, the ripeness before the death of winter, images capturing the seasons, counterbalancing each in the poet's reference to the order long absent from modern urban life, a hell of routine, filled with "Men and bits of paper, whirled by the cold wind" (BN 104). The circle image of the soul's journey of departure and return rolls along like a hoop of light flickering in and out of view, expressing the fluctuating textures of Eliot's mind, until it comes to rest at last as the unchanging symbol of the soul's eventual return to a heavenly home in "Little Gidding."

Eliot's circle journey theme was inspired also by fragments from Heraclitus, another Greek source. The two epigraphs from Heraclitus which appear at the start of the first quartet, "Burnt Norton," indicate the problem to be solved in the progression of the poems: the predicament which dominates human life is knowing which route to take in the soul's journey, but the first fragment suggests that most men are unaware of the divine wisdom which governs the spirit's progress toward harmony. As Heraclitus says: the law of things is a law of Reason Universal but most men live as though they had a wisdom of their own:

"Therefore it is a duty to follow the common law. But although the Logos ('Word') is common to all, the majority of people live as though they had an understanding of their own" (*Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*).

However, no other statement is more revelatory concerning Eliot's concept of a cyclical spiritual journey than Heraclitus' second epigraph on the process of constant change and reciprocal movement among the elements: "The way up and the way down are the same." Later in the *Four Quartets*, Eliot uses this explanation metaphorically, that the descent into the dark night of the soul ("the way down") and the ascent ("the way up") are not antithetical routes in the soul's progress, but that they complement each other so completely that they are integral parts of the same journey. In fact, the way down is the way of Odysseus' journey, away from home into the hands of improvident gods, then into the bowels of the earth to meet the dead, and finally, home again, in the way up toward his soul's restoration.

Therefore, the circle odyssey becomes a perfect symbol of Heraclitus' epigraphs as Eliot appropriates it as the descent and ascent of the soul along its journey: the upward turn of a circle flows indetectably into the lower turn, but, more importantly, each curving section can be thought of

interchangeably as either the way up or the way down. In fact, in Eliot's third quartet, "The Dry Salvages," Eliot uses the second epigraph explicitly. Whereas Heraclitus says: "The way up and the way down are the same," Eliot expresses it this way: "And the way up is the way down, the way forward is the way back." Here we see Heraclitus' ultimate usefulness in describing the soul's journey from Eliot's point of view. In fact, Heraclitus' mysterious central energy functions as a centrifuge drawing together earth, air, water, and fire in a revolving, transmutative cycle in the same way as his thermodynamics serves Eliot symbolically, as a quincunx for his poem, or a fifth element that binds together the opposing energies of the four other elements in the *Four Quartets*.

As Cahill notes, Jung and others have seen a pattern of reality in Heraclitean terms of a dynamic system in which a central energy perpetuates itself by opposing forces, which, though apparently antitheses (140), are found to be phases of one cyclical process. In "Burnt Norton II" there is an echo of the second paragraph in the lines, "This is the one way, and the other/ Is the same" (122-123). Eliot joins together two unlikely sources of inspiration for his idea that the soul pursues a cyclic journey on its way to awakening: the pagan Heraclitus and the Christian mystic John of the Cross. The descent of the soul in "Burnt Norton" is a reference to a passage from the Spanish mystic's description of the soul on the "ladder of contemplation":

"We call it a ladder because, even as the ladder has those same steps in order that men may mount, it has them also that they may descend; even so it is likewise with this secret contemplation, for those same communications which it causes in the soul raise it up to God, yet humble it with respect to itself.... For upon this road, to go down is to go up and to go up, to go down, for he that humbles himself is exalted and he that exalts himself is humbled."

The "descent into darkness" transfers its purgative energy to the soul and causes it to ascend into light, to "living the sweet and delectable life of love with God" (*The Dark Night of the Soul* Book I, Exposition I).

In the *Quartets*, the ladder and the circle as symbols of the soul's way up and way down are interchangeable signifiers. Each follows a pathway between the opposing states of darkness and light, but each rising and descending point is always returnable via the same track. In the *Quartets* even Christ is subjected to the way down:

The Word in the desert
Is most attacked by voices of temptation,
The crying shadow in the funeral dance,
The loud lament of the disconsolate chimera (BN 149-155)..

For that matter, the poet himself, in his craft fails to get across his meaning. Linking the sacred Word with the secular words of the poet, Eliot says:

Words strain,
Crack and sometimes break, under the burden,
Under the tension, slip, slide, perish,
Decay with imprecision, will not stay in place,
Will not stay still. Shrieking voices
Scolding, mocking, or merely chattering,
Always assail them (BN 149-155).

A spiritual apprehension of the truth is the destination of the soul, but this enlightenment is gained only through the contrary property of darkness; we acquire knowledge only through the darkness of total detachment, "Emptying the sensual with deprivation / Cleansing affection from the temporal" (BN 97-98). This is the Way of Negation that, through elimination of everything finite or temporal, leads

to union with God the Eternal. To emphasize the *modus operandi* of the Negative Way, Eliot effectively places the word that describes "what we must do" as the first word in each line:

Desiccation of the world of sense,
Evacuation of the world of fancy,
Inoperancy of the world of spirit;
This is the one way, and the other
Is the same, not in movement
But abstention from movement; while the world moves
In apotency, on its metalled ways (BN 119-125).

Only when the spirit is still can the grace of the divine enter and permeate the soul. But there is an unsettling connection between the evacuation of the soul which supposedly turns us upward in the ascending arc of the circle, and the dark descent into the London Tube which, metaphorically speaking, offers little hope for salvation. As a "place of disaffection," the oppressive circle-journey of the trains shunting back and forth, carry "strained time-ridden faces into a hell of suffocation." Eliot's subterranean vaults of the dead are the modern equivalent of Persephone's realm beyond the Cimmerians' twilight city. In the land of the dead Odysseus meets "drifting, listing," "shambling," and "shiftless" souls who had suffered much in their lives. The souls that rise up out of the trench dug by Odysseus glimmer weakly in a state bereft of imagination and sense. They hunger for the taste of blood in the same way they hunger for their old desires and for some form of reliving the life they knew. Similar to the robotic Londoners of Eliot's *Underground* in need of an authentic life, they are the disembodied. The challenge in the case of modern man as well as for Odysseus is to descend at least figuratively into the "place of disaffection" to answer the claims of those who have suffered and died before us, to hear their stories and to honor them without surrendering

to their considerable power over us. Then, refusing the temptation to eternal rest, the voyager must turn around and begin again the steep ascent toward the living. The greatest challenge for Odysseus as he stands witness at the trench is to answer the exhortation of Elpenor. The soul of his comrade begs Odysseus to return to Circe's house to bury him and to accord him full funeral rites. In his willingness to do so he shows his pity and love for the dead. He resolves to deny his own considerable need to push on toward home, and to circle all the way back to Aeaea once again. In meeting Elpenor's request he is honoring his equality with him and recognizing the fate he himself will eventually share as a comrade of the dead. In this way, Odysseus acquires the humility he needs to complete his homecoming. Dying to the contingencies of life to honor another, greater love, is to become worthy of the life hereafter, thus fulfilling the purpose of the descent into darkness, ancient and modern.

As Homer binds together the meaning of the journey episodically, with one event in time lending its signifiers to interpreting the next, Eliot likewise binds one perspective to another, as he moves from nature in time, to the self, to the subject of humankind in general, to an expanded speculation on the nature of consciousness itself. This is how Heraclitus serves as Eliot's binding medium as he thatches together the four different quartets using the four elements of the cosmos in symbolic terms. With an understanding of Heraclitus' flux of energies discretely mutating into new forms we can understand how Eliot's opposing energies have relevance to a soul constantly in flux. Arrest and movement, flesh and fleshlessness, ascent and descent, are not self-enclosed elements but each is subsumable in each, producing new substances and creating the infinitely variable climate of the soul itself. Heraclitus' spectrum of energies aptly symbolizes the eternal in time, or the moment of the human eternal. The four elements conjoined in a circular movement denote the

ascending-descending circle, representing the ring of eternity and unity. As in "Burnt Norton V," beginnings and endings have no meaning. As Eliot says, "The timeless is a rolling interflow of past and future subsumed by the infinite now":

Or say that the end precedes the beginning,
And the end and the beginning were always there
Before the beginning and after the end.
And all is always now (*On Poetry and Poets*, 94).

In "East Coker" as well, time cannot move forwards or backwards but remains motionless in the eternal present. But Bergsten notes, "In visiting 'East Coker,' Eliot seems to have felt that he had come full circle... The phrase, 'in my beginning is my end' implies a homecoming to the place of departure of his forebears." He goes on to say that in the beginning of this cycle is the elder Thomas Eliot, and, at the end, which in a circle coincides with the beginning, is the younger Thomas Eliot (208).

But Mary Stuart's motto appears at the end of the poem, "In the end is my beginning," as a reversal of the first line, "In my beginning is my end," recalling the circle theme once again. After the darkness of East Coker, the circularity of man's elements – despair, sadness, joy, hope – leads to a belief in despair as a God-given darkness designed to provoke the hunger for the faith that returns in the natural cycle of things. From the ascent out of his purifying struggles, man is reconciled with his soul in the final unity of Being. Like all time-bound things, change dominates them. The poem acknowledges the hope there is in the flux of destruction and creation, as buildings crumble and are rebuilt, as words collapse and then materialize again, as despair shifts back into faith.

In my beginning is my end. In succession
Houses rise and fall, crumble, are extended,

Are removed, destroyed, restored... (EC 1-3).

The process called "succession" is not a straight-line process, but a circular one; there is a cyclic movement from solidity to decay and back to solidity. In speaking in more general language, Eliot describes a symbiosis between man and earth that ultimately forms a larger circle of interdependence:

Old stone to new building, old timber to new fires,
Old fires to new ashes, and ashes to the earth
Which is already flesh, fur and faeces,
Bone of man and beast, cornstalk and leaf (EC 5-8).

The second section of "East Coker I" echoes the sterile type of cyclic movement suggested by the London Tube in "Burnt Norton." The road in this passage matches the oppressive and unnatural quality of the "metalled ways" of commuter transportation. The "deep lane" is "shuttered" with shadows; it is "dark in the afternoon," "the heat is electric," and "the light is sultry."

But the emphasis on the appetitive function of the road – the deep lane's "insistence" on the direction into the village – recalls perfectly both the appetite of Odysseus for driving on and on, no matter what world-weariness suffocates him. In fact, Tennyson's Ulysses, despite his old age, resolves to leave Ithaca once more and forever. He says that he has no choice because ceasing from travel is "to make an end," and the same as ceasing to breathe.

'Tis not too late to seek a newer world.
Push off, and sitting well in order smite
The sounding furrows: for my purpose holds
To sail beyond the sunset, and the baths
Of all the western stars, until I die (*Ulysses*, 57-61).

In *The Odyssey* the ocean road is the passageway of the

soul, and at one and the same time recalls the "appetency" of elements devouring each other, transmuting into the new and assimilating the past. As Tennyson's Ulysses says, "I am a part of all that I have met." In Heraclitean metaphors, the soul on its odyssey is at one moment an element of fire, changed to earth, then water, then air, becoming all "it has met," part of all in all. It is in the very nature of the soul to do "Some work of noble note" in the divine image, "Not unbecoming men that strove with Gods" (*Ulysses* 52-53).

But true to the movement of the elements of Heraclitus, the elements of the soul can only move forward out of the strife of opposing energies. The structure of *The Four Quartets* is antiphonal. Before his faith arrives, the modern Christian faces a hell of his imaginings along the way, equal to, if not greater than, the vortex of Charybdis or the bonfire of the elements. In his despair in "East Coker II" Eliot sees an apocalypse of order starting in the aftermath of World War I and leading all the way up through the midst of World War II that is actually taking place as he is writing *The Four Quartets*. All four poems reflect the bewilderment and resignation of a people trying to carry on in survivalist agony ("And the time of death is every moment," DS 159) that is the wartime post-industrial bewilderment of London life. Until those moments in history, the cycle of the seasons was a platitude for a kitchen calendar. Now in Eliot's wasteland, the circle as a universal pattern has become an anachronism in a world where

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 (EC 63-67).

Here belief fails. The only solace one can take is "in the waiting." Our only reason to hope is in the fact that because

of the interrelationship of all experience, patterns change into their opposite. If we wait long enough, despair turns into hope. This is the circular paradox of the "negative way":

In order to arrive there,
To arrive where you are, to get from where you are not,
You must go by a way wherein there is no ecstasy.
In order to arrive at what you do not know
You must go by a way that is the way of ignorance (EC 135-140).

In order to arrive at what you are not
You must go through the way in which you are not (EC 142-143)

Only through descending-ascending reciprocity between the contraries of ignorance and knowledge, loss and gain, between time and the timeless, can we begin to know ourselves. And "East Coker IV" unites the disparate elements that teach us the way: We must emulate Christ, "the wounded surgeon" (EC147). In order for the surgeon to heal, he must feel the pain of a wound, and the "dying nurse" (EC 153) teaches us that "to be restored, our sickness must grow worse" (EC 156). And turning the contraries of the Negative Way to his personal discipline, the speaker says, "If to be warmed, I must freeze" (EC 164). At the end of the final movement, Eliot tells us the purpose of reaching the point of union between the contrary elements of stillness and movement

We must be still and still moving
Into another intensity
For a further union, a deeper communion (EC 204-206).

Plying the waters of experience demands a lonely heroism. The final movement of "East Coker" closes with poignant images of nature in the immense nullity of an existential sea:

The wave cry, the wind cry, the vast waters
Of the petrel and the porpoise (EC 208-209).

Odysseus is man, *isolato*, swimming in the currents of time. We ourselves are only the moles traveling under the streets of London in the first quartet, moving into the wasteland of "East Coker." In the third quartet, "The Dry Salvages," named for a bleak group of rocks in the Atlantic, we abide in history in the current of human events. We are carried along on the tail of the "strong, brown god" (DS 2), the river that carries the cumulative swell of ocean. We drift along in the tide that leaves our casualties abandoned on the shore, in the same way that the river "tosses up"

...the torn seine,
The shattered lobsterpot, the broken oar
And the gear of foreign dead men (DS 22-24).

The river "hints of earlier and other creation" (DS 18) for "The river is within us, the sea is all about us" (DS 15) and the one rises out of the other. The one is the fate of the other, like earth, air, water, and fire.

Eliot would have agreed with Heraclitus that the character of a thing dictates what its fate will be, that because one element has certain properties it will necessarily turn into another element in a chain of mechanical energies. For Eliot, all things human are made from the strife of opposites and, thus, the life of opposition is our fate. In this way, character becomes fate itself. Eliot echoes an analogous idea in many places. Individual talent (character) becomes part of literary tradition (the fate of culture) after time has tested its worth, as Eliot suggests in "Tradition and the Individual Talent." The individual character emerges as an event of the temporal within the timelessness of tradition. Fate itself rises from character like a man in bedclothes rises from his bed, wholly

dressed in the manner of his environment. By the same token, the character of each new individual element rises out of the history of elements just as any life form emerges from the old primordial soup that preceded it. As F.O. Matthiesson declares, "The reconciliation of opposites is as fundamental to Eliot as it was to Heraclitus. Only thus can he envisage a resolution of man's whole being" (*The Achievement of T.S. Eliot*, 195). The bonfire is the clashing of opposing elements in the Stone Age soul within us.

Lethargy is what we must escape from into its opposite in order to permit the soul to continue its journey. The river quickens the poet's rhythm as he uses dashes and a conversational pace to give the reader a sense of renewed vitality. In the third section of "The Dry Salvages," the speaker, like Ulysses in Tennyson's poem, exhorts us, "Fare forward, voyagers!" The sea is uncontainable space unshaped by time. In the very act of meeting the challenge of experience, we free ourselves from death because each experience is an entirely new beginning emerging from the dead past, and the process is infinite, beyond death.

We can also explain the exuberant tone of some passages as Eliot's celebration of the wider significance of the circle-journey. To understand that, not only are the way up and the way down one and the same, but also that the future is the same as the past. This is to comprehend the full significance of the circularity symbol. As Cahill points out, "The Dry Salvages III," echoes the idea in the *Quartets* that spiritual progress is not linear but cyclic, or perhaps even spiral (118). The cyclic echo is the loudest in this quartet with the addition of Eliot's own epigraph to that of Heraclitus': The way up is the way down, the way forward is the way back.

The circle once again represents the unity of the Way of Affirmation and the Way of Negation, but now the circle is inflated to proportions large enough to include the infinite and to symbolize the unity of past and future (versus the

past that we regret and the future we anticipate with selfish obsession). If each voyage is a new beginning, then time past and time future have no meaning and time becomes timeless.

After we feel the visionary tension of Eliot's affirmation that time indeed does intersect with the timeless, we leave "The Dry Salvages" and enter into the distinct change of tone that takes place in the last quartet. The calm of "Little Gidding" follows the turbulent music of the ocean and "the intensity of a lifetime burning in every moment." This final quartet begins with the speaker's gentle, impressionistic picture of a winter afternoon:

Midwinter spring is its own season
 Sempiternal though sodden towards sundown,
 Suspended in time, between pole and tropic.
 When the short day is brightest, with frost and fire,
 The brief sun flames the ice, on pond and ditches,
 In windless cold that is the heart's heat,
 Reflecting in a watery mirror
 A glare that is blindness in the early afternoon (LG 1-8).

The voyaging imagery is momentarily suspended because the end of our exploration is to arrive at the beginning "and know the place for the first time" (LG 242), completing one turn of the cycle of life events that will end with a death, and that will begin the whole cyclic process over again for the exploring soul.

"Little Gidding," named after an Anglican religious community visited by English poets since the Renaissance, is Eliot's world of quiet reflections where the wind has died down, the soul is becalmed. The speaker has passed through a gate into a garden of faith and comprehension. The seasons return again and again in the sempiternal circle, and in this way "Little Gidding" announces the theme of cyclic continuity – not the closed circle of human events, but the

wider circle of the timeless in time.

The second paragraph of the same section resumes the theme of motion and traveling, but this time Eliot's words are not exhortatory, urging us onward. Rather, his tone is placid:

And what you thought you came for
 Is only a shell, a husk of meaning
 From which the purpose breaks only when it is fulfilled
 If at all. Either you had no purpose
 Or the purpose is beyond the end you figured
 And is altered in fulfillment. There are other places
 Which also are the world's end, some at the sea jaws,
 Or over a dark lake, in a desert or a city –
 But this is the nearest, in place and time.
 Now and in England (LG 30-38).

The apparent paradox of the opposing qualities of time and the timeless is resolved as one melts into the other in the perpetual renewal of purpose in the temporal voyage. The theme of the circle symbol is pursued in the technique of musical repetitiveness in the rhythm of the final paragraph where the sounds create an image of a rolling motion linking one experience in life to the next. The words suggest again a circular design, of beginnings that are forever new with each revolution in the turning wheel of departures and homecomings:

Through the unknown, remembered gate
 When the last of earth left to discover
 Is that which was the beginning (LG 243-245).

Applying the Heraclitean support-system in the previous quartets, Eliot used the contrary properties of water and fire, and earth and air to symbolize the chthonic forces that drive perpetual changes in the nature of spiritual life in the flux of time. In "Little Gidding" Eliot has reached a place

of resolution and in so doing he chooses only one of the elements – fire – as a symbol of a transcendent state beyond the strife of the world's oppositions. As George Williamson comments, "As with Heraclitus, fire becomes the ultimate metaphor or translation from the realm of becoming to the realm of being; or with Dante, the universal form of love seen at the close of the *Paradiso*" (*A Reader's Guide to T.S. Eliot*, 233). The poet creates from the flame a circle-symbol of redeeming faith. The simplicity of the circle, its indistinct beginning and end, represents the end that is the beginning:

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 (LG 255-259).

Little Gidding is a place of rest and prayer, a place to

...put off
 Sense and notion.
 You are not here to verify,
 Instruct yourself, or inform curiosity
 Or carry report. You are here to kneel (LG 42-45).

It is a space widened between chaos and the fevered search for order. In this respect especially, the *Four Quartets* is a symbolic celebration of the triumph of faith over reason in the battleground of Eliot's subjective world. The "crowned knot of fire" in "Little Gidding" is the only circle that remains, because it represents the homecoming to a love without beginnings, and without endings, and the end of voyaging on the earthly plane. In the final quartet, Eliot celebrates his realization that life is subsumed into one greater Being, just as the circle enfolds all in the unity of all things. For Odysseus the homecoming may have meant one final Armageddon

before restoring order to the external forms of the world, to right the balance between gods and men, to reassert civic hegemony. More momentous still, however, is the return to the place of stillness and the absence of the strife of elements in an earthly version of the love Eliot reaches in his final quartet.

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