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SISTEMA DE ESTUDIOS DE POSGRADO

NON-POETIC INFLUENCES IN T. S. ELIOT'S *FOUR QUARTETS*:
BUDDHISM, HINDUISM, AND SAINT JOHN OF THE CROSS

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Dedico este estudio a mi esposa y mejor amiga, Betty Sáenz Cruz, por su constante e incondicional apoyo.

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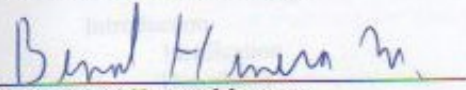
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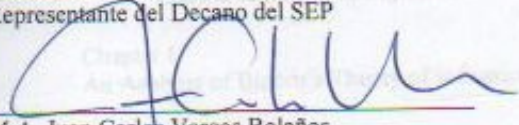
I feel obliged to my family: My wife, who has faithfully been by my side supporting me in every possible way, my father, who taught me to be persevering in life, my mother, for her unfailing faith in me, and my brother and his wife, for giving me support that goes beyond family ties.

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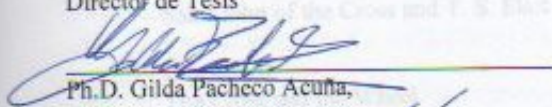
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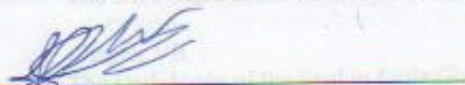
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Resumen

En este estudio se aspira a demostrar cómo la teoría de la ansiedad que genera la influencia poética, propuesta por Harold Bloom, puede hacer a un lado importantes fuentes de influencia debido a una restricción de criterio. Para tal efecto, se ha analizado la obra de T. S. Eliot titulada Cuatro Cuartetos, una serie de cuatro poemas en los que el problema de la ansiedad generada por la influencia no refleja lo propuesto por Bloom (que la principal fuente de influencia poética en un poeta es la figura de otro poeta), sino que más bien, a lo largo del análisis, se descubre cómo el problema de la ansiedad de la influencia que envuelve a Eliot surge de fuentes no poéticas; esto es, del desequilibrio producido por el choque de las profundas creencias cristianas del poeta con los sólidos y lógicos conceptos religiosos del budismo y el hinduismo.

El estudio traza una significativa conexión con el concepto "la noche oscura del espíritu", del místico español San Juan de la Cruz y relaciona los puntos que tan importante concepto para Eliot comparte con las creencias de las dos religiones asiáticas mencionadas. De este modo se muestra cómo la influencia de las tres religiones actúa sobre Eliot y genera el fenómeno de ansiedad al cual Bloom se refirió, a pesar de que, en concordancia con lo estipulado por éste, dichas fuentes de influencia no constituirían el principal origen de la ansiedad en el poeta.

Entre las conclusiones se puede enumerar la necesidad de ampliar la teoría propuesta por Bloom para que reconozca elementos no poéticos como fuentes principales de influencia y la urgencia de reevaluar perspectivas de crítica literaria que estipulan que alusiones religiosas directas arruinan el impacto estético de un poema.

Lista de abreviaturas usadas en este estudio

BG: Bhagavad-Gita

By Saint John of the Cross:

DN: Dark Night of the Soul

Subida: *Subida al Monte Carmelo*

By T. S. Eliot:

BN: Burnt Norton

DS: The Dry Salvages

EC: East Coker

HM: The Hollow Men

L1: The Letters of T. S. Eliot, volume 1

LG: Little Gidding

Se utilizaron las abreviaturas convencionales para los libros de la Biblia.

Introduction

A. Justification

T. S. Eliot, the prolific poet and literary critic, penned a work that created a great controversy among literary critics, the *Four Quartets*. For some, it is Eliot's masterpiece; for others, the work serves as proof that religious influence becomes counterproductive when explicitly manifested in a work of art. My position is that, despite the undercurrent against religion in the last century, religion is, and has always been, a manifestation of the highest ideals of the human beings and, therefore, to ignore its influence is futile. Even though there are people for whom religion ruins a work of art, one has to remember that religion, as a social manifestation, is as impossible to overlook as political concepts. Interestingly, while some critics eagerly banish works that include religious concepts, few people object to the genre known as political literature.

Perhaps the problem with religion is its subjectivity; it is a matter of faith. Hence, one finds it easier to oppose a creed to which one does not ascribe any significance. Nevertheless, political positions are also, in the end, "creeds" that one chooses to embrace. Literary works, as manifestations of a society, portray the political and religious aspects of the social realm in which they were produced. Consequently, despite one's own personal opinion of religion, religious concepts in a work enrich it and sometimes become a powerful source of influence, as in the case of the *Four Quartets*. However, one has to explore the concept of poetic influence in order to prove the assertion above and the theory that is going to be analyzed in this work is the one proposed by Harold Bloom. Bloom's theory of influence seems the most appropriate due to its religious background (it alludes to a metaphor taken from Milton's *Paradise Lost*.)

The impact of this work can be seen when one considers that in over-restricting a theoretical framework (in this case, Bloom's theory of influence), there is a patent danger of mutilating the significance of *Four Quartets*. Some literary critics underestimate the influence of systems of faith upon literary works and even assert that direct religious allusions in *Four Quartets* destroy its poetical significance, to which I disagree.

B. Hypothesis

The different religious sources that permeate T. S. Eliot's *Four Quartets* demonstrate how the main influence on a given poet is not always another poet, which challenges a narrow understanding of Bloom's theory of poetic influence.

C. General Objective

To identify non-poetic sources of influence in the *Four Quartets* such as prose works and religious works that, far from ruining the *Four Quartets*, enrich the work.

D. Specific Objectives

1. To analyze Bloom's theory of influence in order to challenge a possible misreading that would prevent the perception of prose works as poetical sources of influence.
2. To identify the mechanics of influence in the *Four Quartets* by examining the Bible, *Dark Nigh of the Soul*, and the *Bhagavad Gita* in order to find influential concepts.
3. To explore the *Four Quartets* (sections three and four) in order to discover how the religious concepts that come from the influential texts mentioned above affect them.

4. To suggest the broadening of Bloom's theory of influence by means of the incorporation of alternate non-poetic sources of influence.

Chapter I: An Analysis of Bloom's Theory on Influence

Although literary critics have always been concerned about the issue of influence, its importance has been relegated to a minor, if not nonexistent, role by contemporary criticism. With the death of the author, the idea of exploring the possible source from which a work originates seems, to a large extent, uninteresting, because the reader is who ultimately becomes responsible for constructing meaning and ascribing it to a work. Whether the author received some sort of influence, direct or indirect, that led him/her to produce the literary work has stopped being central to the reading process, and most critics (except, perhaps, comparative literature scholars) do not seem to be concerned about influence. However, although some contemporary schools of criticism deny the importance of influence, its presence can still be felt powerfully in practice. In other words, the placing of power in the hands of the reader has not erased the concept of influence from the minds of the public in general. Indeed, influence is discussed at most book presentations, movie productions, and music group interviews. Thus, it seems naive to close one's eyes and to pretend to avoid such a potent presence in practice, for the concept of influence is debated widely and remains a staple of literary discussions.

One of the critics who discuss the issue of influence is Harold Bloom. In his book *The Anxiety of Influence*, he argues that a poet's main, not to say exclusive, influence is, and always has to be, another poet. For Bloom, influence can only come from another literary source, and, more importantly, from another poetic source, an assertion that is going to be questioned in this work. If one follows Bloom's ideas, poets are anxious to overcome the influence of other poets, which implies that poems become the most important source of influence for other poems and, therefore, no prose work will be substantial enough to influence a poetic work.

It is imperative to outline briefly Bloom's theory on influence before proceeding to discuss the flaws and errors in his theoretical framework. For Bloom, the poetic endeavor is polarized; there are only "weak" and "strong" poets. Weak poets, whom he calls in *The Anxiety of Influence* "ephebes," are those poets who can never overcome the influence of their elders. The Greek word is used to refer to poets that are "anti-natural" or "antithetical," for they rebel against the idea of dying and of being forgotten. These poets can never establish their own voice or originality, but rather echo or repeat the literary creations of the poet who most influences them. A strong poet, for Bloom, on the other hand, is a poet who can overcome or withstand influence, and go beyond that influence to produce a literary work that is original and not derivative.

Bloom's Revisionary Ratios

One must take into consideration that influence is a series of what Bloom terms *revisionary ratios*, and it involves movement from and towards the model, the literary paradigm, or the poet who most influences another poet. Bloom proposes several stages and gives names to them. In the first stage, or *Clinamen*, a distancing movement occurs. The poet seems to acknowledge that the precursor's work is accurate up to a certain extent, but then he¹ moves away from it in a "corrective" fashion. Poets enter this stage when they become publicly recognizable figures and directly face the previously honored poets, who have become deities to the public. The work of the strong poets becomes part of the canon, a literary tradition that is perceived as a complete, perfect unit: "This God is cultural history, the dead poets, the embarrassments of a

¹ For the sake of readability, and since this work deals with two male writers, the pronoun *he* will be used instead of the form *s/he* (commonly used to acknowledge gender differences.)

tradition grown too wealthy to need anything more” (Bloom 21). Bloom states that the modern poet is embarrassed by the figure of this potent precursor. Embarrassment springs from a vertical comparison: The previous writer is gigantic, while the modern poet discovers that he is diminished in respect to that writer. In other words, the modern poet, who was placed on a pedestal, becomes aware that there is another poet in a higher position and feels lessened by that comparison. Consequently, it is this feeling which originates poetry: “Poetry begins with our awareness, not of a Fall, but that *we are falling*” (20). Bloom compares this process to *Paradise Lost*. Once the poet knows that he has fallen, he, like Satan in *Paradise Lost*, has hit bottom and has been cast out of the heavenly spheres. When he realizes that he has been humiliated by a powerful previous writer or by an overwhelming tradition which seems perfect and without need for any further contributions, the poet then gives himself the heroic task of rallying what is left to become strong enough to tear down the holy temple of his precursors.

It is important to remember, as Bloom states, that “even the strongest poets were weak at first” (23). They all have the power of self-realization, but, at the same time, they have to struggle with a power within them, i.e., the older poet, the awareness of a great antecedent’s presence, which blocks that realization. Potential poets, according to Bloom, become poets when they, in a heroic effort, shine as brightly as they can, and when they, in the end, outshine their nearest and most important competitor, which allows them to enter the Pantheon. As Bloom states, “the greatest of them are very strong, and they progress through a natural intensification” (24). The poetic force, or in Bloom’s terms, the generative influence that the poet finds both outside and within himself is poetry, and the internal force, or the desire to make poetry, is what leads a person to become a poet. However, to experience poetry as a generative force provokes the tremendous battle between the poet and his titanic antagonist:

How do men become poets, or to adopt an older phrasing, how is the poetic character incarnated? When a potential poet first discovers (or is discovered by) the dialectic of influence, first discovers poetry as being both external and internal to himself, he begins a process that will end only when he has no more poetry within him, long after he has the power (or desire) to discover it outside himself...Poetic influence in the sense—amazing, agonizing, delighting—*of other poets*...for the poet is condemned to learn his profoundest yearnings through an awareness of *other selves*. The poem is *within* him, yet he experiences the shame and splendor of *being found by* poems—great poems—*outside* him. (25, 26)

This idea of “being found” by powerful, moving poems is precisely what Bloom stresses for his definition of influence. He takes the primitive meaning of the word “influence,” which is “inflow,” or “an emanation of force coming in upon mankind from the stars” (26). However, this “inflow” seems to be undesirable for young poets due to the fact that it makes the poet suffer because he has to judge his own poetry using canonic poems as the basis for his poetic self-evaluation. This enslaves the poet, as Bloom says, blocking his creativity through the constant comparison of his own works to the precursor’s. Poetic influence, thus, “is part of the larger phenomenon of intellectual revisionism” (28) and a “disease of self-consciousness” (29).

Bloom enriches his definition of poetic influence by adding a new idea: Influence starts with a deviation, an unnecessary correction that springs from the poet’s need to confront his potent precursor:

Poetic Influence—when it involves two strong, authentic poets,—always proceeds by a misreading of the prior poet, an act of creative correction that is actually and

necessarily a misinterpretation. The history of fruitful poetic influence, which is to say the main tradition of Western poetry since the Renaissance, is a history of anxiety and self-saving caricature, or distortion, of perverse, willful revisionism without which modern poetry as such could not exist. (30)

Hence, the original poem is perceived by the young poet as faulty, incomplete, or inaccurate, which is the poet's way of expressing his unconscious anger toward the precursor and exercising his power upon the previous work. Metaphorically, Bloom implies that the young poet destroys the older poet's "temple" in order to establish his own "temple." Poetic influence posits a disruption; it is separating oneself as a poet from the tradition, which is continuity and, hence, imprisons the present in the past, for all innovative works are measured by a previous poetic standard. Discontinuity implies freedom, and with freedom the poet achieves his self-realization. This explains why a poet finds himself in the position of deciding that something in the tradition has to be revised. Poets, paradoxically, have to fight the tradition in order to insert themselves in it, and the way they do this is by means of swerving: They deviate from the original poem in a corrective fashion proving that they possess imagination and the potential to overthrow the great ancestors, even though they might in reality never achieve the position or brilliance that their precursors had.

The second stage that Bloom proposes in his theory of generative influence is *Tessera*. He borrows the concept from ancient mystery cults, where the word meant "a token of recognition," like the small fragment of a vessel that an archaeologist uses first to identify the object and then to gather the other fragments and reconstruct the vessel. This is a stage in which completion is sought by the young poet and this completion leads to what Bloom terms *antithesis*. The young poet's poem is transformed into a piece of a larger whole without which

the precursor's work would not be complete. It becomes antithetical in the sense that the previous poetic terms and structure are kept by the younger poet intact, but they are employed differently to mean something else. This is an act of revolt against the mighty precursors. Thus influence, instead of being perceived as something favorable or desirable, becomes a curse: "Influence to Nietzsche meant vitalization. But influence, and more precisely poetic influence, has been more of a blight than a blessing... Where it has vitalized, it has operated as misprision, as deliberate, even perverse revisionism" (50). If the young poet employs his precursor's terms, and uses them, then the previous poet becomes a model for the younger one. Bloom quotes Goethe and tries to prove that poets appropriate poetic models only as a way to reaffirm their own self: "To be loved for what one is, is the greatest exception. The great majority love in another only what they lend him, their own selves, their versions of him" (51). Bloom's theory no doubt leads to the inevitable questioning of the value, nature, and function of originality, for all that a person produces poetically is, in fact, affected by the influence of somebody else. Bloom goes even further and extends this assertion and, using Freud, he claims that a poet is under the influence of others even from the very moment of birth. This assertion means that there is almost nothing that can be claimed as one's own, except for the energy that moves a person: "As soon as we are born the world begins to influence us, and this goes on till we die. And anyway, what can in fact call our own except the energy, the force, the will!" (52).

In the case of poets, Bloom wonders whether this force that prompts them to write is produced by the "anxiety of influence." For, after all, the idea of loving one's own reflection in others can be stated in the reverse way: A person not only loves his own image in others, but he also hates himself in others, which is one of the antithesis of poetry: A young poet who faces a powerful precursor loves what that person created (poetry), but at the same time hates and envies

the fact that such a creation does not belong to himself. Hence, the young poet's work has to become the part that completes the precursor's works—the different piece that brings the poet back to unity: It “represents any later poet's attempt to persuade himself (and us) that the precursor's Word would be worn out if not redeemed as a newly fulfilled and enlarged Word of the ephebe” (67), for the poet is anxious and deeply troubled by the dismaying fact that his poetry will be flooded by the precursor's work, and his work, his name, will disappear into oblivion and insignificance. Freud mentions that the fear of domination is universal, and it is precisely this feeling that Blooms calls “the anxiety of influence”: “When a poet experiences incarnation *qua* poet, he experiences anxiety necessarily towards any danger that might *end him* as a poet” (58). This assertion implies that poetry springs from anxiety, not from pleasure, as has been theorized: “Poems are not given *by* pleasure, but by the unpleasure of a dangerous situation, the situation of anxiety of which the grief of influence forms so large a part” (58).

This stage of antithesis and completion can be seen as the horror of a young poet after he discovers that he is trapped in the continuity that constitutes the tradition of poetry and that his works are menaced by the powerful poets that came before him. Once he becomes strong, the poet tries to transform the previous mighty poets into a faulty, inferior version of himself. However, this act also contaminates the poet, who aspires to greatness because that is the only way in which his work can mingle with the precursor's work. Nevertheless, the younger poet uses distinctive, unique words, which Bloom refers to as the “language of taboo” in relation to the precursor's works, which also explains why poetical language varies as time passes: “As the poets swerve downward in time, they deceive themselves into believing they are tougher-minded than their precursors. This is akin to that critical absurdity which salutes each new generation of bards as being somehow closer to the common language of ordinary men than the last was” (69).

This stage, then, is a movement away from the precursor that, paradoxically, intends to get closer to him, which is the great antithesis, while the poet tries to complete the incomplete work done by him at the same time.

The third revisionary ratio that Bloom proposes is one of repetition and discontinuity, which he terms *Kenosis*. The poet acts in a way similar to that in which the defense mechanisms of the psyche attack compulsory repetitions. The final aim of this revisionary ratio is to break out of the precursor's shadow and influence, precisely because, in Freudian terms, the younger poet fears castration of his poetical creativity, of his vision: "A man's unconscious fear of castration manifests itself as an apparently physical trouble in his eyes; a poet's fear of ceasing to be a poet frequently manifests itself also as a trouble of his vision" (78). The poet interprets fitting into a poetic tradition as mere repetition of the other poet's works; hence, he gives himself the task of attempting to create something different and wholly new. Nevertheless, if the great poets once achieved victory, which is the reason why they became heroic figures in the poetic pantheon of gods, the younger poet, in his attempts, chooses the way of failure: "This is merely cyclic quest, and its only goal and glory—necessarily—is to fail" (79). If the poet resigns himself to repetition, he becomes a mere copy of the great ones.

By comparing his works to those of the precursor, the poet is caught in a motion of repetition that has to be stopped if he wants to be original, but that process of comparison cannot be easily undone, for it is at the core of poetry. For Bloom, the means of dialectically affirming and undoing repetition simultaneously implies the perversion of oneself:

[...]strong poets necessarily are perverse, 'necessarily' here meaning as if obsessed, as if manifesting repetition compulsion. 'Perverse' literally means 'to be turned the wrong way'; but to be turned the right way in regard to the

precursor means not to swerve at all, so any bias or inclination perforce must be perverse in *relation to the precursor*, unless context itself (such as one's own surrounding literary orthodoxy) allows one to be *an avatar of the perverse*. (85)

Of course, the young poet does not perceive his own imagination as perverse. Consequently, he believes that the one who deviated incorrectly from tradition was the precursor, for he failed to deviate at a determined point and thus went wrong. In order to undo the repetition, the poet has to empty himself of the overwhelming and potentially debilitating influence of the precursor, which then, once done, provides the freedom needed to proceed. As Bloom states, "This 'emptying' is a liberating discontinuity, and makes possible a kind of poem that a simple repetition of the precursor's afflatus or godhood could not allow. 'Undoing' the precursor's strength *in oneself* serves to 'isolate' the self from the precursor's stance..." (88). This comparison is an act of sublimation that strips the precursor of his great status or divinity, for, at the moment the younger poet decides to empty himself of his creative potential, he is also draining the creativity from the precursor.

Before proceeding with the next stage, the next revisionary ratio, or *Daemonization*, Bloom presents a manifesto for what he terms and highlights as "antithetical criticism." The main idea that Bloom posits is that if the process of creative imagining is always inevitably involved with misinterpretation, making all poems antithetical to their precursors, criticism is also antithetical, for it becomes a series of swervings following the acts of creative misunderstanding (93). Poems, in the end, are misinterpretations of a parent poem and, since both writing poetry and writing criticism of them are misinterpretations, the only difference between criticism and poetry is the degree of misinterpretation. Thus, Bloom states that the

different formats do not change the fact of the existence of misinterpretation: “There are no interpretations but only misinterpretations, and so all criticism is prose poetry” (95).

Once Bloom describes these ideas about poems and criticism, he continues to explain and complete his revisionary ratios. He terms the fourth stage *Daemonization*, which is a stage that presents a direct attack against what makes the previous poets strong, that is, an assault that pretends to counteract the “divine” in their poetry. Bloom terms this stage the “counter-sublime.” According to Bloom, poetry is not a struggle against repression, but it is a kind of repression in which poems do not rise as a response to the present time, but in response to other poems. The poet creates by destroying what was previously constructed, which is to say that he metaphorically breaks the previous poem and uses the pieces to create a new work and, in doing so, gives hints at the precursor’s Achilles’ heel: “Turning against the precursor’s Sublime, the newly strong poet undergoes *daemonization*, a Counter-Sublime whose function suggests *the precursor’s relative weakness*” (100). This act eclipses, or attempts to free the young poet, from the powerful figure of the precursor by suggesting that the latter’s work is not absolutely original, for originality is what makes a poem sublime. Bloom believes that if the former work is magnificent, but not original, the later poem is in the lead, for novelty seems to defeat a poem washed-out by time. It is significant to notice that the magnificence of the previous work cannot be denied because negation of the precursor would imply a death instinct on the part of the young poet who does not want to eliminate the precursor, but to share his glorious strength. This is achieved when the later poet yields what is common between him and his mighty precursor: “*Daemonization*, which commences as a revisionary ratio of de-individuating the precursor, ends by the dubious triumph of yielding to him the whole of the ephebe’s middle ground, or common humanity” (Bloom 107). A tantalizing concluding thought that Bloom states regarding this

revisionary ratio is that the later poet, trying to gain knowledge from the precursor, plays a game of submission, an activity that can lead to an actual loss of creative ability. However, he believes that daemonization is achieved in that submission game as long as the precursor's achievements are reduced to a sphere in which the later poet can handle them.

The following revisionary ratio that the author identifies is one that introduces a movement of self-purgation in which the poet intends to attain a state of seclusion. Bloom terms it *Askesis* and, in a way, this state is similar to the previous one in the sense that the poet yields part of his own human creativity, but instead of emptying himself, yields his potential in order to separate himself from the others, even from the precursor. Bloom describes this ratio as follows: "A way of purgation intending a state of solitude as its proximate goal. Intoxicated by the fresh repressive force of a personalized Counter-Sublime, the strong poet in his daemonic elevation is empowered to turn his energy upon himself, and achieves, at terrible cost, his clearest victory in wrestling with the mighty dead" (116). The whole idea is to perceive the precursor's creative powers which are similar to those of the younger poet. In the state of solitude, Bloom theorizes that the poet experiences the terrible guilt of indebtedness—in other words, the poet undergoes the anxiety of influence. Thus, writing poetry becomes a reverse sacrifice; what was originally meant to renew the poet's life force, takes it away: "[...] all sacrifice is done to renew human vitality. In the process of poetic misprision, sacrifice diminishes human vitality, for here less is more [...] the writing (and reading) of poems is a sacrificial process, a purgation that drains more than it replenishes" (120). The poet separates himself, or herself, from the other poets when he undergoes the process of internalization: If the poet does not look for refuge inside himself, he is exposed to the influence of the precursors. Hence, the poet does not seek a rupture with himself, but rather to internalize all the precursors and their worlds. This assimilation process (labeled by

Bloom as *Askesis*) implies that the poet has to suppress the voices of poetry itself. In other words, the poet silences all the voices from the past that haunt his imagination in order to emerge renewed:

Askesis, as a successful defense against the anxiety of influence, posits a new kind of reduction in the poetic self, most generally expressed as a purgatorial blinding or at least a veiling. The realities of the other selves and of all that is external are diminished alike, until a new style of harshness emerges, whose rhetorical emphasis can be read off as one degree of solipsism or another. (121)

The poet, therefore, in solitude, can perceive himself, as well as the never-erased antagonist. This precursor is recognized by the poet as a figure composed by a group of previous poems that resist oblivion. Henceforth, the poet has to keep struggling, for this stage is a denial of the poet's lack of priority within the poetical tradition: The poet revises the precursor's work and denies in essence the fact that he hoped to become autonomous and independent of his literary source, but during this process he is, in fact, ravaged by the sense of otherness. According to Bloom, the strongest modern poetry is generated by means of purgation, which questions what the poet would have created if he would have been free from the anxiety of influence, the matrix that generated the poet's necessity of seclusion and, therefore, internalization.

Apophrades, or the sixth revisionary ratio that Bloom discusses, is one in which the later poet, in his own final phase of growth and strength, creates the illusion that the precursor's works were written by him, reversing the effect that one gets when considering influence. In other words, when speaking about an author influencing another, it is granted that the precursor is the one who has written the previous poem, but in this revisionary ratio, the later poet has grown so strong that it seems that the precursor was the one who had been under the influence of the later

poet instead; it is “the triumph of having so stationed the precursor, in one’s own work, that particular passages in *his* work seem to be not presages of one’s own advent, but rather to be indebted to one’s own achievement, and even (necessarily) to be lessened by one’s greater splendor” (141). This phenomenon of listening to the later poet’s voice in the literary works of the precursor is called by the author “the return from the dead” and is caused by the fact that the later poet has achieved the internalization of the antagonist and, hence, has inherited his creative abilities, as Bloom intends to show when speaking about Yeats and Stevens, who seem to be imitated by their precursors, Browning and Dickinson: “For all of them achieve a style that captures and oddly retains priority over their precursors, so that the tyranny of time almost is overturned, and one can believe, for startled moments, that they are being *imitated by their ancestors*” (141). Thus, although the dead return, the final triumph belongs to the later poet, for the potent ancestors do not speak with their voices, but with the younger poet’s voice, which shows his persistence and final achievement. With this final ratio, the summary of Bloom’s theory on influence ends. It seems, then, that for Bloom the phenomenon of influence might as well occur when a poet, as a subject, creates an impact in the mind of a younger poet, for the poetic endeavor unites them.

However, can any other subject influence the poet? Are not poets embedded in a network of social relationships to which they react? A major flaw in Bloom’s theory is that one could over restrict it; that is, a person could quote Bloom’s theory to argue that the poets are always the main, not to say the only real influence that a poet can experience. However, it is known today that no single fact triggers a single consequence, but a number of consequences spring from a combination of events that act as causes. If this social knowledge is to be applied to poetical creation, then poets are not only influenced by a single individual, but by many people that make

up the world of their daily social interactions. Indeed, it would not be too far-fetched to assert that the majority of individuals that influence a poet's life are not precisely the poet's "peers," that is, people who are committed themselves to poetry. On the other hand, a poet receives influence from people who are absolutely alien to the poetical endeavor, and since those people often constitute a significant number, it is accurate to think that the poet receives more of this kind of influence than the influence which is strictly poetical. As Gustavo A. Bécquer states in his *Rima IV*: "*Podrá no haber poetas, pero siempre/ habrá poesía*" (4). Moreover, in this poem Bécquer pictures the powerful influence of non-poetical elements:

*Mientras haya unos ojos que reflejen
los ojos que los miran;
mientras responda el labio suspirando
al labio que suspira;
mientras sentirse puedan en un beso
dos almas confundidas;
mientras exista una mujer hermosa,
¡habrá poesía! (5)*

In regards to lyrical poetry, it seems that the figure of the beloved is far more powerful than the poet's peers in the creation of poetry, for without the beloved, no poem is produced. If there is some truth in the assertion above, the logical implication would be that Bloom's perception of the anxiety of influence might be an over-restriction since he seems to be deliberately ignoring many other possible sources of influence that can provoke anxiety. One can think, for example, about the case of a young poet who lives under the shadow of a parent

who is respected in the scientific field and does not approve his or her child's poetical endeavor. This young poet would probably fight a fierce battle to establish himself or herself as a reputable person in the eyes of this close-minded parent and his or her own. Is not that anxiety of influence? And what about a poet's wife? To deny the influence of a person with whom the poet spends a great deal of time, as in the case of the poet's wife, and who has more than likely access to the most intimate moments of the poet's life would seem deliberately close-minded.² Therefore, a critic that ignores this extremely powerful source of influence would tread on dangerous ground. After all, it is not our duty to take sides or judge whether Eliot's first wife

² T.S. Eliot's poetical career provides one example of the debate related to a poet's spouse and his/her influence: There is a dispute as to whether his first wife, Vivienne, exercised a strong influence in the poet's life and that she left a mark that has been ignored for a long time. Regarding this matter, Sarah F. Gold reviews Carole Seymour-Jones' book *Painted Shadow: The Life of Vivienne Eliot, First Wife of T.S. Eliot, and the Long-Suppressed Truth About Her Influence on His Genius*:

'Although the history of literary marriages is littered with tragic muses and sacrificial spouses, few partnerships are considered as ill-starred as that of T.S. Eliot and Vivienne Haigh-Wood (1888-1947). History has condemned the first wife of the great American ex-patriate modernist as a neurotic, hypochondriacal harridan whose presence tormented Eliot and whose committal to an insane asylum after 17 years of marriage proved a long-overdue relief for the beleaguered genius. (Virginia Woolf memorably characterized Vivienne Eliot as *this bag of ferrets* hanging around the poet's neck.) Seymour-Jones's biography, while often stressing Vivienne's victimhood, is a nuanced portrait of an independent spirit becoming unhinged. In their early years together, the Eliots were infamous for their constant peregrinations, their chronic yet evasive medical problems, their money troubles and persistent unhappiness. The lively banter and free sexual mores prized by their friends in the literary avant-garde did little to strengthen their marital stability. Glimpses of their oppressive, sexually silent marriage appear in *The Waste Land*, *Sweeney Agonistes* and *The Family Reunion*—which masterpieces, Seymour-Jones (Beatrice Webb) argues, Eliot might never have written without his intolerable muse. She also endeavors to restore Vivienne's status as a close literary collaborator. As an intellectual biography of the Eliots, this volume should be of considerable interest to scholars of modernism. It stands as a chronicle of a fine mind—highly unstable but not necessarily insane.' (Gold 62)

was insane or not, or the fact that their relationship was a tempestuous one; the point is that Eliot could and might have created something from this storm.

If one is to grant the fact that there have been poets in history that seemed to shut themselves out from society (like Emily Dickinson), one can easily perceive that such a decision was made because of a powerful social influence that the poet deliberately wanted to avoid. Hence, this kind of “social influence” is so powerful that poets have wanted to escape from it and have lived almost monastic lives in order to isolate their creative imagination and not taint it with foreign or so-called exterior forms of influence. In the case of Robert Lowell, who wrote bitter poems about his parents, the above assertion about social influence and the potential important influence on a poet of his family life seems to be proven correct.

If individuals who do not have anything to do with poetical creation influence a poet’s life so powerfully as for him to shape a world-view and the resulting poetical works, how can it be said that the greatest influence on the poet is another poet? Some critics agree with the assertion that a poet’s greatest influence is another poet because of the mutual link that they share, which is the poetical venture in which both of them have embarked. They believe that since the younger poet is still immature, he needs the guidance of a wise mentor who has more experience and, consequently, would be a great help for the former to achieve a state of full growth and maturity.

This thought is considerably misleading, however. Since the figure of the poet as a subject (as a person) is not the main influence, why is it that Bloom insists on the link between two poets? The answer to this question lies in the assumption that the power of the precursor upon a younger poet is not his figure as a person, but his work instead. It is not the person who influences the young poet, but the poetical works of the precursor. The impact is poetry itself; the poetical endeavor is the common link between both poets, and it is quite clear that the

predecessor is found in a privileged position due to his experience. Consequently, poetry influences the younger poet: The precursor's poetry, not the precursor himself.

To follow logically Bloom's ideas, one has to believe that it is actually poetical achievement that impresses the younger poet's mind and can be considered influence. Hence, a poet is the main influence upon another poet because both use poetical language. If it is poetical language that influences the poet, it is necessary to consider what is so moving in this kind of language as to exert power upon someone. The most common argument is that poetic language employs a series of devices that are significant, i.e., tropes and symbols, which are believed to be the most powerful rhetorical devices of poetry, and, in turn, the most difficult to master. Those rhetorical devices are the main concern of a young poet and in order for him to become a mature poet, he has to achieve full command of them. The young poet, hence, is impressed by the way in which other poets use language and starts his first attempts to walk down the same path. Consequently, one could think that the images and symbols found within the poems that the young poet is in contact with are the real source of influence.

Nevertheless, it is not difficult to find flaws in this type of thinking. It is known, especially after Derrida, that all tropes are found in language outside poems. Images and symbols, for example, and even clichés, can be heard in daily speech. For example, when a person wants to do something as trivial as criticizing a friend's dress habits, he can say that his friend dresses "as if the clothes were thrown on him with a pitchfork." Clichés are used in television commercials, and symbols are used everywhere, from road signs to flags. Actually, because tropes and symbols are used in daily life, they are used also in poetry. Since those devices are found in language, language itself, not just poetical language, influences the poet, which proves that a poet can receive influence not only from another poet through poems, but

also from any form of communication, including written language that is not poetry. T.S. Eliot seems to agree with such an assertion, for he declared in his essay “The Three Provincialities” that “literature is not primarily a matter of nationality, but of language, the traditions of the language, not the traditions of the nation or the race, are what first concern the writer” (Parrinder 219).

Language becomes the poetical influence for young poets. However, since poets create their poems manipulating common language to produce poetical devices, it becomes necessary to explain how language acts upon to make a symbol in order to understand why symbols are present in everyday expressions, not only in poetical constructions. Furthermore, an analysis of the mechanisms that are used to produce symbols will undermine Bloom’s idea of the existence of a language that is the exclusive realm of poets, and that they appropriate in order to create their poems and influence other poets. First, one has to consider that poems are made out of words which are most of the time found in everyday speech. If it is true that poets sometimes invent words playing with sounds, it is essential to remember that sounds do not become symbols, but words that can be identified by people do. According to what Michael Riffaterre states in *Semiotics of Poetry*, “a word’s sememe contains a variety of possible associations and the surrounding words somehow limit the range in which the kernel is to be interpreted” (26). In other words, the word “piano” has in itself the potential to be associated to other words like pianist, concert, music, melody, peace, enjoyment and so on. The possibilities are limitless, for each new word that is linked to the base word amplifies the range of meaning and traces the line in which the word is more likely to be interpreted. Of course, each new word constitutes a new source of meaning: If “piano” is linked to “concert,” for instance, words like theater, audience, applause can also be related to it, but dog, tree and park are out of the semantic chain since the

relationship between those latter words to the former is perceived as arbitrary. This is not to say that those words cannot be related, but that the resulting imagery is completely different, for in order to justify the linking of the word “piano” and the word “dog” the reader has to resort to other strategies that will, in the long run, direct the creation of meaning to a different range of possibilities.

Moreover, words are rarely found in isolation; language is generally articulated in phrases. A word, when in proximity of another, is limited in a way: If the phrase “sad piano” is read, then words like peace, enjoyment or happiness might be, due to a process of frame imposition in reading, excluded from the range in which “piano” can be interpreted. Those groups of words, when semantically “charged” with literariness, make poetical constructs. It is important to remember that poetical constructs are not necessarily formed by uncommon words; they are made up by common words used in particular ways that are perceived by the reader as literary, such as tropes. A trope is defined as “the artificial alteration of a word or phrase from its proper meaning to another” (Preminger 409) and this definition shows how banal words can become so-called literary words if used with a literary intention. What is significant in this matter is that although tropes are considered to be poetical constructs and hence a type of manipulation of literary discourse, they are also found, and with high frequency, outside poems: They are present even in everyday language. Expressions like “as happy as a clam” or “as dry as a bone” are common in speech, although they are similes. As a result, one may think that what is believed to be strictly poetical may not be so unique to poetry after all.

Likewise, one can discuss symbols, which are also found outside poetry. Broadly defined, symbols are “something once so joined or combined that stands for or represents, when seen alone, the entire complex” (Preminger 1250). This definition can posit a confusion with the

word “sign,” which has a similar function. Nevertheless, the difference between a sign and a symbol lies in the extent of the representation:

A related distinction is that between ‘sign’ and ‘symbol’, where the former refers to a relatively specific representation of one thing by another—a red traffic light, for example, means ‘stop,’—while the latter refers to a more polysemous of one thing by another—as when the sea, for example, is used to stand for such different feelings as the danger of being overwhelmed (by analogy with drowning), or the excitement and anxiety of making a transition (as in a journey), or the power and fulfillment of strength (as in mighty) and so on. (Preminger 1251)

It is no secret that other literary manifestations like novels or short stories can include a wide variety of symbols. Consequently, it is possible to assume that, despite the fact that such literary manifestations are not poetical, they can exercise a powerful force upon a poet when he is faced with them, for poets are not exclusively in contact with poetry. If so, poets do receive influence from other sources that are not poets: Actually, their greatest influence comes from language itself, manifested in several forms that can include prose as long as they share some significant elements, such as symbols or tropes. Prose should not be left aside as a great source of influence in a poet’s production, for arguing that poets expose themselves only to poetry is an absurd. Therefore, one can assert that an over-restricted understanding of Bloom’s theory of influence refuses to take into consideration the fact that prose is indeed a source of influence that cannot be overlooked.

It is impossible, thus, to state that poems are the only source of influence that poets can experience. In T.S. Eliot’s *Four Quartets*, for example, the influence of an essay is definitely perceivable: *The Dark Night of the Soul*, a powerful religious text written in the sixteenth

century. The *Dark Night of the Soul* was written by a man that stands as one of the most important figures of Christianity: The Catholic mystic Saint John of the Cross. Now, it becomes imperative to understand who this man was in order to analyze his connection to Eliot's *Four Quartets*.

Chapter Two: Saint John of the Cross and T. S. Eliot

A. Saint John of the Cross: His Link to Eliot's *Four Quartets*

It is well known that Eliot had a profound interest in religion, an interest that only increased after his conversion to Anglicanism. Eliot also expanded his religious interest to other systems of faith, concretely Buddhism and Hinduism. He also studied widely influential religious authors, such as Dante and Milton. While Eliot disliked the latter, he always praised the former, as one of his letters shows: "I admit that I had several motives in saying what little I said, in passing, about Milton. First I find him, *on the whole*, antipathetic. Dante seems to me so immeasurably greater in every way, even in control of language, that I am often irritated by Milton's admirers" (L1 426). Eliot seemed to favor Dante not only because of Dante's mastery as a writer, but also because he regarded him as a true spiritual leader.

This interest in religion and significant religious authors was the key that opened the door to Spanish mysticism for Eliot and led him to the works of Saint John of the Cross. In 1913, while Eliot taught philosophy for undergraduate students at Emerson Hall, he kept studying the Spanish mystics and developed a growing interest for Saint John's *Dark Night of the Soul*. In his on-line article entitled "The Influence of John of the Cross in the United States: A Preliminary Study," Steven Payne discusses Saint John's influence in Eliot's works:

Since Eliot first discovered John's works while at Harvard, was still interested enough to cite them as a 'devotional monument' in 'Lancelot Andrewes' (1926) and to quote them ironically in an epigraph to *Sweeney Agonistes* (1926-7), as well as to review an abridged version of John's works in 1934, it is more than probable that he continued reading John in depth and with understanding. Dame

Helen Gardner tells us that when Eliot was writing 'East Coker' (1940) he used E. Allison Peers's translation of John's works. Eliot's preoccupation with Christian mysticism is evident throughout the corpus of his religious works. *Murder in the Cathedral*, for example, presents the inward journey of the protagonist, as he picks his way among ever more subtle and dangerous temptations towards his goal in 'the night of God.'

In the case of Eliot's *Four Quartets*, one can also perceive a potent force coming from Saint John of the Cross's *Dark Night of the Soul*, a prose work. Both works share a powerful symbol, the dark night of the soul. This common link between them might be perceived as an unavoidable contradiction to Bloom's theory of influence, if one restricts Bloom's ideas to a mere poet-to-poet influence, which this work pretends to challenge and debunk. Since the *Four Quartets* were influenced by an essay, and each quartet is permeated by the *Dark Night of the Soul*,³ a reading of Bloom's argument of a poet being influenced primarily by the person of another poet seems inaccurate and misleading.

What is there in the early Saint John of the Cross's *Dark Night of the Soul* that one can perceive as influential in Eliot's late poetry? To find an answer to this question, a broad understanding is needed of the three basic concepts of Saint John of the Cross's philosophy: Self-denial, contemplation, and devotion.

B. Three Basic Concepts of Saint John of the Cross: Self-denial,

³ Eliot's *Four Quartets* is composed by *Burnt Norton*, *East Coker*, *The Dry Salvages*, and *Little Gidding*. Each poem, in turn, is divided into four different sections. For each poem, section III represents the dark night of the soul, a concept borrowed from Saint John's essay. In the analysis, each poem will be identified by the following initials *BN*, *EC*, *DS*, and *LG*.

Contemplation, and Devotion

Most critics agree with the fact that in Saint John's case, the origins of his philosophy cannot be easily apprehended, for the saint actually avoided writing until late in his life. However, there are three principles that can be outlined and that become fundamental for understanding the saint's ideology: Self-denial, contemplation, and a life of prayer.

According to Lucinio Ruano's introduction to *Obras Completas de San Juan de la Cruz*, the ideas of Saint John of the Cross about God, life, and the relationships between human beings are conclusions of a long history of empirical, subjective observations. In other words, most of the saint's philosophy springs from what he concluded about the experiences that he had in his life and from his own reading of the Bible, not from any structured system of beliefs:

El tema que abordamos guarda cierta semejanza con lo que suele denominarse fuentes de una obra. Evito ese nombre, que indica un género literario con exigencias muy precisas, difíciles de cumplir en el caso de San Juan de la Cruz. Pudiera admitirse en lo que se refiere a la Sagrada Escritura. La identificación de otras fuentes ha tenido muy escasos resultados en la exégesis sanjuanista, por inseguras y atinentes a temas secundarios.

Es preferible hablar de experiencia y recursos auxiliares de la misma.
(qtd. in Ruiz 68)

Hence, experience becomes the saint's most powerful source of knowledge. It is this empiric framing of concepts that shapes the world-view of Saint John of the Cross and supports his writing. His life experiences became the foundations for his theological principles.

Consequently, the principles of this theology are not just elaborated dogmas that were alien to his life, but they actually sprung from his own human experience.

Regarding self-denial, a biographical review helps to understand the origins of this important philosophical concept for the saint. Juan de Yepes (Saint John of the Cross) was born in a small Spanish town called Fontiveros on an unknown day, and in an uncertain month, in 1542. This town is particularly important, for it is located in a rocky and barren land, and such geographical characteristics are central to the development of the saint's world-view. He was the son of Gonzalo de Yepes, who belonged to a wealthy family of silk merchants in Toledo, and Catalina Álvarez, a weaver of poor and humble background. The merchant family disinherited Gonzalo because of his "shameful" marriage to a poor girl. Without any financial security, he became accustomed to hard work, which, in his case, meant the lowly trade of weaving. This underprivileged context is the social condition into which young Saint John was born, deprived of luxury and deeply affected by economic hardships.

One, of course, might think that Saint John aspired to improve his economic position in order to acquire those material goods that were denied to him during his youth. For example, being an exemplar son, how could he endure seeing his mother suffer because of poverty? Is not it logical to think that young Juan would plan to acquire a better economic status that would allow him to indulge his mother (and why not himself)? Nevertheless, those ideas were the last thoughts in Saint John's mind. He actually perceived poverty as a gift from God, as a blessing from Heaven. He did not care for wealth; he enjoyed his lack of material goods. Indeed, he lived his whole life in poverty—that was his godly inheritance. In his opinion, assets had to be spiritual, not material.

In the life of Saint John, poverty was a crucial element of his upbringing, for it planted the seed of one of the most significant concepts for the saint: Austerity. According to him, the soul was to be emptied of all desire in order to be filled by God's presence. Deprivation of earthly

goods was so important for Saint John that, like Saint Francis of Assisi, he enforced this norm as the main teaching of a reformed order of friars that he established along with Saint Theresa of Avila. However, Saint Theresa feared that austerity and penance might frighten university students away so she insisted on a balanced life in which Christian virtues such as charity, detachment, and humility would be privileged more than austerity. In the sixteenth century, austerity was closely associated with sanctity, and John, although he recognized Theresa's claims, leaned toward austerity, which other reforming friars also liked to think of as the path for those who were courageous.

Poverty gave birth to austerity which, in turn, prepared the stage for self-denial, a concept which became one of the cornerstones of Saint John's philosophy. Saint John knew that austerity was a vehicle, not an end in itself. The saint, therefore, treated austerity with a degree of uncertainty later in his writings, pointing out how, along with so many other positive attitudes and religious disciplines, they can end up harming rather than helping spiritual life. For Saint John, self-denial is much more than material deprivation; it is an attitude rooted in love, but love for God, not for oneself. As Federico Ruiz Salvador states in his *Introducción a San Juan de la Cruz*: "*San Juan de la Cruz niega las cosas; se niega también a sí mismo. Renuncia a la misma satisfacción que pudiera seguirse a negar. Lo hace por amor, y le basta que Dios lo guste*" (Ruiz 52). Saint John's self-denial includes rejecting material goods that are not needed (and even those which are), destroying selfishness, and giving up the tacit and paradoxical satisfaction of doing so. It is equivalent to ridding one's soul of all desires and aspirations. The most interesting aspect of this emptiness is that, in contrast to the bitterness that often overcomes a person who lacks what he needs or wants, Saint John's self-denial has a radically different quality: Despite all the suffering, the soul is by no means hardened. In the saint's own words:

“El alma enamorada es un alma suave, mansa, humilde, paciente” (qtd. in Ruiz 51). The explanation for this “soft soul” that never hardens is found in the objective that prompts self-denial: Love. When a mother out of love sacrifices for her child, she does not resent it, unless she loves herself more than she loves her child. That explains why it is easy for the saint to reject economic well-being: He compares everything with the love of God. Material desires become attachments that do not allow his soul literally to fly to God; selfish aspirations prevent God from filling Saint John’s soul. The satisfaction, or the ensuing pride that often accompanies such satisfaction, of following God’s lead is made suspect by Saint John as well, for it becomes the rubbish that slows his pace on the path toward God. For Saint John, self-denial is one of the most important elements of the dark night of the soul. After all, renouncing the world, its material treasures, is fundamental for achieving a spiritual goal, for spiritual goals are demanding. As Ruiz states in regards to Saint John of the Cross:

La capacidad de renuncia es la piedra de toque de un ideal, la medida que indica hasta dónde ha calado. Todo ideal es absorbente y, por consiguiente, conlleva eliminaciones. Si conquista del todo, incorpora o inhibe cualquier otro valor incompatible. Juan, personalidad unitaria y con un ideal que vale la pena, se muestra amputador despiadado de todo brote ajeno... La noche de San Juan de la Cruz no es otra cosa que el ejercicio difícil de la ‘opción’, de escoger el bien mayor, renunciando a otros bienes. (49)

One’s failure to establish a spiritual priority, that is, to make the greatest choice, is a direct consequence of not having the capacity to distinguish between what is actually important and what just seems to be. Renunciation is, then, the only training a soul can undergo in order to establish spiritual priorities.

Poverty, moreover, cleared the way for another key concept to be developed, contemplation. Some believe that the origin of this teaching can be found in the geography of his hometown, Fontiveros. In his book *Un Cántico a lo Divino*, Juan Domínguez Berrueta describes Fontiveros and traces a relationship between the geography and the development of Saint John's concept of the teaching of contemplation:

La meseta de Ávila, con sus peñas grises, su horizonte despejado y sin fin.

Aquella es la alta mar de la llanura. La vista del hombre tiene que levantarse hacia el cielo. El contemplativo vive aquí a sus anchas. Se comprende que el hombre que vive entre montañas sienta como nadie la nostalgia de su país, al alejarse de él. Ve mucha tierra, aún al levantar los ojos a lo alto. El hombre de la costa ve mucho mar, ve el camino infinito hacia otras tierras. Es el explorador, el descubridor de nuevos mundos, el hombre de acción. El contemplativo, el místico, necesita ver mucho cielo, sobre una tierra gris, sembrada de piedras. (13, 14)

Fontiveros, thus, was indeed an appropriate place to start developing a contemplative spirit, and it seems that it was exactly what happened in Saint John's case, for whenever he was in the middle of an inner battle and, whenever he had a decision to make, he always favored contemplation. A. Peers agrees on this point: *“Desde el primer día en que conocí la austera pero luminosa belleza de Castilla, me alegré de que San Juan de la Cruz hubiera nacido allí. Hoy, después de un cuarto de siglo en creciente intimidad con su pensamiento, me parece imposible que hubiera podido nacer en ninguna otra parte”* (qtd. in Ruiz 31). Actually, the view and landscape in Castilla is harsh, and its barrenness makes people say this land has no beauty because it is unproductive and uncomfortable.

If one is concerned with developing a spirit of contemplation, however, barren places can have a significant advantage: A harsh, barren land with little vegetation produces less distraction and more contemplation (Ruiz 33). When Juan de Yepes finished his studies, he received two offers for a secure financial future. One was ordination and the position of chaplain at a hospital. The other came from the Jesuits, who were impressed by his intellectual potential and devotion. However, in 1563, at age 21, John entered the Carmelite Order which had been recently founded in Medina as a novitiate. The Medina Order was new and seemed somewhat limited in terms of possibilities and funds. What did Saint John see in such a religious group that made it his definite choice for a future? The answer lies in the fact that the Carmelite Order was tailored for Saint John's spiritual needs: Carmel's contemplative spirit, and its devotion to Mary, was probably what prompted this unexpected decision. Receiving the name Fray (Brother) John of Saint Matthias, he passed his novitiate year studying the Carmelite Rule and the order's spiritual teachings.

It seems that the time Saint John spent with the Carmelites was the impulse that his contemplative spirit needed. After spending some years studying at the University of Salamanca, and despite having a lot of opportunities there, the saint continued feeling uneasy, for he felt that God had a different calling for him; in fact, he felt a new strong attraction, an attraction toward the purely contemplative life of another order, the Carthusians. Even though Saint John enjoyed his studies of theology and art, he wanted to live the contemplative life that had originally attracted him to ordination. Friar John was ordained priest when he was experiencing this vocational crisis.

Saint John met Saint Theresa de Jesus when he traveled to Medina to sing his first Mass. At that time, the resolute nun was considering the possibility of sharing with Saint John the

Carmelite life according to the new contemplative style that she had developed in Avila. When she heard of John's exceptional qualities, she decided to meet him. She was fifty two years old at the time while he was twenty five. Once she heard about his aspirations toward more solitude and prayer and about his thought of transferring to the Carthusians, she told him that he could find fulfillment without leaving "*Our Lady's Order*," and spoke to him enthusiastically about her plan to adapt this new way of life for friars. Fray John listened and saw a new horizon before him—it was the way out of that vocational crisis that he was experiencing. His only condition to join Theresa was that he would not have long to wait. Theresa was pleased with her young recruit and his unwillingness to delay. Saint John's dream finally became true the following year. Saint John, who had already finished with his studies, traveled with her in August to Valladolid, where Theresa intended to establish her reformed monastic order. As Kurt Reindhardt states it:

Despite the fact that after his profession John of Saint Mathias upon his request had been given permission to live according to the primitive rule of the Carmel, it now appeared that even so the cloistered monastic life did not fully satisfy his longing for solitude, austerity, and heroic discipline. At any rate, he had intimated to his superiors that it was his intention to become a Carthusian and that he hoped to be received into the Carthusian settlement of Paular in Segovia. Saint Theresa, however, succeeded in persuading him to defer a final decision in this matter. (22)

Saint John of the Cross, therefore, never became a Carthusian, for all his longings were satisfied in the little farmhouse in Duruelo that Saint Theresa had given him to establish his first monastery, an old shack in a desolate place in which the weather conditions were severe. There, the Carmelite Reform that Saint Theresa wanted to create was started, with Saint John as one of its most significant supporters. Since the community began to grow, the monastery had to be

moved to another area, and it ended up in Pastrana. In 1571, Saint John founded a Carmelite College at Alcala, and he became the first rector. When Saint Theresa was made prioress of the convent of the Incarnation in Avila, she asked Saint John to help her.

However, the opposition to the Theresian Carmelite Reform became strong and manifested itself in the group called Carmelites of the Mitigated Observance. Some of its members managed to subdue the Carmelite Reform and dealt with its followers with force. Consequently, Saint John was seized in the night and taken to Toledo as a prisoner. There, he endured mistreatment and hardship, both of which added a new vitality to his beliefs. As a matter of fact, Kurt Reindhardt believes that it is because of all his suffering as a prisoner that he started to formulate the elements that later on would be used to compose “Noche Oscura”:

The way to the heavenly light leads through the fearful ‘passive nights of the spirit’.

The way of the Cross is the way of Life. But beyond this, Saint John learned at Toledo the lesson of ‘the darkest night’: he knew already that no human power could ever separate him from his Creator and Redeemer. But who can measure or comprehend the suffering of the soul that feels itself abandoned by God himself? Who can fathom the forsakenness that overcame even the dying God-Man in the darkest hour of his agony? (36)

Imprisonment, far from affecting negatively his beliefs, made them stronger. This reversed outcome indicates that Saint John’s faith was solid, for its foundations were the ideals of a life united to God. Consequently, imprisonment was the appropriate circumstance that the saint needed to exercise his faith.

Nevertheless, self-denial and contemplation were only two of the founding pillars upon which the saint’s thought rests. The last cornerstone, devotion manifested in a life of continuous

prayer, is a result of the previous two religious practices. Saint John knew well that the foundation, or underlying principles of his philosophy, was not an end in itself; consequently, he indicated that they were mere paths to reach a goal: Unity with God. It should be noted that here is a significant distinction between Saint John and those who make austerity their goal, or those Greek philosophers that favored solitude and contemplation over meditation. Saint John's contemplation opens the path for communication with God, not with oneself. According to him, contemplation should make a person feel the need to get closer to God and, hence, begin a life of prayer. This norm of devotion is applied to his life and can be seen in his longing to join the Carthusians and his motivations for becoming a Carmelite: *“Algo concreto busca cuando va al Carmen contra las circunstancias. Los motivos más discernibles son dos: Ansias de soledad y vida contemplativa, devoción a la Santísima Virgen. Los lleva en el ama desde su niñez”* (Ruiz 19). While self-denial and contemplation are the first rungs on a ladder for Saint John, devotion is the most important step because it is the decisive step to draw closer to God. Saint John of the Cross had a reputation for being a devout man of prayers. It is this fame that reached Santa Theresa de Ávila's ears.⁴ Devotion was something alive for him, and he believed that routine was deadly. He actually censored those deviations from piety that he saw during his life. Ruiz gives the following summary of those vices:

a) *‘He visto muchas almas bien intencionadas y generosas sufrir y aun malograrse por*

⁴ When Saint John was the Superior in the monastery, he used to go down to bless the food. During days of extreme poverty, he would go down to pray a thankful prayer even when there was nothing to eat, for he believed that “Providence is always good, and there is plenty to be thankful for.” Before eating, the saint would kiss the bread in the likeness of a beggar kissing what has been given to him. There is, nevertheless, an important difference: Pragmatism. Saint John would change any rite when it became an empty act or mere routine. For example, when the action of kissing the bread became routine, instead of perpetuating it as a rite, as most religious figures would have done, Saint John would replace the kiss with an initial bite.

utilizar métodos equivocados'

b) *ha conocido directores de espíritu incompetentes y tenaces en su punto de vista:*

'Muchos

maestros espirituales hacen mucho mal a muchas almas'

c) *abunda la credulidad y el iluminismo en materia de fe y revelaciones particulares*

d) *ha encontrado una muchedumbre de almas piadosas atadas a ceremonias, estatuas, capillas, objetos de devoción, bienes terrenos; peregrinaciones de colorido mundano.*

(98)

For Saint John devotion allows a person to interact with God, but devotion goes beyond ceremonies, symbols, holy places, or rites. Saint John actually considers getting rid of rituals in order to empty one's soul to receive the grace of God. Devotion is not an external act, for external acts are the fruit of hypocrisy; he knows that acting piously is not being pious. On the contrary, the one who is pious necessarily acts according to his state of soul. That is, sanctity produces devotion, but devotion in itself is just a chain that does not allow a person to become the so-called "likeness" of a contrite spirit. A life of prayer would result from the inner desire to be near the object of devotion, God. Hence, everything that makes a person feel this need is welcomed by Saint John of the Cross. This explains why self-denial (along with material and spiritual deprivation) and contemplation are two components that cannot be separated from devotion: When one lacks, according to Saint John, one searches.

This is the beginning of the powerful triadic concept that the saint used as the foundation for his philosophy. How did these three concepts work in Saint John of the Cross? It has been said that a life full of necessities shaped the saint's character and helped him develop his ideas about self-denial, contemplation, and a life of prayer or devotion. This three-fold foundation is

what later on becomes the core for the most powerful symbol that the saint created: The dark night of the soul.

C. Saint John's Dark Night of the Soul

Theories of interpretation, such as semiotics, help to analyze the concept of the dark night of the soul. It is particularly significant now to take into account what Roland Barthes said regarding the formation of a sign. In "The Imagination of the Sign," Barthes states that the sign springs from the interior relationship of signifier with the signified. This relationship, however, is not unilateral, for the signifier is virtually related to a reservoir of signs and also has a direct, actual relationship with discourse, that is, to the continuous flow of preceding and succeeding signs. In other words, signs cannot be isolated, instead they belong to an on-going process of the creation of meaning. Symbols, as more elaborate signs, are created within the frame of the significance of a sign. For example, considering that "cross" is the sign and part of the signifier, its interior relationship to "Christianity" makes it a symbol, which allows "cross" to stand as the signified. This is useful when trying to disclose the powerful image of "night." Night can trigger many associations in the reservoir of signs, both positive and negative, which include, among others, the stars, the moon, solitude, loneliness, fear, trouble, and anguish. If one looks for the interior relationship of the sign "night," one must look for the signified; one has to get rid of those associations that are not part of the signified for night to become a symbol. Nevertheless, "night," as a symbol, can adopt both a positive or negative significance, which means that taking just this kind of symbolic analysis for Saint John's Night will not take us very far.

Barthes also mentions another mechanism involved in the production of symbols, one that is two-fold and that he calls "exterior relationship." On the first level of exterior relationship, the

paradigmatic, he argues that, for a sign to become a symbol, the sign must be distinguished from other signs in the reservoir. For example, there is no possible way in which the color red stands as a symbol of danger unless red can be separated—and easily identified—from other colors. Hence, Saint John's "Noche" must be distinguished from other "nights" in order to become a functional symbol. Here the question is inevitable: How can one know what kind of associations are linked to the sign, if there are plenty of possibilities, many of which can be radically opposed? To provide an answer, it is essential to take a look at the other level of exterior relationship that Barthes discusses: The syntagmatic significance. As indicated before, when analyzing the symbol "sad piano" one can imagine the broad significance triggered by "piano": Music, concert, pianist, piano bar, melody, happiness, sadness, nostalgia, theater, and so on. However, Barthes, posits that those associations are discriminated by the syntagmatic relationship between the word "piano" and those words that can be found before and after it. The word "sad," when related to "piano," might leave out all those associations involving bright, positive emotions. The list of signs, thus, is reduced to sadness and nostalgia in the first place, with a possibility of including music, concert, pianist, bar, melody, and theater (as long as they are interpreted with a degree of sadness.)

Therefore, when one uses Barthes to analyze "the dark night of the soul," it is easily perceivable that Saint John's "night" is in the first place a negative stage. First, "dark" modifies "night," leading to absolute absence of light. Night, in itself, brings about an element of light deprivation, but when preceded by dark, that element is given a categorical strength: All associations related to night involving light must disappear, such as the stars and moon. Second, the word "the" modifies the compound "dark night," making it a distinctive, significant sign that stands out. It is not any dark night, but it is "the dark night," which adds a clear-cut element of

danger to the symbol. Finally, the prepositional phrase “of the soul” finishes the modification of the original “night” that was presented. Hence, Saint John is talking about a very dangerous, and why not, negative stage of the inner self, the one dark night that is internal and, consequently, most overwhelming and perhaps devastating for the spirit since all those associations are triggered by the syntagmatic relationship of the different signs making up the symbol.

This “dark night of the soul” is a very powerful, moving symbol that encompasses the three principles that make up Saint John’s world view and philosophy. Nevertheless, a semiotic analysis, despite being helpful to understand the symbol’s powerful negative component, does not allow one to fully grasp its significance, for it is also a religious symbol, and Saint John’s explanations in his book *Dark Night of the Soul* become the tools that are needed to understand it completely.

The dark night of the soul is, to start with, a symbol that involves self-denial, contemplation, and devotion. Moreover, those basic concepts play an active role within it. As a matter of fact, the conceptual triad can be seen most actively working in Saint John’s writings in *Dark Night of the Soul*. Consequently, it is important to analyze how that triad functions as part of this symbol. First, one should consider the role that self-denial plays in the total meaning of the dark night of the soul. To say that the symbol can be equated to austerity is accurate, at least to a certain extent. This metaphorical night is strongly linked to austerity because of its effects: Night implies deprivation of light; hence, Saint John of the Cross appropriates this metaphor to transmit, in his symbol, how a person must be deprived of everything. However, to understand this idea, one has to take a look at the implications of the concept of lacking light. When a person is in total darkness, the objects surrounding him/her become significant only when they can be taken as aids. Whether they are simple or elaborate, luxurious, valuable or plain and

cheap is unimportant. Colors also lose their subjective value, for a person in darkness is unable to appreciate them, and if the person has been accustomed to light, it is the first need that he experiences. Objects of all sorts, therefore, are relegated to a lesser level due to the person's basic need for light. Moreover, individual skills and abilities suffer the same devaluation that objects undergo: They are useful only in terms of helping the person make his way through darkness. One can assert, hence, that deprivation of light brings about a nullification of the importance that human beings, when in light, place on objects and individual abilities and that results in all the preferences of a person. Light deprivation reduces all those likes and dislikes to one basic need that grows stronger progressively until it becomes a craving for light. Yet, the most relevant question one should ask is what is the meaning of light? Light has always been linked to happiness, life, and, in general terms, to God. Thus, the dark night of the soul is a period in which the soul is deprived of everything that it has affection for, even of God. Just as darkness produces a longing for light, the dark night of the soul creates a yearning for God since all other things are erased and their value nullified. Saint John puts it this way: *“De manera que el alma que hubiera negado y despedido de sí el gusto de todas las cosas, mortificando su apetito en ellas, podremos decir que está como de noche a oscuras, lo cual no es otra cosa sino un vacío de ella de todas las cosas”* (Subida 96).

How does devotion work in the significance of the dark night? If austerity is the bullet that searches for a target, devotion is the trigger: The reason that prompts a person to deny himself everything has to be devotion. One should lose the desire for all things in order to enjoy the fullness of God and be one with him: *“Pero de todos los demás apetitos voluntarios... todos se han de vaciar y de todos ha el alma de carecer para venir a esta total unión, por mínimos que sean”* (Subida 117). If there are no earthly appetites, there is no obstacle for the will of God:

Both His will and the individual's merge. However, in order to forget about one's desires, the individual has to surrender his/her will to God, for Saint John believes that the soul rejoices in everything that is convenient for it, and the only way to submit one's own will is through devotion: Only a very strong love for God can make a person want to abandon what s/he likes the most. Saint John explains in full detail how devotion makes a person abandon three kinds of "bienes" or goods in *The Ascent to Mount Carmel*: First, devotion makes the person renounce all temporary goods, such as wealth, possessions, and family. According to him, those goods are not to be squandered, but instead they should be used to serve God. He points out the fact that material prosperity presupposes a terrible spiritual risk: The person that abounds in those kinds of assets might easily forget God, the source of all of them: "*Por tanto, aunque todas las cosas sucedan prósperamente, antes se debe recelar que gozarse, pues en aquello crece la ocasión y el peligro de olvidar a Dios y ofenderle*" (*Subida* 264). Secondly, devotion takes abandonment of goods to a higher level: One should avoid being attached to natural goods like beauty and grace. He argues that if an individual avoids being attracted to beauty, for instance, s/he will be able to love everyone in the same manner, which facilitates self-denial: The person who loves everyone else in the same way that s/he loves himself or herself loses the selfish perception of being more valuable than the rest of the people. Finally, devotion makes a person forget about sensual goods. Saint John includes in this category everything that pleases the senses and the imagination. Consequently, a great deal of devotion is needed for a person to be able to reach such a level of austerity.

Saint John was aware that if people concentrated too intensely on practicing austerity, they would put aside its cause (devotion), and more devastatingly, its pragmatic end, which is the third component of the conceptual triad that supports the saint's philosophy and his theory of the

dark night: Contemplation. The target of austerity is, actually, contemplation. Taking into consideration that a person, when in the dark, cannot see, his/her need for light becomes a powerful yearning: This is contemplation according to Saint John. In the dark night of the soul, one has to remember, the person is deprived of everything, even of the apparent manifestation of the presence of God. Consequently, an unbearable sense of loss grows within the individual, making him/her look for the most basic element to satisfy this spiritual thirst, that is, God himself: *“Hay otro provecho muy grande y principal en desasir el gozo de las criaturas, que es dejar el corazón libre para Dios”* (Subida 271). When a person cannot see anything, according to him, s/he looks for God, which is contemplation put at work. Hence, the conceptual triad works in the making of the dark night in this way: Devotion makes a person grow fond of austerity and, thus, deny himself everything that can be attractive, for those desires turn into a disturbing distraction that prevents a person from being able to contemplate God. Nevertheless, when a person is free from all practical desires, s/he is able to set his/her sight on higher realms, looking for the only need that is allowed to remain within the soul, which is the presence of God.

Chapter Three: The Cross and the Wheel

A. The Dark Night of the Soul and Eastern Religions in Eliot's *Four Quartets*

Saint John of the Cross' concept of the dark night is visible in the *Four Quartets*.

However, Saint John of the Cross is not the only non-poetical influence for Eliot. Both Hinduism and Buddhism exerted over early Christianity a powerful influence and the presence of ideas derived from such religious systems is also present in Eliot's writing, implicitly in some cases, explicitly in others. As a matter of fact, Eliot had a strong connection to the East, as his participation in gatherings involving Eastern philosophies shows.⁵ Furthermore, the Christian dark night of the soul, as manifested in Saint John's writings, presents several characteristics that have to be taken into account, for they represent the link between Christianity and both Hinduism and Buddhism as religious systems. Among such traits one has to mention three elements: Detachment of all earthly matters and goods, detachment of the self, and awareness of the deceit of the world.

A strong, conscious rejection of material goods is found among the main teachings of early Christianity: It gave birth to asceticism and stands as one of the practices that the first Christian monks cultivated as a virtue. It was also incorporated into the priesthood as one of the vows and no Christian would argue that, in order to be closer to God, one has to get rid of greed. Along with this willful desire to avoid wealth comes disaffection with earthly matters, that is, any

⁵ T.S. Eliot participated in the meetings of a group called "The Buddhist Society" while he was studying at Oxford in 1915. There, he met people who studied Buddhism and Hinduism, such as Henry Furst, and their influence can be seen in Eliot's poetry. It was due to the mutual interest both Furst and Eliot had regarding the influential figure of the Japanese scholar Okakura Kakuzo, Curator of the Department of Chinese and Japanese Arts at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, that they became acquainted. Kakuzo had taken Eliot to meet Matisse in 1910, as Eliot mentioned in a letter. (Eliot 93)

Christian who wants to follow a pious life has to avoid involvement with the secular world, for activities of that sort demand effort and one's concentration, which should be used to get closer to God, shifts to money. Consequently, the early monks and hermits decided to separate themselves from the world in order to reach their ideal.

Moreover, Jesus himself propagated the idea of rejection of material goods with his teachings, for he stated: "Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? Or, What shall we drink? Or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? (For after these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father knoweth that you have need of all these things. But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you" (Mat. 6. 32,33). Thus, the concept of devotion involved rejection of everything that could be perceived as earthly: Food, clothes, property, and wealth. Later on, Paul reaffirmed this idea in his second letter to Timothy: "Thou therefore endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this life; that he may please him who hath chosen him to be a soldier" (2 Tim. 6. 32). In other words, devotion includes the obligation of suffering, but this suffering is a product of detaching oneself from all that might be considered basic for existing in this world. After all, Christians were supposed to believe that their existence on this earth was transitory, for their lives would continue in Heaven. Nevertheless, in order to get there, they had to be devoted to God, which meant placing Him above all other priorities in life. Furthermore, one can also understand by "the affairs of this life" the institutions and practices that are social constructs, such as matrimony, involvement in politics, and other attachments that would imply a great investment of time that should be dedicated entirely to God. An ideal Christian, thus, should avoid these in order to get closer to God, as Paul stated, when talking about the issue of matrimony in his first letter to the Corinthians:

But I would have you without carefulness. He that is unmarried careth for the things that belong to the Lord, how he may please the Lord; but he that is married careth for the things that are of the world, how he may please his wife. There is difference also between a wife and a virgin. The unmarried woman careth for the things of the Lord, that she may be holy both in body and spirit: But she that is married careth for the things of the world, how she may please her husband. And this I speak for your own profit; not that I may cast a snare upon you, but for that which is comely, and that ye may attend upon the Lord without distraction. (7.

32-35)

These earthly distractions mentioned by Saint Paul engulf the mind and absorb all the time, attention, and interest that a faithful Christian should direct to God only. A person who is concerned in pleasing another person more than pleasing God is not fit for a complete union with the godhead.

The ideal Christian must not only avoid involvement with earthly matters and look upon goods disdainfully, but he must also abandon another significant element: His own self. The only effective method for opening oneself totally to the godhead is letting go of one's own personality so that the very nature of the godhead can overflow the person. If the subject is no longer the subject, then he becomes an extension of the godhead: It is the godhead acting upon the life of an individual. This seems to be the idea at work when Paul says that his actions are no longer performed by his will, but by God's through Christ: "I am crucified with Christ: Nevertheless I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me" (Gal. 2. 20). Losing oneself in the godhead is the key for living a Christian life. One has to obey Jesus's lead: "If a man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own

life also, he cannot be my disciple” (Luke 14. 26). In Christian terms, merging one’s will with the godhead is not equivalent to losing, but instead it is winning the most desired state of being; it is being one with God: “And when he called the people unto him, with his disciples also, he said unto them, Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me” (Mark 8. 34).

In Christian terms, denying oneself implies accepting all the plenitude of the will of God; consequently, the life of the Christian is guided by God through the Holy Ghost. When the Holy Ghost guides a person, God acknowledges him/her as His own son or daughter: “For as many are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God” (Rom. 8. 14). However, the implications of being guided by the Holy Spirit are, if one could use these words, devastating to the person’s self, for the person has to reject everything that might prevent him or her from following the Spirit and every step taken has to be pondered taking into account God’s will. Hence, no longer are one’s decisions one’s own, but they have to be controlled by God to the extent of merging one’s will with God’s will so that the mind of God governs the person: “For who hath known the mind of the Lord, that he may instruct him? But we have the mind of Christ” (1 Cor. 2.16).

The last element that results from having lost one’s personality in God is the awareness that the world and one’s life are just a mere shadow, that there exists an ultimate reality that is concealed by material appearances. This real kingdom can be accessed only when everything that is material dissolves. Jesus spoke about this when he encouraged his followers to deny themselves so that they could be able to attain the kingdom of God:

For whosoever will save his life shall lose it, but whosoever shall lose his life for my sake and the gospel’s, the same shall save it...Whosoever therefore shall be ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation;

of him also shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he cometh in the glory of

his Father with the holy angels. (Mark 8. 35, 38)

Jesus even spoke about death as something desirable and productive, for it would release the true potential of the person when s/he became part of the reality beyond the senses: “Verily, verily, I say unto you, except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: But if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit. He that loveth his life shall lose it; and he that hateth his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal” (John 12. 24, 25). With words like “they are not from this world” and “I am not from this world,” Jesus revealed that the world is not the goal of a true Christian, for there is something of more importance than this life on Earth. Thus, when a disciple of Christ longs for secular goods, s/he is being deceived by the shining charm of something that is temporary, unstable, and unreal. The world and everything inside it is just a façade; the true Christian must avoid being deceived by those illusions in the same way in which Christ rejected the temptation offered by Satan:

Again, the devil taketh up into an exceeding high mountain, and sheweth him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them; and said unto him, All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me. Then said Jesus unto him, get thee hence, Satan: For it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve. Then the devil leaveth him, and, behold, angels came and ministered unto him.

(Mat. 4. 8-10)

For Christians, Jesus is the model to imitate; consequently, looking upon earthly matters disdainfully is not only desirable but encouraged constantly in the *New Testament*, for all temptations are mirages that lead the soul away from God.

If a Christian fails to place his/her eyes only on God, s/he then falls into the trap of the illusory, losing the opportunity of attaining the real, that is, God. Hence, Jesus spoke with rejection about this kind of disciple: “And Jesus said unto him, No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God” (Luke 9. 62). The Christian is placed in this dichotomy: S/he has to live on earth doing the will of God, but knowing that the world and everything that it offers are illusory goals that make him/her miss the real target, the kingdom of God.

Saint John of the Cross presented all of these teachings in his writings. As a matter of fact, it is from these teachings that he formed the first element of the dark night of the soul: Austerity, which encompasses negation of earthly matters and the self, and losing one’s individuality in order to be able to enter the ultimate reality: To be absorbed by God. However, achieving such a goal is not easy, for the Christian has to take the path of emptiness. As Saint John himself put it: *“Qué aprovecha y que vale delante de Dios lo que no es amor de Dios? El cual no es perfecto si no es fuerte y discreto en purgar el gozo de todas las cosas, poniéndole sólo en hacer la voluntad de Dios”* (Subida 3.30). In other words, this perfect love will make all other goals in life fall away until the only one that remains is God. After all, negation is the spine of Saint John’s system of beliefs which, according to Federico Ruiz, makes no sense without it: *“La negación es la columna del sistema sanjuanista. Ocupa un lugar irremplazable y contribuye eficazmente a la armonía sanjuanista”* (414). This emptiness, which characterizes Saint John’s writings, can be perceived in two ways: Renunciation and nakedness. Saint John’s nothingness, nevertheless, is not an imponderable enigma that sends into an absurd vacuum the whole existence of an individual. One can visualize it rather as purification, the appropriate means for removing everything that is unnecessary and is an obstacle to achieve wholeness with God. The

process towards purity is based upon love and, without purity, merging one's will into God's is impossible. Thus, in Saint John's *Dark Night of the Soul*, both rejection and union become an indivisible compound of antithesis: To join together, one has to split up; once one is separated, it is possible to be gathered together again.

Saint John's principles of the dark night are also found in *Subida al Monte Carmelo* where he explicitly mentions one of the biblical texts mentioned, which affirms, according to Ruiz, Saint John's strong attachment to one of the roots of Christianity: The Gospels. In *Subida al Monte Carmelo*, the saint mentions the narrow path that leads to God and becomes the path of nothingness:

instruyéndonos e induciéndonos nuestro Señor en este camino, dijo por San Marcos, capítulo 8, aquella tan admirable doctrina, no sé si diga tanto menos ejercitada de los espirituales cuanto más les es necesaria; la cual, por serlo tanto y tan a nuestro propósito, la referiré aquí toda, y declararé según el germano y espiritual sentido de ella. Dice, pues, así...: Si alguno quiere seguir mi camino, niéguese a si mismo, y tome su cruz, y sígame. Porque el que quisiere salvar su alma, perderla ha; pero el que por mi la perdiere, ganarla ha. (2.7)

However, since such detachment has a purpose, Saint John proceeds to explain why it is a must for the Christian to abandon everything that might take away the attention that s/he has to direct towards God in the second book of *Noche Oscura del Espíritu*. This primary objective is to employ all of one's resources in loving God with plenitude in order to say no to the deception of the world:

Tiene Dios tan destetados los gustos y tan recogidos, que no pueden gustar de cosa que ellos quieran. Todo lo cual hace Dios a fin de que, apartándolos y

recogiéndolos todos para sí, tenga el alma más fortaleza y habilidad para recibir esta fuerte unión con Dios...Que por eso, para poder David recibir la fortaleza del amor de esta unión de Dios, decía a Dios: Mi fortaleza guardaré para ti...Según esto, en alguna manera se podría considerar cuánta y cuán fuerte podrá ser esta inflamación de amor en el espíritu, donde Dios tiene recogidas todas las fuerzas, potencias y apetitos del alma, así espirituales como sensitivas, para que toda esta armonía emplee sus fuerzas y virtud en este amor; y así, venga a cumplir de veras con el primer precepto, que, no desechando nada del hombre ni excluyendo cosa suya de este amor, dice: Amarás a tu Dios de todo tu corazón, y de toda tu mente, y de toda tu alma, y de todas tus fuerzas. (11.4)

Saint John of the Cross stresses the importance of submitting one's will to the will of God. When this happens, harmony is achieved and the human soul can rest in love: Nothing will struggle against the love given to God anymore within the person.

B. Buddhism and Hinduism in the Dark Night of the Soul

The basic principles of the Christian dark night of the soul have been borrowed from Buddhism and Hinduism. Eliot mentions these religions in his *Four Quartets*. Furthermore, there are many points of intersection between Christian beliefs and the ones found in Hinduism and Buddhism. In other words, the similarities between the controlling ideas of the Christian dark night and the principles of the religions mentioned above will help to enrich one's understanding of the *Four Quartets*.

Both Buddhism and Hinduism are directed by a series of principles that might seem strange to a Christian. These main beliefs, however, are also found in Christianity, and they permeate the basic thought of Christians. Suffering and impermanence, the wheel of birth, the *maya* and craving, and the still point are the principles that overlap in the three systems of faith to a certain extent. In a way, those principles constitute the section in which the three religions converge and, hence, they are significant for understanding Eliot's *Four Quartets*.

1. Suffering and Impermanence

Hinduism and Buddhism agree that the only permanent element of existence is suffering; everything else is transitory. In the words of P. S. Sri, "The fundamental perceptions of Vedanta as well of Buddhism are those of impermanence (*anithya*) of ephemerality of all phenomena and of the universality of suffering (*dukkha*). These insights are, of course, universal" (17). This impermanence is applied both to subject and object, which results in a complete dissolution of reality, which, in turn, leaves the person in a state of suffering: "Impermanence, when fully grasped, is applicable to the perceiver as well as to the objects perceived; the seer and the seen are both ephemeral, so that individuality or ego is best an illusion. Suffering, when fully understood, is found to be inseparable from existence in the world of phenomena" (17). This perception is rooted in the everyday experience of the world of phenomena, where all the elements include suffering: Death and birth, growth and decay, hope and despair, for instance.

In Christianity, the word suffering echoes throughout both the Old and the New Testament. For instance, the book of *Job* depicts suffering in all its pre-eminence, and it is also presented as a component of the life of the wise in *Ecclesiastes*: The Preacher, as the writer of the *Ecclesiastes* calls himself, comments on the dull existence of the wise. He states that "vanity

of vanities, all is vanity” and “And I gave my heart to know wisdom, and to know madness and folly: I perceived that this is also vexation of spirit. For in much wisdom is much grief: And he that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow” (Ecc 1. 2, 17, 18). The Preacher is certainly aware that, after a long pursuit, the goal seems dull and empty, and that the effort seems futile. Moreover, he agrees with the idea that everything is impermanent.

Whereas these examples illustrate the presence of suffering in Christianity, they, nevertheless, do not connect the principles of the dark night of the soul to the two Eastern religions, for Saint John of the Cross based his dark night almost entirely on ideas that he took from the interpretation of the Gospels. Suffering is found in the Gospels and can be seen at work in Saint John’s principles of the dark night. For instance, it has been mentioned that one of the pillars of the dark night is detachment from earthly matters. The significance attributed to secular disinterestedness is taken from the constant message of Christ and his disciples urging the followers to renounce the “things of this world,” for they have no lasting value for the human soul. It is this idea that states that “heaven and earth will pass” in which the connection is found: For the Christian, everything is ephemeral as well. Furthermore, in the Christian vision, the transitoriness of life is also linked to suffering: The Christian is living in the world but s/he does not belong to this world, for s/he is a citizen of Heaven. Hence, s/he longs for his real home as long as s/he walks through life as a pilgrim. This longing for the real demonstrates the awareness of a condition of alienation mentioned by Jesus, a condition that provokes suffering for every single Christian: “If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you. If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: But because you are not from the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, the world hateth you” (John 15. 18,19). Consequently, suffering

becomes the everyday experience for the Christian that has to struggle against a world that actively attacks him or her due to hatred.

2. The Wheel of Birth

Humanity is bound to the world of time and circumstance. This never-ending change that occurs in the world leaves the individual in a position of suffering, for as long as the person is within the wheel of change, s/he will experience the constant recurrence of suffering in his or her existence. According to Buddha:

The Wheel of Existence is without known beginning...

The Wheel of Existence is empty with a twelvefold emptiness...

Respecting the Wheel of Existence is to be understood that the two factors ignorance and desire are its roots.

Ignorance, desire and attachment form the round of the corruptions...

And it is through these three that this Wheel of Existence is

Said to have three rounds...it is incessant...it revolves. (qtd. in Sri 35)

When a person binds himself or herself to this world of change, s/he is trapped by fate. In other words, if one embraces the wheel, one has to spin on it forever, revolving and passing from a state of happiness that is illusory to another of sorrow, continuously. This symbolism is strongly associated with reincarnation in Eastern religions, for the eternal recurrence of existence has no beginning or end and, thus, the person is forced to endure this unceasing process of birth and death.

How is it possible to relate the wheel of existence that is so familiar for Eastern religions to Christianity, a system of faith that explicitly states that "And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment" (Heb. 9. 27) and, in doing so, closes the door to reincarnation?

Yet the symbolism of the wheel of existence is not absolutely alien to Christianity, for it is present in the first chapter of *Ecclesiastes*: “The thing that hath been, it is that which shall be; and that which is done is that which shall be done: And there is no new thing under the sun” (9). Moreover, W.R. Inge argues that the early Christian era was permeated with the realization that the chief aim of mankind should be “to escape from the ‘weary wheel’ of earthly existence and to find rest in the bosom of the eternal” (qtd. in Sri 36). In addition, the symbolism of the Wheel is also found in the New Testament: The phrase in the third chapter and verse six of *James* “setteth on fire the course of nature” is a free translation of the Greek word meaning wheel, for the same word that is translated as “course” is translated as “wheel” in the Spanish version: “*E inflama la rueda de la creación.*”

In the dark night of the soul there is, however, a rather distinct wheel that does not involve reincarnation. The dark night in itself is a wheel of purification that the soul must endure as long as the soul stays within the body in the world. Consequently, the saint talks about “the dark night of the senses,” which is a process that the person seeking God has to undergo to overcome certain obstacles, and later Saint John mentions the dark night of the spirit, which is another purification process that the soul has to undergo several times for the obstacles that the soul overcame emerge constantly. Thus, the soul lives in pain, suffering, for the vices it thought were gone, after a long and painful process of deprivation, reappear. Hence, it is possible to perceive how the symbol of the wheel of existence with all its suffering is present in the Christian dark night of the soul.

3. The *Maya* and Craving

According to Buddhism and Hinduism, the root of the never-ending suffering that human beings experience in the world of constant flux is craving. The Japanese, for example, observe at the end of the year a Buddhist custom in which they are supposed to get rid of twelve desires in order to be happy the following year. In Hinduism, the words of Krishna reveal the same idea: “All is clouded by desire; as the fire by smoke, as a mirror by dust, as an unborn baby by its covering. / Wisdom is clouded by desire, the ever-present enemy of the wise, / desire in its innumerable forms, which like a fire cannot find satisfaction” (qtd. in Sri 60). The Buddha talks about thirst for sensual pleasures, for existence and becoming, or even for the termination of life. Such a thirst for life, for the transient objects that the world offers, was also strongly discouraged by Christ and his disciples in the Gospels. Craving, and its result, suffering, is another connecting point between the two Eastern religions and Christianity. When one is enslaved by the flux of desires, without being able to realize that they produce endless affliction, one is then blindly trapped in the revolutions of the wheel of existence; it is the ignorance mentioned by the Buddha.

However, not to look for a way out of this bondage implies that the individual is lost in the mist of the *maya*. *Maya* is the world of appearances, the illusion that the world is real, which hence justifies the craving. P. S. Sri explains it this way:

Our perception of an independent material world of objects, persons, and processes is grounded in a pervasive error. We take the unreal for the real and the real for unreal. This is borne out by the famous analogy of the snake and the rope. We often *mis*-take a coil of rope for a snake in the dark; but, on closer examination, we discover it to be only a coil of rope. Our everyday world of appearances may be likened to a snake, and it seems very real to us; we are in the darkness of ignorance caught in the web of illusion. When we are illumined,

we experience the truth; the snake-appearance vanishes into the underlying reality of the rope. This does not mean that the world of appearances is non-existent; the world, according to Sankara, 'is and is not.' (69)

Ignorance becomes the veil that conceals the very nature of truth; it is, as in a trick by a magician, the key for creating what people believe to be there. The illusory creation, as long as people believe it, exists, even though what we perceive, according to our senses, is quite different from what is real.

Human beings, thus, are confronted by a paradox: The world in which they live is and is not. In a state of ignorance, our perception is veiled, and we believe that we are experiencing the real world, whereas we are actually living in an illusion. Consequently, if a person takes the illusory world for real, and then s/he wants something from this deceitful world, s/he is binding himself or herself to suffering, or in the words of the preacher in *Ecclesiastes*, s/he is trying to catch the wind. Another analogy that explains this is that of the thirsty traveler who, in the desert, runs to what seems to be a not-too-distant oasis, which ends up being just a mirage that always remains at the same distance, no matter how much the person runs towards it.

In Christian terms, craving is what Saint John of the Cross defines as the *apetitos* that must be purged in the dark night of the soul, whereas *maya* is the deception of the world. For Saint John, all appetites go against God, for they prevent the person from being able to get closer to Him and chain the individual to a perennial state of suffering. Appetites represent a waste of energy that should be devoted to God. On the other hand, *Maya* is the beginning of the explanation that the saint provides as his justification for the dark night of the soul: It is worthless to gain the world of illusion, for it means to lose one's soul in the darkness of the

apparent. Hence, it is the duty of the Christian to penetrate the illusion, to seek what is real.

Reality is God.

4. The Still Point

The only hope for the person is to free himself from *maya*, which is what chains him to the wheel of existence. This is no easy task, however, for everything is *maya*: It is timeless, for time only occurs within it; unthinkable, for all thought is subject to it and hence, conditioned by it; indescribable, for all concepts and even language result from it. Thus, in order to escape *maya*, the person has to go beyond it. According to Eastern religions, underlying this world of division and appearances there is an indivisible, unchanging reality (called *Brahman* in Hinduism). Once the person experiences *Brahman*, *maya* vanishes like a mirage. The person, in experiencing it, ceases to be an individual—for *Brahman* has no divisions. Consequently, the ego is but illusion, for it results from the ignorance resulting from *maya*. When this enlightenment comes, *maya* is destroyed (everything that is perceived as separate) in the light of purity and wholeness that is *Brahman* and the state of *Nirvana* is achieved. *Nirvana* is nothing but freedom from the wheel of existence. In other words, it is going back to *Brahman*.

Eliot's symbolism of the "still point" is derived from the idea of the wheel of birth that revolves constantly. In the turning world of the wheel, that is movement, division, suffering, and noise, there is a quiet, unmoving, indivisible point in the center. No one who is caught up in the movement of the wheel is ever capable of getting to the still point, for the never-ceasing revolutions prevent him from distinguishing the unmoving center. That is, *maya* hides the still point, the *Brahman*, which explains why a person who lives in the illusion cannot see the reality.

In Eastern religions, *Nirvana* is only achieved after the individual has gained the wisdom that is needed in order to transcend *maya*. Most of the time, the illusion is so strong that it becomes impossible to break during a lifetime; hence, reincarnation becomes the answer for the

question of how an individual gains such wisdom: Once the person has lived several times, the repetitive experience can make the person become aware of the deception of the world and, thus, s/he starts discovering an existence depending upon an illusion. After several lives of suffering, the individual (who might not remember a previous life, but such a memory is irrelevant anyway) wonders why s/he is bound to sorrow and sees the world as a place of woe. This discovery of the wheel of birth enables him or her to renounce aspirations, reject the craving, which prepares the stage for the ultimate enlightenment to come: The state of *nirvana* and the awareness of *Brahman*.

Whether an individual is able to experience *Brahman* or not is a rather pertinent question. Even though some currents of thought claim that this experience is actually out of reach for all individuals, the eighth-century philosopher Sankara,⁶ maintains that it can be concretely experienced by a person but, when that happens, the person loses his individuality. Furthermore, in order to experience *Brahman*, the individual must first reject his or her own ego, which is the key for discovering the still point: Only through self-denial can the craving be stopped and only through the suppression of the ego can the individual's selfish motivations be replaced by a broadened consciousness that links the person to all living creatures and that allows him/her to break from the wheel.

Eliot is attracted to the assertion that individuals are able to experience *Brahman* for two main reasons. First, the Christian writers that Eliot drew upon, such as Dante, Saint Augustine, and concretely Saint John of the Cross, declare unequivocally that a person can be united with the godhead, which will set him/her free from the world and its traps. Second, Eliot, being a

⁶ This philosopher revived the Hindu way of life by reinforcing the nondualistic reality or *Brahman*

professed Anglo-Catholic, is unwilling to declare that human beings are unable to access God and be one with Him, thus contradicting the most basic teachings of the Church. However, in assimilating the idea of *Brahman*, Eliot must have struggled with a concept that is part of the Eastern conception of the still point and that has no room in Christianity, *karma*. This word can be understood as “act,” “deed,” or “work,” and can be defined as an action that inevitably produces an impression in the actor and determines the action that is to come. According to Sri, “since we usually act out of self-interest in order to attain some end or fruit, such egocentric acts bind us to other acts, either immediately or at some future moment; this implies a series of births, deaths, and rebirths for us, the actors. Our own *karma* thus creates our bondage to the world” (Sri 108). Due to the fact that reincarnation has no validity in Christianity, the concept of *karma* has to be adapted to fit into the Christian paradigm. The method for doing so is Saint John’s concept of passions: All the earthly interests that chain the person to an existence without the possibility of experiencing the plenitude of the godhead later on become sins. If it is true that in Christian terms those passions do not cause a person to live several lives, they do prevent the individual from discovering the deception of the world and, thus, have an equivalent function of that of the Eastern *karma*.

The other disjunctive issue that Eliot probably faced is related to accessing the still point. In Buddhism, the still point is attained by conscious, exhaustive individual work. Eliot seems to be attracted to this idea of struggling in order to get to the center of the wheel; however, this idea contradicts the Christian theology of Grace. God cannot be accessed by human will alone, that is, all human efforts to get closer to God are valueless, for it is impossible for the flawed creature to enter the presence of the pure, perfect Creator. Hinduism, nevertheless, opposes the Buddhist concept of the still point and makes it more accessible to the Christian since it argues that God

reveals himself to the person as well, which can be reconciled with the concept of Grace. Eliot seems to be torn in two directions, and in some instances appeals to individual effort to get to the still point, whereas sometimes the poet mentions that passivity is the key. One distinctive point that Eliot stresses is the possibility of having a glimpse of the still point, but beholding it in its plenitude is something that is reserved for people having a particularly high spiritual stature: If most individuals are able to have hints of the reality of the *Brahman*, only saints can absolutely experience the ultimate reality, or God. As Sri states it: “Eliot does uphold the possibility of attaining the reality of the still point, the silent centre around which all the world turns. He even goes so far as to say that most of us are vouchsafed about the nature of the ultimate reality although we are often incapable of the total apprehension possible to a saint” (71). Saint John’s apprehension is, precisely, the dark night of the soul. There, his depiction of how the individual, in cooperation with divine grace, is enabled and becomes united with God serves as the inspiration for Eliot’s the *Four Quartets*.

Chapter Four: The Dark Night of the Soul in *Burnt Norton*

The concept of the dark night of the soul is found in Eliot's *Four Quartets* basically in the third section of each poem. Furthermore, since each fourth section generally expresses the movement out of that dark night, these sections also will be included in this analysis. Both sections will reveal clues that will disclose references to both Saint John of the Cross and Eastern religions.

Let us consider section three of *Burnt Norton*. According to Helen Gardner, this section describes the London subway, known as the Tube. She states that Eliot used this means of transportation daily and, therefore, those moments contributed to the crystallization of the idea of the dark night of the soul in the *Four Quartets*: "The setting of section III is the London Tube. Eliot traveled daily from Gloucester Road Station, whose two means of descent, by the stairs or by the lift, suggested to him the movement down and the 'abstention from movement', while being carried down, in the next paragraph" (86). It is interesting to note that one of Eliot's characters, Julia, in *Murder in the Cathedral*, says that she is able to concentrate when being inside of an elevator that, like the subway, moves people who are apparently still. It is possible to understand the word concentration as "meditation," one of the practices ascribed to mystics. The debate here would be whether Eliot meditates because he is a mystic himself, or if as a poet, he is just using language to convey his ideas of the mystical experiences of Saint John of the Cross. Gardner believes that before the composition of the *Four Quartets*, Eliot was undergoing a crisis in which he once stated that he wondered if he had already exhausted his poetical well. In this vocational crisis, he resembles Saint John of the Cross, and it is necessary to remember that it was a vocational crisis, a crossroad, what contributed to the shaping of the dark night.

As stated above, section III of *Burnt Norton* opens with the sad and lonely images of the London Tube. This is a place where love is not found, a location in which one has to be by oneself, stripped of all love: “Here is a place of disaffection / Time before and time after in a dim light (*BN* III. 1, 2). This idea is easily traced back to Eastern mysticism, in which detachment of the self is essential to attain *Nirvana*. Moreover, the second line no doubt refers to reincarnation, for the idea of time being a continuum is expressed as the merging of both past and present. However, this is also a powerful image of the London subway: People are trapped in a lifestyle that has no direction or purpose; it is abandonment represented by time and light. The light does not shine brilliantly; it is barely seen and recognized. Light, when abundant, helps to give purpose; it defines shapes, colors, and distances. However, when one lacks light, disorientation and confusion arise. In this image, a weak source of light falls on “time present” and “time past,” which implies that both are barely recognizable. In his book *El nudo coronado*, Miguel A. Montezanti supports this assertion in his *Estudio de Cuatro Cuartetos*: “*Con esta sección se abre la representación de una forma de vida carente de orientación, una suerte de muerte-en-vida, como la que se manifiesta en The Waste Land*” (64). With this powerful image, one enters the first stage of the dark night, the anguish of being forsaken, lonely, and confused.

This first darkness in the London Tube, nevertheless, is not a productive dark night, but its prelude. The following one refers subtly to the Hindi idea of *maya*, which, in turn, refers to the concealment of reality behind a veil of appearance. They also refer more explicitly to the central symbol of existence in Eastern religions, the wheel of birth: “...neither daylight / investing form with lucid stillness / turning shadow into transient beauty / with slow rotation suggesting permanence” (*BN* III. 3-6). The image here depicts a stage in which darkness begins to overtake the individual; the soul is beginning to drown in a sea of obscurity. Saint John’s dark

night of the soul begins with rejection, and in the dark and gloomy image of the London subway rejection is suggested by the word “disaffection.” However, the descent has just begun; the light is dim at that moment, but there is still light. Here, although the individual is trapped in an intermediate hell in which s/he is experiencing the lack of material and sensorial goods, as the word “beauty” denotes, s/he is not fully immersed in the darkness: “Nor darkness to purify the soul / emptying the sensual with deprivation / Cleansing affection from the temporal / Neither plenitude nor vacancy” (BN III. 7-10). Thus, there is a clear contrast between the dark tube and the dark night of the soul. Whereas the later darkness is productive and desirable, the former constitutes a state of purposeless, frivolous existence; the person is immersed in the world of the senses.

These contrasting dark episodes can be seen in what Saint John of the Cross calls the *prima noche*. As Montezanti states, “*Esta primera descripción de la noche catártica (que no se ejercita en el ‘lugar falto de afecto’) parece corresponderse con la ‘prima noche’ que habla Juan de Yepes: ‘...la primera noche, que es la del sentido, se compara a la prima noche, que es cuando se acaba de carecer del objeto de las cosas’* (65). The idea that the subject is still attached to earthly matters is seen when the poem reveals that the people in the tube cannot concentrate properly, that is, they are unable to *meditate* due to the constant distraction of their minds flooded with vanity: “Over the strained time-ridden faces/ Distracted from distraction by distraction / Filled with fancies and empty of meaning /Tumid apathy with no concentration” (BN III. 11-14). One can speculate that meditation might have become a significant practice for Eliot, who was schooled in Eastern philosophies. Meditation is a central part of the purification practices of Hinduism and Buddhism. The parallel to Saint John’s cleansing of the soul is seen once more here, for both Eastern religions and Christianity claim that the process of inner

purification requires time to achieve its completion although the saint stresses more vehemently that this is a painful episode for the soul.

It is interesting to note, furthermore, that Eliot uses the word “time” in this section when creating powerfully negative images; the London tube is nothing but a stage of hell. For Hinduism, the worst spiritual tragedy is precisely to be trapped in time as a living individual. Life, hence, is a perpetual hell in which the person is separated from the divinity of wholeness and must struggle over and over with desires that are by no means satisfied. The third section of *Burnt Norton* depicts the torment of hell. Eliot clearly alludes to the hell of repetition and dissatisfaction by showing a group of people that, along with discarded pieces of paper in the obscure environment, are carried away by a cold wind. Equally unimportant, men can be seen as useless paper that the wind moves, rotates, swirls, stops, and returns without a sense of direction. Paper twirls in a micro cosmos (the tube), whereas people do the same in the macro cosmos, and both the paper and the people are insignificant and senseless in the constant movement that for the latter is the wheel of birth. The agent of that movement is the wind, a traditional symbol of freedom that here becomes more like a spiritual force that plays with garbage, moving it from one place to another, without any purpose in an evocation of the Eastern *maya*, the ignorance that deceives people suggesting permanence with its slow rotation. This wind brushes the high places of London and goes to Ludgate, which implies amplitude. Moreover, there are two kinds of movements of air in the London tube: The first one is the exterior wind that sweeps bits of paper away, and the other one is the breath of the passengers inside the subway. For Eliot, that air represents the dissatisfaction of the temporal; the contaminated lungs in section three of *Burnt Norton* breathe constantly in and out, and they are never at rest. As with the need for air, those who are caught up in the temporal are filled with desires that will never be satisfied; they will

gasp forever, longing for, but not attaining anything permanent. The fact that the word “unwholesome” is used to describe the people who wheeze in the dirty environment of the tube shows how they are in need of purification because the breath of the air-requiring people is the “eructation of unhealthy souls,” (*BN III. 16*) that is, the product of the interaction of two equally impure environments: The external, represented by the unclean air inside the subway, and the internal, or the dirty lungs of the passengers breathing in and out, requiring clean air to use it and contaminate it, but getting only filthy air to continue the circle of contamination. Not only does the external wind sweep the garbage on the floor away, it also transports the “unwholesome” product of this interaction to the places mentioned in lines 21-23, which extends the unhealthy atmosphere that constitutes this world for Eliot.

The images above, as formerly stated, do not represent the dark night of the soul in the purifying sense that Saint John of the Cross describes, for they are a threshold to hell. The absence of the dark night is stressed with the claim “not here the darkness, in this twittering world.” What is the point of having such a description of hell instead of the depiction of Saint John’s purifying obscurity? As the saint states, the cleansing process starts when the contaminated person, the sinner, learns that s/he is heading towards destruction and damnation. Such a revelation is acquired by means of rejecting the apparent purpose of all the struggles of life—in other words, acquiring a glimpse of hell. In Eastern religions, it is done through the discovery of the illusion of the *maya*; for Saint John, one’s soul has to grow weary of the ways of the world and undergo “*la pérdida del sentido de todas las cosas.*” That is when the real dark night of the soul begins, in that state in which a person discovers how painfully meaningless life is without God: “The sorrows of death compassed me, and the pains of hell got hold upon me: I found trouble and sorrow. Then I called upon the name of the Lord; O Lord, I beseech thee,

deliver my soul” (Ps. 116. 3,4). It is no coincidence, thus, that Eliot chooses this time to introduce to the reader the beginning of the dark night of the soul after having presented the vision of hell, the chaotic and filthy tube with its movement, trash, and noise. The noisy world has to be abandoned; consequently, the command to go down deeper urges the reader to access the world of silence, nothingness, solitude, and to embrace the absence of light.

Eliot contrasts the continuous movement of the subway to the eternal stillness of the “world not world, but that which is not world.” The tube is the world of desire, moving along two tracks that represent time: The section of the tracks left behind are the past; whereas those ahead become the future: “While the world moves / in appetency, on its metalled ways of time past and time future” (*BN III*. 35-37). This is done to give a picture of the paradox of the dark night of the soul: The individual undergoing the purification process lives within the limits established by time; however, s/he must escape from those boundaries to go out of time, that is, to step into the world that is not world. The image in *Burnt Norton* is that of a person concentrating (or meditating, in religious terms) within the London tube, as opposed to the rest of the passengers who are unable to concentrate because of the many distractions: The trembling movement of the subway, the dim light creating moving shadows, the swirling papers, the need for air, all are representative of the desire for something. According to Saint John of the Cross, the soul is filthy due to earthly fixations that are part of the world of time, desires that attack the senses, the intellect, the spirit, and that cannot be satisfied by earthly matters. They all corrupt the soul, for they broaden the distance between the person and God; a person, instead of turning his/her eyes upon the creator, makes every effort to please those enslaving desires that turn his/her eyes away from God. A person whose heart is trapped by desire becomes greedy and is forever banned from attaining internal peace, as the Bible teaches constantly. What is more,

those people are labeled “fools” in the memorable parable of the rich man who saves up many goods and intends to indulge himself and “be merry” (Luke 12.15-20). Yes, it is their ignorance of the deceit of the world that condemns them to eternal damnation through dissatisfaction.

Burnt Norton attacks craving almost in the same way in which Saint John describes the process of getting rid of desires. Both T.S. Eliot and Saint John of the Cross define the purification process, the real dark night of the soul, as a period of inner shadows in which a person must be emptied of all craving as an ongoing, yet passive stage of deprivation: “World not world, but that which is not world,/ Internal darkness, deprivation” (*BN* III. 27, 28). Eliot, like Saint John of the Cross, constructs a series of gradations of deprivation until reaching the point of total detachment. In *Burnt Norton*, the “destitution of all property” echoes the concept of austerity that the saint treasured and taught vehemently, and Eliot seemed to agree with the idea that material goods is the first anchor to be released from in order to begin the ascent to Mount Carmel. Property turns out to be the primordial source of craving in the human being; once that a person is detached from it, the first stage of purification is achieved. However, according to the teachings of the saint, the purification must continue to reach deeper levels in the soul. Hence, the second stage that Eliot mentions is the abandonment of the earthly joy found in the senses: “Desiccation of the world of sense / Evacuation of the world of fancy” (*BN* III. 30, 31). All sensual pleasures have to be rejected as well, for according to the teachings of the saint, beauty becomes an obstacle that prevents the soul from being united with God. Once deprived of the sensual, the purification progresses to the realm of imagination, to the inclinations and secret longings of the soul and the cleansing finds vanity. As in Saint John’s *Dark Night of the Soul*, darkness not only engulfs the external, peripheral aspects of the person, but it also penetrates to the depths of the human soul, detaching it from everything that might be perceived as an

obstacle. For the saint, even thoughts are vanity; fancy becomes irrelevant. Here one can perceive both in *Burnt Norton* and in Saint John's dark night the suffering of a spoiled soul that is accustomed to wanting and that finally finds itself deprived of all those secret consoling ideas, wishes, thoughts, vanities, until the darkness reaches the core of the person, the spirit. Eliot states that the world of the spirit is deactivated; and it is the sublime and painful instant in which the soul is at last deprived from everything and ready to envision the greatness of the divinity. Saint John before had said the same when he stated that the soul had to be emptied even from the satisfaction of having a closer contact with God, for the dark night of the soul, the state of permanence, not the transitory initial deprivation, does not allow any room for anything that is not God.

However, one can distinguish that, while the pathway in Saint John's *Noche Oscura del Espiritu* is a strong, devoted love that consumes the soul, *Burnt Norton's* dark night, the world of perpetual solitude, can be accessed by two ways which, according to Eliot, in the end, happen to be the same. The first one is deprivation, as has been discussed above; the second one is stillness. Saint John also talks about an active and a passive night, but Eliot emphasizes the fact that tranquillity and silence are essential in order to transcend the temporal: "This is the one way, and the other / Is the same, not in movement / But abstention from movement; while the world moves / In appetency, on its metalled ways / Of time past and time future" (*BN III. 34-37*). Those elements are more a consequence of following the required path for Saint John.

The fourth section of *Burnt Norton* presents to the reader the movement out from this dark period. Since Saint John's dark night of the soul is a paradoxical going down in order to go

up,⁷ it is absolutely necessary to consider how Eliot perceived this movement out, so that the influence of the saint's ideas can be assessed in Eliot's poem.

⁷ For the saint, the only way to be closer to God is by means of diminishing oneself. If one's will is strong, it will always fight against God's direction; therefore, the person has to "go down" (surrender one's will) in order to "go up" (ascend toward God). The idea of diminishing oneself in order to be closer to God was also stated by Jesus when he said to his disciples that the one who wanted to be the greatest would have to humble himself and become the lowest.

The Movement Out in *Burnt Norton*

If the first part of the purification process that Saint John of the Cross describes can be perceived in Eliot's *Burnt Norton*, one can thus expect to find the last part of the process as well, for, as previously mentioned, the dark night is a complex symbol, and Eliot has a name for his use of intricate symbols. This last stage of the process, the movement out of the dark night, corresponds to the fourth section of each of the poems. According to Miguel Montezanti, while the third section of the poems doubtlessly presents in general an attempt to escape from the world by means of concentration and liberation, section four becomes a lyric prayer requesting intercession. (Montezanti 21). How did Saint John's ideas influence that request for intercession?

Section four of *Burnt Norton* opens with rather dark images that can be seen as funerary symbols:

Time and the bell have buried the day,
 the black cloud carries the sun away.
 Will the sunflower turn to us, will the clematis
 Stray down, bend to us; tendril and spray
 Clutch and cling?
 Chill
 Fingers of yew be curled
 Down on us? After the kingfisher's wing
 Has answered light to light, and is silent, the light is still
 At the still point of the turning world (1-10).

The bell, as an archetype, has funerary connotations in poetry, but the fact that both “the bell and time have buried the day,” as the first line states, gives the reader a clear image of death, a re-

statement of the deprivation of light in the dark night. The second line also echoes this lack of light, but there is a subtle religious element: The sun. Of course, it is known that many pagan religions worshipped the sun as a god, but Eliot, being an Anglican, is not using the sun in that way, although there is a definite connection. In the Bible, Jesus becomes the religious link between light and the sun: “I Jesus have sent mine angel to testify unto you these things in the churches. I am the root and the offspring of David, and the bright and morning star” (Rev. 22. 16). The morning star, the sun, is taken away by the “black cloud,” which is the full impact of the dark night for Saint John; the most appalling deprivation in the dark night is precisely the sensation of being forsaken by God. This dreadful feeling probably has its origin in the words of Jesus while hung in the cross: “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” (Mt. 27. 46). Eliot, therefore, is using once again these Christian symbols to illustrate the psychological state of the dark night. However, the dark night is not a perennial state; it is an on going process of purification and, thus, it has an end. For Saint John, the movement out of the dark night starts when the soul surrenders completely to the will of the almighty God. Then, a small light shines within the soul: Perfected faith. *Burnt Norton* expresses this new light with the hope, or rather the longing, for the intervention of God on one’s behalf. The longing becomes a prayer within oneself, concealed by the intriguing symbol of the sunflower. Line 3 starts with this longing “Will the sunflower turn to us.” The prayer here is a subtle one: For the hope is directed to the sunflower, not to God. Nevertheless, the resemblance of the sunflower to the heavenly body shows the reader that the prayer is directed to the “morning star” mentioned in Revelations. Furthermore, the composition of this symbol includes more details to support the idea of a Christian prayer. First, the symbol itself is a flower, which can have connotations of joy and life. Another interesting detail is found in the comparison of the Son of God to several flowers in the Song of Songs: “I am the rose of Sharon, and the lily of the valleys” (S of S. 2. 1). But perhaps

the most interesting detail is found in the sounds that make up the word. The homophony between “sun” and “son” leads one to acknowledge that this longing does not have an animist nature, for the sunflower, or the Son-flower, is actually Jesus.

One has to keep in mind that Eliot was an Anglican. Anglicans, as Catholics do, accept devotion to the Saints and worship the Virgin Mother. Therefore, the prayer in the fourth section is also directed to the Virgin Mary. Grover Smith sustains this idea by analyzing the next image that discloses in the section. Here, the persona longs to see the clematis bend toward himself (lines 3, 4). Grover Smith points out that the only British clematis is *Clematis vitalba*, which is also known as “Old Man’s Beard,” “Traveller’s Joy” and, most revealing, “Virgin’s Bower” (qtd. in Montezanti 68). Here is, then, a prayer directed both to the Virgin Mary and her son, Jesus.

If this is the movement out, one has to remember that this is the first quartet and, consequently, it is more an initiation than the consummated perfection of faith. In other words, the speaker is beginning to understand how the process works here; he is not actually grasping its full extent. Therefore, the next image, a funerary vision of crawling plants getting closer (lines 3, 4) reveals the fears inside the heart of the speaker. There is hesitation; the persona is fighting against himself to surrender, but he has not gotten rid of his natural fear of death. This apprehension is reiterated with the image in the following three lines: “Chill/ Fingers of yew be curled / Down on us?” (BN IV. 5-7). One side of the poet’s heart wants to submit to the will of God, and the other, the imperfect human side that still maintains selfish aspirations, struggles to remain in control of the soul. The last lines reveal how the speaker seems to discover that his unanswered questions are about to be answered. In these lines, there is another symbol that can be related to God. Fishing and Christianity have always been related. The fish was a symbol for the early church members. Moreover, the relevance of fishing can be traced back to the disciples of Jesus, for most of them were fishermen. However, the symbolism might have originated in

the words that Jesus, while mockingly being proclaimed the King of the Jews upon his death, said to Peter and Andrew: “Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men” (Mt. 4. 19). One can assume that the kingfisher that is presented in line eight is another symbol of Jesus. In those lines, the kingfisher remains silent after answering light to light, which is another image of the dark night stage, for Jesus does not apparently answer to one’s longing. Nevertheless, this image has a more positive tone, for it is full of light and energy, represented by the kingfisher’s wing. This is a moment of revelation, of Joycean epiphany in which the speaker has at last begun to understand the purpose of the dark night and is starting the movement out of it. The movement out here is a vision: Eternity is apprehended in an instant, that is, the paradoxical still point of the turning world, the point in which one becomes united with God.

It is a must to acknowledge that the way in which Saint John of the Cross describes the still point of the turning world, although certainly derived from Eastern religions, is not exactly what Buddhism and Hinduism describe. Since Christianity does not accept the teaching of reincarnation, the concept of the still point changes into a momentary experience, a mystical experience in which the individual can glimpse, very much in the likeness of the Eastern *Brahman*, the reality beyond the world and its natural affections, that is, God himself. This is an instant of ecstasy, for the individual contemplating God loses his individuality and merges with Him.

In *Burnt Norton*, this moment marks an initiation; it is the first time in which the persona realizes what the true purpose of the dark night is and, hence, advances one more step along the road to perfection. It is important to stress that, even though the soul has achieved a greater deal of purification, it is not perfect. Yet, God grants a vision at this time. Saint John talks about this still point in chapter XIII of the first book of *Dark Night of the Soul*:

This type of enkindling will explain to us certain of the detectable effects which this dark night of contemplation works in the soul. For at certain times, as we have just said, the soul becomes enlightened in the midst of all this darkness, and the light shines in the darkness; this mystical intelligence flows down into the understanding and the will remains in dryness—I mean, without the actual union of love, with a serenity and simplicity which are so delicate and detectable to the sense of the soul that no name can be given to them. Thus the presence of God is felt, now after one manner, now after another. (140)

God provides a glimpse of His greatness to the soul in the path toward perfection, which helps to understand why the persona in *Burnt Norton*, despite showing doubts and fears, is in the end granted the magnificent vision of the still point of the turning world: “The light is still / At the still point of the turning world.” According to Saint John of the Cross, the initiated soul receives the vision, feels the presence of God in this ultimate reality, but it is not able to understand it through human intelligence.

Chapter Five: The Dark Night of the Soul in *East Coker*

The first line of *East Coker* presents, once again, dark images that, far from being the representation of the first stage of the deprivation required to acquire spiritual awareness, constitute a representation of hell. The hell depicted here is characterized by the absence of meaning ascribed to human activities; the different people mentioned function as tokens of empty human activities. Thus, the economic, social, academic, and even the military actions of human beings lack purpose and meaning: “They all go into the dark” (*EC* I. 1). This line recalls Eliot’s “The Hollow Men,” where people are empty and without purpose:

We are the hollow men
 We are the stuffed men
 Leaning together
 Headpiece filled with straw. Alas!
 Our dried voices, when
 We whisper together
 Are quiet and meaningless
 As wind in dry grass
 Or rats' feet over broken glass
 In our dry cellar. (HM 1-10)

This inner void, however, is by no means to be confused with Saint John’s deprivation, for the greatest contrast is that the “industrious” characters that are seen in the first lines of *East Coker* actually cling to their activities in order to gather meaning from them; they are circling the

prickly pear forever, caught in the wheel of birth. The image of the hollow men trapped in the wheel is reinforced by lines 9-11: “And cold the sense and lost the motive of action. / All we all go with them, into the silent funeral, / Nobody’s funeral, for there is no one to bury.” This dreadful paradox of the silent funeral filled with all sorts of people, but lacking a dead body implies that the funeral is for those who are supposedly alive: The hollow men that attempt to satisfy their spiritual needs by using the temporal as a substitute for what is real.

These lines describe quite clearly the Eastern conception of hell and, at the same time, convey an image of the Christian hell, which is central to understand how the concept of the dark night functions in this poem. The semantic implications of the concept “dark” and “vacant” as to characterize hell contrast sharply with the resonance of the same words as part of the dark night of the soul. First, one has to remember that the Christian hell is often represented as a place of torture characterized by the emptiness and the lack of the presence of God, who is the Truth for Eliot. Therefore, it is a place in which the soul is subjected to perpetual longing for what is real. In the first lines of *East Coker* one finds people trapped by a mirage that produces no sense of direction. This mirage is made up by the lies that are opposed to Eliot’s perception of the divine Truth, Jesus Christ. The more those individuals come and go, wandering without a reason or a purpose, embracing their lies, the more they distance themselves from achieving spiritual fulfillment. Clearly, Eliot’s allusion to hell helps in understanding the other meaning of darkness, for line 12 indicates a change of attitude; the speaker does not follow the human path leading to spiritual dissatisfaction any longer: “I said to my soul, be still and let the dark come upon you” and with this appeal to tranquility in the midst of the purposelessness of movement, he is able to understand the difference between the hellish darkness and the dark night of the soul, as the following line reveals: “Which shall be the darkness of God” (*EC I. 13*).

With the three similes that follow, the poet shows that he has achieved a minimal but significant knowledge about how the darkness of God can be distinguished from the other darkness. The first comparison is the change in scenes at a theater, in which the lights go off :

As, in a theatre,

The lights are extinguished, for the scene to be changed

With a hollow rumble of wings, with a movement of darkness
on darkness

And we know that the hills and the trees, the distant

panorama

And the bold imposing façade are all being rolled away. (*EC* I. 13-19)

The poet uses the image of the theater to show how he is aware of two noteworthy facts regarding the dark night of the soul: The momentary absence of light serves a purpose in a theater, and, perhaps more significantly, instead of plunging one into senselessness, this constructive darkness removes all falsehood from one's life since God designed it to purify one's soul. The poet also compares the initial stage of the dark night to those moments in which the subway stops for an over-extended period of time, which makes passengers react:

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

And the conversation rises and slowly fades into silence

And you see behind every face the mental emptiness deepen

Leaving only the growing terror of nothing to think about (*EC* I. 20-24).

Eliot had previously used the image of voices rising and slowly fading into silence in *Burnt Norton*: "Words move, music moves / Only in time; but that which is only living / Can only

die. Words, after speech, reach/ Into the silence:" (*BN V. 1-4*). However, since Eliot discloses the common nature between the artistic and the spiritual endeavor in section five of each of the quartets, one can notice that the silence that is presented in line 22 is not positive, but a manifestation of the opposite, the uneasiness that prevents people from being still and quiet for meditation. In the tube image, passengers are empty in a negative sense; they are empty because they are yearning for the unreal and, therefore, have nothing but mere illusions. The absence of productive thoughts frightens them, for they do not even have thoughts worthy to be pondered. This deprivation is not the required path to reach unity with God; it is just the consequence of being trapped in the wheel of birth, the hellish existence of those people that lack action and are unable to transcend the illusory. Eliot reinforces the idea of passivity with the third, shortest simile: "Or when, under ether, the mind is conscious but conscious of nothing-" (*EC I. 25*). The idea of ether-induced passivity is also found in the first three lines of Eliot's "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock": "Let us go then, you and I, / When the evening is spread out against the sky / Like a patient etherized upon a table." Here, Eliot symbolizes the state of semi-unconsciousness that so much characterizes Prufrock, a person without a will. This state characterizes people trapped on the wheel of birth, the hollow men. In reaction, the poet shows that he is able to differentiate the dark night of the soul from the emptiness of being attached to the wheel of birth: "I said to my soul, be still, and wait without hope / For hope would be hope for the wrong thing; wait without love, /For love would be love of the wrong thing; there is yet faith /But the faith and the love and the hope are all in the waiting" (*EC III. 27-30*). Eliot's words echo Saint John's invitation to absolute deprivation; the poet first acknowledges the need to forget about the most basic refuge for the human soul: Hope and love, for they are deceitful, as Saint John outlined in his essay. Even though someone may argue that Eliot is just tracing a

direct reference to biblical teachings instead of manifesting the impact that Saint John exerted on his ideas, one can find a detail that connects Eliot to Saint John's teachings. The Bible explicitly mentions faith, hope and love as a triadic motivation for the Christian: "And now these three remain: Faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love" (I Cor. 13. 13). Saint John of the Cross differs a little with Saint Paul's assertion in regards of the pre-eminence of love, for love is also one of the human emotions that might make a person to turn away from God. Saint John argues that even human love for God is misleading and therefore is one of the weaknesses and impurities that disappears after the cleansing process of the dark night, so that God can grant His blessings:

Moreover, in order to attain the said union to which this dark night is disposing and leading it, the soul must be filled and endowed with a certain glorious magnificence in its communion with God, which includes within itself innumerable blessings springing from delights which exceed all the abundance that the soul can naturally possess. For by nature the soul is so weak and impure that it cannot receive all this. As Isaiah says: 'Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man, that which God hath prepared, etc.' It is meet, then, that the soul be first of all brought into emptiness and poverty of spirit and purged from all help, consolation and natural apprehension with respect to all things, both above and below. In this way, being empty, it is able indeed to be poor in spirit and freed from the old man, in order to live that new and blessed life which is attained by means of this night, and which is the state of union with God. (*DN II. 9. 4*)

Moreover, Saint John argues that without hope or love, the soul travels securely in darkness because God is directing it: "God takes thy hand and guides thee in the darkness, as though thou

wert blind, to an end and by a way which thou knowest not” (*DN II. 16.7*). Therefore, the only aid that the person has during that painful experience is the faith that God is guiding him/her, the voluntary submission to the dark night. Eliot shows this insight by asserting that the triadic motivation is found in the waiting (*EC III. 30*). In line 31, Eliot argues abandoning the second refuge, the intellectual vanity in which some people might find pride: “Wait without thought, for you are not ready for thought.” Saint John also stressed how dangerous pride is for achieving unity with God. In a Buddhist sense, pride ties the person to the wheel. However, when one considers the suffering that the dark night causes, one can consider that the thought that Eliot is alluding to is the human need for an explanation of the process. Human understanding, as Saint John explains, is useless, and Eliot follows this idea when saying that one is not yet ready for thought. Once all the defects have been purged, the explanation, or the understanding of the purpose of the dark night, comes. In that moment, it is possible to realize that the dark night is a constructive process, but that insight is acquired as a revelation, the secret wisdom that the dark night produces, as Saint John argues:

The steps and footprints which God is imprinting upon the souls that He desires to bring near to Himself, and to make great in union with His Wisdom, have also this property: That they are not known. Wherefore in the Book of Job mention is made of this matter, in these words: ‘Hast thou perchance known the paths of the great clouds or the perfect knowledges?’ By this are understood the ways and roads whereby God continually exalts souls and perfects them in His Wisdom, which souls are here understood by the clouds. It follows, then, that this contemplation which is guiding the soul to God is secret wisdom. (*DN II. 7. 8*)

Paradoxically, Saint John states that this wisdom is illumination from the dark; in other words, that the absence of light (human appetites, flaws, and aspirations) is what makes the person see clearly:

It now remains to be said that, although this happy night brings darkness to the spirit, it does so only to give it light in everything; and that, although it humbles it and makes it miserable, it does so only to exalt it and to raise it up; and, although it impoverishes it and empties it of all natural affection and attachment, it does so only that it may enable it to stretch forward, divinely, and thus to have fruition and experience of all things, both above and below, yet to preserve its unrestricted liberty of spirit in them all. For just as the elements, in order that they may have a part in all natural entities and compounds, must have no particular colour, odour or taste, so as to be able to combine with all tastes odours and colours, just so must the spirit be simple, pure and detached from all kinds of natural affection, whether actual or habitual, to the end that it may be able freely to share in the breadth of spirit of the Divine Wisdom. (*DN II. 9. 1*)

This illuminating darkness is also found in *East Coker*, section III, line 31: “So the darkness shall be the light, and the stillness the dancing.” The idea of passivity is also reinforced through the oxymoron of the “still dance,” which is also an allusion to the Eastern concept of the still point in the rotating wheel. The following five lines of the section use a number of images that encompass all human sensorial experience:

Whisper of running streams, and winter lightning.

The wild thyme unseen and the wild strawberry,

The laughter in the garden, echoed ecstasy

Not lost, but requiring, pointing to the agony

Of death and birth. (*EC* III. 32-36)

The images include the audible experience in the running water and the laughter, the visual stimuli in the lightning, and both the olfactory and gustatory in the thyme and the strawberry. If it is true that the latter images evoke paradise, the idea of the lightning offers up a definitely dissonant effect. One may think that since the dark night of the soul involves the idea of yielding, there is always an element of danger. Saint John, however, uses lightning to exemplify how, in the middle of total obscurity, an element that may formerly represent danger, becomes a blessing:

All this, speaking spiritually, is to be understood in the sense wherein we are speaking. For the illumination of the round earth by the lightnings of God is the enlightenment which is produced by this Divine contemplation in the faculties of the soul; the moving and trembling of the earth is the painful purgation which is caused therein; and to say that the way and the road of God whereby the soul journeys to Him is in the sea, and His footprints are in many waters and for this reason shall not be known, is as much as to say that this road whereby the soul journeys to God is as secret and as hidden from the sense of the soul as the way of one that walks on the sea, whose paths and footprints are not known, is hidden from the sense of the body.

(*DN* II. 17. 8)

It is impossible, however, to overlook the way in which the idea of reincarnation permeates this Christian thought in Eliot, for line 36 indicates that the agony that the human being experiences is not only death, but also rebirth. The anguish of being subjected to the eternal turning of the wheel of existence becomes the central concern of the individual, which provides a different

perception of the sensorial images that were mentioned above. The senses (seeing, listening, smelling, tasting, and touching) become the confirmation of being trapped into the world of illusion, for it is a way in which the individual can realize that he is a being that exists separately from the real, God, the *Brahman*. Through the ability to receive sensorial perceptions, the person knows that s/he is a person, an individual, and thus the *maya* veils the ultimate reality. For Saint John, the sensorial equals the sensual as well and, hence, becomes an obstacle for achieving total union with God.

Eliot engages himself with both currents of thought at the same time; he resorts to both the Christian concept of self-denial and the Eastern way of emptiness to suggest the implications of the dark night of the soul and outline the process itself. He includes a second poetical persona to present his insight about the dark night of the soul: “You say I am repeating / Something I have said before. I shall say it again. / Shall I say it again?” (*EC* III 37-39). About this poetical device, Montezanti argues that one can interpret the polyphonic problem by considering it the vehicle to transmit ideas found outside of language using language, and that to understand it, one has to resort to the concept and function of Bakhtinian parody:

Es ésta la vertiente por donde es posible acercarse al problema de la polifonía. Para ello es menester retomar el concepto de *parodia* según sus formulaciones modernas. Linda Hutcheon menciona que la auto-reflexividad del arte moderno toma a menudo la forma de parodia y subraya la idea de ‘transcontextualización’. La parodia se sitúa muy cerca de la ironía, y es irónico el distanciamiento que manifiesta la primera persona poética de *East Coker* frente a su propio fragmento ‘poético’. EL lenguaje de la parodia—dice L. Hutcheon—se refiere tanto a sí mismo como a aquello que parodia. (Montezanti 25)

Montezanti stresses that, since the lines that follow the introduction of the second persona are “almost a textual translation from *Ascent to Mount Carmel*” (Montezanti 25), the poet introduces the text using a distancing, doubtful-voiced framework. Consequently, he concludes that it is very difficult to assume that this second poetical persona is either the reader manifested in an implicit dialogue or the poet’s soul (manifested in an introspective monologue).

Another possible interpretation can be constructed by analyzing the second persona’s poetical characteristics. This second persona is silent (the reader never actually hears his/her voice) and critical of Eliot’s ideas (questioning the poet’s insight). One, therefore, might presume that second persona constitutes an alter-ego of the poet; it is the poet’s unbelieving self, the balance required to ponder the new ideas and the way to express them. That second persona is Eliot’s former skeptical self; the representation of the humble faith that Montezanti notes in Eliot when addressing religious faith:

Habida cuenta de que fe religiosa es el concepto antagónico de escepticismo, conviene rescatar qué es lo que Eliot dice acerca de esta resistida actitud:

Obviously, I mean by the sceptic, the man who suspects the origins of his own beliefs, as well as those of others; who is most suspicious of those who are most passionately held; who is still more relentless towards his own beliefs than to those of others; who suspects other people’s motives because he has learned the deceitfulness of his own.

Eliot escribe esto en 1935, es decir varios años después de su conversión.

Escepticismo y religiosidad no son exactamente incompatibles; entremedio halla su justificación la humildad que encumbra *East Coker*. La fe religiosa, así entendida, se hinca en la brecha que abre el escepticismo aun frente a las propias convicciones.

‘Escepticismo’ es ‘humildad’ frente el apasionamiento de las propias creencias.

(Montezanti 16)

Thus, the poet restates, perhaps for himself, the gained wisdom about the dark night of the soul in a series of oxymoronic ideas that might be summarized in the concept of deprivation: “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” (*EC* III. 40-42). The absence of pleasure or even religious joy is clearly manifested by the asseveration “there is no ecstasy,” which contrasts sharply with the idea that ecstasy is pleasurable. Saint John, who experienced this purgatorial process, called it a “horrible” (*DN* II. 12. 1). In addition, the words “arrive,” “get,” “there,” and the prepositions “to” and “from,” which are repeated through the last lines of the section, also suggest the inability to point to an exact location, the direct consequence of lacking light and the confusion that this inability generates. The soul is lost in the dark and knows nothing. Since even the intellect has to be distrusted, the person wanders in ignorance. Nevertheless, this darkness is wisdom-revealing, as lines 43 and 44 unveil: “In order to arrive at what you do not know / You must go by a way which is the way of ignorance.” For Hinduism and Buddhism, *Brahman* is the everlasting truth that lies hidden, and the only way to acquire it is by emptying the head from all preconceived notions of truth. The similarity with Eliot’s “way of ignorance” is significant, especially after considering that the same idea of a concealed truth that is acquired by means of ignorance also exists in Saint John of the Cross:

This property of secrecy and superiority over natural capacity, which belongs to this Divine contemplation, belongs to it, not only because it is supernatural, but also inasmuch as it is a road that guides and leads the soul to the perfections of union with God; which, as they are things unknown after a human manner, must be

approached, after a human manner, by unknowing and by Divine ignorance. For, speaking mystically, as we are speaking here, Divine things and perfections are known and understood as they are, not when they are being sought after and practised, but when they have been found and practised.

(*DN II. 17. 7*)

Eliot develops the idea of self-denial using dispossession in lines 45 and 46: “In order to possess what you do not possess / You must go by the way of dispossession.” As mentioned, both Christianity and Eastern religions depict possessions as obstacles that prevent a person from achieving the total union with the godhead. However, what becomes significant in these two lines is not only the rejection of what a person has, but also what the person acquires in so doing. What is not possessed and can be attained by leaving behind what one already has? To answer this fundamental question, it is necessary to consider the following lines from the poem:

In order to possess what you do not possess

You must go by the way of dispossession.

In order to arrive at what you are not

You must go through the way in which you are not.

And what you do not know is the only thing you know

And what you own is what you do not own

And where you are is where you are not. (*EC III. 45-51*)

In those lines, Eliot is outlining his insight about the dark night and its effects. The constant denial to which the individual submits himself acts not only as purgation, but also as a generator of the virtue that is needed to merge with divinity. Obviously, at the beginning of the process, the person is not ready to be endowed with the great wisdom, love, and purity from the presence of

God. By way of the night of purgation, all the obstacles are removed and, at the same time, the virtues spawn in the soul. The night not only removes, but also grants, as Saint John asserts:

From what has been said, it is clear that God grants the soul in this state the favour of purging it and healing it with this strong lye of bitter purgation, according to its spiritual and its sensual part, of all the imperfect habits and affections which it had within itself with respect to temporal things and to natural, sensual and spiritual things, its inward faculties being darkened, and voided of all these, its spiritual and sensual affections being constrained and dried up, and its natural energies being attenuated and weakened with respect to all this (a condition which it could never attain of itself, as we shall shortly say). In this way God makes it to die to all that is not naturally God, so that, once it is stripped and denuded of its former skin, He may begin to clothe it anew. And thus its youth is renewed like the eagle's and it is clothed with the new man, which, as the Apostle says, is created according to God.

(DN II. 13. 11)

One may assume that Eliot answers the question by referring to several spiritual virtues that the soul is able to acquire in this night, such as wisdom, spiritual gifts, and love. According to him, at the end of the process, the only knowledge that remains is the one that was not possessed at first, that is, the wisdom of God. Likewise, the only possession that remains is that which was not owned when the dark night began, the spiritual gift for excellence, God. Acquiring the presence of God changes the soul into something that it was not at the beginning of the dark night, a vessel of divine love, a soul transformed in the likeness of God. Eliot's insight can be traced back to Saint John's teaching about the effects of the dark night:

This is naught else but His illumination of the understanding with supernatural light, so that it is no more a human understanding but becomes Divine through union with the Divine. In the same way the will is informed with Divine love, so that it is a will that is now no less than Divine, nor does it love otherwise than divinely, for it is made and united in one with the Divine will and love. So, too, is it with the memory; and likewise the affections and desires are all changed and converted divinely, according to God. And thus this soul will now be a soul of heaven, heavenly, and more Divine than human. All this, as we have been saying, and because of what we have said, God continues to do and to work in the soul by means of this night, illumining and enkindling it divinely with yearnings for God alone and for naught else whatsoever.

(DN II. 13. 11)

Eliot is following Saint John's ideas very closely; he summarizes in the last three lines of the third section of *East Coker* the effects that Saint John discusses in his essay, which shows how influential the *Dark Night of the Soul* was on his poetry. The fourth section of the poem, on the other hand, represents once again the movement out of the dark night, and it helps to understand the effects of the purgatory process that Eliot noticed in the third section by providing an insight into the movement out from the purgation.

The Movement Out in *East Coker*

The paradoxical formulation developed in the third section continues in section four. The movement out in the section IV of *East Coker* clearly alludes to Christianity, specifically to the Passion of Christ. Since the references to religion are so explicit, critics have considered this part

of the *Four Quartets* less artistic than the other sections, as Helen Gardner states: “The poem is not an allegory and precise annotation of this kind may destroy its imaginative power” (qtd. in Montezanti 89). However, even though the oxymoronic images do provide a strong reference to Christian dogma, the artistry with which they are crafted cannot be denied, which challenges Gardner’s statement. Furthermore, the fact that they are connected to Christian belief helps to trace them back to Saint John of the Cross, which ratifies how the work of the saint stands as a powerful source of influence on the *Four Quartets*.

As formerly mentioned, the movement out of the dark night in *East Coker* openly refers to the Passion. Nevertheless, the images make the reader envision a crisis at a hospital, in which a physician is operating on a patient: “The wounded surgeon plies the steel / That questions the distempered part; / Beneath the bleeding hands we feel / The sharp compassion of the healer's art/ Resolving the enigma of the fever chart” (*EC IV*. 1-5). The image of a surgeon that is wounded and yet keeps working in order to save a person’s life is an allusion to the passion of Christ that ended in the sacrifice on the cross. The connection is achieved by using the word “surgeon,” which activates a series of images that both trigger dichotomic sensations of pain and relief. Nevertheless, those sensations commonly belong to the patient: S/he is the one that senses the pain of the disease, undergoes surgery, and experiences the painful recovery from the procedure. The greatest contrasting point between those associations and *East Coker* is how the poem presents the reception of pain. The reader can perceive someone inflicting pain in order to heal, but what is more astonishing is that this person is in pain himself. The image of Christ as a “wounded surgeon” has a biblical origin in the prophetic book of Isaiah: “But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: The chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed” (53. 5). There, Christ is presented as a suffering healer

who endures pain instead of the sinners. The sinner, therefore, becomes the patient that does not experience pain because it has been transferred onto the surgeon with bleeding hands. The “distempered part” to which the poem refers is the human soul burdened with all transgressions, where the Christ actively works to remove the putrid flesh. Lines four and five present an oxymoronic image in which the compassion of the healer is felt. It is interesting that the first tactile image refers not to the sin, but to the healer’s art, that is, the compassion of God. Saint John’s *Dark Night* also talks about this painful manifestation of the love of God:

But it must be noted that, as I began to say just now, this love is not as a rule felt at first, but only the dryness and emptiness are felt whereof we are speaking. Then in place of this love which afterwards becomes gradually enkindled, what the soul experiences in the midst of these aridities and emptinesses of the faculties is an habitual care and solicitude with respect to God, together with grief and fear that it is not serving Him. But it is a sacrifice which is not a little pleasing to God that the soul should go about afflicted and solicitous for His love. This solicitude and care lead the soul into that secret contemplation, until, the senses (that is, the sensual part) having in course of time been in some degree purged of the natural affections and powers by means of the aridities which it causes within them, this Divine love begins to be enkindled in the spirit. Meanwhile, however, like one who has begun a cure, the soul knows only suffering in this dark and arid purgation of the desire; by this means it becomes healed of many imperfections.

(DN I. 11. 2)

Saint John also considers that the love of God purges, which implies that, far from being perceived as something desirable or pleasant, it is sensed as the sharp suffering that Eliot describes in line four.

The oxymoron of the painful care continues in the following five lines: “Our only health is the disease / If we obey the dying nurse / Whose constant care is not to please / But to remind us of our, and Adam's curse, / And that, to be restored, our sickness must grow worse” (*EC IV*, 6-10). The agent of the pain, however, changes in these lines. While it was Christ who was inflicting pain in the previous lines, it is a dying nurse who provides the painful treatment in lines six to ten. Since a nurse is a person who works with the physician and keeps track of the evolution of the patient, it is not far-fetched to assume that Eliot's dying nurse is a symbol of the Church. However, the problem that those lines present is the shifting of meaning for the image of disease. The disease that was found in line five was sin but, since the disease described in line six and ten represents health and restoration, it is impossible to think that it refers to human transgressions. The problem of the allusion here is solved by considering what the role of the Church is supposed to be. The Church is an institution that links the person to God; it is a community of followers of God. Therefore, it becomes the keeper of God's covenant and the one that transmits God's word to the people; the nurse that does not want spoil the patient. In other words, it gives God's “prescription” to the sinners, which is the love of God, reminding them of “Adam's curse,” the original sin and how to get rid of it. The sickness that is alluded to here is, then, what Saint John of the Cross would call “the yearning for God.” That passion for the union with God happens to be painful (which justifies calling it a disease) and it causes the person to abandon all other earthly affections, sinful in principle. Once again, it is possible to find a basis for that image in Saint John's *Dark Night*:

Similarly, since the affection of love which is to be given to it in the Divine union of love is Divine, and therefore very spiritual, subtle and delicate, and very intimate, transcending every affection and feeling of the will, and every desire thereof, it is fitting that, in order that the will may be able to attain to this Divine affection and most lofty delight, and to feel it and experience it through the union of love, since it is not, in the way of nature, perceptible to the will, it be first of all purged and annihilated in all its affections and feelings, and left in a condition of aridity and constraint, proportionate to the habit of natural affections which it had before, with respect both to Divine things and to human. Thus, being exhausted, withered and thoroughly tried in the fire of this dark contemplation, and having driven away every kind of evil spirit (as with the heart of the fish which Tobias set on the coals), it may have a simple and pure disposition, and its palate may be purged and healthy, so that it may feel the rare and sublime touches of Divine love, wherein it will see itself divinely transformed, and all the contrarities, whether actual or habitual, which it had aforesaid, will be expelled, as we are saying. (II. 9.3)

When the patient obeys this nurse, his/her health is restored by the growth of the patient's desire to be united with God. All other desires are abandoned; the disease (love) grows worse constantly until the body cannot resist it any longer and yields. The role of the Church is to make the sinner aware of his/her condition and lead him/her to restoration, thus making the sinner's disease (love) worse.

The images progress logically, which answers basic questions of the process that lead to answer the final question of where the healing process takes place. Such concerns are vital for

religion, since they help the person understand the “enigma of the fever chart.” The first two answers were already given and the last lines introduce the answer to the last one: “The whole earth is our hospital / Endowed by the ruined millionaire, / Wherein, if we do well, we shall / Die of the absolute paternal care / That will not leave us, but prevents us everywhere” (*EC IV*. 11-15). All the medical care described in this section of the poem takes place, predictably, in the hospital, which is endowed by the “ruined millionaire.” One might think that the ruined millionaire is a symbol of Adam; but such an assertion leads to contradiction. Even if it is true that Adam lost paradise because of original sin, perceiving him as the provider of the earth is not sustained either in the poem, or in theology, for it would be granting Adam the creative virtues of God: “And, Thou, Lord, in the beginning laid the foundations of the earth; and the heavens are the work of thine hands” (Heb.1.10). Since God is the creator of the world, the hospital cannot be Adam’s property. Moreover, one has to remember that this section of the poem alludes to the passion of Christ. Consequently, the ruined millionaire has to be the Son of God Himself, who “being in the form of God, thought it no robbery to be equal with God, but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men” (Phil. 2. 6, 7). God is the Father that will take care of the patients until they die in His care if they do well—if they are able to undergo the dark night, which is progressive purgation and death for the soul according to Saint John of the Cross. Eliot refers to this purgation in the following five lines: “The chill ascends from feet to knees, / The fever sings in mental wires./ If to be warmed, then I must freeze /And quake in frigid purgatorial fires / Of which the flame is roses, and the smoke is briars” (*EC IV*. 16-20). The way out of this dark night is summarized in the idea of accepting the sacrifice of Christ. All the religious allegory that Eliot uses in this section culminates in the act of the Eucharist, for it is the sacrament that reminds the sinner of the pain

that Jesus had to undergo; it is a commandment that the Church gives to the sinner to keep, and it takes place on earth. Therefore, Eliot openly describes the sacrament of the Eucharist in the five lines that close the section: “The dripping blood our only drink, / The bloody flesh our only food: / In spite of which we like to think / That we are sound, substantial flesh and blood / Again, in spite of that, we call this Friday good” (*EC IV*. 21-25). The paradox about religious sensibility⁸ in the last line reveals how the constriction of the spirit due to the sacrifice of Christ affects the perception of the individual who, despite participating in the sacrament, loves Jesus to the extent of questioning the need for Him to suffer. The persona loves Jesus so much that s/he cannot understand why His sacrifice for humanity is called “Good Friday,” yet he eats Christ’s flesh and blood as commanded by the Church. This paradoxical love for God is what Saint John of the Cross refers to in his teachings about loving Christ: “Veo que es muy poco conocido Cristo de los que se tienen por sus amigos; pues los vemos andar buscando en él sus gustos y consolaciones, amándose mucho a sí, mas no sus amarguras y muertes, amándole mucho a él” (qtd. in Ruiz 379).

Eliot, therefore, is following very closely the teachings of Saint John of the Cross in *Dark Night of the Soul* in *East Coker*, as he did in *Burn Norton*. Since it is possible to trace all the paradoxes (dying in order to be alive, a surgeon that is in pain but heals, and the millionaire who has no assets) back to Saint John’s ideas in *Dark Night of the Soul*, the claim that the essay was significant for Eliot’s completion of *Four Quartets* becomes more viable.

⁸ Eliot analyzed the meaning of a religious experience in his work *On Poetry and the Poets*: “Much has been said everywhere about the decline of religious belief; not so much notice has been taken of the decline of religious sensibility. A belief in which you no longer believe is something which to some extent you can still understand; but when religious feeling disappears, the words in which men have struggled to express it become meaningless. The trouble of the modern age is not merely the inability to believe certain things about God and man which our forefathers believed, but the inability to *feel* towards God and man as they did.” (15)

Chapter Six: The Dark Night of the Soul in *The Dry Salvages*

Critics like Helen Gardner and Montezanti argue that there are several key symbolic relationships in the different quartets. One of them parallels the four ancient elements proposed by Heraclitus. Thus, while *Burnt Norton* is air, *East Coker* earth, and *Little Gidding* fire, the predominant element in *The Dry Salvages* is water. Water is a very important Christian symbol; it represents the baptism, the death of the material world, and the new spiritual life of the believer. In addition, Eliot's note on the title of the poem indicates that the Dry Salvages are a small group of rocks off Cape Ann in Massachusetts. The name "The Dry 'les trois'" becomes particularly significant here as the number three represents the trinity in Christianity. These symbols are the first link to Christianity in a poem that seems to deviate from Christian thought. In fact, the third section of *The Dry Salvages* contrasts with the third sections of the previous and the following poems; whereas the references to Christianity are very explicit in the third section of both *East Coker* and *Little Gidding*, *The Dry Salvages* often refers to Hinduism. It is also possible to perceive this contrast within the poem, for the second and fourth sections of *The Dry Salvages* are more direct in their dealing with Christianity. The *Bhagavad-Gita*, one of the sacred books of Hinduism, is the Eastern source that Eliot uses. However, the idea of detachment presents a thematic connection between the third section of *The Dry Salvages* and Saint John of the Cross.

The whole third section of *The Dry Salvages* deals with the episode in which Krishna, disguised as the charioteer of Arjuna, tells him to march to battle without thinking about the results. The poem starts with a speaker pondering the significance of this event. Montezanti believes that the way in which the poem starts shows Saint John's influence since Eliot employs

the saint's writing style: "Por otra parte, así como el remedo de las paradojas de San Juan de la Cruz se enmarca en una presentación que parece dudar del mismo acto elocutivo, también ahora el poeta toma una cierta distancia de su fuente, al decir 'sometimes I wonder if that is what Krishna meant'" (Montezanti 104). The question refers to the reasons Krishna gives Arjuna to fight since Arjuna, upon seeing all the people that he loved marching against him, decides not to use his weapons to harm them. Among other reasons, Krishna explains to him that the warrior's destiny is to fight, that fighting for a good reason does not add any bad *karma*, and that he should not worry about the consequences of his actions, for he is a warrior and that is his *dharma*. All the explanations that Krishna gives deal with the idea of avoiding reincarnation. One has to remember that, in Hinduism, reincarnation is a negative process that takes place because the person attaches himself/herself to the wheel of existence, the material world. Although Eliot never accepted the idea of reincarnation, he is using the concept to portray how the Christian dark night of the soul works.

The Dry Salvages opens with images of the tube once again, but this time the poet's main concern is detachment from the idea of the future:

I sometimes wonder if that is what Krishna meant—

Among other things—or one way of putting the same thing:

That the future is a faded song, a Royal Rose or a lavender

spray

Of wistful regret for those who are not yet here to regret,

Pressed between yellow leaves of a book that has never

been opened.

And the way up is the way down, the way forward is the way back.

You cannot face it steadily, but this thing is sure,
 That time is no healer: The patient is no longer here.
 When the train starts, and the passengers are settled
 To fruit, periodicals and business letters
 (And those who saw them off have left the platform)
 Their faces relax from grief into relief,
 To the sleepy rhythm of a hundred hours.
 Fare forward, travellers! not escaping from the past
 Into different lives, or into any future;
 You are not the same people who left that station
 Or who will arrive at any terminus,
 While the narrowing rails slide together behind you (*DS III. 1-20*)

Lines eight to ten present the first allusion to the dark night of the soul. The paradox of the two ways (going down in order to go up) is also found in the teachings of Saint John of the Cross. In addition, the poem provides the poet's new insight about the dark night. Even though the reference takes the reader back to the image of medical care in the third section of *East Coker*, line ten presents the conclusion of the episode in the hospital: The patient dies. Since dying in the paternal care is the objective in the previous poem, one can understand that the poet has finally seen the future of the soul pass through the dark night.

It is important to mention that the idea of the future entails a semantic shift when compared to the concept of destiny. No one has dominion over future events; sometimes positive and happy events are overshadowed by sorrow and pain that are uncontrollable, while destiny is commonly viewed as something that can be determined by the person's actions both in

Christianity and Eastern religions. In Eastern religions, *karma* is determined by specific actions in one's life; in Christianity, the person's actions and decisions lead him/her either to Heaven or Hell. In *The Dry Salvages*, however, both concepts are perceived as irrelevant ideas, which can be explained by considering that, when the person undergoes the dark night of the soul, the question of how it will end is irrelevant because there is nothing that serves as a comforting hope. Hence, one does not find any comfort when thinking about the future. It is possible to assert that the dark night in *The Dry Salvages* has given the poet a powerful insight: Acceptance. Passengers of trains, who grieve about leaving their loved ones behind, have to accept departure as a fact and they slowly surrender to the idea of separation, the logical consequence (*DS III*. 11-15). In doing so, the poet recommends detachment as the way to survive separation: "Fare forward, travellers! not escaping from the past / Into different lives, or into any future" (*DS III*. 16-17). Such a recommendation resembles Krishna's words about transcending the material in the *Bhagavad-Gita*:

Arjuna said: What are the characteristics of those who have transcended the three Gunas, and what is their conduct? How does one transcend these three Gunas, O Lord Krishna?

The Supreme Lord said: One who neither hates the presence of enlightenment, activity, and delusion nor desires for them when they are absent; and

The one who remains like a witness; who is not moved by the Gunas, thinking that the Gunas only are operating; who stands firm and does not waver; and

The one who depends on the Lord and is indifferent to pain and pleasure; to whom a clod, a stone, and gold are alike; to whom the dear and the unfriendly are alike; who is of firm mind; who is calm in censure and in praise; and

The one who is indifferent to honor and disgrace; who is the same to friend and foe; who has renounced the sense of doership; is said to have transcended the Gunas.

The one who offers service to Me with love and unswerving devotion transcends Gunas, and becomes fit for realizing Brahman.

Because, I am the abode of the immortal and eternal Brahman, of everlasting Dharma, and of the absolute bliss. (14. 21-27)

Detachment in the *Bhagavad-Gita* has the objective of transcending time and becoming united to the divinity. The person who attaches himself or herself to the temporal is cursed with the wheel of birth, reincarnation, which is commonly perceived as a journey of the soul. Traveling is significant in the third section of *The Dry Salvages*; there are several images of voyages. Since the images of voyage include the movement through the sea, the idea of traveling is also expanded:

And on the deck of the drumming liner
 Watching the furrow that widens behind you,
 You shall not think 'the past is finished'
 Or 'the future is before us.'
 At nightfall, in the rigging and the aerial,
 Is a voice descanting (though not to the ear,
 The murmuring shell of time, and not in any language) (III. 18-24)

In order to survive the dark night of the soul, one has to continue wandering in darkness.

However, this process opens one's spiritual awareness. The poem illustrates this principle with the subtle voice that murmurs in the ear of the person. Its words become particularly significant

when considering that the voice strips the soul from its final possessions, the last two rags that it uses to cover itself and separate it from the godhead. The first one is the realization that, by undergoing the dark night, one's life cannot remain the same: "Fare forward, you who think that you are voyaging; / You are not those who saw the harbour / Receding, or those who will disembark. / Here between the hither and the farther shore / While time is withdrawn, consider the future / And the past with an equal mind" (*DS III*. 19-24). The last possession that the person treasures is undoubtedly attachment to life. Therefore, the voice speaks about the fear of death, but it does so not with the intent of soothing the soul with sweet thoughts about the avoidance of death. Paradoxically, the words instruct one to embrace it:

At the moment which is not of action or inaction
 You can receive this: 'On whatever sphere of being
 The mind of a man may be intent
 At the time of death' - that is the one action
 (And the time of death is every moment)
 Which shall fructify in the lives of others:
 And do not think of the fruit of action.
 Fare forward.

O voyagers, O seamen,
 You who came to port, and you whose bodies
 Will suffer the trial and judgment of the sea,
 Or whatever event, this is your real destination.
 So Krishna, as when he admonished Arjuna
 On the field of battle.

Not fare well,

But fare forward, voyagers. (*DS III. 25-40*)

The greatest sacrifice that the person has to make in order to merge himself or herself with God is precisely to abandon his or her will to be alive. In “the moment which is not of action or inaction,” the dark night of the soul, the person comes to the realization that his life must mean nothing to him/her, for clinging to life reveals a self-centered mentality. Eliot claims that the only concern of the person has to be death, for it is the only constant in people’s lives. The true Christian, therefore, should not grow fearful of death, for it is the threshold of the union with God, as Saint John states:

Es de saber que la muerte natural de las almas que llegan a este estado, aunque la condición de su muerte, en cuanto al natural, es semejante a las demás, pero en la causa y en el modo de la muerte hay mucha diferencia, porque si las otras mueren a muerte causada por enfermedad o por longura de días, éstas, aunque en enfermedad mueran o en cumplimiento de edad, no les arranca el alma sino algún ímpetu o encuentro de amor mucho más subido que los pasados y más poderoso y valeroso, pues pudo romper la tela y llevarse la joya del alma.

Así, la muerte de semejantes almas es muy suave y muy dulce, más que les fue la vida espiritual toda su vida; pues que mueren con más subidos ímpetus y encuentros sabrosos de amor, siendo ellas como el cisne, que canta más suavemente cuando se muere. (qtd. in Ruiz 670)

The record of Saint John’s death shows that he died such a death:

‘Pasado un rato, comenzamos los que estábamos allí a andar de prisa y como turbados, hojeando el breviario o el manual para hacer la recomendación del

ánima. Lo cual visto por él, nos dijo con grande sosiego y paz: *Déjenlo, por amor de Dios, y quiétense'*..

Dos actitudes marcadamente distintas. Fray Juan agonizante, que espera tranquilo la muerte como una continuación de su vida de amor, pide que le lean el *Cantar de los Cantares* y omitan la recomendación del alma. Por otra parte, personas que se azoran y desconciertan con su idea de la muerte, de temor. Es precisamente el moribundo quien recomienda serenidad. Quiere morir sencillamente, con la naturalidad de un creyente. (qtd. in Ruiz 670)

Saint John's idea of death is deeply rooted in the example of acceptance set by Jesus. He himself had to accept death in the crucial moment of his betrayal in the garden. Although Peter tried to defend him with his sword at the time of his arrest, Jesus said: "Put up thy sword into the sheath: The cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?" (John 18. 11). This attitude towards death can be explained in the spiritual awareness that develops during the dark night of the soul. Saint Paul develops this idea when talking about the passion of Christ: "And being found in the fashion of man, he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him" (Phil 2. 8, 9). In the dark night, the person comes to understand that death makes it possible for the individual who seeks God to become one with Him. Death does not terminate the life of love of the Christian but merges him/her with the object of his/her affection, God: "So when this corruptible shall be put on incorruption, and this mortal shall be put to immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?" (1 Co. 15. 55). The fruit of death is consequently union with God for the person who has undergone the dark night. However, the human mind cannot embrace death easily

because it is constantly preoccupied with the material, and the two bonding ropes of the material are regret and worry. These bonds entangle the soul by restraining the mind and fixing it to the temporal. A mind that is saturated by the thoughts of actions cannot concentrate on God, an idea that is suggested in *The Dry Salvages*: “And do not think of the fruit of action. / Fare forward” (DS III. 38, 39). Therefore, it is possible to see how the Christian idea of embracing death, the last teaching of Saint John of the Cross, is also present in the poem.

There is another religious teaching that is also significant in *The Dry Salvages*, but this teaching comes from the *Bhagavad-Gita*. Since regret ties a person to the wheel of birth, one has to forget about the consequences of one’s actions in order to be able to be free. This teaching has its roots in the idea that, when one has regrets, the mind is divided between reality and illusion and becomes ultimately distracted from the truth. Thus, a self-conscious person has to elevate himself above such a state, as the *Bhagavad-Gita* indicates:

The Vedas deal with the three states or Gunas of mind. Become free from dualities, be ever balanced and unconcerned with the thoughts of acquisition and preservation. Rise above the three Gunas, and be Self-conscious, O Arjuna.

To a Self-realized person the Vedas are as useful as a reservoir of water when there is flood water available everywhere.

You have Adhikaara over your respective duty only, but no control or claim over the results. The fruits of work should not be your motive. You should never be inactive.

Do your duty to the best of your ability, O Arjuna, with your mind attached to the Lord, abandoning (worry and) attachment to the results, and remaining calm in both success and failure. The equanimity of mind is called Karma-yoga. (2. 45-48)

The word *guna* can be understood as the quality, state, or the property of mind, matter, and nature. According to the *Bhagavad-Gita*, the three *gunas*, *Sattva* or goodness, *Rajas* or activity, and *Tamas*, or inertia, bind the immortal soul to the body (14. 5). One dominates over the other two by suppressing them. When *Rajas* dominates, the happiness that springs from both knowledge and laziness is suppressed, but the person is bound to the wheel by actions:

Of these, *Sattva*, being calm, is illuminating and ethical. It fetters the embodied being, the *Jeevaatma* or *Purusha*, by attachment to happiness and knowledge, O Arjuna.

O Arjuna, know that *Rajas* is characterized by intense (selfish) activity and is born of desire and attachment. It binds the *Jeeva* by attachment to the fruits of work.

Know, O Arjuna, that *Tamas*, the deluder of *Jeeva*, is born of inertia. It binds by ignorance, laziness, and (excessive) sleep.

O Arjuna, *Sattva* attaches one to happiness, *Rajas* to action, and *Tamas* to ignorance by covering the knowledge.

Sattva dominates by suppressing *Rajas* and *Tamas*; *Rajas* dominates by suppressing *Sattva* and *Tamas*; and *Tamas* dominates by suppressing *Sattva* and *Rajas*, O Arjuna.

When the lamp of knowledge shines through all the (nine) gates of the body, then it should be known that *Sattva* is predominant.

Greed, activity, restlessness, passion, and undertaking of (selfish) works arise when *Rajas* is predominant, O Arjuna.

Ignorance, inactivity, carelessness, and delusion arise when *Tamas* is predominant, O Arjuna.

One who dies during the dominance of *Sattva* goes to heaven, the pure world of the knowers of the Supreme.

When one dies during the dominance of *Rajas*, one is reborn as attached to action (or the utilitarian type); and dying in *Tamas*, one is reborn as ignorant (or lower creatures). (*BG* 14. 6-15)

Adhikaara, on the other hand, means ability and privilege, prerogative, jurisdiction, discretion, right, preference, choice, rightful claim, authority, and control. According to the *Bhagavad-Gita*, one cannot control the consequences of one's actions and, hence, one should not worry about them, for those worries are a manifestation of the dominance of *Rajas*. Therefore, one should transcend attachment to actions and ignorance in order to achieve happiness, or *Brahman*, which is done by means of *Karma-yoga*, the exercise of detaching oneself from worrying about the results of one's actions:

Work done with selfish motives is inferior by far to the selfless service or Karma-yoga. Therefore be a Karma-yogi, O Arjuna. Those who seek (to enjoy) the fruits of their work are verily unhappy (because one has no control over the results).

A Karma-yogi gets freedom from both vice and virtue in this life itself. Therefore, strive for Karma-yoga. Working to the best of one's abilities without getting attached to the fruits of work is called (Nishkaama) Karma-yoga.

Wise Karma-yogis, possessed with mental poise by renouncing the attachment to the fruits of work, are indeed freed from the bondage of rebirth and attain the blissful divine state. (BG 2. 49-51)

In *The Dry Salvages*, this last idea is also present. The closing lines of the third section of the poem become a request to the seamen to forget about the future, embracing Krishna's teaching:

O voyagers, O seamen,
You who came to port, and you whose bodies
Will suffer the trial and judgment of the sea,

Or whatever event, this is your real destination.

So Krishna, as when he admonished Arjuna

On the field of battle.

Not fare well,

But fare forward, voyagers. (*DS* III. 40-47)

A significant word in the poem is “destination.” Although readers normally see it as the point where the seamen have to arrive, it is also possible to read it as “destiny.” If one reads it so, then Krishna’s teaching becomes evident, for the ultimate destiny of the person would be to keep advancing, to proceed disregarding the consequences of that continuous moving forward.

Complete abandonment of the self, hence, is what Eliot sees as the most significant aspect of the dark night of the soul in *The Dry Salvages*. This abandonment implies being willing to die, perhaps the greatest sacrifice for a human being. However, that a seaman embarks knowing that he is going to die is a difficult task indeed. One wonders how the person undertakes such a step. The answer is revealed in the fourth section of the poem, the movement out of the dark night.

The Movement Out in *The Dry Salvages*

Asking a person to die willingly is a request that perhaps very few people would ever entertain. In Christian terms, God expects the believer to place his or her faith in Him completely, so that nothing else matters, not even life, for the soul is secure in the hands of God. However, human faith is weak and, in the face of death, anxiety engulfs the person, which might lead him or her to abandon his or her faith.

Under such circumstances, the means that strong believers use is prayer. Prayer allows the person to keep his or her eyes fixed on God and accept His will. In the Bible, the death of Stephen illustrates how prayer works when the person has surrendered to death:

But he, being full of the Holy Ghost, looked up steadfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God,

And said, Behold, I see the Son of man standing on the right hand of God.

Then they cried out with a loud voice, and stopped their ears, and ran upon him with one accord,

And cast him out of the city, and stoned him.

And they stoned Stephen, calling upon God, and saying Lord Jesus, receive my spirit. (Acts 7. 55-59)

The idea of using prayer to make a terrible moment bearable springs directly from the passion of Christ, for Jesus himself had to undergo the most terrible moments in order to be able to offer his life. Nevertheless, it was not easy for Christ, either, as the Gospel of Luke records:

And when he was at the place, he said unto them, Pray that ye enter not into temptation.

And he was withdrawn from them about a stone's cast, and kneeled down, and prayed,

Saying, Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me: Nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done. And there appeared an angel unto him from heaven, strengthening him. (22. 40-43)

God allowed Stephen to have a magnificent vision of His glory before he was put to death, and He also sent an angel to comfort Jesus since both of them resorted to prayer in order to bear

death. However, according to Saint John of the Cross, prayer becomes completely useless for the individual that is going through the dark night:

But there is another thing here that afflicts and distresses the soul greatly, which is that, as this dark night has hindered its faculties and affections in this way, it is unable to raise its affection or its mind to God, neither can it pray to Him, thinking, as Jeremiah thought concerning himself, that God has set a cloud before it through which its prayer cannot pass [...] It is God Who is passively working here in the soul; wherefore the soul can do nothing. Hence it can neither pray nor pay attention when it is present at the Divine offices much less can it attend to other things and affairs which are temporal. (*DN II. 8. 1*)

In the dark night of the soul, the person cannot pray in order to comfort himself or herself; he or she has to keep advancing with the understanding that God is nowhere to be found, in a state that resembles that of Jesus crying out from the cross: “And at the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani? Which is, being interpreted, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” (Mark 15. 34). As previously mentioned, the dark night is absolute purgation from everything that the soul possesses and that also includes the comfort that one might find in prayer. In the dark night, angels are neither going to provide comfort, nor will soothing glorious visions calm the desperate soul. To the distress of the person, prayers will appear to be unheard and the presence of God cannot be felt. It becomes the most absolute darkness and deprivation.

If prayer, the helmet of the Christian warrior according to Paul, is useless, how can the soul ever get out of the dark night? In *The Dry Salvages*, the answer that the poet finds is intercession. Even if personal prayer is perceived to be ineffective, prayer is by no means

powerless. Consequently, the way out that Eliot sees is the prayer of intercession of other believers who elevate a plea on behalf of the ones undergoing the dark night. In this concrete case, one finds an invocation to the Virgin Mary. It is important to note here that Eliot uses the religious figure of the Virgin because, as an Anglo-Catholic, he believes that the Virgin is the most influential intercessor before God that a person can have.⁹ Therefore, the persona prays to the Virgin, asking her to intercede on behalf of fishermen, merchants, and leaders: “Lady, whose shrine stands on the promontory, / Pray for all those who are in ships, those / Whose business has to do with fish, and / Those concerned with every lawful traffic / And those who conduct them” (*DS IV*. 1-5). The fisherman is an obvious Christian symbol; it represents those people who obey the word of God, the believers, and its origin is found in the words that Jesus said to Simon and Andrew: “Come ye after me, and I will make you to become fishers of men” (Mark 1. 17). Moreover, even though line five seems to refer to merchants and authorities, it is possible to state that the leaders for whom the Virgin has to intercede are religious and political figures, for the phrase “those who conduct them” might be seen as a reference to the shepherd guiding his sheep. Lines six to fifteen present the prominent role of the Virgin as the perfect intercessor since her

⁹ The history of the Anglican church and its beliefs is rather complex. Anglicanism shares a lot of doctrines with the Catholic Church, which explains why Eliot places so much importance to the Virgin Mary as an intercessor. However, the theological foundations are different.

Anglicanism began with a political problem between the Catholic Church and the English crown and, after the Restoration (eighteenth to twentieth centuries), the Anglican Church split in two sections, the High and Low Churches. While the latter’s beliefs were more flexible, the former is characterized by a strict following of the Anglican doctrines and is commonly called the Anglo-Catholic Church. This church has gone back to the Catholic traditions of the Middle Ages, such as the Latin Mass, the sacraments, and the belief of the Virgin Mary as the intercessor on behalf of humankind. Perhaps because of his ideas on tradition, T. S. Eliot converted to the Anglo-Catholic Church in 1927. Eliot’s faith explains his stance concerning the Virgin Mary.

intervention reaches men who have died and their afflicted mothers as well as those people who found death in the sea:

Repeat a prayer also on behalf of

Women who have seen their sons or husbands

Setting forth, and not returning:

Figlia del tuo figlio,

Queen of Heaven.

Also pray for those who were in ships, and

Ended their voyage on the sand, in the sea's lips

Or in the dark throat which will not reject them

Or wherever cannot reach them the sound of the sea bell's

Perpetual angelus.

Lines six to ten have a direct connection with the results of Arjuna's setting forth; however, even though warriors are asked to advance and not to worry about the outcome, this section focuses on the anguish that the mothers of these people experience. The biblical reference to the pain that Mary felt when seeing Jesus on the cross is clear: "Now there stood by the cross of Jesus his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Cleophas, and Mary Magdalene" (John 19. 25). Since the Virgin Mary is the mother of Jesus, who is also setting forth and not returning, she becomes the most suitable person to understand the pain and the sorrow of a mother who has lost her son and, therefore, the best intercessor before God. Lines nine and ten reinforce this claim by establishing the paradox of destiny and origin: Mary is at the same time the daughter of her Son and the Queen of Heaven. In other words, no one has a stronger connection to Jesus than his

mother and, consequently, his mother's prayers are the most influential in Heaven. Lines eleven to fifteen allude to those people who, because of an accident, died at the sea and were drawn to the dry sand of the beach or got lost in the depths of the marine abyss. Nevertheless, the image also refers to the dark night of the soul, where the person is absolutely isolated and hopeless, as suggested by the prayer of the Angelus that cannot reach them.

For Eliot, therefore, prayer is the way out of this void. However, it has to be the prayer of an influential being, and Eliot, an Anglo-Catholic, believes that such a person cannot be anyone other than the Virgin Mary. When one's own prayer proves to be ineffective, the intercession of the Virgin Mary is the only hope for those wandering in the profound darkness of the soul.

Chapter Seven: The Dark Night of the Soul in *Little Gidding*

While the third section of *The Dry Salvages* presents the dark night of the soul as a voyage without departure or arrival points, the dark night of the soul is depicted as the conquest of anxiety through indifference in *Little Gidding*. This indifference, nevertheless, is not just a lack of attention; it is the healthy indifference that Krishna described to Arjuna and urged him to embrace in order to stabilize his *prajna*, or his mind:

Do your duty to the best of your ability, O Arjuna, with your mind attached to the Lord, abandoning (worry and) attachment to the results, and remaining calm in both success and failure. The equanimity of mind is called Karma-yoga.

Work done with selfish motives is inferior by far to the selfless service or Karma-yoga. Therefore be a Karma-yogi, O Arjuna. Those who seek (to enjoy) the fruits of their work are verily unhappy (because one has no control over the results). A Karma-yogi gets freedom from both vice and virtue in this life itself. Therefore, strive for Karma-yoga. Working to the best of one's abilities without getting attached to the fruits of work is called (Nishkaama) Karma-yoga.

Wise Karma-yogis, possessed with mental poise by renouncing the attachment to the fruits of work, are indeed freed from the bondage of rebirth and attain the blissful divine state. When your intellect will completely pierce the veil of delusion, then you will become indifferent to what has been heard and what is to be heard (from the scriptures).

When your intellect, that is confused by the conflicting opinions and the ritualistic doctrine of the Vedas, shall stay steady and firm with the Self, then you shall attain Self-realization. (BG. 2. 48-52)

Freedom of mind is impossible if the person is restrained by the ropes of worry. Since it is typically human to worry about the future, the results of one's actions, it is necessary that the individual be emptied of those concerns. Krishna, thus, tells Arjuna to continue through the path of his destiny without being distracted by worries. The perception of mysticism, therefore, is stronger in *Little Gidding* than in the other quartets, for mysticisms coming from different religious doctrines converge in this last poem.

Christianity is also present in the third section of the poem. The first lines of *Little Gidding* have a strong resemblance with a discursive structure in the Bible, more concretely, with the book of Proverbs. This structure, known as an axiomatic proverb, is found among the writings attributed to Agur in the Bible. Those axiomatic proverbs have a consistent pattern in which the first premise establishes an observation that can be expanded in the second premise. One can see this recurrent structure when reading Proverbs: "There are three things that are never satisfied, yea, four things say not, It is enough: The grave; and the barren womb; the earth that is not filled with water; and the fire that saith not, It is enough" (30. 15, 16). One can easily perceive the same type of structure in the opening lines of the third section of *Little Gidding*:

There are three conditions which often look alike
 Yet differ completely, flourish in the same hedgerow:
 Attachment to self and to things and to persons, detachment
 From self and from things and from persons; and, growing
 Between them, indifference. (1-5)

Eliot is clearly employing the biblical structure of the axiomatic proverbs, which reveals a strong connection between his writing and the Bible. However, even though Eliot's axiomatic lines manifest influence from the Bible, they do not prove the influence of Saint John of the Cross on *Little Gidding*. Unless there is such a pattern in *Dark Night of the Soul*, one cannot properly speak about influence coming from Saint John. Although the axiomatic writing is not present in the essay, it is one of the features of the saint's writing style, which is predominantly found in his brief pieces of writing. For example, the *Writings of Light and Love* includes this axiomatic writing as one of the five writing techniques that critics note and praise:

La lectura resulta interesante y nueva en cada axioma. Se debe, más que nada, a la densidad del contenido. Pero mucho contribuye la riqueza y la perfección del lenguaje. En ocasiones, se suceden varios con idéntica fórmula introductoria, otras veces varían. Ha logrado un procedimiento suave que, sin salir del género, supera la monotonía en que suele incurrir la sucesión de frases cortas e independientes. (Ruiz 171)

Saint John's work *Writings of Light and Love* is varied indeed, for these writings include prayers, confessions, commands, warnings, and the axioms: "Dos veces trabaja el pájaro que se asentó en la liga, es a saber: En desasirse y limpiarse de ella. Y de dos maneras pena el que cumple su apetito: En desasirse y, después de desasido, en purgarse de lo que de él se le pegó" (ALA 22).

Upon reading these pieces of writing, so reminiscent of the Proverbs, one perceives influence as a triangular structure in which one finds the Bible on the top and both Eliot and Saint John at the base. Both Eliot and Saint John use the Bible as a source of influence, but Eliot also borrows from Saint John.

Not only does Eliot write using Saint John's style, but he also shares thematic unity with the saint. The first five lines of *Little Gidding* allude to spiritual growth by means of detachment, the

main idea in *Dark Night of the Soul*. The poem starts contrasting the two ends of the process of spiritual growth that Saint John of the Cross outlines, attachment and detachment. Eliot follows the saint's doctrines closely, as the poem shows with the triadic classification of attachments: "Attachment to self and to things and to persons" (*LG III 5*). However, he also mentions a compromise position, indifference. One might ask whether this indifference is the healthy indifference that Eastern holy books refer to or if it has negative connotations. The healthy indifference frees the person from attachment to the results or consequences of his/her actions, whereas the unhealthy one becomes mere passivity; the person does not actively participate in the transformation of the self. For Saint John, there is certainly a time for passive waiting for God to move His hand, but passivity does not allow a person to enter the dark night. One has to be willing to submit oneself to the dark night of the soul, which implies an active decision and participation with God's will. The indifference that Eliot mentions does not seem to share this nature. The indifference in the first lines of *Little Gidding* is actually the greatest evil since it neither allows the person to walk in the dark night of the soul, nor to enjoy a mundane life: "[...] growing / between them, indifference / Which resembles the others as death resembles life, / Being between two lives—unflowering, between / The live and the dead nettle" (*LG III 4-8*). The two lives that the poem mentions are images of two types of individuals in the world. On one side, there are those who strive for material goods, fill themselves with illusions, and want to live a life of dissipation, whereas there are a few who decide to abandon that lifestyle to look for God. Those are for Saint John of the Cross the ones that are alive. The former, the ones who are attached to the world, are spiritually dead according to Christian teachings: "And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins, wherein in the time past ye walked according to the course of this world" (Eph 2. 1, 2). Saint John parallels this idea of death and life in his *Sayings of Light and Love*: "Whoever knows how to die in all will have life in all"(160).

Therefore, one has to understand that Eliot's "live and the dead nettles" are a representation of the lifestyles of the common people and the mystics. Moreover, since this indifference grows barren, one sees that it cannot be the healthy indifference that Krishna meant. Krishna's indifference makes the person go forward; that is, it produces an impulse to become active when the person is passive, such in Arjuna's case. Similarly, the indifference that Saint John deals with makes the person walk deeper into the dark night, which does not have a negative effect, either. However, the indifference mentioned in *Little Gidding* resembles the passivity of the hollow men who are bound to the wheel of birth. It produces no positive outcome; it just stands in the way as a sterile third option that ultimately leads to the same point as the way of attachment: Spiritual aridity.

Eliot finds that memory is the liberating tool. It seems paradoxical because the doctrines of detachment include freeing oneself from what one loves, which includes memories. However, Eliot posits in *Little Gidding* that the function of remembrance is, precisely, detachment: "This is the use of memory: / For liberation—not less of love but / expanding / Of love beyond desire, and so liberation / From the future as well as the past" (III. 8-11). The role of memory in liberation, as Eliot perceives it, is fundamental. For the poet, memory is a liberating agent provided that this agent is based on love, not regret. According to him, memory does not imply a diminishing of love, but its expansion beyond wanting. Longing for something is an attachment, but if one's love surpasses that frontier, then the individual is not tied by the ropes of desire. One can assert that regrets bind a person because they make him or her see past mistakes with sorrow and, at the same time, make the person worry about the future. The person, therefore, is pulled between the shortcomings of the past and the terrible expectation of failing in the future. Clearly, Eliot believes that memory cannot liberate anyone unless it goes beyond time and, when memory and love become one, memory transcends time.

One might think that the combination love-memory is a rather original idea that Eliot himself crafted. However, Saint John's teachings are the source for that thought. For Saint John, hope transforms memory into something that can be united with God:

Faith voids and darkens the understanding as to all its natural intelligence, and herein prepares it for union with Divine Wisdom. Hope voids and withdraws the memory from all creature possessions; for, as Saint Paul says, hope is for that which is not possessed; and thus it withdraws the memory from that which it is capable of possessing, and sets it on that for which it hopes. And for this cause hope in God alone prepares the memory purely for union with God. (*DN II. 16. 11*)

Once memory is made in the likeness of God, memory becomes love as well, for God is love. Nevertheless, Saint John states that a merely human memory implies a diminishing in love:

For, when the friendship is purely spiritual, the love of God grows with it; and the more the soul remembers it, the more it remembers the love of God, and the greater the desire it has for God; so that, as the one grows, the other grows also. For the spirit of God has this property, that it increases good by adding to it more good, inasmuch as there is likeness and conformity between them. But, when this love arises from the vice of sensuality aforementioned, it produces the contrary effects; for the more the one grows, the more the other decreases, and the remembrance of it likewise. If that sensual love grows, it will at once be observed that the soul's love of God is becoming colder, and that it is forgetting Him as it remembers that love; there comes to it, too, a certain remorse of conscience. And, on the other hand, if the love of God grows in the soul, that other love becomes cold and is forgotten; for, as the two are contrary to one

another, not only does the one not aid the other, but the one which predominates quenches and confounds the other, and becomes strengthened in itself, as the philosophers say.

(DN I. 4. 7)

Consequently, Saint John's *Dark Night of the Soul* could be the source from which Eliot derived his idea of the compound memory-love. The following lines illustrate the similarity between the role of memory in the *Dark Night of the Soul* and Eliot's *Little Gidding*:

This is the use of memory:

For liberation—not less of love but expanding
 Of love beyond desire, and so liberation
 From the future as well as the past. Thus, love of a country
 Begins as an attachment to our own field of action
 And comes to find that action of little importance
 Though never indifferent. History may be servitude,
 History may be freedom. (LG III. 8-15)

Eliot indeed expands the meaning of memory by using the concept of history, which is the collective memory of a country. The former lines also suggest Eliot's strong sense of nationalism, the grounds for his notions of tradition. For him, the one who loves his or her space learns to love something broader, the country. In so doing, the individual's love (one's own place) is erased by the love of the greater realm, the country. Similarly, the expansion of one's personal memories becomes history. History might be an attachment, but it also liberates the person from his or her individual memories by taking them into the collective record of deeds. Eliot states this idea from line fifteen to eighteen: "See, now they vanish, / The faces and places, with the self which, as it could, loved them, / To become renewed, transfigured, in another

pattern.” Individual memories and actions cannot outstand the collective and, thus, fade away, engulfed by the powerful tradition of the history of a country. The self also merges with the collective, which reminds one of the Buddhist teachings about how the self is an illusion and that, when one transcends it, achieves the union with the godhead. This transformation is reinforced by the use of the word “transfigured,” a word with clear Christian connotations. The brief theophany (the manifestation of the divine power of the Son of God) of the transfiguration of Jesus in the mountain hints to the transformation and renewal of all that is announced in the book of Revelations: “And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: For the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea [...] And he that sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new” (Rev. 21. 1, 5). It is interesting to note that Eliot is reconstructing the apocalyptic vision in his poem, for he introduces the transformation of the old (the individual) with the imperative verb “see.” This verb parallels “behold” (when the angel speaks to John in the Apocalypse) in the book of Revelations and both indicate the existence of more than one person; there is somebody who commands and a person who follows directions.

The next lines of the poem suggest a series of hypothetical situations that the poet considers in order to arrive at a conclusion. The first situation deals with the main Christian obstacle that prevents the union with God, sin. Eliot seems to turn his eyes to the common people and what he sees is their spiritual defects. Humans are never free from sin and, therefore, the poet perceives the flaws in them. However, there is an interesting element in the poem, hope, which leads him to be optimistic about the future:

Sin is Behovely, but

All shall be well, and

All manner of thing shall be well.

If I think, again, of this place,

And of people, not wholly commendable,
 Of not immediate kin or kindness,
 But of some peculiar genius,
 All touched by a common genius,
 United in the strife which divided them;
 If I think of a king at nightfall,
 Of three men, and more, on the scaffold
 And a few who died forgotten
 In other places, here and abroad,
 And of one who died blind and quiet,
 Why should we celebrate
 These dead men more than the dying?
 It is not to ring the bell backward
 Nor is it an incantation
 To summon the spectre of a Rose. (LG III. 18-36)

One might think that the optimism derived from hope also contradicts the teachings of the *Bhagavad-Gita* and Saint John, for optimism might be seen as a manifestation of attachment. Nevertheless, “All shall be well” might also imply the healthy indifference in the *Bhagavad-Gita* and the total yielding that Saint John of the Cross mentions. One can assert that this hope is one that transforms memory, according to Saint John of the Cross, because the poet’s perception of the “not wholly commendable” people is affected in a positive way, as the acknowledging of their genius shows. Since Saint John believes that memory becomes love in a spiritual sense, the fact that a person is capable of noticing the good in people shows how his perception has merged with love.

Furthermore, the poem suggests certain ideas that allude to the political situation of England both nationally and internationally. According to Eliot, people were divided politically, which, paradoxically, constitutes the common denominator among them. Thus, what unites them is the fact that they are separated and, perhaps, how passionate they are regarding their beliefs. The second situation that Eliot considers echoes this allusion, for it deals with several political executions, according to Montezanti. In the image of the king and other men on the scaffold, Montezanti sees a clear image of the execution of Charles I: “Se trata obviamente de Carlos I luego de la derrota de Naseby. Pocos años después Carlos sube al cadalso. Lo habían precedido su ministro, Lord Strafford, en 1641 y el Arzobispo de Canterbury, William Laud, en 1645” (131). Some people also find a reference here to Milton in the man “who died blind and quiet.” If that is the case, there is a strong political statement concerning the mourning for people of high political standing and the soldiers in World War I, which is the conclusion to which Eliot arrives: “Why should we celebrate / These dead men more than the dying? (*LG* III. 32, 33). He states that living in the past (honoring people who died long ago without paying attention to the dying of the present) is purposeless: “It is not to ring the bell backward / Nor is it an incantation / To summon the spectre of a Rose. / We cannot revive old factions / We cannot restore old policies / Or follow an antique drum” (*LG* III. 34-39).

However, it is possible to argue that those images of dying people, aside from having a political connotation, also constitute an allusion to the martyrdom of the apostles and to the crucifixion:

These men, and those who opposed them
 And those whom they opposed
 Accept the constitution of silence
 And are folded in a single party.

Whatever we inherit from the fortunate
 We have taken from the defeated
 What they had to leave us—a symbol:
 A symbol perfected in death.
 And all shall be well and
 All manner of thing shall be well
 By the purification of the motive
 In the ground of our beseeching. (*LG III. 40-52*)

Eliot sees a symbol that is the inheritance of humanity and that was forged by the death of all the people in antagonism. One can argue that the political allusions have yielded a religious one: Christianity. The most widespread symbol for Christianity is the cross, a symbol of death since its beginning: “And being in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross” (Phil. 2. 8). For Eliot, it is significant that this symbol has reached its perfection in death: A cross triggers almost immediately an association with death. Consequently, this perfect symbol for death is also the symbol of the death of the Perfect One and, thus, brings rest and peace, which might explain why it is used in cemeteries.

The last two lines of the poem deal with purification, the purpose of the dark night of the soul. The closing lines of the third section of *Little Gidding* encompass the thought of Saint John of the Cross about hope, memory, love, and purification. The prayer represents memory and love that hope has brought together; purification, the goal of the dark night, is implicit in the act of “beseeching.” After all, the image of someone pleading next to a cross might lead one to think about a prayer. The intention does not matter any longer because through prayer one achieves purity again. Therefore, sin has no power over the person, who has been freed from the servitude of evil.

The Movement Out in *Little Gidding*

Since the third section of *Little Gidding* presents an individual who has endured the effects of the dark night of the soul, one can expect the fourth section to deal, at last, with the total union with the godhead as the way out. As previously stated, each one of the quartets includes one of the ancient Greek elements in its structure, and the element that characterizes *Little Gidding* is fire. Needless to say, fire has many associations as an archetype—some positive, some negative. Fire has the connotation of destruction and suffering, but it is also seen as purification, renewal, and empowerment. Eliot takes advantage of this two-fold nature of fire as a symbol to posit two images in *Little Gidding* that share the same origin, although they differ greatly in meaning and connotation. Fire, furthermore, remains a significant symbol for Christianity, where its double symbolic nature acquires more significance for the analysis of the movement out from the dark night in the last quartet. For example, the book of Revelations predicts the destruction of the world by fire; the book of Acts mentions the descent of the Holy Ghost upon the disciples with the manifestation of tongues of fire above their heads. Likewise, fire is a significant symbol for Saint John of the Cross, for it is the symbol of love: “For love is like fire, which ever rises upward with the desire to be absorbed in the centre of its sphere” (*DN* II. 20. 6). According to Saint John, the individual who successfully goes through the process of the dark night is finally purged from all shortcomings by the flame of God:

From what has been said we shall be able to see how this dark night of loving fire, as it purges in the darkness, so also in the darkness enkindles the soul. We shall likewise be able to see that, even as spirits are purged in the next life with dark material fire, so in this life they are purged and cleansed with the dark spiritual fire of love. The difference is that in the next life they are cleansed with

fire, while here below they are cleansed and illumined with love only. It was this love that David entreated, when he said: *Cor mundum crea in me, Deus, etc.* For cleanness of heart is nothing less than the love and grace of God. For the clean of heart are called by our Saviour 'blessed;' which is as if He had called them 'enkindled with love;' since blessedness is given by nothing less than love. (*DN II. 12. 1*)

Thus, the flame that purifies the soul does not start as a ravaging fire that consumes everything immediately, but it is more like a bearable heat that slowly gets rid of the obstacles for the soul to be prepared to receive the burning blaze:

This enkindling and yearning of love are not always perceived by the soul. For in the beginning, when this spiritual purgation commences, all this Divine fire is used in drying up and making ready the wood (which is the soul) rather than in giving it heat. But, as time goes on, the fire begins to give heat to the soul, and the soul then very commonly feels this enkindling and heat of love. Further, as the understanding is being more and more purged by means of this darkness, it sometimes comes to pass that this mystical and loving theology, as well as enkindling the will, strikes and illumines the other faculty also—that of the understanding—with a certain Divine light and knowledge, so delectably and delicately that it aids the will to conceive a marvellous fervour, and, without any action of its own, there burns in it this Divine fire of love, in living flames, so that it now appears to the soul a living fire by reason of the living understanding which is given to it. (*DN II. 12. 5*)

Even though fire has a different meaning in the *Bhagavad-Gita*, its purpose is the same, to purify the soul, as noted in the words of Krishna: “Freed from attachment, fear, and anger; fully

absorbed in Me, taking refuge in Me, and purified by the fire of Self-knowledge, many have attained Me” (*BG* 4. 10). The online site “Basic Teachings of Buddha” uses a lit candle that has to be put out to illustrate suffering and wanting. The image is functional because fire has a constant need of feeding and, when one puts out the candle, suffering stops:

To end suffering, one must cut off greed and ignorance. This means changing one's views and living in a more natural and peaceful way. It is like blowing out a candle. The flame of suffering is put out for good. Buddhists call the state in which all suffering is ended **Nirvana**. Nirvana is an everlasting state of great joy and peace. The Buddha said, ‘The extinction of desire is Nirvana.’ This is the ultimate goal in Buddhism. Everyone can realize it with the help of the Buddha's teachings. It can be experienced in this very life.

All of these associations enrich the interpretation of the different fire images that the fourth section of *Little Gidding* presents. The first image is a dove that brings fire and terrifies people: “The dove descending breaks the air / With flame of incandescent terror” (1, 2). Montezanti argues that this dove can be a symbol of the German bombers attacking England during World War II. That interpretation certainly encompasses the negative perception of fire as an instrument of terror, destruction, and punishment, which, in turn, triggers the vision of the apocalyptic fire. However, one should not take that interpretation for granted. The following lines suggest a contradiction with the image of bombers creating havoc in England: “Of which the tongues declare / The one discharge from sin and error” (*LG* IV. 3, 4). In those lines, if one reads the word “tongues” as the “tongues of fire” in the book of Acts, the symbolism of fire acquires clear religious connotations. It is unlikely for Eliot to envision the German bombers as an agent of spiritual purification, however. Can that dove that brings fire be a symbol of the Holy Ghost? It is an allusion to the Pentecostal fire described in the book of Acts, which goes along with the idea

that the Holy Spirit pours over the sinners the grace and the forgiveness from God. The idea that forgiveness from God is experienced as fire is also found in the Bible, in the book of Isaiah:

Then said I, Woe is me! For I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips,
and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: For mine eyes have seen the
King, the Lord of hosts. Then flew one of the seraphims unto me, having a live
coal in his hand, which he had taken with the tongs from off the altar: And he
laid it upon my mouth, and said, Lo, this hath touched thy lips; and thine iniquity
is taken away, and thy sin purged. (6. 5-7)

Eliot plays further with both the positive and negative connotations of fire in the next lines:

“The only hope, or else despair / Lies in the choice of pyre or pyre— / To be redeemed from fire
by fire” (*LG IV*. 5-7). The individual is put in a position in which s/he has to choose between the
positive fire or the negative one. The former is the purifying agent of God; the latter, God’s
punishment for sinners, Hell. Either choice implies suffering because the person has to decide
whether s/he wants to suffer the flame of purification or suffer the eternal damnation of
tormenting fire. For Eliot, this choice is more a dilemma than a hope: Redemption from “fire by
fire” prompts him to ask himself about the origins of such a predicament. The answer
reverberates in his heart:

Who then devised the torment? Love.
Love is the unfamiliar Name
Behind the hands that wove
The intolerable shirt of flame
Which human power cannot remove.
We only live, only suspire
Consumed by either fire or fire. (*LG IV*. 8-14)

Love is nothing but another name for God, according to John the Apostle: “He that loveth not knoweth not God, for God is love” (1 John 4. 8). Love is the unfamiliar name of God that has been revealed and that can be juxtaposed to the Holy Name in the Mosaic revelation of the Old Testament. “The intolerable shirt of flame” is an allusion to the Greek myth of Hercules and Deianeira’s plan to keep her beloved with her. Likewise, there are two fires in Christianity. One is the punishment for rejecting God’s love; the other, the fire of the Holy Ghost, is given so that human beings learn to love God. This condition of intolerable love that consumes the person is also grounded in Saint John of the Cross, for the saint also resorts to the paradoxical nature of love in his “Llama de Amor Viva”: “¡Oh cauterio suave! / ¡Oh regalada llaga! / ¡Oh mano blanda! / ¡Oh toque delicado! / que a vida eterna sabe / y toda deuda paga / matando, muerte en vida has trocado”(qtd. in Montezanti 133). Saint John of the Cross describes this state of consumption by the fire of love in *Dark Night of the Soul* through the description of the ten steps of the ladder toward the complete union with God. For him, love as fire that consumes the soul is the last step before achieving total union with God. The first step is characterized by a lack of appetite regarding the mundane; the soul climbs the second step when it starts looking for God. The third step is an increase of fervor and the soul then works on behalf of others. The fourth and fifth steps are the same but differ in intensity: The former causes the soul to suffer for the beloved (God), whereas the latter is a longing for God with impatience. The next three steps imply that the soul becomes closer to God to the point of seizing the divinity, to climb onto the ninth step. On the ninth step, Saint John states that the soul is torched by love and cannot resist it, but the soul perceives fire as a positive experience:

The ninth step of love makes the soul to burn with sweetness. This step is that of the perfect, who now burn sweetly in God. For this sweet and delectable ardour is caused in them by the Holy Spirit by reason of the union which they

have with God. For this cause Saint Gregory says, concerning the Apostles, that when the Holy Spirit came upon them visibly they burned inwardly and sweetly through love. Of the good things and riches of God which the soul enjoys on this step, we cannot speak; for if many books were to be written concerning it the greater part would still remain untold. For this cause, and because we shall say something of it hereafter, I say no more here than that after this follows the tenth and last step of this ladder of love, which belongs not to this life. (*DN II. 20. 4*)

The last step is not possible to climb in this life according to Saint John of the Cross. In this tenth step, one merges with God absolutely: One's life is lost in God. Such is the state of *Nirvana* in Eastern religions, which is also impossible to obtain while alive.

Therefore, the way out of the dark night of the soul in *Little Gidding* is death; however, it is not death in a strict physical sense, but spiritual death: "The dove descending breaks the air / With flame of incandescent terror / Of which the tongues declare / The one discharge from sin and error. / The only hope, or else despair / Lies in the choice of pyre or pyre— / To be redeemed from fire by fire (*LG IV. 1-7*). As in the image of bombing that opens the fourth section of the poem, the fire of God will burn all the buildings and facades of the soul, leaving it unprotected to storm the weakened gates and burn the remains of the soul to the ground. In so doing, God will raise something new, a new life, as in Ezekiel's prophetic vision in the valley covered by the dry bones. Thus, the person dies in the absolute paternal care that was announced in *East Coker* and the Christian teaching in the letter to the Hebrews becomes a reality: "For our God is a consuming fire" (*12. 29*).

Conclusion: The Merging of Bloom, Non Poetic Influences, and Eliot

When considering Harold Bloom's concern about the anxiety of influence, one immediately sees that his main preoccupation is the poetical nature of influence. Through his revisionary ratios, he tries to explain how anxiety manifests itself in the younger writer who, by engaging into a fierce competition with a predecessor, tries to become what Bloom calls a strong poet. Sometimes this young poet distances himself or herself from the source of influence; other times the young poet attacks the "strong" poet's work in a search for his or her own place in the pantheon. Even though Bloom is not openly rejecting the possibility of the existence of non-poetical sources of influence, his reduced scope might lead one to overlook other significant sources of influence. It is interesting to note that, even though Bloom's theory of influence deals with the relationship between the poetical work of two authors, he did use a non poetic source to set the framework for his theory, a religious analogy taken from Milton's *Paradise Lost*.

However, "source" and "influence" are different concepts, and the issue at stake is anxiety springing from influence, not the incorporation of different sources. A source is a text that one uses to support an idea; an influence is a powerful force that causes a change in one's worldview. A critic might believe that the "weaker" poet does feel this overwhelming need to find his or her own place in the poetical tradition, which leads to anxiety, as Bloom theorizes. However, Bloom's argument of anxiety as the direct result of competition between two poets is debatable, for it reduces poetical creation to an act of jealousy. It is a poet's creative drives that prompts him or her to write, not the desire, conscious or unconscious, to outshine another poet. It is undeniable that there exists anxiety in the act of writing poetry, but the origin that Bloom discusses, competition between two poets, seems to be over restrictive. Even if poets are

concerned with their standing in literary tradition, it becomes impossible to prove, as Bloom argues, that all poets are competing to outdo one another. That claim becomes problematic if one considers the undeniable friendship that normally springs among poets, such as in the case of T. S. Eliot and Ezra Pound, who even helped Eliot to get his poems published (L1 107). If Eliot was so anxious and worried about outshining Ezra Pound, he would not have shared his poetry with him or asked him for advice. Emily Dickinson, the great American poet, manifested the same anxiety when she wrote to Thomas Wentworth Higginson on April 15, 1862. After reading one of his articles in the *Atlantic Monthly*, she wanted criticism from him about her poetry and began her letter with this sentence: “*Are you too deeply occupied to say if my Verse is alive?*” (Reiss). Had Dickinson been in a competition, she would not have resorted to a stronger poet, her competitor, for self-affirmation of her value as a poet. Anxiety of poetical development is not anxiety of influence; poets are not engaged in a warfare among themselves for popularity, but are more concerned about their artistic development, as the well-known anecdote about Emily Dickinson’s anxiety suggests.

If anxiety of influence results from the clash between a poet and a non poetic influence, Bloom’s theory needs to be amplified to acknowledge it. In the specific case of T. S. Eliot, one can clearly see that anxiety prompted him to pen *Four Quartets*, but this anxiety does not have a poetic nature. It springs in the end from a metaphysical issue, a religious question. The salvation / damnation dichotomy permeates T. S. Eliot’s *Four Quartets*. If one were to think that Christianity alone, as a system of faith, posits the metaphysical problem of salvation, it would be impossible to detect a build up of anxiety in Eliot, for he is an Anglican who valued his doctrines. Anxiety, instead, seems to derive from other religious influences, namely Buddhism and Hinduism. One can imagine Eliot, a highly educated man, having an inner battle to reconcile his cherished Anglican beliefs and the logical ideas coming from Eastern religions. It is the

influence of the different religious texts that Eliot read that seems to create this anxiety in the poet.

Eastern religions exerted a powerful influence on Christian thought, an influence that is commonly overlooked. People tend to assume that Christianity, Buddhism, and Hinduism are separate systems of faith that share no common points. Christian fundamentalists reject out of hand all religious principles that come from different faiths. Eliot, however, studied Eastern religions and became acquainted with Buddhist principles and the *Bhagavad Gita*. This incorporation of religious knowledge seems to have created the phenomenon that Bloom describes despite the fact that neither the *Bhagavad Gita* nor Buddha's principles are poetic influences. For example, Eliot sometimes seems to be distancing himself from Christianity (*Clinamen*) when he starts pondering about the significance of the words that Krishna said to Arjuna and the implications of following one's destiny. Moreover, he is using the language of taboo (*Tessera*); that is, he resorts to Buddhism and Hinduism besides using the Bible and the Christian tradition and, in the end, *Four Quartets* seem to be the original work from which the religious concepts spring, much in the likeness of the ratio that Blooms terms *Apophrades*. Therefore, the anxiety that one perceives in Eliot does not actually have a poetic nature, but a religious one that is impossible to obviate. For Eliot, the problem of salvation (or damnation) is a major issue causing anxiety, a feeling that possibly springs from the powerful clash of the various religious influences that Eliot received during his education. Since salvation, as a metaphysical problem, can be approached from different religious perspectives, there is not a definite answer for it. When one is seriously committed to a system of faith but, at the same time, has been in contact with other beliefs that, far from being ridiculous, make sense, anxiety becomes a logical reaction. In Eliot's case, his Anglican beliefs clashed at a given point with his secular education

and his knowledge of Buddhism and Hinduism, beliefs that stopped being a mere source to become strong influences for him.

When one over restricts Bloom's theory to believe that poets become the exclusive source of influence on other poets, the danger of mutilating the significance of a poetical work becomes obvious. After a careful consideration of the sections three and four of each one of the quartets, it is possible to assert that T. S. Eliot was influenced by several forms of influence that are not uniquely poetical. It is obvious that poets can and have borrowed from a great variety of texts that include prose, music, or painting. Areas of individual interest also become influential, such as religion and, therefore, critics should not believe allusions to a religious creed futile or detrimental to a poetical work. For instance, Spanish mysticism, as manifested through Saint John's essay *Dark Night of the Soul*, constitutes unequivocally a powerful non poetical influence for Eliot's *Four Quartets* concerning content, language, and style. The essay remains a staple in the production of each one of the poems, a seven-year process that started in 1935 with the publication of *Burnt Norton* as the last work in *Poems* and ended in December, 1942, with the publication of *Little Gidding*. When critics say that obvious Christian images ruin the *Four Quartets*, they are perhaps hastily rejecting the reason that justifies the existence of the work, its origins, and one of its greatest sources of influence.

In Eliot's *Four Quartets*, religion can, by no means, be underestimated as a source of influence. Eliot was definitely interested in Spanish mysticism, but his interest in religions led him to study different systems of faith as well, which suggests another practical reason to consider religion an enriching non-poetical influence: It manifests and challenges the beliefs of a society. Since Christianity is not an inclusive religion, a Christian often rejects other beliefs. When one accepts Christian teachings, one has to reject other systems of faith due to the basic biblical teaching that salvation and redemption become possible only through the sacrifice of

Christ. Eliot's Anglican background, nevertheless, did not prevent him from exploring and borrowing from Eastern religions to enrich the *Four Quartets* and challenge a society that experienced a religious vacuum because of fear, depression, and hopelessness in the wake of two World Wars.

Eliot achieved something that was unthinkable at that time in the *Four Quartets*, for he reconciled Christianity and two of the most prominent Eastern religions, Buddhism and Hinduism. Thanks to Eliot, one can perceive Eastern concepts, as *maya* and *Brahman*, in the *Ecclesiastes* and the teachings of Jesus without the recalcitrance created by the exclusive nature of Christianity as a religion. Saint John of the Cross later merges Eastern religions and Christian thinking when he uses those concepts to create the basis for the process to achieve total union with God. The different allusions to Hinduism and Buddhism are perfectly matched to the Christian-Western thought (in the biblical images and in Saint John's *Dark Night of the Soul*) as an expression of an impressive poetical genius and expertise of language.

The artistry required to interweave this semiotic web cannot be denied. Eliot, through *Four Quartets*, contributed to place one more peg into the mystic puzzle that has accompanied humanity since its dawn. The *Four Quartets* endured the test of time because of its universal preoccupations embedded onto the religious paradigms that permeate it. By over-restricting Bloom's theory, critics overlook the non-poetical influences in many texts. It seems unacceptable, thus, the claim that Eliot's work is undermined by the use of explicit religious images; on the contrary, it is precisely the combination of teachings that come from several religions that makes the *Four Quartets* Eliot's masterpiece.

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